LEGITIMATE ILLEGITIMACY: ADDRESSING THE CASE OF ERITREA

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Introduction

The emergence of Eritrea as an independent state in 1993 attracted attention of both scholars and policymakers, as it presented a good real-time opportunity to monitor the initial formation of a State in the post-Yalta-Potsdam system era. It was especially vital to observe this case of ongoing creation and development of new state institutions in Eritrea with a view to the worldwide debate on strengths and weaknesses of authoritarian rule in a post-Cold War world and its prospects.

For many researchers, the issue of a political regime type in this newly formed state became a point of divergence. Within first decade after gaining independence, paradoxically, it became clear that Eritrea's choice was for authoritarianism, and not any other regime type. 2001 has seen the largest national and international media shutdown campaign in Eritrea for the whole period of the country' independence. In 2016, after 23 years of statebuilding (including 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia), Eritrea remains stable and\yet authoritarian. Thus, a question rises on how and why Eritrea maintains this consistency on fighting freedom of media – both internally and externally – and whether there are any domestic or international political risks rooted in it.

This paper overlooks the 23 years' period of developments in both foreign and domestic policies in Eritrea with focus on media control and aims to give a general overview of the main pillars, as well as discontents and perspectives, of upholding authoritarian rule in this country, with a view to implications for regional security and development.

Media Huntdown: a present-day situation review

Eritrea currently ranks last (180th out of 180) in the World Press Freedom Index with 84.86 points attributed to the country media profile, which is the worst result in the world (World Press Freedom Index 2016). The Committee to Protect Journalists has called it the world's "most censored country" in the world, or, in other words, "A dictatorship in which the media have no rights" (T.Zere 2016:34). To date, only grim account is available on behalf of situation with the media and freedom of press in Eritrea: "Eritrean journalists live in perpetual limbo…If journalists stepped out of line, even slightly, they faced arrest and would only be allowed to resume their work after being "rehabilitated"." (T.Zere 2016:35). Even worse, the Reporters Without Borders named Eritrea "Africa's largest prison for media personnel. " (Reporters without borders, January 20, 2016). Moreover, this result has already become a routine one for the country' media profile for 8 consequetive years, causing an upsurge in media personnel fleeding the country: "Like thousands of other Eritreans, dozens of journalists have had no choice but to try to flee abroad to escape the indiscriminate repression. RSF assists as many of these journalists as possible." (Reporters without borders 2015). Eritrean fovernment rejects any international reports of unhuman treatment of the jailed journalists, claiming them to be falsified. Also, "…when this argument proves to be a fake, another argument comes in, stating that a westernized approach to human rights, including media freedom and right to be tried and defended in an open and just court trial, is not applicable to African realities of Eritrea…Furthermore, a third argument agains the due exercise of the freedom of press is then introduced, claiming that "national sovereignty and security are more important" than any human rights and freedoms, especially the civil and political ones (Holscher and Berhane:314).

This has contributed to the ongoing international refugee crisis, which started in 2014 and reached its peak in 2015 in Europe, especially with the catastrophy near Lampedusa island in Italy: "During the first 10 months of 2014, 36,678 Eritreans sought refuge across Europe,

compared to 12,960 during the same period in 2013. Most asylum requests were to Sweden (9,531), Germany (9,362) and Switzerland (5,652)." (Ismail Einashe 2016:48; The Telegraph 2015). Even when Eritrean refugees, fleeing the oppressing regime, reach refugee camps in Europe and Africa, they are still within the reach of government forces and\or progovernment violent nationalist groups: "According to Lul Seyoum, director of International Centre for Eritrean Refugees and Asylum Seekers (ICERAS), Eritrean refugees in a number of camps inside Sudan and Ethiopia face trafficking, and other gross human rights violations. They are afraid to speak and meet with each other. She said, that though information is hard to get out, many Eritreans find themselves in tough situations in these isolated camps, and the situation has worsened since Sudan and Eritrea became closer politically…hundreds of Eritreans have been enslaved in torture camps in Sudan and Egypt over the past 10 years, many enduring violence and rape at their hands of their traffickers in collusion with state authorities." (Index on Censorship Special Report 2016 :48-49). Worse, there are statements that show that Eritrean government forces do not stop hunting Eritrean journalists within national borders, seeking to persecute all independent Eritrean media worldwide, which is in fact a violation of international legal principle of non-interference into domestic affairs: " Asmara…is reaching outside the country in its determination to suppress freedom of expression. Eritrean journalists who have fled to nearby Uganda and Sudan continue to be persecuted by Eritrean government agents. Eritrean exiles have been threatened and even beaten up government supporters in Sweden and Italy for criticizing the regime." (Reporters without borders, January 20, 2016, Accessed December 21, 2016).

The influx of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers to the EU, who face crime threat even in refugee camps, has caused the Reporters Without Borders to call for international attention, if not intervention, in this state of gross human rights abuse: "Western governments are clearly interested in normalizing relations with Asmara because they want to stop the flow of Eritrean refugees, thousands of whom are fleeing the country every month to escape the threat of lifelong conscription." (Reporters without borders, September 21, 2016).

