

The Politics of Policy Formation and Advancing Ethiopia's Place in European Policy Making

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I. Introduction

Ethiopia actively engages European partners through various channels, including state-to-state diplomacy and using other mechanisms. The country has made notable progress in this regard. These efforts include engagements across various European capitals as well as outreach activities by Ethiopian embassies to think tanks, media outlets, and academic circles in key hubs such as Brussels and London. In addition, the Institute of Foreign Affairs under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also contributes research and hosts dialogues that support these diplomatic objectives.

Despite these efforts, the level of engagement during the formative phase of European policymaking remains in some ways limited relative to what Ethiopia's diplomatic capacity and strategic interests require. This formative phase includes the crucial period when campaigns unfold, manifestos are drafted, coalition agreements are negotiated, and the core policy positions shaping European-African relations for years ahead are developed. As a result, Ethiopia often finds itself adapting to frameworks that have largely been finalized by European actors instead of playing a more active role in shaping them from the outset.

Strengthening engagement during this earlier window represents a significant opportunity. It would enable Addis Ababa to move beyond simply responding to ready-made policy packages toward a more proactive role in shaping them. Such an evolution would build directly upon existing strengths, including embassy-level outreach and institutional research capacity. With targeted and systematic efforts aimed at opposition figures, shadow cabinets, political foundations, and think tanks, Ethiopia can better ensure that its strategic priorities, such as regional stability, economic cooperation, and security partnerships, are reflected more clearly in the policies that emerge from European capitals. This adjusted approach would enhance diplomatic effectiveness while remaining consistent with Ethiopia's long-term foreign policy goals.

II. Europe's Rightward Drift and What It Means for Ethiopia

The European political landscape has been reshaped, steadily and now consequentially, by the rise of the nationalist right. The June 2024 European Parliament elections confirmed what national-level results had suggested for nearly a decade that the center no longer holds unchallenged. The European People's Party consolidated its position as the largest bloc with 188 seats, but the broader rightward shift produced a parliament where far-right and national-conservative groupings collectively wield unprecedented influence over the institutional agenda.

In Germany the rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) has significantly challenged the Federal Republics post-war political architecture. In the February 2025 snap federal elections the AfD nearly doubled its previous strength to reach 20.8 percent of the national vote. It secured 152 seats and finished as the country's second-largest political force behind the CDU-CSU. This result reflects more than a temporary protest vote. Heading into mid-2026 the party has sustained strong support in opinion polls and remains dominant in eastern state elections. Its success has pressured the center-right CDU-CSU under Chancellor Friedrich Merz who leads a narrow coalition with the SPD. The government has pursued stricter migration controls including enhanced border measures and deportations. It has also adopted a more assertive stance on foreign and defense policy. While the CDU-CSU maintains the firewall against formal cooperation with the AfD the party's influence has shifted the broader political debate to the right on key issues.

France exemplifies the deep, localized normalization of the far right. While the progressive left managed to narrowly retain the mayoralties of the largest metropolises in the March 2026 municipal elections, Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) achieved unprecedented "territorial consolidation."

The RN claimed major wins and expanded its footprint into over sixty substantial communes, planting more than 3,000 municipal councillors across the French map. More importantly, the election proved the diminishing of the cordon sanitaire (the traditional voting pact to block the far right). Electorates from the traditional conservative right and the far right now mix seamlessly, positioning Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella as the dominant frontrunners ahead of the 2027 presidential contest while President Macron's centrist legacy faces systemic challenges.

While Germany and France witness the far right surging from opposition, Italy provides the blueprint for how these forces govern with absolute institutional coherence. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has successfully transitioned her national-conservative platform from a populist insurgency into Europe's most stable executive anchor.

Rather than succumbing to the diplomatic isolation predicted by various progressives, Meloni has leveraged Italy's strategic concerns regarding Mediterranean migration and regional security to pioneer entirely new external frameworks, such as the Mattei Plan. Rome has successfully proven that a far-right executive can challenge traditional donor-driven paradigms, and shifting to adapt to a transactional, interest-driven approach to foreign policy.

The United Kingdom traditionally insulated from continental populist waves by its First Past the Post electoral system has experienced a major political shift. Nigel Farage's Reform UK has challenged the post-war Labour Conservative duopoly. Following earlier breakthroughs in 2025 the May 2026 local elections saw Reform UK capture 26 to 27 percent of the projected national vote share. It emerged as the largest party by national equivalent vote. The surge inflicted heavy losses on the governing Labour Party which lost around 1500 council seats. This triggered an immediate leadership crisis and led to Prime Minister Keir Starmer's resignation in June 2026. Reform UK gained control of

around 14 councils. It has transformed from an insurgent protest group into a significant force influencing the national agenda and intensifying debate on immigration and related policies. These developments are not merely passive events. They represent openings that Ethiopian diplomacy can actively engage to better advance national interests. The far right's consolidation in multiple European capitals does not uniformly threaten Ethiopian interests. However, it does alter the language and the institutional access points through which those interests must be communicated. A diplomacy calibrated for progressive European governments, emphasizing human rights frameworks and multilateral norm compliance, will not translate automatically into a diplomacy calibrated for national-conservative governments that respond to transactional proposals, security utility, and migration management partnerships.

III. European Countries' Electoral Systems

European electoral cycle in the past few years is the most consequential in recent years for Africa-Europe relations. The significance lies in the cumulative effect of political transitions across Europe, which are reshaping the internal EU political arithmetic governing collective positions on development finance, multilateral institutions, and bilateral conditionality frameworks. Understanding these transitions in sequence reveals a set of connected implications that Ethiopian diplomatic planning needs to engage as an interconnected whole rather than a series of separate bilateral events.

Germany

Germany's February 2025 federal election, called following the collapse of Olaf Scholz's SPD-FDP-Greens coalition government in November 2024, produced a decisive CDU/CSU victory under Friedrich Merz. The CDU/CSU secured 28.5 percent of the vote, with the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) achieving its strongest-ever federal result at 20.8 percent — a result that, while excluding the AfD from coalition arithmetic under the so-called 'firewall' maintained by all mainstream parties, fundamentally constrained the policy space available to the incoming government on migration, asylum, and border management. Merz was elected Chancellor in May 2025 and formed a grand coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) under a 144-page coalition agreement that anchors the government's domestic and foreign policy agenda.

The coalition agreement is the most operationally significant document in the German policy cycle for Ethiopian diplomatic planning. It commits the Merz government to an 'assertive foreign policy', backed by a EUR 500 billion infrastructure and strategic investment fund. On Africa, the agreement reflects Merz's signature emphasis on migration management as the dominant frame for external engagement with the continent — but does not foreclose the co-investment and trade facilitation approaches that the CDU/CSU's globalist tradition has historically supported.

The Migration Management Frame and Ethiopian Positioning

Merz has made migration management the defining prism through which his government approaches African partnerships. His five-point plan for border control and asylum reform sets the domestic political context within which Germany's Africa policy must operate. For Ethiopian diplomacy, this creates a dual opportunity and risk: opportunity because Germany's institutional appetite for partnerships that address migration at source — through economic development, labour mobility frameworks, and border management cooperation. This creates a concrete entry point for Ethiopia, which sits astride one of the primary Horn of Africa-Gulf-European migration corridors.

The risk is that Ethiopia's own internal displacement and outward migration flows can be weaponized in German domestic discourse in ways that complicate the bilateral relationship.

One effective approach is to showcase Ethiopia's role as a key transit country and migration management partner. IOM data identifying the Eastern Route through Ethiopia as a major migration corridor provides the analytical basis for this repositioning, while Germany's previous support for border management initiatives offers a foundation for deeper cooperation. Thus, the Merz government's intensified focus on migration creates the political will to expand this cooperation significantly, provided Ethiopia presents coherent, data-grounded proposals.

The Agenda-Setting Window: Why Now Matters

The Merz government's Africa policy has not yet crystallized in detail. Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul, previously focused on defense, is still forming his Africa analytical framework. This is precisely the moment at which external actors with coherent, economically attractive proposals carry agenda-setting power. The German political foundation ecosystem provides the institutional infrastructure through which Ethiopian perspectives can enter this formative process. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung feeds directly into CDU foreign policy deliberations, and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has maintained an Ethiopia country office since 1992.

Key Actors and Institutions

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
<p>Friedrich Merz (CDU/CSU) <i>Chancellor</i></p>	<p>Assertive foreign policy; EUR 500bn investment fund. Receptive to transactional Africa engagement framed around economic co-investment and migration management. Ethiopia's positioning as a migration management partner is the primary entry point.</p>
<p>Johann Wadephul (CDU) <i>Foreign Minister</i></p>	<p>Previously defence-focused; Africa policy still forming —agenda-setting window. Priority target for MFA engagement. Proposals presented now will shape the foundational framework.</p>
<p>Lars Klingbeil (SPD) <i>SPD Co-Chair</i></p>	<p>Opposition figure within the grand coalition; internationalist development tradition. Key interlocutor for development cooperation positioning. Ensures Ethiopian interests are embedded across party lines.</p>
<p>Annalena Baerbock (Greens) <i>Former FM, now Opposition</i></p>	<p>Sets the normative baseline on human rights and conditionality from opposition. Her successor Wadephul's policy will be defined partly in contrast to her positions — understanding this dynamic is analytically essential.</p>
<p>Alice Weidel (AfD) <i>AfD Co-leader</i></p>	<p>Will not govern but sets migration discourse floor. Monitoring AfD positions is essential to understanding the political constraints on CDU Africa policy — what Merz cannot be seen to concede.</p>

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
KAS (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung)	CDU-affiliated foundation with active Ethiopia country program. Analysis produced by KAS feeds directly into CDU foreign policy deliberations. Transforming this from receptive engagement to reciprocal intellectual partnership is a primary strategic objective.
FES (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung)	SPD-affiliated; Ethiopia office since 1992. Works on political transformation, labour, and gender. Needs to become an intellectual counterpart relationship — Ethiopian institutions contributing analysis rather than only receiving programs.
SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik)	Germany's leading foreign policy think tank. Advises the Bundestag and the Foreign Ministry directly. Embedding Ethiopian voices in SWP research on Horn of Africa security and development is a high-priority access point.

Strategic Engagement Priorities for Ethiopia

- Establish Early Positioning:** Present migration management and trading partnership proposals to the Foreign Ministry within the Merz government's first policy formation year. Framing Ethiopia as an indispensable transit country partner, not a source of pressure is essential.
- Reciprocal Intellectual Engagement:** Transform the KAS relationship from one in which Ethiopia is a research subject to one in which Ethiopian institutions are analytical co-producers — contributing country perspectives to KAS publications that feed CDU policy deliberation.
- Cross-Party Architecture:** Use the FES Ethiopia country office as a conduit for SPD shadow cabinet engagement on development cooperation frameworks. Ensuring Ethiopian positions are embedded in the analytical environment the SPD is building for a future return to government.
- Diaspora Political Mapping:** Identify opportunities for voluntary engagement with members of the Ethiopian diaspora in Germany's political foundation ecosystems and identifying community members active in KAS, FES, AfD or SPD/CDU constituency structures who can serve as institutional bridges.

France

France's political architecture differs fundamentally from Germany's. The Fifth Republic's semi-presidential system concentrates foreign policy authority in the presidency, making the 2027 Élysée succession the most consequential single event in the European electoral cycle for Ethiopian diplomacy. Emmanuel Macron's second and final term expires in May 2027, with the first presidential

round scheduled for April 2027. The field of declared and potential candidates remains highly fragmented as the political factions prepare for the official campaign cycle.

The Rassemblement National's Jordan Bardella leads current polling at approximately a third of first-round support and is widely regarded as the frontrunner. This positioning has solidified as Marine Le Pen faces a highly publicized trial and prosecutors seek a five-year ban on holding public office—a critical legal hurdle that remains pending a landmark judicial decision.

The centrist succession to Macron is contested between former Prime Minister Édouard Philippe, polling in second place at 17–20 percent, and former PM Gabriel Attal. On the left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise remains a dominant radical force, while efforts to organize a unity primary among moderate left forces remain stalled.

The domestic political situation has also severely constrained the current government. Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu's cabinet has navigated intense austerity pressures and domestic crises while trying to sustain France's foreign policy ambitions. Recent local and municipal elections have delivered further gains to the far right, intensifying the domestic political pressure under which Macron's remaining presidency operates.

The Sahel Withdrawal and the Horn of Africa Opening

France's post-Sahel repositioning is the single most consequential structural development in France–Africa relations for Ethiopian strategic planning. The withdrawal of French military forces from Mali (2022), Burkina Faso and Niger (2023), and ultimately Chad, Senegal, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire (2025) marks the definitive end of the *Françafrique* military engagement model that defined French Africa policy for six decades. Paris, stripped of its West African strategic depth and legitimacy, now faces an acute institutional need to develop relationships with stable, strategically significant African partners in geographies where its historical record does not invite rejection.

The Africa Forward Summit hosted jointly by France and Kenya in Nairobi in May 2026 — the first France-Africa summit held outside the Francophone world and the last of Macron's presidency — crystallized this pivot. French diplomatic repositioning is explicitly eastward: toward East African economic heavyweights and Horn of Africa security partners. Macron's personal visit to Ethiopia starting from 2019 signals that Paris understands Ethiopia's strategic centrality as host of the African Union and as the anchor state in the region.

Ethiopia, as the host of the African Union, the region's demographic anchor, and a country with no French colonial grievance to manage, fits France's reconstituted Africa strategy with unusual precision. This structural alignment creates an opening that is particularly time-sensitive: it needs to be operationalized under Macron's remaining presidential authority, while also establishing the relationship architecture that will survive the 2027 succession regardless of outcome.

Key Actors and Institutions

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
<p>Emmanuel Macron (Renaissance) <i>President</i></p>	<p>Foreign policy authority retained despite domestic challenges. Post-Sahel pivot creates genuine institutional receptivity to Horn of Africa partnerships. Macron's personal engagement with PM Abiy is an established channel. Final 12 months of presidency are a window for consolidating bilateral frameworks.</p>

