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News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

The First Conference on the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI) took place in Dakar, Senegal this week. This is to be a nine-mile wide band of trees and shrubbery stretching all along the southern border of the Sahara desert and the Sahel, stretching 4,400 miles through 11 countries from Dakar in the west to Djibouti in the east. Eleven nations, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, are participating in the initiative. **(See article)**

The African Union has welcomed South Sudan's Transitional Government of National Unity sworn into office on Friday (April 29). In a statement on Saturday, AU Commission Chairperson, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, said, "This major step will greatly facilitate the process of tackling the challenges facing the country." South Sudan is now entering the most critical phase in the implementation of the peace agreement and she called "upon all AU member states to provide the necessary support for this demanding endeavor" and on the international community to mobilize the necessary resources for supporting South Sudan.

Experts from Africa's Regional Economic Communities, the African Union Commission, the Economic Commission for Africa and academia were meeting in

Nairobi this week (May 2–6) to discuss issues connected to the Continental Free Trade Area, expected to be in place by October 2017. The meeting focused on nine issues that can be feasibly agreed in advance, including trade in goods and services, special agreements on agriculture, fisheries, industrial pillar, common investment area, trade facilitation and customs cooperation, trade remedies and competition policy, and institutional arrangements for implementation.

World Press Freedom Day was celebrated around the world and across Africa on Tuesday this week (May 3) under the theme of "Freedom of Information". This year is the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration of press freedom principles, adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Namibia in 1991. The declaration calls on governments and citizens to acknowledge free flow of information is a fundamental human right.

Ethiopia

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome, speaking at the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Victory Day and the defeat of the Italians in 1941, said that Ethiopia had successfully defended its sovereignty, making it an icon of independence for others. He said the new generation should draw important lessons from the sacrifices of their fathers and grandfathers and vow to sustain the country's independence. **(See article)**

The Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Abadula Gameda, spoke last week at the Global Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, (April 26-27) one of the meetings being held in advance of the G7 2016 Summit to be held in Ise-Shima in Japan, May 26-27. The Conference concentrated on gender equality and women's empowerment; investing in youth; and building active aging societies as well as proposals to introduce Universal Health Coverage.

Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen met with Donor Assistance Group (DAG) members on Tuesday (May 3) to discuss response to the drought in Ethiopia.

Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom met with Dr. Pelonomi Venson-Moibi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Botswana on Wednesday (May 4). Discussions covered possible ways of expanding levels of cooperation between Ethiopia and Botswana and they reached an understanding to sign agreements in livestock development, culture, youth, civil service, and security.

Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros met Ms. Letizia Moratti, an Italian investor and the Chairperson of E4Impact Foundation on Monday (May 02). E4I Foundation is dedicated to the empowerment and development of entrepreneurship among women and youth in Africa and works in line with the United Nations Agenda 2030 and African Union Agenda 2063.

In a visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia this week, State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie, signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Political Consultations to further enhance bilateral political relations. **(See article)**

The State Minister of the Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) Frehiwot Ayalew, said on International Press Freedom Day, Tuesday (May 3), that ensuring press freedom and its growth played a vital role to enhance development and ensure lasting peace in Ethiopia. She said a democratic system cannot flourish without press freedom. She said the press should fight for its freedom whenever it faces bureaucratic red tape and bureaucrats.

State Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Kare Chawicha, said this week that Ethiopia was due to invest US\$150 billion to implement green economy projects over the next two decades with the aim to reduce greenhouse gas emission and advance economic growth as well as create jobs for women and youth. Funding will come from the government, the public, investors, and partners and from carbon trading.

The European Union delegation to Ethiopia is sponsoring the creation of the Ethio-European International Business School and the Ethio-European Business Innovation

Centre at the Addis Ababa University. The Deputy Head of Delegation of European Union to Ethiopia, Terhi Lehtinen, announced the development of the two institutions at the University on Wednesday (May 4). The cost of the project is estimated at 35 million Euros.

This week Ethiopia celebrated World Justice Week for the 6th time from May 3-8 under the theme “Justice Procedure for Ensuring Good Governance” Supreme Court Vice-President Medhin Keros told a press conference that the celebration aimed to ensure good governance by stamping out rent-seeking and corruption as well as exerting a concerted effort for the implementation of the Second Growth and Transformation Plan. Justice bodies should strengthen efforts to ensure the rule of law and safeguard inalienable human rights.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has issued a statement categorically denying a report by the opposition Ethiopia Satellite Television (ESAT) on April 11. This claimed the Ethiopian government had stopped the fundraising campaign by UN agencies. OCHA Ethiopia totally denies this allegation, noting that the Humanitarian Country Team, in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia, had launched a 90-Day Campaign on March 23 to urgently raise funds and in-kind support for drought-affected areas

The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) at the end of last week (April 29) issued an urgent call for funding to help farmers sow their fields. Ethiopia's Bureau of Agriculture suggests 1.7 million farming families are seed insecure and need seeds for *meher* season, starting as early mid-June for some crops, with planting ongoing until August. FAO said the next *meher* season would be critical to improving families' food security and self-sufficiency in 2016 and called for \$10 million to provide seeds.

The Famine Early Warning Systems (FEWS) issued a new food security outlook this month. It says with heavy rainfall in April, the prospects for the *belg* harvest havimproved. Late planting will delay harvests in the Southern Regional State, but it expects national *Belg* harvests to be average or slightly below average. Additional rainfall during the next few weeks will recharge water sources, improve pasture, and allow land preparation/ planting of *Meher* crops. The emergency will, however,

continue as the humanitarian appeal is only half funded and requirements will peak between June and September.

Eritrea

The Minister of Transportation and Communications, Tesfaselasie Berhane said in an interview that in 25 years of Independence, strategic roads had been built connecting Massawa to Assab; Filfil Solomuna to Afabet; and from Asmara to Tesenai, to Massawa, and to Aqordet and Sawa. Airports at Asmara, Massawa, Assab, Nakfa, Tesenei and Dalak Islands accommodated local and international flights. Massawa and Assab had been renovated to accommodate big ships, cranes and modern docks. Mobile phone services were growing and coverage was almost nationwide. WI-FI infrastructure was already in place and ready for providing Internet service.

