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Ethiopian Politics Post-1991: A Continuous Challenge
to the Peace and Stability of the Horn of Africa Region

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Abstract

The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (The EPRDF) came to power after it defeated a self-proclaimed Marxist military junta in 1991, marking a new beginning in the contemporary political history of the country. The EPRDF has remained in power ever since and introduced a number of reform packages: both economic and political. Despite facing noticeable challenges in the economic sector, the country has registered spectacular economic growth over the past two decades – so that Ethiopia now has one of the fastest growing economies worldwide. The country's economic boom in turn helped to generally improve socio-economic conditions as evidenced in the attainment of most of the Millennium Development Goal targets. However, the promised political dispensations that it was hoped would accompany the economic reforms, have remained problematic. After twenty-five years of EPRDF rule the country still finds itself in a precarious situation, with the last two to three years in particular being marked by political unrest of a hitherto unseen magnitude since the EPRDF assumed power. The Political processes have been contested and hence the legitimacy of the reform package remains not only questionable but requires a fundamental rethinking. The repercussions of any failure in this regard would have far reaching consequences for the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa region as a whole, given the regional importance of Ethiopia, often portrayed as an anchor of peace and stability in this otherwise fragile and conflict affected region of Africa.

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Introduction

In 1991, following the end of a decades long Civil War, Ethiopia began a new chapter in its contemporary political history. The self-proclaimed Marxist military junta had been overthrown by a triumphant Ethno-nationalist force, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), and the country embarked upon a new journey that has now lasted for more than 25 years. A number of reform packages were introduced that help explain the post 1991 developments in the country. Reforms were undertaken in the economic sector and these were accompanied by a number of measures aimed at achieving rapid economic growth, with some notable success. Similarly, post 1991 Ethiopia witnessed the introduction of new forms of governance as the main reform package on the political front. These political reform measures ranged from the transition to a multiparty democracy to the adoption of a new federal form of governance; this marked a clear departure from the country's centuries old highly-centralized governance system. While the reforms have yielded some positive changes, notably maintaining a relatively stable state in the otherwise chaotic Horn of Africa region, and good progress on the economic front, there are many challenges that the country still needs to tackle. In particular, the 'political reform project' that began in 1991 is being seriously contested. Levels of political opposition have grown since the start of the reform project. The accommodation of diversity through the adoption of a federal dispensation though commended, was never fully accepted[1], for various reasons, including the credibility of the scheme itself. The contestations go well beyond what can be expected within a democratic political system and instead are over the very nature of the political conditions of post-1991 Ethiopia. The boycotting of elections, delegitimising of democratic

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[1] The federalism project which is a result of the constitutional reordering in 1991, has generated huge interest among observers of Ethiopian politics. Scholars, political groups and many others, have written and debated on the validity and necessity of the federal arrangement on scale which one can describe as unmatchable as far as the recent history of the study of Ethiopian politics is concerned. There are diverse views on the issue, ranging from strong support to complete rejection. For further engagement with the issue, see for instance the following writings: Christophe van der Beken. (2012). Unity in diversity: federalism as a mechanism to accommodate ethnic diversity: the case of Ethiopia (Vol. 10). LIT Verlag Münster., Fiseha, A. (2006). Federalism and the accommodation of diversity in Ethiopia: A comparative study. Wolf Legal, Gudina, M. (2006). Contradictory interpretations of Ethiopian history: The need for a new consensus. Ethnic Federalism. The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective, 119-30, Mennasemay, M. (2003). Federalism, ethnicity, and the transition to democracy. Horn of Africa, 21, 88-114, Ottaway, M. (1995). The Ethiopian transition: democratization or new authoritarianism? Northeast African Studies, 67-84, Hassen, M. (2002). Conquest, Tyranny, and Ethnocide against the Oromo: A Historical Assessment of Human Rights Conditions in Ethiopia, ca. 1880s–2002. Northeast African Studies, 9(3), 15-49.

institutions, and recurrent violent protests, are all manifestations of a deep discontent with the current political settlement. These challenges show that the 'democratisation' process that began in 1991 needs to be closely examined. This paper attempts to briefly present and depict the current economic and political landscape in Ethiopia, with the aim of highlighting the serious challenges the country has faced, which could also be potentially a threat to the Horn of Africa region. As such, this working paper gives a descriptive discussion on the domestic politics and socio-economic conditions of the country in the post-1991 era.

1.1 Economy

Despite its proud history and vast natural resources, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. In 1992, immediately after assuming power, the new Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) adopted a free market, economic model as the guiding principle for developing the economy of the country - a clear departure from the socialist economic model pursued under the previous regime for over a decade. A number of reform measures were introduced that aimed to improve the conditions of the war-ravaged economy. Among these, the Agricultural Led Development of Industrialisation (ALDI) strategy was adopted to try and industrialise the predominantly agrarian economy of the country. The rationale was that by improving the productivity of the agricultural sector of the country, which absorbed over 85 per cent of the country's manpower and was the largest contributor of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - between fifty to 90 percent of the country's export earnings (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development ((MOFED)) 2013, OECD/AfDB, 2002) - a transformation to an industrialised economy could be achieved. By increasing the productivity of the agricultural sector, it would move away from its subsistence nature, and in turn would facilitate a structural change of the economy overall. The reasoning was that inducing a surplus in the agricultural sector would stimulate consumerism etc. overall and thereby create the foundational demand for industrial growth. Strategies aimed at alleviating the abject poverty of the country were also implemented; these were launched as a series of specific time-bound plans (National Development Plans). Examples included; the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP); and the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP). Similarly, the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) declared by the United Nations (UN) in 2000, were implemented by the Ethiopian government from 2000-2015. These strategies are an integral part of the government's plan to incorporate the sustainable development. In addition, the government also implemented measures such as the privatisation of state properties and increasingly encouraged both domestic and foreign investments. Recently, the government has tried to adopt a series of new plans that attempt to build on the progress made under SDPRP and PASDEP with the ambitious target of not only transforming the structure of the economy, but also achieving low middle-income country status by 2025. The government's defined vision, as set out in the Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP I & GTP II), is as follows:

"building an economy which has a modern and productive agricultural sector with enhanced technology and an industrial sector that plays a leading role in the economy, sustaining economic development and securing social justices and increasing per capita income of the citizens so as to reach the level of those in middle-income countries." (MOFED), 2010: 21).

