

## Secure the peace process in the Horn of Africa!

As associations of Germans, Austrians and Eritreans, who have been dealing with Eritrea for many years and have often visited the country, we are following the current political debate regarding the development in the Horn of Africa and the role of Eritrea with great concern. Once again there is an increasing risk that Europe and its representatives in the EU, on the basis of deliberately false information and misleading campaigns, are unthinkingly becoming an accessory to efforts aimed at destroying the peace process and stabilization in the region. The TPLF's military aggression within Ethiopia and against Eritrea, which has already triggered devastating humanitarian consequences and refugee movements, would then only be a prelude to far worse scenarios.

With the following, deliberately brief contribution on the causes of the conflict as well as a time table (**appendix**) on the historical experiences of Eritrea and its people in the international context, we attempt to contribute, from our point of view, to a fact-based understanding of the current situation.

### Betrayed, sold and deceived

Anyone who talks to Eritrean politicians or even ordinary people in Eritrea about the world powers, the international community and its organizations such as the UN, EU or the ICJ in The Hague is struck by a deep mistrust of these institutions. For 80 years, the UN and the international community disregarded Eritrea's rights, international legal decisions in favor of Eritrea were systematically undermined, sabotaged and sacrificed to "overriding strategic interests" (John Foster Dulles, American Secretary of State, 1950).

There are historical reasons for this mistrust, which will be presented chronologically below. First, however, a look at the present: Why is the question of the role of the international community, which today - in February 2021 - once again arises with all its explosive force for Eritrea, absolutely impossible to answer without a more thorough look at history? This is closely related to the intra-Ethiopian conflict over the Ethiopian province of Tigray. Eritrea is accused of being actively involved in the Tigray war; more than that, Eritrea is accused of massive war crimes and violations of international law in Tigray. To date, no evidence has been provided to support these allegations, and yet: the indictment stands!

## What actually happened in Tigray?

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which was the dominant, ultimately sole, force in the EPRDF-led Ethiopian government for 27 years and feared for its sinecures after Abiy Ahmed took over the EPRDF leadership, refused to cooperate with the central government in Addis Ababa starting in 2018. It held regional elections that were not recognized by the central government. Instead of supporting the peace process that Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had initiated with Eritrea (and for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize), the TPLF systematically prepared for a military confrontation aimed at overthrowing the central government. On November 4, 2020, the TPLF attacked bases of the Ethiopian Federal Army (so called Northern Command), killing numerous soldiers who refused to join it and capturing large arsenals of weapons. That the attack came as a complete surprise to the Ethiopian Federal Army and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is known to all international observers: The TPLF claimed responsibility for this attack as clearly as it did for the missile attacks on neighboring Eritrea that followed a short time later, which was immediately strongly condemned by many states.

The goal of the TPLF's attacks on Eritrea was to elevate the intra-Ethiopian conflict to an international level in light of the looming military defeat. In particular, the massacre of over 600 people (the exact number of civilians killed is not known) in Mai Kadra on November 9, 2020, perpetrated by TPLF-affiliated armed groups shocked international observers.

However, the TPLF's calculation to crush the Ethiopian federal army in a "blitzkrieg" and regain power in Addis Ababa (Phase 1), then prepare to "reconquer" Eritrea (Phase 2), did not work. Within weeks, the TPLF army and militias were defeated by the federal army and militias from other Ethiopian regions; their key leaders were either captured or killed. The central government in Addis Ababa established a provisional administration in Tigray province.

## How perpetrators are stylized as victims

With the obvious military defeat, the remnant TPLF shifted the war to international institutions, general and social media. Overnight, the apparent aggressor TPLF suddenly became the victim: Eritrea is accused of having militarily intervened in the conflict. Despite the lack of any evidence, the internationally well financed and organized propaganda machinery of the TPLF claimed "interpretive sovereignty" over the situation in Tigray for itself within a short period of time - among other things with reports about allegedly marauding and raping Eritrean soldiers, the invention of a "massacre" in Aksum and other fake news. It is

noteworthy that reports, which were brought to the attention of the media and which "experts" close to the TPLF (Martin Plaut, Kjetil Tronvoll, etc.) specifically provided for numerous EU representatives, were always marked "not verified". Nameless so called eyewitnesses ("an American citizen"...) substantiated Fake News and allegations, which were then spread shortly afterwards in the media and political bodies as facts.

