
Ethiopia's Foreign Policy: Regional Integration and International Priorities

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Introduction

On 23 October 2015 the Africa Programme at Chatham House hosted HE Dr Tedros Adhanom, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to reflect on Ethiopia's priorities for regional stability, integration and development, and wider international relations. Ethiopia is growing to dominate the Horn of Africa in both demographic and economic terms. The government plans for growth, fuelled by infrastructural development and increasing exports of electricity to its neighbours, to propel the country towards middle-income status by 2025. Ethiopia is also an important international diplomatic actor, as host of the African Union and chair of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional bloc. It is a key partner in peacekeeping missions in Somalia and the contested region of Abyei on the Sudan–South Sudan border, as well as facilitating regional negotiations to end the civil conflict in South Sudan.

The meeting was held on the record. The following summary is intended to serve as an aide-memoire for those who took part, and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

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HE Dr Tedros Adhanom

I am very pleased to be at Chatham House today. Since its establishment nearly a century ago, this historic and prestigious institution has hosted many prominent people and I am really honored to have that chance for a second time, and hopefully many more.

The topic I will talk about is Ethiopia's foreign policy priorities, regional integration and also international priorities.

Since 1991, Ethiopia's national interests have been completely redefined to focus on the country's internal vulnerabilities and problems, political and economic. The result, systematically laid out in the Foreign Policy and National Security Strategy a few years ago, identified the major threats to Ethiopia and indeed to its survival: economic backwardness and the desperate poverty in which a large majority of the people exist, together with the understanding of the need for democracy and good governance and for the establishment of a democratic structure and government at all levels throughout the country. Without these, Ethiopia would be unable to survive as a country. Its very existence would be in doubt.

Indeed, the philosophy behind Ethiopia's foreign policy is quite clear: that diplomatic activity should serve the country's economic agenda of providing rapid economic development, together with the objective of advancing democracy. Both goals are an imperative necessity for maintaining the very viability of the country. Ethiopia's foreign policy has to serve these twin objectives: rapid economic development which aims to provide all members of society with benefits, and democratization to ensure the most complete participation of people in administering their own affairs. The government has, over the last years, therefore centered diplomatic activities on the promotion of trade, encouraging investment and tourism.

It has in fact become very clear that Ethiopia's national security is bound inextricably with these factors. Indeed it is not too much to say that a commitment to democracy and the war on poverty are the two central elements in national security. Ethiopia is now dedicating all its capacities, and resources to reversing the impact of poverty. It is similarly steadily extending the process of building up the institutions of democracy and good governance in a manner which takes into account the realities of

Ethiopia, recognizing the vital principle of unity in diversity, the need for tolerance and accommodation in light of the diversity of languages, cultures and faiths.

Guided by this policy, Ethiopia has registered remarkable economic achievements, especially during the past twelve years. Our economy has been growing by double digits, which makes Ethiopia one of the fastest growing economies in the world. We have reduced poverty by thirty-three per cent and we have been able to meet nearly all the Millennium Development Goals. Net enrolment rates in primary education increased more than fourfold, from less than twenty per cent in the 1990s, to over ninety-five per cent in recent years, with close to parity in enrolment of girls and boys.

Dear friends, we are consciously pursuing structural economic transformation by improving the productivity and competitiveness of smallholder agriculture, as well as promoting industrialization, value addition and export development. Ethiopia deploys seventy per cent of its budget, the largest of its kind in our continent, for pro-poor activities such as education, health, agriculture and food security. In the course of developing our renewable energy sources, in the past twenty years alone, the country's annual energy output has gone from 360 megawatts to 4,200 megawatts. Taking into account the projects that are currently under construction, the total renewable energy output that will be produced from hydro, wind, geo-thermal and solar sources is expected to reach 12,000 megawatts in the next few years.

In the governance area too, though less appreciated by some, we have made progress. We are able to start building a constitutional system and institutions that recognize and accommodate our diversity – ethnic, religious and others. Of course, our system is a work in progress, a nascent democracy. But here too we have started to observe significant gains. Here too, we are ready to learn from others, strengthen our democratic institutions, nurture a democratic culture and tolerance and ensure the full participation of our people in the country's political, economic and social process. So for us the twin goals of democracy and development are the alpha and omega of our country's survival, so that's why we always say we need to do our homework first. The internal stream is key to national security, and especially the twins of democracy and development.