Surprisingly, the mass abuses of media freedoms, preventing it from exercising its due role in the process of policymaking and governance and statebuilding in Eritrea overall, have long been ignored and\or silenced in the international media and academic circles: "Africa occupies only a peripheral position" in western media…In Eritrea, only when the crisis had been reached and when truly horrifying scenes of actual starvaton were available that the situaton was judged newsworthy. Media emphasized natural disaster while more complicated political aspects of mass starvaton were ignored" (Sorenson 1999: 224-225; Hawkins 2011). This calls for a focal international attention to the problem of forced ousting and\or media shutdown in Eritrea: "RSF urges the European Union, which is trying to normalize its relations with Asmara, to not close its eyes to actions that constitute crimes against humanity and violations of the Eritrean population's fundamental rights." (Reporters without borders, September 21, 2016). In contemporary media sphere, many issues that deal with small and secluded countries without abundant natural resources and\or other strategic geopolitical meaning to the big powers, are simply not taken into account, however cynical this may sound in the era of global networks and the CNN effect: "A country like Eritrea stand little chance of attracting public attention in the global context" (Holscher D. and Solomon Y. Berhane 2008:319).

The grave situation with media shutdown in Eritrea, accompanied with overall context of gross violantions of human rights in this country since 2001, has already been brought to the attention of the international community under the auspices of the United Nations Organization. The UN Human Rights Council has recently labelled the ongoing processes in Eritrea as "crimes against humanity", calling for international attention to this problem (Report of the detailed findings of

the commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea - A/HRC/29/CRP.1, 2015, Accessed December 24, 2016).

All authoritative international organizations that deal with human rights and media freedom, have expressed concern not only about the current "hunt on journalist dissidents", but on the socio-political situation in Eritrea overall: "Not a single election has been held since the country gained independence, and today Eritrea is one of the world's most repressive and secretive states. There are no opposition parties and no independent media. No independent public gatherings or civil society organisations are permitted. Amnesty International estimates there are 10,000 prisoners of conscience in Eritrea, who include journalists, critics, dissidents, as well as men and women who have evaded conscription" (Index on Censorship Special Report 2016: 48). Not all media agencies have been shut down, however. Very few of the remaining news agencies and other media, such as TV and radio- stations, are still in operation. Same goes with the very modest number of internet access points and their maintenance:

"The forty-some Internet cafés, most of which are operating in Asmara, the capital, and in two or three other Eritrean cities, constitute the main access source for the Net, inasmuch as household use is very expensive and practically non-existent. These cafés are watched very closely, particularly during periods of social unrest, or when compromising news about the regime is circulating abroad…In this last African country to connect to the Net, the penetration rate hovers around 3%. In other words, virtually all of the population is excluded from the digital era. The government has chosen not to increase bandwidth speed – a major technical barrier to connection…The country's four service providers have obtained a licence from the Ministry of Information. They all must use the infrastructures of EriTel, which rents them its bandwidth and works in direct cooperation with the Ministries of Information and National Development. This has made network surveillance an easy task. When the regime feels threatened in periods of social unrest or during an international event that concerns it, the EriTel telecommunications firm, which owns the network's infrastructure, does not hesitate – when so ordered by Eritrean authorities – to cut off all connections to the Internet" (Reporters Without Borders 2010)

But, to the words of journalists who used to work in these agencies, their functioning is maintained for the sole purpose of manipulating citizens: "The state-controlled media do little more than relay the regime's ultra-nationalist ideology. The Internet is no exception: the two official websites, www.Shabait.com and www.Shaebia.com, are respectively owned by the Ministry of Information and the sole party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), disseminate only government propaganda" (Reporters Without Borders 2010, 2016).

Interestingly, the effect of media freedom-fighting has already hit other areas of social and economic life in Eritrea today. The regime that had crushed all freedoms to the media, also crushed the potential source of high and fast income from the tourist industry. The main misperseption of potential international tourists about visiting Eritrea, is the issue of regime stability and its ability to keep local crime rates at a low level. This is a paradoxical mistake, as the regime is quite stable, as totalitarian type of both political regime and political culture leaves for no other option. Still, tourist industry suffers from this internationally widespread misperception: "Political stability is also of prime concern for any tourist. As a result of Eritrea's war for independence and subsequent border conflicts with Ethiopia, tourists may well have some negative perceptions about political stability of the country. Although tourist information sources could play a big role in changing this perception by reflecting the internal political stability of the country, this is not happening at present" (Bahta 2003:205).

In 2004, the hunt for dissent of any kind, which started with the crash on the media, was extended to the academic sphere, as the country's only university, The University of Asmara, was shut down for "inefficiency" and providing "disobedient nationals" (Holscher and Berhane 2008: 315). This reflects not only the tightening grip of the current political regime, but the internal fears of illegitimacy and potential ousting from office on behalf of the top officials, as the country's long hoped-for transition to democracy as initial stage of new state formation was never finalized. Instead, as practice has shown, what started as a triumphant newly-born democratic nation, in 20 years' time has fallen into a grim totalitarian regime.

