

ALL-EUROPEAN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND REFUGEE LAW MOOT COURT COMPETITION

10th Edition



CASE STUDY: THE SITUATION IN THE FORMER CYGNUS REGION

Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana

2025



Univerza v Ljubljani



ICRC



Former Cygnus region

scale: 1:10,000,000



legend



national border



regional border



front line

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Rutania and Ara share a history dating back to ancient times, when Rutanian and Aranian tribes migrated across what are today their respective territories. By the 4th century, the tribes had settled along the Altan river, whose fertile delta provided resources enabling both tribes to flourish—Rutanians on the east bank and Aranians on the west bank. Connected by similar pagan beliefs—both perceiving the world as inhabited by various spirits such as those of waters, forests, fields, and those of households—they formed the state of Cygnus, with its capital, Daliaq, founded in the 5th century. Cygnus converted to monotheism in 7th century, but the well-preserved remains of the ancient pagan temples can still be seen in Daliaq today. Tribal fragmentation led to the formation of separate feudal principalities, which became the precursors to two federal states—Rutania and Ara—separated by an administrative border along the Altan River. The Kolechia region, predominantly populated by ethnic Rutanians, was assigned to Ara as it lay on the west bank of the river. This was not opposed by the ethnic Rutanian population living there, as the borders were merely administrative in nature. Residents of Kolechia retained their jobs in the Rutania federal state and maintained regular contact with their relatives and friends living there. Cygnus failed to fully industrialize, leaving its economy underdeveloped compared to other countries in the region. Its heavy reliance on exports made it vulnerable to boom-and-bust cycles following volatile global price swings in the late 20th century. This led to hyperinflation and a decline in living standards. The traditionally strong central government gradually devolved powers to the national assemblies of both federal states, hoping to preserve social and ethnic peace and unity. However, politicians from each of the federal states began blaming the other for economic hardships and even threatening civil war. It was amid this tense atmosphere that the Kolechian issue emerged. Aranians increasingly perceived pro-Rutanian elements in Kolechia as a potential threat. In early 1987, Rutanian representatives, with the support of Aranian representatives of Kolechian origin, initiated procedures in the federal parliament to alter the administrative border to include Kolechia within Rutania. On 10 May 1987, Aranian national assembly announced that Ara's existence in the common state of Cygnus was under threat and unilaterally declared independence from Cygnus. Rutania followed with a similar declaration on 13 May 1987, formally dissolving Cygnus. Both Ara and Rutania were admitted to the United Nations on 31 December 1987. To reduce dependence on Aranian markets, Rutania signed a Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Defence with Obristan on 1 January 1988.

2. **Ara** is a democratic parliamentary republic led by President Arisa Kastenja. It covers a total land area of 490,000 km². Over 30% of its population resides within 50 km of the capital, Centurion. According to the January 2025 census, the population of Ara is 28,250,245, comprising 75% ethnic Aranians, 20% ethnic Rutanians, and 5% others. Ara's economy is modern and service-oriented. Key exports include machinery, chemicals, packaged medicines, and clothing. Ara's GDP per capita is 31,460 €. Unemployment among ethnic Aranians stands at 3.7%, whereas among ethnic Rutanians it exceeds 20%. The Aranian Armed Forces are a well-equipped professional force with 43,000 personnel.
3. Most of ethnic Rutanians in Ara live in the Kolechia region, where they constitute a majority. Within Kolechia, 10% of the population lives in the city of Nirsk, while most of the population reside in small rural villages. In 1987, economic conditions in Kolechia have worsened due to the new state border between Ara and Rutania, and have not improved since. Some Kolechians seek greater autonomy within Ara, while more extremist elements pursue full independence and closer ties with Rutania.
4. The Rutanian Party of Kolechia (RPK) promotes the ambitions of ethnic Rutanians and claims to represent the entire community. The RPK has secured a majority of Kolechian votes in every parliamentary election since Aranian independence in 1987 by portraying itself as the sole protector of Kolechian Rutanians against Aranian centralist policies. RPK is led by Zimon Wens, who is viewed as a central figure in the party's operations. Although it is nominally a legitimate and democratically elected political party, the RPK also organizes protests and riots in Kolechia that frequently escalate into violent confrontations with law enforcement. RPK is known to have close ties with Rutania which sponsors its activities. A 2024 Aranian intelligence report indicated that the RPK maintains an armed wing (RPKAW) equipped with weapons smuggled from Rutania, with many RPKAW officers receiving training at the Rutanian Officer Academy.
5. **Rutania** is a weak parliamentary democracy dominated by a strong political oligarchy led by Prime Minister Rutman Drax. It covers 365,000 km², with over 25% of the population concentrated within 100 km of its capital, Grestin. According to the January 2020 census, Rutania has a population of 37,160,874, 96% of whom are ethnic Rutanians. The economy comprises both modern and legacy systems, much of which is run by a select group of oligarchs. Key exports include agricultural products, coal, iron, and uranium. The recent discovery of lithium and cobalt in the Transaltania region has created the potential for new battery-producing industries for electric vehicles. Rutania's GDP per capita is 18,260 €, and unemployment

