

# **A Tale of Two sides on Federalism**

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It can't be denied the fact that the previous feudal and dictatorial regimes have crippled our country. And the subsequent military junta, the dictatorial 'Derg' regime has elongated the country's misery for another 17 years by reversing the peoples' struggle. After the demise of 'Derg', it took a very bitter struggle at every level to build a stable country with a single collective political economic system in which its citizens benefit from the rapid and sustainable development as well as from the democratic order that's being built. However, there were and still are some extremist who choose not to accept this fact.

Although our country has achieved great many accomplishments as a result of its adhered new federal system, come every nation, nationalities and people day there isn't a stone left unmoved blacken the developmental democratic system which is bearing success to the country, by previous regime nostalgias and some extremist forces.

On this article, I will start by looking into the hurdles our country needed to hop in order to build its today's system and help my readers grasp a sense of understanding about the subject, and will finally probe into their recent smear campaign and in the process raise the question 'where will this smear campaign (of theirs) on the federal system led them to?

As it's known despite the fact that the 'Derg' was overthrown in 1983, there were other hurdles that needed their own fight. On one side there were some progressives that believed federalism is the only solution that's capable of stopping the blood-shading and chaotic Ethiopian political,

economical and social issues; on the other side there were those who inclined themselves to two opposite extreme ideologies.

The first issue that needed resolve was the fact that at the time there were up to 17 armed ethnic groups. As history tells us these organizations believed that (without contemplating the realities on the ground), seceding from Ethiopia was the only solution to the problems and vowed to fight for this cause.

The other (second) extreme is the one that see (from an antique and obsolete vista no less) the new federal system as a threat to the country's existence, in which in the name of 'unity' tried to draw out the nation, nationalities and peoples' demand for equality and democratic rights with 'we know for you' political mantra, which could have dragged the country into unending chaos.

At the time, a heavy struggle had to be waged in order to solve these hurdles in a serene manner and establish a democratic federal country. There needed to be a struggle against anti-Ethiopian forces; fortunately the progressive forces won that struggle. Things weren't rosy even after this. The country again faced very difficult tests. One of those tests and the biggest of them all was the fight against poverty, the country's number one enemy.

As it can be remembered, by understanding that this mutual enemy can only be destroyed through the collective hand of the government and the country's nation, nationalities and people; the government took the leading role in taking the responsibility of inserting a winning mentality on the public over poverty.

At the time important questions like 'which approach is best to fight poverty' And 'what are the basic key issues that can help win against this mutual

enemy, had to be asked. In order to answer these questions a constitution which will serve as the supreme law of the land needed to be ratified.

Although the government opened the door for everyone to be involved when the constitution was being ratified, some of the previous regime nostalgias and power-monger anti-peace forces did not choose to accept the opportunity. However the transitional government (at the time) did not stop from teaching these people that real power emanates from the people. So, it did an edification work in educating the people that real power is vested in the hands of Ethiopia's nation, nationalities and peoples.

During these times, comments like 'the country should not have a constitution; a country that's built on an ethnic - based federalism cannot be successful in any way' were brought up. By giving the necessary and appropriate replay (to these tests, the Ethiopian nation, nationalities and people with their own consent and agreement ratified the FDRE constitution on November 29, 1987.

This constitution serving as a document of their covenant has answered Ethiopian peoples' years of demands and questions. Since, we have seen the difficulties putting up a federal system has faced (even if it's roughly, now we will turn our attention to its achievements.

After (the ratification of the constitution), war was declared on an enemy that has been living in the country for years; an enemy that have made its people to bow their heads in shame - our number one enemy poverty. The whole Ethiopian people became aware of the fact that there isn't any enemy out there bigger than poverty.

And to fight and win against this enemy, our country's people from the old to the young, being led by our government's successful policies and strategies, have achieved an economic development like the lights that have

never been seen before in our history. A change of feat: from extreme poverty to a rapid and robust development.

After the federal system came into effect and the constitution ratified, basic demands with regards to peace, development and democratic issues have been answered. The constitution has guaranteed peoples' right to self administer, to adhere to their respective religion peacefully, to speak and write in their own language, and to express their tradition and heritage freely. It should be noted here that the cause of the Ethiopian peoples' struggle that spanned generations is to answer these demands.

