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# Country report 69

## Ethiopia

Domestic political situation

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Asylum and refugee  
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## **Abstract**

This country report focuses on the current political situation in Ethiopia and is therefore an update of the two BAMF Country Reports 33 Ethiopia and 51 Ethiopia (Tigray). Prime Minister Abiy has not succeeded in calming the unstable security situation in some parts of the country. Ethnic conflicts continue with numerous deaths, looting and displacement.

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## List of abbreviations

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ABC	American Broadcasting Company
ACCORD	Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AI	Amnesty International
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
ANDP	Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP)
BAMF	Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDP	Benishangul-Gumuz Democratic Party
BPLM	Benishangul Gumuz People's Liberation Movement
EDF	Eritrean Defence Forces
EEPA	Europe External Programme with Africa
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defence Force
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPO	Ethiopia Peace Observatory
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
GLF	Gambella Liberation Front
GPDM	Gumuz People's Democratic Movement
GPLM	Gumuz People's Liberation Movement
GPDM	Gambella Peoples Democratic Movement
HNL	Harari National League
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organisation
PP	(Ethiopian) Prosperity Party
SDP	Somali Democratic Party
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples
TDF	Tigray Defence Force
TIRA	Tigray Interim Regional Administration
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

## Foreword

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The initial hopes of a general calming of the unstable security situation in some parts of Ethiopia when Prime Minister Abiy took office in April 2018 have not materialised. Ethnic tensions and violent clashes have increased alarmingly in many parts of the country. Although the conflict in the regional state of Tigray has ended for the time being with the agreement on a "permanent cessation of hostilities" concluded in November 2022, armed clashes between regional militias and state forces are occurring, particularly in Oromia and Amhara, resulting in numerous deaths, looting and displacement.

Although Ethiopia sees itself as a nation state, the population still defines itself primarily in terms of its ethnicity. Minorities feel disadvantaged when it comes to access to resources such as land, water, forests, political decisions, elections, administration, employment and state facilities such as schools and health centres.

This country report is intended to provide an in-depth insight into the causes of conflict, conflict actors as well as the humanitarian situation and current developments, particularly since 2022.

# 1. General overview

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According to the constitution that came into force in 1995, Ethiopia is a federal and democratic state. The borders of the federal states are based on linguistic, ethnic and settlement boundaries.<sup>1</sup> After the fall of the Derg regime (socialist military dictatorship since 1974) in May 1991,<sup>2</sup> the pan-Ethiopian rebel alliance Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF or Ih'adeg), an (ethno-regional) party alliance consisting of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF or Woyane = uprising, rebellion<sup>3</sup>), the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO), the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), became the ruling party.<sup>4</sup> With Meles Zenawi as prime minister, the TPLF, which led the liberation war against the Derg regime and successively brought key positions in the power apparatus and the economy under its control, had a traditional claim to leadership in the EPRDF until the end.<sup>5</sup>

Sustained economic growth, from which only parts of the population benefit, democratic deficits, political repression and efforts to expand the Addis Ababa capital region at the expense of the surrounding Oromia region - without offering appropriate compensation for land expropriation - in order to develop new industrial areas ("Addis Ababa Integrated Regional Development Plan" - "Masterplan") were the triggers for protests that began in Oromia in 2014<sup>6</sup> and spread to Amhara and Somali.<sup>7</sup> The security forces responded with extreme force and violence.<sup>8</sup>

Due to the ongoing unrest, tensions and disputes arose within the EPRDF between reformers and hardliners, which ultimately led to the resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn<sup>9</sup> as prime minister and chairman of the EPRDF on 15 February 2018. On 27 March 2018, the EPRDF Council, the party's highest decision-making body, elected Abiy Ahmed Ali<sup>10</sup> as the new party chairman and candidate for the office of prime minister, which he officially assumed on 02 April 2018.<sup>11</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> The constitution made ethnicity the most important, if not the only, factor in state organisation (as stated in the preamble: "We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia...", The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 21/08/1995; Ethiopian citizenship can only be obtained by belonging to one of the officially recognised ethnic groups. The right to self-determination is reflected in the right to territorial autonomy. Nine ethnically defined regional states were created with the right to their own flag, constitution, parliament, court and police force: Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Harar, Oromia, Somali, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) and Tigray, as well as the two city states of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Afar, Amhara, Oromia and Tigray are each considered the "homeland" of the ethnic group whose name they bear, even if other ethnic minorities live there. The other regions, especially the SNNPR, are inhabited by several ethnic groups that can claim autonomy at the local level. Ayele, Z.; Günther, J.: *Ethnischer Föderalismus in Äthiopien*, APuZ 18-19/2020, p. 18.
  - <sup>2</sup> In 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie was ousted from power in a military coup. The deposition of the emperor was followed by a military council dictatorship (Amharic: Derg) under the leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam, initially supported by the USA, until the Derg openly embraced socialism in 1978 and turned to the Soviet Union. Mismanagement and the restriction of civil rights led to numerous armed uprisings by oppressed ethnic groups whose situation had deteriorated under the Derg. In 1991, the TPLF defeated the Derg in alliance with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).
  - <sup>3</sup> The TPLF called itself the "second Woyane" (Tigrinya: "revolution/rebellion") to establish a historical link to the earlier Tigrayan rebellion in 1943 against political centralisation by Emperor Haile Selassie after the Italian occupation. Forsen, T.; Tronvoll, K.: *Protest and Political Change in Ethiopia: The Initial Success of the Oromo Qeerroo Youth Movement*, *Journal of African Studies* – Vol. 30 No. 4, 2021, p. 5.
  - <sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group: *Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara*, Briefing 194/Africa, 16/11/2023.
  - <sup>5</sup> The EPRDF followed the socialist principle of "democratic centralism". The party was led by a central committee and a politburo, which enforced decisions, in spite of regional and local governments, in a partly authoritarian manner down to the municipal level.
  - <sup>6</sup> Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF): *Länderreport 66 Äthiopien – Sicherheitslage Oromia*, 03/2024, p. 10f.
  - <sup>7</sup> For details on the masterplan and the development of the protests: Forsen, T.; Tronvoll, K.: *Protest and Political Change in Ethiopia: The Initial Success of the Oromo Qeerroo Youth Movement*, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* – Vol. 30 No. 4, 2021, pp. 5, 10.
  - <sup>8</sup> *Government of Ethiopia: Human Rights Commission Publicises Findings about the Recent Sporadic Disturbances*, 18/04/2017.
  - <sup>9</sup> Hailemariam, a member of the SEPDM and a member of the small ethnic group of the Wolayata from the border region with Kenya, took office in 2012 following the death of Meles Zenawi, who had ruled Ethiopia since independence.
  - <sup>10</sup> Abiy joined the resistance against the Mengistu regime and reached the rank of lieutenant colonel. He earned a PhD in peace and security studies and headed the Ethiopian Cyber Intelligence Service. In 2011, he entered politics and rose quickly within the OPDO. Burke, J.: *These changes are unprecedented: how Abiy is upending Ethiopian politics*, 08/07/2019.
  - <sup>11</sup> Johnson, D.: *Déjà-vu oder echter Aufbruch – Äthiopien zwei Jahre nach Abiy Ahmeds Amtsantritt*, 24/04/2020, APuZ 18-19/2020, p. 11.

Because of the political reforms, the removal of long-serving EPRDF officials from state power, especially members of the TPLF, the release of political prisoners from jail and the return of numerous opposition members from abroad, as well as the peace agreement with Eritrea, Abiy was long regarded as a great beacon of hope on the path to democratic change in Ethiopia.<sup>12</sup> Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 2019 for his domestic and institutional reforms, which he also refers to as "medemer" (Amharic: "synergy through cooperation" with the aim of a multi-ethnic community; oromo: "Ida'amuu"),<sup>13</sup> his commitment to various peace efforts in the Horn of Africa and the peace agreement with Eritrea.<sup>14</sup>

The opposition's political room for manoeuvre has increased since Abiy took office.<sup>15</sup> Legislative reforms have also been introduced, such as the Proclamation on Preventing and Combating Terrorism Crimes 1176/2020<sup>16</sup> and the Proclamation 1185/2020 on the Prevention and Suppression of Hate Speech and Disinformation in January 2020.<sup>17</sup>

In November 2019, the EPRDF decided to dissolve the old alliance and rename it the (Ethiopian) Prosperity Party (PP).<sup>18</sup> The decision to establish the PP was taken by the EPRDF's Executive Committee. Only the TPLF voted unanimously against it and justified its rejection on the grounds that it did not agree with the new party in terms of vision, objectives and political orientation (ideology). The TPLF also accused the PP of acting "illegally" because it was jeopardising the federal system and therefore the constitution.<sup>19</sup>

In the subsequent final vote in the 180-member Executive Council, the highest decision-making body of the EPRDF, the founding of the PP was finalised. The TPLF boycotted the meeting. According to expert observers, the merger, which was officially recognised by the electoral board in December 2019, marked a significant shift from an ethnic to a pan-Ethiopian political organisation. The formal self-dissolution of the EPRDF took place in February 2020 with the approval of the PP by the relevant electoral commission.<sup>20</sup>

The following parties belong to the Prosperity Party:<sup>21</sup>

- Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP)
- Benishangul-Gumuz Democratic Party (BDP)
- Oromo Democratic Party (ODP; formerly: Oromo People's Democratic Organisation, OPDO)
- Amhara Democratic Party (ADP; formerly: Amhara National Democratic Movement, ANDM)
- Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM)
- Somali Democratic Party (SDP)
- Gambella Peoples Democratic Movement (GPDM)
- Harari National League (HNL).