Regardless of the criticisms of the efficacy and wisdom of the choice of policies and strategies adopted above, the Ethiopian economy has indisputably grown spectacularly since 1991. In recognition of this dramatic change, on March 13, 2014, *Time Magazine* devoted its topical coverage to examining the success of four pre-eminent global emerging markets, which included Ethiopia. In his detailed analysis, Michael Schulman stressed that there were success stories emerging from the developing world, which were different from the BRIC's countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) as captured in his title "Forget the BRICs; Meet the PINEs" (PINE's - Philippines, Indonesia, Nigeria and Ethiopia). In explaining the success and potential of the 'PINEs', he expressed the opinion that Ethiopia deserved inclusion for its achievements in overcoming the status of a country 'Once synonymous with poverty' (Ibid). There is strong evidence to support this viewpoint. Ethiopia, once one of the poorest countries in the world has managed to change its economic outlook due to the reform measures that were initiated post-1991. The country's economy has grown steadily from the baseline of 0.5% per annum between 1981-1991, to 5.1% per annum between 1992-2004 (MOFED 2013), to impressive levels of around 10.9% per annum between 2005

to 2015 (World Bank Group 2015, AfDB, OECD & UNDP 2016, MOFED 2013). These growth rates are some of the fastest in the world for a non-oil producing country (UNDP 2015). Also worth noting is that economic growth was maintained despite the occurrence of three major events that could have halted growth and had devastating consequences for overall development in the country. The first was the severe drought that occurred in 1997 and led to the economy contracting temporarily by 1.4% (OECD & AfDB 2002). The second event was the outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998-2000; this slowed the pace of growth. The most serious and severe incident, was the 2015 drought, the worst the country had seen in 30 years. This event was caused by the *El Nino* weather event resulting in the economic growth dropping to 8% in 2016 (AfDB, OECD & UNDP 2017).

Overall, economic growth has had a positive impact upon the country's socio-economic conditions as evidenced by Ethiopia's remarkable progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals and the various other targets it had set itself. A report, jointly published by the United Nations office in Ethiopia and the National Planning Commission of Ethiopia (NPC), looked into the progress made towards achieving the MDGs, stated "Ethiopia must be commended for making significant progress in the achievement of the MDGs." (NPC & UN 2015: i). The report outlined how Ethiopia had achieved six of the eight Millennium Development Goals and has made significant progress towards achieving the targets for the other two goals (MDG 3 - ensuring gender equality and empowering women, and MDG 5 - improving maternal health). The prevalence of extreme poverty and hunger in the country has reduced from 48% in 1990 to 23.4% in 2015. Universal primary education targets have been achieved despite some disparity in the male/female ratio. Regarding the other goals, such as reducing child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development, Ethiopia has been hailed for achieving all these goals either well in advance or on schedule (Ibid). Ethiopia has also made significant improvements to its internal infrastructure and in its ability to attract foreign investment. Two good examples of infrastructure development are huge expansions made to the nation's road network and the construction of the 'Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam'. The road network has grown from 18,000Km in 1991 to over 120, 000Km

today – a huge increase of 70% over 25 years (FBC 2016)[2]. The 'Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam', construction began in 2011 and once completed will be the largest hydroelectric dam in Africa, with a power generation capacity of 6,450MW. A change in the country's economic outlook triggered a tremendous increase in the flow of direct foreign investment into the country, while domestic investment has also grown. Although Ethiopia is still regarded as one of the most difficult countries in which to do business, this obstacle is counteracted by the country's perceived investment potential with it being recognized as one of the top ten investment destinations in Africa (African Investment Report 2015). Chinese, Turkish, Indian, British and Dutch investors are among the frontrunners when it comes to investing in the country. However, despite the remarkable achievements made since 1991 as outlined above, some serious economic issues remain that deserve attention.

1.1.2 Economic Challenges

Success in the economic sphere, has not come without its challenges. These challenges range from entrenched structural problems, to those associated specifically with either the content of the post-1991 reform measures, or problems arising from the implementation of these measures, to newly arising issues that could reverse the gains and improvements made regarding the socio-economic conditions of the country. In broad terms, the challenges facing Ethiopia's economy can be categorized into three different areas.

