

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO ETHIOPIA

Subject: ETHIOPIA – Overview August 14 – 20: Both sides remain convinced that a military victory is within reach

Summary:

While fighting between TDF/TPLF and ENDF/Amhara Forces continued on several fronts, OLA extended occupation of rural areas in Oromia Region and gained control over some important roads. There seems to be small to no appetite to start negotiating at this point: both sides are convinced that they will be able to achieve a decisive military victory within the coming months. Eritrea reportedly sent reinforcements to Western Tigray and might be preparing a new offensive. There is no more food available in Tigray and the humanitarian needs in other regions are also growing fast. The repression against ethnic Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia is continuing. PM Abiy Ahmed made a visit Asmara and to Turkey where he signed a military cooperation agreement.

Assessment:

1. While fighting between TDF/TPLF and ENDF/Amhara Forces continued on several fronts, OLA managed to occupy large parts of the rural areas in Oromia including gaining control over some important roads. It will require a lot of security resources from the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) to manage the geographical expansion of OLA territory and to try to regain control over the occupied areas.
2. Some analysts are saying that Eritrea is preparing a counter-offensive from the North and from the West against TDF/TPLF in order to force the Tigrayans to withdraw troops from the current war theatres in Amhara. Other analysts point out that Eritrea might be preparing for a TDF/TPLF offensive into Eritrea which is anticipated to start after the rainy season (by the end of September).
3. The GoE continues stressing that no negotiation with TDF/TPLF will be possible, unless the latter stops fighting and withdraw from Amhara region. Both sides are convinced that they will be able to obtain a decisive military victory within the coming months, forcing the other side to make important concessions in a possible future negotiation.

4. GoE did not loosen restrictions on humanitarian access to Tigray. While continue pledging unfettered humanitarian access, the reality created on the ground is different – as experienced by the Delegation while trying to obtain flight permissions for the Humanitarian Air Bridge to Mekelle.
5. On the international scene, PM Abiy Ahmed made a visit to Asmara on his way to Turkey, where he signs a military cooperation agreement. In all likelihood the PM was discussing the procurement of drone technology which – in the eyes of the Ethiopian PM – could hand a decisive military advantage to the ENDF. Unconfirmed reports of Turkish drones to be deployed in Ethiopia soon followed the visit.

Details:

Continued fighting in Amhara and Afar

6. During the week of August 14th-20th, fighting between TDF/TPLF and ENDF/Amhara forces continued on at least four fronts in the Amhara Region: Debark (road from Tigray border to Gondar), Sekota (road from Tigray border to Lalibela), Debre Tabor (road from Weldia to Bahar Dar) and Winchale (road from Weldia to Dessie). Several claims and counter-claims were made about the occupation of towns, with the overall trend still indicating a further advance of TDF/TPLF forces deeper into the Amhara Region.
7. ENDF launched a counter-offensive from Afar into Tigray, launching attacks on the TDF/TPLF Eastern flank. Fighting was reported near Chifra (Afar) and Mehoni (Tigray).
8. Over the past days, Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen visited several places in Amhara close to the front lines. He is the first member of the Government known to visit areas with active fighting since the start of the conflict.
9. Several universities in Amhara Region have started organizing basic military training programs for their staff and students.

OLA reported to have taken control of several rural areas in Oromia and Amhara

10. After the announcement of its alliance with TDF/TPLF, more focus was put on the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). While initial assessments showed some doubts on the OLA's numerical strength and military capacities, they have made some remarkable progress over the past weeks in controlling several rural areas and in cutting important roads. In Western Oromia, OLA controls several the rural areas of the four "Wellega" zones, as well as the main roads around the town of Nekemte. In Southern Oromia, OLA controls rural areas of the Guji Zone and managed to establish check points on the main road between Addis Ababa and the Kenyan border. In the North Shoa Zone of Northern Oromia, OLA took control of rural areas near the town of Kuyu and also briefly occupied the town itself.
11. In South-Eastern Amhara, OLA is reported to have occupied several rural districts near the town of Kemisse on the main road from Addis Ababa towards Dessie and Weldia. OLA is also reported to be have established itself around the gorge of the Blue Nile on the border between the Amhara and Oromia Regional States, and to have established a check point on the main road between Addis Ababa and Bahar Dar near the bridge at Dejen.
12. While the OLA clearly does not have the same level of organization, equipment and military experience as the TDF/TPLF, the organization seems to be gaining support among the rural population in large parts of the Oromia Region (as well as in areas of the Amhara Region with a strong presence of ethnic Oromo). It was reported from some rural areas how OLA enters villages, calls village meetings in order to explain its objectives and policies to the local population and afterwards just asks the Prosperity Party administrators and security forces to leave peacefully – which in some cases happened.
13. On August 17th, one of the smaller opposition parties in the Afar Region, the Afar National Democratic Party, announced that it will join the TDF/TPLF-OLA coalition against the Government of PM Abiy Ahmed. It is reported that also smaller, relatively unknown movements such as the Benishangul Liberation Front and the Sidama Liberation Front have announced that they will join the TDF/TPLF-OLA alliance. One of the two factions in the Oromo Liberation front (OLF), on the other hand, announced that it will continue to support PM Abiy Ahmed.