The Australia mining group Danakali Ltd formally applied to the Government on Monday (May 2) for a mining license for its Colluli Potash Project, which is expected to start production in 2019. The project is a 50-50 joint venture with state-owned mining firm ENAMCO, and development is expected to be in two phases, each producing about 425,000 tonnes a year.

Kenya

Eleven giant pyres of elephant tusks were set on fire on Saturday (April 30) as President Uhuru Kenyatta was the first to light the biggest ever ivory bonfire of 105 tonnes of elephant ivory and 1.35 tonnes of rhino horn. The President told a meeting of African Heads of State and conservationists on Friday (April 29) that it was necessary to impose a total ban on trade in ivory to end trafficking and prevent the extinction of elephants in the wild. He said "To lose our elephants would be to lose a key part of the heritage that we hold in trust. Quite simply, we will not allow it."

Inspector-General of Police Joseph Boinnet said on Tuesday (May 3) that security agencies the previous week had foiled a planned biological attack using anthrax and arrested three suspects. One of those arrested belonged to an East African terror group network that had links to the ISIL.

Somalia

The President relieved the 85 year old Chief Justice, Aydid Ilka Hanaf, of his duties on Wednesday (May 4) and appointed Dr. Ibrahim Idle Suleyman, a lawyer from Somaliland, as his replacement with immediate effect. According to the President's Constitutional Adviser, Omar Dhagey, the decision was taken on grounds of complaints of corruption and of age.

Somalia's parliament ruled out any proposals by the government to delay the forthcoming presidential election for two more months on Sunday (May 1), reiterating that elections would be held in August and September, as opposed to December. The Parliament was responding to a proposal submitted by Prime Minister, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, on Sunday.

Human Rights Watch marked World Press Freedom Day by issuing a report in the dangers facing Somali journalists, 59 of whom have been killed since 1992. The worst year was 2012 when 18 died. Another three were murdered last year. Last month the authorities executed a member of Al-Shabaab convicted of killing five journalists. Journalists, however, still say they are unsafe in Mogadishu due to attacks by the militants and threats from government officials.

The UN Security Council will travel to Somalia this month to show support for elections scheduled in August, Egypt's UN Ambassador, and this month's council president, said. The Council envoys would also travel to Nairobi during the May 17-21 trip and hold meetings in Cairo with the Arab League. The visit to Somalia would support the elections to be held in August.

A group of about 10 British soldiers arrived in Somalia this week to offer medical, engineering and logistical support to AMISOM. They are the first of 70 British troops to be deployed in Somalia as part of UN peacekeeping efforts to counter the extremist group Al-Shabaab. The UK Defense Secretary, Michael Fallon, said on Sunday (May 1) that this reinforced the UK's commitment to targeting terrorism around the world.

The Office of Puntland Human Rights Defender issued its first annual report this week covering the period November 2014-to November 2015. During the year it received 49 complaints of human rights violations and said it succeeded in resolving at least half. Remaining complaints, it said, were being handled by the courts and other concerned agencies after reference by the OPHRD.

South Sudan

The newly appointed ministers of the Transitional Government of National Unity were sworn in on Friday (April 29) in compliance with the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, after President Kiir dissolved his cabinet the previous day. **(See article)**

South Sudan's government said on Wednesday (May 4) that it located more than 100 of the children abducted last month from Ethiopia. It said the children are unharmed. Ethiopia forces, with the approval of the South Sudan government, have been deployed into the area to assist the search, a move backed by South Sudan's government,

Sudan

The Foreign Ministry insisted on Monday (May 2) Sudan had "sovereign rights" over the border territories of Halayeb and Shalatin. They have been administered by Egypt since shortly after Sudan's independence in 1956, despite Sudan's regular protests; and the area has been under Cairo's full military control since the mid-1990's. The Foreign Ministry called on Egypt to engage in direct negotiations to resolve the issue or resort to international arbitration.

The Speaker of the National Assembly, Professor Ibrahim Ahmed Omer, met with the South Sudan Parliament's Deputy Speaker, Jasmine Samuel and South Sudan delegation on Monday (May 2). He underlined the importance of consolidating relations between Sudan and South Sudan State and of reactivating the agreement on

four freedoms signed between the two states. The two sides are holding talks to enhance economic and political cooperation.

Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Ghandour, in a speech to parliament on Tuesday (May 3), said the Sudan government welcomed the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan and expressed its hope they would work together for peace and stability in the region. He underlined his readiness to work with South Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deng Alor, to build a model relationship. He said the "security and stability of the South Sudan also meant the security of Sudan."

Saudi Arabia Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Ali bin Ibrahim Al-Naimi, paid a one-day visit to Khartoum on Wednesday (May 4) to discuss collaboration in the Atlantis II project to extract metals from hydro-thermal basins in the Red Sea, expected to earn \$US 20 billion eventually. He was taking part in a meeting of the Sudanese-Saudi Standing Committee on Joint Exploitation of Natural Resources in the Red Sea. Mr. Al-Naimi also met with President Omar Al-Bashir who said Sudan was ready to receive Saudi investment in mineral development.

Ethiopia celebrates Diamond Jubilee of Patriots' Victory Day on May 5

The 75th anniversary of Patriots' Victory Day was celebrated across the nation today (May 5), marking the end of the Italian occupation, commemorating those who died during the Italian occupation (1936-41) and honoring the veterans of the resistance movement. In Addis Ababa, the Diamond Jubilee of Patriots' Victory Day was colorfully celebrated at Victory Square, capital in the presence of residents, ministers, ambassadors and high level government officials, including President Dr. Mulatu Teshome, Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom, the Mayor of Addis Ababa, Ato. Diriba Kuma, and the President of the Ethiopian Patriots' Association, Lij Daniel Jote Mesfin.

President Dr. Mulatu, laying a wreath at Victory Square, noted that the current generation should carry on the patriotism and sustain a similar glorious victory in

the fight against poverty. The President noted that Ethiopia's victory over the Italian occupation had served as a source of inspiration for African brothers and sisters during the fight against colonialism. Lij Daniel Jote Mesfin, President of the Ethiopian Patriots' Association pointed out that the patriots' victory over Italian occupation has been a living witness to the exercise of national unity. He said the victory served a source of inspiration and strength to the youth of the country, and emphasized that the youth should intensify their efforts to sustain the ongoing national development projects and the country's renaissance.

