

# Ethiopia-Eritrea: The Great Illusion

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Isaias Afewerki on ESAT

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By Worku Abera

### Part I: The Politics of Reconciliation?

In an interview with two ESAT journalists that was posted on YouTube last month, Isaias Afewerki raises the possibility of an economic union between Eritrea and Ethiopia to advance “common objectives”, similar to the economic arrangement that existed between Eritrea and Ethiopia during the 1991-1998 period. The main obstacle to forming such a union, he contends, has been “Woyane’s distortions to serve its narrow political agenda”. For the union to take place, he argues, the current government has to be replaced. His suggestion of a common market is mostly intended to placate Ethiopian viewers and listeners, especially those who believe in a democratic and united Ethiopia. Before we all jump on the bandwagon of a common market with Eritrea, we need to examine his statements critically since he makes a number of contradictory, disingenuous, and factually incorrect assertions.

As part of a public relations campaign to convince Ethiopians about the benefits of an economic union with Eritrea, he seemingly extends a message of goodwill towards the Ethiopian people. He appears concerned about the myriad of political problems facing Ethiopia, echoing the fears, concerns, and worries of many Ethiopians about the political direction the country has taken since the EPRDF came to power in 1991. He says the “corrupt Woyanes” have accentuated ethnic division in Ethiopia to serve “their narrow agenda”; the constitution is “a joke and immoral”; it poses a grave danger to the unity of Ethiopia. He suggests that he supports the struggle for democracy and unity.

In the interview, he covers a wide range of subjects, but it would be arduous to critique the entire interview since he talks about so many topics, often rambling from one topic to the next, frequently discussing matters that were not raised by the interviewers. I will limit my brief comments to his statements related to the thawing of attitude towards Ethiopia, his advice to political groups opposed to the regime in Ethiopia, the distortion of history for political purposes, the demonizing of ethnic groups, his cavalier dismissal of national myths, his reference to “the sanctity of Eritrea’s colonial borders”, his claims of opposing the EPRDF’s constitution, and his support for the opposition groups in Ethiopia.

I will address the myth about the mutual benefits of an economic union between Ethiopia and Eritrea. As well, I will argue that the EPLF supports some of the opposition groups fighting the current regime in Ethiopia to advance its short-term and long-term objectives, not out of any altruistic motivation to help Ethiopia solve its political problems. I also raise the clash of national interests over the port of Assab. I hope the comments will contribute to the debate on the strategic objectives of the EPLF in Ethiopia, the proper tactical and strategic alliances for creating democracy and national unity in Ethiopia, and the potential conflict with Eritrea over the port of Assab. The comments appear in 7 parts.

### **The thawing of attitude towards Ethiopia**

Isaias Afwerki’s views on Ethiopia, as well as those of many Eritreans in the Diaspora, seem to have evolved for the better. The anti-Ethiopian rhetoric of the EPLF and its supporters has subsided, if not completely vanished. The change in his attitude towards Ethiopia may reflect a genuine recognition of the historical ties between Eritrea and Ethiopia, but it is also a pitch for an economic union to extricate Eritrea from the multitude of social, economic, and political problems it faces under his regime. In Eritrea today, the people face hard economic hardship (as witnessed by the interviewers); his regime is internally and externally isolated; and the majority of Eritreans have become disenchanted with his government. Therefore, short-term and long-term economic and political motives explain his apparently reasonable, thoughtful, and conciliatory statements about Ethiopia.

His pronouncements are politically motivated, but the improvement in the attitude of many Eritreans towards Ethiopia is most probably genuine. A few years ago we, Eritreans and Ethiopians, were usually described as citizens of the Horn of Africa, but today we are all “Habeshas”, at any rate some of us, sharing the same positive traits. There are a few explanations for this evolution in attitude. First, Eritreans are frustrated, bitter, and angry with the regime in Eritrea. Many consider his government to be as bad as the Derg, if not worse. Despite the huge sacrifices they made for achieving independence, Eritreans are embittered that they ended up with a dictator, not much better than Mengistu.

Second, they have come to realize that the EPLF’s anti-Ethiopia propaganda is untruthful. Eritreans, especially the Tigrigna-speaking Eritreans, have rediscovered that they have shared history and culture with Ethiopia, particularly with the history and culture of Abyssinia. Third, Eritreans recognize that there is no fundamental animosity between them and Ethiopians. The animosity, such as it exists, has been engendered, fomented, and exploited by politicians on both sides. After a cooling off period of almost a quarter of a century following Eritrean independence, after realizing that independence did not deliver what was promised, it appears that Eritreans have re-examined their negative attitude towards Ethiopia. The apparent change in his feelings towards Ethiopia may mirror the real improvement in the predisposition of many Eritreans towards Ethiopia.

