

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **“Normative Power Europe”? The European Union Democracy Promotion in Africa: A Focus on Ethiopia (Pre-April 2018)**

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One of the debates regarding the EU's role in the international relations has been what kind of an international actor the Union has been since its inception. While, some argues that the Union has a realist approach, authors like Ian Manners see the EU as a 'normative power', which is more of an idealist approach in the international relations. The latter conception has brought a lot of attention towards the study of EU's relations with the rest of the world; particularly, the developing countries in Sub Saharan Africa. In an attempt to navigate such debate, basically by examining the case of the EU and Ethiopian relationship, this article attempt to reveal the narrative of labeling the EU as a 'Normative Power' and democracy promoter is just an idiom. The article suggests that the strategic importance of Ethiopia to the EU, in the fight towards terrorism, peacekeeping, and managing migration in the region of the Horn of Africa has affected the EU's commitment towards diffusing the alleged normative values in the country. Thus, this article divulges that the EU's security interest overshadows the promotion of its democratic values and norms in Ethiopia.

**Key words:** Normative power, Neo-realism, Cotonou agreement, Ethiopia.

## **INTRODUCTION**

'Normative' power Europe is one of the most contested concepts in international relations of the European Union (EU). Manners (2002) argued in his work that the European Union as an actor in international relations plays a distinctive role of diffusing democratic norms and values (p. 236), and it seeks to redefine international norms in its image (p. 252). To explain 'Normative' power, according to Staeger (2016: 984), Manners points to authors proposing normative concepts of power like Luke's 'third face of power' and defines it as power to influence values of others to prevent potential conflicts of

interest from arising (Lukes, 2004). However, his landmark article has brought a lot of debate on the role of the EU in world politics.

In his realist critique on "Normative Power Europe", Hyde-Price (2006: 217), argued that the EU is used by its member states as a collective instrument for shaping its external milieu by a combination of hard and soft power. The concept is scrutinized due to the gap between what the EU says and what it does in international politics by proclaiming that self-interest, especially security interest, overrides the diffusion of norms in international relations

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(Del Biondo, 2015: 249). The arguments about the 'Normative' power of the EU principally stem from the basic principles enshrined in the EU laws and policies. Manners (2002: 242) explains that the broader normative basis of the EU has been developed over the past 50 years through a series of declarations, treaties, policies, criteria, and conditions. He identified five 'Core' norms in those laws and policies which guide the EU in international politics namely: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and respect for human right and fundamental freedoms (ibid.).

The Union has concluded several cooperation agreements with developing countries of the world. One of these agreements is the Cotonou Agreement (CA) which was signed between the African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (ACP) and the EU in 2000. The CA has a broad aim of helping countries of ACP in building a democratic system, maintaining peace and security, improving economic development, reducing poverty, raising living standards and building strong trade partnerships (Cotonou Agreement, 2014: 17). By giving greater attention to normative values of the EU, the revised document of the Cotonou Agreement (2014: 23), underlines that "respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, which underpins the ACP–EU Partnership, shall strengthen the domestic and international policies of the parties and constitute the essential elements of this agreement". According to this agreement, the ACP countries are expected to fulfill certain principles for sustained cooperation which would otherwise result in suspension from the partnership (Cotonou Agreement, 2014: 103-104).

However, the question is, does the EU consistently implement the normative clauses in occasions where the signatory countries fail to adhere to the principles? Ethiopia therefore, could be a strong case study in investigating the EU's position as a normative leader in its international relations, particularly with countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, the purpose of this research is to reveal that the label of 'normative power' ascribed to the EU does not extend beyond the idiom, while looking at some specific cases like Ethiopia. The author argues that the EU prioritizes its self-interest- security interest- in its international relations with Ethiopia and is not genuinely a norm-setting entity. The study focuses on Ethiopia, before Abiy Ahmed came into power.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ian Manners (2002: 235-258), assumes that the European Union is a 'normative power'. For him, the legal ground that governs the EU constitution has distinctive norms which represent the EU identity and norms of democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights. However, Neo-realists affirm that states should aspire to ensure their security and act rationally to sustain their interests. Hyde-Price (2006, p. 221), a neo-realist

affirms that, in the anarchic self-help system, the primary concern of states is security. States are thought to be rational actors that go aggressively to maximize their benefit. The driving force behind cooperation at the international level is peace and security. States ought to focus on securitizing their external environment and other interests; democratization and human rights are of secondary importance (ibid., p. 222). From the realist perspective, the EU's strong sanctions would be mostly against countries that are of low historical importance, which are not useful in the fight against terrorism, and of low commercial interest to the EU. From the idealist perspective, the EU's strong sanction would most likely be in the case of sudden deterioration of human and democratic rights in unstable countries with low economic performance, and when there is pressure from the regional organization and domestic actors.

