

# THE ANKARA PROCESS: CAN THE SOMALIA-ETHIOPIA TENSION BE RESOLVED THROUGH TÜRKİYE'S EFFORTS?

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## SUMMARY

The main disagreements between the two countries are historical, religious, border, strategic and political issues.

This report examines the historical, religious, strategic, and cultural roots of the tension between Somalia and Ethiopia, focusing on the recent developments surrounding the “access to the sea” demand. In particular, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2024 between Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland President Musa Bihi has raised serious concerns regarding Somalia’s territorial integrity and sovereign rights, leading to a regional crisis. The “Ankara Process,” facilitated by Türkiye, presents a significant opportunity to de-escalate and possibly resolve this tension through diplomatic means. Türkiye plays a critical role in this process due to its historical and cultural ties with both sides. The study highlights the potential opportunities and avenues for cooperation that could emerge from this tension between Somalia and Ethiopia. However, it also warns of the risks to regional and global stability should the parties move toward conflict rather than cooperation. The process, facilitated by Türkiye, has the potential to impact the strategic balances not only between Somalia and Ethiopia but across the entire region.

## INTRODUCTION

Somalia and Ethiopia have been in competition with each other for centuries and have occasionally engaged in major wars. We can mention four major wars that have occurred between the two countries up to the present day. In this context, the Adal Sultanate, located in north-eastern Somalia in the 16th century, posed a severe threat to the Ethiopian Empire. The leader of the Adal Sultanate, Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi, launched campaigns against Ethiopia in 1529.<sup>1</sup> To withstand these campaigns, Ethiopia had sought help from the Kingdom of Portugal. Looking at the wars of this period, it can be thought that religious tensions between Islam and Christianity played an important role. Another conflict occurred in 1964 when Somalia supported the Western Somali Liberation Army in its efforts to annex the Ogaden region to Somalia, leading to border clashes between Ethio-

pian and Somali forces in Ogaden.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, the Ogaden War occurred in 1977-1978<sup>3</sup>, during which Somalia essentially captured the region. However, Ethiopia, supported by the USSR and Cuba during the Cold War, launched a counter-attack and pushed back Somalia. Lastly, in 2006, a split occurred within the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia, and the radical group that emerged from this split increased its influence in the region close to the Ethiopian border<sup>4</sup>. Ethiopia intervened in Somalia, claiming that this situation threatened its national security. In short, looking at the entire historical process, we can talk about two countries that have been constantly at war and in conflict with each other. The broad area of control that Somalia established on the East African coasts, in a sense, also demonstrated the power of Islam. Therefore, the main disagreements between the two countries are historical, religious, border, strategic and political issues.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on January 1, 2024, between Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland President Musa Bihi<sup>5</sup>, who seeks to secede from the Somali Federal Republic, has emerged as the primary source of recent tensions in the region. This MoU has not only remained an agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland but has also led to a diplomatic crisis with the Somali government. Given the gravity of the situation, Türkiye, as part of its efforts to con-

1 Jeffrey M. Shaw, *The Ethiopian-Adal War 1529-1543: The Conquest Of Abyssinia | From Retinue To Regiment 1453-1618*, (Helion & Company, Warwick: 2021), p. 293.

2 Daniel Kendie, "Towards Resolving the Ethiopia-Somalia Disputes", *International Conference on African Development Archives*, 104, 2007.

3 Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Volume: 33, No: 3, (2000), p. 635

4 Napoleon A. Bamfo, "Ethiopia's Invasion of Somalia in 2006, Motives and, Lessons Learned", *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Volume: 4, No: 2, (2010), p. 61.

5 "QA-2, Statement of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr. Öncü Keçeli, in Response to a Question Regarding the Memorandum of Understanding Signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland on January 1, 2024", Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 January 2024, (Access date: 15 August 2024).



tribute to peace in the region, has assumed a crucial role as a facilitator in resolving this issue. Within this framework, Türkiye hosted indirect talks between the foreign ministers of Ethiopia and Somalia during negotiations held in Ankara on July 2.<sup>6</sup> The second round of these talks took place on August 12-13 in Ankara, with a third round scheduled for September 17.

At the forefront of expectations and potential progress related to the Ankara Process is the cancellation of the MoU signed between Ethiopia and Musa Bihi. The official announcement of the MoU's cancellation would, in a sense, also serve as an "apology to Somalia". It is well understood that Ethiopia's fundamental objective in this dispute is "access to the sea." However, the issue is far too complex to be defined. Indeed, the Somali population harbors significant security concerns regarding Ethiopia's desire for sea access.

In this context, a key point of contention is whether Ethiopia's "access to the sea" would be for commercial or military purposes. The idea of providing sea access for purely commercial purposes, without any transfer of sovereignty, has been repeatedly expressed by Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and various Somali officials as "acceptable" in different forums, given Ethiopia's needs.<sup>7</sup> However, the notion of access or presence for military purposes is considered a "red line" by Somali officials and the Somali population, as it raises serious concerns regarding the preservation of territorial integrity and respect for Somali unity.<sup>8</sup>

Somalia and Ethiopia, which share a border of approximately 1,650 kilometers, have deep historical, cultural, and commercial ties. At the same time, there are numerous historical issues between these two countries. In this context, the historical problems between Somalia and Ethiopia have led to significant trust deficits in contemporary relations. This is particularly evident in the issue of Ethiopia's access to the sea. However, Türkiye's facilitation efforts present an essential opportunity to overcome this trust deficit and to find a sustainable solution between the parties. Acknowledging the sensitivities of the Somali population and government will play a decisive role in the success of this process.

Türkiye has recently pursued an active diplomatic approach to contribute to peace and stability in the Horn of Africa, where it has solid diplomatic, historical, and cultural ties.