Ethiopia in the early 20th century was the only un-colonized African country, the only country to retain its sovereignty apart from the brief interruption of the Second Italo-Ethiopian war that started in October 1935. Italy invaded Ethiopia under the orders of the then Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini. Italy had far more advanced weaponry than Ethiopia and its use of aircraft and poison gas allowed it advance rapidly from its colony in Eritrea, taking over Addis Ababa in May 1936. In Rome, Benito Mussolini proclaimed the Italian King Victor Emmanuel III as Emperor of Ethiopia.

Although Mussolini proclaimed the Italianization of the country and declared "Ethiopia is Italian," widespread resistance to the occupation continued across the country. An attempt was made to assassinate the Viceroy, General Rodolfo Graziani in Addis Ababa in February 1937. In an act of retaliation, he ordered to Italian troops to massacre tens of thousands of the population. The attempt on Graziani's life and the effect of the massacre of Addis Ababa was a turning point in the resistance of the patriot forces. It marked the beginning of stronger and much organized guerilla warfare across the country by the patriot force, activity in which the participation of Ethiopian women was equally remarkable. The momentum that began in 1937 did not falter, continuing steadily until Emperor Haile Selassie was able to re-enter the capital in May 1941.

On the occasion of this 75th anniversary of Patriots' Victory Day, the Italian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Giuseppe Mistretta noted that Ethiopia and Italy have enjoyed long and strengthened multilayered cooperation. This, he stressed, will be bolstered further in the years ahead. Ethiopia and Italy, of course,

have long overcome the problems arising from the era of colonialism and fascism. Their relationship today, following the introduction of Ethiopia's current Foreign Policy Strategy, has seen a steady strengthening in all areas. In fact, what amounts to a longstanding historic relationship has been consolidated by various cooperation agreements and by a whole series of high level visits. Recent visits to Italy by Ethiopian officials have included Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (2004) and former Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin (February and April 2009). Visits by Italian officials have included visits by Prime Minister Romano Prodi, (January 2007), and by Foreign Minister Franco Frattini (January 2010).

The visit of Prime Minister Meles to Italy in 2004 was a particular landmark. Ethiopia and Italy signed agreements for a soft loan of 220 million Euros for the Gilgel Gibe II hydropower project, for the cancellation of US \$432 million of debts, and for the return of the Axum Obelisk taken to Rome by Mussolini. Agreement was also reached for a series of regular political consultations between the two Foreign Ministries, marking the opening of a new chapter in bilateral cooperation. Ethio-Italy relations have in fact, been continuously expanding, covering economic cooperation, regional peace and security and global issues of common interests.

The bilateral relations have most recently been further bolstered by the visits last year of Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi in July 2015; and by Foreign Minister, Paulo Gentiloni, in July, to sign the Executive Program for Cultural Cooperation for 2015-2019. Foreign Minister Gentiloni also signed three agreements on drought resilience and sustainable livelihood, women's economic empowerment and social integration, and support for development of the health system in Oromia and Tigray Region States. Italian President Sergio Mattarella has recently made a five day official visit to Ethiopia, March 13 - 17, 2016.

The formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan

Two days after the arrival of Dr. Riek Machar in Juba on Thursday last week (April 28) and his swearing-in as First Vice President, South Sudan's former warring parties and political rivals finally formed the long-awaited Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) to administer the country for the next two and a half years. The political rivals that formed the TGoNU were represented by President Salva Kiir; First Vice-President, Riek Machar, representing the SPLM-in-Opposition; Deng Alor Kuol, acting chairperson on behalf of Pagan Amum, former SPLM Secretary General, representing the Former Political Detainees; and Lam Akol, Chairman of the Democratic Change (DC) party, representing Other Political Parties.

The day before the formation of the TGoNU the names of officials to be appointed to ministerial positions were handed to President Kiir. The President dissolved the previous cabinet and the next day (April 29) he named appointees to their new ministerial portfolios. Thirty full cabinet ministers and seven deputy ministers took oath of office in a function headed by President Salva Kiir and his two deputies, First Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar and Vice-President, James Wani Igga. President Kiir appointed 16 of the ministers and 4 deputy ministers; another 10 ministers and two deputy ministers were from the SPLM-IO; the Former Detainees had two ministers and a deputy minister; Other Political Parties also had two ministers and a deputy minister.

At the formation of the TGoNU, President Salva Kiir appealed to the ministers to work together. The President told the new appointees, "The responsibility imposed on us by the agreement needs each and every one of us to contribute to the stabilization of our country." He urged people to "forget about what happened" during the war and move forward. Riek Machar, on his behalf, urged the ministers to tackle insecurity. Dr. Machar added: "Once there is peace, the economy will be stabilized, so once we stabilize our economy, we should work to ensure that the South Sudanese Pound is the one talked about in the region."

The international community welcomed the formation of a new government of unity in the country. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said the formation of the new government was an "important milestone in the peace process" and urged South Sudan's leaders to establish all the other necessary institutions of transition. He also urged the parties to immediately cease all hostilities. The African Union Commission Chairperson, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma, hailed the government as a major step that would greatly facilitate the process of tackling the challenges facing the country. She also noted that with the establishment of the transitional government, South Sudan was entering the most critical phase in the implementation of the peace agreement, in which consolidation of peace and reconciliation, as well as the undertaking of post-conflict reconstruction and economic recovery in the country, needed to be given top priority.

The United Nations Security Council has also welcomed the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity, describing it as "an important milestone" in implementing the agreement. In a statement on Wednesday (May 4), it called on the TGoNU to end the cycles of violence and fully implement the peace agreement signed by its warring parties in August last year. It said the TGoNU members should "work together to fully implement the agreement and bring an end to the cycles of violence and suffering, including by adhering to the permanent ceasefire, and by urgently creating the transitional institutions envisioned in the agreement, which are needed to maintain security and build trust between the parties." The Security Council statement said the TGoNU should urgently remove impediments on the ground to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and called on the Government to allow the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) free movement to exercise its mandate, including protection of civilians and investigation of human rights violations.

