PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND THE PROSPECT OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN ETHIOPIA

Alefe Abeje
Lecturer, Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia

Abstract
    The principal democratic institutions in democracy are political parties. Party law plays a crucial role in institutionalizing multi-party politics. Institutionalization of a party system is vital for the success of democratic system. Unfortunately, several writers show a bleak picture concerning the institutionalization of African political system in general and the party system in particular (Lindberg, 2007; Bogaards, 2003). Given multiparty politics is a late comer in Ethiopia, this problem is perhaps more direr in Ethiopia. Observation of their structure, social base, resources, procedure of internal decision-making, and the like clearly show the weak level of institutionalization as assumed by democratic theory. Thus, they are less likely to fulfill their democratic functions in democracy. Given these problems, strict implementation of the regulatory regimes, especially in the areas of internal democracy and transparency of financial management, is an important in step towards institutionalization. But, there should be a delicate balance as heavy-handed regulation at early stage of party development may become counterproductive (Randall, 2008: 256).

Keywords: Party politics, multiparty politics, democracy, party system institutionalization

Introduction
    Following the seizure of power by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (hereafter called EPRDF) in 1991, Ethiopia has embarked on a dual transition, from authoritarianism to democratic regime and from a centralized unitary state to a federal system. The success of a federal system necessitates the existence of democratic institutions to deliver the promises and expectations of federalism such as autonomy and popular participation. Political parties, as the principal democratic institutions of governance, are meant to institutionalize both democratization and the federalization process. In this sense, as assumed by the democratic

theory, institutionalization of a party system is indispensable for the success of democratic consolidation.

The purpose of this article is to investigate how legal and constitutional context governing multiparty politics is conducive with the principles of multiparty politics and status of party system institutionalization in Ethiopia in light of established theories. It will do so by considering their structure, social base, resources, procedure of internal decision-making, and the like.

1. Conceptual Framework: Overview
1.1. Defining Political Parties

Given enormous varieties in terms of their historical evolution, organization, ideology, social base, and so on, defining political parties is a difficult task (Smith, 1996:198). However, there is a fair amount of consensus in respect of what political parties are and of their role in a democratic system (Matlosa, 2007: 19). A political party is often defined as a group of people organized for the purpose of winning government power (Thakur, 1995: 220; Heywood, 2006: 218; Mohammed Salih and Nordlund, 2007:19). For Mohamed Salih (2003: 68-69), the concept of political party in full sense entails "structures, functions, substantial following, and ideology".

African political parties, unlike their counterparts in West, are mostly ethnically organized (Mohamed Salih, 2001:4 Mohamed Salih and Nordlund, 2007: 144). African parties are also characterized by the presence of strong patron-client relationship between party leadership and rank-and-file members (Mohamed Salih, 2001:4; Marcus and Ratsimbaharison, 2005). Furthermore, they are often criticised for promoting personal squabbles among politicians and for being undemocratic (Blondel, 1978: 6), and for being highly hierarchical (Mushi, 1995: 12). Note also that African political parties, unlike their counterparts in Europe, emerged under undemocratic circumstances (Mohamed Salih, 2003: 2).

The major functions of political parties can be summarized as: nominating, electioneering, shaping opinion, mediating among groups (brokerage), managing government, and providing link between government and citizens (Mohammed Salih, 2003: 67; Smith, 1996: 206). Citing Randall (1988), Mohamed Salih pointed out four major functions of political parties: they endow regimes with legitimacy by providing ideologies, leadership or opportunities for political participation; they act as a medium for political recruitment, thus creating opportunities for upward social mobility; they provide opportunities for the formation of coalitions of powerful political interests to sustain government, have major influence on policies as a result of devising programmes, supervise policy implementation, and promote the political socialization or mobilization of people to undertake self-help activities; they provide political stability in societies that are able to absorb

increasing levels of political participation by the new social forces generated by modernization (Mohamed Salih 2001: 34; 2003: 4; Smith, 1996:199-201). In addition, Mohamed Salih (2003:7) notes that in competitive political systems parties provide 'the connection between the party system and government on the one hand, and between government and society on the other.' With in a context of competitive party systems, therefore, political parties are multifunctional institutions; they "can be put to almost any political or governmental purpose" (Blondel, 1969: 15). In a nutshell, 'the debate is no longer whether there should be parties, but whether the party system should be pluralist or not' (Doorenspleet, 2003: 169).