## TÜRKİYE'S MEDIATION ROLE AND MOTIVATIONS IN THE ANKARA PROCESS

Taking steps toward resolving disputes between the two countries is critically important for ensuring peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region, particularly in terms of the security of maritime trade routes in the area. In this context, facilitation of communication for resolution emerges as a key tool in international relations, especially in addressing crises of such strategic significance. Türkiye has assumed a significant role as a facilitator in the dispute between Soma-

6 Tunç Demirtaş, Etiyopya-Somali Görüşmeleri: Türkiye'nin Diplomatik Rolü ve Bölgesel İstikrar, *SETA Odak*, (July 2024), (Access date: 15 August 2024).

7 Hasan Sheikh Mahmud, "Itoobiya Waxaanu Isku Haysanaa Siday Bada Kusoo Gaadhaysaa, Mw Xasan Sheekh", Youtube, <https://youtu.be/C7WcLRUS95I?si=NOO-FJZFSqTjWD6B> (Access date: 14 August 2024).

8 Jama, "Ethiopia-Somaliland Sea Access Deal: Reactions and Implications", *The Somali Digest*, 2 January 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

lia and Ethiopia, which has been exacerbated by Ethiopia's signing of a MoU<sup>9</sup> with the Somaliland administration on January 1, 2024, without the consent of the Somali Federal Government. This crisis has led to heightened tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia, with the parties not coming together to discuss the issue until July 2, 2024. As a key player in the Horn of Africa, Türkiye initiated the "Ankara Process" in response to the crisis and has played an instrumental role in this initiative.<sup>10</sup>

Türkiye's credibility with both Somalia and Ethiopia is of paramount importance. This credibility helps to remove barriers to communication and dialogue between the parties, even indirectly. The deep-seated mistrust stemming from the historical context between Somalia and Ethiopia represents one of the major obstacles to a resolution. However, Türkiye's efforts to strengthen communication and keep dialogue channels open provide an opportunity for a peaceful resolution through diplomacy.

Türkiye has recently pursued an active diplomatic approach to contribute to peace and stability in the Horn of Africa, where it has solid diplomatic, historical, and cultural ties. The conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia is a critical issue, especially concerning both countries' strategic and economic interests. Furthermore, ensuring regional stability and safeguarding strategic and financial interests are essential motivations for Türkiye.<sup>11</sup> With strategic relations in Somalia and extensive economic ties in Ethiopia, Türkiye aims to enhance regional stability through this process.

Moreover, Türkiye follows a strategy in its Africa policy to strengthen economic relations and increase trade volume. In this regard, resolving the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia, two of the most critical countries in the Horn of Africa, aligns with Türkiye's broader objectives.

Türkiye has assumed a key mediating role in resolving this conflict as part of its efforts to contribute to peace and stability in the region. However, to do so, Türkiye needs to possess a sufficient level of credibility and a positive image among the parties involved. In the context of this facilitation initiative, referred to as the Ankara Process, Türkiye does not have a singular or solely national interest-driven objective. Unlike other regional and global actors, Türkiye primarily aims to contribute to regional peace, stability, and security by leveraging its advantages and capabilities in the region. Positive developments in the region will keep open a window of opportunity that allows Türkiye to economically and commercially benefit alongside the countries of the region.

Furthermore, this issue extends far beyond being a bilateral concern between Somalia and Ethiopia. As such, countries like Djibouti and others in the Red Sea Basin, including Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, may also be impacted by this conflict. This matter, therefore, has broader geopolitical implications beyond the Horn of Africa. Türkiye can be seen as attempting to maintain the balance in the region to prevent potential geostrategic disruptions. If this balance is disturbed, the existing security risks in the region could escalate. The involvement of other regional factors could open the door for non-state armed actors and terrorist organizations to exploit the situation.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in a sense,

9 Esra Tekin, "Türkiye Voices Concern over Agreement Between Ethiopia, Somalia's Breakaway Region", Anadolu Agency, 4 January 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

10 "Ankara Süreci'nin İlk Toplantısı, 13 Ağustos 2024, Ankara", Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 August 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

11 Tunç Demirtaş, *Türkiye'nin Doğu Afrika Ortaklığı: Öngörüler, Fırsatlar ve Riskler*, (SETA Rapor, İstanbul: 2023), s. 35.

12 "Al-Shabaab and Somalia Unite Against Ethiopia and Somaliland", Horn Observer Contributor, 4 January 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

any conflict that occurs or may occur among the actors with whom Türkiye has good and strategic relations has the potential to affect Türkiye as well. Therefore, the steps Türkiye has taken to swiftly resolve regional instabilities highlight Türkiye as a country that takes the initiative.

Additionally, in the context of the recent massacres and genocide in Gaza, Israel's actions have blatantly disregarded international law and the international order. Similarly, the MoU signed between Somaliland and Ethiopia, lacking the consent of the Somali Federal Government, is deemed inconsistent with international law. Therefore, Türkiye, as an actor that supports and upholds international law within the global system, is playing a crucial role in this initiative. Lastly, within the framework of its Africa partnership policy, Türkiye stands out with its efforts to preserve peace and stability in the Horn of Africa, particularly as it seeks to develop economic and trade relations.

## DIPLOMACY AS A TOOL IN PROCESS MANAGEMENT

In the Ankara Process, diplomacy has been employed effectively as a primary tool. Following this, good communication and dialogue, along with the identification of potential economic cooperation opportunities in the region, are seen as key instruments in the process. Indeed, it is considered that effective communication plays an important role in the resolution of issues. The first tool that should be utilized to address disputes between states is diplomacy.<sup>13</sup> In this context, Türkiye employs diplomacy in a manner that benefits not only the involved parties but also the regional actors.

Moreover, Türkiye exercises diplomacy at the highest level. In this regard, the meetings between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali hold significant importance.<sup>14</sup> President Erdoğan is a highly respected and influential leader, recognized and accepted at every level by the parties involved. Beyond Türkiye's image as a reliable actor in the eyes of both countries, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's influence and standing in Ethiopia and Somalia have been among the key driving forces of this process.

