

Adopting A Federal System: Benefits and Challenges of Functioning Federalism in Ethiopia.

TEMESGEN MENDO¹, DR. SONAM MANSUKHANI²

¹ Jain (Deemed-to-be) University, Bengaluru, India

² Assistant Dean – Academics School of Creative Liberal Education (SCLE) Jain University, Bangalore.

Abstract- *This article examined the advantages of adopting federalism and the contemporary challenges of functioning federalism in Ethiopia. Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were used for the study. Survey questionnaires were collected from 384 citizens (Oromia, South Nation, Nationality, People, Sidama, Somali regions, and Addis Ababa city). The in-depth interview was collected from 64 key informants (legislators, academicians, political parties, and officials). The findings show that adopting federalism in Ethiopia has an important role and function. On the other hand, the challenge for practising federalism in Ethiopia is the escalation in ethnic-based conflict in the country, fueled by competing for ethnic agitation and the state's and ruling party's dissonance.*

Indexed Terms- *ethnic conflict, ethnic diversity, the federal system*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is the most populous country on the African continent next to Nigeria. According to statistics for 2020, the country's total population is estimated over 112 million.¹ Ethiopia is an ethnically pluralist society.² Ethiopia adopted federalism in 1995, and the FDRE constitution is the foundation for Ethiopian federalism. Ethiopia's constitutional framers aspired for a federal framework that would be politically responsive and successful while maintaining the society's ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. The desire to establish ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia is motivated to ensure that each regional state has an entire sovereign state and independence.

Federalism is an alternative device that has played a vital role in maintaining diverse social, cultural, historical, and economic characteristics in pluralist

countries, including Ethiopia. One of the essential importance of adopting federalism in Ethiopia is that the federal system plays a critical role in promoting decentralization, accelerating democracy, and ensuring good governance by removing the central government's monopoly on power. According to [1] the ruling EPRDF party claims that ethnic federalism was the sole option to politically reorganize the country, better the Ethiopian people's political involvement, and offer a voice to the historically excluded communities or ethnic groups. However, since the inception of federalism, many factors have challenged the function of federalism in Ethiopia. Among the challenges are there are unfolded conflicts in many areas of the region in Ethiopia.

Infect conflicts have many essences, which is why there is no single definition for conflict. conflict-torn countries account for more than a quarter of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa. Different actors make more claims and complaints inside their systems now than 50 or 60 years ago for different causes and factors..... A minor conflict that is not appropriately managed might escalate into a massive war and rifts among countries, causing enormous turmoil and unhappiness. Conflicts have a variety of causes, each with varying degrees of severity. The disputes were a significant source of concern about escalating ethnic conflict [2]. The Uppsala conflict data project there were 58 "major armed" conflicts in the world from 1990 to 2002, of which were ethnic-related conflicts. Conflict for someone is to get power, but for others to get liberty. Some are a struggle for his reputation, and others are for equality of identity. Federalism could help reduce inter-ethnic conflicts, particularly those aimed at controlling the political center, by providing competing ethnic groups with political and economic resources at the local and regional levels. Federalism can aid in the transformation of violent conflicts between competing ethnic groups for control of the

political center into intra-regional nonviolent conflicts within local and regional administrations [3].

There is currently no compelling evidence that the EPRDF regime successfully achieved a long-term solution to the conflict dynamics. Despite the rhetoric and human rights reports on 'ethnic wars' in Ethiopia and the occasional case studies, no one has produced an inventory of those local-level disputes and attempted to make sense of the patterns, if any, in public and scientific discourse. However, doing so and comparing the situation to that prior to 1991 is crucial because Ethiopia's new political structure was supposed to provide internal peace by reducing ethnic and ethno-regional conflicts, which were a source of armed insurrection [4].

