

GO SOUTH! – THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HUNGARIAN–ETHIOPIAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN 1959-1960

VIKTOR MARSAI

Abstract: In the mid-1950s, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an effort to break free of the isolation brought about by the military defeat and communist takeover after WWII. One of the main priorities of Hungarian foreign policy was the developing world, including Africa. Although the revolution and subsequent reprisals of 1956 temporarily halted the opening up, at the end of the decade Hungary launched a new diplomatic offensive. Ethiopia, which symbolized African independence and power, was among the main targets. In spite of the setbacks and challenges, and thanks to the determination of Hungarian diplomats, Hungarian-Ethiopian relations were normalized in 1959–60. This paper examines this process by analyzing documents from the Hungarian National Archive and explains why establishing diplomatic connections proved valuable to both parties.

Keywords: Hungary; Ethiopia; diplomatic relations; Africa.

Contextualization of the paper

In recent years, Africa has gained increasing attention and importance in Hungarian foreign and trade policy. This can be seen in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' approval of the Global Opening Policy in 2011 and the Southern Opening Policy in 2015 and, last but not least, in the Hungarian government's adoption of the Africa Strategy in 2019 (Tarrósy & Morenth, 2013, pp. 77–96; Nagyné, 2016, pp. 189–196). The re-establishment of the independent Africa Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the opening of new embassies on the continent, and the launch of the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Program for hundreds of African students also demonstrated this shift in the Hungarian approach towards the continent and the end of decades of neglect and disinterest.

Nevertheless, the re-establishment of relations has not been an easy task, as is evident in the case of the East African regional power, Ethiopia. Hungary closed its embassy in Addis Ababa in 1992 (originally opened in 1965), so the return of Hungarian diplomacy in 2016, after a hiatus of 24 years, was in essence a fresh start.

This was not the first occasion when Hungary attempted to bolster its presence in the Ethiopian Highlands without preliminaries. The Hungarian government faced similar challenges in the mid-1950s when Budapest launched efforts to expand its diplomatic and

economic presence in third world countries – including in Africa. Reading the files in the National Archives of Hungary (NAH) and speaking with current diplomatic and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) staff delegated to Africa, the researcher often finds astonishing parallels between various stories and events. Therefore, it is perhaps not superfluous to examine in some detail how diplomatic relations were first established with Addis Ababa during the Cold War years.

In addition, it is also important to understand the intention of the parties that led to the establishment of diplomatic relations. In Cold War discourse, examining the actions and interests of superpowers and great powers dominated the landscape for decades. Nevertheless, thanks to recent research it has become more and more evident that smaller states and third parties were not simply passively involved in the Cold War competition but were active players with their own agendas and were relatively successful in implementing them. One of the best examples of how Third World countries utilized the Cold War competition is to be found in the Horn of Africa, where Ethiopia and Somalia adeptly exploited their geopolitical importance to superpowers while pursuing their own interests. This is well demonstrated in the books of I. M. Lewis (2002), H. Marcus (2002), R. Patman (1990), C. Clapham (2017) and D. Jackson (2018).

Furthermore, the new research and approaches have not only highlighted the importance of third-world actors in the global competition but also underlined the significance of the smaller states in the Soviet Bloc, which have generally been almost totally neglected until now. Recent volumes by J. Sáringer (2016), C. Békés (2019), P. Muehlenbeck (2016) and R. Yordanov (2016) have clearly shown how Central and Eastern European countries tried to follow their own international relations agenda in the shadow of Moscow, sometimes successfully. For instance, in building a socialist bridgehead in US-dominated Ethiopia in the 1950s, Czechoslovakia was perhaps as important as the Soviet Union, thanks to its historical connections with Addis Ababa (Yordanov 2016, p. 11).

This paper is among the work of a cohort of Hungarian researchers who have examined the topic in recent years (Tarrósy, 2018; Marsai, 2019; Búr, 2021; Solymári & Tarrósy, 2021) and continues and extends the work of the authors mentioned in the previous paragraph. To fill in the gaps, the author's research, supported by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, concentrates on obtaining a better understanding of Hungarian foreign policy regarding the Horn of Africa and the importance and effects of these diplomatic relations for Budapest's Africa policy as a whole. Consequently, the main research questions of the paper are 1. How did a newcomer to the Horn of Africa – the People's Republic of Hungary – try to build up its presence in the region? 2. What was the importance of Ethiopia for Budapest's general foreign policy; 3. and What challenges did Hungary face in the process?

As this paper will demonstrate, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Ethiopia provided important lessons for the Hungarian government and the MoFA, which were to prove crucial in expanding connections with other third-world partners. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Budapest had to establish diplomatic relations with what were relatively unknown actors – from its perspective at least (Solymári & Tarrósy, 2021, pp. 148–149). Therefore, any fresh experience and knowledge proved useful in helping Hungarian diplomacy to understand how it could approach new relations and the attendant challenges.