Media "All-Out" Policy Record in Eritrea

Given the grievous accord of current media-related situation in Eritrea, a question rises: how did the once-promising newly created prodemocratic nation turn into a violent and abusive authoritarian, if not totalitarian, single-ruled regime?

The origins of this phenomenon can be traced back to the colonial era. The "Eritrean problem", that spiralled to a violent shutdown of all independent media today, has been created artificially by the European colonial powers, however ignored this fact may seem today with both sides silencing it: "The problem of Eritrea was created by Italian colonialism…Eritrea represents a paradoxical case of a country denying parts of its recorded history and culture because they do not fit present political requirements" (Ottaway 1991:70-71). Thus, after the colonial powers compromised over the division of Africa in 1884, Eritrea became a territory that has not only been under colonial governance, but also a "bargaining item" for the ruling Italian and British administration.
This added to both insecurity and the increase of nationalist sentiment in Eritrea, which did not fade with the liberation of Africa in 1960, as Eritrea was first transferred to Ethiopian rule in 1958 with power of regional autonomy, and then simply annexed by the Ethiopian regime in 1962 (see more in Dilebo 1974). The situation aggravated in the 1960s, with Eritrean Liberation Front being created in exile in 1958 to struggle against imposed Ethiopian rule. The first major Eritrea-Ethiopia tensions that involved a crackdown on the Eritrean press peaked when Ethiopia annexed Eritrea in 1962 (Allen and Seaton, 1999). From 1962 until the referendum and independence of Eritrea in 1993, Ethiopia continuously banned Eritrean political parties, closed some of the vocal gutter press, and arrested journalists who raised concerns about Ethiopia's hegemony (Jacquin-Berdal and Plaut, 2005). Throughout the period under President Haile Mariam Mengistu (1974 to 1991), a protracted civil conflict cost an estimated 100,000 people their lives, and more than 50 journalists were imprisoned or disappeared inside the country (Allen and Seaton, 1999; Fessehatzion, 2003). Furthermore, the programme of the top executive office of Ethiopia in 1970-1990s, the Derg, did not in fact implement the declared concept of "equal nationalities" having a natural right to independence or self-government. This implied that "full independence to any of the regional independence movements could not be an issue" (Olsen 1991:26). All these activities of the Derg led to a dramatic rise in guerilla activities in Eritrea. By 1977 the Eritrean guerilla movements were as strong as ever and in control of all Eritrea apart from the cities of Asmara and Massawa (Halliday & Molyneux 1981:171-193). Even long after granting independence to Eritrea under international pressure, the Ethiopian government continued the anti-Eritrean media campaign (Simon, 2006). In 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the Ethiopian Mengistu regime, which escalated the conflict with Eritrean separatists and weakened the military's supremacy (Abbink, 1994). Eritrea managed to gain its independence in 1993, but "discord between the neighboring states has continued since then" (Kalyango, Vultee 2012:122).

The role of media (i.e., radio broadcasting) was crucial throughout 30 years' period of Eritrea' independence struggle. It was also seen as a fundamental element of constucting and maintaining a wide and secretive instant communication network for the ELF/EPLF freedom fighters in the 1990s, and it proved to be one of the most important elements of ELF/EPLF victory overall: "One of the reasons contributing to the movement's success was its use of clandestine radio broadcasting" (Downer 1993:93). In fact, this was a move to unite all eritreans: "The ELF was the first to use radio broadcasting in the Eritrean struggle. In 1966, it broadcast from Radio Damascus in Syria and about a decade later began its own station, the Voice of the Eritrean Revolution. The EPLF started the Voice of the Broad Masses in Eritrea, and during the heaviest fighting in 1980-81, kept the world informed about the events" (Downer 1993: 98-99). As

concluded by modern researchers, "The EPLF's main achievement was to mobilise the people – half of them Christian, half Muslim, from nine distinct ethnic groups – into a highly-motivated, remarkably well-disciplined force" (Connell 2005:70). In 1993 Eritrea was granted independence basing on the popular census. The leader of the Front – Isayas Afeworki – became the President of temporary transitional government of Eritrea, with the Front accessing into power and changing the name to National Front for Democracy and Justice.

At first, all the activities of the ELF/EPLF seemed to be aiming at following the democratic path – "the Front worked to liberate women, workers and peasant farmers from centuries of grinding poverty, chronic hunger and unspeakable oppression. In fact, it was experiments with land and marriage reform and the provision of services like agricultural extension, primary education, adult literacy and village-level public health in the liberated areas, implemented in a highly participatory manner, that motivated such large numbers of peasant farmers, workers, women and youth to join the struggle" (Connell 2005:70).