In the eyes of the international media, Africa is currently the epicentre of unrest and conflict; as [5] stated, deaths after World War II were three times as many because of interstate conflict. According to [6], one-third of the conflict in Africa is along ethnic lines. There are more than 76 different ethnicities in Ethiopia, each of which has its own culture, language, and traditions. Ethiopian societies have a long history of coexistence, tolerance, unity, and solidarity. Ethiopians' culture, tradition, and language are all closely intertwined among Ethiopians. Ethiopians adopted the federal system in 1995. However, upon its inspection, many factors challenge the practices of federalism in Ethiopia. This article examined the advantage of adopting federalism in Ethiopia and explored the contemporary challenges of functioning federalism in Ethiopia. Hence, these articles tend to answer the following questions:

1. What is the advantage of adopting federalism in Ethiopia?
2. What are the contemporary challenges of functioning federalism in Ethiopia?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Benefits of Federalism

Federalism appears to be the most widely acknowledged form of governance for administering multi-ethnic governments to give each constituent unit enough opportunity for independent growth [7]. Federalism is a type of administrative structure in

which two levels of government share power with equal status [8]. The two governments, the central and state governments, are independent, each having significant autonomy over its functions. Local governments have only a limited amount of authority under this approach. A federal government's administrative powers are split between the centre and the units. Either the constitution specifies which powers the federal government should have and leaves the rest to the federating units, or it specifies which powers the federating units should have and leaves the rest to the federal government. Both the federal and state governments are independent and autonomous in their respective domains of power under a federation. According to [9] federalism is a constitutional arrangement to divide power among various bodies so that federated structures can enjoy significant independence over specific policy areas guaranteed by the constitution while they deal with agreed rules with wholesome without calamity over other areas.

Federalism is a political partnership in which the nations have formally agreed with each other in a written form. Adopting federalism has many benefits, more importantly with nations having divided societies in various ways. One of the reasons why federalism has so many benefits is that it allows political and administrative systems to be localized. Local administrations' smaller branches are located in the heart of the community, and at this point, the citizens are quickly getting service from their local administration. The federal system allows citizens to influence their government to deal with the real issues that need to be addressed by the government for better achievement. The federal system will not concentrate all authority in the hands of the central government but can increase public participation in decision-making.

Furthermore, by bringing the administrative system to the local level, federalism can help to improve service delivery. This can assist citizens in influencing their government and reducing administrative tyranny. One of the most critical features of federalism is that it serves as a deterrent to tyranny and overreach by dividing power between the federal government and state governments and disseminating it among three institutions that act as checks and balances on each other. The protections we have against a tyrannical, uncontrollable government are one of the most

important reasons the federalism system was built the way it was. There are various types of federalism, but the primary line is that they all involve self-rule and shared rule. Ethnic federalism, according to [10], [11], and [12], minimizes ethnic imbalance and regional secession, allows ethnic communities to self-rule, and therefore creates ethnic concord. Ethnic federalism, on the other hand, exacerbates ethnic disputes, escalates secession, suppresses individual civil rights, and finally leads to country disintegration [13] [14].

Federalism reduces the need for secession in Ethiopia by promoting self-government, according to EPRDF leaders and other researchers [15].

EPRDF leaders contend that ethnic federalism was the sole option for democratically reconstructing the country, increasing the political involvement of Ethiopians, and giving ethno regional rights to previously oppressed peoples or nationalities [16].

2.2 Challenges of Federalism in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been practising ethnic-based federalism since 1991. The administrative system in Ethiopia was highly centralized before 1991. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is comprehended of ten ethnolinguistically split regional states. In a federalist concept, all nations and nationalities have fairness and equality rights in the country's decision-making process. Moreover, the same is true: no ethnic group is superior to others in the administrative system of the emperor. In most cases, the federal system is a standard characteristic worldwide. It is widely regarded as the federal administrative system is a preferable system of government for ethnically pluralist countries like Ethiopia. However, from scholarly perspectives and experience of democratic federations, the Ethiopian federal system is pursued without any genuine democratic process.

