

## **"Ethiopia's Groundbreaking Acknowledgment of Somaliland - Analyzing the Multifaceted Implications of the MoU"**

Ethiopia has long sought to diversify its maritime access, historically relying heavily on Djibouti for trade. The recent strategic agreement signed between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland's President Muse Bihi Abdi represents a significant shift in this pursuit. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) holds the promise of providing Ethiopia direct access to the Red Sea through Somaliland's Berbera port, a move that transcends mere economic implications by fostering deeper regional integration.

The focal point of the MoU lies in granting Ethiopia access to the Red Sea via the Berbera port, a strategic opportunity to significantly bolster its trade capabilities. This access holds substantial economic promise due to the Red Sea's importance in international maritime and trade. Additionally, Ethiopia's commitment to include Somaliland in Ethiopian Airlines could potentially elevate Somaliland's international recognition and economic ties within the African continent.

President Bihi's assertion that Ethiopia could become the first African nation to officially recognize Somaliland underscores the diplomatic significance of this agreement. In reciprocation, Somaliland has agreed to lease a substantial portion of its coastline to Ethiopia, solidifying Ethiopia's access to the Berbera port and indicating a mutually beneficial exchange.

However, the nuances of this agreement extend beyond celebratory headlines. Detailed negotiations will be crucial in delineating terms and conditions, including the specifics of Somaliland's stake in Ethiopian Airlines and the modalities of the coastline lease.

Moreover, this collaboration sets a precedent for regional diplomacy and cooperation, potentially reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa. It signals a new era of economic interdependence and mutual benefit, with Ethiopia expanding its maritime reach and Somaliland gaining increased recognition.

The MoU stands as a testament to the transformative potential of strategic partnerships of both sides, addressing immediate economic needs while having far-reaching ramifications for diplomatic relations, regional stability, and the broader geopolitical landscape in the Horn of Africa. Its finer details and implementation will be closely watched in the coming months and years.

### **"The MoU: Balancing Hopes and Uncertainties"**

The recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland has sparked a complex debate centered on Somalia's unity, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. For Somaliland, it's a pursuit of de jure recognition of its de facto independence, while Ethiopia aims to regain access to the sea. Rooted in history, these issues have evolved, intertwining internal politics, geopolitical significance, and international legal ramifications.

The controversy isn't solely about a port or navy base lease. While similar arrangements exist, the novelty of this MoU lies in Ethiopia's potential formal recognition of Somaliland as an independent state.

Somaliland bases its legal argument for independence on its past sovereignty, union with Somalia, and subsequent dissolution post-1991. It insists on respecting colonial-era borders as per the Organization of African Unity (African Union) principles. The international community's reluctance to recognize Somaliland remains a significant obstacle despite its past independence.

The 2005 AU report acknowledged the complexity, recognizing the need for stability while respecting existing borders. Some experts suggest pragmatic approaches, such as granting de facto recognition or representation within AU discussions, and acknowledging Somaliland's unique situation while adhering to border principles.

Somaliland's push for recognition is part of a broader effort. International recognition requires substantial support, often through negotiated referendums facilitated by regional and global powers. Recent mediation efforts between Somalia and Somaliland have shown promise but may face challenges due to the MoU.

The MoU's specifics remain undisclosed, leading to conflicting interpretations from Addis Ababa and Hargeisa. Ethiopia's stance on recognition and access to the sea and Somaliland's expectation of formal recognition highlight unresolved core elements.

Legally, the MoU lacks the binding force of a treaty, creating political implications rather than legal obligations. This agreement's significance lies in politics rather than law.

Geopolitically, the MoU could ease tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea but raises concerns among regional allies. Somalia's diplomatic rejection underscores opposition to Somaliland's recognition, escalating tensions.

Amid global competition and shifting alliances, the MoU symbolizes Africa's geopolitical importance, prompting a reevaluation of partnerships and alliances

### **The Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU Offers a Path to Prosperity and Recognition"**

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland brings forth a spectrum of potential advantages and opportunities for Somaliland, encompassing economic, political, and socio-cultural realms. At its core, this strategic agreement signifies a pivotal step towards Somaliland's economic diversification and growth.

Economically, the collaboration offers a promising avenue for Somaliland's financial development. Granting Ethiopia direct access to the Berbera port indicates a significant uptick in trade and commercial activities. This not only translates into substantial revenue from port fees but also augments the overall economic prospects by stimulating trade, investments, and job creation. Moreover, the potential development of infrastructure linked to port activities, such as roads and logistics, could amplify Somaliland's economic capacity and connectivity.

One of the crucial prospects arising from this collaboration is the potential for increased international recognition. The partnership with Ethiopia, a prominent regional power, potentially elevates Somaliland's visibility and status on the global stage. Being part of an agreement with a recognized nation like Ethiopia might pave the way for Somaliland to garner attention and prospective recognition from other countries and international bodies. This could bolster Somaliland's bid for formal recognition as an independent state in the future, underpinning its political legitimacy and sovereignty.

Furthermore, the MoU holds the promise of fostering stability and bolstering regional relations. Collaborating with Ethiopia signifies an acknowledgment of Somaliland's significance and potential contributions in the Horn of Africa. This engagement could cultivate a framework for peaceful cooperation, ultimately contributing to stability in a region historically fraught with instability and conflict.

Additionally, the agreement might pave the way for mutual socio-cultural exchanges and development initiatives. Enhanced cooperation between Ethiopia and Somaliland may foster cultural ties, knowledge exchange, and mutual learning, potentially enriching both societies through shared experiences and collaborations in various fields.

While the advantages seem promising, the effective utilization and management of these opportunities are critical. Diligent planning, transparent governance, and strategic utilization of the economic influx are essential to realize the full potential of this collaboration. Similarly, fostering inclusive policies to ensure that the benefits extend to all segments of Somaliland's society will be imperative in capitalizing on this historic agreement.

### **Reactions from International Actors**

The MoU between Ethiopia and Somaliland has solicited varied responses from international bodies. The AU Commission emphasized the imperative nature of preserving the unity, territorial integrity, and full sovereignty of all African Union member states, including Somalia and Ethiopia. Conversely, the Arab League stood in complete solidarity with the Somali government's decision to reject the MoU, denouncing it as invalid, unacceptable, and a breach of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial sanctity.

In a similar vein, the European Union (EU) and Egypt lent their support to Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, reiterating the significance of upholding unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity as per Somalia's constitution and foundational AU and UN instruments. However, the UN is yet to issue a formal stance on the matter.

The US State Department called for diplomatic dialogue to de-escalate tensions in the Horn of Africa post the MoU, reaffirming its recognition of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its 1960 borders. This call for engagement resonates despite broader global concerns influencing the US's position in maintaining international order.

Author Name: Gulaid Yusuf Idaan

Tell: 00252634420801

Email: [idaan54@gmail.com](mailto:idaan54@gmail.com)

Senior Lecturer and Researcher

Master's Degrees in:

International Law and Diplomacy

International Relations

Project Management and Planning