## Historical background: EU-Ethiopia relations

The relation between the EU and Ethiopia is founded on the CA, with partnership dated 1975, which is the Lome Agreement. The European Union External Action (EEAS) (2016) website reveals that Ethiopia is one of the important partners of the EU's in the continent.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the CA, the two parties signed a "Strategic Engagement" agreement which further strengthens bilateral relations and their commitment to sustainable development, democracy, human right, good governance, and the rule of law (ibid.).

On the 40th anniversary of EU-Ethiopia cooperation, the EU Ambassador to Ethiopia, Chantal Hebberecht, stated that "relationship with Ethiopia has been long-lasting, successful as well as constructive, and will continue as such for the next fifteen years, in order to achieve the country's vision of becoming a middle-income country" (European Union Newsletter 2015: 2).

In financial terms, the EU support to Ethiopia would exceed 2 billion Euros for the period of 2015-2020 (EEAS 2016). The budget would be allocated for development and maintenance of peace and security in the region, management of migration (framed under the Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility), protection of human rights, as well as promotion of democracy and good governance (ibid.). The fact is that both parties enjoy good partnership, irrespective of Ethiopia's progress in building a democratic system in line with the EU protocols.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research focuses on secondary sources such as literature review drawn from a variety of scholarly publications. As a result, the author used a desk review approach to come up with an

<sup>1</sup>See: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/1186/ethiopia-and-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/1186/ethiopia-and-eu_en) for more information.

argumentative conclusion on the topic. Essentially, various themes were chosen to support the main research issue. Attempts were also made to substantiate the data from the secondary source with the Cotonou Agreement in order to make the argument stronger and valid.

## ANALYSIS

### Ethiopia in the eyes of Western institutions

The incumbent government in Ethiopia came to power in 1991. Since then, the country has been under the control of a single party called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). National elections have been held several times during the period between 1991 and 2015, where opposition parties had little or no room for a seat in the parliament. Such practices in the country are justified by the Freedom House (2017); which has led to the declaration of the country as one of the authoritarian States in Sub-Saharan Africa. In very recent years, the politics of this country is also plagued by mass protests in the large portions of the country as a result of widespread and growing discontent over the repressive rule of the government. Amnesty International also echoes the same report of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly, which are almost nonexistent. There are arbitrary arrests and detention, and the use of torture (Amnesty International 2016).

The Human Rights Watch (2016: 1) extends its analysis on the country to the very narrow political space for different actors including civil society, media, and opposition parties, all of which are casualties of Ethiopia's government's authoritarian rule. The EU Parliament resolution (2016: 2-5) describes the existence of gross human right violation and the lack of democratic practice in Ethiopia. The resolution has further ordered Ethiopia to take immediate action to improve the country's poor record of respecting the human and democratic rights of the citizens.

What makes the situation worst is that, the repressive rule is backed by rules and regulations enacted by the government. According to the report of Freedom House (2016), Ethiopia uses the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation of 2009 (ATP) to repress the democratic rights of the people and instrumentalize the legal system to block the entry of Civil Society actors. This report also shows that Ethiopia has the lowest rating as regards respecting the political right and civil liberties of its citizens, 7 and 6 respectively, and has been indicated as a 'not free' country in the freedom status<sup>2</sup>. Generally, by understanding the ever-deteriorating level of democracy in the county, the European Parliament called for large-scale improvement in the governance system of the country in January 2016

(European Parliament, 2016: 4)

### Ethiopia in the lens of the Cotonou agreement

The Cotonou Agreement is one of the means by which the EU manifests its presence in the politics of the countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Among others, the EU plays an active role in the politics of Africa owing largely to humanitarian concerns, geographical proximity, the potential spillover effect of instability, and historical ties rooted in the colonial era (Mix, 2013, p. 12). It is believed that the EU aspires to promote democratic norms and values in all of its bilateral or multilateral agreements with non-European countries (Kotzian et al., 2011, p. 995), but it is not uncommon to see that the promotion of the 'normative' values is overlooked for various reasons.

Referring to the CA, James and Zinke (2005) state that:

*Article 96(3)(a) and (c) in essence stipulates that formal consultations can be called when a breach of the essential elements listed in Article 9 is deemed to have occurred and provides the basis for the application of 'appropriate measures' (sanctions) which can lead to the suspension of cooperation.*

Owing to its repressive rule, Ethiopia has breached and has been breaching those essential democratic elements listed in Article 9 of the CA. Large-scale violations of human and democratic rights have been recorded in the country. The recent widespread public protests and the response of the government can be taken as a good reflection of how far the government of Ethiopia has gone in its repressive form of leadership. The situation in the country has been widely echoed by commentators of democracy in the West. Amnesty International (2016) states that more than 800 people were killed by government forces in a year-long mass protest in 2016.<sup>3</sup> Apart from that, the EU parliament also condemned the use of excessive force by the government against peaceful protesters.