However, clandestine radio and other secretive means of uniting for liberation as instruments of guiding and inspiring during the struggle for independence, may later turn into dangerous opponents for the ruling regime of Eritrea, thus causing unrest within the country and undermining the sole authority of the ruling executives:

"…Indigenous stations operate from within the country. They can use either fixed-site, non-portable transmitters or portable ones. The advantage of the fixed-site, high-power transmitter is the ability to broadcast over a larger area. The high-power transmitter also gives greater control over the broadcast messages. This type of station is, for obvious reasons, most threatening to the government, since its very existence symbolizes the fact that the government does not have control over its own territory. It further enhances popular support for the movement among the country's citizens" (Downer 1993:99)

Unsurprisingly, this secretive "… pattern of behaviour, established in the liberation movement in the 1970s and 1980s, held true for the government in the 1990s and obtains today" (Connell 2005: 72-73). Soon after war for independence was over, ex-combatants were "relocated" to political posts within a large system of public administration in the newly formed government of Eritrea, thus contributing to the spirit of "militarism" and military-like ideals within the civil service of the country – and these were and still are the people who are in charge of all media-related policies:

"As in many other African states, Eritrea's civil service is politicized. Former combatants, who contributed to the country's struggle for independence, have been rewarded with positions in public sector organizations as well as in the new ministries. … The allocation of positions has not always been in keeping with the specific technical qualifications or administrative capabilities of the ex-combatants. This, in addition to their political background, may explain that ex-combatants can be found among all parts of Eritrea's public and governmental sector, including the strategic apex…Clearly, these are not very good conditions in which to optimize the performance of Eritrea's public administration and its civil service in particular" (Soeters and Tessema 2004:624).

However, the people failed to see the real picture up until early 2000. Before that time, the majority of population was living in a kind of a media-ispired political dream:

"A three-year, highly-participatory constitution-making process produced a legal foundation for the articulation, exercise and future contestation of basic civil and human rights. Despite its flaws, the manner in which it was produced, involving tens of thousands of Eritreans at home and abroad in discussions on what rights they held dear and what they wanted from their newly created state, added value beyond the document itself. And it fed the dream held by many liberation-era veterans that Eritrea was on the road, however rocky, towards the development of a popular democracy that would come to operate transparently within a defined legal framework once the country passed the transitional stage" (Connell 2005:74).

The discriminative practices of hunting down the dissidents flared with the renewed war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998-2000: "First Ethiopia and then Eritrea rounded up and deported people whose ethnic origins – sometimes going back two generations – identified them with their foe, regardless of whether they were legally citizens of the country from which they were being ousted" (Connell 2005:75; also Spencer D., Spencer W., with Hoggang Yang 1992). Even

primary education dissemination activities were aimed at averting Ethiopian influence during conflict and postconflict period; there were obsious testimonies of "a good history of running literacy campaigns" agains Ethiopian rule (Murthy 2006:56). In a wider context, all media sources were exploited to achieve a common anti-Ethiopian and pro-Eritrean government sentiment: "TV, radio and internet-based programmes on "awareness"" (Murthy :67). In fact, this was pure political manipulation to secure incumbent rule and exclude even potential attempts of public protests. This was not Eritrea's unique experience, though, as these practices have become common to North-East Africa states in 1990s: "State propaganda on national media escalated the ethnic civil conflicts that culminated in genocide in 1994, during Rwanda's guerrilla war, and Ethiopia's border conflicts with Eritrea and Somalia in 1993 and 1994" (Kalyango, Vultee 2012:119-120).

Freedom of press was declared in Eritrea in 1998 and a Constitution adopted in 1997, but no elections were held ever since. All opposition parties of Eritrea today exist and operate only in Eritrean diasporas abroad. These issues alone helped to avert people's opinion about the path the Eritrean regime initially following: "As the situation worsened in Eritrea, the post-liberation haze of euphoria began to fade. Eritrea went into lock-down. Its borders were closed, communication with the outside world was forbidden, travel abroad without state approval was not allowed. Men and women between the ages of 18 and 40 could be called up for indefinite national service. A shoot-to-kill policy was put in operation for anyone crossing the border into Ethiopia" (Index on Censorship Special Report 2016:46).

The pathway towards a now-totalitarian regime of Eritrea was gradual and not straightforward: "What was needed under these conditions, those close to Isaias [Afeworki – the current President of Eritrea] argued, was 'guided democracy' in which an enlightened few would make the key decisions about Eritrea's future and involve the general population (and the rest of the movement) in those decisions largely by mobilising people post hoc to implement them" (Connell 2005:74). Following a harsh shutdown of Asmara University' mass student protests in 2001, the executives turned to an all-out war against any independent thought in a wider country context.