1.2. The nexus between democracy and political parties

Competitive multiparty politics does not simply mean existence of many parties in a country. Adejumobi (2007: 26) notes, "There is…a need to make the distinction between the existence of a large number of political parties and a party system. The former is a situation in which there are many parties but no meaningful party competition; one party is dominant. The latter is when there is real competitive party politics and democratic competition…A genuine party system is marked by the existence of two or more independent political parties actively engaged in the competition for political power and with a meaningful presence in terms of electoral results". Matlosa and Karume (2004: 10) classified the dominant party system as a system "in which despite the multi-party situation, only one party is so dominant that it directs the political system and is firmly in control of state power over a fairly long duration of time that even opposition parties make little if any dent on the political hegemony of a dominant ruling party", quoted in Brooks (2004: 1).

Dolo (2006) defines opposition parties as "partisan political institutions that are intentionally designed to temper the ruling party's excesses while still pursuing both legislative and presidential offices." For Dolo (Ibid), "an authentic democracy is one where the ruling party has an effective opposition." The existence of political opposition within a competitive party system presents alternatives to the ruling party and, therefore, stimulates debate within society over ideas and policies; and allows society to question the actions and choices of government (Mer sel, 2008; Tavits, 2008). Moreover, it is argued that countervailing forces, the most effective of which is existence of a strong political opposition, are essential to check transgression toward authoritarian tendencies and abuse of power by the incumbency (Giliomee & Simkins, 1999: 337), cited in Brooks (2004: 2).

The well-functioning of mature political parties is a prerequisite for sustainable democracy (Mohamed Salih, and Nordlund, 2007; Matlosa, 2007; Suri, and et al, 2007; Adejumobi, 2007:20). Political parties have been

recognized as indispensable components of representative democracy (Reilly, 2008: 3; Hicken, 2008: 70). Hence their role is often taken for granted (Heywood, 2002: 247). Schattschneider asserted that "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties" (1942:1), quoted in Brown and Bruce (2008). They are the main tool by which democracy is introduced and maintained in modern politics (Blondel, 1978: 5; Mersel, 2006). Without strong political parties, politics is reduced to unlimited opportunism and the blatant self-serving interest of politicians who may derail the nation-building process and the democratic entrenchment (Marcus and Ratsimbaharison, 2005; Haynes, 2002: 99), or greater chance for coups (Hicken, 2008: 73). Therefore, students of political parties have commonly associated political parties with democracy itself (Thakur, 1995: 220).

Political parties are crucial actors in aggregating interests and developing competing policy proposals that provide people with a choice (Paye, 2007:149; Matlosa, 2007: 20; Mohamed Salih, and Nordlund, 2007:19). Huntington notes that "the principal institutional means for organizing the expansion of political participation are political parties and the party system" (Huntington, 1968: 398). Besides, parties have roles to form governments, and finally, reach legislative policy agreements (Johari, 2006: 85). Parties are also a primary channel in democratic systems for holding governments accountable for their performance (Fish, 2005; Reilly, 2008: 4). Beyond these, political parties are also agents of democratic socialization, helping to indoctrinate democratic attitudes, thereby contributing to democracy-building (Scarrow, 2005: 9; Marcus and Ratsimbaharison, 2005).

However, as Mohammed Salih (2003: 71) noted, the democratic role of political parties is more of a possibility than a guarantee, depending on factors such as "stage of economic and social development, the political culture …" Parties in developing democracies usually failed to adequately play all of these roles in practice (Randall, 2008: 257). Marcus and Ratsimbaharison (2005) and Matlosa (2007) assert that they can even become an obstacle for both democratic transition and consolidation. In this regard, there are at least three characteristics of political party systems that have effects on how well a democratic government functions (Paye, 2007: 149): (1) their level of institutionalization; (2) their degree of fragmentation; and (3) their degree of polarization (Mushi, 1995). Reilly (2008: 4), for instance, identified a range of "pathologies" that weaken parties ability to discharge their roles in transitional democracies: 1) they are mostly poorly institutionalized, with limited membership, weak policy capacity and shifting bases of support; 2) they are often based around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, rather than reflecting society as a whole; 3) they are typically organizationally thin, coming to life only at election time; 4) they have little

in the way of a coherent ideology; 5) they often fail to stand for any particular policy agenda; and 6) they are frequently unable to ensure disciplined collective action in parliament.