Beyond Türkiye's image as a reliable actor in the eyes of both countries, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's influence and standing in Ethiopia and Somalia have been among the key driving forces of this process.

Indeed, during this process, President Erdoğan's relationships with the leaders of Ethiopia and Somalia, combined with Türkiye's policies that support peace and stability in the region, have accelerated the search for a resolution. Consequently, Türkiye's trustworthy role in this process, reinforced by President Erdoğan's leadership, has become one of the most critical dynamics in the efforts to establish lasting peace in the region.

In short, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, along with the Africa team at the helm of Turkish diplomacy and President Erdoğan himself are regarded as "reliable actors" between the two coun-

<sup>13</sup> Tayyar Anı, *Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Dış Politika*, (Alfa Yayınları: Bursa, 2017), s.323.

<sup>14</sup> Gökçe Karaköse, "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Somali Cumhurbaşkanı Hasan Şeyh Mahmud ile Telefonda Görüştü", Anadolu Ajansı, 11 August 2024; "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Etiyopya Başbakanı Ali ile Telefonda Görüştü", The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, 10 August 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

tries that have been grappling with trust issues. It is crucial to remember that Somalia and Ethiopia did not engage in any dialogue from January 1st to July 2nd. Türkiye managed to bring the official representatives of these two states under one roof in Ankara and through shuttle diplomacy, has steered the process towards a resolution while asserting its unique influence.

Following the second round of talks after the meeting between Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on August 3, 2024, in Ethiopia, Minister Fidan noted that significant progress had been made in the process.<sup>15</sup> On August 10, 2024, after President Erdoğan's phone conversation with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, it was observed that Türkiye has elevated its diplomatic engagement to the highest level. Foreign Minister Fidan's visit to Ethiopia and the possible impression of Abiy Ahmed's dominant role and will in the decision-making process suggest that the issue might be resolved at the presidential level, highlighting the potential for resolution through summit diplomacy. Therefore, the meetings between President Erdoğan and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on August 10 and with Somali President Hasan Sheikh Mohamud on August 11 indicate that the issue is being addressed at the highest level.

Diplomacy is a process. After discussions on various platforms regarding the Ankara Process, there have been statements such as "the issue is still unresolved" or "a failed process." However, it is important to remember that no one has a magic wand. The various problems arising from issues between two countries, which have historical, religious, strategic, and political dimensions rooted in centuries past, undoubtedly make the

resolution of contemporary issues more challenging. Therefore, expecting the resolution of centuries-old problems within a few days would be unrealistic. However, managing the issues correctly and preventing them from escalating into conflict until the final stages is a significant effort that deserves recognition.

Nevertheless, managing the diplomatic process is a challenging task. Disagreements and differing opinions may arise during negotiations. In this context, the experience required for Türkiye's seasoned diplomacy to understand and manage the approaches and reactions of the parties involved is crucial. Furthermore, such historically rooted issues create mutual trust problems between the two countries. However, Turkish diplomacy is progressing with an awareness of this historical context and the current realities, while also being mindful of external actors attempting to intervene. This approach ensures that negotiations are controlled and maintained effectively. In this process, actions are taken with an understanding of the historical background, current dynamics, internal dynamics of the countries and the region, and future developments.

Moreover, the recent statements from Ethiopia and Somalia expressing hope for the future of the process are significant. Additionally, the ability of Somalia and Ethiopia to address issues through indirect negotiations, even if indirectly, is crucial for regional security and stability. In this regard, Türkiye's mediation efforts hold significant value for many actors on national, regional, continental, and global levels.

In addition to all this, recent developments such as the prisoner exchange between the U.S. and Russia mediated by MIT<sup>16</sup>, and the U.S.'s request for Türkiye to mediate in reducing ten-

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15 "Bakan Fidan: Etiyopya-Somali Krizinde Taraflar Arasında Önemli Yakınlaşma Sağlandı", TRT Haber, 13 August 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

16 Ferdi Türkten, "MIT'in Yönettiği Takas Operasyonunu ABD Başkanı Biden Canlı Takip Etti", Anadolu Agency, 11 August 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

sions between Iran and Israel, have underscored and confirmed Türkiye's image as a "reliable actor."<sup>17</sup> Türkiye's role as a regional power positions it as a critical player in resolving international crises through diplomatic channels. This indicates that Türkiye's assistance might be sought in addressing various contentious issues. Thus, this situation highlights Türkiye's strategic importance, success, and diplomatic flexibility in both regional and global politics.

## PERSPECTIVES AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON THE ANKARA PROCESS

From the official statements and public reflections, it is evident that both Ethiopia and Somalia generally appear hopeful about the process. Additionally, the satisfaction expressed regarding Türkiye's positive contributions, along with the favorable attitudes towards President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, highlights the significance of Türkiye as a key actor in this process. Both Ethiopia and Somalia appreciate Türkiye's mediating role and believe it will play a crucial part in achieving a peaceful resolution. This situation enhances Türkiye's diplomatic influence in the region and positions it as a critical partner in ensuring security and stability in the Horn of Africa. However, it is also observed that both parties have different expectations as they move forward. Although not explicitly stated in the declarations, underlying texts suggest that there are various differences and challenges in their perspectives and expectations.

From Ethiopia's perspective, Türkiye's efforts in seeking solutions for access to the sea

have generated expectations. Ethiopia's expectations also reflect its belief that the current issue can be resolved. Thus, Ethiopia's expectation is to continue the process positively under Türkiye's facilitation and to proceed with optimism towards the advancement of the process.<sup>18</sup>

Both Ethiopia and Somalia appreciate Türkiye's mediating role and believe it will play a crucial part in achieving a peaceful resolution.

