

‘Stubbornly ignored against better judgement’



Escalation with announcement: Although the police were warned in advance, violence broke out again (Stuttgart, 16 September 2023)

Raids against attackers at Eritrea events. Narrative of internal Eritrean struggles spun further. An interview with Dirk Vogelsang (first Chairman of the German-Eritrean Society)

Interview: Ina Sembdner, junge Welt, issue of 29 March 2025, page 2 / Germany

On Wednesday, properties linked to the riots against Eritrean events in recent years were searched in a major raid. The 17 ‘named suspects’ are suspected by the Federal Public Prosecutor General of founding and/or being members of a domestic terrorist organisation, specifically the ‘Brigade N'Hamedu’. Is this a good signal for Eritreans living in this country?

Only to a very limited extent. The fact that, almost three years after the brutal attacks on Eritrean cultural events, coordinated measures are finally being implemented that reflect the scale of these attacks is certainly in a way a satisfaction for the victims, some of whom are still traumatised today. The question remains: Why only now? The perpetrators of the ‘Brigade N'Hamedu’ have been known to the authorities since 2023 at the latest. Ultimately, the decisive question is: Is it about enforcing the state's monopoly on the use of force, about demonstrating its ability to act against migrants who commit offences? Or is it about showing everyone that the Eritrean communities are just as worthy of protection as all other people living here? As long as the conflict is portrayed in the media as an ‘internal Eritrean conflict’ and the perpetrators as victims, the second alternative is unfortunately unlikely.

While the Federal Public Prosecutor General avoided naming the suspected members by nationality, dpa ran the headline ‘Raid against Eritrean group’ and then went on to develop the common narrative that the members of the brigade supposedly belonged to the Eritrean opposition. How do you explain this stubborn persistence?

The question goes to the heart of the problem: there is no serious Horn of Africa expert or journalist dealing with Ethiopia and Eritrea who is not aware that the brigade consists exclusively of Ethiopians, mostly young men from the northern Ethiopian province of Tigray. However, the mainstream media stubbornly ignore this against their better judgement because it doesn't fit the picture. The image of a dictatorship over an incapacitated people is the punishment for decades of ‘insubordination’ towards the West, for refusing to accept the world market and insisting on independence. It is a bitter irony that the same TPLF (‘People's Liberation Front of Tigray’, jW), which was supported with billions for 27 long years as a Western governor in Ethiopia, is now - since it has failed several times - sending its young people to Europe to open a second front here as a terror brigade.

To what extent is the situation here influenced by developments in the Horn of Africa?

Massively, in two ways. Firstly, the situation in the Horn of Africa, which has always been a powder keg due to its geographical importance, is more dangerous than it has been for a long time. Surrounded by Ethiopia, which is in danger of collapsing due to fighting between ethnic groups and financial problems, Sudan, where a murderous, externally fuelled civil war is raging, and countries with fragile power structures such as Kenya and Somalia, Eritrea is a guarantor of stability, peace and all-round social development. The ‘leader’ states of the West, of which Germany is one, cannot ignore this. The recent meeting between the Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and Christoph Retzlaff, the Federal Foreign Office's Africa envoy, shows that at least the time of ‘we no longer talk to each other’ is over. Secondly, following the Pretoria Agreement on the settlement of the Tigray conflict, the TPLF has broken up into several factions and has finally lost its popular base, which also has an impact on the groups it controls abroad, such as the Brigade.

So can the Eritrea festivals traditionally organised in the diaspora take place peacefully again in the future?

The time of this brigade has passed, but the peaceful running of the Eritrea festivals, as it has been for decades, is more likely to depend in the short term on whether these cultural events can continue to be demonised and slandered as ‘dictator-supporting celebrations’ by a significant section of the media without consequences. If there is no change of course here, certain forces will see this as ‘carte blanche’ and act accordingly.

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