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**12 comments**

[Comment](#) from: Sam Luerey [Visitor]



Eritreans see themselves not as Habesha. At least not anymore and yes Eritreans always had love to Ethiopia but that doesn't mean to the rulers. As you can see the majority of the Eritreans is for the government and not against the government. Last but not least, Isaias Afewerkis words and deeds for united Ethiopia is well recorded and everyone who wants to see it can see it in the book called Adulis and in all Ethiopia related interviews. Weyane, please stop trying to kill a written, documented truth. It won't help you to go even an inch.

03/30/15 @ 10:17

[Comment](#) from: Wello [Visitor]



I could not understand your point. It's just garbage. I am really sorry for Nazret to publish such articles in there website.

03/30/15 @ 10:23

[Comment](#) from: newcomer [Visitor]



Believing Isayas cares for the union of Eritrea and Ethiopia is like instructing a dog to watch over 1 kilogram of fresh meat. Don't be naive my people don't be naive starting with ESAT people.

03/30/15 @ 13:27

[Comment](#) from: Nakfa [Visitor]



1. There was no any EPLF anti Ethiopian propaganda. Anti Dergue propoganda yes.
2. Eritreans have never denied that they are habesha (except Sam Luerey)
3. Hardship has never really influenced our integrity. So the notion that Eritreans are changing their attitude towards Ethiopia is simply false.
4. Once gain, independence and self-determination are something a country or people should not

sell for a temporary benefits. That is why Eritreans fought for decades and are fighting  
5. Iseayas has been saying the same thing for decades. A strong and unified Ethiopia could be a good friend to Eritrea. Well on that he is very naive idiot ( or as our friends from Tigray would say typical Hamasien).

7. Compare GoE with Dergue. hmmm

8. Agree ,GoE should focus on Eritrea. We have lots of problems of our own.

03/30/15 @ 13:28

[Comment](#) from: Weldu [Visitor]



Very good article. The only obstacle to a normal and neighborly relationship between the two brotherly people and sisterly nations is the totalitarian fascist in Asmara.

03/30/15 @ 13:40

[Comment](#) from: C'est moi senait [Visitor]



When the last mad of Africa dictator pol pot issayas is dead then your illation comes true.

There are two eritreans ,the old narrow minded nationalistic eritreans with Italian and Arab dreams and are now in their last days of life, very old, sick, betrayed by the dream they once sacrificed their entire life's and energy, losing their members of their family for a dream that became now a nightmare and hopeless future. The other are a new generation of Eritrea with new vision to be free from the old narrow ethnical mentality, who are now desperate to reach Europe and be free from a northern Korea type of dictator whom they hate. These are a new Eritrean of with new thinking to have their own free thinking ,with new religion abounding the old and have a better understanding to come close to Ethiopians as a brother and sisters .

03/30/15 @ 13:57

[Comment](#) from: Yosephyacob [Visitor]



My life time humiliation being an ethiopian with out Eritritia!

The unity of one people in different theritory could have brought such a happy ending to our two nation, and could have showd tremendous maturity for the rest of the world .

Eritrian could be the best medicine like a vaccine to rest of ethiopia to be immunized from the existiing ethnized time bomb creamed by coraption and financial blindness.

I wonder king hailsilase unified Erthria to mother land , had seen the danger of adwanism and the only medicine were the children of Bahrenegash .

Bring it on Erthria!,,,,

03/30/15 @ 14:52

[Comment](#) from: Dejen [Visitor]



Issayas Afeworki is the enemy of Ethiopia. Nazret should stop posting such articles which try to make Shaebya as the friend of Ethiopia.

Opposing the regime in Addis Ababa should be supported by all Ethiopians. Supporting Shaebya and promoting the Criminal Issayas Afeworki as a friend of Ethiopia is treason. Nazret should stand for the interest of Ethiopia and should not post articles that support Eritrea and it's leaders.

Issayas Afeworki has been propagating such statements as Ethiopia being the result of WWII policies of the European powers. Issayas Afeworki follows the policy of divide and weaken Ethiopia by being anti-Tigray and supporting the other ethnic groups to stand against Tigray. Disseminating such ideas of "divide and rule" by pitting Ethiopian tribes against one another should not be allowed in a website that seems to stand for Ethiopia.

03/30/15 @ 15:06

[Comment](#) from: extraterrstrial [Member] \_



Ethiopia never have an enemy as hateful and as evil as Eritrea. Just tell him to give up the Ethiopian port and vanish from the face of the earth.