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<sup>12</sup> United Kingdom – Home Office: Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia – Opposition to the government, 07/2020, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Hirt, N.: Geostrategic power struggles in the Horn of Africa, 10/2019, Institute of African Studies (GIGA) – Focus Africa No. 5, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Deutsche Welle: Friedensnobelpreis an Abiy Ahmed überreicht, 10/12/2019.

<sup>15</sup> Observers saw the change of power as the most significant political change since the fall of the Mengistu regime in 1991. Abiy's election was made possible because the government, in particular the TPLF leadership elite, did not appear to have a coherent concept for combating the unrest that had been ongoing since 2015. An alliance of the OPDO and ANDM succeeded in electing Abiy as prime minister (also known as the "Oromara Alliance"). Abiy received 108 of the possible 169 votes. Shiferaw Shigute of the SEPDM received 59 votes, mainly from the TPLF; Johnson, D.: Déjà-vu oder echter Aufbruch – Äthiopien zwei Jahre nach Abiy Ahmeds Amtsantritt, 24/04/2020, APuZ 18-19/2020, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ezega News: Ethiopia Approves New Anti-Terrorism Law Consisting of Death Penalty, 02/01/2020; Amnesty International points out that the rights of persons detained or prosecuted for alleged terrorist offences are better protected, but that other provisions continue to restrict freedom of expression. Amnesty International: Report on the human rights situation covering 2020 – Ethiopia, 07/04/2021.

<sup>17</sup> Proclamation No. 1185/2020, ratified on 13/02/2020, threatens authors of posts on the internet or social media that may lead to violence or disruption of public order with fines of up to ETB 100,000 Birr (approx. EUR 1,700 as of 8/04/2024) and imprisonment for up to five years. Human rights organisations criticise that the law restricts freedom of speech and could be used to silence critical voices. The government considers the law necessary as it also holds the media responsible for the increasing ethnic violence. Cascais, A.: Afrikas Gesetze gegen Internet-Hass: Hass bekämpfen, Freiheit einschränken, 19/02/2020.

<sup>18</sup> Yibeltal, K.: Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed gets a new ruling party, 22/11/2019.

<sup>19</sup> Tesfay, A.: The illegal Prosperity party (PP) has no room in Tigray-Ethiopia; must go, 01/01/2020; Tigray Online: Tigray people national conference concludes, Tigray people rejected Prosperity Party, 30/12/2019.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, D.: Déjà-vu oder echter Aufbruch – Äthiopien zwei Jahre nach Abiy Ahmeds Amtsantritt, 24/04/2020, APuZ 18-19/2020, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ezega News: The EPRDF Officially Ends; The Prosperity Party Begins, 26/12/2019.

On 21 June 2021, the parliamentary and regional elections, which were originally scheduled for mid-2020 but were postponed several times due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were held in large parts of the country and were won by the PP. According to the electoral commission, the party won 421 of the 436 parliamentary seats. As expected, Abiy was thus confirmed in office. In many constituencies, however, only PP candidates stood for election.<sup>22</sup> Several opposition parties, such as the two largest opposition groups of the ethnic Oromo, the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), also boycotted the ballot due to the imprisonment of their politicians and ongoing repression. After the Ethiopian government refused to give any assurances regarding unrestricted access to all regions where elections were to be held, among other things, no international observers were present during the election.<sup>23</sup>

Prime Minister Abiy's reform process is not without controversy. The main points of critique include:

- the precarious security situation in almost all parts of the country,<sup>24</sup>
- the use of force by the security forces,<sup>25</sup>
- the increase in ethnic conflicts, such as the armed conflicts in the regional states of Tigray, Amhara and Oromia,<sup>26</sup>
- the terror of armed groups against other ethnic groups and minorities.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Ethnic conflicts

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### 2.1. Tense security situation

While many ethnic groups remained excluded from decision-making processes due to the previous dominance of the EPRDF, Prime Minister Abiy's political reforms led to more freedom of expression, with the result that while open discourse was increasingly possible, this was also used to fuel and polarise ethnic conflicts. In many parts of the country, this dynamic, together with a rapidly growing population, has led to conflicts and divisions over land ownership, boundary issues and political representation, which resulted in several ethnic groups demanding more autonomy. The International Crisis Group includes Ethiopia in its list of ten conflicts to watch in 2024. Although the armed conflict in Tigray has been resolved with the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA), it has triggered violence in other regions.<sup>28</sup>

Some fear a fragmentation of the country, similar to former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s ("Balkanisation"), with bloody clashes between the ethnic groups, ethnic cleansing and even a civil war that would lead to the disintegration of the country.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Deutsche Welle: Erdrutschsieg für Regierungspartei in Äthiopien, 10/07/2021.

<sup>23</sup> Schwikowski, M.: Äthiopien: Wahlen, kein Wunder, 12/05/2021.

<sup>24</sup> There have been several attacks since Abiy took office. For example, on 23 June 2018, during Abiy's first public appearance in Addis Ababa, there was an attack with a hand grenade in which several people were killed and others injured. The reasons behind the attack remain unclear. On 10 October 2018, there is said to have been an attempted coup by soldiers. A military court sentenced the perpetrators to prison terms of between two and 14 years. On 22 June 2019, the president of the Amhara regional state, Ambachew Mekonnen, and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Seare Mekonnen, who hailed from Tigray, were among those killed in assassinations. They were considered confidants of Abiy. The suspected mastermind of the attacks, General Asaminew Tsige, was shot dead by security forces two days later. More than 80 people were killed and hundreds injured in riots in Addis Ababa and the surrounding Oromia region in October 2019. The trigger was a police action against the Oromo activist and media entrepreneur Jawar Mohammed. The murder of musician and Oromo activist Hachalu Hundessa on 29 June 2020 in Addis Ababa led to bloody protests with around 200 people killed. More than 3,500 people were arrested. The background to the attack remains unclear. BAMF: Länderreport 33 Äthiopien - Allgemeine politische Lage, 05/2021, p. 33f.

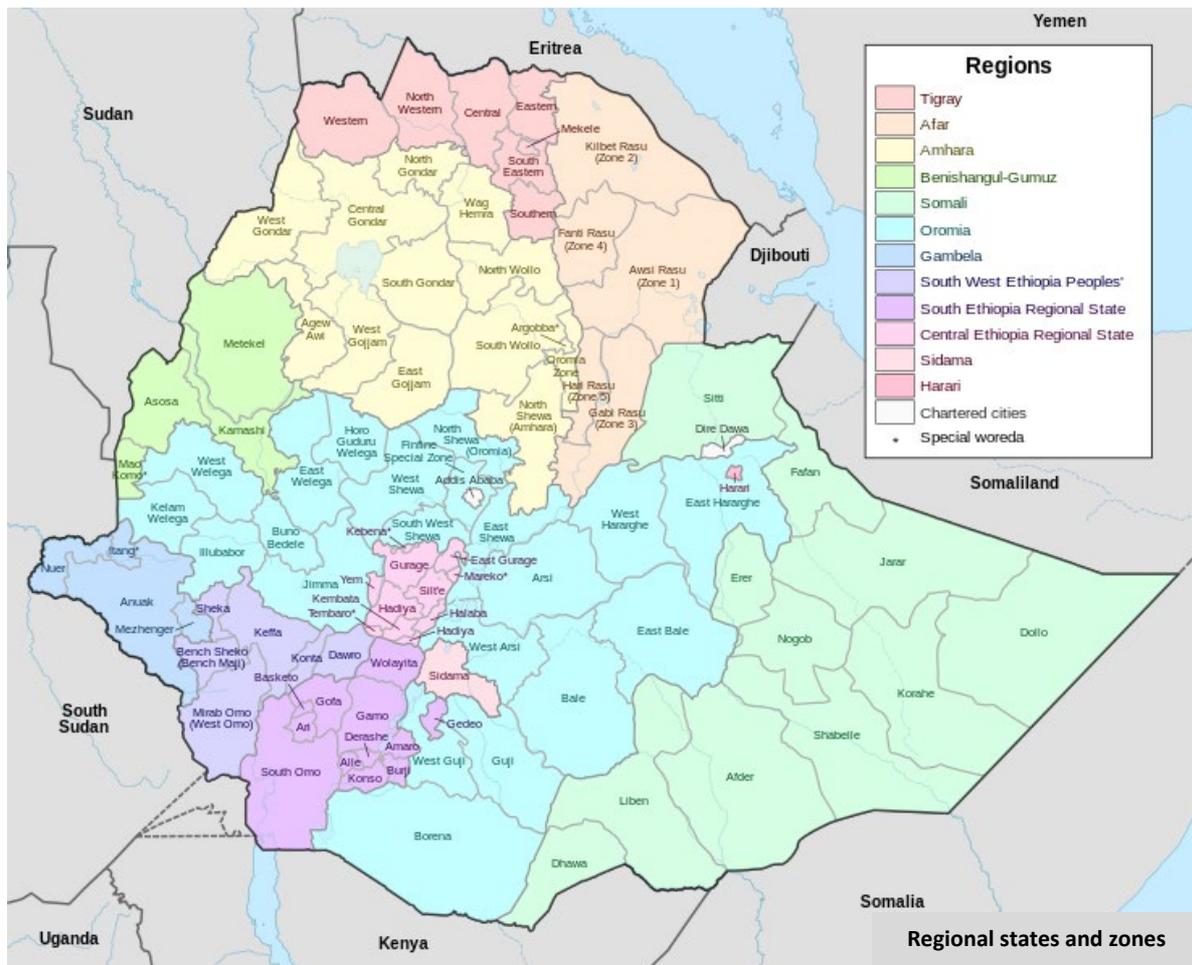
<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW): World Report 2024 - Ethiopia, Events of 2023, 10/01/2024; Amnesty International: Report Ethiopia 2022, 28/03/2023.