The methodology of the paper is a strong diplomatic history approach based on archival research. This approach is essential; although some might argue that it is outdated, considering the huge gaps of knowledge on the topic and lack of information about even the most fundamental developments in Ethiopian-Hungarian relations. In spite of Yordanov's efforts to draw on the files of the Budapest archives, Hungary's activities in Ethiopia receive very limited attention in his book — compared with Bulgaria or Czechoslovakia — just a few paragraphs. Since the reports from the Hungarian Embassy and Foreign Trade Office in Addis Ababa show that Budapest was no less an important partner for Ethiopia than Prague or Sofia, it can be assumed that his pioneering research was limited chiefly by his lack of knowledge of Hungarian. To overcome this barrier, the author analyzed all the available files — running to hundreds of pages — of Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports on Ethiopia held in the National Archives of Hungary and issued from 1949, when the first reports on Ethiopia were compiled, to March 1960, when the first Hungarian ambassador, Lajos Szijártó, presented his Letter of Credence to the Ethiopian Emperor. Moreover, the collection of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contains the files not only of that ministry but also of other institutions and ministries involved and so provides a broad understanding of the topic.

The paper starts by examining why Hungary turned to the South and sought to establish diplomatic relations with Ethiopia. The next section deals with the diplomatic efforts after the 1956 revolution in Hungary, which significantly weakened the credibility of the Hungarian socialist government and delayed the process. Then, the paper analyses Ambassador Lajos Szijártó's visit to Addis Ababa, which provided important information for both parties on the intentions and possibilities. Lastly, the paper describes the establishment of diplomatic relations and, in the concluding remarks, highlights the successes, the failures, and the lessons.

The prelude

To understand the importance of Ethiopia, and the developing world in general, in the Hungarian foreign policy of the 1950s, it is necessary to analyze the general circumstances, which differed greatly in Budapest from in other Central-Eastern European socialist countries. After World War II (WWII), the reconstruction and re-building of the country, the Paris peace negotiations, the Soviet occupation, and the pressure on Hungary to embrace Socialism diverted all Hungary's energy and attention away from developing a more independent and global foreign policy. Hungary was among the defeated countries in WWII and that further limited its space for maneuver.

Nevertheless, this started to change in the mid-1950s, when Hungary regained its sovereignty — at least partially — and managed to build up a professional foreign service apparatus that sought to expand relations in the international system. In this period there was growing interest in the developing world, including Africa, rooted in the recognition by the government and the MoFA that Africa, Asia, and Latin America would become the new geographic area of geopolitical, economic, ideological, and cultural competition (Búr, 2021, 341–342). The speed with which Budapest adapted to the new circumstances and began its first “global opening” illustrates its growing assertiveness. It must be also emphasized that this took place *before* the revolution and war of independence in October 1956. Hence,

in the beginning, efforts to establish new relations were related not to the diplomatic isolation that followed 1956 but to the clear perception among Hungarian decisionmakers that the international system was changing and new regions were becoming of increasing importance. Therefore, it was no accident that Hungary was among the first countries to open an embassy in independent Sudan in 1956. Indeed by the end of that year, Hungary had established diplomatic relations with forty-two countries, including Ecuador, (North) Korea, Argentina, (North) Vietnam, Mongolia, Iran, Syria, Bolivia, Egypt, Tunisia, Cambodia, and Uruguay (Sáring, 2016, p. 25).

After the successful diplomatic offensives in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, Hungary's efforts were targeted at Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The SSA was largely a *terra incognita*, not only for Budapest but also for Moscow and other socialist capitals. And, although most African territories were still under colonial rule, the sunset of European power was on the horizon, and in many cases the date of independence had already been agreed (Nugent, 2004, pp. 23–57.). This was the general context in which Ethiopia became increasingly important for Budapest.

Yet, Hungarian-Ethiopian relations were not new; consequently, research – albeit not much – has been published. Balázs Szélinger published a thorough analysis in his PhD dissertation in 2008. Nevertheless, Szélinger ended his analysis at the close of WWII and emphasized the weakness of relations. Although the Austro-Hungarian Empire had established official diplomatic relations with Abyssinia in 1905 (Szélinger, 2008, pp. 26–27), these were mainly symbolic, and most interaction took place through informal channels (merchants, explorers, etc.). The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after WWI (1918) gave rise to a hiatus in relations, with the exception of refugees from the annexed territories of Hungary after the Trianon peace treaty. In addition, since the Kingdom of Hungary had strengthened its partnership with fascist Italy in the 1930s, the Hungarian government and media supported the Italian invasion of the Ethiopian Highlands. Therefore Budapest did not try to establish official links with Addis Ababa before WWII.

After WWII, besides the aforementioned domestic political reasons and military defeat, the latitude for Hungarian activity in Ethiopia was limited by the fact that Addis Ababa quickly turned towards the Western alliance, chiefly Washington – given Moscow's supportive position on Eritrean independence – to obtain backing for the occupation of Asmara. And, although the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, wanted to maintain Ethiopia's independent and, later, non-aligned status, in practice this meant close cooperation with the United States, as demonstrated in the military and economic cooperation between the two parties and the creation of an American military base in the country (Yordanov, 2016, p. 7; Marcus, 2002, p. 158.). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the first HNA files from 1949 considered Ethiopia a member of the Western bloc. Nevertheless, the true nature of Ethiopian foreign policy, and its strong orientation towards independent action, became clear during a conversation between the Hungarian and Ethiopian ambassadors to the United Kingdom. During the meeting in London, the Ethiopian ambassador, Abebe Retta, avoided all topics related to the emerging East–West division of the world (Erős, 1949, July 2).