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
<p>Sébastien Lecornu (Renaissance) <i>Prime Minister</i></p>	<p>In office since September 2025 following intense parliamentary reshuffling. As the former Minister of the Armed Forces, he possesses extensive, granular knowledge of East African military logistics, defense cooperation, and Red Sea security. He represents the ideal executive anchor for securing high-level, practical bilateral commitments before the end of the presidential term.</p>
<p>Jean-Noël Barrot <i>Foreign Minister</i></p>	<p>Centrist diplomat steering the Quai d'Orsay through the current multi-factional coalition landscape. He remains the primary ministerial relationship target for state-level diplomatic engagement. Key entry points include structured dialogue on regional maritime architecture, African Union institutional stability, and formalizing bilateral investment treaties.</p>
<p>Édouard Philippe (Horizons) <i>Presidential Candidate</i></p>	<p>Currently polling second (17–20%). Former PM with strong institutional memory. If elected, will prioritise stability and continuity in Africa policy. Building relationship now ensures Ethiopian perspectives are embedded in his policy formation process.</p>
<p>Jordan Bardella (RN) <i>Presidential Frontrunner</i></p>	<p>RN President; leading polls. Building foreign policy platform. While building a comprehensive foreign policy platform, his specific Africa doctrine is fluid. Indirect approaches through think tanks, business networks, or trusted intermediaries may be more appropriate to share perspectives. Though ideologically opposed to traditional development aid, his camp is potentially receptive to migration management and co-investment framing and transactional arrangement.</p>
<p>Marine Le Pen (RN) <i>Strategic Force</i></p>	<p>Convicted; legal status under appeal (ruling scheduled for July 7, 2026). Remains strategic influence within RN. Shapes Bardella's policy direction. Monitor the developments.</p>
<p>Bruno Retailleau (LR) <i>Presidential Candidate</i></p>	<p>Les Républicains endorsed candidate. More traditional European conservative. If LR consolidates ahead of 2027, Retailleau becomes the right-wing alternative to Bardella.</p>
<p>Jean-Luc Mélenchon (LFI) <i>Left Candidate</i></p>	<p>Radical left; anti-interventionist and a vocal critic of historical Western security paradigms in Africa. His coalition's positioning heavily influences parliamentary debates on international development cooperation and multilateral financial reform.</p>

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
<p>Les Horaces</p>	<p>An influential, discreet network of senior civil servants, tech executives, and business leaders operating as the primary policy engine for the RN leadership. Because its members are anonymous senior bureaucrats, it cannot be engaged via open public partnerships; it must be approached indirectly through trusted intermediaries in corporate governance or think-tank working groups.</p>
<p>Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS)</p>	<p>The premier French think tank dedicated to defense and security analysis. Red Sea choke-points and Horn of Africa maritime stability align perfectly with their current research priorities. Joint publication initiatives serve a dual purpose: elevating Ethiopian perspectives while satisfying French analytical demand for stable regional anchors.</p>
<p>Quai d'Orsay Africa Directorate</p>	<p>The permanent, non-partisan civil service structure. This directorate represents the most durable institutional relationship across any political or electoral transition. It remains the bedrock upon which all long-term French-Ethiopian diplomatic, economic, and technical agreements must be anchored.</p>

Strategic Engagement Priorities for Ethiopia

- **Consolidate Under Macron:** Use Macron's remaining presidential authority to consolidate a bilateral cooperation framework that locks in Ethiopia's positioning as France's primary Horn of Africa strategic partner covering Red Sea security, AU institutional engagement, and investment facilitation.
- **Think Tank Pre-Positioning:** Engage various think tanks simultaneously: commission or co-author analytical pieces on the Ethiopian strategic role in Horn of Africa stability that will reach all major presidential candidates through their policy research networks.
- **Opposition Outreach Architecture:** Make separate, structured contact with the foreign policy advisers of both Bardella's RN and Philippe's Horizons before the April 2027 first round. Engaging shadow leaderships in various settings.
- **Migration Partnership Framing:** Position Ethiopia as an indispensable migration management partner for whichever government forms post-2027. For instance, the RN's domestic political driver is migration, and Ethiopia's leverage over Horn of Africa migration flows is substantial and that could be constructively leveraged in partnership frameworks.
- **Diaspora Political Mapping:** Identify Ethiopian diaspora members in France active in party branch structures of Renaissance, LR, and even RN-adjacent formations.

Italy

Italy under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni presents a qualitatively different diplomatic environment from either France or Germany. Meloni's government is neither in transition nor facing imminent electoral challenge. Elected in September 2022, the FDI-led coalition under Meloni has stabilized as Italy's most durable government in recent decades and faces no federal election before 2027. This stability is itself strategically significant — it means that the policy frameworks Meloni's government has established for African engagement, including the Mattei Plan, will be implemented with a consistency and institutional continuity that Ethiopian diplomacy can rely on for the remainder of this parliamentary term.

Giorgia Meloni has emerged as one of Europe's more strategically coherent interlocutors with Africa. Through the Mattei Plan, her government has promoted a government-to-government investment framework that emphasizes partnership over dependency. The approach departs from traditional donor-recipient models by prioritizing co-investment, mutual economic interests, and long-term strategic cooperation.

The Mattei Plan and Its Ethiopian Dimension

The Mattei Plan launched at the first Italy-Africa Summit in Rome in January 2024 and reviewed at the second summit, held for the first time on African soil in Addis Ababa in February 2026 is the operational architecture through which Italy's Horn of Africa engagement is structured. The plan focuses on five sectoral pillars: energy, infrastructure, water and agriculture, education, and healthcare. Active projects in 2025 reached a total value of between EUR 1.3 billion and EUR 1.4 billion, resourced through the Africa Fund, the Italian Climate Fund, and co-financing with multilateral institutions.

Critically for Ethiopian planning, the second Italy-Africa Summit was not merely hosted in Addis Ababa — it was co-organized with the Ethiopian government and aligned with the 39th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, at which Meloni addressed the heads of state as a guest of honor. The relationship between Abiy Ahmed and Giorgia Meloni extends beyond routine diplomatic engagement and reflects a well-established personal working relationship at the leadership level. Their frequent interactions and sustained political coordination have contributed to a strong degree of mutual trust, which has increasingly supported broader Ethiopia-Italy cooperation. This personal channel is an asset that the MFA must systematically leverage while it exists.

Italy's interest in the Horn of Africa is not rhetorical. Its proximity to the Mediterranean migration corridor, its historic colonial and post-colonial presence in the region, its engagement with East African agricultural and commodity chains give Meloni's government structural incentives to engage Ethiopia with a seriousness that ideological differences with Brussels progressives might initially obscure. Italian analysts themselves note, however, that 'Italy's stated ambition to secure major geopolitical influence in Africa is not yet matched by the scope of the Mattei Plan' — meaning that the plan needs Ethiopian demand and uptake to become the substantive anchor its architects envision.

Key Actors and Institutions

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
<p>Giorgia Meloni (Fdi) <i>Prime Minister</i></p>	<p>Personal relationship with PM Abiy established. Drives the Mattei Plan; her political identity is invested in its success. Direct engagement priority — Ethiopia stands as one of her most credible, stable strategic partner states on the continent.</p>
<p>Antonio Tajani (FI) <i>Foreign Minister</i></p>	<p>Forza Italia leader; more traditional European conservative with strong EU relationships. Key counterpart for EU-level multilateral positioning. Engagement on AU reform and multilateral development finance architecture.</p>
<p>Matteo Salvini (Lega) <i>Deputy PM</i></p>	<p>Anti-immigration domestic focus; less engaged on Africa policy. Internal coalition constraint on Meloni's international ambitions. Requires tracking for policy boundary purposes, but offers low direct engagement value.</p>
<p>Elly Schlein (PD) <i>Opposition Leader</i></p>	<p>Centre-left; articulate internationalist. Will develop Africa policy if PD-led coalition forms post-2027. Long-term investment target. Immediate engagement should be pursued quietly through academic and think-tank networks while she consolidates her long-term foreign policy blueprint.</p>
<p>Giuseppe Conte (M5S) <i>Opposition</i></p>	<p>Populist; unpredictable. Previously PM twice with very different governing approaches. Low direct engagement priority.</p>
<p>Farnesina Africa Desk (Italian MFA)</p>	<p>Technical operational counterpart. The primary implementing body for Mattei Plan projects in Ethiopia. Immediate engagement priority for Ethiopian Embassy Rome — structured quarterly coordination on project pipeline and new initiative proposals.</p>
<p>IAI (Istituto Affari Internazionali)</p>	<p>Italy's leading foreign policy think tank; close analytical relationship with the Mattei Plan. Establishing structured institutional link-ups—such as contributing Horn of Africa maritime and stability analysis to IAI publications—feeds directly into the broader Italian policy ecosystem.</p>