Despite this fact, at the time both local and foreign-based Medias' political 'analyst' claimed 'if federalism is put to effect in Ethiopia, its people by grouping against each other will wipe themselves out'. They have continuously tried to propagate as if the federal system will not benefit us.

These detractors did this not because they are impervious to the fact that the federal system is beneficial to our people, - but because they choose to align and propagate with the extremist forces that are nostalgic to the previous regimes.

Despite the fact that these people said whatever they wanted to say, both the government and the people being impervious to these peoples smear and discrediting campaign, and instead choose to strengthen their unity by understanding their diversity is their beauty and to work for mutual development.

And this fact has been stated by Dr. Hashim Tewfiq on his book 'Transition to Federalism: the Ethiopian Experience' cited Larria Diamon's "federalism is the appropriate political tool to tolerate differences that arises from social identity or to subdue conflicts that may arise from differences of social or

other identity differences”. His book also briefs that federal system plays a huge role in growing a collective economy.

Understanding this reality, the developmental and democratic government of our country played a huge role in (helping) Ethiopia’s nation, nationalities and people to ratify the constitution through their consent and agreement. The EPRDF-led popular struggle that freed the country from the dictatorial rule of the ‘Derg’ had a committed believe that power is only directed by the people and for the people. And it has enabled the people to be the ultimate holder of power by enshrining it on the constitution-the supreme law of the land.

Here it’s helpful to mention our great leader Ato Meles Zenawi’s one time comment about the federal system- in order to further strengthen my argument. our great leader had said, “the constitution is the culmination of our peoples’ years of struggle; it is by taking this popular struggle into account that the constitution was ratified...

...Ethiopian tradition means the sum of all Ethiopian peoples’ tradition. Ethiopian language is the sum of all of the peoples’ language. And Ethiopian history means the sum of all the people’s history. And this history is hosted along with its difference best in the federal system.” Further he underlined the fact that adhering to federalism is the only option for the country. And we have seen the great leader’s comment turn into reality. And the system is continuing without losing its footing.

Although some extremists after the unfortunate passing of the fmr. PM came out and claim crazy analysis like ‘the country will be destabilized through inner political problems; its people will wipe each other out’... and other stuffs as well. It’s been clearly witnessed that no one shared this sinister stance of theirs. This is because the federal system is not built on

soft basis as they though (claim to be), but on a very strong foundation- which is the peoples' consent. So, it's been proven that their vista on the federal system is blurring or twisting the truth.

There weren't any worst scenarios not raised by these extremists following the unfortunate passing of our great leader H.H Mr Meles Zenawi. We all remember their prophetic-like comments they propagated through their personal puppet Medias, "Ethiopia will not have a stable government post – Meles." As these extremist politicians adhere to "zero-sum' politics, they won't back down from doing any thing (even bad) if it helps their cause. They don't even have the tranquility to ask if the country they wished for exists in post-Meles Ethiopia.

Their antique and obsolete political view of 'the country will be disintegrated' can't sway anyone outside of themselves. Let me raise few instances to support this. As we all know, there wasn't any Ethiopian or friends of Ethiopia left not shocked by the sudden death of Ato Meles Zenawi.

The people have shown its deep love for the leader by lining in the street from Bole Airport to the grand palace in that rain and cold. And for the next two weeks the public came not only from Addis Ababa but also from other regions and foreign lands to express their deep sorrow by their own prerogative. Although the extremist saw all this and know for a fact that there are many Meles'es created, it still did not stop them from spewing their shaggy dog story \_that claim the country is done is dusted for.

Of course the passing of Ato Meles has created deep sorrow and shock. However, the people from border to border have said that it will strive to implement our great leader's vision by following the federal system path he crafted for us and strengthen our unity through spirited effort. And many foreign – based Medias were taken back by the publics' mourning to its

leader's death so much that, they reported the news in a contrary mood to the extremists by saying, 'Ethiopians buried their beloved leader'.

While the foreign media reported (the event) like this, the so-called oppositions and extremists; who wish disintegration for their own country, reaction to the event have gotten them nothing except to being unfavorably judged by the public.