At present, the game of media suppression in Eritrea is being played by the government agencies with the help of both psychological manipulation and physical oppresion – "…attempt to employ fragments of anti-imperialist, postcolonial and cultural relativity discourses to justify the subjugation of other peoples" (Holscher and Berhane 2008:320). This originally focused on the media sector, which became the main target of state-run crusade on freedom: "On 18 and 19 September 2001, the Eritrean government initiated a sweeping crackdown on its high-level critics…Shortly after this crackdown, the government closed all the private newspapers in the country and began arresting others associated with…expressions of dissent during the previous year. The justification was that those arrested – and the press – had been a fifth column for Ethiopia, though no formal charges were brought, no evidence presented, no trials conducted and no explanations ever offered" (Connell 2005: 77). 18 September 2001 is now seen as the "Black day" for all the independent media in Eritrea, both national and international:

"On 18 September 2001, the government led by Issayas Afeworki, a former hero of the Eritrean revolution turned dictator, rounded up all the opposition members who had dared to publish an open letter in the privately-owned media calling on the government to implement the constitution and hold elections. The editors of all the independent print media were arrested a week later. Held in Asmara without being tried or charged, they went on hunger strike. In order to hide them from their outraged families and fellow citizens, the authorities transferred them to the remote EiraEiro detention centre. Their families have not seen them since then" (Reporters Without Borders September 21, 2016, Accessed December 21, 2016).

The hunt on independent media never stopped in 2001, and it is in full swing today: "But from 2001, the real crackdown began and independent newspapers such as Setit, Tsigenai, and Keste Debena, were shut down. In raids journalists from these papers were arrested en masse…No

independent domestic news agency has operated in Eritrea since 2001, the same year the country's last accredited foreign reporter was expelled" (Index on Censorship Special Report 2016:46). A sad side-effect of the crackdown on all media in Eritrea has evolved in 2000s, affecting the inner psychological attitudes of Eritreans towards foreigners, as well as to each other, thus adding to the spirit of violence and aggression in all spheres of society:

"By the middle of 2004, visitors reported that residents of Asmara, long noted for their outspoken character, spoke of politics only in hushed tones and clipped utterances…More disturbing, the people, once noted for their generosity and openness to outsiders but fed on a steady diet of anti-foreigner propaganda since 2001, had begun to turn aggressively xenophobic toward outsiders, blaming them for their increasingly desperate plight. All foreigners are now required to get special permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to travel outside Asmara. Few do so, leaving most of the country cut off from contact with the outside world and informed about it only through party cadres and government-controlled print and broadcast media" (Connell 2005: 76-77).

Historical pathway dependancy exhibits itself very clearly in this context: as Eritreans have long lived under suppression – ruled by the colonial authorities of Italy and Britain, and by the Ethiopian regime afterwards – they have actually never experienced any other pattern on rule, which would icnlude respect and protection of human rights and freedoms. Moreover, the long-term psychology of the "sieged fortress" that is to be defended at all costs, also fuelled the idea of inevitability of a strong single-man rule, sacrificing all freedoms for an only and just cause of the whole political process in the country even after gaining independence.

General context of internal political transformations in the region

Having an overall view of the way of declining of once-promised freedoms to Eritrean people to a violent suppression of all forms of dissent in society with an ongoing huntdown on national and international independent media coverage, it is important to see a wider international political context that has contributed to the present-day situation in Eritrea.

After the end of the Cold War the global political agenda has shifted towards the issues, previously regarded as those of "lower importance" in comparison with "high security" issues, such as global full-scale superpower rivalry (Armstrong 2004: 329).

First of all, problems of internal political development of African states, which accidentally were positioned in the center of diverging international tendencies, received the full focus of attention: «Two opposite tendencies determine current processes: on the one hand, the intertwining of modern societies as a result of globalization, deters mechanisms of democratic control of a nation-state, which itself is an outdated issue. On the other hand, new technologies of electronic communication offer all citizens such a broad access to information, that it growingly hardens the further existence of authoritarian political regimes» (Kaiser 1998: 6).

Alongside, a thesis that the type of regime invariably influences economic development of the whole region has received recognition in the academia at that time (Schedler 2002; Spears 2002). Despite numerous debates on correlation between internal and external factors of influence on the poor economic performance of the African countries, experts in development problems have come to understanding that the «quality of national governance influences the speed of development of the country» (Tierry 2002). This provoked interest both from regional studies experts and global political trends' analysts. As Wilson E. put it, «today we need such an interdisciplinary approach to studying political transformations in Africa, which would be based upon empirical data, took account of the history of development of this region and its specific features» (Wilson 1994: 253).

The threshold of centuries has led researchers into assuming that it was the State that centered the whole structure of post-Cold War international relations and international security systems, and this fact fuelled the discourse while excluding any focus on non-state players' influences on global politics (Coward 2006: 55). In this respect, the situation in Africa looks quite dissimilar: in contrast to the developed countries' trend to weaken the role of the State, in

Africa it is primarily the State that can influence both local and regional contexts of security. This adds significance to the process of political transformation in the region, as the State remains the focal element of political structure of African countries. Decades after gaining independence for the African states it became manifest that «first leaders of the free countries did not realize the fact that in majority of cases the countries they had under their leadership were a mix of disintegrated local communities with diverging systems of subjection (power distribution), as well as no account was given to the limits of available resources and opportunities» (Austin 1984: 15).