From the Somali perspective, emphasis is consistently placed on preserving Somalia's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and unity. There is a hope for a peaceful resolution that would mutually benefit both parties. Somalia appears to have expectations of achieving a solution that will protect all resource access rights of the Somali people as per the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>19</sup>

Based on the statements from Somalia and Ethiopia, a discourse analysis reveals that Ethiopia's emphasis on "access to the sea" is particularly noteworthy. Historically, this discourse represents Ethiopia's longstanding aspiration.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Abiy Ahmed Ali's earlier statement about securing "direct access to the sea for Ethiopia's survival" highlights Ethiopia's geopolitical objectives in the region and the steps it might take to achieve them. Notably, Ethiopia uses the term "access to the sea" rather than "need for a new

18 "Bakan Fidan: Etiyopya-Somali Krizinde Taraflar Arasında Önemli Yakınlaşma Sağlandı", TRT Haber, 13 August 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

19 Ibid.

20 Amadeus Dombrowski, "Some Ideas About The Historical Role Of Ethiopia's Access To The Sea", *Northeast African Studies*, Volume: 6, No: 1/2, (1984), p. 171; Faisal A Roble, "The Historical Search for A Sea Outlet and Leadership Legacy", 1 December 2023, Wardheer News, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

17 "ABD, MİT Başkanı Kalın'dan Arabuluculuk Talep Etti", NTV, 14 August 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).



port in addition to the existing ports in the region.” The concept of “access to the sea” was also used historically by Ethiopia in the post-World War II period.<sup>21</sup>

In this context, Ethiopia has generally been a landlocked country throughout its history, although there is a historical exception. Eritrea plays a significant role in this historical context. Italy colonized the region that is now Eritrea in 1889, and this area remained an Italian colony until World War II. However, in 1942, during World War II, this region came under British control. According to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 390 (V) - A, adopted in 1950 and implemented in 1952, Eritrea was to be governed by a local Eritrean parliament but would have a federal status with Ethiopia for ten years in matters of foreign relations and defense. Thus, Ethiopia gained access to the sea through Eritrea from 1952 until 1962. The resolution explicitly emphasized the need to consider “Ethiopia’s geographic, historical, ethnic, or economic rights and claims, particularly Ethiopia’s legitimate need for adequate access to the sea,”<sup>22</sup> based on reports from the UN Eritrea Commission and the Temporary Committee.

However, by 1962, Ethiopia had dissolved the Eritrean parliament, annexed Eritrea, and incorporated it into its territory. One year before the annexation, the Eritrean Liberation Front was established, and in 1991, the recognition of Eritrea’s de facto independence marked the end of its struggle for independence. This situation persisted until the independence reform was implemented in 1993. Indeed, following Eritrea’s separation from Ethiopia, which won its struggle

for independence in 1993, Ethiopia’s access to the sea was lost after 41 years of having unhindered access.<sup>23</sup>

## CAN THE PARTIES TURN THE CRISIS INTO AN OPPORTUNITY?

If the parties act rationally in the Ankara Process, resolving the issue through diplomacy appears quite feasible. New cooperation opportunities in the region could emerge. In this context, if Ethiopia cancels the MoU, establishes state-level relations with the Somali federal government rather than communicating with the Somaliland administration, commits to using the port in Somalia solely for commercial purposes, and increases its engagement in enhancing economic cooperation with the Somali government, both Ethiopia and Somalia, along with the regional populations, could greatly benefit from this crisis situation. For instance, Ethiopia’s commercial activities through Hobyo Port in Galmudug or Mogadishu Port in the capital could provide significant economic and security benefits to both countries. This could also create opportunities for new settlements or the development of existing ones around the routes leading to Ethiopia, and offer new job opportunities for the local population.

Since 2019, 17 new districts have been established in Galmudug, with these districts’ clans cooperating with the Somali Federal Government. The new districts created through agreements with clan leaders are more advantageous than what was previously provided by the Al-Shabaab terrorist organization, leading to

21 Gebre Hiwet Tesfagiorgis, “Access to the Sea in the Context of Eritrea and Ethiopia”, Eri-Platform, 2022, p. 4.

22 UN General Assembly | Fifth Session, pp. 20-22, <https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/059/88/pdf/nr005988.pdf>, (Access date: 13 August 2024).

23 Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1995).

reduced support for Al-Shabaab in these areas compared to previous years. However, Al-Shabaab remains a security risk in Somalia. Thus, these new districts can be seen as having significant strategic importance in the fight against Al-Shabaab. The alignment of the new districts' layout and corridors with the real-world dynamics could enable fragmented security improvements in the region.<sup>24</sup>

In this context, ensuring access to Ethiopia via relatively safer routes through these new districts could also help address security issues caused by Al-Shabaab. However, this does not mean that there are no conflicts within these newly established districts. Indeed, inter-clan conflicts are occasionally observed in the towns of Herale and Abudwak near the Ethiopian border.<sup>25</sup> In this context, while it is known that groups belonging to the Marehan and Dir clans have conflicts over wetlands<sup>26</sup>, clan-based issues in Somalia also remain a notable internal problem.

However, adopting a cooperative approach instead of a conflict-oriented one could help prevent an increase in regional tension. In this context, the cancellation of the memorandum signed between Abiy Ahmed and Musa Bihi on January 1 could add extra pressure on Musa Bihi's administration before the Somaliland elections. Therefore, establishing direct state-level communication between the Somali Federal Government and Ethiopia could create an opportunity for cooperation. Otherwise, this situation could bring about an increased risk of tension at a time when cooperation should be encouraged. Ad-

ditionally, the involvement of various foreign actors dissatisfied with or seeking to obstruct the process through Somali internal dynamics could lead to regional instability. To prevent this, strengthening regional and international cooperation, and coordinating diplomatic efforts while considering developments in different regions, is crucial. Moreover, taking necessary measures against actors aiming to exploit Somalia's internal dynamics is vital for maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Türkiye has continued its engagements with both Ethiopia and Somalia, and has also consulted with other regional actors to work towards a peaceful resolution of the issue.