stands at 11%. The military is conscription-based with 82,000 active members, equipped with some modern weapons but still heavily reliant on legacy systems. Rutania considers the loss of Kolechia to be a historic injustice and continues to maintain close ties with the RPK. There are indications that Rutania provides funding, training, and personnel to RPK. Rutania also maintains close relations with Obristan. A bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Defence from 1988 includes Article 9 on collective self-defense: “an armed attack against one Contracting Party shall be considered an attack against both Contracting Parties.”

6. **Icaria** is an island state - a presidential democracy with a stable political environment and a long-standing policy of neutrality, led by President Giorgius Alfayani. Neutrality enables Icaria to act as a stabilizing force in the region, providing a buffer between the competing interests of its assertive neighbours. Icaria enforces a strict visa policy. The newly elected government, with the majority held by the Icarian Traditional Party, is among other things committed to stop the flow of refugees and immigrants into the country. Icaria’s economy is developed and mainly service-oriented. It maintains a small but modern armed force.
7. **Obristan** is a democratic parliamentary republic characterized by a clearly delineated separation of powers, emphasizing transparency, civil participation, and the rule of law. It consistently ranks high on global human development indexes. Over the past decade, Obristan has demonstrated robust economic growth, driven by a diversified industrial base. Its armed forces are modern, well-equipped, and trained for both domestic and international operations. Obristan is party to the Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Defence with Rutania and hosts the annual joint military exercise “Northern Strike” with Rutania.

I. BACKGROUND

8. On 18 March 2025, the Aranian parliament adopted a decree aimed at improving governmental economic efficiency, including the closure of primary schools with fewer than 50 pupils across Ara by September 2025. As a result, more than 50% of primary schools in Kolechia would have to be closed. This would force children from underpopulated areas of the country to commute and attend larger schools further away. Ethnic Rutanians, residing in small villages of Kolechia, felt that this decree was aimed against their agricultural lifestyle, and feared that their children would be unable to attend classes in the upcoming school year. The RPK spearheaded a vocal campaign disseminating this message, asserting that the decree represented an assault on Kolechia's future.

9. On 20 March 2025, over 100,000 people gathered in the city of Nirsk. Peaceful protests soon escalated into violent clashes with Aranian police, spreading unrest throughout the city. 15 protestors were killed, including six individuals who were fatally shot by Aranian police officers using "less lethal" rubber bullets. In response, Zimon Wens announced the deployment of the RPKAW, under the command of former Aranian Armed Forces colonel Matilda Volda. On 22 March 2025 Volda ordered the erection of roadblocks on Kolechia's main roads, thereby prohibiting the passage of vehicles bearing non-Kolechian registration plates. In the following days, most of rejected vehicles would turn around and seek alternative routes, but some of them tried to break through the roadblocks and were fired upon. On 23 April 2025, in a coordinated operation, RPKAW captured all police stations and administrative buildings in Kolechia. The battle for Nirsk railway station was particularly severe; railway workers, loyal to Ara, barricaded themselves inside and resisted until running out of ammunition in the early morning hours. Twelve railway workers and 57 RPKAW fighters were killed. The event triggered a massive outcry all over Ara.
10. President Kastenja declared a national state of emergency on 24 April 2025 and deployed four brigades of the Aranian Armed Forces to retake Kolechia and capture leading RPK members. RPKAW rapidly set up the defences and Aranian Armed Forces encountered a series of blocked roads, destroyed bridges and ambushes on their approach. This prevented them from making any meaningful advance into Kolechia. On 26 April 2025, the Aranian Air Force bombed Nirsk's airport, radio towers, and power plant. During the operation, two Aranian helicopters were downed by RPKAW.
11. On 28 April 2025, Kolechian regional assembly declared independence from Ara and established the Republic of Kolechia, recognizing RPK as the sole legitimate party under Zimon Wens, who simultaneously announced general mobilization into RPKAW. Many volunteers from Rutania also enlisted to RPKAW. Kolechia's statehood was not recognized by the international community. In response to the Kolechian declaration, President Kastenja designated the RPK a terrorist organization acting as a proxy of the Grestin regime. On 1 June 2025, Zimon Wens was tried in absentia and found guilty of high treason by the district court of Centurion.
12. Sporadic fighting in Kolechia continues along the static frontline to this day, with both Aranian Armed Forces and RPKAW entrenched, neither side making meaningful progress. Aranian Armed Forces rely on superior artillery power, which completely flattened several Kolechian villages within 10 kilometers behind