Meanwhile, several waves of conflicts emerged in local areas of the continent and gradually took over regions and subregions of Africa. This provokes a thought that African "hot spots" are not only points of concurrence of interests and bilateral diplomatic and economic concerns, but these are the "knots of conflicts", which were created through transformation of local conflict into a transboundary one, and then into a neighboring country's conflict and so on. Such process is dangerous, as it tends to grow up the "waves of conflicts", which can overtake the whole continent. A local territorial conflict, which was generated by the two parties in one state, thus acquires a self-sustaining logic, dynamic and speed. This situation may be a showcase for a global tendency of transformation of local conflicts into regional ones (Huth 2002; Brown 2003; Lemke 2002).

At the beginning of 21st century, many African countries were forced to develop their competitive abilities and modernize their political structures. This was mainly due to the pressures of globalization, as these countries were to initiate the opening or developing of their societies and thus strengthen regulatory systems within the states (Kaiser 1998: 4). For many underdeveloped countries globalization meant forced adaptation, as their volatile political systems with strong leniencies towards central authority and power cartels narrowed the space for reformers and building wide-scale political coalitions (Yanning 1998: 27).

Media became one of the crucial factors of these poltiical transformations, often called "decmocratic transits": "Broadcasting has been one of Africa's major forces for social and political mobilization, though the role of media in the democratization process has been slow to develop. Radio and television were often used to promote development and public health goals" (Kalyango, Vultee 2012:122). A special role then was attributed to more independent newspapers which were originally a prime source of information for decision-making elites, and radio, though seen as 'the people's medium', has only rarely "fulfilled the democratic potential embedded in these thoughts" (Van der Veur, 2002: 81). As a result, Africa today can be characterized as the most politically disintegrated continent.

This leads towards a question of how the political transformations of 1990-2000s influenced the present-day situation in Eritrea as it is one of the most illustrative cases of democratic-turned-authoritarian (if not totalitarian) rule with severest fight on media freedoms in the world?

The context for statebuidling in Eritrea in the 1990s was worsened by the fact that the accounted weakening of state-centered model of international relations, which was predominant in the political discourse during the Cold War period, has already been refuted at the time when Africa at large saw the rise of political powers, striving for national interests (Coward 2006: 57). Researchers have widely concluded that principles of transformation have had a strong impact on the international relations' system development in the 20-21st centuries (Cardoso 2001). Also, a once-spread argument that "Whoever controls Ethiopia/Eritrea can either control or directly influence events in Africa and the Middle East" (Zegeye, Tegegn 2008:266) which highlighthed the superpowers' geopolitical stance in the Horn of Africa in the Cold War era, has downshifted in the 1990s only to upsurge in 2000s on the wake of the global war on terror.

It should be noted here that African countries project an image of being very different from any other region. A focal difference between the West and the East in this aspect is reflected in tradition of recruiting of the governing political elite: in majority of cases, political parties and platforms in Africa are formed on the basis of patron-client relationships – i.e., personal relations between leaders and common members, clan-family relations, ethnic groups' ties, religious affiliations and other bases, which have no primary relation to the political manifestos or classical political parties and lobby groups. It is noteworthy that "African leaders govern under conditions very different from other societies ...they really operate in a social vacuum" - (Hyden 1985:36). The relations of subjectivity in Africa can demonstrate their essences in various forms: in some countries, people are strongly committed to their King, and therefore they provide him with all authorities to rule them; or their ethnic/family/clan leaders, who possess power only until they are entrusted with people's faith in their character without any permanent authority in their hands; or they entrust all power into a city/group of cities conglomerate; and in some cases, the object of subjection may not even be apprehendable to a white man (Wraith 1953: 13). So, it was quite logical that

"The new African political elite used the political mechanisms it is familiar with. And these are exactly the personalized mechanisms of power which originate from the economy of affection. So, many of the new political leaders in Africa have attempted to create personal political hinterlands of their own by using public funds in support of certain groups of people or regions with whom leaders have ties of kinship" (Olsen 1991:22-23).

Surprisingly, it somehow evades the traditional line of historical-political thinking that the system of governance in Tropical Africa region originally developed according to a rather rigid authoritarian scheme. African countries did not follow the path of creating polises, communities or any other forms of pre-state rule with representative power format. Originally the African state as such (Lloyd 1981) was characterised by sacralisation of the ruler, economic and political-ideologic reciprocity, asymmetrical participation in the process of production of goods and a special form of delegation of power, which prioritises the principle of intimidation over the principle of consensus. Colonialism and the pro-western system of governance that was introduced by it were thus artificial to the African state and they were not rooted in traditional form of african governance (Kreijen 2004: 115-116). Attempts to crush patronate-based system of rule, which is so natural for oriental communities as such (Schraeder 2000; Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo 1998; Chuta Onwumechili 1998), proved to be useless and senseless, as they never led to the dissemination of democratic norms in Africa. This leads into thinking that clan-based political tradition, which presupposes only a "client-patron" scheme of power sharing is a characteristic feature of political process in the region on the whole. Despite the fact that the leaders of the region believe the improvement of governance in the region to be preferable, this does not automatically mean that these state are ready to sacrifice traditional and informal norms and expectations: "If we want to have a more thorough understanding of how politics has been conducted in Africa in the 1980s, I am convinced that it is useful to be aware of the special socioeconomic system which is represented in the so-called "economy of affection…which stresses the fact that the modern state apparatuses in African societies lack connection with the African peasant mode of production" (Hyden 1985: 22).