The Troika of the US, the UK and Norway, also welcomed the formation of the government but also stressing: "While formation of the transitional government is a step forward, with thousands dead, widespread atrocities committed, and millions displaced from their homes during the conflict, this is no time for celebration." The Troika also noted firmly: "The fighting must stop, decisive action must be taken to tackle the economic crisis, and there must be full cooperation with the UN and humanitarian agencies to ensure aid reaches those in need; formal and informal impediments must be removed." The European Union, through its commissioner for

humanitarian affair, said “Now the leadership must work to deliver peace and security, as well as humanitarian access for the people of South Sudan.” The EU said it would support the new government if it worked to end persistent conflict, abuse of civilians, violations of international humanitarian law, and corruption. It described the “worsening humanitarian situation and the suffering of the people of South Sudan [as reaching] extreme proportions,” noting that “restrictions on access continue to impede humanitarian operations.” It said firmly: “The EU expects the Transitional Government to uphold its obligation to respect independent and unhindered humanitarian assistance.”

Mr. Festus Mogae, Chairman Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, responsible for the implementation of the Peace Agreement, welcomed the appointment by President Salva Kiir of the full new Cabinet of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU). In a press release, the JMEC called on the new Government of National Unity to immediately embark on the full implementation of the Agreement, address the humanitarian concerns, and embark on necessary political, security, judicial, economic and other reforms critical for the recovery and rehabilitation of the country.

There are issues that need to be dealt with urgently, not least the increase in the number of states to 28. The IGAD Foreign Ministers in an extraordinary meeting at the end of January said the plan was “inconsistent” with the peace agreement and called on President Kiir to pause his plan to increase the number of states to 28. They said the South Sudanese government should stop the process of creating new states until after a national boundaries commission could review the process. On Tuesday this week (May 3), Ellen Loej, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) and Head of UNMISS, underlined this saying that the new states had added to ethnic tensions. The SRSG added: “we are waiting the outcome of the transitional government's deliberation on this issue and we will hope that it can be done in a way that will lessen tensions in various areas.” She said “we expect the transitional government to urgently address the issue of 28 states, and in the meantime we are not formally recognizing the 28 states, though we are of course dealing with the officials on the ground.”

The JMEC said earlier that IGAD's communiqué essentially outlined the position of the JMEC which did not recognize the implementation of the new states and the creation of a total of 28 states. Even after the formation of the TGoNU, the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission has the final say on any decision of the Presidency, the Council of Ministers and even Parliament if they overstep the limits of the letter or the spirit of the Agreement to Resolve the Conflict in South Sudan.

Meanwhile on Wednesday (May 4), President Salva Kiir unilaterally issued an order appointing a team of ten presidential advisors. The appointments were apparently made without consultation with the other parties in the Transitional Government of National Unity. Determining the number and appointment of advisers was considered one of the contentious issues on which the parties had yet to agree. Observers suggested that this was an attempt by the president to pre-empt demands that he should appoint advisors from the other parties to the peace agreement. It has also raised concerns that the President might be intending to work with his own team of advisors rather than with the cabinet of the Transitional Government as a whole. Among the new team of advisors, all from President Kiir's own group, are the former deputy speaker of the national legislative assembly, Daniel Awet Akot, as advisor for military affairs; former Central Equatoria state governor, Clement Wani Konga, as advisor for special affairs; former deputy secretary general of the SPLM, Anne Itto, advisor for agriculture and food security; the secretary general of the country's Islamic Council, Tahir Bior, advisor for religious affairs; and former government's chief mediator during peace talks with the opposition, Nhial Deng Nhial, as a senior advisor and presidential envoy. Other appointments are Tor Deng Mawien, advisor for decentralization and intergovernmental linkages; Tut Kew Gatluak, advisor for security affairs; John Gai Yoh, advisor for educational affairs; Aggrey Tisa Sabuni, economic affairs advisor and Lawrence Korbandy, legal affairs advisor.

Ambassador Madeira says AMISOM will remain in Somalia to achieve its mandate

Ambassador Fransisco Madeira is the Special Representative of Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) in Somalia and the head of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). He was appointed last October. Last week he gave a long interview to the Kenyan newspaper, the Star, underlining the effectiveness and purposes of AMISOM. AMISOM was, of course, created in January 2007 as a regional peacekeeping mission operated by the African Union with the approval of the United Nations, to replace the Ethiopian forces which had entered Somalia two months earlier at the request of the then Transitional Federal Government of President Abdullahi Yusuf, set up in 2004 in Nairobi. President Abdullahi had asked for assistance to respond to the attempts of the Islamic Courts Union to overthrow the Government. Ethiopia defeated the ICU attack on Baidoa, where the Government was based in December 2006, and advanced to clear Mogadishu of extremists. It then called for an African regional peacekeeping mission to replace its own forces. The result was AMISOM, mandated to support Somali transitional governmental structures, implement a national security plan, train the Somali security forces, and to assist in creating a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid as well as support the Federal Government's forces in their battle against Al-Shabaab extremists. The first Ugandan troops arrived in March 2007 but it was not until 2009 that Ethiopia was able to withdraw all of its troops as AMISOM forces only slowly increased to a sufficient level. AMISOM replaced the earlier IGAD Peace Support Mission in Somalia (IGASOM), which had never managed to become functional.

AMISOM has now been operating for nine years and it comprises of troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda as well as police units from Nigeria and Uganda as well as individual police officers from eight countries. It has a total of 22,126 uniformed personnel. And Ambassador Madeira is very clear: it has achieved a great deal with its operations and other work in Somalia despite the threats it faces from "violent extremists, insurgency, radicalization and terrorism." He said that fighting these three branches of war required AMISOM to "develop skills to read the situation on the ground, have thorough knowledge of the area, interact very closely with the population, collect accurate, actionable intelligence and to know exactly, at every moment, where possible, where al-Shabaab is and hit them with minimum effects to the population."

It had been successful in many ways, scoring quite significant results. The cases of insurgency were decreasing. He said AMISOM's aim was simple: "to help stabilize Somalia so it can independently govern itself. The people of Somalia deserve the freedom to go about their daily lives. More so, once we are done with our mission here and leave, Somalia will be in a position to take up its full responsibilities including its role as a full member of the African Union and the international community. He also noted that AMISOM was undertaking a mission that not only served Somalia, but the region at large. Part of its mandate in Somalia was to ensure that Al-Shabaab did not continue to cut piracy deals in the Indian Ocean. This supported international trade and commerce. This could be achieved through the political systems that AMISOM was working to put in place. In the same way, AMISOM was striving to ensure the Somali security institutions reach a position to take over from us and maintain the level of peace and stability in the country that could allow governance to take place. "Our efforts" said Ambassador Madeira, "strive to make sure the government of Somalia, and its institutions, is in a strong position. Our efforts aim at allowing the population to engage in agriculture and transport their goods to the markets, wherever these markets are".