Strategic Engagement Priorities for Ethiopia

- **Formalize the Mattei Plan Partnership:** Present a comprehensive Ethiopian Mattei Plan partnership proposal covering energy (hydropower interconnection), agriculture (value chain investment), education (technical training), and water (shared watershed management). The summit in Addis Ababa has created maximum political momentum; delay risks dissipation.
- **IAI Research Partnership:** Commission IAI to produce a joint Ethiopia-Italy research paper on the Horn of Africa's strategic role in energy security and migration governance. This publication would simultaneously serve Italian think tank interests and embeds Ethiopian perspectives in Rome's policy ecosystem.
- **Strategic Partnership Designation:** Leverage the Abiy-Meloni personal channel to elevate the bilateral relationship to a formal Strategic Partnership designation — following the India model where PM Modi's December 2025 visit produced a Strategic Partnership agreement with Ethiopia.
- **Centre-Left Architecture:** Engage Elly Schlein's PD through IAI-organized research dialogues — establishing the analytical relationship that positions Ethiopian interests in the centre-left policy framework being built for a potential post-2027 return to government.
- **Diaspora Political Engagement:** Coordinate with the Ethiopian community in Italy — where Italian political foundation networks have active presence — to identify diaspora members embedded in political structures who can serve as institutional bridges.

Hungary

Hungary's constitutional framework operates on a unicameral parliamentary model centred on the 199-seat National Assembly (Országgyűlés). Legislative entry is governed by a complex, mixed-member parallel system: 106 members are elected in single-member constituencies using First-Past-The-Post, while the remaining 93 seats are allocated via a national proportional party-list system with a 5 percent threshold. A defining feature of this system is its 'winner-compensation' mechanic, which transfers unused votes from losing candidates and surplus votes from winning constituency candidates to the victorious party's national list — artificially magnifying a clear plurality into a decisive, sometimes two-thirds constitutional supermajority.

This structural accelerator which historically anchored Viktor Orbán's governance catalyzed the swift dissolution of his sixteen-year administration in the parliamentary election of April 12, 2026. Propelled by an unprecedented 79 percent voter turnout, Péter Magyar's Tisza Party secured 53.1 percent of the national vote, translating into 141 seats and a constitutional supermajority. Fidesz-KDNP was reduced to 52 seats.

Political Force	Seats Secured (of 199)
Tisza Party (Péter Magyar)	141 Seats — Constitutional Supermajority
Fidesz-KDNP (Viktor Orbán)	52 Seats
Our Homeland (Mi Hazánk)	6 Seats

The post-election transition moved rapidly. Following formal inter-party consultations, the National Assembly convened on May 9, 2026 to swear in Magyar as Prime Minister, with the new administration fully constituted on May 13, 2026. Anita Orbán assumed leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The cabinet draws heavily on civil society networks and technocratic specialists, with an explicit mandate to dismantle Orbán's structures.

Structural Reorientations for African Diplomacy

Under Orbán, his government has pivoted toward the African continent with a major focus on economic partnerships, security cooperation, and curbing irregular migration to Europe.

The Magyar administration is rapidly reintegrating Hungary into mainstream EU consensus frameworks, aligning with the European People's Party platform in Brussels and shifting its focus toward standard development effectiveness criteria emphasizing institutional transparency and anti-corruption. This fundamentally alters the voting arithmetic within the European Council on development financing and multilateral positioning.

Strategic Engagement Priorities for Ethiopia

- **Immediate Technocratic Access:** Present data-driven, program-specific development proposals to the new cabinet — the technocratic composition of Magyar's team makes evidence-based institutional proposals the appropriate engagement mode.
- **Narrative Realignment:** migration management policies have the possibility to continue. New talking points must emphasize regional economic integration, maritime logistics, and green infrastructure — matching the Magyar government's preferred lens of standard development effectiveness.
- **EPP Parliamentary Channels:** Build parallel communication channels with Hungarian representatives newly embedded within EPP groups in the European Parliament — secondary protection for Ethiopian interests in Brussels.
- **Diaspora Mobilization:** Engage and organize Ethiopian diaspora communities, professional networks, and students in Budapest, Debrecen, and other Hungarian urban centers to interface with transitional policy committees.

Denmark

Denmark's March 24 snap election, called by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen following diplomatic engagements over Greenland's strategic sovereignty vis-à-vis the United States, produced a textbook case of the complications that electoral volatility creates for external partners' diplomatic planning. Frederiksen calculated that Arctic security would translate into a decisive majority; the electorate, as the campaign progressed, refocused on cost of living pressures, healthcare, and welfare stability. The Social Democrats won only 21.8 percent of the vote, their lowest share in 120 years, leaving the center-left bloc short of a majority with 84 seats.

The decisive position was held by Lars Løkke Rasmussen's Moderates, a centrist formation with 14 seats. The deadlock was resolved on June 1, 2026, with the formal appointment of the Frederiksen III Cabinet on June 3, a broad minority coalition uniting the Social Democrats, the Green Left (SF), the Moderates, and the Radikale Venstre, with Rasmussen successfully retaining his post as Foreign Minister.

Implications for Ethiopian Diplomatic Planning

This outcome illustrates the structural limitations of relying exclusively on government-to-government engagement. An MFA that had maintained relationships only with the incumbent Social Democrats was left watching coalition negotiations conclude from the sidelines. An MFA that had maintained parallel relationships with all three major factions would be engaging the new arrangement from an established relationship base.

With the Green Left (SF) now in formal cabinet governance, Danida's development assistance will face intense internal pressure to anchor bilateral cooperation to strict human rights and environmental benchmarks. This systemic shift will require immediate programmatic engagement from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to insulate baseline development cooperation. Rasmussen's retention as Foreign Minister provides a continuity bridge; the established relationship with his office should be the immediate activation point.

- **Immediate Activation:** Activate engagement with the Frederiksen III cabinet immediately through the established Rasmussen Foreign Ministry channel. The window of coalition formation influence has closed; the diplomatic imperative shifts to early engagement with the newly seated cabinet.
- **Danida Conditionality Management:** Proactively present a programmatic engagement proposal to Danida addressing governance and accountability dimensions, insulating baseline development cooperation from Green Left conditionality pressure.
- **DIIS Research Partnership:** Commission the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) to produce joint analysis on Horn of Africa security dynamics. This will enable converting Danish research networks into Ethiopian advocacy infrastructure.

Sweden

Sweden's proportional representation system with a 4 percent national threshold structurally generates polarized bloc politics rather than single-party mandates. The September 13, 2026 general election represents a critical policy event for Ethiopia's long-term development partnerships. The contest is between the Centre-left Red-Greens, led by Magdalena Andersson's Social Democrats (polling at approximately 33 percent), and the incumbent right-wing Tidö coalition under Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson.

The political environment was dramatically transformed on March 13, 2026 by the formalization of 'The Sweden Promise' (Sverigelöftet) — a landmark agreement in which the Liberals officially dropped their long-standing veto against the far-right Sweden Democrats, opening the path for Jimmie Åkesson's Sweden Democrats to enter government as formal cabinet ministers for the first time in Swedish history if the right-wing bloc retains power. This would guarantee a significantly more aggressive, politically conditioned reduction of traditional development funds. Conversely, the Social Democrats have positioned themselves as defenders of the traditional development model, with prominent figures pledging to restore Sweden's international development spending to 1 percent of GNI.