Many researchers believe that the process of democratic transit (also labeled as internal political transformations) in majority of sub-Sahara countries began in 1990. In L.Diamond's opinion, this process was entitled to free African nations from tyranny, oppression, corruption and the lack of real governance, - issues that were characteristic of political processes in majority of african states since decolonization started in 1960s (Diamond 1993: 3). It was assumed that many problems of african states were rooted in unresolved problems of the Cold War period. However, the end of the Cold War did not bring about the elimination of all these problems, as it was the case with the two great powers' standoff. African continent actually became a hostage

of security issues, as problems of oppression of rights of autonomous regions, poverty, civil and international wars and etc topped the agenda in this region.

Non-transparency of small states – a new phenomenon of world politics?

The case of Eritrea may be assessed within a wider international political context. For the last 25 years, a trend of small states becoming non-transparent and isolated from the global political game, has been developing without attracting much attention from both policymakers and academia. These small countries were simply ignored in the media and, as a result, in the larger academic and policymaking communities worldwide. In fact, what has gone unnoticed, shows some very interesting aspects in relation to present-day situation, - and the media huntdown in Eritrea is just but one of illustrative examples that prove this "new old" trend. So, what is it that has gone unnoticed in the small and isolated countries, such as Eritrea?

First, the end of the Cold War was marked by the collapse of several states. The situation was aggravated by the visible dilapidation of the role of State-centric model of International Relations. As an outcome of a serious deterioration of the State authority, local manifestations of nationalism have become vivid in countries traditionally classified as underdeveloped states. In these countries nationalism was a temporary substitution for the lost state identity. As a result, several countries, inspired by the wave of political transformations of the 1990s, opted for "non-transparency", which in a decade resulted into a sustainable phenomenon in world politics.

One of the features of non-transparency is the forced isolation from global processes and global economy, which has negative consequences for the development of these states. This is vital, as another peculiarity of non-transparency is the fact that such state lacks significant economic and political leverages and resources, and thus it can not avert unsatisfactory external conditions. So, non-transparent country(-ies) may opt for initiating a local conflict in order to attract international attention, which may catalyze foreign investment. The initiated conflict helps to create a "negative publicity" by drawing a formally negative image of a country at war, which in future may cause the positive change of attitude of the great powers. This was the case of Eritrea-Ethiopia war, as well as the case of Eritrea-Yemeni and Eritrea-Djibouti territorial disputes (Zegeye, Tegegn 2008; Westing 1996).

Some aspects of current non-transparent regime in Eritrea may be attributed to colonialism. A strong influence on the process of foundation of Eritrean political institutes was cast by the Italian colonialism, as well as a long period of Ethiopian predominance over this land. Italy made an effort to introduce the western political institutes into the colony, whereas Ethiopia cut them short of practically any form of representation. The Italian "experiment" was left unfinished with its forced withdrawal from Africa, and the Ethiopian influence resulted into a long period of standoff and the eventual seclusion of Eritrea. The point is that colonialism and the form of governance which it introduced, were largely artificial and were aimed at oppressing local population, which hindered the independent political development. Moreover, the substantive period of colonial rule has deprived these countries of the "mechanism of return": newly formed states couldn't return to pre-colonial governance after they have overcome the colonial rule.

In this respect, it is interesting to note a current discrepancy in opinion among researcher on what type of regime do we in fact see in today's Eritrea. Some call Eritrea a military regime (Hadenius and Teorell 2007), some call it a hybrid regime (Wright 2008) , and some even call it a civilian regime (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010). This is also a result of non-transparency of the regime and a total control over the media and the image of Eritrea it projects on the international arena. However, no doubt should exist in characterising this non-transparent regime as a

totalitarian one, since an all-out crackdown on all forms of dissent finalised the "non-transparency" status of Eritrean totalitarianism in 2001: "The limited dissent that had been tolerated after the independence war – a period that saw the appearance of a vigorous and critical private press, heated debates among government and party officials, the convening of an international Eritrean Studies Association conference with papers raising questions about democracy and development, and more – was sharply curtailed in the summer and fall of 2001" (Connell 2005: 76).

Another illustrative and paradoxical feature of non-transparency is that the state opts for seclusion from all international interactions even though it looses crucial investment into its ailing economy: "Eritrea is not taking advantage of opportunities that the Internet provides…According to the Foreign Relations Office of the Ministry of Tourism Eritrea, the Ministry has never advertised in foreign mass media…Interviews with Eritrea-based travel agencies during the present study revealed that none of them had a website. [Nor had the Ministry of Travel]" (Bahta 2003: 204-205).

The overall situation of non-transparency is largely dependent on the strength and efficacy of the state and its political regime. The State acts as a managing lever of the conflict potential of the territory, and in case of its weakening or failure the internal political processes become uncontrollable. Major dangers of non-transparency belong to the spectrum of non-classic threats to security, since they are derivatives of the governing capacity of the state.

