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NOTES
EXCHANGED BETWEEN THE
UNITED KINGDOM AND ITALY
RESPECTING
LAKE TSANA

Rome, December 14/20, 1925

PRESENTED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS TO PARLIAMENT BY COMMAND OF HIS MAJESTY

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Notes exchanged between the United Kingdom and Italy respecting Lake Tsana.

No. 1.

Sir R. Graham to Signor Mussolini.

M. le Président du Conseil, *Rome, December 14, 1925.*

Your Excellency is well aware of the vital importance to Egypt and the Sudan of maintaining and, if possible, increasing the volume of water for irrigation purposes available in those countries from the Blue and White Niles and their tributary streams. Various schemes for the purpose have been carried out or are projected and you are informed of the negotiations undertaken at Addis Ababa by His Majesty's Government, acting in a fiduciary capacity for the Sudan Government and mindful of Egyptian interests in the matter, in order to obtain a concession from the Government of Abyssinia for the construction of a barrage at Lake Tsana with a view to storing its waters for use in the Blue Nile. So far these negotiations have led to no practical result.

In November 1919 the delegates of the Italian Government then in London were good enough to offer Italian co-operation in this question in the following terms:—

“In view of the predominating interests of Great Britain in respect of the control of the waters of Lake Tsana, Italy offers Great Britain her support, in order that she may obtain from Ethiopia the concession to carry out works of barrage in the lake itself, within the Italian sphere of influence, pending the delimitation of the extent of the territorial zone to be recognised as pertaining to Great Britain in respect of the latter's predominant hydraulic interests, and pending a just consideration of the reservation on behalf of Italy by the Tripartite Agreement likewise in respect of her hydraulic interests. Italy further offers her support to Great Britain in order that the latter may obtain from Ethiopia the right to construct and maintain a motor road between Lake Tsana and the Sudan.

“Italy requests the support of Great Britain in order that she may obtain from the Ethiopian Government the concession to construct and to run a railway from the frontier of Eritrea to the frontier of Italian Somaliland; which railway according to the Tripartite Agreement must pass to the west of Addis Ababa. It is understood that this railway, together with all the necessary works for its construction and for its running, must have an entirely free passage across the above-mentioned motor road.

"Italy requests from Great Britain, as she also reserves to herself the right to request from France, an exclusive economic influence in the west of Ethiopia and in the whole of the territory to be crossed by the above-mentioned railway, and the promise to support with the Ethiopian Government all requests for economic concessions regarding the Italian zone."

The above offer was not entertained at the time chiefly owing to the strong objection felt to the idea of allowing a foreign Power to establish any sort of control over the head waters of rivers so vital to the prosperity and even the existence of Egypt and the Sudan. But in view of the relations of mutual confidence so happily existing between our two Governments, His Majesty's Government desire to extend to this question the principle of friendly co-operation which has proved so valuable in other fields. His Britannic Majesty's Government have accordingly further examined the question and recognise that the Italian proposal is not in contradiction with the stipulations of the London Agreement of the 13th December, 1906, since the object of that agreement is to maintain the *status quo* in Ethiopia on the basis of the international instruments indicated in article 1 thereof and the co-ordination of the action of the signatory States to protect their respective interests so that they should not suffer prejudice.

They would therefore welcome the Italian support offered provided that it can be accepted without prejudice to those paramount hydraulic interests of Egypt and the Sudan which the Italian Government have not failed to recognise.

I have therefore the honour, under instructions from His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to request your Excellency's support and assistance at Addis Ababa with the Abyssinian Government in order to obtain from them a concession for His Majesty's Government to construct a barrage at Lake Tsana, together with the right to construct and maintain a motor road for the passage of stores, personnel, &c., from the frontier of the Sudan to the barrage.

His Majesty's Government in return are prepared to support the Italian Government in obtaining from the Abyssinian Government a concession to construct and run a railway from the frontier of Eritrea to the frontier of Italian Somaliland. It would be understood that this railway, together with all the necessary works for its construction and for its running, would have entirely free passage across the motor road mentioned above.