The Sida Strategy Renewal: A Time-Critical Imperative

The current 2022–2026 Swedish bilateral strategy for Ethiopia expires this year. Its successor will be drafted immediately following the formation of the new government in October 2026, drawing on existing analytical inputs. This creates a time-sensitive diplomatic imperative. The window for Ethiopian institutional submissions to that process is closing rapidly as September approaches. This

deadline requires immediate, substantive documents that present Ethiopian development priorities, assess the current strategy against sovereign Ethiopian criteria rather than only Swedish benchmarks, and propose a comprehensive framework for the next period.

- **Pre-empt the October Strategy Blueprint:** actively inject Ethiopian institutional perspectives into Sida's ongoing country assessments and the Social Democrats' foreign policy committees before September. Ensuring national priorities are part of the inherited record the new government receives.
- **Right-Wing Opposition Engagement:** Open proactive channels with right-wing factions within the Riksdag's Committee on Foreign Affairs including Kristersson's Moderates and the Sweden Democrats. It can be done by framing Ethiopia's value in terms of migration management cooperation and trade facilitation, buffering against partisan cancellation if the Tidö bloc wins.
- **Citizen Diplomacy Mobilization:** Coordinate with organized Ethiopian diaspora networks across Stockholm and Gothenburg. Mobilizing community nodes to engage with localized party districts, particularly within Centre and Social Democratic party wings.
- **Dual-Track Preparation:** Prepare two separate engagement packages calibrated to each electoral outcome: one emphasizing governance, accountability, and development cooperation for an Andersson government; one emphasizing labour migration management and trade facilitation for a Kristersson second term.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's First-Past-The-Post framework manufactures large legislative monopolies from a minority of the popular vote. However, this concentration of authority makes the prime ministership structurally sensitive to inner-party dynamics. Following defeats in the May 2026 local elections and intense pressure over internal economic policies, Sir Keir Starmer formally resigned as Prime Minister on June 22, 2026. Andy Burnham who entered Parliament via a by-election in Makerfield has emerged as the overwhelmingly dominant candidate for the Labour succession, backed by senior party figures and positioned to avoid a protracted summer leadership contest. Formal nominations open July 9, 2026, with a rapid transition expected by mid-July.

Key Actors and Institutions

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
<p>Keir Starmer (Labour) <i>Outgoing PM</i></p>	<p>Formal engagement maintained for the transitional period. The Africa investment framework established under his government — including the December 2025 seven-point framework reorienting engagement from 'donor to investor' — is the policy baseline the successor will inherit.</p>
<p>David Lammy (Labour) <i>Foreign Secretary</i></p>	<p>Articulate on Africa investment framework. Key engagement counterpart for the transitional period. The Chatham House address by FM Gedion Timothewos created a relationship foundation with Lammy's FCDO that should be actively maintained.</p>

Actor / Institution	Strategic Assessment & Ethiopian Engagement Priority
<p>Andy Burnham (Labour) <i>Likely next PM</i></p>	<p>Most important formative-phase engagement target in the UK. Foreign policy team building platform now. The institutional window for embedding Ethiopian priorities into the incoming prime ministerial agenda is open and brief.</p>
<p>Kemi Badenoch (Conservative) <i>Opposition Leader</i></p>	<p>Nigerian-British background; skeptical of traditional aid but potentially receptive to investment framing for Africa engagement. Long-term investment: if Labour's mandate weakens by 2029–2030, Badenoch's Africa positioning will matter.</p>
<p>Nigel Farage (Reform UK) <i>Opposition Leader</i></p>	<p>Anti-aid; migration control; emphasize trade framing. Engage through UK-Ethiopia Chamber of Commerce networks in addition to formal diplomatic channels.</p>
<p>Chatham House (RIIA)</p>	<p>Most significant UK foreign policy think tank. FM Gedion Timothewos' engagement is the foundation; build toward a formal joint research partnership.</p>
<p>ODI (Overseas Development Institute)</p>	<p>Development policy think tank with Ethiopia program. Key ally for making Ethiopia's case on ODA reduction impact. Commission ODI to produce an impact assessment of UK bilateral cooperation with Ethiopia.</p>
<p>FCDO Africa Directorate</p>	<p>Permanent civil service counterpart. Most durable institutional relationship regardless of political transitions — the foundational relationship that all other UK diplomatic engagement rests upon.</p>

Strategic Engagement Priorities for Ethiopia

- Engage the Incoming Executive Early:** Establish immediate communication lines with Andy Burnham's transition team to embed Ethiopian core regional priorities such as Red Sea security, AU reform, Horn of Africa stability into the foundational policy platforms of the next administration before they are institutionalized.
- Capitalize on the Chatham House Relationship:** Build directly upon the Chatham House conference breakthrough — FM Gedion's address on African agency in global governance — by proposing a formal joint research partnership between the MFA and Chatham House on Horn of Africa security and development architecture.
- Cultivate the Shadow State and Historic Connections:** Shift away from a narrow focus on the sitting executive. Sophisticated diplomacy requires maintaining institutional continuity with the political opposition and frontbench shadow teams. During Labour's long opposition years, Andy Burnham held senior shadow cabinet briefs including Shadow Health, Education, and Home Secretary. Countries that foresightfully built deep, structural relationships with that shadow cabinet hold an immediate institutional advantage, ensuring that bilateral

understandings on regional security and maritime access remain insulated from sudden shifts in leadership.

- **Establish Direct Pipelines to the Parliamentary Opposition:** Initiate parallel engagement with the rising parliamentary presence of Reform UK under Nigel Farage and the formal Conservative opposition under Kemi Badenoch. Because both factions will spend the coming legislative cycle defining their long-term foreign policy and international development portfolios, inserting Ethiopian substantive perspectives now ensures our strategic interests are protected under any future political orientation.
- **Diaspora Network Activation:** Mobilize the extensive Ethiopian diaspora concentrated in London, Birmingham, and Leeds by identifying members with access to Labour constituency networks, Conservative policy forums, and Reform UK's growing councillor base.
- **FCDO Civil Service Anchor:** Engage the FCDO Africa Directorate as the durable civil service relationship — the institutional anchor that provides continuity through leadership transitions and ensures Ethiopian interests are embedded in the permanent bureaucratic record.

IV. The Formative Phase: Opportunities to Deepen Ethiopia's Engagement

The conceptual cornerstone of the argument is the formative phase, which is the period spanning approximately 18 months before an election through the first 90 days of a new government's tenure, during which the policy positions that will govern European engagement with partner countries for the next five years are actually produced. Understanding this phase precisely is essential. In this phase access is cheapest, leverage is greatest, and here Ethiopian engagement could be significantly strengthened.

Governments do not arrive in office with blank slates. The intellectual content of what they will do including the development policy frameworks, the human rights conditionality approaches, the trade policy orientations, the bilateral partnership priorities — has been assembled over years of opposition research, party foundation work, shadow cabinet deliberation, and academic network consultation. By the time a minister takes office, the broad parameters of their approach are established. The first 90 days are devoted to consolidating and beginning to implement what was prepared in opposition, not to designing new frameworks from scratch. This is why access to serving ministers, while valuable, is access to the implementation phase rather than the formative phase. The formative phase, paradoxically, is easier to enter precisely since it happens before the barriers of formal governance apply.