Ambassador Madeira dismissed the possibility of negotiating with Al-Shabaab: "What is there to negotiate with Al-Shabaab? What would I negotiate with Al-Shabaab, and where? People who kill innocent people including children and women, have no regard for human dignity and no respect for life, have no right to negotiation opportunities. How many more are they going to kill? Absolutely no chance of any negotiations." He went on: "I don't know when we are going to eliminate them but I can guarantee that it will happen. We will stop at nothing to neutralize them. He said it was important to start de-radicalization, sensitize the youth against being misled "by these murderers" and warning them that joining the terrorists is not a good thing since they only stood for evil. Certainly, he agreed, radicalization was a big problem in Somalia. AMISOM needed to work with the population and implement de-radicalization programs. It needed those who had expertise in the issue to come and support it. He said the troop-contributing countries continued to assist because they knew that without peace in Somalia, there would be no peace in their own countries. AMISOM, he said, was going to try to change the mindset of the young people and try as much as possible, to provide

them with an education, shelter and food in order to reduce the number of recruits for Al-Shabaab. It would work with the international community to reduce the number of weapons that were coming, for instance from Yemen, into Somalia. It would strengthen government institutions in Somalia, so that the state could offer a nation-wide presence and govern its people in a manner fit for all. He added that AMISOM would also continue to appeal to Al-Shabaab members to come to their senses and make them understand that if they surrender, they could have a place in the Somali society.

Ambassador Madeira was also clear about the challenges facing AMISOM: “We have an acute shortage of force multipliers and enablers. We are dealing with an insurgency that uses terrorism and deceit to push its agenda. So, we need to develop the capacity to collect accurate intelligence to be able to hit Al-Shabaab where it hurts most, at the least time that they expect it. This requires air assets which we don’t have.” Equally, on occasion, the resources to pay the troops hadn’t always been sufficient. He took this very seriously and had been obliged to take the issue up with all the concerned entities. He said he had been assured it was a technical problem and that by the end of the month, the soldiers would start to get their arrears of pay. He also noted that AMISOM was working to get other sources of resources to replace the European Union’s 20% reduction and had been in discussion with the United Nations over this.

Ambassador Madeira said AMISOM was very pleased the leaders and elders of Somalia had agreed on a model of election which was much more inclusive than the one used in 2012. This, he described, as a very positive step forward, an accelerator to peace and stability. He emphasized that it had been agreed that the mandate of the incumbent parliament or the senior officials in government would not be extended. In fact at the beginning of this week, the Somali Parliament firmly rejected a suggestion from the Prime Minister that the election should be delayed for two or three months. Ambassador Madeira also underlined that the elections would be subject to scrutiny and a voting process by citizens. It was also welcome that women had been given 30 per cent of the seats in Parliament. He said he was sure Al-Shabaab would never have contemplated any such scenario. They were, indeed, now busy trying to ensure the kind of election didn’t take place. He had been in

discussions with the Somali authorities to agree on the best plan to secure the elections. They had agreed on a number of benchmarks and he was confident the elections would take place and the voters would be assured of protection.

Ambassador Madeira noted that AMISOM's mandate had so far been regularly renewed. This was the decision of the AU Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council. AMISOM, he said, was still needed in Somalia and it was making a real difference. "If we want to end terrorism in Somalia and Africa as a whole," he said, "we have to continue fighting Al-Shabaab here. This is not an isolated war. It's part and parcel of the wars being waged in Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, a worldwide threat which has to be addressed globally [through] international solidarity and combined resources."

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council will travel to Somalia later this month to show support for the elections scheduled for August. The Permanent Representative of Egypt, Ambassador Amr Aboulatta, this month's Council president, announced on Monday (May 2) that the fifteen council members will travel to Nairobi during May 17-21 as well as visit Cairo to hold meetings with the Arab League. He said the Council would be going to Somalia "to push for the elections" and it would "try to give the support of the Council." Last month, the Security Council heard a report on the situation in Somalia during a special meeting in New York attended by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud who has announced that he will be a candidate for the President elections due to be held a month after the Parliamentary election.

Ethiopia and Saudi Arabian sign Memorandum on Political Consultations

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on political consultations on Monday this week (May 2) during a visit by Ethiopia's State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie to Riyadh. The two sides agreed to further enhance existing bilateral political relations and foster mutual understanding of each other's national peace and security interests. They also reached an understanding on the

importance of holding regular consultations between the two countries at all levels on bilateral and international matters of common interest and concern.

During the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, H.E. Dr. Nizar bin Madani, State Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia said that both Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia are very important and influential countries in the region. He noted the strategic influence they have in the Greater Horn of Africa and the Middle East. He also emphasized that the political consultation mechanism will help the two countries to exchange views on their bilateral relations as well as on regional and international political developments.

Ethiopia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye said that the arrangements for political consultations will assist in creating mutual understanding and build cooperation in combating international terrorism, human trafficking and illegal migration. Referring to the significance of the historic ties between the peoples of both countries, Ambassador Taye underlined that the MoU signed between the two countries would give new and fresh impetus to the existing relationship.

Both sides also stressed the importance of working together in media relations as well as strengthening people-to-people ties through public diplomacy initiatives.

During his visit to Riyadh, Ambassador Taye also briefed members of the international diplomatic community residing in Riyadh. In an event organized by the Ethiopian Embassy, he addressed members of the diplomatic corps on Ethiopia's contribution to peace and security in the Greater Horn of Africa, the economic progress it has made in the last decade, its resilience in overcoming the impact of the El Nino-induced drought, and its bid for non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

Conference on the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative

The First Conference of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI) on the theme of “Restoring Africa’s Landscapes – The Way Forward” has been held this week (May 2-7) in Dakar, Senegal. It’s gathered representatives from more than 20 African countries North and South of the Sahara and all partners of the GGWSSI and it aims to deepen the commitment of participating countries and organizations to action, communicate results already achieved, and share experiences and knowledge among implementing partners. Experts and researchers are attending it from member states, the relevant Regional Economic Communities, the African Union Commission and NEPAD as well as development partners. The Conference will be organized around three days of technical sessions to exchange and share knowledge about programs and projects in support of the Great Green Wall, and a one-day high-level segment bringing together African Ministers and development partners.