A more dangerous and unclear feature of non-transparency of Eritrea is that it is increasingly prone to external outburst of violence as a result of internally silenced unrests: "It is important to realize that only to a limited extent are such systems open to outside political and economic pressures… peaceful conflict solutions will be difficult" (Olsen 1991: 24).

Also, it shadows the perception of media as a viable political instrument for building democratic society instead of the existing regime: "Although previous explorations have advanced our understanding of how people use media in conflicts and how press performance affects democratization, security, and other important factors, much terrain remains to be examined on how citizens evaluate their media in times of conflicts/post-conflicts in Eastern Africa" (Kalyango, Vultee 2012:120). Instead, state-controlled broadcasters are used by the Eritrean government to manipulate the public by inducing the most government-beneficial divisions and by continuously labeling opponents as terrorists and opportunists (Ocitti, 1999; Rubongoya, 2007). This only inhibits all peacebuilding and post-conflict efforts in the region:

"Poverty and lack of freedom make a perfect breeding ground for dissent and political instability. In this regard, both the Eritrean and the Ethiopian governments are prime examples of repressive regimes. This constitutes an extremely serious problem for both countries, as sidelining the civic sectors will eventually affect peace efforts. The process of peace requires the participation of the civic sectors of both countries. Suppressing space as an internal factor has a negative effect on peace efforts" (Zegeye, Tegen 2008:267).

Last but never the least, the non-transparency trend has grown into the routine ways domestic processes are operated: "…often vacancies are not published, indicating that the way people are recruited for specific jobs often is unclear. In addition, selections are often made before job announcements are written or vacancies are advertised" (Soeters, Tessema 2004:268).

In this way, non-transparency of the ruling regime in Eritrea has already demonstrated both its internal and external grievous features with many risks entailed in it both in national and international terms.

Conclusions

Evidently, the political transformations of the 1990s, which have influenced the situation in Eritrea, which was on the peak of national liberation struggle at that time, were pretentious by origin, as they were overpoliticized by the groups and individuals, which used these transformations in the "host" regime of Ethiopia, of which Eritrea was a part until 1993, as a pretext for legitimizing their dominance. A practical long-term goal of the incumbent government-led crackdown on all free media is the maintenance of the existing political status-quo, since it permits the government of Eritrea to save the foundations for the existence of the dominating regime.

Another thing is that in non-transparent authoritarian Eritrea the role of the military factor is still very high, even in the traditionally non-military sector of the media: "The cabinet did not provide a forum for debate or decision-making. It, too, served mainly as a clearing-house to determine how policies hammered out elsewhere would be put into practice. Even the military remained under the president's personal control, as Isaias leapfrogged his own defence ministry to exercise direct command through four theatre-operation generals, whom he had brought with him" (Connell 2005:73).

One of the principalities of the Eritrean case is the unwillingness of the state government to engage in negotiations and participate in international life. Even when Eritrean government advances to the level of international interaction, it aims at short-term goals only, - which is proven by the fact of formal participation in numerous international organizations. For example, Eritrea is a member of the UN and several regional organizations, and it formally exercises diplomatic and consular relations with many countries, which demonstrates a strong international diplomatic recognition of this state as such, however the regime it maintains within country borders. Moreover, the current vector of international migrations shows that in case of a humanitarian catastrophe or the abandonment of statehood in Eritrea the burden of refugees is shifted to the neighboring states, as well as to the developed states of the world.

In case of Eritrea the subjectivity of power, which is the foundation of legitimacy of the existing regime, is defined by the acting totalitarian leader. This 'authority leverage' provides the acting leader and his cabinet with the possibility to maintain their artificial legitimacy for an indefinite period. In perspective, after losing such a leverage, the leader of Eritrea will loose a chance to uphold 'phantom legitimacy' of both the office and the regime itself, which may lead to the outburst of the potential of distrust of the regime, and thus provoke social unrest. Given poor economic conditions in the region and the flourishing of non-democratic regimes in the African Horn region, one may well prognose a possibility of a new "Arab Spring" scenario in the North-East Africa.

The case of huntdown on all independent media in Eritrea demonstrates the threat of weak state structure, covered temporarily by the powerful authoritarian rule. A weak state is not capable of maintaining security of its borders – so, the conflict potential of the country or even the whole region may burst into a civil war. Moreover, the total non-transparency of the state leads to the creation of pretexts for the state failure in case of removal of a strong authoritarian\totalitarian leader, who acts as a center of the whole system. In its turn, the collapse of such a state carries a potential threat to the whole system of regional security, because it means the removal of one of its elements, which may lead to the upheaval of the whole system. The upheaval in this case will be worsened by the political and spatial vacuum. An international conflict with the involvement of a non-transparent totalitarian state may emerge because of the pressure projected by the political elites on the incumbent regime and opposition. This is aggravated by the fact that Eritrea has already gone through the stage of consolidation of a non-democratic regime.

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