Ensuring that discussions proceed with mutual cooperation and trust is one of the most important aspects for the continuity of the process. In this framework, addressing Somalia's interests and the concerns of its people, maintaining territorial integrity<sup>27</sup>, Ethiopia's cancellation of the MoU with Somaliland, and ensuring sea access for commercial purposes will be key topics at each meeting. Furthermore, this issue has evolved into a process that affects not only Somali-Ethiopian relations but also regional relationships.

Since the meeting held in Ankara on July 2, Türkiye has made significant efforts to resolve the issue and has initiated intense diplomatic activity in the region. In this context, Türkiye has continued its engagements with both Ethiopia and Somalia, and has also consulted with other

24 "The Galmudug Crisis: A Blueprint For Sustainable Settlement", Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, Policy Brief, 2019, p. 2.

25 "Death Toll Reaches 50 in Inter-Clan Fighting in Central Somalia", Hiiraan Online, 9 June 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

26 Abdi Sheikh, "Violent Clash Between Clans in Central Somalia Kills 55", Business Day, 10 June 2024, (Access date: 15 August 2024); "Reer Haraale Peace Conference to be Held in Qabridahare.", Somali Net, 19 February 2022, (Access date: 15 August 2024).

27 "Consultations on the Situation between Ethiopia and Somalia under the "Peace and Security in Africa" Agenda Item", Security Council Report, 28 January 2024, (Access date: 15 August 2024).

regional actors to work towards a peaceful resolution of the issue.

Indeed, Somalia has managed the process through direct negotiations with Ethiopia, Egypt<sup>28</sup>, Djibouti, and Kenya, and by providing updates to countries such as Qatar, the UAE, and the United States within a cooperative framework. Therefore, it is evident that the process, facilitated by Türkiye, is not progressing solely between the three countries. Indeed, the steps taken throughout this process reveal that Ethiopia has been experiencing regional diplomatic pressure since January 1. Türkiye places significant importance on its relations with both Somalia and Ethiopia. Indeed, Ethiopia is one of Türkiye's key economic partners on the African continent.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Ethiopia and Türkiye have various cooperation agreements in areas such as military, trade, economic, health, and security. In this context, providing a pragmatic and rational solution to the regional issue is seen as the most appropriate approach for the parties involved. This situation not only offers a solution that Somalia can accept and benefit from but also provides Ethiopia with the opportunity to access a new port for commercial purposes, potentially contributing to the development of regional trade. One of the main expectations is for this process, which has led to a crisis between Ethiopia and Somalia, to end with a peaceful agreement. If an agreement is anticipated by the end of the Ankara Process,

it is expected that Somalia would prefer an agreement that does not pose future issues within its national borders. However, not all issues in international relations can be resolved. In this context, although some issues may remain unresolved, they should be managed or kept in a state that prevents them from escalating into active conflict.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, managing the issue effectively, regardless of the outcome, is crucial. Achieving a compromise that considers the mutual interests of both parties in the short or medium term will also lay a significant foundation for future cooperation and peace efforts.

## POTENTIAL REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACTS OF THE SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN ISSUE

The issue between Ethiopia and Somalia should not be viewed merely as a bilateral problem between two neighboring countries or as a recent issue with no historical depth. In fact, the historical background, including wars, conflicts, disputes, border issues, and other related topics discussed in previous sections, has led to serious trust problems between Ethiopia and Somalia.<sup>31</sup> The current issue cannot be understood independently of its deep-rooted historical context. Furthermore, the tensions arising from the strategic transformations within the global system are complicating the existing problems between Ethiopia and Somalia. Regional rivalries inherited from the Cold War and conflicts of interest among international actors are reigniting historical hostilities between the two countries. In sum-

28 Muhammed Yasin Güngör, "Turkish Foreign Minister Meets Egypt's President During 2-Day Visit", Anadolu Agency, 5 August 2024; (Access date: 15 August 2024).

29 In 2023, Türkiye's trade volume with Ethiopia was approximately \$350 million. Additionally, Türkiye makes significant direct foreign investments in Ethiopia. Turkish construction firms have undertaken major projects in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, construction, and health in Ethiopia. In this context, around 200 Turkish companies operate in Ethiopia. Indeed, the total amount of Turkish investments in Ethiopia is approximately \$3 billion. See, Seleshi Tessema, Tufan Aktaş, "Türkiye, Etiyopya'da En Fazla Yatırımı Olan İkinci Ülke", Anadolu Agency; Halis Akyıldız, "Türkiye'nin Addis Ababa Büyükelçisi Baran: Türkiye, Etiyopya'da En Büyük Yatırımcılar Arasında Yer Alıyor", Anadolu Agency, (Access date: 15 August 2024)

30 William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal*, (Random House New York: 2019), p. 29.

31 Daniel Kendie, "Towards Resolving the Ethiopia-Somalia Disputes", International Conference on African Development Archives, 104, 2007.



mary, this issue should be viewed as a reflection of regional and global strategic balances, and it is highly likely to have an impact on both global and regional equilibria.

As the global system undergoes strategic transformations, leading to new alliances and power balances, the Horn of Africa has recently gained increased attention as a distinct arena of global and regional competition.<sup>32</sup> This competition has, in a sense, made the Horn of Africa the center of influence struggles among global and regional powers. The strategic location of the region, providing access to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, has made the Horn of Africa critical both economically and militarily.

In summary, if this issue continues to escalate, it will have various regional and global impacts. For instance, any situation affecting Somalia's territorial integrity, national security, and independence, a member of the Arab League, will likely involve neighboring Red Sea countries such as Djibouti, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Consequently, the impact on the Red Sea could lead to security issues in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and potentially threaten or close critical sea routes. If Ethiopia's access to the Red Sea is considered beyond commercial purposes, it could subsequently lead to struggles over control of global strategic waterways, global energy security, and the safety and flow of global trade routes. In essence, this issue has the potential to affect the global economic system profoundly.