In subsequent years, only rudimentary and ad hoc reports of Ethiopia reached Budapest. But in the mid-1950s, the international environment seemed more supportive of a socialist diplomatic offensive in East Africa. The Suez crisis was understood – and exaggerated – by

Eastern capitals as a sign of growing internal tension within imperialism, so most actors adopted a more assertive approach towards Africa.

Although 1956 did not bring imperialism to its knees, the Suez crisis also marked a shift in Ethiopian foreign policy. On the one hand, the Emperor was deeply dissatisfied with American support for Egypt against Israel and the European powers. Haile Selassie's approach stemmed from Ethiopia's traditionally strong pro-Israel and pro-Jewish traditions, and a distrust of Arab and Muslim nations. On the other hand, the experienced and accomplished emperor quickly grasped the changing nature of the international system, and, through exploitation of Cold War rivalry, the potential for rebalancing his country's foreign policy after a period of excessive dependence on Washington (Yordanov, 2016, p. 9). Therefore, Haile Selassie was more supportive of opening up towards the socialist states than he had been. In addition, the Bandung conference of 1955 gave further impetus to opening up towards the Eastern Bloc. In 1955, Addis Ababa made its first large commercial deal with Prague, followed by another with the Soviet Union in 1957 (MoFA, 1962, August 11). The revitalization of relations with Hungary was a part of these general efforts.

The first Hungarian steps towards establishing official diplomatic relations with Addis Ababa were taken in 1956, during the wave of the general expansion of Hungarian foreign policy in the developing world. After the recognition of Sudan, it seemed a logical step towards establishing further bridgeheads in Sub-Saharan Africa. To facilitate the process, István Ágics, who worked both as a reporter for the Hungarian Telegraphic Office (MTI) and a representative of the Hungarian Foreign Trade Bureau (which became Technical and Scientific Cooperation – TESCO – in 1962) visited Ethiopia in August 1956. When transferred to Cairo, the Hungarian ambassador, György Zágor, asked Ágics to try to find out in Addis Ababa what the Ethiopian reaction would be if Budapest suggested establishing diplomatic relations. In East Africa, Ágics met with Blatta David Okbazkui, Ethiopia's first deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and later with the Duke of Harar, Mekonnen Haile Selassie, the Emperor's most influential son (Mekonnen, unfortunately, died in a car accident in 1957). The journalist shared Hungary's intentions with the Duke, who was open to deepening relations and promised he would discuss the issue with his father. Some days later Mekonnen invited Ágics for lunch and told him that the Emperor was generally interested in the idea. Nevertheless, the Duke of Harar added "unfortunately, the situation in Suez does not enable us to profoundly examine the topic." Therefore, Mekonnen suggested that Ágics "should come back at the end of September or in early October, and then the issue will be solved soon." (Széphelyi, 1956, September 24). On 19 September, some weeks after the journalist had left Addis Ababa, A. P. Miriallis, head of the Emperor's economic committee, phoned Ágics (Miriallis was staying in Prague with a delegation) and passed on an official message from Haile Selassie. The Emperor notified the journalist and the Hungarian government that "before his travel to India on 20 October, he is ready to accept Ágics over the topic of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries." Selassie also informed the journalist of his regret that his illness had meant he was unable to receive Ágics [in August] (Ibid.). According to a Hungarian MoFA report, the government decided that Ágics would travel to Addis Ababa in the company of János Veress, an official from the MoFA, to start negotiations on the issue. The plan was that the Hungarian ambassador to Egypt, Zágor, would be accredited to Ethiopia (Széphelyi, 1956, October 5). These rapid

developments demonstrated that Budapest's timing was excellent and that Addis Ababa was ready to bolster relations.

Nevertheless, the plan never came to fruition: the revolution and war of independence in Hungary in October–November 1956 led to the abandonment of the trip. The reprisals and political turmoil which followed the revolution, and, later, the consolidation efforts by the Kádár regime, diverted attention away from foreign policy. Furthermore, the Soviet intervention and the brutality of the new regime contributed to Hungary's renewed isolation in the international system. Therefore, in the late 1950s, seeking new foreign partners who could facilitate Hungary's return to the international stage seemed more important than ever.