Kolechian front lines. It was later revealed that Aranian artillery was using cluster munitions, and in response Volda ordered the evacuation of remaining civilians, as the villages are uninhabitable until thorough demining.

13. Aranian Armed Forces losses total 1,634 killed, 3,452 wounded, and 341 captured. RPKAW losses include 1,254 killed, 2,965 wounded, and 289 captured. In addition, Institute for the Study of War reported 5300 killed Kolechian civilians.
14. Captured RPKAW fighters await trial in Centurion penitentiary, while the fate of captured Aranian soldiers remains unknown. A company of Aranian soldiers was seen being paraded through the main square of Nirsk during the so called "March of victory" on 8 June 2025.
15. Since the outbreak of tensions in March 2025, Rutania's campaign to discredit the Aranian government has intensified. This includes extensive propaganda campaigns and cyber-attacks targeting companies and government institutions in order to cause panic and influence Aranian policies. Rutania, however, never officially claimed to be the author of those attacks. Rather, it is believed that it is relying on malicious actors who gain access to Aranian computers undetected. Aranian Information Security Office fears that those actors have discovered vulnerabilities in Centurion hydroelectric plant systems and have already installed malicious code, which could open the floodgates on any occasion. Rutanian authorities have consistently denied the accusations levelled against them in all multilateral fora. Instead, they have attributed the hardships experienced by Kolechians and political prosecution of RPK to Ara. Furthermore, they have attempted to garner international sympathy for the separatist cause of Kolechia in their statements.
16. In the early morning hours of 15 July 2025, the Aranian Armed Forces launched an offensive into the Rutanian Transaltania region. Caught unprepared, Rutanian forces retreated disorganized, abandoning bases and precious pieces of equipment. President Kastenja addressed the Aranian population in the morning TV broadcast, where she stated: "The operation is a proportionate response to Rutanian acts of hybrid war against Ara. It is aimed at halting the illegal flow of weapons, supplies, and volunteers from Rutania to Kolechia". The same day Rutanian Prime Minister Drax ordered long-range ballistic missile strikes on Centurion. Many missiles were intercepted by Aranian air defence. This prompted Rutania to use a mix of modern satellite guided rockets with 10-meter accuracy and rockets from the cold war reserves, relying on inertial navigation systems with 500-meter accuracy in their salvos to overwhelm Aranian defences. Centurion

Times reported that over 300 residential buildings were destroyed in the attack, 612 civilian died, whereas no military targets were hit. On 17 July 2025, in a letter to the UN Security Council, Drax articulated that missile attacks are proportionate acts of self-defence against Aranian armed attack.

17. On 28 July 2025, Aranian forces captured Daliaq. After the loss of the city, the Rutanian military regrouped and halted further advances. With Ara facing overstretched supply lines and Rutania facing the depletion of the missile stockpiles, a ceasefire agreement was brokered by Icaria on 5 August 2025. According to the agreement, both sides would cease their attacks, and would remain at their current positions.
18. Known Aranian military losses include 7,894 killed and 546 captured; known Rutanian military losses include 3,456 killed and 251 captured. Approximately 4,500 civilians were killed during the attack on Daliaq and an additional three thousand are receiving urgent medical treatment in Daliaq hospitals, which are running out of essential medicines.
19. On 7 August 2025, president Kastenja held a press conference where she announced that Transaltania will remain under control of Aranian Armed Forces as a buffer zone which will prevent further Rutanian support to Kolechian terrorists. As the armed forces are doing exemplary work, no humanitarian organization is needed and will not be allowed to enter Transaltania. In order to sustain the costs of Aranian presence in Transaltania, studies on extracting Transaltanian lithium and cobalt are underway.
20. Recent reports indicate multiple military trucks transporting valuable pagan artifacts from the Daliaq temples, presumably to Ara proper.
21. An anonymous source told Grestin Today news channel that many Transaltanian civilians have been taken away by Aranian military police, with their whereabouts unknown.
22. Around 50,000 Daliaq residents fled to Grestin or Icaria. They speak of long waiting lines for food, as the Aranian Armed Forces withhold most of it for their own needs, leaving only a fraction available for the local population.
23. With Kolechia surrounded by Aranian forces, Rutania's support ceased. As food scarcity is increasing, many Kolechians attempt to flee by land to Rutania or by sea to Icaria. Those attempting the land route are stopped at Aranian Armed Forces checkpoints and subjected to extensive interrogations aimed at identifying