Firstly, there are the easily observable structural problems associated with the Ethiopian economy and the low level at which the country still finds itself economically. Despite the steady economic growth in the 1990s followed by rapid, sustained, growth between 2004/5 to 2015, and a concurrent improvement in socio-economic conditions, the country remains one of the poorest in the world. About 25 million people, around a quarter of the population, still live below the poverty line (living on less than 1.25 dollars a day) (NPC & UN 2014). Every year, before and after the economic boom of 2005, between 5 and 18 million Ethiopians have had to depend on food aid. Levels of food insecurity massively increased in 2015 when

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[2]See Interview of Dr Workineh Gebeyehu, former Minister of Transport on Road Coverage network available at Fana Broadcast website http://www.fanabc.com/english/index.php/component/k2/item/5913 accessed on 29/12/2017

the country's worst drought occurred. To this day, the drought still stands as one of the most devastating famines that has occurred in the country's history (Oakland Institute 2016, Abbink 2017). The agrarian sector still dominates the economy despite efforts to promote industrialisation. The government admits, the performance of the sector has not met expectations (MOFED 2013). It remains dominated by small scale, traditional farms that are highly vulnerable to climate instability. As a result, the country's agricultural sector, rather disappointingly, is still not even able to produce enough to ensure the food security of the country, let alone produce enough to lead an envisioned structural change of the economy by supporting growth through a surplus of food supply. Added to these structural problems are demographic issues, with Abbink rightly describing the country as suffering from "economic Woes" (2017:47). The country's annual population growth rate stands at 2.5% which has been unchallenged by its rapid economic gains. The country's population grew from around 48 million in 1991 to nearly 100 million in 2017, making it the second most populated country on the continent after Nigeria (Central Statistical Agency ((CSE)) of Ethiopia 2017, World Bank 2017). Population pressure is now widely believed to be the main factor in explaining the increasing occurrences of inter-communal conflict over grazing land or other similar resource-related disputes across the country. Of even greater concern is the fact that Ethiopia has a very young population - around 60% of the population is below 30 years of age – as this is far beyond the absorptive capacity of the economy in terms of job creation. Youth unemployment is already posing a big threat to the stability of the country as evidenced by the recent unrest in Oromia, which compelled the regional and federal governments to announce initiatives worth billions of Birr to create jobs for the youth in a scheme dubbed the 'Youth Revolving Fund'[3].

Financial risks can also arise as a result of some of the measures taken by the government. For instance, some observers have voiced concerns over the country's ever-growing levels of external debt. External debt increased fivefold between 2008/09 and 2014/15, from USD 2.8 billion to USD 19 billion, an increase from 12.1% of GDP to 26.2% GDP (AfDB, OECD

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[3] The Ethiopian Federal government announced a 10 billion birr funding scheme called the 'Youth Revolving Fund' in 2016 to create more jobs for young people in response to a prevalent youth unemployment problem also believed to be among the main causes for the protest that erupted in the Oromia and Amhara regions in 2015. The Scheme was also endorsed by the Federal parliament too.

&UNDP 2016). Other issues, such as a foreign exchange shortage and the poor performance of its export earnings, all fall within the first layer of economic challenges.

Moving beyond these structural observations, a second layer of issues related to the economy can be perceived. Disappointed with the small-scale farms that were unable to produce sufficient food to ensure food security for the country, the Ethiopian government began encouraging the development of large commercial farms. It offers both domestic and foreign investor incentives to develop larger farms with reduced leases, financial loans, and other incentive packages. The foreign and local investors seized upon the opportunity. The Karuturi[4] Global limited company, an Indian horticulture company, as well as hundreds of domestic investors were among those that invested in the Gambella region, a lowland area with fertile soils in the western part of the country. Karuturi Global was given a substantial piece of land totaling around 300,000 hectares (some 120 kms wide) to grow wheat and other cereals on a lease contract of 2 million Birr per year for a period of 50 years (a very cheap deal of less than a dollar per hectare per year). In return, the company promised to create up to 60,000 jobs. While this scheme was meant to support and bolster the country's economy, some serious issues emerged. Firstly, concern was raised regarding the 'Rural Resettlement Program' or 'villageization' - a program marketed as being a means to relocate a scattered population to a centre where they could more easily access social services – which was implemented by the government in the areas where lands were to be made available to investors. Human rights groups argued that, the affected local populations were in fact being evicted against their best interests, a practice often labeled as 'Land Grabbing' or a 'Global Rush for Land' (The Guardian 2011, Oakland 2016). Secondly, hopes placed in these big commercial farming ventures were left unfulfilled as their output did not live up to expectations. Karuturi Global's lease contract was terminated in 2015 after failing to meet the government's expectations regarding wheat production and a government investigative report into the operations of domestic investors across the Gambella regional   state revealed that of the 229,755 hectares of land leased to commercial farm developers, only

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[4] For more information on Karuturi and the issues it had with the Ethiopian authorities see onhttp://hornaffairs.com/2015/01/20/karuturi-under-the-spotlight/ http://hornaffairs.com/2015/12/31/karuturi-loses-farmland-ethiopia-cancels-contract/ and, https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/faqs-indian-agriculture-investments-ethiopia.

about half was being cultivated, despite the government giving around 3.3 billion Birr in loans and other incentive schemes (AddisFortune 2016). Furthermore, the report revealed the widespread mismanagement of government funds and corrupt practices; the findings of the report were so incriminating that they led to the removal of the president of the Development Bank of Ethiopia, Mr Esayas Bahre. The failures of the Karuturi Global company and that of the domestic investors problematised if not the content of the scheme then clearly its implementation.

More problematic is the involvement of the government and party-affiliated businesses in the economy. The change from a command economy to market-led economy was expected to engender a growing role for the private sector post-1991, as the basic tenets of a market economy model dictate. Indeed, the post-1991 period has seen the private sector expanding at least in comparison to its role under the previous socialist Derg regime. A push for greater privatisation has been a key component of the reform packages introduced and implemented over the past two decades. However, the country's private sector remains underdeveloped and weak. This is not for a lack of entrepreneurial effort from within the private sector itself, but partly because the state seems to be increasingly reinserting itself into the economy in ways that could prove to be both unsustainable and burdensome in the long run. Regarding, the recently established Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC[5]), which has a mandate to play a leading role in the industrialisation of Ethiopia, provides a good illustration of the determination of the government to continue to play an active role in the economy - a move that will have consequences for the development of the private sector. Since its foundation in 2009, the company has been heavily involved in the country's Mega projects such as the Grand Renaissance Dam, new sugar plantations and other vast public manufacturing investments. It controls some 14 different manufacturing enterprises - an unparalleled achievement given its eight years of existence (METEC 2017). Bearing this in mind, it is of some concern that this huge business conglomerate is under the ownership

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[5] See more about METEC on its website accessed on 25/12/2017, at http://www.metec.gov.et/web/guest/metec-background A report produced by the Oakland Institute in 2016 on METEC's involvement in mega sugar plantations can also be found at https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/miracle-mirage-manufacturing-hunger-poverty-ethiopia

of the military. The decision to allow 'men in uniform' to hold such levels of economic power stand in stark contrast to the notion of a market economy.

Performance-related issues of METEC have also recently emerged. METEC used to run 10 multibillion projects involving sugar plantations and factories, but this has been reduced to just two as a result of the company's utter failure to execute its contractual obligations, which in turn brings into question the government's approach and vision when it comes to transforming the economy if it chooses to endorse such inefficient public enterprises. The role being played by the affiliates of the ruling EPRDF party further complicate matters. The four parties that form the EPRDF coalition each have a trading wing. The major one worth mentioning is the Endowment Fund for Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), which is the Tigray People's Liberation Front's (the dominant party in the coalition) trading wing. EFFORT is a Multi-Billion Birr conglomerate of businesses. It owns over two dozen enterprises that operate in selected areas across all sectors of the economy (agriculture, manufacturing and service). In 2010, EFFORT companies reported a total of 2.7 billion Ethiopian Birr (ETB) of capital, and 6 billion ETB in assets (Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011). The ruling EPRDF party is unquestionably doing big business. This clear merger of politics (power) and the economy which is on display in Ethiopia, is detrimental to the growth of the private sector. Whereas, generally the role of the government can be understood within a Developmental State model, which advocates for an increased state role during economic transition phases, it is hard to appease the role being played by party-affiliated businesses with the tenets of this model.

The final layer concerns the efforts to ensure equitable growth. While the endeavors of the Ethiopian government are generally perceived as being pro-poor and hence widely supported, paradoxically the question of 'marginalisation', whether real or perceived, is also often put forward. Indeed, the recent unrest in the Oromia and Amhara region states, among others, was believed to have been triggered by the 'economic and political marginalisation of ethnic Oromo's and Amhara' (BBC 2017), by the Tigrayan elites who were reaping the benefits of the country's economic growth through their associations with influential political figures. Feelings of marginalisation (both economic and political) among the Oromo elite in particular remains a major issue that continues to destabilise the country. Since 2014,

instability and unrest in the Oromia region (the largest in the country) has disrupted businesses (hundreds of commercial building have reportedly been burnt down across the region) and contributed towards a slowing of economic growth rates. Rampant corruption levels and illicit financial flows out of the country remain prevalent, entrenching the levels of resentment against economic injustices within the country. Generally, while the issues discussed have left a dark shadow over the economy of the country, political factors at the macro level, remain the most pressing issues, and thus need to be analysed.

1.2 An Overview of the Political Process Post-1991

The demise of the Derg military dictatorship that ruled from 1974 to 1991 resulted in the creation of a 'New Republic'. The markedly new ideas that underlay the new republic are best captured by the current nomenclature of the Ethiopian state itself, 'The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia' as enshrined in the constitution of the country adopted in 1994. The political reform package of the EPRDF party that has been in power since1991, included provisions for the devolution of power in the form of a federal political dispensation and the introduction of multiparty democracy, both hallmarks of the political era in post-1991 Ethiopia. Following a meeting sponsored by the United States of America between the victorious TPLF-led group and various other political forces in May 1991 in London, a way forward that included adopting a Transitional Charter that would establish a Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGoE), was agreed upon. Consequently, upon the invitation of the TPLF-led group the representatives of the various political groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front, the Sidama Liberation Front and other groups met in Addis Ababa and adopted the Transitional Charter that would serve for the transitional period before being replaced by a new constitution in 1994. In accordance with the Transitional Charter, a transitional government composed of the various dominant political forces at the time, including the Oromo Liberation Front and other political forces that represented the southern nationalities (the Hadiya, the Sidama, the Gurage, etc), was established, in which the constituent parties formed a power sharing agreement - the flaws of which will be discussed below. The Transitional Charter stated that the break away from military rule entailed not just a break away military dictatorship but a discontinuity from all previous

oppressive regimes and, as such, represented a 'historic' moment to rebuild and restructure the country (Transitional Charter of ToG 1991:1). In this regard the Charter pledged that '*a proclamation of a democratic order is a categorical imperative*'(Ibid). To contextualize the democratic order envisaged by the Charter, a reference was made to the adoption of the 1948 United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In particular, the right of every individual to have freedom of conscience, expression, association and peaceful assembly was declared to be fully respected without any limitations. Similarly, the right to engage in, and exercise unrestricted political activity and organize political parties, was also fully recognized, so long as this did not violate the rights of others, as stated in the Charter. Moreover, a harbinger of the federal constitutional dispensation that would later be adopted - the problematic issue of the right of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination - was also incorporated into the Charter. The self-determination rights of the nations, nationalities and peoples, according to Charter, included the right to preserve, promote and develop one's own identity, language, culture and history, administer one's own affairs and participate in the central government fairly and on an equal basis (Ibid: Article 1). After four years of transitional administration, in 1994 a new constitution was adopted, and a new constitutional arrangement came into effect a year later, in line with the terms stipulated in the Transitional Charter.