Based on the CA, the EU is supposed to sanction ACP countries regardless of their economic or strategic importance, but no genuine action is yet in place to suspend cooperation with Ethiopia. Virtually, if non-adherence to the democratic principles leads to suspension of cooperation, Ethiopia should be a typical candidate for the application of the Article 96 suspension clause of the CA. On the contrary, aid money is still flowing into Ethiopia and the country has remained one of the largest destinations of the EU's aid. The EU development cooperation support to Ethiopia exceeded € 2 billion for the period of 2014-2020.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 1=Most Free, 7=Least Free. See Freedom House web page for further information <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/ethiopia>.

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/ethiopia-after-a-year-of-protests-time-to-address-grave-human-rights-concerns/> for a detailed report of Amnesty International on Ethiopia.

<sup>4</sup> See [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ethiopia/1186/ethiopia-and-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ethiopia/1186/ethiopia-and-eu_en) for more information.

### Why does the EU tolerate Ethiopia?

After the publication of Manner (2002) article on what kind of an international actor is the European Union, there has been a debate on the EU's international role and whether security interests or the promotion of European values and norms are the driving force in the EU's external cooperation. Hyde-Price (2006) argued that states prioritize the stability of their external environment rather than the promotion of democratic values and norms. In referring to the EU's performance in international cooperation with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Del Biondo explained that security interest seemed to be the most important when it comes to why the EU is inconsistent in sanctioning negative conditionality in the case of failure to obey the principles in the CA. It also claimed that, whenever there is a conflict between security and democracy promotion, the EU tends to prioritize security interests.

In the case of Ethiopia, regardless of its poor record in adherence to the protocols of the CA and being a very repressive country, it enjoys one of the most successful partnerships with the EU among other African countries. Portela (2007, pp. 45-47) states that the EU has used development aid suspension as a tool to address breaches of democratic rule in some African countries. However, some other African countries that appear equally problematic did not face sanctions (Brummer 2009, p. 197 cited in Del Biondo 2015, p. 238). Under this condition, it is legitimate to ask the question, why has the EU been lenient with Ethiopia.

Saltnes (2013: 2-5) analyzed the various debates surrounding the EU's inconsistency in implementing the human rights clause in the CA. In doing so, she identified three major categories of understanding discrepancies in the conditionality clause. They are: the primacy of economic interests, the primacy of security interests, and special relationships related to colonial history. Some literature (Saltnes, 2013; Del Biondo, 2011, 2015, 2012) relate the Ethiopia case to the second argument, as the country has a very weak economy and no ties with any of the former colonizing countries of Europe. Del Biondo (2011, p. 386) argues that Ethiopia is a trusted ally of the EU in the Horn of Africa because of its relative stability in the unstable region. By recalling the strong relationship between both parties, she explains that the security interests of the EU in Ethiopia account for the lack of implementation of the human rights clause in the CA. In summing up her argument, Del Biondo maintains that Ethiopia's position as a vital partner in the fight against terrorism and its importance in maintaining peace in the region has been given higher value in the West than the existing flaws in the implementation of democratic norms and values.

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, the EU's reluctance to suspend cooperation with Ethiopia is much related to the concern of migration flow into the EU countries in case of any political instability in the country.

Related to this, as a home of more than 100 million people and its geographical proximity to Europe, Ethiopia has been given great importance to the EU's migration concerns from the region. The "Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility" which was signed in 2015 between both parties also positioned Ethiopia as a key country of origin, transit, and destination of irregular migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa on the way to Europe (European Commission, 2015: 1). According to Kotzian et al. (2011: 996), the avoidance of the spillover effect of instability has a lot of importance in the European Union's partnership with third countries. In the case of Ethiopia, it is assumed that sanctioning the country for the sake of normative interest would weaken the government and further jeopardize the EU's long-term interest in the country. Del Biondo (2011: 386) points out that, the EU adopted a Strategic Partnership in the region of the Horn of Africa for the fear of instability in the region which could undermine the EU's security. Cross-border dynamics in the form of illegal migration and trafficking of arms, drugs, and refugee flows are the major concerns of the EU in the region. It is evident that Ethiopia has enjoyed relative stability for more than 20 years and has been playing an admirable role in the security of the region<sup>5</sup>. However, the relative stability of the country is at the expense of the rights of the people to exercise democracy. De Waal (2015) has made a sorrow analysis of politics in the Horn of Africa in his book: "*The real politics of the horn of Africa: money war and the business of power*". He argues that most powerful international actors engaged in the pursuit of their interests in the Horn of Africa. For him, these powers are engaged in "counter-terrorism and defense strategies" than the promotion of democracy in countries like Ethiopia.