### **Eritrean war crimes in Tigray?**

Today, Eritrea is pilloried for being involved in war crimes in Tigray, while there is no mention of the roots of the conflict and the war initiated by the TPLF leadership. Nor is there any mention of the fact that Eritrea is making every effort to help the population fleeing the war, massacres and destruction, and to provide the best possible care for the refugees - regardless of the fact that the corona control measures that have been extremely successful in Eritrea so far are being jeopardized by the waves of refugees.

All those who deal with this issue are well advised not to be led astray, but to look at the demonstrable facts as well as the explanations of the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, to critically examine them and then to make their own judgment.

It would be fatal if official representatives of Germany or the EU would be misled once again into condemning or sanctioning Eritrea on the basis of targeted false reports and the campaign politically controlled by paid TPLF "activists". It was barely 12 years ago that sanctions were imposed on Eritrea. At that time, Eritrea was accused of destabilizing Somalia by supporting the terrorist militia Al Shabab with fabricated news, resulting in UN sanctions. Annually, these accusations were independently verified without finding any proof ("no evidence"). Still, Eritrea and its people suffered from these unjustified sanctions until November 2018. The masterminds of the 2009 sanctions are the same ones who today accuse Eritrea of war crimes in Tigray.

Is the international community, is the EU facing up to its international legal, political and also moral responsibility today? "Cui bono?", who benefits? This question was already rightly asked in ancient times. It is to be hoped that the politicians in Europe do not fall for the same "experts" again and protect both themselves as well as the suffering people in Eritrea and its neighboring countries from the consequences of repeated mistakes

This is our appeal to all political and other decision makers who are currently concerned with the role of Eritrea in the Tigray conflict.

**Board of the German-Eritrean Society (DEG) e.V.\***

**Board of the Austrian-Eritrean Society (ÖEG)**

Frankfurt, 24th February 2021

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## Appendix:

### Eritrea's bad experience with international organizations:

Chronological time table from 1941

- 1941: The British army defeats the Italian army at Keren. Eritrea comes under British administration. In the following years, the British dismantle industrial plants and important infrastructure facilities in the country (e.g., Massawa cable car to Asmara). Eritrea is set back decades in its development. The British occupiers' raid was tolerated by international powers discussing Eritrea's future.
- 1943: The U.S. and Ethiopia sign an agreement. Ethiopia receives economic/military support, and becomes the most important U.S. partner in the Horn of Africa.
- 1946: British administration allows parties to be formed in Eritrea.
- 1947: Paris Peace Treaty. The four victorious powers (USSR, USA, Great Britain, and France) are charged with determining Eritrea's political future. Great Britain proposes to divide Eritrea between Sudan and Ethiopia. No agreement is reached.
- 1949: The UN sends a commission to Eritrea to form an opinion. As a former Italian colony, Eritrea should have been granted independence as part of the "decolonization" process.
- 1950: The UN decides on the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia (Decision 390 A (V)), which comes into force in 1952.
- The Eritrean people are not consulted at any time about their opinion of the UN's plans, and the numerous parties in Eritrea are likewise not included in the decision-making process.**
- 1952: Election of the constituent assembly in Eritrea. Eritrea's constitution is ratified in July 1952. In the years that follow, the Ethiopian central government violates numerous agreements from the Federation Agreement.
- 1953: Ethiopian legislation is begun to be extended to Eritrea. The Ethiopian emperor's deputy is installed as head of government without consulting the Eritrean parliament.
- 1956: The Eritrean official languages Tigrinia and Arabic are replaced by the Ethiopian official language Amharik.
- 1958: The Eritrean government is transformed into an administration. The Eritrean flag is replaced by the Ethiopian flag.
- The gradual undermining of the UN decision by Ethiopia is watched idly by the UN. Protests by Eritrean parties to the UN go unheard.**
- 1958: Foundation of the ELM (Eritrean Liberation Movement)