Mr. Abdoulaye Balde, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Senegal, in an opening speech noted the Initiative of the Great Green Wall constituted a recovery strategy for Sahel Saharan areas with potential real involvement of grassroots actors and local authorities. He said Sengal’s strategy is essentially based on solidarity actions among stakeholders. Dr. Djime Adoum, the Executive Secretary of the Interstate Committee for the Struggle against Drought in the Sahel (CILSS), in his welcome speech highlighted that land degradation was a reversible process and emphasized that sustainable and integrated land remained an effective tool for a structural solution to the food and nutrition security in the Sahel and Africa, Jamal Saghir, the Regional Adviser of the Vice President for Africa of the World Bank Group, reiterated the continued support of the World Bank for climate resilience in Africa, said the Great Green Wall Initiative provided an operational platform to meet the challenge of the development of African drylands. Dr. Janet Edeme, Director at the Commission of the African Union, described then Great Green Wall as the most innovative initiative - "a world wonder". It is a global platform, with multiple stakeholders who together are fighting land degradation and desertification.

This is the first conference held on the GGWSSI, which was first adopted as a concept over a decade ago by the African Union, and launched in 2007 by the African

Union Assembly as a Pan African program, “The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative,” with the overall aim of addressing the issues of land degradation and desertification in the Sahel and Sahara, boosting food security and supporting communities to adapt climate change. The grand vision of the “Great Green Wall” is for a wall of vegetation reaching thousands of miles across Africa and slowing the spread of the Sahara Desert. It is to be a nine-mile wide band of trees and shrubbery across the southern border of the Sahara’s southern Sahel desert, stretching 4,400 miles through 11 countries from the Senegalese capital, Dakar in the west, to Djibouti on the Red Sea/Indian Ocean coast. Eleven nations, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, have agreed to participate in the initiative.

The concept has been given a real boost by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP 21) and the provision of \$4bn of funding from signatories to COP 21. 11:18The UN Environment Program (UNEP) (the World Food Program, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the UN-backed Global Environment Facility (GEF), the largest public funder of UN environmental projects support the Great Green Wall initiative. It has so far received a total of US\$1.8 billion from the World Bank and another \$108 million from the Global Environment Facility. In turn, the Dakar conference is providing confirmation of political commitment from the states, producing a road map for action on the ground, strengthening the GGWSSI’s Community of Practice and providing a framework as well as new strategic directions.

In fact, the Great Green Wall is more than a wall; it is a mosaic of land management interventions, with the focus on climate change adaptation. The original idea of a line of trees across the desert has grown into an integrated approach, adopting different interventions adapted to local ecosystems and tailored to the needs of communities. The African Union Commissioner for the Sahara and Sahel Great Green Wall, Elvis Paul Tangam, says 15% of the trees have been planted already, largely in Senegal and Burkina Faso. He said, “Senegal has reclaimed more than four million hectares of land along the Great Green Wall, [and] planted more than 27,000 hectares of indigenous trees that don’t need watering. Many animals that had disappeared from

those regions are reappearing - animals like antelopes, hares and birds that for the past 50 years nobody saw." Many of those planted in Senegal have been acacia trees that can be harvested for Gum Arabic, a substance used widely to manufacture products including pharmaceuticals and soft drinks. Other indigenous trees are being planted to maximize shade and prevent ground water loss, and shrubs that can be grazed by livestock.

The countries signed up to the initiative will be putting forward their national action plans at the ministerial meeting this week. In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry is responsible for undertaking all actions necessary for the implementation of the initiative, in collaboration with the appropriate federal, regional and city administrations. The National Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of the initiative was produced in July 2012 with the aid of the FAO after a series of stakeholder consultations and a couple of consultation and validation workshops. The strategy document highlights the evolution of the GGWSSI; presents assessment of Ethiopia's biophysical, socio-economic and policy, legislation and institutional aspects as they relate to the initiative and potential areas across which the GGWSSI development could traverse the country. It also highlights previous integrated natural resource management experience in the country, lessons learnt from these and from the current implementation of national development programs and plans for aligning the GGWSSI with these to increase synergy and effectiveness.

The Plan details six pillars for the strategy: sustainable management of improved production systems; development of basic socio-economic infrastructure; development of income generating activities; promotion of good local governance; capacity building of stakeholders; and research and knowledge management. These pillars are subsumed into four programs for ease of implementation, and for the five-year pilot plan a budget of US\$67 million was proposed. It provides for a coordination mechanism and system of monitoring and evaluation of the initiative and proposes a National Agency for Great Green Wall Initiative in Ethiopia (NAGGWE) to handle all issues related to the implementation, coordination, and monitoring of the initiative. This cooperates with a 'national steering committee' and a scientific and technical committee. It outlined expected outcomes: recovery, development and diversification of agriculture and livestock through the control of

water resources by creating retention ponds, artificial lakes and water works to improve production systems; reduction of soil erosion due to the presence of a vegetative cover that will help reduce wind speed and facilitate the infiltration of rainwater, increasing organic matter contributing to the restructuring of degraded soils; increasing the rate of reforestation in the grip of GGWSSI for the restoration of ecological balance, conservation, recovery of plant and animal biodiversity and increased coverage of local needs for forest products, including wood and fire service, but also in non-wood products (gums, resins, roots, leaves, bark, fruits, etc. pharmacopoeia), and improvement of the peoples' standard of living and health through income generation and development of basic social infrastructure that will help bring back the "ecological migrants" into their rehabilitated areas.

The plan notes that Ethiopia, like many other countries in the Sahel, has been heavily affected by widespread land degradation and desertification and calls the statistics on natural resources degradation in the country "staggering": the loss of 140,000-200,000 ha per annum of forest and woodlands; annual nutrient losses of 30 kg/ha of nitrogen and 15-20 kg/ha of phosphorous; soil loss due to water erosion of 2 billion metric tons/year (average of 42 tons/hectare/year). It identifies the cause of land degradation as largely stemming from improper land use and poor land management practices, population pressure, overgrazing, deforestation and the use of crop residues and dung for fuel in rural areas. These, it says, are further exacerbated by factors such as inadequate input supply, insecure land tenure, weak agricultural research and extension services and poor marketing systems. Decades of policy failures and lack of capacity to implement government interventions have also contributed. It adds that the dry lowlands, the focus areas of GGWSSI, are experiencing erratic rainfalls as well very severe droughts. This, the plan underlines, was why the Ethiopia Government was one of the pioneering countries to accept and endorse the GGWSSI.

