

The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict

From: WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ETHIOPIA?

Condensed from
the Italian Memorandum to the League of Nations.

From the last half of the preceding century, Italy opened diplomatic relations with the countries which constitute the actual empire of Ethiopia. All of her activity in Ethiopia has had its juridical consecration in the treaty of May 2, 1889.

Article XVII of this treaty clearly defined the pre-eminent Italian position in Ethiopia and was communicated to all the powers on Oct. 11, 1889. Thus was assumed the peaceful development of Italo-Ethiopian collaboration in a regime similar to that set up in other African and Asiatic regions.

But immediately after the conclusion of the Treaty of 1889, the Ethiopian government began a series of hostile acts which were continually becoming more serious and led to armed conflict in 1895-6, brought to a termination by the Treaty of October 26, 1896.

Notwithstanding this past experience, the Italian government again took up a policy of collaboration with Ethiopia, necessary for the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland united with Ethiopian regions by close and direct relations.

The Italian government concluded a series of treaties and accords with Ethiopia which were to regulate all reciprocal relationships. These accords, laid down in the most friendly spirit, are the document of Italy's willing attitude in comparison with Ethiopia, to whom Italy has offered, in times of peace, every possibility of development and collaboration.

To demonstrate the loyalty and benevolence with which the Italian government treated Ethiopia lies the fact that the greatest shipment of arms and munitions supplied to Abyssinia—before the well-known treaty of 1930 amongst Italy, France, and England which regulated the amount of arms to be imported into Ethiopia—was actually made to the Negus by the Italian government.

The latter furnished him with 400 Monlicher rifles, 1,000 Monlicher muskets, 1,000,000 cartridges to suit, 24 colt machine guns, 1,000,000 cartridges to suit, fifty Beretta pistols, three hundred and fifty machine gun rifles, one million cartridges to suit, for a sum amounting to one million and nine hundred Italian liras—a sum of which the Negus still owes Italy 840 thousand.

These arms furnished by Italy and not yet fully paid for are being prepared by the Negus against Italy. In the last few years it is known that there have been feverish requests for war materials. Furnishment of these (conducted by contraband and concealed operations), has considerably increased. It is clear that these arms had no other purpose than to be used against Italy. The importance of the Ethiopian State as far as Italy is concerned is illustrated by one fact alone, the common frontiers of Ethiopia with the two Italian colonies of East Africa have an extension of more than two thousand kilometers.

THE VIOLATION OF ITALO-ETHIOPIAN TREATIES

Four arrangements of facts have characterized Italo-Ethiopian relationships in the last forty years: 1) Ethiopian refusal of the delimitation of the frontiers of the Italian colonies and the consequent unjust occupation of Italian territory on the part of the Abyssinians; 2) A continued offense to the immunity of Italian diplomatic representatives in Ethiopia and to their inherent rights; 3) A permanent offense to the life and goods of Italian subjects in Ethiopia to whom the development of any enterprise of an economic nature was refused; 4) Offense and attempts on the life and goods of Italian subjects on Italian territory.

These four sets of facts legalize the affirmation of the Italian government, that Ethiopia has openly and deliberately violated all obligations assumed by treaties and Italo-Ethiopian agreements and pacts still in force.

This violation has not been confined to any one episode but is systematic and follows a regular program.

THE CONFINES

The Italian government has, above all, endeavoured to delimit in a definite form the confines of its colonies with Ethiopia in order to eliminate the first elementary reasons for eventual controversies.

It has demonstrated in this way its good will of peaceful cohabitation while it afforded Ethiopia the possibility of defining in its constituent elements the essence of its state since there can be no state if it is not first of all individuated in precise territorial limits.

On the other hand the Ethiopian government has adopted a policy of constant refusals and delays which can only be interpreted as an alibi sought to constantly keep an open door to all attempts of an Ethiopian invasion in Italian territories.

With regard to the frontier of Eritrea, based on Article 1 of the agreement of May 15, 1902, the Ethiopian government was to have determined on the grounds the boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia in such a way that the Cuman tribe would remain in Eritrea. The Ethiopian government never accepted to proceed towards delimitation of the boundary in this sector.