1.3. Intraparty democracy

One dimension to the link between political parties and democracy is the political parties' internal democracy (Mersel, 2006). Mostly, existence of intra-party democracy expressed in undertaking three tasks: selecting party candidates, selecting party leaders, and defining policy positions (Ibid, 13). But an alternative, and perhaps the correct, view is that: 'a democratic programme cannot be advanced by an undemocratic party' (Seyd &

Regarding the imperative of imposing a duty of internal democratic structures the difficult question is to make a distinction between what is considered private and public (Paye 2007: 180). There are, however, convincing reasons for imposing a duty of internal democratic structures on political parties (Mersel, 2006): first, parties represent the society and major component of democracy. If individuals have a right to equality and liberty in a democracy, they must also have these rights within the bodies that enable them to participate in that democracy. Second, lack of internal democracy may be seen as evidence of external non-democracy. Third, political parties that lack internal democracy might oppress and control not only their own members but also the general public. The fourth rationale focuses on collective-action problems within a party. There is the risk that party leadership will not be supervised at all by party members (*Ibid*). Advocates for intra-party democracy argue that parties using internally democratic procedures are likely to select more capable and appealing leaders, to have more responsive policies, and, based on the view that parties "practice what they preach," using internally democratic procedures for their deliberation and decisions strengthen democratic culture (Scarrow, 2005: 13).

1.4. Political funding

There is an increased dependence of parties on public subsidies, which is seen as indication of the strengthening of the party–state linkage (Lars Sva sand and Widfeldt, 2000). In addition, their internal organization and external activities are increasingly managed by the state through public law (Van Biezen, 2008: 25). Thus, the increased relationship between parties and the state can be seen in two ways: subisides and regulation. The cumulative effect was that the parties become transformed into 'public utilities': While parties previously drew their legitimacy from their capacity to represent the key constituencies within civil society, they now justify themselves based on a conception of democracy that sees parties as an essential public good (*Ibid*, 27).

Increased regulation of party financing is necessitated due to (Van Biezen, 2008: 35-36): first, direct state subsidies inevitably calls for that. Second, the regulation of political financing is often part of a concerted attempt to at least minimize illicit financial practices and to enhance the accountability of political parties. Moreover, parties are now seen as most susceptible to corruption, more than any other institution (Scarrow, 2007; Hislope, 2005).

1.5. Party System Institutionalization

Institutionalization is the 'process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability' (Huntington, 1968:12). Citing Mainwaring and Scully (1995), Paye (2007: 149) notes that party systems can be considered to be institutionalized when: 1) patterns of interparty competition are relatively stable; 2) parties have fairly stable and deep bases of societal support; 3) parties and elections are viewed as legitimate and as the sole instruments for determining who governs; 4) and party organizations are characterized by reasonably stable rules and structures (see also Mohamed Salih and Nordlund, 2007: 59; Diego Achard-Luis E. Gonzalez, 2005:29). Fluid party systems, in contrast, are characterized by: 1) instability in patterns of party competition as new political parties frequently enter the system, and existing parties exit; 2) a high degree of electoral volatility3; and 3) political parties with weak roots in society (Hicken, 2008: 78). McMenamin (2008: 226) pointed out three major characteristics of an institutionalized party: the first characteristic is "organizational systemness", implying real organization, not a mere network, or façade. Second, it exercises "embedded decisional autonomy". Although it has links to society, it has substantial control over its own decision-making (Randall, 2008: 255). Third, it exhibits "value infusion", its members do not treat it purely instrumentally. The continuity and success of the party are regarded as a good in itself. Finally, the institutionalized party has a "definite public image and presence" as well as a "relatively stable basis of support".

Organizationally, there are two key features to define the level of party institutionalization: the degree to which internal decision procedures are formalized, and the extent to which the party has coordinated structures throughout its target constituency (Scarrow, 2005: 12). Organizationally strong parties are not subservient to the interests of ambitious leaders; they acquire an independent status and value of their own. Rather, politicians are dependent on parties for their positions and career advancement (Ibid). Second, institutionalization implies party structures are firmly established, they are territorially comprehensive, and they have resources of their own (Diego Achard and Luis E. Gonzalez, 2005:36).

According to Haynes (2002: 99) and Paye (2007: 149), under institutionalization party system, democracy is more sustained. For Haynes

(*Ibid*), institutionalized party system help strengthen confidence in the democratic process in the four ways: help moderate and channel societal demands in to an institutionalized environment of conflict resolution; serve to lengthen the time horizons of actors; prevent the dissatisfied groups from resorting to violence; and help to inculcate in the minds of the ordinary people that government is democratically accountable. In contrast, fragmentation complicates coalition-building and inhibits compromise on policy issues (Paye, 2007). This means a high level of party system fragmentation is detrimental to the proper functioning of democratic regimes (Birnir, 2008: 158; Binda and et al, 2005:15). In contrast, institutionalized party politics will promote moderation and mutual accommodation, and thereby democratic stability (Schamis, 2006; Scarrow, 2007). For McMenamin (2008: 227), funding regulations affect institutionalization in that they require a more professional administration of resources. Furthermore, an internally democratic party is more institutionalized because elections require a minimum level of organizational systemness (Scarrrow, 2005).

