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## Umpiring a Federal System

The Ethiopian Choice in Comparative Perspective

Federalism is highly intertwined with perpetual intergovernmental partnership between the two orders of government – national and regional. This interrelation is not always serene and may lead to conflicts. Either level may misinterpret the federal pact or even intentionally violate the terms of the respective constitutional prerogatives. A neutral umpire is therefore needed to dispose of such conflicts and ensure coexistence. Apart from an impartial interpretation of the constitution and the resolution of intergovernmental conflicts, umpires play a crucial role in adapting the constitution to changing circumstances, especially in federations where proposals for constitutional amendments rarely succeed. Most federations designate their highest court or form a sui generis institution exclusively to deal with these matters. This study compares the Ethiopian approach with other popular patterns in Europe and the United States and explores how the nation, by adopting a unique institutional framework, attempts to strike a balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces. The study concludes that the endorsement of a political body to safeguard federalism is normatively defensible and politically effective.



**85,00 €**

79,44 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

**Artikelnummer:** 9783727259906

**Medium:** Buch

**ISBN:** 978-3-7272-5990-6

**Verlag:** Stämpfli Verlag AG

**Erscheinungstermin:** 01.06.2017

**Sprache(n):** Englisch

**Auflage:** 1. Auflage 2017

**Serie:** Publikationen des Instituts für  
Föderalismus Freiburg Schweiz

**Produktform:** Kartoniert

**Gewicht:** 454 g

**Seiten:** 272

**Format (B x H):** 156 x 228 mm

