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By the Network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES) - Scandinavian Chapter
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Who is a liar? : Meles or EU-Election Observation Mission

Meles Zenawi labelled the EU-EOM preliminary statement “a big lie” and “so much garbage.”

Bereket Simon said that EU-EOM had lacked “integrity and professionalism.” What does the outburst from Meles and Bereket reveal?

The letter of Meles in the Ethiopian Herald was full of pinpricks and cut and paste remarks. Exposing his trade mark of the usual naked arrogance, **he confirmed his full agreement with the EU-EOM observation on issues that he finds from their statement that he thinks supports his views of the election process, whilst he denounced as “big lie” and “garbage” the aspects of the report that contradict his views.** Any sensible person may find something to agree or disagree with the presentation or content of the EU Observation team’s report. But Meles is highly tendentious, and exhibits black or white framing of the issues that appear in the report. He is selective, and anything from the report that he gleans and seems to agree with his idea of the election, he claims it to be true. All in the report that do not fit his interests and purposes are pronounced haughtily as “a big lie” or “garbage”. This is not an isolated outburst by Meles. It expresses the essence of Meles and Co. This is how they came to power using force and lies, and this is how they choose to stay in power by continuing to alternate the use of force and lies. If you are not loyal to their lies, then you are ‘*non persona non grata*’ in their world. For them their prejudice is reality, and reality is to be interpreted to fit their schemes. If it does not facilitate their schemes, then reality has to be ignored or condemned.

What is interesting about the outburst by Meles in his letter to the editor of the Ethiopian Herald is the fact that the bitter medicines that he so easily administers to his real and imagined political opponents now seem to be forced into the throats of the European Union Observation mission delegation as well. It is hugely embarrassing to use such below the belt and childish insults and tantrums to berate the officials of the EU Observation mission delegation. This tactic by the ruling elite is nothing new to Ethiopians, but it certainly must come as a surprise to use the same worn-out tactics, deceit, blackmail, and accusation to discredit the EU Observation Missions’ work. This arrogant action provides a taste to the EU team to witness first hand what it is like to be subjected with lies, insults, blackmails and deceits that are the daily diet that, and unfortunately Ethiopians are daily confronted with.

Let us recapitulate the big lies he attributes to the EU-EOM that are contained in the superciliously arrogant letter by himself to the Herald:

Big lie 1: Meles wrote: “So what has the ban on demonstration got to do with the investigation? Nothing”, but actually what the EU-EOM statement said was “...the **context** of the complaints process was marked by on-going high tensions in the country...tension was exacerbated by the fact that, since polling day, public demonstrations were banned and media openness ceased, with the official media back under the tight control and spinning of the ruling party...” What the EU-EOM statement described is the true context or the condition in which the investigation process was undertaken. What Meles needs to prove beyond reasonable doubt is how the ban on demonstrations, and media and information control, monopoly of force, the emergency law, and a situation that constitutes intimidation and threats would not have any bearing or influence on the investigation process. In addition the opposition submitted substantial numbers of complaints that have been dismissed by the ENBE. The percentage that was dismissed was as high as 90 %. Not only did the control of force, information, power and economy had influence on the investigation, but also Meles cannot sell his missive by denying the fact that his party started to use the banning and the emergency situation to get disgraced officials of his cabinet to be re-elected. What Meles and Co. did is very clear for any one who has observed the developments in Ethiopia. What makes it bizarre is that they choose to fire at the EU Observers whilst they have only themselves to blame for creating the situation that dangerously destabilised the investigation process in the first place. To be in denial of such evident connection of their action to influence the investigation process negatively is to indulge and wallow in sophistry.

Big lie 2: Meles wrote: “If access to public media is denied to the opposition then the investigations must be flawed, they declare”. But we have not found such kind of “declaration” or implication in the EU-EOM statement. This is similar to the usual tactic and deceit of Meles and Co. to fabricate stories in order to terrorise, imprison and kill opposing individuals and groups. When Meles does this under his name after all the pompous caveat that he is going to throw some new insight, it exposes the ruling elite as people who cannot even read properly the EU-EOM statement, let alone read it with a generous spirit to understand their main message and learn from it for the sake of building the country and addressing its most urgent problems of feeding 9 million ordinary citizens who are starving daily, and 18 million that are severely malnourished!

Big lie 3: Meles wrote:” The EU-EOM alleges that the government refused to agree on a code of conduct on the utilization of the media. That is a lie. The government was not and could not be part of the negotiations on the code of conduct. The negotiations were between the parties”. **Meles tries to deny the well-known truth that EPRDF is the government. Meles and Bereket went to the extent of forgetting (or is it denying) that they are the Prime Minister and Minister of Information of the government, respectively.** Is Meles not the chairman of EPDRF and the Prime Minister of the Government? Does he even know this? It worries us deeply that Meles does not even seem to know what he does as that which everybody knows to be his job. Or is he trying to pretend there is a separation of power between the Government and the party. What Ethiopia definitely needs is to arrive at the historical stage where there will be separation of powers not in words but in reality. **To be sure, the country needs an independent**

media with its own governance arrangements; it needs an independent judiciary. It needs an independent military force that will not execute the will of a political party. Above all Ethiopia needs a free economy, not monopolised as it is the case now by a self-serving and selfish ruling party.

Big lie 4: Meles wrote: *“There is no legislation that affects the governance of all municipalities during the period in question. That is quite simply a lie.”* At least Meles should accept the well-known fact that after the election various legislations were endorsed by the out-going parliament to affect the governance of Addis Ababa. How can Meles deny and call the EU-EOM liars, when it is under his own nose that measures were taken to unwelcome the new Addis Ababa municipal authority by actions such as reducing the tax base, nullifying federal Government budget subsidy, passing authority for transport services and civic organisation registrations to central Government.