Eritrea sends reinforcements – Intentions are unclear

14. Eritrean troops are occupying a strip of territory in Northern Tigray reaching from Adigrat to Shire and Badme. Eritrean troops are also present in Western Tigray, where they have taken up defensive positions with tanks and artillery around Adi Goshu and Humera, and possibly also along the border with Sudan. Over the past days, it was reported that Eritrea has sent reinforcements to Western Tigray. This could possibly have been done in order to replace ENDF and Amhara units that have been re-deployed in Amhara Region.
15. PM Abiy Ahmed made a short visit to the Eritrean capital Asmara on August 17th – no more details as the visit was not publicised.

No more food in Tigray – humanitarian needs in other Regions are growing

16. Samantha Power, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), issued a statement on August 19th highlighting that – for the first time in nine months of war in Ethiopia’s Tigray region – aid workers will this week run out of food to deliver to millions of people in the Region who are facing hunger: “USAID and its partners as well as other humanitarian organizations have depleted their stores of food items warehoused in Tigray”.
17. In the meantime, Western Tigray – currently occupied by Amhara, Eritrean and ENDF forces – remains inaccessible to humanitarian actors.
18. Due to active fighting, humanitarian needs in the Afar and Amhara Regions are increasing fast. Exact numbers are hard to come by, but it is known that several 100,000s of people become IDP’s over the past weeks. USAID made public its new allocation of humanitarian aid to the two regions.
19. The Telegraph Newspaper on August 17th published a detailed account – including satellite pictures – of TDF/TPLF attacks on Amhara civilians in several villages in the Kobo area between Alamata and Weldia that would have taken place during the first week of August. TDF/TPLF published a statement on August 19th to deny these accusations and to call for an independent UN-led investigation.

20. The Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO) announced that it is investigating 11 local and international organizations for alleged fraudulent activities. No list of the CSO's under investigation was published. EU partners also reported that ACSO has stopped the accreditation process for new organizations, which might create a challenge for some EU partner organizations that were in process to finalize their official registration in Ethiopia.

Continued repression of people of Tigray origin in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country

21. During the past days, police in Addis Ababa carried out a new round of arrests of Tigrayans living in the capital. Among those arrested was Hailu Kebede of the Salsay Woyane Part (a political party from Tigray opposed to the TPLF), who met with EU Envoy Pekka Haavisto some months ago (as well as with the EU EOM Assessment Team).
22. On August 18th, Human Rights Watch published a detailed account documenting the ethnic profiling, unlawful arrests and forced disappearances of ethnic Tigrayans in the capital Addis Ababa.
23. Over the past weeks, there have been unconfirmed reports of attacks on ethnic Tigrayans in some towns of the Amhara Region – reportedly even people who only have a very remote connection with the Tigray Region have also been targeted.
24. On August 18th, all Embassies and International Organizations based in Addis Ababa received a Verbal Note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asking them to provide a detailed list of all security staff employed to secure their premises/residences. Of particular concern there is request to all Embassies to provide details on the “ethnicity” of their security staff. Several EU MS have already indicated that they are not planning to provide the requested information to the Ethiopian authorities – this will be coordinated in the next HoMs meeting on August 24th.

Second part elections possibly delayed

25. It looks increasingly unlikely that the second part of the elections will take place on September 6th. The latest rumours from the National

Electoral Board of Ethiopia indicate a postponement probably to the end of September.

26. One of the areas where the elections still have to take place is the Somali Region. The Ogden National liberation Front (ONLF) expressed their frustration over the NEBE's investigations into the complaints they filed together with other opposition parties regarding the voter registration process in Somali Region. ONLF published a statement saying that

“Participating in the rigged elections in the Somali State will be meaningless”.

27. Unconfirmed reports indicate that protests took place last week in the Western Gambella Region against the ruling Prosperity Party over the general call for mobilization that was launched by the Government last week (each Region is apparently expected to send a certain numbers of recruits to the fronts in Northern Ethiopia).

PM Abiy Ahmed visits Ankara and signs a military cooperation agreement with Turkey

28. On the invitation of the Turkish President Erdogan, PM Abiy Ahmed made an official visit to Turkey on August 17th – 18th. On the occasion of the visit, Ethiopia and Turkey announced the signature of diplomatic, social and economic agreements; as well as cooperation agreements on water development and military cooperation. President Erdogan also stated that he attaches great importance to the resolution of the Tigray crisis and offered to mediate on the border dispute between Ethiopia and Sudan.
29. It is presumed that PM Abiy Ahmed asked Turkish support to obtain military technology, especially drones. Drone technology played a big role in the first phase of the conflict in November 2020, when TDF/TPLF was pushed back to remote mountainous areas of Tigray. The Ethiopian PM afterwards talked enthusiastically about this drone technology in the Ethiopian Parliament and seems convinced that it could alter the course of the war once again. According to analyst, the Ethiopian PM would mores specifically be interested in obtaining Turkish Bayraktar-TB2 and ANKA-S drones.

30. It was reported last week that the Ethiopian authorities transferred the management of 6 on 11 Turkish schools in Ethiopia which used to be run by the Gulen Movement to the pro Government Turkey's Maarif Foundation. This is still controversial as some of the schools were actually lawfully owned by German private education companies.
31. Ethiopian State-media continue to broadcast programs with anti-Western content, targeting specifically the US and the EU.