<sup>26</sup> Dieterich, J.: Äthiopien: Nach den Tigray die Amhara, 12/09/2023, in: Frankfurter Rundschau – Print edition.

<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International: Report Äthiopien 2022, 28/03/2023.

<sup>28</sup> International Crisis Group: 10 Conflicts to Watch in 2024, 01/01/2024.

<sup>29</sup> Ethiopia Insight: Minority rights dilemma exemplifies Ethiopia's brutal identity crisis, 11/03/2023; Schadomsky, L.: Ethiopia at risk of Balkanisation, in: Deutsche Welle, 04/11/2021.



Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/80/Map\\_of\\_zones\\_of\\_Ethiopia.svg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/80/Map_of_zones_of_Ethiopia.svg)

Many Ethiopians also attribute the tense security situation to the legalisation and return of armed resistance groups from exile, who would encounter a weak central and disoriented state.<sup>30</sup> While Ethiopia relied on an authoritarian system to maintain centralised power under long-time Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (1995 - 2012) and under his predecessor, the Stalinist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974 - 1991), Abiy has explicitly stated that he wants to grant more rights to the regions.<sup>31</sup>

Among other things, the constitution grants each region the right to establish its own "state police force" (Special Forces, Amharic: Liyu Hail) to "maintain public order and peace" in addition to the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF). Many regions also formed regional armed forces, which were often involved in armed disputes and thus caused intensification of conflicts.<sup>32</sup>

In early April 2023, the Ethiopian government responded and decided to disarm all militias nationwide and integrate the regional special forces into the state police and the national army in order to promote ethnic unity and prevent regional forces from getting involved in conflicts.<sup>33</sup> On 15 April 2023, Chief of General Staff Birhanu Jula declared that all militias had been successfully disarmed and placed under the command of the ENDF.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Hirt, N.: Äthiopiens Regionale Beziehungen - Zwischen Hegemoniestreben und dem Wunsch nach Stabilität, APuZ 18-19/2020, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> BAMF: Länderreport 33 Äthiopien - Allgemeine politische Lage, 05/2021, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> Adam, E.: Äthiopien: In der Sackgasse des ethnischen Föderalismus, in: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 12/2019, p. 4. The militias were mostly formed at kebele level by local civilians and were intended to support the security forces. They rarely have heavy weapons and are not under the command of the military. UK Home Office: Country Policy and Information Note, Ethiopia: Actors of protection, 02/2024, 32f.

<sup>33</sup> Tekle, T.: Ethiopia's post-war challenge: Disarming regional militias, 16/04/2023.

<sup>34</sup> Addis Standard: Army Chief proclaims end of regional special forces "as of today", 15/04/2023.

## 2.2. Conflict region: Amhara regional state

### 2.2.1. Demobilisation and Fano

In Amhara, the second largest region in Ethiopia with around a quarter of the total population,<sup>35</sup> the decision to demobilise all militias was met with widespread rejection on the grounds that this would be an attack on regional autonomy and would jeopardise security in Amhara.<sup>36</sup> A persistent threat from Tigrayan forces was claimed and therefore the presence of local armed forces was argued to be necessary for ensuring their own security.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the Fano militias resisted their demobilisation.<sup>38</sup>

Fano (Amharic: ፋኖ, literally "The Youth")<sup>39</sup> is an ethno-nationalist youth movement that has developed since 2010 from out of the protests against the central government, which at the time was still dominated by the TPLF, and sees itself as a representative of the ethnic Amhara, the second largest population group.<sup>40</sup> Many of its leaders were arrested in the course of the violent protests between 2016 and 2018, but were released again after Prime Minister Abiy took office. Shortly afterwards, there were renewed clashes between Fano and the security services. The attempt to disband Fano in early 2020 was abandoned in November 2020 due to the conflict in Tigray, when Fano became an important ally of the ENDF.<sup>41</sup>

The organisational structure of Fano is unclear. It is said that Fano has no central organisation, but consists of several local groups that hardly coordinate their operations with each other.<sup>42</sup> Fano itself explained that the leadership consists of seven executive members under the chairmanship of Arbenga Zemene Kassie and vice president Masresha Sete<sup>43</sup> and that the local groups are united as the Amhara Fano Popular Movement under the leadership of Fantahun Mohaba.<sup>44</sup> In the course of the demobilisation of local militias, the Fano is said to have merged with parts of the Amhara Regional Special Forces.<sup>45</sup> The exact strength of the Fano is unclear; in the course of the conflict in Tigray, the strength of the Fano together with the Amhara Regional Special Forces was estimated at around 200,000.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The Amhara held leading positions in business, administration and the military both under Emperor Haile Selassie and during Mengistu's dictatorship. After the EPRDF took power in May 1991, a disproportionate number of Amhara were dismissed from their positions. However, they still maintain an influential interest group in the diaspora.

<sup>36</sup> Necho, A.: Conflict trends analysis - Amhara region, in Rift Valley Institute, 10/11/2023.

<sup>37</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 411, 17/04/2023.

<sup>38</sup> Anadolu Ajansi: Ethiopia disarms regional militias despite protests, 17/04/2023.

<sup>39</sup> According to one source, Fano is a historical term that was used "in the Ethiopian struggle against injustice and foreign invaders" and referred to armed units to protect the population in the rural Amhara communities. Berhanu, G.: Fano - A Living Saviour Of The Amhara People And The Ethiopian Spirit - Analysis, in: Eurasia Review, 02 February 2022. Other sources translate Fano as "freedom fighters" whose roots go back to the occupation of Ethiopia by Italy (1935 to 1941). The Africa Report: Will the Fano drag Ethiopia back into civil war? 26/09/2023.

<sup>40</sup> Asylum Research Centre: The Situation in Tigray, 11/2021, p. 24.

<sup>41</sup> The Africa Report: Will the Fano drag Ethiopia back into civil war?, 26/09/2023.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

The oldest local militia is said to be the Gondar Fano militia; Necho, A.: Conflict trends analysis - Amhara region, in Rift Valley Institute, 10/11/2023.

<sup>43</sup> Amhara Online: Statement from Amhara People's Force (FANO), 17/08/2021.

<sup>44</sup> International Crisis Group: Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara, Briefing 194/Africa, 16/11/2023.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. on the whole: Amnesty International: 'We Thought They Would Fight With Those They Came To Fight' - Extra-judicial executions in Bahir Dar by ENDF soldiers", 26/02/2024.

<sup>46</sup> BAMF: Länderreport 51 Äthiopien - Tigray, 09/2022, p. 14.