### Locating 'the concept of normative power Europe in EU-Ethiopia relations

The EU-Ethiopian partnership might be one way to illustrate the nature of the EU as an international actor. It enables us to see how substantive the EU's commitment is to the 'normative' values and principles which are deemed to be the driving force of its international relations.

Farrell (2005: 264) notes that the CA has been hailed as a new paradigm in terms of its substantive requirements for Africa-EU relations by giving greater vigor to issues such as human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and good governance; but the partnership has less of a normative agenda than rhetoric in the

<sup>5</sup>The internal stability of the country has started to be questioned after various uprisings in the different parts of the country in 2015 against the Central government. Worrying about its detrimental effect, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has visited the country and discussed what the country must do to deal with the political crisis it has faced after more than two decades of relative stability. Read <https://www.voanews.com/africa/merkel-visiting-ethiopia-state-emergency-unfoldsfor-further-information>.

agreement. She further argues that the partnership has a more realistic tone than the dissemination of normative values (ibid.). The detailed explanation above reveals that the EU's partnership with Ethiopia is more geared towards the securitization of its external milieu. The EU has been working hard to maintain peace and security and to manage the migration and mobility of people originating from the region.

In explaining the instrumental variation in democracy promotion of the EU in Africa, De Biondo (2015: 238) states that realism has an important explanatory value in illustrating the reason behind the EU's reluctance to trigger the human right clause in the CA in countries like Ethiopia. This, in turn, shows a clear difference between what the EU says and what it does in its international relations. On the other hand, Manners (2002, p. 252) underlines that "the EU is built on the crucial, and usually overlooked observation that the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is". However, it seems Manners has missed a crucial point in this regard and it has given some other meaning 'what it is' is 'what it does'.

In the case of Ethiopia, the EU has contributed a lot to development projects, but the widely observed allegation of human rights abuses and crackdowns on opposition overshadows the economic growth thrust (Mousseau and Moore, 2013: 8). The idea here is not to intuitively denounce the EU's contribution to the development effort of the country. However, 'normative' interests go beyond poverty reduction. Issues of democracy, good governance, human rights, and the rule of law are all at the center of what are called normative values. In this country, the continually worsening violation of human rights has resulted in a political crisis which subsequently led to the declaration of a 6-month state of emergency, leading parts of the country to be under military rule (Amnesty International, 2017). However, Ethiopia's European allies continue to look away, except for their written condemnation (parliamentary resolution) of the political crisis in the country. Lack of genuine action by the EU means, as Zimels (2011: 25) rightly remarked, the EU's normative values "are not universally endorsed and are nothing more than cosmetic conditionality to be implemented selectively," according to the study.

Finally, Ethiopia's deep integration into the global network of the fight against terrorism, extremism, and combating of irregular migration (De Waal 2015: 195) has also contributed to the EU's reluctance to take the right action based on the agreement. Therefore, here comes the idea of what Hyde-Price refers to as "milieu shaping" in neorealism.<sup>6</sup> Ethiopia's position in a chaotic and conflict-prone area, combined with its relative stability for a while, has enabled the government to receive

preferential treatment in its relationship with the EU, despite its disobedience of the values that regulate the parties' cooperation. Manners (2002: 253), conception of "the absence of an obvious material gain from intervention" is also equally problematic as the EU has a clear conflict of interest in Ethiopia and the whole region of the horn of Africa. Thus, the EU is not a pure democracy promoter (Del Biondo and Orbie, 2014, p. 421); rather, as the theory of realism in International Relations indicates, it is an institution driven by genuine self-interest.

## Conclusion

The EU's priority for security interests is no secret in the case of Ethiopia. Despite widely reported human and democratic rights violations, Ethiopia has not been treated under the suspension clause of the CA. Security interests override the promotion of norms and values in the EU's international cooperation. To reveal where the EU's priority lies, this article explored the reasons why it has failed to apply the principles of the CA against Ethiopia. Ethiopia and the European Union enjoy a strong partnership regardless of the former's failure to abide by the guiding values of the CA. The article reasons out that the strategic importance of Ethiopia to the EU in efforts against terrorism, for peacekeeping, and the managing of migration from the region of the Horn of Africa are the driving forces behind the strong relationship between both parties. These interests of the EU, in turn, affect its commitment towards diffusing the alleged normative values into this country. Thus, this article revealed that the EU's security interests overshadow the promotion of democratic values and norms. Therefore, the EU's reluctance to take action based on the principles outlined in the CA means, the objective of disseminating democratic values to third countries involved in the cooperation agreement is just rhetoric and dependent on conditions. This makes the EU's role as a global 'normative' power in promoting democratic values and norms considerably doubtful.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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<sup>6</sup> Milieu shaping is the assumption of neorealism which asserts that great powers have an interest in the stability of their external environment. See Hyde-Price, A. (2006, 222).

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