

Russia – Ethiopia: 125 years of Diplomatic Relations

On February 25, 2023, the Russian Embassy in Ethiopia solemnly celebrated the 125th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. In his speech, Ambassador of the Russian Federation E. Terekhin emphasized that relations between the two countries are based on friendship, mutual respect, and trust and now have a multifunctional, mutually beneficial character.

Ethiopia in modern borders arose only at the end of the 19th century as a result of numerous conquering campaigns of Emperor Menelik II. Diplomatic relations with the Russian Empire were officially established during the reign of Menelik II in February 1898. This event is directly related to the victory of Abyssinia over the Italian colonizers in the Battle of Adua on March 2, 1896. For the first time in history, an African country defeated a European colonial empire and became independent. Special mention should be made of Russia's participation in the events in Ethiopia. In confronting the colonial power, Russia provided diplomatic and partial military assistance, helping Ethiopia with weapons and ammunition free of charge.

In February 1898, a Russian delegation headed by Pyotr Mikhailovich Vlasov was sent to Ethiopia to establish diplomatic relations between the two countries. In February 1902, the State Council decided to establish a permanent diplomatic mission in Ethiopia with an envoy in the position of resident minister. Actual State Councilor Konstantin Nikolaevich Lishin was appointed head of the mission. He arrived in Addis Ababa on March 28, 1903. It was planned to expand the range of bilateral relations, extending them to the economic and military spheres. The activities of K.N. Lishin were very fruitful. He died in 1906 and was buried in Addis Ababa. In memory of him, on February 10, 2023, on Diplomat's Day, flowers were traditionally laid on his grave. Russian Ambassador E. Terekhin highlighted that K.N. Lishin "laid a solid foundation for Russian-Ethiopian intergovernmental relations."

Friendly relations between Russia and Ethiopia date back many centuries, which, undoubtedly, were facilitated by a single faith - Christianity. Monks and merchants, church ministers and soldiers, representatives of the Cossacks and travelers, scholars and diplomats, writers and poets participated in the process of getting to know the two countries and peoples.

In 1895, an Ethiopian embassy headed by Prince Damto was sent to Russia. The formal purpose of the mission was to lay a golden crown on the grave of the deceased Russian Tsar Alexander III and congratulate Nicholas I on his accession to the throne. The goal was to obtain military assistance and diplomatic support in the upcoming war with Italy. The mission stayed in Russia for a whole month. This

was the first official visit to Russia by an embassy from Black Africa, which was given a very solemn reception.

At the end of the XIX century several research expeditions of V.F. Mashkov (1889–1892), full members of the Russian Geographical Society A.V. Eliseev and N.S. Leontiev (1893), geographer and ethnographer A.K. Bulatovich (1896-1898), and others, contributed to the strengthening of Russian-Ethiopian ties.

In 1904, mining engineer N.N. Kurmakov led a geological exploration expedition. It was sent on request of Menelik II to explore the gold mines belonging to the Ethiopian treasury. The emperor was pleased with the results of the work and awarded all members of the expedition, including miners, Ethiopian orders and medals. Special mention should be made of the activities of the outstanding Russian scholar-botanist and plant grower N.I. Vavilov. In 1926–1927 he led an expedition to Ethiopia, during which unique material on cultivated plants and soils of the country was collected, and farming techniques were studied in detail.

The development of friendly, trusting Russian-Ethiopian relations was also facilitated by the activities of the Russian Red Cross Society, which arrived in Ethiopia on May 26, 1896, consisting of 41 people. Later, a permanent Russian hospital was opened in Addis Ababa. The authority of Russian doctors was so high that Emperor Menelik II and Empress Taitu used only their services.

Relations between the two countries were terminated after the revolution of 1917 and resumed only in 1930–1940 when both countries fought against fascism and Nazism. Support of the Soviet Union in condemning the Italian aggression against Ethiopia in 1935–1936 in the League of Nations contributed to the strengthening of relations between the two countries and the creation of a favorable image of Russia in the eyes of the Ethiopian public.

The actual resumption of relations took place only in 1943. In 1945, after the opening of the Soviet permanent exhibition in Addis Ababa, under the auspices of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), the Russian Cultural Center began to operate. Emperor Haile Selassie II opened it personally. In 2020, the Russian Cultural and Scientific Center in Addis Ababa celebrated its 75th anniversary.

Cultural and military-diplomatic relations were supplemented by economic ties. In 1940–1950 equipment and agricultural machinery were supplied to Ethiopia. The first agreement on trade and cooperation between the USSR and Ethiopia was signed in 1959. However, the imperial regime during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie II and its focus on the United States and Great Britain did not favor the development of Soviet-Ethiopian relations. The overthrow of the emperor in 1974 and the coming to power of the Provisional Military Administrative Council in

1977 by Mengistu Haile Mariam, who proclaimed the construction of socialism as his goal, radically changed the situation.