The GGWSI initiative reflects strong political commitment among the States concerned. It cuts across a wide range of aspects including natural resource (land, water, forest) management, pastoral development, sustainable agricultural production as well as gender and youth mainstreaming into development for improvement of livelihoods. It will require huge investment of financial and human

resources, and it is a long term engagement stretching over several decades, though the pilot phase is for five years. It is not surprising that Dr. Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, has said the wall could become one of the 21st Century wonders of the world. It will be unique, she said, and “everyone can be a part of its history,” adding, “Together, we can change the future of African communities in the Sahel.”

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: an instrument for regional integration

Nearly half of the Earth’s land surface is occupied by trans-boundary lake and river basins. Many of these river basins are important engines of regional economic development, crucial bases of livelihood resources, and are critical sites of biodiversity conservation. The Nile is no exception and is now in the process of providing a significant contribution towards regional economic development. Driven by the vision of the late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia launched the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a major Hydro-electric Project, now 50% complete. This aims to enable Ethiopia to power its growth with the production of renewable energy. Ethiopia has always been the major contributor to the Nile, with its Blue Nile feeding rainfall from the Ethiopian Highlands to the wider Nile downstream and providing most of the river’s water, around 85%. Equally, since the Government announced the start of construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project in 2011, with the aim of generating 6,000 mw, the project has been a significant driver for national consensus and has demonstrated significant strengthening of the unity of all Ethiopians. An Italian company, Salini Costruttori SPA, is undertaking the construction. Salini has built more than 20 dams in Europe, Asia and Africa, including the Gilgel Gibe II and Tana Beles dams in Ethiopia and is currently constructing the on-going Gilgel Gibe III dam, which has now started to generate power. Ethiopia’s Metal and Engineering Corporation (METEC) is carrying out the electro- and hydro- mechanical work at GERD.

The primary domestic objective of the GERD project is generation of electricity. When complete, it will enable Ethiopia to completely cover the country's internal power needs even though these have been growing at an average rate of 25% a year. It will also allow for the export of power to neighboring countries. A reliable and affordable source of energy is a fundamental need not just for the wellbeing of the country's population but also for its economic growth and poverty-reduction efforts. Ethiopia also aspires to be the green energy hub of East Africa, delivering clean and renewable energy at cost value to neighboring countries. Studies suggest a one unit percent increase in energy supply can increase economic growth by at least one percent. On that basis when GERD begins operations, the national economy of many of the neighboring countries and Ethiopia will increase significantly. This, in turn, will provide a catalyst for regional development, increasing interdependence within the IGAD Regional Economic Community and help to create long-lasting peace between countries throughout the region.

Indeed, for Professor Harry Verhoeven, from the School of Foreign Service of Washington's Georgetown University in Qatar, this is central factor behind the construction of GERD. He told the Ethiopian Herald in an interview recently that the building of GERD was a project designed for regional integration. He welcomed the concept and said the Ethiopian Government had made the right choice in deciding to build the Dam. Professor Verhoeven noted that it would be less costly for the Ethiopian government to export electricity to Sudan from the Dam than for Sudan to build its own power-generation projects. The landscape of Ethiopia provided more useful terrain for the building of power-generation projects in contrast to the flat plains of the Sudan. This offered, he said, a reason for constructing GERD as a concrete example of ways to bring the region together. Given the overall regional shortage of power this was highly significant and was an unquestionable step forward. Countries in the region needed power. This would help provide it. The net result of building GERD, in fact, offered the provision of benefits from power-generation and flood control to the downstream riparian countries, Sudan and Egypt and to Ethiopia.

GERD is an idea, a construct, that deserves the fullest international support. Professor Verhoeven said: "Ethiopia deserves credit in international relations as the

government has developed and designed a vision of regional integration particularly [in the supply of] water and electricity and this is real and not for show.” It is an unquestionable step forward for regional integration and Ethiopia’s leadership role should be sustained. The region, he said, needs to collaborate and work together for such kinds of endeavor. Professor Verhoeven emphasized that, historically, the countries in this region had breathed life into each other. For a long time, they had fought each other, but, he underlined, “the way of seeing resources should not be taken as a source of conflict but as a means of cooperation.”

Professor Verhoeven discussed other areas of peace and security in the Nile Valley and the Horn of Africa and the efforts of IGAD to resolve the conflict in South Sudan. He welcomed the mediation of IGAD, noting that it had tried to resolve the civil war there and made strenuous efforts to mediate the various conflicting interests and tried to bring international attention to help in its resolution. Professor Verhoeven commended the work of the mediators, Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin and colleagues from Kenya and Sudan, and believed they had done all they could. Similarly, Ethiopia, as chair of IGAD, had made substantial efforts to get all those involved in the crisis together.

However, Professor Verhoeven felt that the answers that IGAD was providing to the problems of the region were not catching up with the problems. He believed the problems were developing faster than the solutions. IGAD, for example, had been powerless, even divided, over the issue of Yemen, he pointed out. It had not been able to stop the reorganization of Al-Shabaab and its continued operations in Somalia, despite all the efforts of AMISOM. It had little to show in resolving problems inside Sudan, in Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile. He noted IGAD can only be successful if its members do their homework inside and then come to the international level. He added, “Of course, I can talk international language of peace but if I make worse at home, then there is no point in what I do. We have to learn lessons from the war on terror — mistakes made in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and may be inside Europe and USA.”

Should Europe pay to stop refugees fleeing Eritrea?