## 2.2.2. Armed conflicts

As a result of the refusal to demobilise, the first unrest broke out in several towns in April 2023. The ENDF then launched a military offensive in late May 2023, including on the grounds of a monastery in Woreda<sup>47</sup> Debre Elias (East Gojam Zone), which, according to the accusation, was being used as a retreat and training centre by the Amhara Popular Front Fano<sup>48</sup> under the leadership of the well-known opposition figure Eskinder Nega.<sup>49</sup> Fano is said to have deliberately killed religious leaders, local elders and civil servants. The fighting is said to have killed 200 militiamen and ten soldiers and injured at least 200 others.<sup>50</sup>

On 26 July, Fano fighters attacked an ENDF convoy in Woreda West Denbiya (Central Gondar Zone), killing several soldiers.<sup>51</sup> The clashes escalated in August when Fano took control of several towns.<sup>52</sup> Local politicians, including the regional chairman of the Prosperity Party (PP) Girma Yeshitila,<sup>53</sup> and security officials are said to have been killed,<sup>54</sup> detention centres stormed, looted and prisoners freed.<sup>55</sup> The government imposed a six-month state of emergency.<sup>56</sup> The ENDF succeeded in driving Fano out of the cities under its control.<sup>57</sup> There were also reports of a wave of arrests of ethnic Amhara, particularly in Addis Ababa.<sup>58</sup> After a temporary lull in the fighting, violence has been escalating again in large parts of Amhara since September 2023.<sup>59</sup>

The ENDF is accused of killing more than 70 civilians and looting property after fighting with Fano in the town of Majete (North Shewa zone). A few days later, the Ethiopian army reported that it had repelled an attack by Fano in the city of Gondar and killed more than 50 militants, while a representative of the militia claimed that dozens of soldiers had been captured.<sup>60</sup> According to Fano, the aim was to overthrow the Ethiopian government through armed struggle and hand over power to the Ethiopian people. At the same time, he described the central government as a "fascist regime" that "spreads corruption and ethnic extremism throughout the country".<sup>61</sup> According to local sources, the establishment of military command posts and increased controls by the ENDF resulted in restricted access to several areas in Amhara, as well as shortages of food and medicine.<sup>62</sup>

After a temporary calming of the situation, fighting broke out again in November 2023 between Fano and the ENDF in the zones of South and North Shewa, Central Gondar, North Wollo as well as Eastern and West Gojam.<sup>63</sup> Both sides accused each other of serious human rights violations. For example, the ENDF allegedly arbitrarily killed adolescents suspected of supporting Fano, while Fano is said to have shot local government officials.<sup>64</sup> The UNHCR expressed concern about the "devastating effects" of drone attacks.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> A woreda (district) is the third administrative level in Ethiopia after the regional state and the zone and consists of several kebeles (local administrations).

<sup>48</sup> At the end of February 2024, the merger of the Amhara Popular Front Fano with the Fano militia under the leadership of Sheleka Zinabu to form the Gojam Amhara Fano was reported, Ethiopia Peace Observer (EPO): EPO Weekly Update, 05/03/2024, with annotations.

<sup>49</sup> Addis Standard: Fighting at local monastery in Amhara region leaves multiple casualties, authorities confirm military action, 01/06/2023.

<sup>50</sup> International Crisis Group: Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara, Briefing 194/Africa, 16/11/2023.

<sup>51</sup> AllAfrica: Amhara Region Local Council Admits Casualties After Confrontations During Senior Army Members' Visit to Gorgora Resort, 27/07/2023.

<sup>52</sup> These include Bahir Dar, Gondar and Lalibela. Paravicini, G; Endeshaw, D.: Fighting in Ethiopia's Amhara region prompts fear for ancient churches, in: Reuters, 07/11/2023. Overall, cf. Amnesty International: 'We Thought They Would Fight With Those They Came To Fight' - Extra-judicial executions in Bahir Dar by ENDF soldiers", 26/02/2024.

<sup>53</sup> Addis Standard: Girma Yeshitila, Amhara Prosperity Party head, shot dead, 27/04/2023.

<sup>54</sup> International Crisis Group: Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara, Briefing 194/Africa, 16/11/2023.

<sup>55</sup> Africa News: Ethiopian police arrest hundreds during state of emergency, 14/08/2023.

<sup>56</sup> The imposition of a state of emergency gives the security services the power to impose curfews, ban the carrying of weapons and public gatherings and make arrests without warrants and searches, among other things.

<sup>57</sup> Aljazeera: What's behind the crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara region? 10/08/2023.

<sup>58</sup> Africa News: Ethiopian police arrest hundreds during state of emergency, 14/08/2023. The number of detainees is disputed: official figures put the figure at 3,200, while the opposition speaks of tens of thousands of people affected.

<sup>59</sup> The Guardian: Ethiopian troops accused of mass killings of civilians in Amhara region, 08/09/2023.

<sup>60</sup> Wasike, A.: 50 militants killed as security forces, militia clash in Ethiopia's restive Amhara region, Anadolu Agency, 25/09/2023.

<sup>61</sup> Schwikowski, M.: Friedensdialog für alle Konfliktparteien versäumt, in: Deutsche Welle, 27/09/2023.

<sup>62</sup> Ethiopia Observer: Heavy fighting continues in various areas of Gojam and Wollo provinces, 07/11/2023.

<sup>63</sup> Paravicini, G; Endeshaw, D.: Fighting in Ethiopia's Amhara region prompts fear for ancient churches, in: Reuters, 07/11/2023.

<sup>64</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 497, 16/11/2023.

<sup>65</sup> Der Standard: Laut Uno Dutzende Tote bei Kämpfen in äthiopischer Region Amhara, 18/11/2023.

Two ultimatums in November and December 2023, in which the Amharic regional government called on Fano to surrender and lay down their arms, failed. An announcement by the regional government that over 5,000 Fano militiamen had surrendered was refuted by Fano "as wishful thinking".<sup>66</sup> Although Fano has largely withdrawn from the urban areas, it continues to operate in the countryside, where it is said to receive broad support from the population.<sup>67</sup>

The fighting continues in 2024, with civilian casualties on the rise.<sup>68</sup> For example, the British news channel BBC reported, citing eyewitness accounts, that more than 50 people were killed in the town of Merawi (North Gojam zone) on 29 January. Government soldiers had returned to the town after a battle with Fano and had deliberately killed mainly male civilians. This is the highest number of civilian casualties since the outbreak of the conflict with Fano in April 2023.<sup>69</sup> Fano is said to have rejected an alleged offer by the government to negotiate in late January 2024.<sup>70</sup> In early February, due to the ongoing tense situation, the government extended the state of emergency imposed in August 2023 by four months.<sup>71</sup>

In mid-February, the ENDF stepped up its operations against Fano. One focal area of fighting was in the region around the city of Lalibela (North Wollo zone). At least 18 civilians are said to have been killed in drone attacks in North Shewa. For security reasons, most roads in Amhara were closed, including between Dessie and Addis Ababa, one of the most important connections to Tigray.<sup>72</sup> An army spokesman said in late February that the division operating under the Gojam command post in the village of Agut (Woreda Sekela) had "killed 47 extremists".<sup>73</sup>

At the beginning of March, there were reports of fighting in Bahir Dar between Fano and security forces. Fano is said to have controlled the regional capital for a day.<sup>74</sup> Sources also reported that Fano had captured the town of Shewa Robit (North Shewa zone).<sup>75</sup> Armed clashes were also reported in Awi, East and West Gojam, North Shewa, North and South Wollo zones. Fano is said to be responsible for the deaths of several government officials and the abduction of more than 200 youths in East Gojam.<sup>76</sup> At the end of March, there was also ongoing fighting in Woreda Gondar (North Gondar). Fano is said to have attacked a large ENDF garrison near the airport. The militia is also said to be responsible for the deaths of five Prosperity Party officials.<sup>77</sup> In early April, Fano reported killing 52 soldiers and injuring several others in the South Gondar zone.<sup>78</sup>

On 12 April, two Fano militiamen were shot dead by police in Addis Ababa as they tried to evade arrest. They are said to have been planning an attack. Fano confirmed the incident and explained that it is the militia's strategy to attack Ethiopian security forces in cities as well.<sup>79</sup>

Local sources also reported increasing religious tensions in Amhara. In April 2024 alone, several Muslim civilians were reportedly shot dead in Bahir Dar and Gondar in attacks by unknown men. A statement released by the Islamic Council of Amhara Region said that 80 Muslim civilians had been targeted and killed in the region in the last eight months.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Borkena: Update on the Ongoing War in Amhara Region, 29/12/2023.

<sup>67</sup> International Crisis Group: Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara, 16/11/2023. In January 2024, it was reported that "normality" had returned in many cities and that important services, including banks and medical facilities, were available again. Addis Standard: Amhara region breathes sigh of relief as major cities return to routine, 11/01/2024.

<sup>68</sup> EPO: EPO Weekly Update, 24/01/2024.

<sup>69</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW): Military Executes Dozens in Amhara Region, 04/04/2024.

<sup>70</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 513, 29/01/2024.

<sup>71</sup> Reuters: Ethiopia extends state of emergency in Amhara, 02/02/2024.

<sup>72</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 521, 26/02/2024.

<sup>73</sup> AllAfrica: Ethiopia's Amhara Region Sees Renewed Fighting Between Government Forces, Fano, 27/02/2024. In early April 2024, the ENDF declared that the roads to Dessie, Debre Berhan and Shewa Robit had been reopened. EPO: EPO Weekly Update, 09/04/2024.

<sup>74</sup> Reuters: Fighting returns to capital of Ethiopia's Amhara region, 01/03/2024.

<sup>75</sup> Borkena: Shewa Robit town reportedly came under Fano control, 04/03/2024.

<sup>76</sup> EPO: EPO Weekly Update, 05/03/2024. Fano claimed that they were members of the ENDF and kebele militias.

<sup>77</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 531, 02/04/2024.

<sup>78</sup> Borkena: Rebel forces in Amhara region say they have killed 52 gov't soldiers, 04/04/2024.

<sup>79</sup> ABC-News: Three killed in Ethiopia shootout as regional rebellions spill into the capital, 12/04/2024.