Shadow Cabinets and the Access Inversion

Parliamentary systems create by institutional design a structure of shadow governance whose diplomatic significance is overlooked by African foreign ministries. Opposition parties formally appoint shadow ministers whose explicit function is to develop policy positions in preparation for potential governance. The Swedish Social Democrats' shadow development cooperation minister is currently preparing the policy platform that Sida, the Swedish Foreign Ministry, and Sweden's EU development delegations would execute if Andersson wins in September. This person is developing their understanding of bilateral partner countries, their analysis of what Swedish development

cooperation has achieved and should prioritize, and their relationships with the civil society organizations and academic networks that will advise them in government.

The access calculation here is fundamentally inverted compared to access to a serving minister. A serving European foreign minister has hundreds of competing demands, is insulated by protocol structures that filter all incoming requests, and has already formed the positions they will implement. The time cost of meeting an African ambassador competes against every other demand in an impossibly constrained schedule. A shadow development minister in opposition has time, intellectual openness, and limited incoming attention from African diplomatic services. The cost of building a relationship at this stage such as a substantive meeting, an invitation to Addis Ababa, a joint policy dialogue organized through an Embassy event is structurally low. The return, measured in access and substantive influence after the election, is potentially high. Many diplomatic services, including Ethiopia's, have historically focused more on serving governments than on opposition and shadow structures. This inversion offers a valuable opportunity for more systematic engagement.

The Hungary case illustrates this inversion with particular clarity. Tisza Party foreign policy advisers spent two years in opposition building their policy framework. During that period, they were accessible, building knowledge, and actively seeking substantive engagement from external actors that would help them govern more effectively. The Ethiopian Embassy in Budapest had a two-year window to build relationships with the people who now run Hungarian foreign policy. Whether it used that window in any systematic way remains unclear from observable engagement patterns. What is clear is that the Magyar government now has a foreign policy team that needs to build its Africa knowledge base largely from scratch, and that the states with prior access to Tisza policy networks are better positioned to shape that knowledge base than those without it.

Coalition Agreements as Intelligence Documents

When European coalition governments form, the coalition agreement they produce is the most operationally significant document in the entire electoral cycle for foreign policy planning purposes. Unlike campaign manifestos which are aspirational documents designed partly for electoral effect, coalition agreements are negotiated contracts between governing partners that reflect the actual trades and compromises each party made to enter government. Their language on development cooperation, migration management, climate finance, and foreign policy orientation represents the most reliable prediction available of what the government will actually do.

For instance, during the 2021 German coalition agreement between the SPD, FDP, and Greens contained specific commitments on the percentage of ODA allocated to climate finance, on policy coherence for development, and on human rights conditionality as a principle of bilateral cooperation. These commitments did not appear from nowhere when the government was formed. They were the product of months of coalition negotiation between parties with different priorities and different political bases, and they directly governed German positions in EU Council deliberations on Ethiopian conditionality during the Northern Ethiopia conflict period. The French and German foreign ministers who traveled to Ethiopia in January 2024 to press for accountability for abuses as a condition for EU normalization of relations were giving expression to commitments embedded in their foundational governing documents. Understanding the logic of those commitments of which coalition partners drove them, what they traded to secure them, which were genuinely held and which were bargaining chips — is foundational to understanding the diplomatic environment in which Ethiopian interests must be navigated. Coalition agreements are public documents. They are not being systematically analyzed within the Ethiopian foreign policy apparatus at the speed and depth that their policy significance requires.

V. The Think Tank Ecosystem

Between the political party and the government minister sits a layer of institutional infrastructure that often receives limited diplomatic attention from most African diplomatic services but functionally central to how European policy is produced. The think tank and political foundation ecosystem generates the intellectual content that parties adopt as policy, places researchers in ministerial advisory roles, and maintains the knowledge networks that inform European positions on partner countries. For Ethiopia, this ecosystem represents both the most accessible and one of the most promising areas for deeper engagement into European policymaking.

The German political foundation system makes the architecture visible in its clearest form. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, which is constitutionally affiliated with the CDU, maintains an active country program in Ethiopia focused on strengthening reform-oriented political and civic actors, and produces country analyses that assess Ethiopia's political reform trajectory. These analyses flow directly into CDU foreign policy deliberations. The KAS report on Ethiopia's political situation — which has noted that ‘the reform process initiated in 2018 has been challenged and that ethnic tensions and armed conflicts continue to strain national unity’ is the document that CDU foreign policy advisers read when they are forming their Ethiopia positions. That document shapes what a CDU-led German government says and does regarding Ethiopia.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has maintained an office in Ethiopia since 1992 and works on political transformation, labor relations, gender equality, and media development, with an explicit focus on promoting social democratic values and engaging with trade unions, civil society organizations, and government institutions including the Ethiopian Parliament. FES Ethiopia produces analysis and facilitates dialogue that flows into SPD foreign policy thinking. The relationship between Ethiopian institutions and both of these foundations has been primarily receptive in character. Ethiopian actors attend foundation-organized events, benefit from foundation-funded programs, and are engaged as research subjects or dialogue participants. What the relationship has not been is reciprocal in the substantive intellectual sense.

The reciprocity gap has concrete consequences. When the KAS country program in Addis Ababa produces a report on Ethiopia's political situation, that report becomes part of the analytical environment in which CDU foreign policy advisers form their views on Ethiopia. Ethiopian perspectives on the political situation, on the constraints facing the reform process, on what the stalling of reforms reflects and what it would take to accelerate them, are absent from that document unless Ethiopian institutions have actively contributed to its production. The KAS report a European document produced by European analysts drawing on European frameworks, and it reflects European analytical priorities rather than Ethiopian ones. The way to change that is to be present in the research process from which it emerges — contributing perspectives, challenging assumptions, providing context that European analysts without deep country knowledge cannot generate on their own.

The Gulf states have understood this for the past years. The UAE's cultivation of European think tank ecosystems involves a combination of research funding, expert conference sponsorships, and the strategic placement of policy arguments into academic and analytical channels that make those arguments appear to emerge from independent European analysis rather than from Gulf strategic communication. India's comparable investment in UK think tanks ahead of and following Brexit produced a cohort of British analysts who were substantively informed about India's economic reform agenda and institutionally positioned to advocate for UK-India trade frameworks that aligned with New Delhi's interests.

Ethiopia needs to build robust institutional networks that facilitate shared analysis, practical cooperation, and effective advocacy. Think tanks and media institutions can help translate national ambitions into actionable strategies while amplifying Ethiopia's policy priorities on the international stage. This analytical framework exists within the Ethiopian foreign policy establishment. The translation of that framework into specific partnership arrangements with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Folke Bernadotte Academy in Sweden, the Danish Institute for International Studies, and Clingendael in The Hague has not yet occurred at the scale that Ethiopian diplomatic interests require. Elevating these institutions as substantive intellectual counterparts is essential to actively shape the analytical content they produce on the region.

VI. Comparative Lessons: What Proactive Electoral Engagement Looks Like in Practice

The case for proactive engagement with European electoral cycles is strengthened considerably by examining states that have developed systematic approaches to this challenge. Morocco and India, operating in different regional and institutional contexts, both illustrate how a deliberate investment in pre-electoral relationship building and opposition-phase access can translate into durable diplomatic influence that survives electoral transitions in partner countries.

Morocco

Morocco's foreign policy provides the most instructive comparative case for Ethiopian policymakers, both because Morocco operates in a broadly similar regional position — an African state with major European partners — and because its approach to European political engagement has been systematically documented. Moroccan foreign policy analysis has explicitly described the country's diplomatic strategy as combining active partnership strategies with multilateral integration in a dynamic of continuous diplomatic consolidation. It is a formulation that describes exactly the mode of engagement that Ethiopia could further develop in its approach to Europe.

