

Diplomats under surveillance

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The two members of the European Commission expelled by the Ethiopian authorities for "trafficking" had not been arrested at Moyale, a town on the border with Kenya, as the Ethiopian authorities claim, but 150 km from there, near Agre Mariam, on their way back from Addis Ababa. The Swedish diplomat Bjorn Jonsson and the Italian Enrico Sborgi had gone to the border to accompany Yalemzewd Bekele, a 29 year old human rights activist who worked for the European delegation in Addis Ababa. She believed she was in danger of being arrested because of her links with the opposition.

She had initially taken refuge in the premises of the European delegation and later in Jonsson's house. She was then accompanied to Moyale where she was arrested on 19 November while showing her papers to the Ethiopian immigration service. Fasil Assefa, who was waiting for her at the Koket Borena hotel but had no intention of going to Kenya, was also arrested. According to some sources, the Ethiopian intelligence agents investigating Yalemzewd had photos of her eating a pizza with Jonsson, her line manager, the day she took refuge in the EC premises in Addis Ababa. They are also said to have photos showing her in the company of other members of the staff of the European delegation during private meetings. This would appear to show that the whole affair had been minutely prepared by the Ethiopian intelligence services. Better still, according to opposition sources, these services have benefited from the complicity of members of the private security company which guards the European delegation compound. This security firm, Sebhatu and Brothers, is owned by the brothers of Mimi Sebhatu, a journalist close to the regime who benefited with her husband Zerihun Teshome, for the attribution of a licence to launch a private radio station. She is also the editor of the newspaper Eftin which is strongly supportive of the Ethiopian regime. Agents from this security company could have informed the official intelligence services of Yalemzewd's comings and goings and of her departure for Moyale. Her telephone conversations with the expelled diplomats, and with Tim Clark, the head of the European delegation in Addis Ababa, are also believed to have been recorded in the same way. Sebhatu & Brothers may be employing disguised government agents. It was the government coalition, EPRDF that, according to people close to Mimi Sebhatu and her husband, provided half of the funding to create this security company. This company has more clients than another security company linked to partisans of the regime, belonging to Major Alemseged Gebre Yohannes, a former deputy Police Commissioner.