Efforts for the establishment of diplomatic relations after the 1956 revolution in Hungary

Less than a year after the unsuccessful diplomatic efforts, on 11 August 1957, the MoFA ordered Ambassador Zágor in Cairo to re-approach the Ethiopians and ask the country's representative in Egypt to help establish official diplomatic connections between Budapest and Addis Ababa. On 21 September, the Ethiopian ambassador informed Zágor that he had forwarded the Hungarian request to the Ethiopian MoFA. In the meantime, Zágor's mandate expired, and he was replaced by Lajos Szíjártó, who became Hungary's ambassador to Egypt. Szíjártó was authorized to continue negotiations with the East African country. However, the process quickly stalled for personal and institutional reasons: the Ethiopian ambassador was recalled and his position remained unfilled for six months (Szíjártó, 1958, June 7).

Seeking alternative paths forward in East African diplomacy, the Hungarian delegation in Belgrade visited the Ethiopian representation to facilitate further steps. The fact that the Ethiopian ambassador to Yugoslavia, Keflegezi Gebremascal, had been appointed to Egypt and was soon to leave for Cairo seemed a perfect alignment of circumstances. Nevertheless, Keflegezi "got a little confused, because he thought that the issue had already been resolved." (Kós, 1958, March 13). The ambassador, who seemed supportive towards Hungary, promised he would encourage the Ethiopian MoFA to take up the request. The vacancy in Cairo and the meeting in Belgrade clearly demonstrate how limited the horizontal and vertical information sharing was within the Ethiopian MoFA, and that all decisionmaking was in fact concentrated in the Emperor's inner circle, with it sometimes taking years for a particular issue to be tackled. That did not make it easy for Hungarian diplomats to achieve tangible results.

In addition, the actions of Hungarian decisionmakers and diplomats were sometimes contradictory. In April 1958, the head of Political Division IV at the MoFA, Péter Kós, who was responsible for Africa, again urged Szíjártó to obtain results in the matter, since extending Hungarian diplomatic relations to Asian and African countries was a key strategic goal for Budapest. Kós even reprimanded Szíjártó for his lack of progress (Kós, 1958, April 22).

To obtain results, Kós suggested that János Veress, now the chargé d'affaires in Khartoum, should travel to Addis Ababa. In his reply, Szíjártó emphasized that the lack of Ethiopian representation in Cairo for the past five months meant he had not been able to act.

On 30 April, the new Ethiopian ambassador, Keflegezi, arrived in Cairo and visited Szijártó. The Hungarian ambassador informed his Ethiopian counterpart about Hungary's previous efforts and the notional support of his predecessor in the matter. Keflegezi declared that he could not "see any obstacle to the normalization of relations" (Szijártó, 1958, May 1). Of course, the East African ambassador added, administrative issues – personal and financial – should be considered "because there [have been] austerity measures in the Ethiopian diplomatic corps" (Ibid.). Szijártó recommended that Ethiopian representation be arranged without further financial obligation, through the delegation of the Ethiopian ambassador to Yugoslavia to Budapest.

In the meantime, János Veress, the *chargé d'affaires* in Khartoum, called Szijártó and informed him that the head of the Hungarian Trade Office (HTO) in Khartoum, István Lunger, had travelled to Ethiopia to consult about establishing diplomatic relations. This case is a good illustration of how the HTOs, under the Ministry of Foreign Trade, followed their own agenda and of the often ad-hoc nature of cooperation between the various Hungarian ministries and actors. It not only weakened Hungary's position and the chances of successful negotiations but stoked internal rivalry and personal tensions.

In Addis Ababa Lunger was told that Hungary should have negotiated through the Ethiopian embassy in Cairo and that if Keflegezi backed the idea, the Ethiopian MoFA would do likewise. In general, this answer seemed somewhat evasive, since the nature of the decisionmaking in Addis Ababa was such that it is hard to imagine an ambassador deciding to initiate relations with another state. It is also possible that even the staff at the MoFA were not aware of the Emperor and his cabinet's intentions regarding Hungary.

At this point, Hungary still did not want an independent embassy in Addis Ababa. Instead, it was considering delegating its ambassador in Khartoum to Ethiopia. It also seemed likely that an independent trade office would be created soon after a diplomatic deal. Therefore, the MoFA urged Lunger – who had some connections in East Africa – to travel again to Addis Ababa to obtain further results (Kós, 1958, May 13a). The Ministry of Foreign Trade was not happy with the MoFA intervening in its business and was in no hurry to share its results. This is clearly illustrated in a letter from the MoFA, written in May 1958, asking for further information regarding Lunger's achievements in Ethiopia (Kós, 1958, May 13b).

Alongside these efforts in Africa, Hungarian institutions took steps to prepare the necessary resolutions and documents for the establishment of diplomatic relations. Hence, on 12 May, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed that the government should authorize the establishment of official relations. It argued that "the Ethiopian government seems ready to establish trade and diplomatic connections with the countries of the Socialist Bloc. Ethiopia already has diplomatic and economic relations with many socialist partners" (MoFA, 1958, May 12). It is interesting to see that in spite of the debates and tensions at the lower levels of the administration the Hungarian government supported the idea in its entirety, accepting the resolution without further discussion and forwarding the matter to the final decisionmaker, the Presidential Council of the People's Republic of Hungary (Ibid.).