The new constitution further consolidated the political reform agenda begun in 1991. The federal dispensation of power sharing was formally laid out, and the idea of a multiparty democracy was extensively enshrined in the constitution. The new constitution also established the FDRE state (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia) (FDRE Constitution, Art. 1). The FDRE state is comprised of member states which are largely organized along ethno linguistic lines, confirming the right to form one's own state under the 'Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (the NNPs) principle. Nations, Nationalities and Peoples are defined as:

"A 'Nation, Nationality or People' for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in common or related identities, a common psychological

make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory ."(Ibid Article 39(5)).

The nine member states of the federation are: 1) The State of Oromia 2) The State of Amhara; 3) The State of Tigray; 4) The State of Somalia; 5) The State of Afar; 6) The State of Benshangul Gumuz; 7) The State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples; 8) The State of the Gambela Peoples; and 9) The State of the Harari People. The first five states are named after the numerically dominant ethnic groups found in their respective delimited territories. The ethnic Oromo's in the state of Oromia, the ethnic Amhara group in the state of Amhara, the ethnic Tigre in the state of Tigray, the ethnic Afar, and ethnic Somalis in the States of Afar and State of Somalia are the predominant ethnic groups within each state. The remaining member states, with the exception of the state of Harari which is a small city state surrounded by Oromia state of which the ethnic Harari's constitute less than ten percent of the state's population, are highly diversified with no single dominant ethnic group. A notable example of this is the State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples which has more than 56 ethnic groups cohabiting in its territory. In terms of the size of the member states, Oromia State accounts for one-third of the country's total land mass whereas the Harari State is by far the smallest at only 340 square kilometers. While the State of Somalia, the State of Amhara and the State of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples are also large in size, the rest of the member states are smaller - signifying the asymmetric nature of the Ethiopian federation. Likewise, the ethnic composition of the federation reveals that together ethnic Oromos and Amharas constitute around 70 per cent of the total population of the country - the Oromos being the single largest group at 34.4 percent (CIAWorldfact Book 2017). In addition to the nine member states of the federation, there are two city administrations: The Addis Ababa city administration and the Dire Dawa city administration, both of which are accountable to the federal government. The Addis Ababa city administration is located in the Oromia state and is constitutionally recognized as the capital of the federation, whereas the status of the Dire Dawa city administration is contested constitutionally as the arrangement arose from other subsidiary legislation[6].

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[6] Dire Dawa City Administration was established by Proclamation no. 416/2004 of the Federal parliament as a provisional legal entity. The ownership of the city was claimed by both the Oromia and Somali regions and the

The constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia established two tiers of government, both with legislative, executive and judicial functions and specific delimited powers (Ibid: Articles 50-55). The federal government was constitutionally assigned the powers that conventionally go to the central government in most federations. Hence, the federal government has the power to formulate and implement the country's national policies and strategies relating to economic and social and developmental issues, such as enacting national standards and policy criteria for education, health, science and technology et cetera. Defense, foreign policy, refugee and immigration matters, the power to control arms and defend the constitution, the national bank, monetary and financial issues, regulation of inter-state trade and foreign commerce, transport policy (railways, ports, airways and roads that link two or more states) and communications infrastructure (telecommunication and postal), also all fall under the remit of the federal government along with the power to levy taxes on federal tax matters, to impose and lift a state of emergency, and to govern political parties and elections. The States are granted the power to form a state government that best advances their interests and enacts and executes policies, strategies and plans that relate specifically to their state's social, economic and developmental matters. They can administer their land and natural resources, have power over the revenues allocated to them, can establish a state police force, and run a state civil service with its own budget. In addition, any power not exclusively given to the federal level (the residual power) forms a part of the state's reserve.

Moreover, the constitution created a bicameral house at the federal level; the House of Peoples Representatives (HPR), the lower house, and the House of Federation, the upper house. The HPR is the legislative body with the highest authority within the federal (central) government. It has 550 seats of which 530 are directly filled by members elected by the people, every five years, from every constituency with a 100,000, while the other 20 seats are reserved for minority nationalities and peoples. The upper house, the House of Federation, is a non-legislative body that is tasked with interpreting the constitution and acting as an 'empire' of the federation. Unlike the HPR which represents the voting

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proclamation was issued as a temporary measure till the issue is to be resolved. Hence the city status is autonomous only due to the ongoing failure to resolve this contestation.

preferences of the citizens and which is therefore directly accountable to the people, the House of Federation is where the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples are represented. Each Nation, Nationality and People is represented by one member plus an additional seat for every one million of its populace. At the state level, the legislative functions are entrusted to the State Council, which is also the highest organ of state authority and directly responsible to the people. The highest executive power at the federal level is held by the Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister, who is also the head of government. The Executive body comes from the party or coalition of parties that has the majority of seats in the House of Peoples Representatives. The position of president at the federal level is largely a ceremonial one. The President of the republic is elected for a six-year term by a joint meeting of the two federal houses. At the state level, the highest executive power also rests with the State Administration which is similar to the Federal executive. The constitution establishes parallel branches of the independent judiciary at both the federal and state level, each with judicial authority over their respective jurisdictions. The federal supreme judicial power is granted to the federal Supreme Court, which also has power of cassation over the state supreme courts - the only instance where an independent parallel existence of the judiciary of the two tier government gives way to an intersection over which the Federal judiciary reigns. The constitution further stipulates the non-interference of any governmental body at any level over judicial matters, stressing the principle of judicial independence.