<sup>80</sup> EPO: EPO Weekly Update, 16/04/2024.

### 2.2.3. Western Tigray Zone

The violence in Amhara was also triggered by the "Cessation of Hostilities Agreement" (CoHA) concluded between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF in November 2022 in the course of the armed conflict in the regional state of Tigray. This agreement was criticised in Amhara because the negotiations took place without Amharic participation, although Fano and Amhara Special Forces (ASF) fought on the side of the federal army.<sup>81</sup> Ethiopian military, Amhara security forces and Fano occupied the woredas of Kafta Humera, Tsegede and Welkait in the Western Tigray Zone,<sup>82</sup> declaring that this was a return "to the homeland" and placing all of Western Tigray under Amhara administration.<sup>83</sup>

The military and militias thus fulfilled the demands of large sections of the Amharic population for the reintegration of the woredas into the Amhara regional state. Like the Tselemti woreda in the Central Tigray zone, all these woredas were formerly part of the Amhara-dominated province of Gondar. When the EPRDF came to power in 1991, the areas were annexed to Tigray - against the will of the majority of the local population.<sup>84</sup>



Source: <https://passportparty.ch/2020/11/11/tigrays-border-conflicts-explained/>

<sup>81</sup> Schweizer Flüchtlingshilfe (SFH): Éthiopie: état d'urgence et situation des personnes d'origine ethnique amhara, 26/09/2023. Amhara was not a party to the dialogue, but the deputy president of the Amhara region Getachew Jember was a member of the negotiating team, which was not supported by large sections of the Amhara population. International Crisis Group: Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara, Briefing 194/Africa, 16/11/2023.

<sup>82</sup> Welkait is home to the largest sugar plantation and the largest irrigation dam in Ethiopia. Humera is known for its fertile agricultural land and sesame production. Getachew, S.: Ethiopia - Peace deal at risk as rival ethnic groups lay claim to fertile lands, 28/07/2023.

<sup>83</sup> Nyssen, J.: Amhara nationalist claims over Western Tigray are a smokescreen for ethnic cleansing, in: Ethiopia Insight, 17/11/2022.

<sup>84</sup> On the historical aspects: Tesfaye, A.: Under Ethiopia's federal system, Western Tigray belongs in Tigray, in: Ethiopia Insight, 04/08/2022. The Tigray criticise the procedure as unlawful and as "Neftegna imperialism". Neftegna (Amharic: "bearer of the neft/weapon") is equated with a repressive system that uses armed force to impose its (Amharic) totalitarian ideology on the local population. Plaut, M.: Ethiopia: Four factors complicating the war in Tigray, 11/11/2020.

The future affiliation of the zone is unclear. The Ethiopian government initially avoided taking a clear position, but repeatedly brought up a referendum,<sup>85</sup> which Amhara rejects in principle,<sup>86</sup> as does Tigray's transitional government.<sup>87</sup>

The Amharic security forces and Fano are accused of serious human rights violations and ethnic cleansing. Ethnic Tigrayans are said to have been forced to leave the region. There have also been reports of deportations to central Tigray and killings in the event of resistance. At the same time, Amharic farming families were asked to relocate to the region and take over the abandoned farms.<sup>88</sup> Even after the ceasefire, the media reported ongoing displacements. In December 2023, around 7,000 Tigrayan refugees are said to have sought refuge in camps near the town of Endabaguna (North Western Zone).<sup>89</sup> In early March 2023, Defence Minister Abraham Belay announced that the ENDF would take control of the Western Zone to facilitate and secure the return of internally displaced persons. This would also be done to "pave the way for a referendum, intended to definitively settle the territorial dispute".<sup>90</sup> In addition, an "Amhara anti-riot force" is to be formed to fight against Fano, for which recruits are already being trained. The ENDF is to concentrate on securing strategic positions in the towns and main roads.<sup>91</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Conflicts with the OLA-Shane in Amhara

Since spring 2021, there has been ongoing conflict between security forces and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA-Shane) in the areas near the Oromia Special Zone and the North Shewa Zone, resulting in deaths, displacement and the destruction of infrastructure. In October and November 2021, the violence escalated when TPLF militias, together with allied OLA-Shane fighters, temporarily took control of Kemise and other towns in the Oromia Special Zone. The ENDF, Amharic special forces and Fano managed to regain control in December 2021. Human rights violations, including arbitrary executions, are said to have occurred in the process. In April 2022, there were also clashes along the border areas of the North Shewa and Oromia special zones, the reasons for which remain unclear. Both the OLA-Shane and Fano were held responsible for the killing of herdsmen.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Yibeltal, K.; Wycliffe, M.: Ethiopia plans vote to solve Tigray-Amhara territory dispute, 07/11/2023; Getachew, S.: Ethiopia: Peace deal at risk as rival ethnic groups lay claim to fertile lands, 28/07/2023.

The formation of a new, autonomous regional state or an administrative zone under the control of the Ethiopian government is also conceivable. Observers point out that this would create a corridor between Amhara and Eritrea and thus prevent Eritrea from providing (alleged) logistical support to the Fano. International Crisis Group: Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara, Briefing 194/Africa, 16/11/2023.

Some sources also see the referendum as a concession to Tigray in order to gain its support in a possible war against Eritrea. In this respect, reference is made to Abiy's demand for direct access to a harbour on the Red Sea. In July 2023, the prime minister declared the need for a port of his own. Ethiopia is the most populous landlocked country in the world and the Red Sea is its natural border. However, he denied a violent approach. Eritrea and its harbour in Assab would probably be affected. In any case, an agreement through negotiations seems impossible, especially as Eritrea repeatedly emphasises its sovereignty. Waal de, A.: Ethiopia PM Abiy eyes Red Sea port, inflaming tensions, 08/11/2023.

In early January 2024, Ethiopia signed a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland to grant Ethiopia access to the sea via the port in Berbera. In return, Somaliland is to receive a stake in Ethiopian Airlines. The memorandum of understanding, which also includes the establishment of a naval base (in 2018, the Ministry of Defence was tasked with examining the possibility of establishing a navy and the first navy recruits graduated on 27 June 2023) on a 20-kilometre strip of land leased by Ethiopia near the towns of Luqhaye and Saylac (Awdal region) for a period of 50 years, was met with widespread criticism. The European Union, the United States and the African Union, among others, called for Somalia's territorial integrity to be respected. Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from Somalia in 1991 but is not internationally recognised as an independent state. However, the Ethiopian government has declared that it is "closely examining" the issue of recognising Somaliland. Farter, H.: 'We are ready for a war': Somalia threatens conflict with Ethiopia over breakaway region, in: The Guardian, 13/01/2024; Euractiv.com: EU urges respect for Somalia sovereignty after Ethiopia deal, 03/01/2024; Yibeltal, K.: Ethiopia signs agreement with Somaliland paving way to sea access, 02/01/2024.

<sup>86</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED): Fact Sheet - Crisis in Ethiopia's Amhara Region, 10/08/2023.

<sup>87</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 518, 04/04/2024. TIRA justifies its rejection with the unresolved issue of the return of displaced persons to these areas, as the composition of the population could have a decisive influence on the outcome of the referendum. Addis Standard: Amhara region says activities kicked off to resolve identity, boundary issues with Tigray, 08/07/2023.

<sup>88</sup> HRW: "We Will Erase You from This Land", 06/04/2022.

<sup>89</sup> Addis Standard: Thousands fleeing Western Tigray seek refuge in Endabaguna town as hunger, persecution rise, 30/01/2024.

<sup>90</sup> Addis Standard: Ethiopia's defence minister unveils strategy for Western Tigray crisis resolution amidst political disputes, 05/03/2024.

<sup>91</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 533, 08/04/2024.

<sup>92</sup> EPO: Oromia Special Zone and North Shewa Zone Conflict, 29/09/2023. Oromia Special Zone and North Shewa Zone are neighbouring zones in the Amhara region, with the Special Zone being administered by ethnic Oromo. For more details, see Raven-Roberts, A.: Special zones and special histories: conflict and collaboration in Northern Shewa, 21/05/2021.