In April of 1958 Lunger spent two weeks in East Africa and – assisted by the Soviet ambassador to Ethiopia – met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Head of the Protocol Department of the MoFA. Although everybody seemed supportive, the Head of the

Trade Office could not achieve any meaningful progress. His only success was to conclude agreements with 14 trade representatives in Addis Ababa on promoting Hungarian products, and opening up Ethiopian markets to Hungarian companies. The fact that Ethiopia was much more interested in Hungarian business activities than in diplomacy clearly indicated that the East African country badly needed foreign economic investments and knowledge. In addition, at this point Ethiopia was still extremely cautious about making official connections with a socialist country, especially one in isolation because of the reprisals following the 1956 revolution (Sziójártó, 1958, May 16). Nevertheless, both Sziójártó and János Veress felt optimistic (Veress, 1958, May 19).

After these events and antecedents, the reply from the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was rather confusing and personal tensions arose again. Kós, the Head of Political Division IV, was dissatisfied and blamed the Hungarian diplomats for having exceeded their mandate. Kós argued – untruthfully, judging by his previous letters – that he had merely requested Sziójártó and Veress to collect information. “In spite of my order, as revealed in your report, [...] you sent an official notice to the Ethiopian ambassador, without a consultation with the Center. [...] We should add that the Ministerial Council has only recently reached the decision to start negotiations on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Ethiopia” (Kós, 1958, May 28).

Reading the files, it is hard to judge what the reason behind Kós’ letter could have been. It was clear that Hungary had been trying to establish official relations with Ethiopia for at least two years and, before travelling to Cairo, Sziójártó had been given direct orders to continue those efforts. Furthermore, one month earlier Kós had even reprimanded the Hungarian ambassador for his lack of progress. Therefore, it seems that personal tensions and grievances may have been in the background. Sziójártó’s response supports this idea. In it, he raised all the circumstances that proved that he had acted in good faith. Sziójártó also reminded Kós that before travelling to Cairo he had received a direct request to continue the negotiations begun by his predecessor and that during his stay in Egypt he received renewed encouragement to expedite the process. Sziójártó emphasized that after their meeting Keflegezi asked Sziójártó for an official note because the Ethiopian ambassador could not approach his government about the matter without one. The Hungarian ambassador also attached Zágór’s previous letter in his reply to Kós, which supported Sziójártó’s version of the events. (Sziójártó, 1958, June 13). Although the internal debate within the Hungarian MoFA did not have any significant effect on the process, it demonstrated the internal tensions that sometimes poisoned everyday work.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that not all the staff at the Ethiopian MoFA were as supportive of Hungary as Keflegezi was, and Addis Ababa was still suspicious of Budapest. For instance, Cséby reported from Belgrade that during his first visit the new Ethiopian ambassador had “asked many questions about the counterrevolution, the intervention of Soviet troops, our guarantee of impunity for Nagy and his associates, and similar topics. I gave the proper answers to all of these questions, but the ambassador just nodded without conviction” (Cséby, 1958, July 1). The Yugoslav episode illustrates the divisions within the Ethiopian diplomatic corps and the highly diverse attitudes towards Hungary at different levels of the administration.

Szjártó's visit to Addis Ababa

In spite of the Ethiopian promises, 1958 did not bring any improvement in relations. Therefore, to give new impetus to the process, at the end of 1958, Szjártó travelled to Ethiopia for a conference of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. At the opening ceremony, the Soviet ambassador to Ethiopia, B. I. Karavaev, introduced Szjártó to the Ethiopian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Siraka, who invited the Hungarian diplomat to his office. At the meeting on 2 January, Siraka held a pragmatic – and not too friendly – discussion with the Hungarian diplomat. Disregarding protocol, the deputy minister emphasized from the beginning that his country was interested mainly in trade relations, especially in trading oil seeds and coffee. Siraka asked from which country Hungary bought coffee and told Szjártó that their greatest rival was Brazil. As the ambassador reported, “Siraka made it clear that without Hungarian coffee imports from Ethiopia, they could not arrange any significant business or purchases from our country” (Szjártó, 1959, January 10). The deputy minister could not share any meaningful information on the status of negotiations on diplomatic relations. So it appeared that trade relations were more important for Addis Ababa than diplomacy.

Three days later Szjártó had a more polite and pleasant conversation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs himself, Ilma Deressa. The fact that Ilma followed a completely different track from his deputy bolstered the impression that the Ethiopian diplomatic corps still worked along personal lines and attitudes, and that the foreign policy goals of the country and the administration were not entirely clear – sometimes appearing ad hoc in manner. In a confidential meeting with Szjártó, Karavaev complained about Ethiopian behavior. The Soviet ambassador told his partner that the Ethiopian government and parliament were just puppets of the Emperor and that the “budget of the country is in the hands of the Americans. Ministries are also led by American advisors” (Ibid.).