The FDRE constitution canonizes the human and democratic rights of individual citizens. It even puts this as a core objective of the pronouncement of the republic when it states:

"*Firmly convinced that the fulfilment of this objective (**of establishing the democratic order**) requires full respect of individual and people's fundamental freedoms and rights, to live together on the basis of equality' and without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination*" (FDRE Constitution Preamble:2)

The rights of the individual make up about one-third of the provisions of the constitution. From the fundamental right to life and the security of person and liberty, to democratic rights such as the right to hold an opinion (freedom of thought), freedom of expression (including press freedom), the right to association et cetera. These were all enshrined in the social

contract of the new Ethiopian republic in a similar manner to those in modern liberal constitutions around the world. In the construction and application of these fundamental human and democratic rights, reference was also made to the international human rights the country has adopted as its guiding principles, including the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Human Rights[7]. While the recognition of these fundamental rights and freedoms under the Transitional Charter, the FDRE constitution, and the general political reform agenda, can be seen as a positive step, whether the post-1991 government has lived up to its proclaimed reformist agenda is a matter for debate.

A closer look at the nature of the country's political reform since 1991 gives cause both for optimism but also for concern, the balance being tilted towards the latter. On a positive note, there was, for the first time, a tentative democratic opening. The modern political history of the country attests to the fact that the concept of political democracy was hardly known both under the absolutist monarchy of Emperor Haile Selassie and Colonel Mengsitu's military dictatorship. The concept of multiparty democracy, as it is understood and practiced under the new republic, is something that entered the formal Ethiopian political sphere only after 1991. The number of opposition political parties has grown from none to dozens within the past 25 years. Five periodic elections have taken place in which the opposition has, on occasion, contested and won seats. Free press has mushroomed since 1991 despite the challenges it continues to face. Numerous Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations have come into existence over the past two decades. Though seemingly mundane, given the context of the country's chaotic past, these steps constitute huge progress. Secondly, the measures taken to devolve power, later known as 'the federalism project', which was also a major component of the reform agenda, have arguably improved the system of governance. It has empowered previously marginalized groups; the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples. The core of the Ethiopian State's political power had been controlled for a long time by the northern political elites, marginalizing dozens of majorities. The post-1991 era saw a reversal of the century-long concerted

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[7] The principal international Human rights covenants ratified by the country are; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights(ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

centralization process through the recognition of the right to self-determination for the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia. This altered the relationship of the elite highland core vis-a-vis the elites of the marginalized periphery (Arriola & Lyons 2016, Clapham 2009). The regional states now more strongly assert their presence in their political interactions with the center. One can also point to the relative peace and stability that the country currently enjoys in an otherwise very troubled region as being a mark of success. Some countries, such as Eritrea, have postponed the democratization issue indefinitely whereas the Republic of Somalia is still struggling to install a viable government. The prospect for peace and stability seems to be a distant one for the newly-born Republic of South Sudan, while Sudan is dealing with ongoing levels of instability in its Darfur region and other areas. Although more can be said of the positive outcomes of the political process since 1991, the challenges to the democratization process that the country has faced still outweigh its achievements and deserve attention accordingly.

1.2.2 The Challenges of the Political Reform Process

The setbacks of the political reform agenda have resulted from the manner in which the reform agenda was launched in 1991. These setbacks have led to the current situation where the country finds itself in a series of state of national emergencies under the control of the security apparatus - the Military Command Post. While the transitional period is seen as having been largely inclusive and the beginning of a democratic opening the EPRDF, the hitherto rulers, was already exerting its control. After overthrowing the military junta (the Derg) the EPRDF took 32 seats of the 87 seats of the Council of Representatives (CoR) established under the Transitional Charter for itself, with the remaining 55 seats being apportioned to over 32 other political organizations represented in the unelected council. The executive power of the TGE also went to the EPRDF. The role assumed by the EPRDF as both the 'guardian' of the reform project but also an ordinary 'participant' represented a conflict of interests and a dictate of the victor. Moreover, the EPRP (Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party) and the MEISON (All Ethiopian People Socialist Movement), the exiled but important opposing political forces that emerged out of the Ethiopian Student movement of the 1960s, did not participate in either the process that led to the formation

of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia nor in the post-establishment political processes. These two organizations (EPRP & MEISON) together with a few other political groups, did try to initiate another parallel transitional process but these efforts proved to be futile as it was quickly shut down by the EPRDF - their representative was arrested at the airport upon arrival and deported out of the country. Moreover, the major oppositional political force to the EPRDF at the time, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), later withdrew from the Transitional Government. The withdrawal of the OLF, the second largest party behind the EPRDF in terms of seats occupied in the Council of Representatives of the TGoE, and the AAPUO's (All Amhara Peoples Union Organization) denouncement of the EPRDF's political tactics and policies, were both major blows to the already precarious legitimacy of the transitional political process. These withdrawals and the attempted launch of parallel political initiatives, should be seen as having been attempts by the opposition forces to delegitimize the political process. The major oppositional players at the time questioned the composition and neutrality of the institutions being established, especially the electoral management body. They rejected the electoral commission by boycotting the very first election held under the new Republic. Rights groups also noted that the Transitional Government of Ethiopia had used political imprisonment 'on a large scale' to silence its opponents and critics across its four year rule, after it came to power in 1991 (Amnesty International, 1995). The report by Amnesty International further stated that over 100 journalists were imprisoned under the rule of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. The post-Transitional Government of the New Republic does not look any different as far as political developments are concerned.

The Transitional Government was replaced by the constitutionally established government of the FDRE state in 1995, after the promulgation of the FDRE constitution ended the TGoE a year before. To begin with, the FDRE constitution was itself still contested for its content and the manner in which it came about. It was seen more as being a formalization of the EPRDF's political program (Merara 2003) than the supposed document of supreme importance that would mark a fresh political start based on lofty ideals. The period from the promulgation of the constitution to the present day has unfortunately been marred by recurrent political upheavals, particularly in the aftermath of certain political events such as elections. The rejection of political institutions and delegitimization of the democratization

process by the opposition has continued to this day. In addition, since 2014, popular uprisings against the ruling party and government have erupted in the two major regional states: the Oromia region and the Amhara national state. Scrutinizing certain political events can shed light on the political impasse the country is currently facing.