## EGYPT-SOMALIA DEFENSE AGREEMENT

An example of the regional impact of the Ethiopia-Somalia tension is the signing of a defense

agreement between Egypt and Somalia on August 14, 2024, aimed at strengthening security and cooperation.<sup>33</sup> According to the statement, this agreement also opens discussions on various other issues. In this context, Somalia appears to be diversifying its alliances due to its conflict with Ethiopia. Existing issues between Egypt and Ethiopia, particularly concerning the Renaissance Dam on the Nile River, are already well-known.<sup>34</sup> This issue arises from the risk of losing control over the vital Nile waters to Ethiopia. Additionally, if Ethiopia gains access to the Red Sea through the Somaliland region, it could

This situation not only offers a solution that Somalia can accept and benefit from but also provides Ethiopia with the opportunity to access a new port for commercial purposes, potentially contributing to the development of regional trade.

negatively impact the Suez Canal, which is of critical importance to Egypt, and the revenues derived from this canal.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Ethiopia's potential to exert a strategic influence on Egypt by controlling the Bab el-Mandeb Strait raises Egypt's security concerns. Egypt fears that Ethiopia's increased dominance in the Red Sea could seriously threaten the strategic importance and economic value of the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal is critical to Egypt's national security and

32 Michael Kihishen, et.al., "The Challenges of International Powers Competition in the Horn of Africa: The IGAD Experience", *Abyssinia Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, Volume: 8, No: 2, (2023), p. 66.

33 Mohamed Dhaysane, "Somalia, Egypt Sign Defense Pact to Bolster Security Cooperation", Anadolu Agency, 14 August 2024, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

34 Housam Darwish, "Egypt and the Politics of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: An Update", 16 August 2022, IDE Policy Brief, No: 173, p. 1.

35 Ezzat Kenawy, "The Economic Impacts of the New Suez Canal", *Strategic Sectors: Economy & Territory*, Mediterranean Yearbook, 2016, p. 282.

economic prosperity, as it is a significant transit point for global maritime trade and provides substantial revenue to Egypt.

If Ethiopia enhances its influence over the Bab el-Mandeb Strait by gaining access to the Red Sea through the Somaliland region, it could jeopardize Egypt's control over the Suez Canal. Additionally, Egypt and Ethiopia are already experiencing issues concerning the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Consequently, this situation is prompting Egypt to reassess its regional security strategies, strengthen its military and diplomatic measures, and diversify its alliances. As a result, Egypt would be concerned about Ethiopia potentially becoming a dominant power in the southern Red Sea and subsequently controlling the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which controls entry and exit traffic in the region.

Therefore, in addition to the existential security issues between Somalia and Ethiopia, the defense and security cooperation between Egypt and Somalia could lead to the emergence of new issues in the existing Egypt-Ethiopia disputes and result in a more pronounced consolidation of regional bloc formations. This cooperation between Egypt and Somalia may reshape the power dynamics in the region and potentially create a counterbalance to Ethiopia's strategic objectives. The potential establishment of AUSSOM to replace ATMIS by the end of 2024 in Somalia<sup>36</sup>, and the involvement of Egypt and Djibouti in this force, could be seen as worrisome for Ethiopia. On the other hand, this new alliance between Somalia and Egypt should be viewed as a reflection of regional tensions rather than a direct message against Türkiye.

36 "Communiqué of the 1225th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council Held on 1 August 2024, on Consideration of the Concept of Operations of AU-Led Mission in Somalia post-ATMIS.", Africa Union, 2024.

Somalia, seeking to diversify its alliances due to its issues with Ethiopia, has moved closer to Egypt. Egypt, facing existing problems with the Renaissance Dam on the Nile and Ethiopia's attempts to access the Red Sea through Somaliland, has heightened its security concerns. At this point, Türkiye's "Economic and Defense Cooperation Framework Agreement,"<sup>37</sup> signed and ratified with Somalia on February 8, 2024, remains valid. Türkiye, which maintains a close relationship with Somalia based on these agreements and fulfills its responsibilities without issues, continues its close relations with Somalia. Türkiye, aiming to contribute to regional peace and stability, is pursuing diplomatic steps through various channels to prevent potential new crises in the region.

## IMPACTS ON THE RED SEA

Ethiopia's desire for "access to the sea" through Somali territory, which borders the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, pertains specifically to the Red Sea. However, there are two important aspects to keep in mind. First, in 2002, Ethiopia signed an agreement with Djibouti to use the Port of Djibouti. Under this agreement, Djibouti was highlighted as Ethiopia's "natural port."<sup>38</sup> Ethiopia has been using this port for the past 22 years, and 95 percent of its total trade volume is conducted through this port.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, in 2018, Ethiopia took a step to diversify its port access in the region by pur-

37 Tunç Demirtaş, "Türkiye-Somali Anlaşmasının Verdiği Mesaj ve Türkiye ile Müttefiklik", *SETA Odak*, (22 2024), (Access date: 14 August 2024).

38 Accord Signed to Use Djibouti Port", 15 April 2022, The New Humanitarian, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/31135/djibouti-ethiopia-accord-signed-use-djibouti-port>, (Access date: 13 August 2024).

39 Francisco Serrano, "The Ethiopia-Somaliland Port Deal Could Sink Djibouti's Economy", 2 February 2024, World Politics Review, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

chasing a 19 percent stake in the Berbera port located in Somaliland, which is part of Somalia.<sup>40</sup> The average distance between these two prominent ports is 250 kilometers.

Given this, historical and strategically significant locations in Somaliland's Awdal region, such as Zeyla and Lughaya (located east of Awdal), emerge as potential sites for Ethiopia. Zeyla, located 40 kilometers from the Djibouti port, and Lughaya, 130 kilometers from Djibouti, are situated between the Djibouti and Berbera ports. If Ethiopia aims to build a port "only for commercial purposes" based on its "access to the sea" narrative, such a move could significantly reduce the port revenues to which Djibouti is largely dependent and diminish the importance of the Berbera port, thereby negatively affecting the commercial attractiveness and significance of these ports. However, the potential impacts on Djibouti are considered more critical.