With this object in view the necessary identic instructions should be sent to the British and Italian representatives in Ethiopia to concert for common action with the Abyssinian Government in order to obtain that the concessions desired by the Governments of Great Britain and Italy regarding Lake Tsana and the construction of a railway to join up Eritrea with Italian Somaliland, should be granted contemporaneously. It remains understood that, in the event of one of the two Governments securing the concession sought for while the other Government failed to do so, the Govern-

ment which had obtained satisfaction would not relax their whole-hearted efforts to secure a corresponding satisfaction for the other Government concerned.

In the event of His Majesty's Government, with the valued assistance of the Italian Government, obtaining from the Abyssinian Government the desired concession on Lake Tsana, they are also prepared to recognise an exclusive Italian economic influence in the west of Abyssinia and in the whole of the territory to be crossed by the above-mentioned railway. They would further promise to support with the Abyssinian Government all Italian requests for economic concessions in the above zone. But such recognition and undertaking are subject to the proviso that the Italian Government on their side, recognising the prior hydraulic rights of Egypt and the Sudan, will engage not to construct on the head waters of the Blue or White Niles or their tributaries or affluents any work which might sensibly modify their flow into the main river. It is understood that the above proviso would not preclude a reasonable use of the waters in question by the inhabitants of the region, even to the extent of constructing dams for hydro-electric power or small reservoirs in minor affluents to store water for domestic purposes, as well as for the cultivation of the food crops necessary to their own subsistence.

His Majesty's Government avail themselves of this opportunity to assure the Italian Government that the construction and operation of the dam will be effected so far as possible with locally recruited labour and will not raise the level of the waters in the lake beyond the maximum hitherto attained during the rainy season. They are therefore confident that the existence of the dam will not only be of value to Egypt and the Sudan but will increase the prosperity and promote the economic progress of the local inhabitants.

I take this opportunity, &c.

R. GRAHAM.

No. 2.

Signor Mussolini to Sir R. Graham.

Ministero degli Affari Esteri,

Signor Ambasciatore,

Roma, 20 dicembre 1925.

Ho l'onore di accusare ricevuta della nota in data del 14 dicembre con la quale Vostra Eccellenza, per incarico del suo Governo, ha attirato la mia attenzione sul problema dell'irrigazione dell'Egitto e del Sudan e sui negoziati finora condotti senza risultato dal Governo britannico per ottenere dal Governo abissino la concessione di costruire uno sbarramento sul Lago Tzana allo scopo di immagazzinarne le acque per alimentare il Nilo Azzurro.

Vostra Eccellenza ricorda a questo proposito le proposte che

vennero presentate a Londra nel novembre 1919 dai delegati del Governo italiano per un'amichevole cooperazione anglo-italiana in tale questione, e mi dichiara che le proposte stesse non furono allora accolte per l'obiezione che sorse all'idea di permettere ad una Potenza estera di stabilire una qualsiasi specie di controllo sulle sorgenti di fiumi così vitali per la prosperità e persino per l'esistenza dell'Egitto e del Sudan. Ma che ora, considerando i rapporti di reciproca fiducia così felicemente esistenti tra i nostri due Governi, il Governo di Sua Maestà Britannica desidera ostendere a tale questione il principio della cooperazione amichevole che ha dato prove tanto apprezzabili in altri campi.

Vostra Eccellenza aggiunge che il Governo di Sua Maestà Britannica ha perciò proceduto ad un più attento esame della questione e riconosce che le proposte italiane non contraddicono alle stipulazioni dell'accordo di Londra del 18 dicembre 1906, poichè lo scopo di tale accordo è il mantenimento dello *statu quo* in Etiopia in base agli atti internazionali indicati nell'articolo 1 dell'accordo stesso, ed il coordinamento dell'azione degli Stati firmatari nella protezione dei rispettivi interessi in modo che questi non abbiano ad esserne pregiudicati.

Il Governo britannico pertanto, aderendo alle proposte italiane, accoglierebbe volentieri l'appoggio dell'Italia purchè questo possa essere accettato senza pregiudizio di quei prevalenti interessi idraulici dell'Egitto e del Sudan che il Governo italiano stesso ha riconosciuto.