In the period up to 1991, bilateral relations were largely determined by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1978. Trade and economic ties developed quite actively, reaching a special intensity in the 1970s. Technical assistance has increased many times over. With the assistance of the USSR, more than 20 major projects were implemented: dozens of industrial enterprises and large energy facilities, and a polytechnic institute were built. Soviet geologists discovered deposits of various minerals. Assistance was provided in the cultivation of tea and oilseeds, and the creation of livestock farms. Military-technical cooperation also developed actively. Over 20,000 Ethiopian citizens were educated in the USSR, and 5,000 specialists underwent vocational training. Particularly great assistance was provided to Ethiopia in overcoming the consequences of many years of drought and famine in the mid-1980s.

The regime change in Ethiopia in 1991 and the collapse of the USSR led to a reduction in bilateral interaction.

Since the late 1990s - early 2000s, there has been an increase in the mutual economic interest of the two countries. This is facilitated by the bilateral Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation and Trade (IPC), established in 1995. During a visit to Moscow in December 2001, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi signed a Declaration on the principles of friendly relations and partnership.

The main directions and projects of cooperation are fixed in the "Medium-term program for the development of trade, economic and scientific and technical cooperation between the Russian Federation and the FDRE" (2002). It includes the following sectors of the economy: the oil and gas industry, electric power industry, geology and natural resources, industry, water management and irrigation, land development, agriculture, health care, and training of national personnel. Of great importance for the country were the cancellation in 2005 of Ethiopia's debt to the USSR / RF (1104 out of 1268 million US dollars) and the restructuring of its balance for 30 years.

In 2012, an agreement on scientific and technical cooperation was signed, and projects for the development of the peaceful atom are being actively developed.

There is a representative office of the Rostec State Corporation in Ethiopia, as well as Russian companies for the exploration of hydrocarbon deposits. The Ethiopian government is interested in the participation of Russian companies in the modernization of the state district power station, which was built by the Soviet Union. On April 15, 2019, in Sochi, on the sidelines of the XI International Forum "ATOMEXPO-2019", a roadmap was signed to establish cooperation in the

implementation of projects for the construction of a nuclear power plant and the Center for Nuclear Science and Technology in Ethiopia. Ethiopian citizens study in Russian universities in civilian specialties. Russia has repeatedly provided humanitarian aid to Ethiopia. In 2019, at the 7th meeting of the IGC, a special emphasis was placed on the addition of energy (including nuclear) in the field of science, technology, and training.

Cooperation in the field of trade is actively developing. In 2021, the trade turnover between Russia and Ethiopia amounted to 225.24 million US dollars, an increase of 359.18% compared to 2020 (exports - 194.7 million, imports - 30.54 million). The structure of Russian exports to Ethiopia includes food products and agricultural raw materials, metals and products from them, chemical industry products, machinery, equipment, and vehicles, and wood and pulp, and paper products. Imports from Ethiopia consist of agricultural products.

The Joint Russian-Ethiopian Biological Expedition is working productively. Russian experts are taking part in applied research on the application of innovative methods to increase the productivity of Ethiopia's agriculture. The issue of creating a Joint Russian-Ethiopian Biological Center on its basis has been practically resolved. The Russian Academy of Sciences and the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences are showing great interest in cooperation in the scientific field. Several agreements were signed between the scientific institutions of both countries regarding mutually beneficial cooperation in the scientific and technological fields.

The dynamics of Russian-Ethiopian multifaceted contacts today are at a high level. A political dialogue is maintained between Russia and Ethiopia, and interaction is carried out through the Foreign Ministries of the two countries.

The countries actively cooperate in the field of international relations. Ethiopia supports the Russian Federation in the UN and opposes anti-Russian sanctions by the United States and Western states. Russia supported the federal authorities in their struggle against the militants of the Tigray People's Liberation Front for independence and territorial integrity.

The positions of both countries on issues of international cooperation often coincide - from the need to develop equal partnership and respect for human rights to the ideas of the multipolarity of the modern world order. This is evidenced by constant contact and business visits of representatives of both countries. This is especially true for foreign policy departments. In 2019, at the Russia-Africa summit, negotiations were held between the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, and the President of the Russian Federation, V.V. Putin. As a result of the negotiations, dozens of important agreements were signed.

In July 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov visited Ethiopia. The minister held meetings with Ethiopian President Sahle-Work

Zewde and Ethiopian Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen. Issues of technical cooperation between the two countries, the development of agriculture, and the extraction of minerals were discussed. In an interview with Izvestiya on July 27, 2022, Demeke Mekonnen noted that “the two countries are cooperating fruitfully in space, medicine, and nuclear research.” There are active inter-parliamentary as well as inter-party ties between United Russia and the ruling party of Ethiopia, the Prosperity Party.

The potential for the development of Russian-Ethiopian relations is great and covers a large number of areas. Added to this is the favorable image of Russia among Ethiopians and the centuries-old benevolent attitude of Russians towards Ethiopia.

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