All in all, the 8<sup>th</sup> Ethiopia's nation, nationalities and peoples' day hosted in Somali region's capital Jijiga; like the last 7 events, have played a major role in strengthening our peoples' unity and highlighting the achievements of our federal system. And the people have promised to execute the theme of the celebration which was 'our constitution for our renaissance'.

Despite seeing the huge difference between yesterdays and today's Ethiopian Somali region, the so-called oppositions and extremists who can't seem to learn from their past mistakes, did not stop from hating on the federal system without any explanation.

What this sinister act of theirs proves is the fact that these forces are trying to confuse (distract) the public by looking through a vista of (anger) caused by the success created by the federal system. Although their effort to confuse or distract the public hasn't got them any results, I believe the smear or blackening campaign they launch on every nation, nationalities and peoples day or the day the ratification of the constitution (written by the blood of our people) is celebrated, should be countered (answered) to.

One of the ridiculous reports made public with regards to the 8<sup>th</sup> nation, nationalities and people was an article put out by Ato Hailemeskel Beshewan yeleh, a columnist on a magazine called 'fact' (a not really factual magazine) on its November 2006 issuance; under the title 'behind the celebration nation, nationalities and peoples Day'.

Looking at this man's causality-laden article in which he ranted through 4 sub-titles (federalism, confused party, TPLF's constitution and crumbling constitution), nobody can be blamed if he/she thinks the man does not dwell in not only Shewa (as his name suggests), but also in Ethiopia as a whole. This is because the issues he raised are a 'myth' that he and others with their own hidden agenda propagate. It's not in-sync with the realities that exist in our country. It should also be noted that this same person is one of those persons that's pissed by the success of the federal system.

This myth-writer which is one of the people that are pissed by the success of the federal system as (seen from his distorted view on the subject), has tried to argue that our country's federal system has failed by exaggerating and twisting every little detail for his cause.

So if his cynicism is any thing to go by, the federal system that has brought an unprecedented economic development; in which people from around the world attested to, is failing according to him. By mentioning conflicts that aroused as a result of grazing land and water; which for the record have been arising within nation and nationalities of our country for years, and citing the eviction of Amharic speaking people from Guraferda and Beninshangul region ... etc, he was conceited enough to claim that the federal system has failed as a result of these aforementioned issues. This is ridiculous beyond any imagination. This story writer is either unaware or doesn't want to acknowledge the fact that in conflict is part of the fabric of any society. He doesn't want to acknowledge this because it will not help his smear campaign.

Nevertheless, even in an advanced society and countries, let alone in a society of ours where public consciousness is only in a 'good' stage, conflict is an inevitable phenomenon. Man inevitable enters in conflict with himself, his surroundings and with nature itself. This is because of the scarcity of

world's natural resources. And Ethiopia is no exception – as the country like every other nation on earth has scarcity of natural resources.

So, conflict has been a constant phenomenon in the past and will be so in the future. However, as the federal system of our country is working tirelessly on this issue (unlike the past regimes), its changing the narrative. It has enabled the country's nation nationalities and people to use their natural resource appropriately and help them share it with their brothers and sisters.

However that might be, it's not easy to change in few years the blurred attitude past regimes created in the country for years; it takes a long process, time and a change in attitude. Nevertheless, this myth-writer just out of his desire to blacken the system has tried to tell us without any shame that it's a 'failed federalism'; shrugging off this reality.

But the federal system hasn't failed. In fact the system by uniting the country's people, it has built the strongest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa where the people benefits step-by-step. Thus, I believe the man's 'failed' rhetoric exists only in the workings of his mind, not in this new Ethiopia.

Ato Hailemesqel; with his panache for foreign thinking that are impervious to our country's reality and for quotations of some people with their own sinister agenda, wasn't concerned that he was completely stepping out of logic and reality. When he claimed the eviction of Amharic-speaking people from Gura ferda and Beninshangul region was a confirmation to the failings of the federal system. The fact that he's arguing without any fact or logic didn't concern this would-be write or more appropriately the copy/paster of other peoples' comment.