The trajectory of the five regional and national elections held in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015 reveal the country's bumpy political road. In the first two elections the opposition largely boycotted the elections, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the political process and the EPRDF as a ruling party. The exception was Prof. Beyene Petros' party which competed and won some seats in the Southern part of the country - Hadiya Zone - in the election of 2000. The EPRDF therefore won the first two elections without facing any serious challenges. In the third election (2005) the opposition forces regrouped and seriously participated. The initial optimism surrounding the election, which most observers saw as a genuine multiparty exercise (Harbeson 2005, Lyons 2006, Aalen & Tronvoll 2009, Asnake 2011), was soon replaced by disappointment as the ruling EPRDF and the major opposition alliances (the Coalition for Unity and Democracy ((CUD)) and ((UEDF)) the Union of Ethiopian Democratic Forces) declared themselves the winners before all the votes had even been counted. However, the opposition did make significant gains in the country's urban areas and in some regions (Oromia, Amhara and the Southern Nations and Nationalities) winning up to 173 out of the 547 seats. In the capital, Addis Ababa, the opposition won all the Federal parliamentary seats as well as those of the city administration council. The controversy surrounding the election process sparked violent protests that claimed the lives of more than 200 protesters. Furthermore, members of the CUD coalition refused to take up their seats in parliament and consequently, its leaders ended up in jail. Journalists and some civil society leaders were also imprisoned alongside the CUD leaders.

The next two elections (2010 and 2015) were almost exclusively contested by the EPRDF and its affiliate parties with opposition parties only able to play a minimal part in the highly controlled political space, established through new restrictive laws. Just before the 2010 election, the Charities and Societies law which regulated and restricted funding sources to civil society organizations, was enacted. The Media laws were also revised to further regulate the media landscape. Electoral laws were reenacted, and a new Anti-terrorism law was put

in place. While the government and the ruling party justified the enactment of these new laws on the grounds of protecting the security and sovereignty of the state, and further clarifying the regulatory framework, the opposition and other critics essentially saw this as a move to restrict and narrow the political space (Aalen & Tronvoll 2009, Abbink 2006). In the end the EPRDF and its affiliate parties won all but one of the seats, which went to an opposition candidate. In the last election (2015) the EPRDF and its affiliate parties won all the seats - a complete 100 percent victory. The elections so far held under the FDRE state regrettably demonstrate a perennial problem with the democratization process of the new republic. After twenty years, instead of garnering some support from all sides of the political spectrum, the democratization process remains deeply contested. None of the elections under the FDRE state can be described as having been successful democratic exercises. A consolidation of the democratic governance principles will only become meaningful if both the ruling party and the opposition parties in Ethiopia accept them with a common understanding. To date, the EPRDF has molded them into tools to legitimize its political practices and governance, while for the opposition their clear superficiality discourages endorsement. There has been a tendency to express these political frustrations through armed resistance; the former CUD leadership are worth noting here, in addition to the dozens of other groups in exile in neighboring countries that have already rejected the EPRDF-led political process.

The human rights record of the FDRE state has become increasingly problematic too, though it cannot be disputed that there have been improvements when compared to its predecessor - the Derg regime. In particular, the government's means of dealing with opposition politicians and dissident voices are worrying. International human rights groups and the US state department all detail instances of abuse. A 2016 Amnesty International report describes how the EPRDF government has, over the last 25 years, used legislation to 'stifle' dissent - referring to three contentious pieces of legislation enacted by the HPR: The press law, Charities and Societies proclamation and the Anti-terrorism proclamation. The report details how these new laws were used to justify the arrest of opposition party leaders, journalists and other critical voices and generally squeeze the political space. The excessive use of lethal force by security forces when suppressing protests, has also increased markedly

in recent years. Within the last three years alone, over one thousand protesters have been killed by government security forces in the Oromia and Amhara regional states alone. Moreover, a statement made by the US State Department in reference to recent abuses perpetrated across the country noted, *"The most significant human rights problems were security forces' use of excessive force and arbitrary arrest in response to the protests, politically motivated prosecutions, and continued restrictions on activities of civil society and NGOs" (2016:2).*

Furthermore, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and internet freedoms are all areas in which there is still much room for improvement. In view of this, the country was classed as 'Not Free' by the Freedom House Global Freedom Index (2016), scoring lower than neighboring Somaliland and Djibouti.

The second component of the political reform project, the devolution of power via the federal political power arrangement that aimed to resolve the historical 'nationality question' has also begun to be questioned. In theory the system, aimed at empowering the historically-marginalized and dominated groups - the Nations, Nationalities or Peoples - should have been embraced and defended. However, the federal political dispensation project instead generated a diverse and radical set of views from the outset. It has increasingly attracted fierce opposition from among the ethnic groups who are often seen as the 'natural' supporters of the current political arrangement. The Oromos are a notable example in this regard. At present the Oromo partners in the ruling EPRDF have become the latest ones to question the *modus operandi* of the federal system, joining the Oromo opposition groups who rejected the system long ago. What initially appeared to the regional government to be an ordinary local protest against the handover of communal land to private investors, in Small Ghinch town in the South West Shewa Zone of Oromia, has become a political phenomenon that has engulfed the whole of Oromia in popular uprisings against the government since November 2015. The protest is ongoing and has turned deadly - claiming thousands of lives. Though caused by a small protest in Ghinch, it was fueled by the federal government's plan to expand the territory of the capital city by incorporating surrounding Oromo towns and villages in a plan called 'The Addis Ababa and the Surrounding Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Plan' or 'the Addis Ababa Master Plan'. Despite the

federal government's decision to drop the Addis Ababa Master Plan, protests have continued to rage unabated across Oromia. It is now widely accepted that the protests are a product of greater and more fundamental issues; one Oromo scholar and activist, Awol Kassim, captured this well when he wrote,

"Although the protests were sparked by a government plan to expand the territorial and administrative limits of Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, into neighboring Oromo towns and villages, they were manifestations of long-simmering ethnic discontents buried beneath the surface." (2016 Aljazeera).