However, we realize that our development will be more sustainable if there is a shared vision and action for peace and development in the whole of our sub-region. Ethiopia therefore attaches utmost importance to its relations with its neighbours and believes that creating the economic conditions of regional integration is vital. It is accordingly taking concrete action to promote regional integration by linking the sub-region with massive infrastructure developments.

In this regard, our road link with Djibouti and Sudan is creating an enabling environment for trade and people-to-people contact, and the standard-gauge rail linking Ethiopia and Djibouti is expected to be operational next year. The Ethiopian side of the road linking Ethiopia and Kenya is already completed and the Kenyan side is nearing its completion. The Lamu Port and Lamu South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor project involving railway, road and port infrastructure is currently under way, also a bit slow, and Ethiopian Airlines has been a leading carrier with an extensive network in our sub-region and beyond. The huge electric power dams Ethiopia has been building are targeted not only to satisfy the domestic demand but also to supply the region with much-needed electric power. Ethiopia has already begun supplying Djibouti and Sudan with electric power, and signed a deal with Kenya for two thousand megawatts more; that will be realized after the completion of the Ethiopian renaissance dam. That East African power pool can actually reach up to Rwanda.

Ethiopia has been promoting the idea of equitable water-sharing and has now embarked upon an environmentally sound hydroelectric project that will provide a win-win situation to all the countries

involved. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will not only benefit Ethiopia but the downstream countries of Sudan and Egypt and contribute to the East African power pool, realizing regional integration. This integration in our sub-region, we believe will contribute to integrating Africa, realizing our dream for our Africa as united, prosperous and peaceful by 2063.

Dear friends, on the security front, we have been able to significantly decrease our vulnerabilities to external security threats. However, we realize that the durability of the successes we have achieved as a country depends on the prevalence of peace and security in the whole of our sub-region. Ethiopia firmly believes that its peace and security is the peace and security of its neighbours, and vice versa. This explains Ethiopia's commitment to peace and security as demonstrated by our participation in the various peacekeeping operations within our sub-region in particular, and our continent in general. In our sub-region, the deployment of Ethiopian troops in Darfur, Abyei and Somalia has made a significant contribution for the maintenance of regional peace, security and stability. Especially if you take Abyei: it is just Ethiopian troops keeping the peace of that disputed border between Sudan and South Sudan. During the last five years, we have increased our contribution to the UN peacekeeping operations fourfold. Currently, Ethiopia is the second largest troop contributing country to UN peacekeeping missions. If we add to this our involvement in African Union peacekeeping missions, we will find that Ethiopia is the largest contributor of peacekeeping troops in the world.

Dear friends, as most of you are well aware, IGAD, along with the African Union and other partners, has been exerting every effort to end the tragic conflict in South Sudan. From the beginning, we in IGAD knew that the process aimed at helping the parties return to peace and national reconciliation would be a complicated one. But, there was no option but to continue to assist, encourage, and even press the parties, when necessary, in order to achieve durable peace and stability in this sisterly country. It is against this backdrop that the parties finally signed a Comprehensive Agreement last August. As we continue our collective endeavour towards the next phase, we are hopeful that the international community will continue to assist the mechanisms established to ensure a scrupulous implementation of the agreement.

On the other hand, as has been very obvious, over the last two years, the gains made both on the political and military fronts in Somalia have created encouraging conditions for the successful political transition in Somalia. For the first time in two decades, Somalia has a real chance of emerging from the quagmire of conflict, to attain sustainable peace. In this regard, I am pleased to note the progress achieved in the formation and strengthening of regional administrations and the measures taken to establish institutions that are required in order to consolidate the gains made so far. Of course, it is impossible for this process to always proceed without obstacles that need to be overcome. The international community should encourage the people and leadership of Somalia in their journey towards stability, reconciliation and development by realizing Vision 2016, and exploiting the existing window of opportunity that is created.

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman, international terrorism is a global threat that affects all parts of the world. In our sub-region, the terror group that has been wreaking havoc is al-Shabaab – an international terrorist organization that has declared allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, [or] ISIS. As part of AMISOM, and with the active involvement of Somali national defence forces, Ethiopian troops are currently engaged in a successful regional effort to defeat al-Shabaab.