But, the reality is not as what this man claims to be. First of all the people evicted from Guraferda and Beninshangul by some irresponsible people are

not only Amharic-speaking people; Oromigna and other language-speaking people were also among the evictee. And secondly they have been able to return to their place by the government. This man did not even want to mention this fact, as his objective is to try to instigate a conflict between people.

All in all, it should be noted that the system that's being built in our country will move forward by improving and correcting itself. As its known all federal system wasn't built in a day. Problems are inevitable in this kind of situation. The main thing is to solve these problems along with other tiny details as the process moves forward. With regards to this, the federal system that's being built in our country has reached its present state by giving timely and appropriate answers to these issues.

By solving minor and inevitable problems it has been able to create conducive system where the country's nation, nationalities and peoples (through their consent and harmony) lives together as one.

Other than this, the writer's usual 'as these people are being this, so the federal system has failed' blabber can only point to the fact that he's got shortage of ideas worth raising. But, this doesn't hide the fact that it's a funny; if we're to ask 'If this system has failed (like he said), then what system is he living at?'

And this would-be writer has raised an issue that's contradicting to his subtitle of 'a confused party'. This man who's bent on inking the government negatively has tried to confuse others, being a confused person that he is. The issue he raised basically entails; an illogical argument that claims the ruling party is using nation and nationalities issue as a political card, backing this statement with his usual 'this is true because some one has said it' argument.

However, since any reader of this article knows this deceit very well, I don't think its worth to say anything more on the issue. However, I would like to raise one fact-that is the nation, nationalities and people rights that the ruling party fought so hard for and have a strong commitment to, will not be put up for debate.

As we all know, the ruling party's position on this issue is not like what this confused person or his likes are spewing. As nation, nationalities rights is something that our people have fought for and many children of Ethiopia have sacrificed their lives for; be it the ruling party or the people of Ethiopia position on this issue is both firm and irreversible. So, I would like to tell this would-be writer 'in your dreams'.

Though, Ato Hailemesqel talks about the constitution, the fact that he looks at it with contempt (just like 'Ginbot 7') can be seen from the way he calls the constitution- "TPLF's Constitution". 'Ginbot 7' as we know, gave the constitution this term as a result of its spite to Tigrayan people and their leading party, but its unclear and confusing why this would-be writer chose to use this same term. This is because, despite its fault while he used the term 'EPRDF's Constitution' throughout his article, it's not clear why he used the term "TPLF's Constitution' for the title.

All in all, the constitution (as expressed in the constitution itself) is the ownership of Ethiopia's nation, nationalities and people; it's not of a single party. Although the man said what he said what he said out of spite, it will only bestow an unfavorable impression from the people on him.

Also, this man's article is contradictory. In one side, appeasing as if he cares claims 'the ruling party is using the nation and nationalities issue for its own political gain'; and on the other side emerging with his true self says

‘there’s no option but to ratify new constitution by tearing this one (which guarantees nation, nationality issue ascendancy)’.

As far as I can understand, those who dream (aspire) to tear the constitutional system should be the country’s and peoples’ enemy, terrorists and anti-peace forces, not a citizen that’s enjoying one of the perks of the constitution- doing his job peacefully.

Of course it’s his right to dream of tearing the constitution, but I don’t think it’s responsible or right of him to propagate about tearing the constitution using the media. I believe its stepping out of the ‘Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation’ or would even be breaking the law.

All in all, he and his likes should realize that as long as the nation, nationalities and people of Ethiopia; who ratified it with their absolute consent and agreement, exists there will be no chance that the constitution will be tore apart, as they wish. Also any person with an astute outlook will know that contemplating about tearing the constitution is like stripping off the sovereign owners of the constitution, which are of course the nation, nationalities and people of Ethiopia. And the result will be marginalization from the wider public.

Generally, it should be noted that despite the hurdles thrown by those who didn’t understand the federal system or those extremists with their own agenda like the lights of this would-be writer, the federal system is moving by correcting and improving itself. With this, it has enabled us to move in a developmental path instead of total disintegration. Continuing with launching a smear campaign on the federal system come every NNP day, downplaying the country’s (the federal system’s) success to serve their hidden agenda and stripping down the sovereignty of the people with their

propagation cannot bring them anything other than nostalgia for an undemocratic regime.