Arbitrary killings were also reported in 2023. In April, Fano allegedly shot at least ten Oromo civilians, looted houses, set them on fire and stole livestock.<sup>93</sup> In the town of Majete (North Shewa), fighting between the ENDF and Fano is said to have resulted in more than 34 civilian casualties in May and more than 70 again at the same location in September. The ENDF soldiers had accused them of supporting Fano and hiding fighters and weapons in their homes.<sup>94</sup> In early November, the media reported that more than 18 people were killed in clashes between Fano and local militias in Woreda Artuma Fursi (Oromo Special Zone).<sup>95</sup> In mid-March 2024, clashes between Amharic and Oromo militias were reported in Woreda Kewet (North Shewa) and Woreda Jilye Tumuga (Oromo Special Zone) with several civilian casualties. Looting is also reported to have taken place.<sup>96</sup>

### 2.3. Conflict region Tigray

The military conflict between the Ethiopian military and its allies on the one side and the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) on the other, which began in November 2020 and claimed over 600,000 lives, has ended for the time being since the ceasefire agreement of November 2022 (Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, CoHA).<sup>97</sup> The first steps towards the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants have been implemented.<sup>98</sup> In March 2023, an interim government for Tigray was finally established under the leadership of Getachew Reda. At the same time, the Ethiopian parliament decided to remove the TPLF from the list of terrorist organisations. In the context of the conflict, there are numerous reports of serious human rights violations including sexual violence against women, ethnic displacement and mass killings allegedly committed by all parties to the conflict (on the armed conflict in the regional state of Tigray, see also [BAMF: Länderreport 53 Äthiopien - Tigray, October 2022](#)). The Eritrean army (Eritrean Defence Forces, EDF) has not yet complied with the request to withdraw its troops from Tigray. They are to remain stationed in some border regions (mainly in the woredas of Irob and Shiraro and in the towns of Tsorona, Zalambessa and Gulo-Mekhedra).<sup>99</sup> In December 2023 and January 2024, Eritrean soldiers allegedly abducted Tigrayan farmers and stole their livestock.<sup>100</sup>

The humanitarian situation remains difficult. Although the government has restored services such as electricity and water supply, telecommunications and banking in large parts of Tigray,<sup>101</sup> some public services, particularly in the areas of education<sup>102</sup> and the health system, are still only available to a very limited extent.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> EPO: Oromia Special Zone and North Shewa Zone Conflict, 29/09/2023.

<sup>94</sup> Kassa, L.: Ethiopian troops accused of mass killings of civilians in Amhara region, 08/09/2023.

<sup>95</sup> Natnael, F.: Clashes between militiamen and armed residents left at least 18 killed in Oromo special zone, Amhara region, in: Addis Standard, 07/11/2023.

<sup>96</sup> EPO: EPO Weekly Update, 26/03/2024.

<sup>97</sup> The background to this was a power struggle between the federal and regional governments. After Abiy took office, many Tigrayans lost their leading positions in the military, politics and business and complained of "ethnic persecution". In early November 2020, the situation escalated when TPLF militias allegedly attacked ENDF bases in Tigray. Abiy then ordered a military offensive in Tigray.

<sup>98</sup> Critics also labelled the agreement a "capitulation deal". Sisay, M.: With Tigray at a crossroads, Tigrayans need to talk, 26/01/2023. In March 2024, the transitional government in Tigray announced the demobilisation of more than 100,000 former fighters. AllAfrica: Tigray Interim Admin Announces Demobilisation of Over 100,000 Ex-Combatants Amid Rehabilitation Challenges, 12/03/2024.

<sup>99</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Algemeen Ambtsbericht Ethiopie, 31/01/2024, p. 11 with further references. On the situation of the Irob, see also: The Catholic Herald: Catholic Irob minority has lost its home in Ethiopia's Tigray region, 24/04/2024. Eritrea denied the accusation and stated that Eritrean troops were exclusively on "sovereign Eritrean territories", which the TPLF "illegally occupied". Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 522, 29/02/2023.

In early April 2024, Irob Anina Civil Society (IACS) showed a video on X from a middle school in northern Woreda Irob, in which a teacher explained that the region is Eritrean territory. IACS: <https://twitter.com/IrobAnina/status/1775011045377278356>, 02/04/2024.

<sup>100</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 515, 05/02/2024.

<sup>101</sup> Austrian Development Agency: Äthiopien - Kurzes Länderprofil zu politischer Lage, Menschenrechten, Wirtschaft, Entwicklungspolitik, 01/2023, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> 85% of the schools were partially or completely damaged. AllAfrica: Ethiopia: L'aide humanitaire au Tigré est suspendue, plus de 500 écoles restent fermées, 10/05/2023.

<sup>103</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 406, 06/04/2023.

Support in the form of relief supplies also remains problematic, since aid organisations had temporarily suspended food deliveries after supplies were stolen or embezzled.<sup>104</sup> Although the World Food Programme (WFP) and the US resumed food deliveries in late 2023, the supply situation remains extremely difficult, especially in border areas and off the main roads. Persistent drought and an extremely high inflation rate are also putting a strain on the local population. At the end of December 2023, interim President Getachew declared that 91% of the population in Tigray were "at risk of starvation".<sup>105</sup> At the end of January 2024, over 350 people were reported to have died of starvation in the past six months.<sup>106</sup> However, the international community and organisations are trying to provide support. The WFP, for example, has declared that it will provide life-saving aid to avert "a major humanitarian catastrophe".<sup>107</sup>

According to reports, there is a power struggle between the interim government in Tigray (Tigray Interim Regional Administration, TIRA) and parts of the TPLF.<sup>108</sup> One consequence is the dismissal of influential officials, including the administrators of the South East Zone and North Western Zone, Liya Kassa and Teklay Gebremedhin, both of whom are also members of the TPLF Central Committee. They were accused of having violated their duties, in particular of not having sufficiently served the interests of the population.<sup>109</sup> Criticism of the TPLF's policies is also growing. In December 2023, four opposition parties - the Tigray Independence Party, the Arena Tigray for Sovereignty and Democracy, the Salsay Woyane and the Tigray National Shengo - formed the Covenant for Radical Change, criticising the TPLF for getting bogged down in internal power struggles instead of tackling the "political, economic and social crises" and calling for participation in the transitional government in Tigray.<sup>110</sup>

In early February 2024, a first official meeting took place between the Ethiopian government and a TIRA delegation led by TIRA President Getachew Reda and leading representatives of the TPLF to discuss progress and shortcomings in the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement, in particular, the withdrawal of Amharic militias and Eritrean forces, the return of displaced persons and refugees, the investigation of atrocities committed during the conflict, the demobilisation of the TDF, the unresolved status of the Western Tigray Zone and the supply situation.<sup>111</sup> The talks are to be continued, although TIRA requires the participation of the African Union.<sup>112</sup>

In March 2024, reports from pro-government media that Getachew was "collaborating with entities such as the Eritrean government and other regional elites to undermine the authority of the federal government" caused irritation.<sup>113</sup> Observers see this as the beginning of a defamation campaign against TIRA and the TPLF.<sup>114</sup> In its 2024 Annual Threat Assessment Report, the US Secret Service concluded that the unresolved territorial disputes posed a significant risk of a renewed flare-up of conflict in Tigray.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> The Tigrayan side said in November 2023 that several dozen people had been charged with stealing food aid, mostly low and mid-level officials. Several hundred more people are under investigation. Houreld, K.: U.S. resumes assistance to Ethiopia after intense negotiations over corruption in aid programme, 14/11/2023.

<sup>105</sup> Yibeltal, K.; Northern Ethiopia facing famine, says Tigray official, 29/12/2023.

<sup>106</sup> Endeshaw, D.: Ethiopian official: at least 372 deaths due to hunger in two regions in last 6 months, 31/01/2024. Prime Minister Abiy, on the other hand, said that no deaths due to hunger had been reported so far, but deaths were rather due to diseases such as cholera or malaria. He acknowledged a drought in Tigray, but referred to extensive aid deliveries from the Ethiopian government. Addis Standard: PM Abiy says "no death due to starvation so far" as authorities in Tigray report 860 deaths from hunger, 06/02/2024.

<sup>107</sup> United Nations: UN food agency ramps up deliveries amid worsening food security in Ethiopia, 06/02/2024.

<sup>108</sup> On the conflicts and background as well as possible scenarios, cf. Mehari Taddele Maru: Tigray's strategic dilemma in midst of unravelling polycrisis in the Horn and US policy shift towards Eritrea: Scenarios for transitional admin, 21 December 2023, and Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Algemeen Ambtsbericht Ethiopie, 31/01/2024, p. 11, with further references.

<sup>109</sup> Beyene, M.: Tigray's tug of war: The quest for recovery amidst power struggles, 19/12/2023.

<sup>110</sup> Borkena: Tigray opposition parties form a covenant for radical change, 26/12/2023.

<sup>111</sup> Mehari, T.: Beyond Cessation of Hostilities: Sustaining Peace, 27/02/2024.

<sup>112</sup> Addis Standard: Tigray announces talks on Pretoria accord implementation will be conducted 'exclusively through AU panel', 04/04/2024.

<sup>113</sup> Mihret, G.: Tracing Tigray's path to peace: Uncertain future looms as Pretoria accord implementation drags on, 19/03/2024.

<sup>114</sup> Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA): EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 525, 11/03/2024.

<sup>115</sup> Addis Standard: US Intelligence Community report warns 'unresolved territorial issues could lead to a resumption of conflict' in Ethiopia, 12/03/2024.