In these circumstances, personal sympathy towards certain states was a decisive factor during meetings. Therefore, it was important that Ilma was not directly against socialist interventions. During his meeting with Szjártó, it soon became clear that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had already been informed about Hungarian intentions by Siraka. The minister told Szjártó that they were ready to establish relations at envoy level. Ilma emphasized that financial and personal issues meant they could not open an embassy in Budapest and that the Ethiopian ambassador in Moscow would be accredited to Hungary. As Szjártó reported, “the minister told me that he would send us a memorandum on the topic through the Ethiopian embassy in Cairo within ten days” (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the promise did not materialize.

During his stay, Karavaev notified Szjártó that Ethiopia was conducting an “Eastern Opening” towards socialist states and had established diplomatic relations with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Romania. Nevertheless, as regards Hungary, the arrest and execution of Imre Nagy seemed a great obstacle because “after the case of Imre Nagy, many articles were published in the daily newspapers in Addis Ababa, which questioned the view that, in their tendencies, the October [1956] events followed a counter-revolutionary agenda” (Szjártó, 1959, January 12). In addition, in his previous reports, Zágor had underlined that the Ethiopian leadership had not entirely forgotten Hungary’s support for the aggressor during the Italian invasion (Zágor, 1957, March 11).

Because of the American influence in the East African country, the Soviet ambassador saw limited space for maneuver in the political sphere. Therefore, according to Karavaev, it was pointless establishing an independent embassy. Creating a trade office appeared to be more valuable given the Ethiopians' interest in selling coffee. Nevertheless, the Soviet diplomat also advised that appointing a second or third secretary as a *chargé d'affaires* could raise the standing of the office because it would guarantee diplomatic status (Szjártó, 1959, January 12). In his previous report, Zágor had emphasized the importance of the diplomatic rank of potential Hungarian representatives, for in the Emperor's feudal court that determined the diplomat's success in representing Hungary's interests (Zágor, 1957, March 11).

The establishment of diplomatic relations in 1959

Although the early days of 1959 and Szjártó visits brought no positive developments, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to be ready for action should Addis Ababa gave a positive answer. To add fresh impetus to the process, in March 1959, *Chargé d'Affaires* János Veress travelled from Khartoum to Addis Ababa. Veress visited the State Secretary of the Ethiopian MoFA, Gashaw Zeleke, who had also been asked to facilitate the issue in a letter from Szjártó. Gashaw was polite but could not supply any further information. As Veress reported, "the declarations of the State Secretary demonstrated that, at the highest level, [the Ethiopians] still want to postpone the decision" (Veress, 1959, April 18). In May 1959, Hungary received similarly neutral statements from the Ethiopian ambassador to the Soviet Union (Kós, 1959, May 12).

It is a great paradox that after so many meetings and posts there was such limited information about a breakthrough. At the end of July, the Hungarian Presidential Council accepted Szjártó's accreditation to Addis Ababa, indicating that a positive message must have arrived from Ethiopia (MoFA, 1959, July 31). It is also surprising that the NAH files do not contain – or at least, the author could not find – the official memorandum regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. It is only from later reports that we learn the exact date of the move was 17 November 1959 (Várkonyi, 1978, August 22).

There are numerous explanations as to why Addis Ababa finally consented to official relations. The most important one is that by 1959 the Széphelár regime appeared to have stabilized its positions not only in Budapest but also, step by step, on the international stage. Therefore, there was no additional reason for Ethiopia to resist as it could expect further important financial and technical support from socialist Hungary for its development plans.

While there are only fragmented reports regarding the second half of 1959, Szjártó's second journey to Addis Ababa to present his *agrément* to Haile Selassie is relatively well-documented. Although Hungary wanted to schedule the visit for January 1960, in the end the Ethiopians informed their counterparts that the Emperor was ready to accept the Hungarian ambassador in March. Szjártó and another Hungarian diplomat, Lajos Nagy, arrived in Addis Ababa on 3 March. Mesfin Ababa, the Protocol Director of the MoFA was responsible for the delegation. On 4 March, Mesfin received the ambassador in his office, and they discussed the ceremony details. As Szjártó reported, "Mesfin was very helpful during our stay [in Ethiopia] in everything" (Szjártó, 1960, April 14). The next day, the delegation met

with the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ato Jilma. Although Ato was thought to be pro-American, Szjártó stated that he “received us with cordial politeness” (Ibid).

Haile Selassie accepted the delegation on 10 March. At 9.00 AM, Tafesse Lemma, the Emperor’s adjutant, arrived at the hotel in a car decorated with the Hungarian national flag. Tafesse accompanied the Hungarian delegation to Guenete Leul Palace – now the main building of Addis Ababa University. A Guard of Honor received Szjártó, who reported to the Emperor. After three bows, he presented his *agrément* to Haile Selassie. “The Emperor took the credential and welcomed me as the first representative of the People’s Republic of Hungary [in Ethiopia].” After the formal ceremony, the Emperor had a 10 to 15 minute impromptu conversation with the delegation. Szjártó conveyed the greetings of István Dobi, the Head of the Presidential Council, and the Hungarian people to the Emperor. The ambassador also presented Haile Selassie with some famous Tokaj wine (Ibid).