In conseguenza Vostra Eccellenza, per incarico del suo Governo, richiede l'appoggio e l'assistenza del Governo italiano presso il Governo etiopico per ottenere da quest'ultimo la concessione di costruire uno sbarramento nel Lago Tzana insieme con il diritto di costruire e mantenere una strada automobilistica per il passaggio delle merci, del personale, ecc., dalla frontiera del Sudan allo sbarramento.

Vostra Eccellenza mi dichiara che il Governo di Sua Maestà Britannica appoggerà in contraccambio il Governo italiano perchè ottenga dal Governo abissino la concessione di costruire ed esercire una ferrovia dalla frontiera dell'Eritrea fino alla frontiera della Somalia Italiana, restando inteso che detta ferrovia, nonchè tutte le opere occorrenti per la sua costruzione ed esercizio, avranno libero transito attraverso la suddetta strada automobilistica.

A tale scopo Vostra Eccellenza aggiunge che necessarie ed identiche istruzioni dovrebbero essere inviate alla Rappresentanza britannica ed a quella italiana in Etiopia per concertare una comune azione presso il Governo abissino, al fine di ottenere che le concessioni desiderate dal Governo britannico e da quello italiano, circa il Lago Tzana, e la costruzione di una ferrovia che colleghi l'Eritrea con la Somalia italiana, debbano essere accordate contemporaneamente. Resta inteso che nel caso in cui uno dei due Governi si assicurasse la concessione richiesta mentre l'altro Governo non vi riuscisse, il Governo che avesse ottenuto soddisfazione non rallenterebbe i suoi maggiori sforzi per assicurare una corrispondente soddisfazione per l'altro Governo interessato.

Vostra Eccellenza mi dichiara poi che, nel caso in cui col valido appoggio del Governo italiano il Governo di Sua Maestà Britannica ottenga dal Governo abissino la richiesta concessione al Lago Tzana, il Governo britannico riconoscerà anche l'esclusività dell'influenza economica italiana nell'ovest dell'Abissinia e in tutto il territorio attraversato dalla suddetta ferrovia. Il Governo britannico inoltre appoggerà presso il Governo etiopico tutte le domande italiane per concessioni economiche nella detta zona. Tale riconoscimento e tale impegno sono però soggetti alla condizione che il Governo italiano dal canto suo, riconoscendo il preminente diritto idraulico dell'Egitto e del Sudan, s'impegni a non costruire sulle sorgenti del Nilo Azzurro e del Nilo Bianco e dei loro tributari affluenti alcuna opera che possa in modo sensibile modificare il loro defluire nel fiume principale.

Vostra Eccellenza dichiara infine restare inteso che, con la suddetta condizione, non si precluderebbe un ragionevole uso delle acque in questione agli abitanti della regione, compresavi anche la costruzione di dighe per forze idro-elettriche o di piccoli serbatoi negli affluenti minori destinati ad immagazzinare acque per usi domestici, così come per la coltivazione dei prodotti alimentari necessari al loro sostentamento.

Vostra Eccellenza inoltre, per incarico del Sua Governo, assicura il Governo italiano che la costruzione e il funzionamento della diga verrà effettuato, per quanto possibile, con mano d'opera locale, e che non si eleverà il livello delle acque del lago oltre il limite massimo finora raggiunto durante la stagione delle piogge. Il Governo britannico confida perciò che l'esistenza della diga, non soltanto sarà vantaggiosa all'Egitto e al Sudan, ma accrescerà la prosperità e promuoverà il progresso economico delle popolazioni locali.

In risposta alle suindicate dichiarazioni e richieste di Vostra Eccellenza, ho l'onore di far conoscere per parte mia che il Regio Governo ha preso atto che il Governo britannico riconosce l'opportunità di estendere alla questione di cui sopra il principio della collaborazione amichevole che ha dato prove così apprezzabili in altri campi, e ciò con tanta maggiore soddisfazione in quanto è mio convincimento che tale collaborazione sarà tanto più utile quanto più estesa.

Il Regio Governo ha pure preso atto che il Governo di Sua Maestà Britannica si è ora persuaso che le proposte italiane presentate nel novembre 1919 non contraddicevano alle stipulazioni dell'Accordo di Londra del 13 Dicembre 1906, poichè lo scopo di tale accordo (come l'Italia ha sempre sostenuto) è il mantenimento dello *statu quo* in Etiopia in base agli atti internazionali indicati nell'articolo 1° dell'Accordo stesso ed il coordinamento dell'azione degli Stati firmatari nella protezione dei rispettivi interessi in modo che non risultino pregiudizi agli interessi medesimi.

Dato ciò, quantunque le suddette proposte presentate a Londra nel novembre 1919 facessero parte di un più ampio negoziato di carattere coloniale in dipendenza del Patto di Londra del 1915, negoziato che ha avuto soltanto parziale attuazione, pur tuttavia

il Regio Governo acconsente a riprendere le proposte suddette, specialmente condividendo il desiderio del Governo britannico, di attuare il principio della cooperazione amichevole, anzi confidando che tale principio possa essere sempre più esteso per la tutela e lo sviluppo dei rispettivi interessi italiani e britannici in Etiopia, naturalmente sulle basi e nei limiti delle disposizioni dell'Accordo di Londra del 1906.

Ho l'onore pertanto di dichiarare a Vostra Eccellenza che il Regio Governo appoggerà il Governo britannico presso quello etiopico perchè ottenga da quest'ultimo la concessione di costruire uno sbarramento nel Lago Tzana con il diritto di costruire e di mantenere una strada automobilistica per il passaggio di merci, personale, ecc., dalla frontiera del Sudan allo sbarramento.

Il Regio Governo prende atto d'altra parte che il Governo britannico appoggerà in ricambio il Governo italiano perchè ottenga dal Governo abissino la concessione di costruire ed esercire una ferrovia dalla frontiera dell'Eritrea fino alla frontiera della Somalia italiana, restando inteso che detta ferrovia, nonchè tutte le opere occorrenti per la sua costruzione ed esercizio, avranno libero transito attraverso la suddetta strada automobilistica.

A tale scopo il Regio Governo invierà le necessarie istruzioni al Rappresentante italiano in Addis Abeba identicamente a quelle che il Governo britannico invierà al proprio Rappresentante, per concordare una linea di azione comune presso il Governo abissino al fine di ottenere che le concessioni chieste dal Governo britannico e da quello italiano relativamente al Lago Tzana ed alla costruzione della ferrovia di congiunzione fra l'Eritrea e la Somalia siano contemporaneamente accordate. Rimane inteso che nel caso in cui uno dei due Governi ottenesse la concessione da esso richiesta, mentre l'altro non vi riuscisse, il Governo che avesse ottenuto soddisfazione non desisterebbe dall'impiegare i suoi sforzi più efficaci per assicurare una corrispondente soddisfazione all'altro Governo interessato, allo scopo di fare in modo che le due concessioni abbiano a ricevere possibilmente contemporanea pratica attuazione.

Il Regio Governo prende atto che nel caso in cui col valido appoggio del Governo italiano, il Governo di Sua Maestà Britannica ottenga dal Governo abissino la richiesta concessione al Lago Tzana, esso riconoscerà l'esclusività dell'influenza economica italiana nell'ovest dell'Abissinia ed in tutto il territorio che sarà attraversato dalla suddetta ferrovia, nonchè appoggerà presso il Governo etiopico tutte le domande italiane per concessioni economiche nella detta zona.

Dal canto suo il Governo italiano, riconoscendo il preminente diritto idraulico dell'Egitto e del Sudan, si impegna a non costruire sulle sorgenti del Nilo Azzurro e del Nilo Bianco e dei loro tributari ed affluenti alcuna opera che possa in modo sensibile modificare il loro defluire entro il fiume principale.

Prendo atto che il Governo di Sua Maestà Britannica ha tutta l'intenzione di rispettare i diritti d'acqua esistenti delle popolazioni dei territori limitrofi compresi nella sfera di esclusiva influenza

economica italiana. Resta inteso che per quanto è possibile e compatibile coi prevalenti interessi dell'Egitto e del Sudan, il progetto in parola debba essere concretato ed eseguito in modo tale da dare un adeguato soddisfacimento ai bisogni economici di queste popolazioni.

Gradisca, &c.

MUSSOLINI.

(Translation.)

Ministry for Foreign Affairs,

Rome, December 20, 1925.

M. l'Ambassadeur,

I HAVE the honour to acknowledge the receipt of the note of the 14th December, in which your Excellency, on instructions from your Government, drew my attention to the problem of the irrigation of Egypt and the Sudan and to the negotiations hitherto conducted without result by the British Government to obtain from the Abyssinian Government the concession for the construction of a barrage at Lake Tsana, with the object of storing the waters of the lake to feed the Blue Nile.

Your Excellency recalls in this connection the proposals which were presented in London in November 1919 by the delegates of the Italian Government for an amicable Anglo-Italian co-operation in this question, and you inform me that these proposals were not then accepted owing to the objection which was felt to the idea of allowing a foreign Power to establish any kind of control over the sources of rivers so vital to the prosperity and even the existence of Egypt and the Sudan. But that now, in view of the relations of reciprocal confidence so happily existing between our two Governments, His Britannic Majesty's Government desire to extend to this question the principle of friendly co-operation which has proved so valuable in other fields.

Your Excellency adds that His Britannic Majesty's Government has accordingly proceeded to a more careful examination of the question, and recognises that the Italian proposals are not in contradiction with the provisions of the Agreement of London of the 13th December, 1906, since the object of that agreement is the maintenance of the *status quo* in Ethiopia on the basis of the international instruments indicated in article 1 of the agreement itself, and the co-ordination of the action of the signatory States in the protection of their respective interests so that these should not suffer prejudice.

The British Government consequently adhering to the Italian proposals, would welcome the support of Italy, provided that it can be accepted without prejudice to those paramount hydraulic interests of Egypt and the Sudan which the Italian Government themselves have recognised.

Your Excellency, therefore, on instructions from your Government, requests the support and assistance of the Italian Government with the Ethiopian Government in order to obtain from the latter the concession to construct a barrage on Lake Tsana, together with

the right to construct and maintain a motor road for the passage of stores, personnel, &c., from the frontier of the Sudan to the barrage.

Your Excellency declares to me that His Britannic Majesty's Government will in return support the Italian Government in obtaining from the Abyssinian Government the concession to construct and operate a railway from the frontier of Eritrea to the frontier of Italian Somaliland, it being understood that such railway, together with all the necessary works for its construction and operation, shall have free transit across the motor road mentioned above.

With this object, your Excellency adds, the necessary and identic instructions should be sent to the British and Italian representatives in Ethiopia to concert for common action with the Abyssinian Government, in order to obtain that the concessions desired by the British and Italian Governments regarding Lake Tsana and the construction of a railway to connect Eritrea with Italian Somaliland should be granted contemporaneously. It remains understood that, in the event of one of the two Governments securing the concession sought for while the other Government failed to do so, the Government which had obtained satisfaction would not relax their best endeavours to secure a corresponding satisfaction for the other Government concerned.

Your Excellency then states that, in the event of His Majesty's Government, with the effective support of the Italian Government, obtaining from the Abyssinian Government the concession asked for at Lake Tsana, the British Government will also recognise the exclusive character of Italian economic influence in the west of Abyssinia and in the whole of the territory crossed by the above-mentioned railway. The British Government will further support with the Ethiopian Government all Italian requests for economic concessions in the above-mentioned zone. Such recognition and undertaking are, however, subject to the proviso that the Italian Government, on their side, recognising the prior hydraulic rights of Egypt and the Sudan, will engage not to construct on the head waters of the Blue Nile and the White Nile and their tributaries and affluents any work which might sensibly modify their flow into the main river.

Your Excellency finally states that it remains understood that the above proviso would not preclude a reasonable use of the waters in question by the inhabitants of the region, even to the extent of constructing dams for hydro-electric power or small reservoirs in minor affluents for storing water for domestic purposes, as well as for the cultivation of the food products necessary to their own subsistence.

Your Excellency further assures the Italian Government, on instructions from your Government, that the construction and operation of the dam will be effected, so far as possible, with locally recruited labour, and that the level of the waters of the lake will not be raised beyond the maximum limit hitherto attained during the rainy season. The British Government are therefore confident that the existence of the dam will not only be of value to Egypt

and the Sudan but will increase the prosperity and promote the economic progress of the local populations.

In reply to the above-mentioned declarations and requests of your Excellency, I have the honour to state on my part that the Royal Government have taken note that the British Government recognise the desirability of extending to the question referred to the principle of friendly collaboration which has proved so valuable in other fields; this has been noted with all the more satisfaction, inasmuch as it is my conviction that such co-operation will be the more useful the further it is extended.

The Royal Government have further taken note that His Britannic Majesty's Government are now persuaded that the Italian proposals presented in November 1919 are not in contradiction with the provisions of the Agreement of London of the 13th December, 1906, since the object of that agreement (as Italy has always maintained) is the maintenance of the *status quo* in Ethiopia on the basis of the international agreements indicated in article 1 of the agreement itself and the co-ordination of the action of the signatory States in the protection of their respective interests so that these should not suffer prejudice.

This being granted, although the above-mentioned proposals presented in London in November 1919 formed part of a wider negotiation of a colonial character arising out of the Treaty of London of 1915, a negotiation which had only partial results, the Royal Government nevertheless agree to take up again the proposals in question, especially sharing the desire of the British Government to realise the principle of friendly co-operation, and further trusting that this principle may be continually further extended for the protection and development of the respective Italian and British interests in Ethiopia, naturally on the bases and within the limits of the provisions of the London Agreement of 1906.

I have, therefore, the honour to state to your Excellency that the Royal Government will support the British Government with the Ethiopian Government, in order to obtain from the latter the concession to construct a barrage at Lake Tsana, together with the right to construct and maintain a motor road for the passage of stores, personnel, &c., from the frontier of the Sudan to the barrage.

The Royal Government take note, on the other hand, that the British Government will, in return, support the Italian Government in obtaining from the Abyssinian Government the concession to construct and operate a railway from the frontier of Eritrea to the frontier of Italian Somaliland, it remaining understood that this railway, together with all the necessary works for its construction and operation, shall have free transit across the motor road mentioned above.

With this object, the Italian Government will send the necessary instructions to the Italian representative in Addis Ababa in an identic sense to those which the British Government will send to their own representative, to concert a common line of action with the Abyssinian Government in order to obtain that the concessions asked for by the British and Italian Governments regarding Lake

Tsana and the railway connecting Eritrea and Somaliland should be granted contemporaneously. It remains understood that, in the event of one of the two Governments securing the concession sought by them, while the other failed to do so, the Government which had obtained satisfaction would not relax their most effective efforts to secure a corresponding satisfaction for the other Government concerned, with the object of ensuring that practical execution of the two concessions should, if possible, be contemporaneous.

The Royal Government take note that in the event of His Britannic Majesty's Government, with the effective support of the Italian Government, obtaining from the Abyssinian Government the concession asked for on Lake Tsana, they will recognise the exclusive character of Italian economic influence in the west of Abyssinia and in the whole of the territory to be crossed by the above-mentioned railway, and will also support with the Ethiopian Government all Italian requests for economic concessions in the above zone.

On their side the Italian Government, recognising the prior hydraulic rights of Egypt and the Sudan, engage not to construct on the head waters of the Blue Nile and the White Nile and their tributaries and affluents any work which might sensibly modify their flow into the main river.

I note that His Britannic Majesty's Government have every intention of respecting the existing water rights of the populations of the neighbouring territories which enter into the sphere of exclusive Italian economic influence. It is understood that, in so far as is possible and is compatible with the paramount interests of Egypt and the Sudan, the scheme in contemplation should be so framed and executed as to afford appropriate satisfaction to the economic need of these populations.

Accept, &c.
MUSSOLINI.