The Morocco-Europe relationship has been built not through government-to-government interaction alone but through sustained cultivation of political networks across European party lines. On the migration management dimension, Morocco's positioning ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections — which delivered a surge of far-right anti-immigration politicians into office — illustrates the sophistication of anticipatory engagement. Rabat had been building its value proposition as a migration management partner across successive European governments of different ideological compositions, ensuring that when European domestic politics pushed migration to the center of electoral competition, Morocco was already embedded in the policy conversations as an indispensable partner. The result is that the EU-Morocco relationship on migration management is now described as a cozy arrangement — meaning it is a settled partnership that survives ideological changes in either direction because it serves multiple political agendas simultaneously. Ethiopia has significant leverage on migration management questions given Eritrean and Ethiopian migration flows into Europe. It has not yet developed a comparably settled and multifaceted migration partnership framework that consistently positions it as a key strategic partner, rather than primarily as a focus of European migration management pressure.

The diaspora dimension of Moroccan diplomatic strategy deserves particular attention as it connects directly to Ethiopian capabilities. Moroccan political leaders have explicitly framed diaspora engagement as a mechanism for projecting influence in Europe, describing diaspora members as a bridge with host countries and as an extension of Moroccan influence in French and Belgian political environments. The Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger, established in 2007, functions as a formal institution through which diaspora political energy is channeled toward diplomatic

objectives, with explicit mandates covering conferences on diaspora roles in diplomacy. This institutional design converts what is otherwise a dispersed demographic presence into an organized diplomatic asset.

The Ethiopian diaspora in Europe is substantial. Millions of Ethiopians abroad reside precisely in the countries most relevant to Ethiopian European diplomacy. The Ethiopian Diaspora Service has generated over USD 6 billion in annual remittances, demonstrating organizational capacity and diaspora engagement at scale. What does not yet exist is the organizational architecture through which the political dimension of that diaspora presence — the members active in Swedish party branches, in German civil society organizations affiliated with political foundations, in Dutch policy networks — is identified, supported, and connected to Ethiopian diplomatic priorities in a systematic way.

India

India's engagement with European political networks operates through a model of substantive reciprocity. This strategy focuses on actively contributing rigorous analytical and intellectual content to European policy discussions. Indian diplomatic services have built relationships with European think tanks as intellectual counterparts who bring distinct analytical frameworks to shared policy questions. This positions India within the knowledge-production networks that feed into European policymaking in a way that recipient-mode engagement cannot achieve.

India's approach to the 2010 UK general election under David Cameron's Conservative-led coalition illustrates the mechanics. Indian officials had maintained structured relationships with Conservative Party shadow ministers through the UK-India Business Council and through defense and trade engagement channels starting as early as 2006. In 2009, during a state visit to the UK by the President of India, Indian officials made it a priority to hold separate and structured meetings with Cameron and his key shadow ministers while they were still out of power.

When Cameron's government was confirmed, Indian interests were already embedded in the transition agenda's economic and trade working groups. The resulting UK-India Enhanced Partnership framework, concluded within Cameron's first year in office, reflected relationship capital built over the preceding parliamentary term.

Ethiopia's current challenge is that its diplomatic energy is consumed managing existing relationships under conditions of human rights scrutiny, post-conflict reconstruction, and ongoing sub-national security pressures. The EU's own April 2026 decision to resume direct budget support to Ethiopia, criticized by Human Rights Watch as an inadequate response to deteriorating pre-electoral civic conditions, illustrates both the structural European interest in Ethiopian stability and the persistent tension between that interest and normative conditionality. That tension, paradoxically, is precisely the space in which proactive Ethiopian diplomacy can operate most effectively. European governments that are investing in Ethiopian stability, even under political pressure to attach more stringent conditions, have a built-in incentive to see those investments validated.

Ethiopia's engagement with India provides a useful reference point. The December 2025 visit of Prime Minister Modi, which elevated the Ethiopia-India relationship to a Strategic Partnership and produced agreements on UN peacekeeping training, customs management, and the establishment of a data center at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, illustrates that Ethiopia can operate at a high level of bilateral strategic engagement when the institutional architecture for it exists. The challenge is extending that sophistication to the pre-governmental and sub-governmental levels of European political systems. This requires targeting the shadow cabinets, think tank networks, party

foundations, and parliamentary committees where the analytical environment for European policymaking is actually constructed.

VII. An Integrated Framework for Ethiopian Electoral Engagement

Translating diplomatic presence into strategic influence requires an integrated framework that systematically navigates the pre-election, transition, and post-formation phases of European political cycles. By continuously mobilizing key institutional mechanisms across these temporal windows, Ethiopia can secure the embedded access necessary to shape external policies.

Ethiopia has the institutional foundation to replicate and improve upon this model. For instance, the EU-Ethiopia Parliamentary Friendship Group exists in formal terms, but its operational depth, measured by the frequency of expert engagements, the quality of information shared, and the degree to which Ethiopian officials provide genuine political intelligence rather than ceremonial briefings, remains limited. The Horn of Africa's geopolitical significance has, if anything, increased since the Ukraine war reconfigured European calculations about maritime corridors, energy diversification, and Red Sea security. More importantly, Red Sea security has been increasingly dominant in global policy discussions following the persistent Houthi attacks on commercial shipping. This maritime volatility intensified exponentially during the 2026 war in Iran, which sparked severe escalation across the Bab el-Mandeb and triggered unprecedented insecurity throughout the Strait of Hormuz chokepoint. Ethiopian officials should be producing substantive briefings for sympathetic MEPs on precisely these themes, building an epistemic advantage that converts parliamentary contacts into policy advocates.

The Temporal Architecture: Three Phases, One Continuous Process

The pre-election phase, running from approximately 18 months before polling day to election day itself, is the investment phase in which the analytical and relational groundwork for subsequent engagement is laid. During this phase, the primary activities are political intelligence production, opposition network cultivation, think tank ecosystem engagement, and diaspora political mobilization. These activities are simultaneous and mutually reinforcing. The political intelligence produced about opposition party positions informs which think tank networks are most relevant to engage. The diaspora network contacts provide access to party-level political intelligence that formal embassy reporting cannot generate. The think tank engagement creates occasions for opposition politicians to encounter Ethiopian perspectives in substantive intellectual contexts rather than only in formal diplomatic settings.

The pre-election phase is also when the strategy renewal process for bilateral cooperation frameworks needs to be engaged. For instance, Sida's Ethiopia strategy expires this year. Its renewal will be drafted by the incoming government drawing on existing analytical inputs. The window for Ethiopian institutional submissions to that process — substantive documents that present Ethiopian development priorities, assess the performance of the current strategy against Ethiopian rather than only Swedish criteria, and propose a framework for the next period — is closing as September approaches. An active policy submission, circulated to Sida's country desk, the Foreign Ministry's Africa directorate, and the relevant parliamentary committee before the election, means that whichever government forms in October inherits a substantive Ethiopian position paper as part of the documentary record.

The transition phase, running from election day through the formation of a new government and the first 90 days of its operation, is the highest-value engagement window and an area with significant

potential for expansion. New governments in their formation phase are simultaneously most open to relationship-building initiatives and most determined to demonstrate competence through visible early results. A well-prepared Ethiopian diplomatic initiative during this window — calibrated to the specific ideological composition and stated priorities of the incoming government offers the incoming government something it can use domestically while advancing Ethiopian interests in the bilateral framework. The specific calculation differs across party outcomes. For instance, an Andersson-led government would be receptive to a development cooperation initiative that signals Ethiopia's commitment to the governance and accountability dimensions of Swedish development policy priorities. A Kristersson second term would be more receptive to framing around labor migration management and trade facilitation. Both framings should be prepared before the election.