Another protest also occurred in the Amhara region, home to the second largest ethnic group after the Oromo. While the immediate cause of the protests in the Amhara region was a border dispute between the Amhara and Tigray regional authorities, it evolved into a solidarity movement in support of the Oromo protest. Regardless of the immediate causes or any ulterior motives that drive the two protests, it appears that there was a discernible common belief in the current Tigrian domination of Ethiopia. The 'Tigris elites' are seen as a minority which enjoy an overly privileged position both economically and politically under EPRDF rule, in violation of the federal arrangement. Broadly, the Oromos are calling for a genuine federal arrangement in which they are proportionately represented in the central government and the autonomy of their region is respected, while the Amhara elites propose the revision of the whole federal plan in favor of a non-ethnicized arrangement.

The EPRDF-led Government declared a state of emergency in November 2016 after a year of protests. The party pledged to 'deeply renew itself' and also 'widen and deepen' the democratization process, acknowledging that there existed a crisis of good governance in the country that had been compounded by corruption. To this end, the federal cabinet was reshuffled and a dialogue with opposition parties operating in the country was initiated. However, 10 months later when the state of emergency was lifted in August 2017, the protests in Oromia region continued and the security situation in the country continues to deteriorate. Attempts at dialogue with opposition parties, the major component of the supposed government reform package to widen political space in response to the protests, were marred by the withdrawal of the two major opposition parties: the Blue Party and the

Medrek Coalition. A few months later in November 2017, the government unveiled a new plan to create a 'National and Regional Joint Security Council', which basically amounted to a securitization of the political system, essentially imposing another 'state of emergency' in all but name. This new legislative body has been tasked with contolling the security situation of the country and taking appropriate action accordingly (FBC 2017). Additionally, the ongoing conflict on the border of the Oromia and Somali regions – which has become a massive, tragic, man-made humanitarian crisis[8]- has placed the security and survival of the country itself at risk. Clearly, the post-1991 political reform phase has proved itself to be a controversial political project that has resulted in an impasse that requires some fundamental rethinking.

A continuity of the current status quo seriously risks having wider repercussions for the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa region (Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan and South Sudan), a region that is already in crisis[9]. A failure of the Ethiopian state would be disastrous for a number of reasons. Firstly, Ethiopia is the largest and the most populous country in the Horn – its population of over 100 million is larger than the combined population of all of the rest countries in the region - and the biggest country in terms of its the land mass. Secondly, as the host nation of the African Union (AU), politically Ethiopia plays a crucial role in the region. It is also a founding member and the chair nation of the IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development). Ethiopia has actively intervened in the conflicts in a number of states in the region (South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia) by taking part in the peace keeping missions[10]. The country also hosts more than half a million refugees fleeing from conflicts and repressions in neighboring countries. Thus, any negative political developments in Ethiopia could potentially pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa region.

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[8] In addition to the protests that have engulfed a wider part of the country, over 700,000 civilians have fled their homes and have been residing in IDP camps for several months as a result of a new conflict between the Oromia and Somali regional states that began in 2016. Militia and regional security forces on both sides have been accused of carrying out mass evictions and killings of innocent civilians.

[9] Many of Ethiopia's neighboring countries find themselves in crisis. Somalia is still struggling to become a viable state while it battles the jihadist militant group, al-Shabab. Sudan and South Sudan still have an ongoing dispute over their border territories. South Sudan is in the grip of a four year long Civil War. Eritrea is regarded as being the 'North Korea of Africa' where citizens have been fleeing en masse from persecutions and repressions.

[10] Ethiopian peace keeping troops are currently stationed in Somalia, South Sudan and in the disputed area of Abyei between Sudan and South Sudan operating under both AU and UN mandates.

Conclusion

To conclude, Ethiopia post-1991 has witnessed spectacular economic progress which has been coupled with improvements in the socio-economic conditions of the country. The country has registered some of the fastest economic growth rates in the world, largely attributable to the policy changes introduced and implemented by the EPRDF-led government. However, despite the economic progress, Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The structural base of the economy remains rooted in the agrarian sector which is vulnerable to the vagaries of nature. The role of the state, particularly the role of military-related institutions, supposedly seeking to achieve a rapid transition of the country's economy to industrialization, has proven to be problematic both in terms of their policy choices and also as far as their performance is concerned. The huge involvement of companies affiliated with the ruling party in the economy and the issue of ensuring equitable growth are issues that will need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of economic progress going forward. The Political reform agenda, comprising the introduction of a multiparty democracy and the devolution of political power in the form of Federalism, has already faced major setbacks and resulted in a political impasse. The political reform project is seriously contested and the levels of contestation have been increasing since the reform project began despite some positive political developments in the aftermath of 1991. These contestations go beyond the expected differences over political issue(s) that define democratic systems. Rather they reject and question the whole political system of post-1991 in Ethiopia. Elections are often boycotted, democratic institutions denied legitimacy, and recurrent violent protests occur. These actions are all manifestations of the deep levels of discontent with the current system, and an indication that there is a fundamental need to rethink the current political process as a whole to address the political impasse. Finally, any further negative political developments in Ethiopia would certainly pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa given the size of the country and its political weight in the region.

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