A lack of party system institutionalization can also undermine the ability of the voters to hold politicians individually and collectively accountable in two ways (Hicken, 2008: 78): "First, when parties are short-lived electoral alliances, when personalism trumps party label, when party switching is rampant, it is difficult for voters to identify who to blame or credit for particular outcomes. Second, even if blame can be assigned, weak institutionalization makes it difficult to cause electoral punishment. Another reason for concern is that, the combination of disillusionment with the uninstitutionalized system and weak party loyalties may provide opportunities for anti-system/anti-party politicians to rise to power (Hicken, 2008: 79).

2) Party law in Ethiopia

It could be conceived as "the body of state-based regulations that determine the legal status of political parties and that specify how parties may operate, must organize or should be funded" (Van Biezen, 2008: 30). For Richard Katz (2004: 2), party law: 1) determines what constitutes a political party, who benefits from public resources, who participates in the government and how; 2) regulates the types of activities that parties may engage in raising and spending of funds, campaign activities, party manifestos, etc; and 3) ensures specific forms of party organization and behaviour. The third form of regulation is perhaps the most controversial (Mersel, 2008; Scarrow, 2007), as this may interfere with the internal functioning of parties and impose conditions for the selection of officials, or constraints on the ideological content of the party programme or electoral manifesto (Matsola, 2007).

The body of party law is derived from a series of related bodies of law, such as laws on political parties, political finance law, electoral law, campaign law, court decisions and constitutions. Note that constitution is usually not treated as a source of party law (Van Biezen, 2008: 30). Constitutions of the established liberal democracies traditionally not mentioned political parties (Muller, 2000), owing to the fact that earlier parties were not seen as key institutions for democracy, and also because parties were seen as private and voluntary (Biezen, 2008: 39). In contrast, the newer democracies prescribe the activities of political parties because of a legacy of the past where the parties were instrumental in the establishment and maintenance of authoritarian rule (Ishiyama, 2001). Owing to this, many of the post-communist constitutions follow a "prescription model" of party regulation, banning parties from advocating totalitarian methods of political activity, or dictating that they must be separate from the state, and regulate the membership of political parties (Kopecky, 1995).

In principle, two types of party constitutionalization can be distinguished (Van Biezen, 2008: 37): the first defines political parties while dealing with the institutions of the state or political rights. The second is the formal identification of parties as public institutions. For example, constitutions may define political parties as necessary for democracy, either in institutional terms (when the composition of one or more key democratic institutions or procedures, such as parliament or elections, is defined in terms of political parties) or in functional terms (when the constitution defines the democratic system itself, or one or more key democratic principles, such as electoral competition, in terms of political parties) (Ibid).

Two types of provisions can be identified in the Ethiopian Constitution. First, the constitution defines the composition of one key democratic institution in terms of political parties when it says, 'A political party, or a coalition of political parties that has the greatest number of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives shall form the Executive and lead it' (Art. 56); 'Powers of Government shall be assumed by the political party or a coalition of political parties that constitutes a majority in the House of Peoples' Representatives' (Art. 73.2). Second, the Constitution enshrines key democratic principles, such as political participation, in terms of political parties when it says, 'Every person has the right to freedom of association for any cause or purpose' (Art. 31).

However, in contrast to the case in some countries such as Nigeria, the Ethiopian constitution did not "micro-manage" the activities of political parties. The details are left to a separate proclamation. In Ethiopia, it seems that the tendency to regulate parties stems from the totalitarian legacy of the military regime. As we will see it later, parties are subject to a host of state regulations and laws. These regulations range from relatively simple

minimum requirements for registration to more complex issue of parties' source of income.

The body of party law in Ethiopia is provided for by a series of legal acts. The main ones include: 1) the Transitional Charter; 2) Proclamation No. 46/93 (amended as Proclamation No. 573/2008); 3) Proclamation No. 64/93 (amended as Proclamation No. 532/2007); and 4) the FDRE Constitution. The Charter recognized freedom of conscience, expression, and association; the right to engage in unrestricted political activity (Arts. 1, 2, and 13). This provided official recognition to the existence and operation of political parties. These provisions further elaborated and reaffirmed by the FDRE Constitution (Arts. 29, 30, 31, 38, and 39).