The international nature of the threat posed by al-Shabaab requires a more extensive international cooperation, especially in intelligence-sharing and preventing terrorist fundraising activities. However, we believe that terror cannot be defeated by military force alone. It is equally important to address the root causes on which terrorism thrives, the most important of which are increasing levels of poverty, widening income disparities, lack of employment and educational opportunities, [and] absence of

democracy and good governance. Special attention must also be given to counter radicalization, deradicalization and the drying up of their sources of financing. This is a monumental task which requires global partnership.

There is a need for global partnership in other areas as well. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are one such area of partnership that can make a difference in addressing the pressing issues of our time such as poverty, hunger, diseases, income disparities, which I mentioned earlier, climate change, et cetera. We will certainly take our responsibilities of implementing the SDGs as seriously as we did with the Millennium Development Goals, which were implemented successfully for the most part. We intend to achieve even better results with the SDGs, by integrating them into our Growth and Transformation Plan. However, the implementation process requires substantial financial resources for which the cooperation of our development partners is crucial, and as has been agreed during the Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa, and based on the action agenda at Addis Ababa.

Appropriate and prudent use of natural resources is essential for sustainable and inclusive development. We are, therefore, vigorously pursuing a green economy strategy whose goal is to achieve a carbon-neutral economy by 2030. As described earlier, Ethiopia has achieved tremendously in producing energy from renewable resources. Ethiopia is determined to pursue its green growth agenda and has therefore been actively promoting its renewable energy programme and seeking partners for its implementation. It has been playing a leading role in the drive for the generation of clean and green energy in Africa. As a result, our bilateral and multilateral development partners are fully aware of the extent of our commitment to clean and green energy. Having submitted its INDC [Intended Nationally Determined Contributions] in June 2015, Ethiopia is now looking forward with optimism to the upcoming Climate Summit in Paris. By the way, 2015 is very historic: we agreed on the outcome documents, the Addis Ababa action agenda, especially Finance for Development, in July 2015; the SDGs were endorsed in New York in September 2015; and now we hope for a success story at the meeting in Paris too.

Dear friends, I hope you would agree with me that the global geopolitical landscape is fast-changing. This era is defined by the emergence of new powers, the proliferation of powerful non-state actors, easy access to instantaneous mass communication, enormous technological advancement, and many other new developments. We have also observed the increase in the number of intra-state conflicts and the threat of terrorism and violent extremism as well as the transnational crimes by non-state actors that are posing greater risks to world peace and security.

The prevalence of poverty and inequality, the spread of pandemic diseases, the impact of climate change, and other socio-economic challenges also have serious implications for the survival of humanity as a whole. That is why, particularly at this juncture in history, we need a principled global partnership more than ever before. That is also why we need to reform the global governance institutions, including the United Nations, to be able to address its weaknesses and make a greater difference, not only in the peace and security area, but also in the economic, social, human rights and humanitarian areas.

This cannot be achieved without the full cooperation of all countries – developed and developing – based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and based on our respective capacities. Failing to do so will have serious repercussions for the peace and prosperity of our world. Therefore, it is in the enlightened self-interest of all of us – both developed and developing countries – to work towards the realization of a just, harmonious and peaceful global order.

For us in Ethiopia, we are very well aware that renewed international partnership is critical for the success of our transformational and ambitious objectives. We have continued to strengthen our partnership with

our traditional partners, as we have also solidified our partnership with our friends from the South, and South–South Cooperation has become hugely critical for our development.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that since the adoption of our current foreign policy thirteen years ago we have come a long way. We have been able to achieve double-digit economic growth for over a decade; built important governance institutions; significantly increased our contribution to regional peace and stability and put in place major infrastructure networks for regional integration. We are conscious the journey ahead of us will continue to be challenging. We have to overcome the challenges of climate change and achieve greater food security; we have to meet our vision of becoming a lower-middle-income country by 2025; we have to strengthen and nurture our democratic culture; together with our neighbours, we have also to ensure regional peace and stability and transform regional integration to the next level. The successes of the last decade tell us that this is indeed possible. What is required is dedication, mutual understanding and accommodation of differences on our part; and principled international partnership from the part of the global community.

I thank you!