European politicians are still grappling with efforts to provide some way of dealing with the migrant/refugee crisis that shows no sign of abating. Last weekend alone more than 700 people attempting the lethal sea crossing from North Africa to Italy were rescued and taken to Sicily. Their arrival came just two days after 26 survivors of a capsized boat off the Libyan coast were rescued and taken to Lampedusa where Red Cross teams were on hand to provide emergency support. At least 84 people are still missing. The President of the Italian Red Cross, Francesco Rocca, said: "Last year, thousands died attempting this journey. Safe and legal routes for those escaping hunger, poverty and violence must be found otherwise people will continue to die." As summer approaches and waters become calmer, it is expected many more people will attempt to make the treacherous crossing to Italy from North Africa, particularly from Libya. Already more than 27,000 people have arrived in Europe from Libya to Italy this year – suggesting the crossing from northern Africa will again become a primary route for migrants. In 2015, more than 150,000 people made the same journey, more than a quarter of them Eritreans, according to the UNHCR. There were 37,000 the previous year. This year, the UNHCR says there has been no diminution in the 4,000 to 5,000 people fleeing Eritrea every month.

The migration crisis has dominated headlines and confounded politicians throughout Europe, and Eritrea has been a particularly difficult issue, as unlike refugees from Afghanistan or Syria people are not fleeing war or conflict; they are escaping from human rights' abuses consistently committed by the Eritrean government itself. The UN Human Rights Council's Commission of inquiry has provided detailed and credible reports of routine extra-judicial executions, torture and arbitrary detention, as well as of indefinite conscription and extensive forced labor. The UK's Guardian newspaper noted last week that many Eritreans claim to have spent more than twenty years in slave-like, unpaid national service. A year and a half ago there were reports that Eritrean officials, off the record, had promised visiting UK and Danish officials that they would be limiting national service to the original 18 months shortly, rather than allowing it remain open-ended.

There has been no change yet, and few Eritreans expect the government to alter its policies. Indeed, Eritrea's Minister of Information, Yemane Gebremeskel, said at the end of February that there were no plans to scrap or cut national military service, despite reported promises to do so as part of an EU-Eritrea aid deal amounting to €200 million, announced in December in new long term support to promote poverty reduction and socio-economic development in Eritrea through the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). Under the National Indicative Program, signed a month later, €175 million is earmarked for the Eritrean energy sector and €20 million to improve governance. Announcing the new program on behalf of the European Union, European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, said: "The EU provides development aid where it is most needed to reduce poverty and support people. In Eritrea, we have agreed to promote activities with concrete results for the population, such as the creation of job opportunities and the improvement of living conditions."

The news that the Eritrean authorities did not intend to keep their side of the implicit bargain came as no surprise to many Eritreans and observers of Eritrea. They had already criticized a deal "based on empty promises instead of tangible results." There were also concerns that Eritrea's lack of financial transparency would allow any funds to strengthen a dictatorial regime instead of helping those in need. In other words, there was a widespread belief that giving funding to Eritrea would only exacerbate the problem of refugees and migrants. As the Guardian noted, unaccompanied children from Eritrea are the largest group to seek refuge in the UK.

In fact, giving aid to the Eritrean regime, campaigners say will not address the causes not have any impact on the exodus, it will in fact only make things worse. Indeed, "it feels like the government is getting a reward from Europe for oppressing its own people." Meron Estefanos, director of the Eritrean Initiative on Refugee Rights, said "It feels like the oppressors are getting a reward from the European Union for oppressing their own people; there is no accountability [in Eritrea]; it seems to me that the EU is very naive." Others point out that the issue is not so much one of European naiveté. It is rather that the EU is split over migration with both the European Parliament and the European Commission having completely different

agendas. When it comes to Eritrea, these different agendas breed serious policy problems.

When announcing the new program, the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, said that the EU was at the same time “insisting on the full respect of human rights as part of our ongoing political dialogue with Eritrea. As in other countries, the EU engages with governments around the world to promote human rights, democracy, and people-centered development everywhere.” Many, as the Guardian noted, remain sceptical. It quotes former European MP, Baroness Glenys Kinnock, now chair of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea, as highly critical of the EU deal: “I’m horrified that, as Europeans, we’re offering any kind of support to president Isaias Afewerki”, she says. She added: “It will never reach the people and it will never improve their lives while he is there. It absolutely flies in the face of any claims we make as Europeans that we’re fighting for the rights and freedoms of the people of Eritrea.”

Others argue that by dealing with the regime the EU may appear complicit in human rights abuses. Abraham Zere, the Director of PEN Eritrea in Exile, who was forced to flee in 2011, says that many refugees living in the Diaspora agree that the aid funding will do little more than prolong the life of dictatorship. He says: “The minimum services like electricity, water supply and food are lacking [there],...not because of lack of resources – but mainly through an utterly failed administration.” He is definite: “aid will not help the destitute population.” Daniel Mekonnen, a prominent Eritrean human rights lawyer in Geneva, warns that a time of increased urgency, the aid deal could severely discredit the EU. “By dealing with such a regime, in a strangely non-transparent and non-accountable manner, the EU risks the danger of portrayal as complicit in the perpetration of gross human rights violations, including a possible situation of crimes against humanity, as concluded in June 2015 by a UN commission of inquiry.” He argues the regime is not going to change because of EU funding. He said: “I liken the [government] to a habitual offender, a serial killer, or offender of the worst type, who has zero chance of rehabilitating.”

The Guardian noted that MEP and the Chair of the EU Committee on Development, Linda McAvan, is also concerned about the aid plan. It quotes her as saying that no

money has yet changed hands, and that: “We’ve made it clear that we are very sceptical, as a European Parliament, about funding the Eritrean government in any way.” She also points out that “There has been talk of them getting rid of their national service, which isn’t a national service - it’s a lifetime conscription by the government - but it hasn’t happened. Many MEPs have strongly objected to the plan, but they are not able to block the proposed payments completely.

Baroness Kinnock is trying to raise a debate in the UK House of Lords on the subject. She points to the “clearly untenable and unreasonable” policy on Eritrean refugees. Under the new EU migration deal, Eritreans – and other non-Syrians – reaching Greece are to be sent back to Turkey where the government have begun negotiations to send refugees and migrants back to a number of countries including Eritrea. The UK government has recently changed its Home Office Country Code guidance for Eritrea. In the past, the vast majority of Eritreans, at least 95%, would have their asylum applications accepted. During the last year, this figure fell to 28%. Baroness Kinnock said “As I’ve said before, [this deal] is life-threatening to them. They can’t go back.” She said: “I know families who have used every resource they’ve got to pay smugglers to take their children across the border into Sudan or Ethiopia, even though the government has a shoot to kill policy on those borders; they deserve our support, not increasing the threats to them.”