Conclusions

With Lajos Szjártó’s accreditation to Ethiopia, the first stage of establishing diplomatic relations was completed, even if there was still a great deal to do. In 1962, Hungary opened a foreign trade office in Addis Ababa; in September 1964, Haile Selassie visited Budapest (Marsai, 2019); in 1965, Hungary established an embassy in Ethiopia; and finally, in 1966, Gyula Kállai, Head of the Ministerial Council, visited East Africa, including Ethiopia.

Although the procedure may sometimes appear to have been unsophisticated, considering the circumstances, the establishment of diplomatic relations was a key success and achievement for Hungary. First of all, Budapest achieved its strategic goal and built up a presence in a Sub-Saharan African capital that maintained close connections with Washington and that was, at least in the beginning, highly suspicious of Hungarian intentions. Therefore, the efforts of the Hungarian government and its diplomatic corps deserve acknowledgement, in that by leaving their traditional comfort zone they launched a diplomatic offensive to expand Hungarian foreign relations with countries Budapest had very limited knowledge and experience of. The determination and effort shown by Hungary should not be underestimated, even if it was facilitated in the context of a greater and general socialist diplomatic offensive in/towards the East African country. The fact that Hungary managed to break free of its diplomatic isolation and repair official links with Ethiopia, a largely pro-Western country, just four years after the events of 1956 was undoubtedly a success. It was mainly due to the efforts of the Hungarian diplomats and MoFA staff in Budapest, Cairo, and Khartoum, who went to Herculean efforts to establish relations.

Nonetheless, without the changes in Ethiopian foreign policy in the 1950s Hungary’s mission would have been impossible. Haile Selassie’s decision to rebalance his country’s foreign policy and allow more leeway for the socialist countries provided a unique opportunity. Even if it was mainly a symbolic move, it offered Moscow and its allies a chance to build bridgeheads in Addis Ababa.

It is also worth underlining that the process revealed the weak points of the Hungarian administration. Internal institutional and often personal debates greatly hampered the effectiveness and delayed success. The lack of clarity on the exact competences and,

often, clear decisionmaking procedures sowed confusion and stoked further tensions and grievances. These would cause havoc in subsequent years too.

Last, but not least, it is also evident from the files that the Eastern Bloc's influence remained limited and marginal until the Ethiopian revolution in 1974, and – as Karavaev told Szíjártó – socialist diplomats often had to work in a hostile environment. As had happened with Szíjártó and Cséby, in subsequent years, many Hungarian diplomats faced distrustful or even hostile Ethiopian counterparts. On the other hand, many Ethiopians were fed up with Western influence and warmly welcomed the newcomers. An important aspect was that leftist ideologies had started to spread among the elite in the 1950s, and some elements wanted reforms to mitigate the misery of the population, something which seemed impossible under the rule of an absolute monarch. Many Ethiopians thought that the socialist transformation of Central Eastern European countries could provide a viable example of modernization for their country too (Marcus, 2002, pp. 190–207).

In this constellation, Hungary was just a smaller part of a bigger picture. Nevertheless, Budapest not only successfully exploited the circumstances but also changed negative attitudes towards Hungary in Addis Ababa and managed to establish official relations in what was expected to become the diplomatic capital of Africa.

References

- Békés, Cs. (2019). *Enyhülés és emancipáció* [Détente and emancipation]. Budapest: Osiris – MTA TK.
- Búr, G. (2021). A szubszaharai Afrika szerepe a Magyar Népköztársaság külpolitikájában [The role of Sub-Saharan Africa in the foreign policy of the People's Republic of Hungary]. *Világtörténet*, 3, 339–351.
- Clapham, C. (2017). *The Horn of Africa: State formation and decay*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, I. M. (2002). *A modern history of the Somali*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Magyar Közlöny. (2019). 1177/2019. (IV. 2.) kormányhatározat az Afrika stratégiáról. [Resolution on the Africa strategy of Hungary] *Magyar Közlöny*, 56 Vol., 2 April 2019, 1861–1864.
- Marcus, H. (2002). *A history of Ethiopia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Muehlenbeck, P. (2016). *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1948–1968*. Basingstoke: Palgrave – Macmillan.
- Marsai, V. (2019). Az utolsó császár Magyarországon [The last emperor in Hungary]. *Afrika Tanulmányok/Hungarian Journal of African Studies*, 14/3–4, 29–46.
- Nagyné, R. E. (2016). Magyarország és az arab Közel-Kelet [Hungary and the Arab Middle East]. In B. Koller & V. Marsai (Eds.), *Magyarország Európában, Európa a világban* [Hungary in Europe, Europe in the World], pp. 189–196. Budapest: Dialóg Campus,
- Nugent, P. (2004). *Africa since independence*. Basingstoke: Palgrave – Macmillan
- Patman, R. G. (1990). *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Solymári, D. & Tarrósy, I. (2021). A magyar diplomácia újjászületése Afrikában [The rebirth of Hungarian Diplomacy in Africa]. *Külföldi Szemle* 4, 147–183.
- Szélinger, B. (2008). *Magyarország és Etiópia. Formális és informális kapcsolatok a 19. század második felétől a II. világháborúig*. [PhD Dissertation. Szeged, University of Szeged]. Retrieved April 16, 2021, from http://doktori.bibl.u-szeged.hu/1212/1/dissertatio_SzB.pdf
- Sáring, J. (Ed.). (2016). *A szuezi válság és Magyarország* [The Suez crisis and Hungary] Budapest: Veritas – Magyar Napló.
- Tarrósy, I. & Morenth, P. (2013). Global opening for Hungary – New Beginning for Hungarian Africa Policy? *African Studies Quarterly* 14/1–2, 77–96.