RPK members. Long waiting lines have become improvised camps. These camps are overcrowded, with poor housing conditions, frequent food shortages, and no access to services, including health care. Reports of deaths from starvation have emerged in Nirsk, Kolechian villages, and border camps. Humanitarian organizations have been consistently denied access to Kolechia.

24. On 8 August 2025, during a press conference in the capital of Icaria, President Giorgius Alfayani addressed the current refugee and security situation in the region. The President expressed serious concern over the humanitarian situation in Kolechia and Transaltania, warning that “many Rutanians may be in imminent danger” due to escalating violence and instability. He called upon the authorities of Ara to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure the protection of Rutanians, particularly civilians and internally displaced persons. According to Alfayani, “The rights of every human being must be preserved regardless of political tensions or military operations. The lives of civilians should never become a bargaining chip.”
25. During the same conference, President Alfayani unveiled a national plan for the reception of asylum seekers from Transaltania and Kolechia.
26. Regarding Transaltania, he acknowledged that the number of people seeking asylum has exceeded the capacity of the Icarian reception system. As a result, the government cannot provide immediate accommodation and full services to everyone. A priority list for humanitarian assistance was presented, giving precedence to children, women, and family units. These will be accommodated in a central refugee reception center, where they will be provided with basic needs (hygiene kits, food, heating), education for children under 15, who will be enrolled in local primary schools, medical services, with a doctor visiting the center twice a week and five nurses on duty 24/7. Meanwhile, providing psychological assistance to address armed conflict traumas is under consideration. The center has a capacity of 2500 people and is secured by Icarian police forces.
27. For the remaining asylum seekers who cannot be housed in the center, the government will issue monthly vouchers worth 50 € to assist them in finding accommodation and covering basic needs. However, these individuals will be required to report to the nearest police station every two days.
28. Non-governmental organizations have criticized the voucher scheme, stating that the amount is far from sufficient to secure accommodation or ensure dignified living conditions. The Icarian police also faced public backlash after an incident at the

reception center in which police arrested seven individuals with banners supporting Rutania. Authorities justified the arrests by citing the Icarian Criminal Code, which criminalizes open support for any party in an armed conflict on its territory as a breach of national neutrality.

29. On the matter of Kolechia, President Alfayani reaffirmed that Icaria takes Ara's suspicions regarding terrorist activities in the region seriously. He stated: "Our nation will protect Icarian security at all costs. While we stand for humanitarian principles, we cannot ignore legitimate security concerns."
30. President Alfayani announced that he would hold a meeting with the Aranian President Kastenja. Following the consultation, Alfayani declared that Ara had presented "convincing information" about security threats. As a result, Icaria will deploy its naval forces to international waters between Kolechia and Icaria to intercept vessels carrying Rutanians fleeing from Kolechia.
31. Under the new arrangement, individuals intercepted in transit are to be returned to Ara for interrogation. In its request for international assistance, Ara asked Icaria to play a dual role: first, to help maintain the fragile ceasefire, and second, to provide information on potential terrorists—something Ara considers essential to sustaining the ceasefire. Furthermore, Ara insisted that all Rutanians apprehended in transit be handed over for investigation, warning that any failure to do so would not only undermine its counter-terrorism efforts but also endanger Icarian security and compromise Icaria's declared neutrality.
32. Icaria has begun to systematically return Rutanians arriving from Kolechia back to Kolechia. Even those who manage to reach Icarian soil are later transferred back to Kolechia and subsequently handed over to Ara, as they are considered terrorism suspects. President Alfayani stressed that Ara has promised to provide full legal guarantees during any trials and that this arrangement is in line with Icarian national security policy and its interpretation of neutrality.
33. On 20 August 2025, based on collected evidence, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court, following the request from the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, authorised an investigation into the situation in the former Cygnus region since 18 March 2025.
34. All States are members of the United Nations. Obristan is also a permanent member of the UNSC, while Ara has commenced its mandate as a non-permanent member of the UNSC in September 2025.

35. All States are parties to the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as to all relevant international treaties and other agreements.