Instead she had a well populated zone occupied by a tribe of the Cunomo by appointing and subsidizing the chiefs. A series of grave incidents begin from this. To this day a strip of territory between the Moreb and Setit rivers which belongs to Italy by the pact of 1902 is occupied by armed Abyssinians.

A convention of July 10, 1900 fixed the eastern boundary between Eritrea and Tigris. They were to proceed on the basis of that convention to the precise determination of the boundary. Only in 1907 could she begin the work with a mixed commission which, however, had to interrupt their work due to the obstacles raised by the Ethiopian delegates. From that time it has been impossible to induce the Ethiopian government to take up again the delimitation of the frontier.

Even with respect to Danakil on the Eritrean frontier, the accord of 1900 contained in its second article the obligation of fixing the boundary line. But in this region too the Ethiopian government has always offered every kind of resistance for the definite delimitation of the boundary while raids and rapine by Ethiopians have continued in Italian territory.

With regards to Somaliland the questions dealing with the frontier are regulated by the convention of May 16, 1908.

The border according to the convention was to have been delimited by a mixed commission on the spot on the basis of principles established by the convention. Not until 1910 was the Ethiopian government induced to nominate its two delegates for the mixed commission of the boundary but after only four months the labours were interrupted with the pretext offered by the Ethiopian delegates of not being able to guarantee the security of members of the commission in the region of the Ogaden frontier.

THE TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP, 1928

The Italian government wanted to give the greatest proof of its willingness to be friendly with Ethiopia by entering a Treaty of

Friendship with Ethiopia on August 2, 1928. This is the first and only treaty of its kind concluded by a European power adjacent to Ethiopia. It has the exceptional duration of twenty years and it confirms Italy's peaceful intentions.

Based on the future collaboration specified in the treaty, Italy also concluded an additional agreement in which she conceded an outlet to the sea to Ethiopia in the free zone of the port of Assab in Eritrea and the construction of a road from Assab to Dessie in Ethiopian territory. The fundamental clause of the Treaty of Friendship is in Art. 3 which contains the obligation on the part of the two governments to enlarge and stimulate commerce between the two countries.

The most evident and constant obstructionism has always, however, opposed every Italian economic initiative on Ethiopian territory.

Among the many foreign technicians engaged by the Ethiopian government at Addis Ababa as advisers in her administration after 1928, only one electrical engineer is Italian. The same radio station constructed by the Ansaldo Company was entrusted to foreign technicians, a Frenchman and a Swede.

Notwithstanding the scarcity of means of communication which Ethiopia has with her neighbouring regions, the government of Addis Ababa did not want to construct a road in the direction of the Italian colonies and traffic has still to move along ancient caravan routes and mule paths. No Italian technician was admitted in the public works administration, no Italian physician installed in the missions.

The Ethiopian government has even refused the offer of an undertaking which the Italians were willing to assume gratis, prophylaxis against the bovine pest which was threatening to destroy the domestic animals in Ethiopia and menacing that of adjacent Italian, French and British colonies.

This prophylaxis had given excellent results in Eritrea and Somaliland. The Ethiopian government did not wish to give any support or collaboration to use it in Ethiopia as well. One of the few enterprises in Abyssinia, that for the development of the potassium mines of Dallol could not go on because the Ethiopian government hindered the construction of the necessary roads for the access and unloading of the products.

No agricultural activity was permitted the Italians in Ethiopia. But the same road from Dessie and Addis Ababa which was to give Ethiopia the desired access to the sea in the free zone and open new avenues to commerce could not be built because the Ethiopian government did not even consent to begin work on this territory.

The Treaty of Friendship of 1928 which was to have made Italy one of the most favoured countries economically in Ethiopia has rendered her instead the least favoured.

THE KLOBUKOWSKY TREATY

Other violences perpetrated by the Ethiopian government were that which concerns the Klobukowsky Treaty entered into as part of the particular Italo-Ethiopian accords. In virtue of the clause of the most favoured nation contained in Article 3 of the commercial Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of July 21, 1906 and in virtue of Article 4 of the Treaty of Friendship of August 2, 1928, the citizens, subjects and those protected by Italy have the right of being treated according to the terms of the treaty concluded between Ethiopia and France, Jan. 10, 1908 known as the Klobukowsky Treaty.