- Tarrósy, I. (2018). Hungarian foreign policy towards Africa during communism and in the post-Soviet era. *Twentieth Century Communism* 15, 43–61.
- Yordanov, R. A. (2016). *The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa during the Cold War*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Archival sources

- Cséby, L. (1958, July 1) Cséby Lajos belgrádi nagykövet levele a Központnak [Ambassador Lajos Cséby's letter to the Center from Belgrade] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Erős, J. (1949, July 2) Beszélgetés a londoni abesszin nagykövettel [Conversation with the Abessin ambassador to London] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 114/Pol 1949
- Kós, P. (1958, March 13) Kós Péter követ levele Kairónak [Péter Kós' letter to Cairo] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 001986
- Kós, P. (1958, April 22) Kós Péter levele Kairónak [Péter Kós' letter to Cairo] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Kós, P. (1958, May 13a) Perspektivikus terv Etiópia viszonylatában teendő külpolitikai lépéseinkhez [Long-term plan for foreign policy actions in Ethiopia] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Kós, P. (1958, May 13b) Lunger elvtárs etiópiai útja [Comrade Lunger's travels in Ethiopia] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Kós, P. (1958, May 28) Kós levele Kairóba [Kós' letter to Cairo] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Kós, P. (1959, May 12) Az etióp nagykövet bemutatkozó látogatása [The welcoming visit of the Ethiopian ambassador] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 2. box Etiópia 1945–1964. 00814
- MoFA (1958, May 12) A Külügyminisztérium előterjesztése a Kormány számára [The proposal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Government of Hungary] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- MoFA (1959, July 31) Előterjesztés az Elnöki Tanács felé [Proposal for the Presidential Council] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 2. box Etiópia 1945–1964. 00814
- MoFA (1962, August 11) Kereskedelmi kirendeltség felállítása Addisz-Abeában [Establishment of a trade office in Addis Ababa] HNA XIX-J-1-k Etiópia 1961-64 ADM 1. box 3/b 1/x34-1
- Széphelyi, Z. (1956, September 24) Diplomáciai kapcsolatok felvétele Etiópiával [Establishment of diplomatic relations with Ethiopia] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Széphelyi, Z. (1956, October 5) Diplomáciai kapcsolatok felvétele Etiópiával [Establishment of diplomatic relations with Ethiopia] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Szjártó, L. (1958, May 1) Szjártó Lajos nagykövet levele [Ambassador Lajos Szjártó's letter] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Szjártó, L. (1958, May 16) Szjártó Lajos levele Kairóból [Szjártó's letter from Cairo] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Szjártó, L. (1958, June 7) Szjártó Lajos 1958. június 7-i levele a központnak [Lajos Szjártó's to the Center of 7 June 1958] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Szjártó, L. (1958, June 13) Szjártó Lajos 1958. június 13-i levele [Lajos Szjártó's letter of 13 June 1958] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964. 003022
- Szjártó, L. (1959, January 10) Beszélgetés Sziraka etióp külügyminiszter-helyettessel és Ilma Deressa külügyminiszterrel [Conversation with Siraka deputy MoFA and Ilma Deressa MoFA] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 2. box Etiópia 1945–1964. 00814
- Szjártó, L. (1959, January 12) Beszélgetés az etiópiai szovjet nagykövettel [Conversation with the Ethiopian ambassador] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 2. box Etiópia 1945–1964. 00813

- Szjártó, L. (1960, April 14) Megbízólevél átadása Etiópiában [Delivery of agrément to Ethiopia] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box Etiópia 1945–1964. 003869
- Várkonyi, J. (1978, August 22) Magyar-etióp kapcsolatok [Hungarian-Ethiopian relations] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 50. box. Etiópia 1978. 004807
- Veress, J. (1958, May 19) Veress János ideiglenes ügyvivő levele Kartúmból [Letter from János Veress chargé d'affaires from Khartoum] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 1. box, Etiópia 1945–1964
- Veress, J. (1959, April 18) Veress János kartúmi ügyvivő levele [Letter from chargé d'affaires János Veress] NAH XIX-J-1-j, 2. box Etiópia 1945–1964. 00814
- Zágor, Gy. (1957, March 11) Zágor György feljegyzése [Note from György Zágor] NAH XIX-J-1 ADM, 1. box 1961–64 Etiópia

Migration Research Institute
University of Public Service
2 Ludovika tér
H-1083 Budapest
Hungary
Email: marsai.viktor@migraciokutato.hu

OCRID: 0000-0002-1574-9343