Ethiopia is a federal policy. However, its national institutions are governed by the highly centralized EPRDF, which drastically alters the prime minister's decisions in the rural village. John Young (n.d.) also highlighted that this strategy is one of the tools available to the federal government in regional states to control or exploit policy. The ruling party had a well-organized party network that reached the village

level. With their determination to "employ & chase," the central to the local village seizes power and dismisses. According to [17], Ethiopian federalism has never achieved its historic goal of establishing common law and self-government. The ruling party claims it has aided the regime's divide-and-conquer strategy by pitting one ethnic group against the other. The federal system was undercut by the party's organizational ethos of democratic centralism and centralization. Although federalism is a national bargain between the diverse interest groups which history has thrown together,³ the adoption of the federal arrangement in Ethiopia occurred out of revolution rather than genuine negotiation of political forces. According to international human rights agencies, opposition groups, and intellectuals, the regime is becoming increasingly authoritarian and the federal system is not adequately operating [18]. According to [19], federalism is a tool for regulating and resolving ethnic conflicts.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Research design is about procedures for collecting, evaluating, interpreting, and reporting data in research projects [20]. It is the big picture strategy for connecting conceptual research concerns to relevant empirical research. In other words, the research design determines how the required data will be collected and analyzed, as well as how all of this will be used to answer the research question.

An exploratory and descriptive research design was used for this article. This research design is intended to follow the research methodology that will fulfil the research objectives. The sequential approach of the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods was deployed. The researcher can use a quantitative approach to answer the main research question. However, some of the variables in the study question need qualitative methodology. The quantitative survey questionnaires were first analyzed for this study, followed by the in-depth interview (qualitative).

A mixed research approach was used to collect and analyze the data.

3.2 Data collection

Survey questionnaires were collected from four regional states with a total of 384 respondents: Oromia (153), South Nation and Nationality People (78), Sidama (42), Somali regional states (60), and Addis Ababa (51). At the same time, the interview was conducted with 64 key informants (KII), namely, academicians (4), political party leaders totally, 25 (the ruling party 15 and the opposition party 10), elected representatives (19), and government officials (16) as key informants.

3.3 Quantitative Sampling Techniques

Even though the region, city, and districts are aware of the number of clusters in each study area/administrative area, no precise estimate of the population in each cluster exists because no national census has been conducted in the last 15 years. There has never been a survey to gather secondary sources before. As a result, the z-score method calculated the credible sample size and the number of participants or population size of an unknown population.

The participants were chosen using the following criteria:

$$n = Z^2 (p) (1-p) / C^2$$

$$n = (1.96)^2 (0.5) (0.5) / 0.0025$$

$$n = 0.9604 / 0.0025$$

$$n = 384.16$$

$$n = 384$$

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This thesis study aimed to analyze the importance of adopting federalism in promoting national unity and contemporary challenges to the functioning of federalism in Ethiopia. For this purpose, the following hypothesis and research questions have been prepared.

Ha. Ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia has helped promote national unity in our society.

Q1. What are the factors that challenge the practices of federalism in Ethiopia?

A one-sample t-test tested the hypothesis to know whether federalism promoted national unity in Ethiopia or not. The question was intended to know the factors that challenge the practices of federalism in Ethiopia.

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1: Democratic profile

Demo graphic Aspect	Catego ry	Freque ncy	Percent	Region	Freque ncy	Perc ent
Gender	Male	239	62.2	Oromia	153	39.8
	Female	145	37.8	Somali	60	15.6
	Total	384	100	SNNP	78	20.3
Age	18-30	138	35.9	Sidama	42	10.9
	31-40	203	52.9	Addis Ababa	51	13.3
	41-50	38	9.9	Total	N=384	100 %

Source: Research on Functioning Federalism in Ethiopia computed from the survey (2021)

4.2 The importance of Adopting Federalism in Ethiopia

This portion is essential to determine the significance of ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia. The 5-point Likert scale with a 95% Confidence Interval of the difference was used to determine the participant's opinion, as shown in Table 2 below. Three hundred eighty-four respondents were asked to fill out a scale from strongly disagree to agree 1 strongly disagree and 5 strongly agreed, respectively. In this regard, the researcher double-checked whether 384 people's opinions differed from neither agree nor disagree.

The number 3 in this paper is indicated in neither category (neither agree nor disagree). One sample t-test was used to know the significance level.

Hypothesis (a): Ethiopia's adoption of federalism has promoted national unity while preserving diversity. The sample t-test was used to determine whether adopting federalism in Ethiopia promoted national unity and helped maintain diversity in Ethiopia. The result is outlined in table 2.