03/30/15 @ 15:28

[Comment](#) from: Erty [Visitor]



I think there is no any kind of illusion about Ethiopia and Eritrea's relation. For most Ethiopians, Eritrea's desire to integrate with Ethiopia has one and only one objectives; access to Ethiopia's tremendous natural resources. Eritrea hopping to make Ethiopia land locked, and hopping to use their geographic position to chock Ethiopia didn't work as they planned it. Eritrea become ocean locked. They become a stream of water with out its source spring. They were planning to lease their port services to Ethiopia at premium and use that fund to buy Ethiopia's natural resources to build industries and sell back industry products to Ethiopia. The port service that Eritrea was going to proved to Ethiopia was not only going to be used for as cash cow but also to use the port service to force Ethiopia to yield to Eritrea demands economically as well as socially. Most of us might think that Eritrea's business plan is not a bad idea. But, to make this plan work and sustain it, Eritrea was trying to keep Ethiopia on a short leash so that when ever Ethiopia does something contrary to Eritrea's economy and growth plan Eritrea was going to take appropriate measures to

make sure to stop it; Let me give an example, when ever Ethiopia was starting to build some industries in Tigry region, the Eritrean government used to tell the Ethiopian authorities that the industry Ethiopia building is already in Eritrea and Ethiopia should abounded the project. This posturing of Eritrea emanated from their military strength at that time and they thought that military power balance was going to stay forever.

I think if Eritrea wants to keep its political independence but integrate to Ethiopia economically, that is not going to work. Ethiopia and Eritrea have overwhelming blood relation, social, cultural, geography, language, and religion similarities that existed for centuries which dictates political unification than the economy integration. The economy aspect of the integration is a small portion that needs to be discussed as a primary goal for integration purposes. Let us not put the cart before the horse. Above all, Ethiopia and Eritrea economies are two hugely different economies in terms magnitude and growth prospect. Economic unification would bring little benefit to Ethiopia, it is hugely advantageous to Eritrea. If Ethiopia had small population, limited natural resource, feeble economy we were not going to have this conversation today, given Eritrea's action when it was strong and thinks has any advantage over Ethiopia. Above all, Eritrea fought 30 years for political and economy independence. What has changed in the last 20 years that spurred to suggests economics integration but not political integration with Ethiopia is a good thing? Ethiopia will not allow Eritrea to dictate Ethiopia's relation ship with Eritrea. Either political or economical integration, had to be planned by Ethiopia only. Eritrea already has made the ultimate choice on its future. Eritrea has more elements that foster politically integration with Ethiopia in other areas than its economy. If politically integration is not on the table the idea of economic integration from Eritrea is just an empty gesture that is not going to help the two countries relationship. Ethiopia and Eritrea have a strong relation that dictates political integration before economic integration. The Eritrean government for the last twenty years have been struggling to build Eritrea's economy and is trying to reverse that using Ethiopia resources and market. The regime in Eritrea wants to keep politically independence but have economic integration even though the thing that favor political integration outweighs economic integration in these two countries. In good intention, for the two people to live together political integration is the first order given the two countries more than three thousand years history, not 50 years history as always suggest by political stooges to mislead Eritrean and Ethiopian people. Economic integration Before political integration between Ethiopia and Eritrea is just the usual gimmicks by the ruling clique in Eritrea.

03/30/15 @ 15:51

[Comment](#) from: oneluv21 [Visitor]



As Eritrea I have Few questions to the so called Eritrean president:

1. Why not worry about Eritrea's free election so that we can select a business minded president instead of a war monger like you
2. Why not worry about creating a constitution approved by the people of Eritrea?
3. Why not worry about Eritrea's Economy and infrastructure?
4. The people of Tigray are more closer to us ethnically than other Ethiopian groups so why not cooperate with them?

5. Why not open trade with Mekele?

6. What are you still doing as a president more like king for over 20 years? You are not even elected so you do not speak for me.

03/30/15 @ 17:48

[Comment](#) from: Dejen [Visitor]



We should leave “Eritrea” to it’s fate. We do not need any political union or to have any form of economic integration. Eritrea’s secession is good riddance. We do need “eritreans” in our communities because they are deeply anti-Ethiopia. Every one wonders why “Eritreans” hate Ethiopia. Eritrea’s hatred against Ethiopians is so much one wonders whether this is possible.

Those of you Ethiopians who want to live with “eritreans” can go to Eritrea. Many communities in the world are divided even though they have similar culture or language. Many arab countries have different governments even though their language and culture is similar. We have North Ireland and Republic of Ireland, which hate each other so much that North Ireland is part of the UK. We have also North and South Korea. I think we should not “Eritrea” to unite with Tigray of Ethiopia. Tigray like North Ireland is part of Ethiopia and is actually miniature Ethiopia.

We should repatriate all eritreans and their extended families back to Eritrea. There should no “Eritreans” living in Ethiopia for reasons of security and also political sabotage that could happen any time. We should think of our own citizens and give Ethiopians a safe country to live. No Eritrean in Ethiopia please. Deport them or send them to another country like Kenya or Sudan.