In late March 2024, armed clashes were reported in Woreda Alamata in the south of Tigray (Dehubawi zone). The region is under the control of Amharic forces. The attack is said to have originated from Tigrayan militias and was a reaction to new curricula and maps that see the zone as part of Amhara. Both sides accused each other of provocation.<sup>116</sup> International sources report that over 50,000 people have been displaced.<sup>117</sup> There had already been clashes between the parties in mid-February, also involving the Amharic Fano militia,<sup>118</sup> before the Ethiopian military intervened. No deaths were reported in either case.<sup>119</sup>

## 2.4. Conflict region Oromia<sup>120</sup>

In the regional state of Oromia, regular armed clashes between the Oromo Liberation Army<sup>121</sup> (OLA-Shane) and the Ethiopian security forces occur. The OLA-Shane split from the Oromo Liberation Front in 2018. It refuses to engage in political discourse with the Ethiopian government and demands, by force of weapons, autonomy for the regional state. The violence has been escalating since November 2022.<sup>122</sup> The OLA (an estimated 300,000 militants are fighting within the OLA)<sup>123</sup> is accused of deliberately killing people who are loyal to the regional or federal government.<sup>124</sup> Victims of the OLA are often ethnic Amhara.<sup>125</sup>

In return, there are also attacks by the Fano. The background to this are border disputes and access to natural resources.<sup>126</sup> On 25 April 2023, the first peace negotiations between the Ethiopian government and the OLA began in Tanzania, which were described as constructive by those involved, but ended without result. According to reports, the main disagreement was over the OLA's demand to hold a referendum on autonomy for the regional state of Oromia. Although both sides declared their willingness to meet again,<sup>127</sup> the Ethiopian military actually launched another offensive against the OLA on 17 May 2023.<sup>128</sup>

In November 2023, representatives of the OLA and the Ethiopian government met again for talks in Tanzania. While the OLA-Shane was represented by its commander Kumsa Diriba (aka Jaal Marroo) and his deputy Gemechu Regassa (aka Jaal Gemechu Aboye),<sup>129</sup> the government was represented by Redwan Hussein, security advisor to Prime Minister Abiy, and Justice Minister Gedion Timothewos, among others. A US delegation led by Mike Hammer, Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the governments of Kenya and Norway participated as moderators.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Addis Standard: Amhara regional gov't calls on TPLF to 'vacate occupied areas swiftly', 17/04/2021.

<sup>117</sup> The Africa Report: More than 50,000 displaced by clashes in northern Ethiopia: UN, 23/04/2024.

<sup>118</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 531, 02/04/2024.

<sup>119</sup> Addis Standard: Deadly clash in South Tigray Zone as Amhara, Tigray regions accuse each other of provocation, 30/03/2024.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. on the whole also BAMF: Länderreport 66 Äthiopien - Sicherheitslage Oromia, 03/2024.

<sup>121</sup> The term "Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)" for the armed arm of the OLF is not used consistently in all sources. However, since current reports usually differentiate between the OLF and the OLA, especially when it comes to military actions that are explicitly attributed to the OLA (or OLA-Shane), the synonym "OLA" is used in this country report.

<sup>122</sup> The OLA was initially active in the border regions of western and southern Oromia. However, the Tigray conflict created a security vacuum in the region, as a result of which the OLA shifted its operations to other parts of the regional state. While the OLA's operations were previously limited mainly to assassinations of government and police officials, bank robberies and kidnappings, it now also carries out more complex attacks and is said to control several territories. The Guardian: 'This is a pandemic': Ethiopia's Oromia region gripped by surge in kidnappings, 23/01/2024. The Guardian quotes victims of kidnappings: according to them, ransoms of between ETB 20,000 (EUR 325 as of 08/04/2024) and ETB 500,000 (EUR 8,125 as of 08/04/2024) are paid to release relatives.

<sup>123</sup> However, observers consider the OLA to be insufficiently organised and armed to pose a real threat to the Ethiopian government; Africa News: Ethiopia - new government-OLA talks end without agreement, armed Oromo group, 22/11/2023.

<sup>124</sup> Zelalem, Z.: Worsening violence in western Ethiopia forcing civilians to flee, 20/02/2021.

<sup>125</sup> United States Department of State (USDOS): 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia, 20/03/2023, p. 42; The Defense Post: At Least 50 Killed in Ethiopia's Oromia Region: Rights Body, 16/02/2023; HRW: Ethiopia: Civilians in Western Oromia Left Unprotected, 31/08/2022; BBC: Ethiopia violence in Oromia: PM Abiy Ahmed calls attack a massacre, 05/07/2022; AI: Ethiopia: Over 50 ethnic Amhara killed in attack on village by armed group, 02/11/2020.

<sup>126</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 411, 17/04/2023.

<sup>127</sup> Plaut, M.: EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 423, 03/05/2023.

<sup>128</sup> Reuters: Oromo rebels accuse Ethiopian forces of attacks following peace talks, 17/05/2023.

<sup>129</sup> Addis Standard: Second round peace talk to end conflict in Oromia kicks off in Dar es Salaam; OLA Commander on board, 08/11/2023.

<sup>130</sup> Addis Standard: Senior gov't officials join military leaders in Dar es Salaam as ongoing talks with OLA progress positively, 13/11/2023.

These talks also ended without result. The government said that the OLA had made "unrealistic demands", e.g. for participation in government in Oromia.<sup>131</sup> The parties were also unable to agree on a ceasefire.<sup>132</sup>

During and after the meeting, armed clashes continued between the ENDF and the OLA-Shane in Guji, Horo Guduru, Kelam and West Welega zones, in Arsi and in West and North Shewa, with numerous deaths on both sides.<sup>133</sup> In March 2024, the OLA-Shane was blamed for the abduction and death of four monks from the Ziquala Monastery of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and five employees of a sugar factory near the town of Adama (East Shewa Zone).<sup>134</sup>

## 2.5. Conflict region Benishangul-Gumuz

Ethnically motivated conflicts have also occurred in the regional state of Benishangul Gumuz. Between September 2020 and mid-2021 in particular, there were armed clashes between state security forces and militias in the Metekel Zone, resulting in civilian casualties.<sup>135</sup> Prior to this was the influx of Amharic settlers, border disputes and the demand that the zone should be assigned to the Amhara regional state. However, it remained unclear who was responsible for these attacks. While the local population blamed Fano,<sup>136</sup> ethnic Amhara saw themselves as victims of Gumuz militias (such as the Gumuz People's Democratic Movement - GPDM, Gumuz Liberation Front - Buadin and the Gumuz People's Liberation Movement - GPLM). The central government, on the other hand, blamed the TPLF and OLA-Shane and sent in the military to restore order.<sup>137</sup>

In December 2020, peace negotiations began between the regional government, the GPDM and the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM), a militant group active in the border area with Sudan and which campaigned in favour of the ethnic Berta. In late February 2021, it was reported that around 2,000 GPDM militiamen had handed over their weapons.<sup>138</sup> In May 2021, the GPDM initially agreed to demobilise and signed a peace agreement in October 2022.<sup>139</sup> In December 2022, the BPLM also declared its intention to end the armed conflict.<sup>140</sup> In March 2023, more than 370 GPDM members were released as part of an amnesty. Currently, there are only isolated violent attacks on the civilian population and state institutions.<sup>141</sup> In March 2024, the Boro Democratic Party (BDP) pointed to increasing violence against the civilian population, especially in Woreda Sedal (Kamashi Zone). There have been attacks, kidnappings and killings. "Armed groups from Sudan" were responsible.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Addis Standard: Updated - Gov't, OLA second round talks in Tanzania end without agreement, again, 21/11/2023.

<sup>132</sup> Addis Standard: Global Oromo Interfaith Council urges resumption of peace talks in Ethiopia amidst stalled negotiations, 24/11/2023. In mid-December 2023, Prime Minister Abiy dismissed his peace minister Taye Dendea with immediate effect and had him arrested for "terrorist activities". The arrest came after Dendea, an Oromo, criticised the Ethiopian government for failing to reach an agreement in talks with the OLA. Reuters: Ethiopia peace minister critical of PM Abiy held for suspected coup plot, 12/12/2023.

<sup>133</sup> EPO: EPO Weekly Update, 02/04/2024; Plaut, M EEPA Situation Report, Horn of Africa, No. 513, 29/01/2024; Addis Standard: 45 believers killed in two separate attacks in Arsi and Kellel Wollega zones, Oromia region, 01/12/2023. In February 2024, Reuters referred to studies according to which a so-called security committee headed by the former chief of staff and president of Oromia, Shimelis Abdisa, had ordered extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions to suppress the resistance in Oromia. Paravicini, G.: In Ethiopia, a secret committee orders killings and arrests to crush rebels, 23/02/2024.

<sup>134</sup> AllAfrica: Five Wonji Sugar Factory workers found dead after two-week hostage ordeal, 16/03/2024; EPO: EPO Weekly Update, 27/02/2024.

<sup>135</sup> Süddeutsche Zeitung: Mehr als 100 Tote bei Massaker in Äthiopien, 24/12/2020.

<sup>136</sup> Ezega.com: Fano Will Not Lay Down Arms If Demands Are Not Met: Chairman, 28/03/2020.

<sup>137</sup> Borkena: Benishangul: At least 60 civilians mostly women, children killed, 12/01/2021; Addis Standard: More than 20 people killed in fresh attacks in Benishangul Gumuz, 25/09/2020.

<sup>138</sup> Xinhua: 2,000 Ethiopian fighters surrender to government, 25/02/2021.