Table 2: One sample Result

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Degree of Si g. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Ethnic based federalism in Ethiopia has helped promote national unity in our society	2.83	1.251	-2.611	.009	-.167	-.29	-.04

Source: *The Advantage of Adopting Federalism and Contemporary Challenges of Functioning Federalism in Ethiopia computed from the survey (2021).*

4.3 Factors that challenge the functioning of federalism are in Ethiopian

This section discusses the variables that are critical to federalism's practices. The respondents were asked to rank the seriousness of the issues from most serious to least serious, according to their views and impression (see Table 3). 107 (27.86 %) out of 384 respondents ranked the weakness of the institutional framework as the most serious challenge to the implementation of federalism in Ethiopia, followed by 104 (27%), which is the inability of the federal government to manage disputes between ethnic groups as the second most serious challenge to the working of federalism, and 96 (25%) out of 384 ranked lack of cooperation between the federal and regional governments as the third most serious challenge to the working of federalism in Ethiopia. Finally, the Limited role of the Legislature in decision-making was ranked as the fourth step or the least serious from the given statement.

Table 3: Factors that are a challenge to Ethiopia's federalist policies

Issue	Frequency	%nt	Rank
a. Weakness of institutional framework	107	28	1 st
b. The inability of the federal government to manage disputes between ethnic groups	104	27	2 nd
c. Absence of harmony between the federal and regional governments	96	25	3 rd
d. Limited role of the Legislature in decision making	77	20	4 th
Total	384	100	

Source: *Survey on Federalism and Contemporary Challenges of Functioning federalism in Ethiopia (2021).*

V. DISCUSSION

In this section, we will first discuss the result of the survey questionnaires (quantitative) obtained from the respondents of 384 and then followed by the Qualitative (the interview) result obtained from 64 key informants who participated in the interview question. Interviews were conducted with 64 key informants (KII), namely, academicians (4), political party leaders, 25 (the ruling party 15 and the opposition party 10), elected representatives (19), and government officials (16) as key informants. The question for the participants was similar to the survey questionnaires but with a different approach. In his regard, the first question forwarded to the participants was focused on federalism benefit in Ethiopia has regardless of promote national unity and solidarity in the society.

People were asked whether Ethiopia's adoption of federalism promoted national unity and helped preserve diversity. As shown in (Table 2), the mean value was 2.83, slightly higher than neutral (2.5). Accordingly, People who polled strongly agreed or disagreed with the statement that Ethiopia's adoption of federalism has promoted national unity and helped preserve diversity. $t(383) = -2.611, p=0.009$, the P-value for ethnic-based federalism in promoting national unity was determined to be 0.009, which is less than 0.05 at the 95 percent confidence level. This indicated that the statistics are substantial. It differed significantly from the neutral response number 3. The t-test resulted in a significant value of 0.009, indicating the result was significant.

The same question has arisen in open-ended interviews with key informants. A qualitative interview was conducted to ascertain the thoughts of sixty-four respondents who participated in the interview (open-ended questions). 95 % of the individuals interviewed revealed that ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia aided in promoting national unity. The interviewee expressed their opinion in the following ways:

"Federalism could promote national unity if: All nations, nationalities, and peoples could govern themselves independently; if nation, nationality, and people are treated equally before the law; If they are guaranteed equal political representation and

economic participation; and; If human and democratic rights, such as the right to speak, write, and develop their language, are respected."

Ethnic federalism is the only answer to ethnic diversity. The remark mentioned above is made not because of the adoption of ethnic-based federalism but rather because of the TPLF's underlying objective of "divide" and "rule" to maintain power. A popular TPLF divide-and-conquer strategy gives one a small pleasure while excluding and eliminating the other. Ethiopia is a country that was co-founded, evolved, and is united. Ethiopia has a history of coexistence, unity, and solidarity, and federalism can strengthen the existing unity in advance.