Therefore, Ethiopia's initiative to seek "access to the sea" through Somaliland, rather than utilizing the existing and functional nearby ports, poses a serious risk of destabilizing regional balances. This risk is particularly significant for Djibouti, as the initiative could weaken Djibouti's economic and strategic importance, making it economically more vulnerable and potentially disrupting the regional diplomatic and strategic equilibrium. If Ethiopia requires a new port for commercial purposes, it would be more understandable and rational to consider Somali's Indian Ocean-facing coast for such a need.

However, demands for access to the sea, particularly those aimed at controlling the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, which governs access to the Gulf of Aden and the entrance and exit of the Red Sea and holds a critical position for global

trade security, carry the risk of disrupting many regional balances. When considering the strategic importance of the Red Sea together with the Suez Canal controlled by Egypt to the north, Ethiopia's attempts to gain sea access have broader geopolitical implications. The Bab al-Mandeb Strait is vital for global maritime trade. In this context, the security of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea has gained more importance, particularly with the increased security issues stemming from the Houthi conflict in Yemen during the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

If Ethiopia's access to the Red Sea is considered beyond commercial purposes, it could subsequently lead to struggles over control of global strategic waterways, global energy security, and the safety and flow of global trade routes. In essence, this issue has the potential to affect the global economic system profoundly.

Looking at Somalia's statements and concerns, clear red lines emerge. In this context, Somalia considers any situation involving "presence" and "military presence" as crossing its red lines.<sup>41</sup> Even various sources suggest that Ethiopia's presence in the Red Sea should be avoided for three fundamental reasons. The first reason is that Ethiopia's access to the Red Sea is thought to destabilize the region, which three sub-reasons can explain significantly.

The first sub-reason is that Egypt and Ethiopia are competing actors in the region. One of the

40 "Ethiopia Acquires 19% Stake in DP World Berbera Port", 1 March 2018, Gulf News; "Ethiopia Loses 19 Percent Stake of Berbera Port", Horn Diplomat, 11 June 2022, (Access date: 15 August 2024).

41 Villa Somalia, "Madaxweynaha JFS Xasan Sheekh oo khudbad u jeediyay shacabka ayaa ka hadlay cabashada shacabka", 17 August 2024 (Access date: 18 August 2024).

areas of competition is the sharing of Nile waters and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Additionally, if Ethiopia gains access to the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, it could indirectly control the Suez Canal, which is of vital importance to the Egyptian economy. Indeed, the economic revenue derived from the Suez Canal, located in northern Red Sea and owned by Egypt, is significant for Egyptian trade. Therefore, there is a risk that the competition over the Nile could be transferred to the Bab al-Mandeb Strait in this context.

In this context, the Suez Canal has made a substantial contribution to the Egyptian economy as of 2023. During the 2022/2023 fiscal year, the revenue from the Suez Canal amounted to 9.4 billion dollars.<sup>42</sup> The revenue from the Suez Canal represents 52 percent of Egypt's transportation income and 15 percent of the country's main foreign exchange earnings. Additionally, in 2023, the Suez Canal saw 25,887 ship transits.<sup>43</sup> Given the total revenue of the canal, the average income from each ship transit was approximately 363,000 dollars. This revenue is due to the Suez Canal hosting about 15 percent of global trade and the shift of Europe's oil and gas imports from Russia to Arab Gulf countries. These figures clearly illustrate the importance of the Suez Canal to the Egyptian economy. The Suez Canal not only generates direct income but also plays a strategic role as a key point in global trade.

The second reason is related to the emphasis on the desire for sea access rather than port access. It is thought that the potential emergence of new ports in the area between Djibouti and Berbera could undermine the strategic and economic importance of these two ports.

As a third sub-reason, Ethiopia's distancing itself from the Somaliland issue, which is an in-

ternal problem of Somalia, should be considered. Indeed, if Ethiopia has activities it wishes to undertake in the Somaliland region, it is believed that it would prefer to carry them out through the Somali government.

The second reason is that some Somali actors believe Ethiopia only uses the concept of 'access to the sea' and avoids using terms such as 'presence' and 'military base'. In this context, after canceling the MoU with the Somaliland administration, various actors have expressed that Ethiopia might be more inclined to pursue access to the sea through a port on the Indian Ocean coasts, which could be used solely for commercial purposes under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, rather than through the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden. However, there are concerns that Ethiopia's desire for sea access in the north might lead to further steps, such as using the area for military purposes and potentially annexing the region, which poses security problems.

The third and final reason highlights the importance of Djibouti for Somalia. Somalia and Djibouti, described as "two states, one nation," have deep ties. Djibouti, which borders the Somaliland region, can establish direct connections with Somalia through its borders. From this perspective, insecurity arises if a port were to be established on a 20-kilometer coastline near the Djibouti border with Somaliland, potentially severing the connection between Djibouti and Somalia through future roads and security corridors created for this purpose. This connection is crucial for both Somalia and Djibouti, as a disruption could lead to a significantly larger perceived threat from Ethiopia to Djibouti in subsequent phases.<sup>44</sup>

42 Samar Samir, "Egyptian Suez Canal's Annual Revenue at All-Time High", *Egypt Today*, 22 April 2023, (Access date: 13 August 2024).

43 Ibid.

44 Tunç Demirtaş, "Etiyopya-Somali Görüşmeleri: Türkiye'nin Diplomatik Rolü ve Bölgesel İstikrar", *SETA Odak*, (July 2024).

## SOMALIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ARAB LEAGUE AS A DIPLOMATIC LEVERAGE

In addition to the Ankara Process, this issue is also likely to impact the Arab League due to Somalia's membership in the organization. Indeed, Somalia has strong historical, cultural, and religious ties with the Arab world.<sup>45</sup> In this context, Somalia's efforts to leverage its position within the Arab League and align its actions with the organization are notable. Such efforts are aimed at legitimizing its political stance and strengthening its regional diplomacy.

By emphasizing its Arab identity, Somalia also aligns itself closely with the Arab League, positioning itself as an integral part of the Arab world.<sup>46</sup> This strategy has recently gained significant importance in both Somalia's domestic politics and regional diplomacy. Close relations with the Arab League offer Somalia the opportunity to increase its influence in the Arab world, develop dialogue with Gulf countries, and garner support from these nations. Consequently, this approach may also serve as a lever in Somalia's relations with Ethiopia, suggesting that Somalia has the capacity to exert pressure on Ethiopia not only through the African Union but also via the Arab world.

The Arab League generally aims to preserve unity among its member states and tends to avoid taking strong stances that could lead to internal divisions. Therefore, it is observed that the Arab League acts to prevent conflicts in the Horn of Africa and to ensure regional stability. Given that instability in Somalia could have ripple ef-

fects on the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula, the Arab League may support peace efforts between Somalia and Ethiopia. However, the role of the Arab League in the region will largely depend on the financial contributions of its member states as well as the relationships between the Gulf countries and Egypt.

Nonetheless, this process could be quite complex. Ethiopia's relationships with the Gulf countries could complicate the Arab League's stance on Somalia. At the same time, despite serious elements of competition and occasional discord among them, the Gulf countries have deep economic partnerships with Egypt and Sudan. They have the potential to exert pressure on Ethiopia through these countries. However, since the influence of the Arab League largely depends on unity among its member states and financial contributions, its role in the Somalia-Ethiopia conflict is likely to be limited.

## CONCLUSION

The tension between Somalia and Ethiopia, while ostensibly rooted in the issue of "access to the sea," actually reflects deeper and more complex historical, religious, cultural, and strategic factors. Somalia harbors concerns that Ethiopia's pursuit of maritime access is not only commercial but also entails military presence and geopolitical ambitions in the long term. This situation heightens the critical importance of safeguarding Somalia's territorial integrity and sovereign rights, which are considered red lines by the Somali government.

The "Ankara Process," facilitated by Türkiye, presents a significant opportunity for resolving this issue through diplomacy by earning the trust of both sides. In this context, Türkiye's role extends beyond that of a mere facilitator, solidifying its position as a key actor in ensuring

<sup>45</sup> League of Arab States, <https://arabmpi.org/>, (Access date: 14 August 2024).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

regional peace and stability. Türkiye's historical and cultural ties with both Ethiopia and Somalia provide it with a crucial advantage in managing this process. Meanwhile, Somalia's relationship with the Arab League enhances its capacity to assert a stronger stance against Ethiopia on international platforms. This relationship offers Somalia a vital diplomatic leverage in countering Ethiopia's efforts to secure access to the sea, with the potential to influence the regional balance of power.

Despite these challenges, the exploration of regional cooperation opportunities could transform this crisis into a win-win situation for both countries. Ethiopia's access to the sea, strictly for commercial purposes and with respect for Somalia's sovereignty, could contribute to the development of regional trade and the reduction of security risks. Addressing the Somali government's concerns could help de-escalate tensions and foster opportunities for mutual gain in the region. However, if a conflict-oriented approach is adopted instead of cooperation, it could lead to significant risks of instability on both regional and global scales.

It is important to recognize the internal fragilities that both countries face. For Somalia, the absence of a fully established state structure,

ongoing security issues, and the prevalence of clan-based divisions within the 4,5 clan system present significant disadvantages. Nevertheless, the enduring and robust sense of nationalism in Somalia, despite past devastations and challenges, remains a critical advantage. Ethiopia, on the other hand, faces a different set of issues. Despite its population of 120 million, Ethiopia's diverse ethnic composition of over 80 groups and the complexities of its federal structure contribute to various internal vulnerabilities. However, Ethiopia contrasts with Somalia in having a more established institutional state, though it is characterized by weaker nationalism due to the varied demands of different ethnic groups.

In conclusion, resolving the tension between Somalia and Ethiopia will not only impact the bilateral relations between the two countries but also directly influence the strategic balance across the Horn of Africa, East Africa, and the Middle East. In this context, Türkiye's efforts to contribute to regional security and its capacity to manage this issue are making significant contributions to peace and stability in the region. This process could serve as an important model for future diplomatic initiatives, with the Ankara Process potentially advancing towards summit diplomacy as the situation evolves.



# THE ANKARA PROCESS: CAN THE SOMALIA-ETHIOPIA TENSION BE RESOLVED THROUGH TRKİYE'S EFFORTS?

TUNÇ DEMİRTAŞ

## SETA | ANALYSIS

This study deeply analyzes the roots of the centuries-long conflicts between Somalia and Ethiopia and the strategic interests underlying the current maritime access dispute. By tracing the origins of these issues back centuries, the study seeks to uncover the motivations and causes of trust problems behind the maritime access dispute through the lens of wars, border disputes, and various conflicts that both countries have experienced at different periods in history. The report places special emphasis on Trkiye's facilitation efforts in this crisis and the diplomatic initiatives known as the "Ankara Process." The study examines how Trkiye has utilized its historical, cultural, and diplomatic ties to manage this process and play a critical role in overcoming the trust deficit between the two countries. The depth of Trkiye's relationships with both Somalia and Ethiopia offers a unique opportunity to resolve this crisis, while also demonstrating Trkiye's commitment to promoting peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. Trkiye's efforts to facilitate peace and stability in this process once again highlight its significant role in regional diplomacy. This report is not only an in-depth examination of Somalia-Ethiopia relations but also sheds light on how global and regional power balances in the Horn of Africa are being shaped.

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