Proclamation 46/93 provided provisions governing the registration of political parties whereas Proclamation 64/93 covered electoral matters. Proclamation 46/93 dealt with many issues such as definition, formation, prohibited acts, documents of political parties, finance, and dissolution and suspension of political parties. It says that all Ethiopians above the age of 18 can form a political party or to be member of a political party (Art. 4.1). Any member of a political party shall have, in accordance with the by-laws of the party, the right to participate in the meetings of the party, to express freely his views and comments, to vote and elect or be elected (Art. 28). The intention seems to ensure the organization of the political parties to be done on democratic lines. All office-bearers should be elected by members concerned for specified **time**. Membership of a political party is prohibited to certain public offices, namely judges, armed forces, and police force (Art. 58). The objective here seems to keep parties separate from the institutions of the state. As such this reflects an important legacy of the past, in which the WPE was instrumental in the maintenance of very authoritarian military rule. But, the Proclamation did not provide clear provision for the banning of certain ideologies.

Regarding registration, the Proclamation puts certain requirements. True, party formation requirements vary greatly between countries. In Ethiopia, in order to qualify as a nationwide political party, at least 1,500 founding members are required out of which residents of a single region should not exceed 40% of the total. The rest of the founding members, which should amount to about 15% of the total number of the founding members in each region, should be residents of at least four of the regions (Art. 5). To be registered as regional party, a political party should have at least 750 founding members, of which more than 60 per cent of the total must be residents of one region (Art.6). Party registration is the responsibility of the National Board of Ethiopia (hereafter called the Board). When applying for registration political parties should submit memorandum of association of the party, the political program of the party, the by-laws of the party, the

names and addresses of the party leaders, the document signed by the founding members, the document showing that political party leaders are elected by the general assembly, and the like (Art. 8). The law also contains requirements as to the internal party structure and the rights and duties of party members such as the right to elect and to be elected to internal party offices (Arts.28, 29). If the Board rejects the application for registration by the political party, the organization can petition to the Federal High Court (Art. 9.10).

As per the proclamation, a political party shall have basic documents such as memorandum of association, political programme, by-laws, documents related to ownership, property and revenue and expenditure (Art. 12). If a political party wishes to amend these documents, it shall notify to the Board. The by-laws of the political parties should include things such as conditions for admission of members, details of the rights and duties of members, details of various organs of the party and description of their respective functions, the manner of participation of members in the activities of the party (Art. 15).

The proclmation says that the sources of income of a political party are: a) membership dues collected from members; b) donations or grants by the Ethiopian nationals and companies in accordance with the limit to be set by the Board; c) the grant and support to be given by the government (Art. 51). The law prohibits political parties from engaging in commercial and industrial activity (Art. 53). Accepting donation or grant from foreign nationals, foreign governments or foreign political party, welfare organizations or non-governmental organization, religious organization, prisoners of war, terrorist organization, government organization, etc is prohibited (Art.52). Parties can, up on the approval of the government or regional state administration, collect money from events organized on temporary basis.

The proclmation also provides that the government may give financial support for political parties that have representation at the Federal and State legislatures for conducting their day to day activity and for election purpose. On their part, the political parties have a duty to ensure and notify that the support granted by the government has been utilized properly and for the intended purpose (Art. 44). The support to political parties must be apportioned between the parties based on the proportional of their number of seats in federal or state houses (Art. 45). The support to the purpose of election for federal or state houses must take in to account the number of candidates nominated by the political parties, and the number of women candidates nominated by the political parties (Art. 45).

The National Electoral Board is authorized to examine the accounts and financial records of all the political parties and make such reports public

for scrutiny. The political party should submit a written report annually or whenever the NEB requires signed by the political leaders as to the property and debts of the party certified by the auditor (the report includes the source of income and property of the political party) (Art. 19(4)); notification of leading members (Art. 21); keeping documents of political parties (Art. 22). The auditor of political party have the right to find and examine at any time any documents related with the assets and properties of the political party (Art. 24), shall perform their respective work ethically, honestly and naturally (Art. 26.1). Every political party shall have the responsibility to prove to the Board that its expenditures are spent for its political objective (Art. 55).