"What is missing in Ethiopia is not a lack of collaboration among individuals, but a lack of leadership that can work together." The federal system's values are cooperation, respect, and tolerance. These values are expressed in the FDRE constitution. "Ethiopians, nations, nationalities, and peoples coexist in various fields and levels... Ethnic federalism has aided nations, nations, and people in using their language, developing and promoting their culture and traditional systems. Adopting ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia, for example, could allow nations, nationalities, and peoples to develop self-autonomy in their languages, cultures, and religions. One of the founding principles of Ethiopia's post-1991 government, which came to power following a successful armed struggle, was ethnic-based federalism, which was informed by a neo-Leninist political model known as revolutionary democracy. By viewing Ethiopia as an ethnically varied country with a history of ethnolinguistic dominance, the EPRDF-led government implemented an ethnic-based federal system that was intended to encourage variety. Ethnicity became the conceptual foundation of the EPRDF governments for political organization and administration. Ethiopia became a federal polity comprised of nine states and two chartered cities. The ethnic federal system fully recognized ethnic autonomy while preserving state unity. Its new Constitution established a federal government that was primarily based on ethnic territorial groupings. The Constitution seeks ethnic independence and equality while maintaining the country's unity.

It is spelt out in the Constitution. For example, the preamble to the EFDR constitution tells us about the nation, nationality, and people. It demonstrates the extent to which the EFDR constitution granted rights to nations, nationalities, and peoples. It is evident in Articles 8 (1-3)⁴ and 39 (5)⁵. The primary goals of the FDRE Constitution promised to repair the unbalanced administrative system practiced by previous regimes, strengthen existing common values and coexistence, establish lasting peace, secure democracy, and build a common economic and political community. Individuals' and nations', nationalities', and peoples' rights and equality must be guaranteed to achieve this.

- The contemporary challenges of the functioning of federalism in Ethiopia

Our survey findings show that the institutional framework's weakness, the federal government's inability to manage disputes between ethnic groups, and the absence of harmony between the federal and regional governments have substantial factors affecting the function of federalism in Ethiopia (see Table 3).

The question arose for 64 critical informants for the interview. Thirty-five out of sixty-four (53 %) respondents claimed that the substantial factors affecting practicing federalism in Ethiopia are the weak institution, ethnic conflict, and federal government hindrance. Another 47 % of the interviewees believe the challenges of federalism's function in Ethiopia are related to the unfair dispersion of political power and resources.

"The main challenge for federalism in Ethiopia is failing to implement federalism following the Constitution. On the other hand, the weak institution is a fertile ground for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to apply the principle of "divide and rule."

Disputes over natural resources such as grazing and water are not uncommon in Ethiopia. Moreover, such disagreements were settled through talks with local negotiators, elders, and celebrities. What is being done in Ethiopia is entirely different. The current ethnic conflict resulted from a political conspiracy by the TPLF and its allies. They worked tirelessly to gain political advantage from the competition.

The federal government often interferes outside of regional interests and demands, resulting in mismanagement of the inbuilt division of power. Lack of fair political engagement, especially for minority ethnic groups, raises nationalist extremism. The weak institution resulted from the inability to perform federalism in Ethiopia. These are the significant events in Ethiopian history that have hampered the implementation of federalism over the last 27 years.

"Although federalism implies a fair political and resource distribution of regions, this was not the case in Ethiopia. The main reason is that a single political party, allowing the TPLF to plunder and perplex the people as it sees fit, rules the country. States are not completely sovereign and free of central government involvement in some aspects."

Politicians seeking power created the current conflict in the country. Conflicts in Somalia, Oromia, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, and elsewhere have been caused causing by the TPLF and its agents. In Ethiopia, the TPLFF has been involved in several inhumane activities, including incarceration, torture, and murder. "Ethnic conflict does not represent the Ethiopian people, nor does federalism. Politicians, political elites, and agents deliberately fuel conflicts throughout the country. For instance, people did not cause the conflict between Guji Oromo and Geadeo. "This is your line of demarcation," Guji's cadre said. The Gedeao cadre, on their own, stated the same thing."

Ethiopia's federalism has been challenged by the mixed administrative system led by the TPLF EPRDF, which is neither purely decentralized nor purely centralized. First, we must distinguish between our desires and facts. While desire is natural, the reality is defined by what we see and judge. It is not appropriate to compare Ethiopia, the United States, or other countries. There are no primary conditions compared to those of a developed country. America, for example, adopted federalism in 1787, Austria and Canada in 1867, India in 1950, and Nigeria in 1954. All of those have more experience than Ethiopians in the adoption of federalism. There are three sources of the problems that faced Ethiopia in practising federalism. The first is the historical structure of the Ethiopian administration before 1991.