Big lie 5: Meles wrote: *“Any one who has a passing knowledge of what outgoing parliaments do until the very day their term ends would find the argument preposterous.”* But everybody including Meles knows that after the election, the outgoing parliament endorsed the altering of rules and regulations that bar the new parliament from generating agendas by making it impossible to raise issues unless they muster a majority to agree before hand to submit an issue on the table. This is a wholly inappropriate way for the outgoing and heavily EPDRF dominated parliament to set inhibiting procedures for the incoming parliament, knowing full well that the new parliament will have many opposition representatives for the first time. The responsibility to force the opposition parties to contemplate or debate boycotting parliament lies entirely in Meles’ hands.

Big Lie 6: Meles ended his diatribe against the EU-EOM by firing the following indictment for not calling the above decisions by the outgoing parliament as illegal: *“It [EU-EOM] did not do that perhaps because it knows that it would be laughed out of town, if it did so”.* Rather than focusing on the issue of the action of the outgoing parliament passing such inappropriate measures and procedures, Meles is keener to hound the EU-EOM on why they have not characterised what he likes them to position themselves for him to mount critiques against them and target them for denunciation. At any rate Meles denies what has been crystal clear- that is, that the parliament has passed such restrictive measures. Meles has ended up writing his first letter against his own tradition by filling it with his usual tradition of lies and misquotations. His letter is full of more of the same lies, but we have had enough of his big lies and prefer to join the nation and others, and say his letter deserves to be “laughed out of town”.

The Letter to Meles from the Opposition Parties

One wonders why Meles took the “untraditional” extraordinary step, as he said in his letter to respond to the EU-EOM personally after the press he controls went for them with rude and crude allegations against them, and still ignores to respond to the opposition leaders request to solve the country’s outstanding dilemmas with communicative rationality and not his usual threat or use of force if his demands and wishes are not met by the opposition parties. What we see is an alarming development of criminalising the opposition leaders and members through the public media. **The response to the opposition’s call for dialogue is to criminalise them, not to engage with them constructively, with**

good intentions and with an open spirit. The speed with which Meles zoomed to reply to the EU-EOM makes it abundantly clear that what the ruling party fears most is the possible punishment that can follow a damning report against the regime's destabilisation of Ethiopia's first ever emerging democratic process. What Meles fights is not for democracy but for maintaining himself as the poster boy or darling of the west. When that is threatened by accurate reporting of some courageous Europeans or American officials, we now know how he will surely pounce. Meles should have known that a response to and dialogue with the opposition parties rather than using media control to criminalise them will be infinitely better to solve the country's problems. It is important there should be honest debate with the opposition parties rather than to try to sneak all his de-selected/de-elected cabinet members back into power by the back door. He must realise that he would be laughed at everywhere by choosing to impose a rejected rule by force on the Ethiopian people. Bereket and the other ministers will have no credibility what so ever, and they better not make themselves objects of national ridicule and disgrace by pretending they have been re-elected. Meles has to also understand that the whole show is a monumental farce.

EU-EOM Final Report

We would like to call upon the EU-EOM to continue and persevere to tell the truth about how an election that started relatively well ended up with so much rigging, intimidations, threats, detentions, killings, blackmail, insults and deceit. We ourselves in the NES have been attacked by a barrage of insults and threats using mischievous identities and pseudonyms by misquoting, alleging, claiming false accusations of our objectives. This has not had the effect that the ruling party acolytes expected. They thought we would be intimidated and refrain from exposing the injustices that the people of Ethiopia have been confronted with during this dramatic episode of hope for democracy followed by a reversal of the justice-laden drive towards democracy.

We would like to express our appreciation for the integrity, professionalism and honesty with which the EU-EOM have tried to present a credible report that has won the support and endorsement of the EU head office. Above all we think the Ethiopian people saw on the ground the many injustices that the EU-EOM was able to capture in their largely honest report. We expect that the Ethiopian people will support the honest report that has been provided by EU-EOM. **Far from what Meles said that the EU-EOM statement has created "outrage across the nation", we think the statement will be seen to reflect the experience that the people have gone through and will thus be appreciated by the people, country and nation.**

We call upon the EU-EOM to produce the final report with the perspective of speaking truth to power without fear or favour. There is no reason what so ever to be distracted by false allegations. We call upon you to make the wisest possible recommendation that would facilitate a democratic transition in Ethiopia.

Concluding Remark

At the moment, promoting the democratic process is paramount. The democratic process is under threat from the way the ruling party wishes to selfishly appropriate it for its own self-promotion rather than to root democracy and sustain it in Ethiopia. If the ruling party had come to power through free, fair and just election, we in the NES would have been one of the first to support them. But as it is evidently clear to the world, the ruling party is trying to destabilise the democratic process, invite those who have been de-selected by the back door and impose a dictatorship by force and pass that as democracy. We must reject this notorious action. The only way we can rescue the democratic process is either through a fair, just and free, and fully monitored and independently administered/managed re-run of a national election or the formation of a government of national concord. This demand is absolutely critical to rescue the democratic process in Ethiopia. What is critical to admit is that this is the time to make the democratic process create a credible and peaceful transition through the vote and not the bullet. **We find deeply disturbing that Meles keeps threatening dictatorship, criminalising the opposition leaders and prominent members, and inviting armed struggle as the only way to unseat him.** This is deeply offensive and does not recognise the historical stage that the nation has reached. Ethiopia has reached the historical time to make the peaceful democratic transition. No one has a right to stop the time.

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