This treaty regulates the regime of the citizens, subjects and those protected by the European states in Ethiopia and constitutes the principal guarantee which European collectivities have under the actual conditions of civilization in the Ethiopian state. It is natural that every violation on the part of Ethiopia of the Klobukowsky Treaty is also as far as Italy is concerned a new failure to keep the Treaty of Friendship besides the obligations which the Ethiopian government has towards all the European countries.

According to Article 2 of the Klobukowsky treaty the subjects of the States subscribing to the Treaty can possess real estate with the right of reciprocity for Ethiopia. But the Ethiopian authorities have systematically refused the acquirement and possession of lands to Italians and strangers. They have also forbidden strangers to establish themselves on Abyssinian soil with long lease contracts. The same Article 2 of the treaty concedes full freedom of movement and residence in Ethiopian territory to foreign subjects. The Ethiopian authorities have in many regions denied this permission with pretended motives of security which in more than one case are only pretexts to limit the legitimate activities of strangers. Thus it happened in the first semester of 1933 when the British Consul of Mega was forbidden to undertake an excursion in the territories of the Borana and to the British Consul of Danakil to reach the Sudan by way of Metemma. Article 2 of the treaty states further that the freedom of commercial movements in Ethiopia must not be obstructed by any monopoly or exclusive privilege of purchase or sale reserved excepting for existing state monopolies. In 1922, however, the Ethiopian government accorded the alcohol monopoly to a Belgian concern the R. T. A. L. E. T. Again in 1930 the Ethiopian government conceded the salt monopoly to a French company. On Sept. 5, 1930, the Diplomatic Corps sent the Ethiopian government a collective note of protest for the concession of these two monopolies. But the note did not receive any answer. The third article of the Klobukowsky Treaty explicitly states the amount of customs duty to be levied on foreign merchandise imported in Ethiopian territory. The Ethiopian government has arbitrarily added to the duty fixed by that treaty other duties and taxes in its favour. Repeated protests from the Diplomatic Corps have also remained unanswered.

Article 4 of the Treaty obliges the Ethiopian government to the concession of the clause of the most favoured nation as far as duties, taxes and jurisdiction to all the powers are concerned.

The Ethiopian government has instead conceded notable facilitations to merchandise proceeding from British Somaliland, refusing them to France, Italy and other countries.

Article 7 of the Treaty states that controversies arising between foreigners and Ethiopians must be judged by a special court constituted by an Ethiopian judge and by the consul of the state to which the foreign party belongs. The Ethiopian authorities have considered the consul not as a judge on equal rights with the Ethiopian magistrate, but as a mute spectator without power.

If a disagreement arose between the consul and the Ethiopian judge the trial was postponed for a definite decision at the Emperor's court where the consul has no power and the Ethiopian government insists that Abyssinian law alone be applied.

The Diplomatic Corps has presented the Ethiopian government with numerous proposals for the constitution of regular mixed tribunals. No accord could be reached.

That of the Ethiopians is the only state in which the Diplomatic Corps is forced to declare a juridical strike in order to obtain the carrying out of sentences given by local courts to induce the government to accept in principle the examination of the necessary reforms.

The last paragraph of Article 7 of the Klobukowsky Treaty recognizes the right of the Ethiopian police to arrest the subjects or foreigners under protection accused of crime with the obligation, however, of immediately advising and handing them over to the consul of the country to which they belong.

The Ethiopian police have violated this clause many times. In 1933, for example, the Ethiopian authorities without any apparent reason imprisoned 14 Italian colonial subjects. Several months of negotiations on the part of the Italian legation at Addis Ababa

were necessary to obtain their freedom. At the same time 19 Italian colonial subjects were arrested in the same manner in the Ogaden territory of the "Fitaurari" Mezechia. It took months of negotiations before they could obtain their freedom. In May, 1934, 9 Italian subjects from Italian Somaliland, who were with an expedition of leopard hunters with a view to obtaining skins for curing were arrested by armed Abyssinians and sent to the prisons of Degadur. They remained there for eight months and were subjected to the cruelest ill-treatment.

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