<sup>139</sup> Addis Standard: Benishangul Gumuz regional govt, rebel group sign peace agreement, 19/10/2022.

<sup>140</sup> Addis Standard: Benishangul Gumuz region signs peace agreement with second rebel group, deal signed in Sudan, 12/12/2022.

<sup>141</sup> Addis Standard: Eight killed, 16 injured in latest attack by armed group in Benishangul Gumuz despite peace agreement, 15/07/2023.

<sup>142</sup> Addis Standard: Opposition party raises alarm over surge in violence in Benishangul-Gumuz region, 13/03/2024. The woreda in the west of the regional state near the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was briefly under the control of an unspecified "armed group" in April 2021. Media East Online: Ethiopia loses control of country close to Renaissance Dam, 22/04/2021.

## 2.6. Conflict region Gambella

In the regional state of Gambella, tensions exist between the two largest ethnic groups in the region, the Nuer, who have fled and migrated from South Sudan, and the local Anuak (also Anywaa).<sup>143</sup> The situation escalated into violent conflicts between Anuak militias and state security forces, including among the civilian population, due to disputes over scarce resources and the unequal distribution of services, particularly since 2016.<sup>144</sup>

After fighting in mid-June 2022, the Gambella Liberation Front (GLF) took control of the regional capital Gambella together with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA-Shane). Local media reported 37 deaths. However, regional security forces and the ENDF succeeded in driving the militias out again. The government forces were accused of killing at least ten civilians suspected of having links to the OLA-Shane during house searches.<sup>145</sup> In April 2023, the GLF announced that it would end its armed struggle and in future peacefully defend the interests of the Gambella ethnic group. This was preceded by peace talks between the GLF and the Ethiopian central government and the Gambella regional government in Addis Ababa and Juba in South Sudan. The former fighters were offered admission to a rehabilitation programme.<sup>146</sup>

At least 24 people were killed in renewed clashes between armed groups in May and July 2023 in the woredas of Itang, Gog and Gambella. Dozens were injured, property destroyed and looted and thousands driven from their homes. One of the reasons for the violence is said to have been the arrival of more refugees from South Sudan, mainly Nuer fleeing the conflicts in their country.<sup>147</sup> According to a report published by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in February 2024, at least 138 people have been killed and 113 injured in clashes between local militias and refugees in Gambella since May 2023.<sup>148</sup> At the end of March 2024, three people were reportedly killed and several injured in an attack by suspected Anuak militias on a bus in Woreda Abol. The bus was on its way to the Tharpam refugee camp.<sup>149</sup>

## 2.7. Conflict region Afar/Somali

In the border region between the regional states of Afar and Somali, long-standing disputes over territories repeatedly lead to violent conflicts. At the centre of the conflict are three kebeles in which ethnic Somalis from the Issa clan, one of the most powerful Somali sub-clans, live. These three kebeles are located in Afar zones 1 (Awsi) and 3 (Gabi) as well as in the Sitti Somali zone.<sup>150</sup> The Issa are demanding reintegration into the Somali region, which the Afar regional authorities strictly reject. The disputed areas have important resources, such as the Awash River, as well as transport routes, including the motorway and railway from Addis Ababa to the port in Djibouti, the only connection between Ethiopia and the sea to date.<sup>151</sup>

The violent conflict between the Issa and the Afar began in October 2019, when at least 17 civilians were killed and 34 others injured in an attack by an unknown group of armed men in Obno (Woreda Afambo, Zone 1). The attackers are said to have been wearing the uniform of Somali special forces and Issa militias.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Numerically, the two ethnic groups make up two thirds of Gambella's population. The Anuak consider themselves to be the only indigenous group in the Gambella region, while the Nuer are simply the "others" with fewer territorial claims.

<sup>144</sup> Hagos, S. Z.: German Development Institute: Refugees and local power dynamics - the case of Gambella Region of Ethiopia, 2021, pp. 1, 11.

<sup>145</sup> Addis Standard: Security forces shoot civilians in Gambella city two days after regional gov't vows to 'totally eradicate' remaining members of Oromo, Gambella armed groups, 16/06/2022.

<sup>146</sup> Addis Standard: Gambella Liberation Front returns 195 combatants to pursue peaceful politics after agreements inked in Juba, Addis Ababa: regional state, 30/04/2023.

<sup>147</sup> Tekle, A.: A land torn apart: Gambella's struggle against ethnic violence and neglect, 29/07/2023; Addis Standard: Nine killed, 17 injured in latest violence in Gambella, regional gov't says situation under control, 25/03/2023.

<sup>148</sup> AllAfrica: Ethiopia: 138 Killed, 113 Injured in Gambella Region Over Nine Months - EHRC Report, 29/02/2024.

<sup>149</sup> AllAfrica: News - Deadly Armed Attack On Bus In Gambella Region Leaves Three Dead, Several Injured, 27/03/2024.

<sup>150</sup> The disputed areas include the kebele Adaytu (Woreda Mille), Undufo (Woreda Gewane) Gedamaytu (Woreda Amibara).

<sup>151</sup> EPO: Afar Somali Regions Border Conflict, 29/09/2023.

<sup>152</sup> Ethiopian Monitor: At least 17 people killed by Armed Men in Eastern Ethiopia, 15/10/2019.

In late October 2020, at least 27 people were reportedly killed following clashes in the villages of Dan La Helay and Garba-Issa (Sitti zone). According to the Afar, the attacks were launched by Issas.<sup>153</sup> In January 2021, around 30 security forces are said to have been killed in clashes between state security forces and Issa in Adaytu (Woreda Mille, Zone 1)<sup>154</sup> and more than 100 people in Woreda Gewane (Zone 3) in early April 2021.<sup>155</sup> After a meeting in April 2021, the presidents of both regions declared their intention to end the violence and respect the current borders. In May 2022, an agreement was reached on the withdrawal of all regional special forces from the disputed area. Nevertheless, sporadic violence continued, including in February and April 2023, when several militiamen were killed and injured in clashes between Afar and Somali militias in the Sitti zone (Woreda Erer and Woreda Ayisha).<sup>156</sup> There are currently no reports of armed clashes in the region.

## 2.8. Conflict region Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region

Conflicts have also arisen in the multi-ethnic Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). Individual ethnic groups have repeatedly demanded more autonomy, such as the Sidama, who declared themselves a semi-autonomous regional state following a referendum on 18 June 2020.<sup>157</sup> Ethnic groups in the Gurage, Wolayata, Kaffa, Hadiya, Kembata-Tembaro and Gamo-Gofa zones are also striving to establish their own regional states.<sup>158</sup> In September 2021, a clear majority voted in favour of the formation of the regional state South West<sup>159</sup> and in February 2023 of the regional state South Ethiopia.<sup>160</sup> In July 2023, the Ethiopian parliament approved the creation of Central Ethiopia as Ethiopia's 13th regional state.<sup>161</sup> The situation in SNNPR has eased noticeably.<sup>162</sup> At most, there are sporadic attacks by unknown groups, such as in the Central Region (Woreda Gurage)<sup>163</sup> and in the South Region (Gamo Zone, Woreda Arba Minch Zuria), which are presumably motivated by border disputes. There have been reports of deaths, injuries, looting and displacement.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Addis Standard: At least 27 killed in clashes in the border between Afar, Somali Regions, 29/10/2020.

<sup>154</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): Ethiopia: Afar-Issa land dispute - Flash Update, 27/01/2021.

<sup>155</sup> Aljazeera: Over 100 killed in clashes in Ethiopia's Afar, Somali regions, 07/04/2021.

<sup>156</sup> EPO: Afar Somali Regions Border Conflict, 29/09/2023 with further references.

<sup>157</sup> Although the Sidama account for only 4% of the total population of Ethiopia, they are the largest ethnic group in SNNPR at around 19% (other larger ethnic groups are the Wolayta (11%), Hadiya (8%), Guragie (8%) and Gamo (7%)). In the course of a dispute over the implementation of the referendum, there were clashes between security forces and demonstrators in Hawassa, the capital of the SNNPR, as well as attacks by radicalised Sidama youths (Ejeto) on other ethnic groups, in which at least 50 people are said to have been killed. On 20 November 2019, around 98.5% of registered voters voted in favour of Sidama autonomy. HRW: Annual report on the human rights situation in 2019 - World Report 2020, Ethiopia, 14/01/2020.

<sup>158</sup> The right to autonomy is explicitly enshrined in Article 39(1) of the federal constitution ("Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia ...[the] unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession").

<sup>159</sup> Addis Standard: Ethiopia gets eleventh state with more than 96% approval for South West referendum, 09/10/2021.

<sup>160</sup> The Star: Millions vote in Ethiopia referendum for new region, 06/02/2023.

<sup>161</sup> Addis Standard: Allocation of administrative offices between cities in newly established cluster regions in Southern Ethiopia raises discontent, 09/08/2023.

<sup>162</sup> EPO: EPO Weekly Update (2-8 December 2023), 12/2023.

<sup>163</sup> For further information see. EPO: EPO Weekly Update (7-13 October 2023), 10/2023.

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