According to the Proclamation, certain conditions could lead to the suspension and dissolution of political parties. These conditions include failure to notify the Board when it changes its name, emblem, leadership, auditor, head office, and other similar change; when a party fails to submit to the Board annual performance, audit, or other periodic reports; failure to take part in two national or regional elections; and engaging in criminal activities as to be determined by the courts of law. The next part of the paper will discuss whether or not the legal framework propmotes multiparty politics.

The Status of party System Institutionalization in Ethiopia

The first major weakness of the opposition in Ethiopia is that they are personalistic and thus lack intraparty democracy. Broadly, personalism refers to loyalty to persons rather than to impersonal ideologies, institutions, or rules (Scarrow, 2007). Mostly, followers of political parties in Ethiopia identify the leaders with the party and show their loyalty solely to the party leader and not to the party's ideology. So far, only the statute of the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) included recently a provision of term limit for the party leader. Political parties often lack standard procedures in candidate nominations and leadership competition. They do not conduct their national assembly meetings regularly and the leadership lacks transparency in the financial administration.

Despite the existence of the organogram, such as general assemblies, and so on, on paper, most parties are highly dominated by founders and leaders. Functioning, preparation for election, merger with other par ties, etc are based on the interests of one or few leaders. The annual meeting of the general assembly is little more than window dressing. This apparent lack of intra-party democracy adversely affects the prospect of institutionalization in Ethiopia.

Another chronic weakness is failure to produce coherent and comprehensive policy alternative to the electorate. Opposition parties in Ethiopia simply emphasize the weaknesses of EPRDF and argue that they can run the government "better than the EPRDF." This seriously undermines

their social base.   Lack of viable policy alternative and strong organization affeted their outrech and recruitment activities. This contributed for a low level of party membership. Most of the political parties that came in to being after 1991 have no roots in the society. Many of the opposition parties also lack proper contact with civil society organisations such as trade unions, labor unions, and peasants associations. Given the aforementioned host of weaknesses, the trend seems, especially 2005 elections, a gradual disconnection of the citizen from the major opposition parties.

Women and the youth are heavily underrepresented in the political profile of political parties. Many parties have included in their programmes the need to address the problems of women and the youth. However, pledgees in this regard seems more as a public relations exercise as there are no concrete words done to increase women political participation in their respective parties.

Another big weakness of opposition parties is their weak resource capacity, both financial and human resources. It is clear that the secret behind the success of every political party is strong financial base. The inequality with the ruling party in this regard is huge. The opposition parties are even unable to pay for office rents. Compounding these problems is that the law prohibited donation or grant from foreign nationals, foreign government or foreign political parties, nongovernmental organizations. The idea is that foreign funding poses threat national sovereignty. Besides, there is a fear that foreign funding could also lead to the formation of the so called "party entrepreneurs" (i.e.individuals who establish political parties for business). Given the economic condition of the country, these fears are well founded.

Another problem is hostility and stark polarization between the ruling party and opposition parties. Within the opposition bloc, it is possible to present a mixed picture. They often tried to create electoral alliances to increase their chances of obtaining more seats. Mostly, however, they suffer from inter-party and intraparty conflicts.

Conclusion

In the post- 1991 period, Ethiopian political landscape has witnessed a democratic opening. For the first time in its history the role of political parties is recognized by law. Since that time the number of political parties has been proliferated in Ethiopia. It is clear that the federalization process also contributed for the consolidation of multiparty politics.

The success of a federal system and democracy necessitates the existence viable political parties. The principal democratic institutions in democracy are political parties. Political parties in Ethiopia have an indispensable role in maintaining and developing the federal system and ensuring the equality of nationalities and regions. Indeed, the division of

power at different levels of government can be equitable and fair only with competitive party system. Unfortunately, consideration of such important elements such as social base and internal organization of political parties indicate a bleak picture concerning the institutionalization of political system in general and the party system in particular.   The weak level of institutionalization is seriously hampers the prospect of democratic consolidation in Ethiopia. In practice, are not fulfilling their democratic functions.

With regard to the legal and constitutional framework, it is creates conducive environment for the development of multiparty politics in Ethiopia. By and large, legal provisions governing multiparty politics could is fair, credible, and up to the standard. The problem issue, however, is these are not translated fully into practice. There is clear lack of credibility on the part of the National Election Board in the eyes of opposition parties. Besides, the implementation of the regulatory with regard to issues of internal democracy and financial matters is very weak. For instance, the funds of parties are not audited from time to time and the public do not get information as to where parties get the funds and on what items the money was spent. However, taking aside the alleged intimidation of opposition parties by government officials and EPRDF functionaries, in reality, the major problem lies on political parties themselves.

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