- 1960: Foundation of the ELF (Eritrean Liberation Front)
- 1961: Beginning of the armed liberation struggle by the ELF
- 1962: The federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia decided by the UN is dissolved by Ethiopia and Eritrea is incorporated as a province into the Ethiopian empire.
- Silently and inactively, the UN watches as the last remnant of its own resolution is swept away. The annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia clearly violates international law...**
- 1973: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) is formed from parts of the fragmented ELF and becomes the dominant force in the independence movement in the following years.
- 1974: Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie is overthrown by the military, and a military junta (DERG) takes power.
- 1977: The DERG turns away from the U.S. and toward the USSR, which henceforth provides massive military aid in the fight against the Eritrean independence movement.
- 1988: The tide of military conflict turns in favor of the EPLF with the capture of the Ethiopian command center in Afabet.
- 1990: February 10: The EPLF captures the Eritrean port city of Massawa. This cuts off supplies to Ethiopian troops in the interior.
- 1991: May 24: The EPLF captures Eritrea's capital, Asmara, without a fight. Remnants of the Ethiopian army surrender or flee.
- May 28: Supported by mechanized units of the EPLF, the Ethiopian Liberation Movements Alliance (EPRDF) marches into Addis Ababa. Dominant force in this alliance: the TPLF.
- 1993: Internationally supervised referendum on Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia. 99.8 % vote in favor of independence. On May 24, Eritrea declares independence; on May 28, Eritrea becomes a member state of the UN.
- 1998: Border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea begins.
- 2000: Eritrea and Ethiopia sign the Algiers Peace Agreement. The agreement mandates an Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) to draw and demarcate the border "based on relevant colonial treaties (1900, 1902 and 1908) and applicable international law." The Commission is not empowered to make decisions "ex aequo et bono." There is agreement on both sides that its border demarcation decision will be final and binding on both sides.
- 2002: The International Court of Justice in The Hague awards the city of Badme and other disputed areas to Eritrea in an arbitration ruling on the border demarcation.

- 2003: September 19: Ethiopia officially declares the decision of the Boundary Commission "null and void" in a letter to the UN Security Council.
- The "guarantors" of the peace agreement, namely the UN, EU and others, accept Ethiopia's unilateral rejection of the arbitration award without comment and exert no pressure on Ethiopia to accept the border demarcation decision and thus pave the way for peace.
- This failure across the board led to a "no peace no war" state between the two countries - that is, a situation between peace and war. Only when the TPLF loses its influence in the Ethiopian government does the way for peace and border demarcation become clear in 2018 (see below).*
- 2009: The UN adopts sanctions against Eritrea for alleged support of the terrorist militia Al-Shabab. Among other things, it is alleged that tens of thousands of Eritrean soldiers are fighting alongside them.
- The sanctions are reviewed annually by the UN. The commission charged with this task repeatedly finds that there is no evidence for the allegations underlying the decision to impose sanctions. Nevertheless, they are renewed every year.
- 2015: The UN Human Rights Council publishes a report on the human rights situation in Eritrea. This report is extremely controversial, as it only refers to anonymized statements of around 550 refugees and omits assessments/opinions of others, also international organizations, who are in Eritrea, or does not have their say.
- 2017: Ambassadors of the states of Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy as well as the EU representative sharply criticize the report of the UN Human Rights Council.
- The report of the Human Rights Council and especially the appointment of a special rapporteur, who has already acted as an anti-Eritrean activist in the past, leads to massive anger on the part of the Eritrean government, which in turn points out that it has been cooperating constructively with the UN Human Rights Council for years, including in the review process on the human rights situation under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).
- 2018: June 5: Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed recognizes the border demarcation between the two countries. On July 8, a peace treaty is signed between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Relations normalize, controlled border openings are prepared.
- November 2018: UN sanctions against Eritrea are lifted.
- 2020: On November 4, the Ethiopian garrison Northern Command is attacked by the TPLF, numerous soldiers are killed ... Massacre in Mai Kadra by TPLF militias ... TPLF shells Eritrea several times with rockets...