The second problem was that the system that had been in place for 27 years had not been fundamentally focused on nurturing federalism and its principles. Desire is the third factor. The desire to achieve fully democratic and trustworthy federalism in Ethiopia must be needed. This is why the problems they encountered from time to time were not gradually resolved. Instead of emphasizing national unity, the entire country's politics and the TPLF aimed to divide the people.

Federalism can strengthen unity and social cohesion if implemented as enshrined in the Constitution. However, over the last two decades, so-called political scholars and activists have worked to undermine Ethiopia's centuries-old unity. Political and ethnic fundamentalists have instilled in their followers that their ethnicity, region, and religion are superior.

Countries with diverse ethnic, religious, social, and cultural groups are increasingly considering federal reform as a potential tool for maintaining national unity. Federalism is capable of resolving conflicting interests, autonomy, and territorial disputes. However, if identity issues are not adequately addressed, it should be noted that federalism does not guarantee peaceful coexistence. Ethiopia's problem is not federalism but political culture. The long-standing challenge in Ethiopia is a lack of a well-developed culture of self-determination. Another reason is that some people and groups do not believe in or accept identity equality. The TPLF EPDRF was the leading proponent of this ideology. For the past twenty-seven years, the TPLF EPRDF has propagated a nationalist extremist mentality in Ethiopia. These issues are not caused by federalism but rather by poor governance and politics. The root cause of the conflicts and misunderstandings in Ethiopia (1995 to 2018) was not federalism but the country's violation of democracy and human rights.

In some cases, questions were not answered democratically. In Ethiopia, for example, if someone wanted to form a political party in the last twenty-seven years, he had to be arrested, killed, and deported from the country. The principle of federalism can assure citizens that they can adopt, follow, and accept any ideology without abusing others. However, serious problems have existed in Ethiopia for the past twenty-seven years. The central government, for

example, meddles in inter-regional political governance and decision-making. Some regions served as watchdogs and were unable to decide on their own. When ethnic identity is used as a political expression to deal with socioeconomic relationships with other groups, it frequently results in a situation that blocks "rationalism" on issues of common interest and creates a narrow political identity, which leads to conflict. In the TPLF narrative, today is that ethnic identity has become the main agenda for all of their political discourse, limiting the possibility of reaching a consensus through political discussion, compromise, and peaceful coexistence. Ethiopians are currently experiencing political upheaval as a result of this.

CONCLUSION

Our survey data and interview result concluded that ethnic-based federalism is the sole solution to maintaining diversity in Ethiopia. Since adopting federalism, the Ethiopian nation's nationality and people have the right to practice and exercise their culture, tradition, and identity.

Countries with diverse ethnic, religious, social, and cultural groups are increasingly considering federal reform as a potential tool for maintaining national unity. However, if identity issues are not adequately addressed, it should be noted that federalism does not guarantee maintaining diversity.

Regarding the challenges of practising federalism in Ethiopia, the institutional framework's fragility, the federal government's incapacity to manage ethnic conflicts, lack of concord between the federal and regional administrations, interference of the federal government in regional or states issues, and lack of fair distribution of political power and resources are all key factors for the challenges of federalism in Ethiopia. On the other hand, the current ethnic violence results from a political plot orchestrated by the TPLF and its supporters. No evidence supports that the Ethiopian ethnic conflict has represented the societies in Ethiopia. However, Politicians, political elites, and agents infiltrate the country with the intent of igniting strife.

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- [1] See Ethiopia (2020), population data reported by the UN.
- [2] See Ethiopia's population, history and background on <https://education.stateuniversity.com>.
- [3] Regional governments are largely dependent on the subsidies of the federal government that affects the independence of the regions in terms of exercising their autonomy.
- [4] (1). All sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia. (2). This Constitution is an expression of their sovereignty. (3). Their sovereignty shall be expressed through their representatives elected in accordance with this Constitution and through their direct democratic participation.
- [5] A "Nation, Nationality or People" for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.

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