The post-formation phase, running from the consolidation of the new government through the mid-term of its mandate, is when the structural relationships established in the preceding phases need to be institutionalized. Institutional relationships differ from personal ones in that they survive the inevitable rotation of individual officials. An Ethiopian embassy that has built working relationships not only with the development minister but with her deputy, her civil servant counterpart at the Foreign Ministry, and her academic and civil society advisers has built something that endures when the minister moves on. An Ethiopian think tank that has an active research partnership with FES or KAS has a relationship that outlasts any particular German government. Institutionalization is the mechanism through which the returns on pre-electoral investment are secured over the full duration of a governing period.

Four Institutional Mechanisms

This systemic approach demands a high degree of inter-agency synergy, specifically requiring a structural collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Intelligence apparatus. To operationalize this, the first mechanism involves establishing a specialized European Political Intelligence function jointly managed by the MFA's Europe Desk and the National Intelligence and Security Service.

This function produces pre-election assessments of all major parties in strategically relevant European countries, mapping their policy positions, their key personnel including shadow ministers, and the think tank and academic networks that supply their intellectual infrastructure. It maintains a rolling 24-month electoral calendar. It commissions rapid transition assessments, specifying the policy implications for each Ethiopian bilateral relationship and the specific engagement steps the relevant embassy should execute. It maintains a database of opposition political figures whose pre-governmental relationships with Ethiopian missions should be cultivated during their opposition periods.

The second mechanism is a substantive reciprocity program with European political foundations and think tanks. This program transforms the relationship between Ethiopian research institutions and European foundations to a collaborative and intellectually productive one. The specific modalities include joint research projects where Ethiopian scholars are principal investigators, invitations to contribute analytical chapters to foundation publications on Horn of Africa issues, regular exchange programs that place Ethiopian researchers in the European analytical environment, and structured dialogue forums that Ethiopian institutions host and set the agenda for rather than only attend. These activities shift Ethiopian perspectives from the periphery to the center of the European knowledge production process. The resulting framework ensures a sustainable, institutionally durable mode of engagement that remains entirely insulated from the shifting electoral fortunes of any individual European government.

The third mechanism is a Diaspora Political Engagement Program, administered jointly by the Ethiopian Diaspora Service, the MFA and the Intelligence. This program identifies diaspora members with meaningful access to European party structures — not only elected officials, though those exist, but also party branch committee members, ministerial advisers, civil society organization board members affiliated with party foundations, and junior officials in European government departments. It briefs these individuals, on a voluntary relationship basis, on Ethiopian diplomatic priorities. It provides them with analytical materials that make them effective participants in host-country policy discussions. It creates, through embassy-organized events and policy dialogues, occasions for diaspora members with political access to develop direct relationships with senior Ethiopian officials that give them both the motivation and the authoritative grounding to advocate effectively. This is a practice that Morocco has systematized through the CCME, that Ireland has employed through diaspora networks in the United States, and that India is increasingly formalizing through diaspora engagement frameworks in the Gulf and in North America.

The fourth mechanism is a language and country expertise development program within the MFA's human resource architecture. Language capacity is not a supplementary skill for European-posted diplomats. It is the analytical precondition for everything else. Reading Swedish party manifestos, understanding German coalition agreement language, tracking Danish parliamentary committee proceedings in the original — these require functional competency in the relevant languages, not conversational proficiency in English. A diplomat posted to Stockholm who cannot read Swedish has access to a narrow slice of the Swedish political information environment: the slice that English-language media chooses to cover, translated through interpretive frameworks that reflect others' journalistic priorities rather than Ethiopian diplomatic ones. The MFA's training programs need to reflect this reality in posting criteria, in pre-posting language preparation requirements, and in career incentive structures that reward country expertise developed over time rather than penalizing the longer postings that depth of knowledge requires.

The Interconnections: Why the Mechanisms Must Work Together

These four mechanisms should be pursued in an integrated manner. Each amplifies the effectiveness of the others in ways that justify treating them as an integrated system. The Political Intelligence function provides the analytical framework within which the substantive reciprocity program can be targeted most effectively — knowing which think tank is most influential with which party, which research project is most likely to shape the next bilateral strategy, which shadow minister is most intellectually engaged on development cooperation questions. The diaspora engagement program provides access to party-level political intelligence that no formal analytical exercise can generate. The texture of internal party debates and the personal relationships among key figures offer important insights into political dynamics. The divergence between publicly stated positions and actual policy priorities provides an additional layer of understanding that informs the Political Intelligence function's assessments. The think tank engagement creates the knowledge environment in which diaspora advocates can be most effective, because advocacy that is grounded in credible analysis is qualitatively more influential than advocacy that is merely expressive of interest. The language capacity investment makes all three mechanisms operable at the depth of analytical engagement they require.

The integration also operates across the temporal phases. The pre-election investment in opposition relationships is what makes the transition phase engagement possible at speed. The transition phase engagement with the incoming government's policy team is what makes the post-formation institutionalization productive rather than merely ceremonial. The institutionalized relationships of the post-formation phase reduce the investment required in the pre-election phase of the next cycle, because they have left behind an established framework within which new electoral transitions can

be engaged. This is the compounding logic of sustained proactive engagement that each cycle builds on the foundation of the previous one, making the diplomatic capital invested in European political relationships a genuinely appreciating asset rather than a depreciating one.

VIII. Conclusion

A partnership built on the structural convergence between Ethiopian and European interests in Red Sea security, Horn of Africa stability, migration corridor management, and energy diversification is a partnership that different European governments of different ideological compositions have independent reasons to sustain.

The moment of greatest diplomatic leverage in any European political cycle precedes the moment at which most foreign ministries conventionally begin to engage. Whether the governing coalition in Berlin, Paris, Rome, Budapest, Copenhagen, Stockholm, or London leans toward national-conservative transactionalism or progressive multilateralism, the formative phase in which that coalition's Africa policy is assembled offers a window of access that closes once governance begins and protocol, competing demands, and settled positions take over. Morocco and India built durable influence in European capitals by treating opposition years, coalition negotiations, and think tank ecosystems as the primary terrain of diplomatic investment, rather than as a preamble to work that only begins once a government is seated.

For Ethiopia, the strategic priority is determining when in Europe's political cycle to begin engagement with emerging political transitions. A diplomatic posture that enters at the formative phase, through shadow cabinets, coalition negotiations, political foundations, and diaspora networks, converts what is a defensive and reactive relationship with European policy into one in which Ethiopian interests are present at the point where that policy is actually written. Sustained across the pre-election, transition, and post-formation phases, and institutionalized through the four mechanisms set out above, this posture offers Ethiopia a route toward a European relationship that is resilient to electoral volatility precisely since it was built across, rather than after, the political transitions that produced it.

Note on sources and methodology:

This document was compiled using open-source reporting and institutional publications from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS), the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Chatham House, Hungarian National Election Office, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Clingendael, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Human Rights Watch (HRW), UK Electoral Commission and Labour Party statements the European Union's official statements and Council decisions, Reuters, and the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Horn Review's own prior country-brief series, among others; information reflects developments available through July 2026. The analysis is intended for research and informational purposes and does not necessarily represent institutional positions or official editorial views.