Ethiopia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The country is undergoing a transition since the newly appointed (in April 2018) Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched a series of economic and political reforms that are transforming the governance landscape of Ethiopia, including an increase in the release of political prisoners, and the removal of exiled political organisations from the terrorist list. Imprisoned journalists were released, and key institutions (police, prison administration, justice sector) are undergoing deep reforms. Restrictive legislation on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) was reviewed and drastically improved. Appointments of new leaders for institutions such as the Supreme Court or the National Election Board have provided additional energy into the reform process. The very restrictive Anti-Terrorism Law has been reviewed but not approved in 2019. Daniel Bekele, former Senior Director at Human Rights Watch, was appointed as the Head of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which is undergoing a complete overhaul under his tenure. Ethnic tensions were on the rise in 2019 leading to clashes in different part of the country, including in Amhara, Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz, Afar and Somali Regions, claiming the lives of more than 1,200 people. The large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained unsolved, with numbers disputed by the government approximately amounting to 2.4 million. After a first period of denial/downplay, the government, in the attempt to reduce numbers, used humanitarian assistance to incentivise returns, which continues to raise serious human rights and humanitarian concerns. In the course of 2019, many demonstrations were denied permission and organisers were arrested. Mass arrests occurred after the Sidama referendum postponement (July 2019) and in Addis Ababa (October 2019, two days after the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize), including (temporarily) some journalists.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In 2019, EU action focused on the following areas:

⬚ Promote electoral reforms, inclusive political party dialogue and citizens' participation;

⬚ A legal framework in line with international standards, accountable institutions, fair trials and good prison conditions;

⬚ Promote recognition of the positive role of civil society and media in society; space for more independent and professional media and effective Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) protection mechanisms;

⬚ Promote decent work standards, a more equitable access to social services, economic opportunities for women and youth, effective mechanisms to address corruption issues, and address land issues;

☐ Protection of victims of human trafficking, safe and dignified return of irregular migrants, protection of refugees in line with international standards, decent work standards for migrant workers;

3. EU bilateral political engagement: In May, the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, visited Ethiopia. The EUSR met with the President, the Prime Minister, the Head of the National Electoral Board, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, 102

the deputy Chair of the Peace and Reconciliation Commission, representatives from civil society and media organisations, opposition parties and humanitarian organisations. This visit focused on three topics: elections, transitional justice and the situation of IDPs.

In November, an Art.8 Dialogue was conducted with Foreign Affairs Minister Gedu Andargachew. A wide range of issues was discussed, including human rights and democratisation in Ethiopia.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU has designed a 'Democratic package' (EUR 26.8 million) including the following projects:

i. Establishing an environment for inclusive, knowledge-based dialogue on the political process in Ethiopia, implemented by International IDEA since February 2019 (FPI/IcSP-funded project for 18 months, EUR 1 million).

ii. Supporting the legal and justice reform in Ethiopia, implemented by the Ethiopian Lawyers Association (ELA) since April 2019 (EIDHR-funded project, 24 months, EUR 400,000).

iii. Prevention, Mitigation and Management of Election-related Conflicts and Potential Violence in Ethiopia (PEV-ETHIOPIA), implemented by the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) since June 2019 (FPI/IcSP-funded, for 18 months, EUR 3.6 million).

iv. Supporting the Ethiopian Political Parties Dialogue for political reform, implemented by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) since October 2019 (FPI/IcSP-funded, for 18 months, EUR 1.8 million).

v. European Response to Electoral Cycle Support in Ethiopia (EURECS Ethiopia), implemented by the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) since October 2019 (EDF-funded project, 36 months, EUR 20 million including EUR 10 million from Germany).

In early 2019, the EU-Ethiopia Civil Society Fund III (CSF III) issued a call for proposal with the total amount of EUR 11,750,000 for projects in the areas of 'democratic governance and rule of law', 'service delivery and community engagement' and 'gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment and protection'. Twenty-four grants will contribute to strengthen citizens' participation.

5. Multilateral context: Several EU Member States (Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Sweden) supported UN-led programmes in 2019, in various fields such as (i) Electoral process, governance and judicial reform (UNDP); (ii) Sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, preventing violence against women (UNFPA and UN Women); (iii) Support to refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR).