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ETHIO-DJIBOUTIAN RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY – TOWARDS NEW AFRICAN COOPERATION

ABSTRACT

Very good political and economic relations between Djibouti and Ethiopia can be treated as an exceptional case in such a conflict-ridden region as the Horn of Africa. Ethio-Djiboutian cooperation owes its 'renaissance' mostly to the consequences of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War (1998-2000) that left Ethiopia without direct access to a sea basin. Today, almost 90 per cent of Ethiopia's imports arrive via the port of Djibouti, while Ethiopia receives 95 per cent of the Djiboutian regional exports. One of the major infrastructure projects that should even enhance this interstate cooperation is the renovation of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway network. On the international level both countries are committed to the question of security, peace, and stability in the Horn of Africa (e.g. they are engaged in Somali and South Sudanese peace processes). The aim of the article is to analyze this specific personification of interstate cooperation, taking into account the conceptual framework imposed by the definition of 'interstate cooperation' proposed by Robert Keohane back in the 1980s. Moreover, the author attempts to look into the reasons behind the development of such good relations, seeking an answer to the question whether or not they are really mutually beneficial¹.

Keywords: Djibouti, Ethiopia, interstate cooperation, the Horn of Africa

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In May 2014 on the occasion of the handover of nine new Chinese vessels to the Ethiopian authorities in the port of Djibouti, the Djiboutian president Ismail Omar Guelleh declared “We believe that Ethiopia is Djibouti, and Djibouti is Ethiopia – no difference at all”, pointing out very good mutual relations in economic and political dimensions². In recent years, the two countries are in agreement that the enhanced regional integration is of paramount importance to eradicate poverty, boost the economic development and promote the so-called ‘African Rebirth’, starting with their own economic partnership for mutual progress³.

The economic relations between Ethiopia and Djibouti have been growing in recent years in almost all the sectors, what is highlighted by the fact that almost 90 per cent of Ethiopia’s imports arrive via the port of Djibouti. The renovation of the Addis Ababa – Djibouti railway is on its way, and both countries are enhancing their interconnectivity in the areas of hydropower supply, trade, or military cooperation, among other things. All this paves the way for broader cooperative partnership and political consultations on regional and global issues of common concern, especially those related to the security, peace and stability in the region of the Horn of Africa. A good example is related to the Ethio-Djiboutian support to the warring parties of South Sudan to end the conflict through constructive dialogue under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) mediation, another one is the Ethio-Djiboutian commitment to the peace process in Somalia, also in militarily aspect. Moreover, in 2013 Djibouti and Ethiopia signed several agreements to cooperate on judicial matters, education, health, and sharing intelligence information to fight against illegal migration, human trafficking, criminals and other emerging security threats⁴.

INTERSTATE COOPERATION

For the purpose of this article it seems important to familiarize the reader with the definition of interstate cooperation. The common mistake is to see ‘cooperation’ as the opposite of conflict. Nevertheless, although cooperation is a necessary effort to resolve an actual or potential conflict, the real opposite of conflict we should rather seek in harmony (of interests) than in cooperation itself. Moreover, even in very close alliances (which are the most developed forms of interstate cooperation), such as between the United Kingdom and the United States, or France and Germany, cooperation can

² ‘Ethiopia is Djibouti and Djibouti is Ethiopia’, *Geeska Afrika*, 17 May 2014, at <<http://geeskaafrika.com/2014/05/17/ethiopia-is-djibouti-and-djibouti-is-ethiopia/3378/>>, 24 May 2015.

³ N. Yassin, ‘Ethio-Djiboutian Relations: towards African Economic Integration’, *Sudan Tribune*, 12 April 2014, at <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50611>>, 30 June 2015.

⁴ “Djibouti Looks to New Cross-border Rail Link for Growth’, *Zawya Projects*, 21 September 2015, at <https://projects.zawya.com/Djibouti_looks_to_new_crossborder_rail_link_for_growth/story/ZAWYA20150922054013/?utm_source=zawya&utm_medium=web&utm_term=term&utm_campaign=story/>, 28 October 2015; N. Yassin, ‘Ethio-Djiboutian Relations...’

also involve a dose of rivalry, what makes it even more distanced from the state of harmony – somewhat a natural opposite to conflict⁵.

The closest to Author's understanding of interstate cooperation is a definition provided by Robert Keohane in 1984: "intergovernmental cooperation takes place when the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating realization of their own objectives, as a result of the process of policy coordination", Keohane further notes that, in turn, the state of harmony is a situation in which no adjustments need to take place because actors' policies facilitate the achievement of each other's goals "automatically"⁶. Helen Milner points out that this definition somehow implies that "cooperation provides actors with gains or rewards", however, they do not need to be of the same kind, or even the same magnitude, but it is necessary that they are mutual⁷.

And what about the potential problem with inefficiency in cooperation? One of the explanations, sometimes viewed as fundamental, is *monitoring problems*. In the situation of interstate cooperation if states could perfectly monitor each other's behavior then they would reduce or even eliminate the risk of being exploited by the other side ("cooperation partner")⁸. Kenneth Waltz predicted that states could be reluctant in engaging in the form of cooperation in which there was a risk of being taken advantage of by other states. That is why, according to realists, it is probable that states would cooperate with one another on a short-term *ad hoc* basis⁹. This article is an attempt to analyze the specific personification of interstate cooperation, taking into account the conceptual framework imposed by the definition proposed by Keohane and its potential consequences for understanding Ethio-Djiboutian relations in 21st century. The paper is based on the qualitative analysis of the already existing data (mainly the press, reports and some official documents), critical reading of the literature of the subject, data gathered during a study visit to Ethiopia in September 2014 (in the form of participant ob-

⁵ Ch. Farrands et al., *A New A-Z of International Relations Theory*, London 2015, pp. 65-66 (*Library of International Relations*, 63).

⁶ R.O. Keohane, *After Hegemony. Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, Princeton 2005, pp. 51-52.

⁷ H. Milner, 'International Theories of Cooperation among Nations. Strengths and Weaknesses', *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (1992), p. 468, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2010546>>.

⁸ A. H. Kydd, *International Relations Theory. The Game-Theoretic Approach*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 128-129.

⁹ R. O. Keohane, L. L. Martin, 'Institutional Theory as a Research Program' in: C. Elman, M. Fendius Elman (eds.), *Progress in International Relations Theory. Appraising the Field*, Cambridge, Mass.-London 2003 (first published in 1984), pp. 76-77 (*BCSIA Studies in International Security*). Nonetheless, realism was viewed by some scholars as truly pessimistic; they were seeking possible ways of undermining its hard logic. Cooperation analyzed in the framework of game theory was one of such ways. The core of the cooperation theory (which dates back to 1980s) in international relations was the Repeated Prisoner's Dilemma model, based on the RPD game, in which two players play the Prisoner's Dilemma over time indefinitely. The RPD game should offer an explanation of how it is possible to sustain cooperation without centralized enforcement. The main question to be addressed by cooperation theory was when states are able to sustain mutual cooperation and when they are not. A.H. Kydd, *International Relations Theory...*, pp. 127-128.

servation, interviews, and informal talks), as well as consultations with scholars on the Horn of Africa (mainly during 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies).

DJIBOUTI TODAY

The Republic of Djibouti is a small (23 200 km²) former French colony in the Horn of Africa, formerly known as French Somaliland (1896-1967) and the French Territory of the Afars and the Issas (1967-1977). The official languages are Arabic and French, while the state's official religion is Islam (94 per cent of the population professes Sunni Islam)¹⁰. Apart from religion, the proximity of the Arabian Peninsula is also visible in the country's economy (growing trade relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf) and foreign policy (Djibouti is an active member of the League of Arab States¹¹). The ethnic structure of Djibouti is dominated by Somalis (60%) – mainly from the Issa clan (the sub-clan of Dir), the second largest ethnic group are Afar people (35%), the remaining five per cent of the population are French, Italians, Arabs, and Ethiopians¹². The latter are mainly economic migrants, often staying in the country illegally¹³.

Considering its small area and population (approx. 830,000), the importance of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa lies mainly in its geographical location – on the Gulf of Aden at the entrance to the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, which separates the African continent from Asia, making Djiboutian territory of strategic importance for regional and international actors¹⁴.

Since the 80s of the 20th century Djibouti is ruled according to the following division of power: the president is elected from among the Somali Issa clan and the prime minister from among the Afars. This solution, however, did not prevent the eruption of a conflict between these two ethnic groups (in the form of the creeping civil war, 1991-1994/2001)¹⁵, especially because although formally the Djiboutian system is

¹⁰ Djibouti's Constitution of 1992 names Islam as the sole religion of the state (in its Preamble), however, in Article 1 the Constitution provides equality for citizens of all faiths, not only Muslims. Moreover, Article 11 mentions the freedom of religious practice. *Constitution de Djibouti du 4 septembre 1992*, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, at <<http://democratie.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/Djibouti.pdf>>, 10 October 2015.

¹¹ 'Profile: Arab League', BBC News, 5 February 2015, at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15747941>>, 29 October 2015. [The official website of the League of Arab States is in Arabic only – author's note].

¹² CIA, The World Factbook, 'Djibouti', at <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dj.html>>, 11 February 2016.

¹³ P. Domański, 'Dżibuti' in: J. Mantel-Niećko, M. Ząbek (eds.), *Róg Afryki. Historia i współczesność*, Warszawa 1999, p. 333 (*Historia Państw Świata w XX Wieku*); J. Jeffrey, 'Ethiopians in Djibouti', Deutsche Welle, 6 May 2015, at <<http://www.dw.com/en/ethiopians-in-djibouti/g-18429576>>, 28 October 2015.

¹⁴ A. Rabasa, *Radical Islam in East Africa*, Santa Monica 2009, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵ From 1991 to 2000 Djiboutian authorities fought a civil war with the Afar rebels that started an insurgency against Issa domination in public life. The rebellion was led by the Front for the Restoration

a semi-presidential one, in reality the role of the President has always been immeasurably greater. The current President, Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, took power in 1999¹⁶ after his uncle Hassan Gouled Aptidon, the first president of the independent Djibouti, who held office for four consecutive terms over the period 1977-1999, and from 1977 to 1992 ruled Djibouti with the use of presidential decrees, because the state did not have a formal constitution. Both governments have been considered authoritarian, moreover the Afar minority, favored during the French era, suddenly felt marginalized during the Issa clan presidency, whose political domination was possible due to the construction of the Djiboutian system of government and exercised political practice¹⁷.

The Djiboutian economy is based on the transport sector, using its geostrategic location and the seaports it possesses: the international port of Djibouti (located in the capital – Djibouti City), as well as its extension – opened in 2003, the port of Doraleh. Moreover, in 2012 the construction of a new port in Tadjourah was announced¹⁸. The importance of Djiboutian ports increased after the Eritrean-Ethiopian War of 1998-2000. As a result of the conflict Ethiopia was cut off from the sea and forced to look for other possibilities for access to the sea basin. Currently, Djibouti experiences also a large number of foreign investments from the Gulf states (mainly from the United Arab Emirates, particularly Dubai) and China¹⁹. The Chinese (Chinese Railway Engineering Corporation and Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Corporation) are renewing and modernizing the disused Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway line, founded in the colonial era²⁰. Although Djibouti could not complain about the lack of interest of

of Unity and Democracy (*Front pour la restauration de l'unité et la démocratie*, FRUD) and among its fighters there were former soldiers of the Ethiopian army under the Mengistu government (Mengistu himself was toppled in 1991). The Djiboutian government signed peace treaties with different factions of FRUD in 1994 and in 2000. The final peace treaty was agreed in May 2001. The agreement was focused on a kind of “decentralization” – at local level – more representative local authorities were to be set up. P. Domański, ‘Dzibuti’, pp. 353-360; *Djibouti Foreign Policy & Government Guide*, Washington, D.C. 2010, pp. 24, 81-82, 166.

¹⁶ However, the current de facto ruling party (Rassemblement populaire pour le progrès, RPP) has been in power for 35 years (Guelleh himself over this period held various public positions on behalf of his party).

¹⁷ H. Mahadallah, ‘Leadership in the Horn of Africa: The Emic/Etic Perspective’ in: R. Bereketeab (ed.), *The Horn of Africa. Intra-State and Inter-State Conflicts and Security*, London–Uppsala 2013, pp. 57-58; K. Whiteman, ‘Hassan Gouled Aptidon. Founding President of Independent Djibouti’, *The Guardian*, 5 December 2006, at <<http://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/dec/05/guardianobituaries.world>>, 26 October 2015.

¹⁸ ‘Construction of Djibouti’s Third Sea Port Begins’, *The Economist* – Intelligence Unit, 28 December 2012, at <<http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=989990683&Country=Djibouti&topic=Economy&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=Policy+trends&u=1&pid=253679009&oid=253679009&uid=1>>, 28 October 2015; Port de Djibouti SA, at <<http://www.portdedjibouti.com>>, 28 October 2015.

¹⁹ D. Styan, *Djibouti. Changing Influence in the Horn’s Strategic Hub*, London 2013, pp. 3-8 (*Chatham House Briefing Paper*, AFP BP 2013/01).

²⁰ The work related to the construction of the railway was carried out in the years 1894-1917. The re-starting of the railway link was planned for March 2016, but it seems that it may experience some delays. D. Hartleb-Wroczyńska, ‘Kolonializm w Rogu Afryki’ in: J. Mantel-Niećko, M. Ząbek (eds.), *Róg*

foreign partners and related investments²¹, its GDP per capita amounts to 3,300 USD (2015), with a systematic growth in the last few years (about \$200 per year), at the same time being the highest GDP per capita among the countries of the region²², these figures mask huge social inequalities and a high level of poverty. The unemployment rate in Djibouti for several years has been estimated at 60 per cent and 18.8 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line on less than \$1.25 a day²³.

On the regional level Djibouti is actively engaged in the peace process in neighboring Somalia, and recently also in South Sudan (mainly through Intergovernmental Authority on Development) – the youngest African state which since December 2013 has experienced a brutal civil war²⁴. President Guelleh likes to think about himself as one of the “architects” of the Somali peace process. It is justified only to a certain extent; thanks to him peace talks in Arta (a town situated 48 km from the Djiboutian capital) were initiated, which resulted in the creation of the Transitional National Government, recognized by the international community as the central Somali government over the period 2000-2004²⁵. In the last 15 years President Guelleh spared no efforts to be actively involved in the Somali peace process, however, it would be an exaggeration to consider Djibouti one of the most important international players engaged in find-

Afryki..., p. 102; ‘Ethiopia Says New Railway to Djibouti to Start in Early 2016’, Reuters, 28 January 2015, at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-railway-idUSL6N0V74Z920150128>>, 28 October 2015; ‘Chinese-built Electric Railway to Replace Ethiopia’s Historic French Line’, The East African, 13 March 2013, at <<http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Chinese-built-electric-railway-to-replace-Ethiopia-old-rail/-/2558/1718934/-/yi2efrz/-/index.html>>, 15 November 2015.

²¹ President Guelleh is looking also for non-traditional trading partners – trying to establish close trade relations and encourage investment in his country, for example, this kind of efforts was aimed at the United Kingdom. For this purpose, in May 2013, together with a representation of a nearly hundred people (ministers, representatives of public and private sector, he visited the City of London. O. Caslin, ‘Djibouti: À la conquête de la City’, *Jeune Afrique*, 12-18 May 2013, p. 15.

²² CIA, The World Factbook, ‘Djibouti’... For comparison’s sake, in Ethiopia, enjoying high economic growth in recent years, GDP per capita in 2015 amounted to \$1,700. CIA, The World Factbook, ‘Ethiopia’, at <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>>, 11 February 2016.

²³ Estimated data cited by The CIA World Factbook, in absence of the official data on unemployment and poverty in Djibouti from the World Bank. CIA, The World Factbook, ‘Djibouti’...

²⁴ This initiative was also economically motivated. In 2012 Djibouti, Ethiopia, and South Sudan signed a preliminary agreement in which they agreed on construction of the pipeline aimed to connect oil fields in South Sudan with Djiboutian port on the Gulf of Aden. However, the current turbulent political and security situation in South Sudan prevents any actions that could implement this agreement. ‘South Sudan in Ethiopia-Djibouti Oil Pipeline Deal’, BBC News, 9 February 2012, at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16969483>>, 11 October 2015; D. Stryan, *Djibouti...*, p. 9; Office of the IGAD Special Envoys For South Sudan, at <<http://southsudan.igad.int/>>, 29 October 2015; ‘South Sudan’s Rebel Leader Meets Djibouti President’, *Sudan Tribune*, 13 July 2014, at <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article51673>>, 29 October 2015.

²⁵ For more information about this and other Djiboutian initiatives in the peace process in Somalia see: A.P. Kasaija, ‘The UN-led Djibouti Peace Process for Somalia 2008-2009: Results and Problems’, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2010), at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2010.497357>>.

ing a solution to the Somali conflict. Nevertheless, in President Guelleh's foreign policy one can perceive eclecticism and pragmatism. He backs the Palestinian cause, encourages the Chinese to invest more in Djibouti, and supports the United States in the war on terror, while at the same time he tries to refresh Djibouti's relations with the former metropolis. In a similar eclectic spirit and style Guelleh also describes the Djiboutians – "African at heart, Arabist in culture, and universalist in thought"²⁶.

For the international position of Djibouti it is not without significance that a number of international actors have military interests in Djibouti. The possibility of using Djiboutian bases and ports is a strategically important element for the realization of their policy in the region. Among these important international players, one can find the former metropolis – France which maintains in Djibouti the largest of its bases on the African continent, constantly keeping about two thousand soldiers. Another important player is the United States, in 2001 the Djiboutian authorities leased the former French base – Camp Lemmonier to U.S. Navy. In this way, Camp Lemmonier became the only permanent U.S. base in sub-Saharan Africa, in 2008 passing under the newly established United States African Command (AFRICOM)²⁷. Altogether it hosts over four thousand US military personnel, as well as "the army" of the US drones²⁸, used to track down the militants of Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Al-Qaeda in Yemen²⁹. While the United States experienced a difficult time with Ethiopia and Eritrea – both their allies – which got engaged in a war (1998-2000), they started to appreciate even more the strategically located tiny Djibouti that appeared to be very stable and internally calm, especially in comparison with its neighbors. The value of the Djiboutian strategic location and its potential became already clear for the United States during the Gulf War (before they were rather concentrated on the Somali port of Berbera, as a consequence of good Somali-US relations prior to the 1990s)³⁰. Also today the best possible relations with Djiboutian authorities are in the broadly understood interest of the United States, especially while taking into account the more and more active Chinese policy in the region³¹.

²⁶ L. Schermerhorn, 'Djibouti: A Special Role in the War on Terrorism' R. I. Rotberg (ed.), *Battling Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, Cambridge, Mass.–Washington 2005, pp. 53-54.

²⁷ In May 2014 U.S. President Barack Obama and Ismail Omar Guelleh signed a new 20-year lease agreement on Camp Lemmonier base. E. Schmitt, 'U.S. Signs New Lease to Keep Strategic Military Installation in the Horn of Africa', *The New York Times*, 5 May 2014, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/06/world/africa/us-signs-new-lease-to-keep-strategic-military-installation-in-the-horn-of-africa.html?_r=2>, 20 May 2014.

²⁸ Unmanned aerial vehicles.

²⁹ F. Gardner, 'US Military Steps up Operations in the Horn of Africa', BBC News, 7 February 2014, at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26078149>>, 27 October 2015; R. Zuber, 'Djibouti: How Washington Supports Terror to Fight Terror', *Foreign Policy Journal*, 14 October 2015, at <<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/10/14/djibouti-how-washington-supports-terror-to-fight-terror/>>, 29 October 2015.

³⁰ P. Woodward, *US Foreign Policy and the Horn of Africa*, Aldershot 2006, p. 89 (*US Foreign Policy and Conflict in the Islamic World*).

³¹ In August 2015 Djiboutian authorities ordered Americans to leave the port town of Obock, where they benefited from the pier and a small airport. The reason behind this decision was related to Chi-

ETHIOPIA AND ITS NEIGHBORHOOD WITH DJIBOUTI

After the fall of the military regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, the new Ethiopian authorities introduced a number of economic reforms with an aim to restructure the economy and achieve macroeconomic stabilization. As a consequence, in the last two decades Ethiopia has witnessed previously unseen development in many areas. The country can count with a constant GDP growth, however, similarly to Djibouti, it experiences a big economic inequality problem. Moreover, the growth itself has not attracted, as some authors point out, a sufficient reduction of poverty. It seems that the Ethiopian government could be more concerned with the overall development of the country and not only aiming at two-digit growth figures, especially while the levels of urban and rural poverty driven by a constant population pressure are still very high³². Historically, most of Ethiopia's GDP used to come from agriculture. In the past, it was generally coffee export. Nevertheless, low coffee prices on the world markets introduced forced diversification of the agricultural production for the export markets (flowers, vegetables, khat). Appreciated for its constant efforts, in 2005 Ethiopia was one of the 18 countries that benefited from 100% multilateral debt relief of loans from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the African Bank of Development, and this only indicates what is visible also today that the international actors are convinced of the important role Ethiopia plays in the region and view it as a crucial element to the region's political and economic stability. This political stability often seems to be more recognized than the country's sometimes dubious commitment to the human rights and the standards of good governance³³. One of the recent examples

na's plans of building a military base there. S. Tiezzi, 'Will China Take Over US Military Facility in Djibouti?', *The Diplomat*, 21 August 2015, at <<http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/will-china-take-over-us-military-facility-in-djibouti/>>, 5 November 2015. Moreover, in Djibouti there are also contingents which are numerically smaller from other countries, such as Japan, which holds in Djibouti its first overseas base after the Second World War, as well as Germany, Russia or India, stationed with the aim to patrol and protect the Gulf of Aden, in relation to the constant piracy threat off the Somali coast. For the same reason Djibouti became a logistic base and transportation hub for the first European Union maritime operation (started in 2008) – EU-NAVFOR-ATALANTA (*European Union Naval Force Somalia*), aimed at protecting ships on the waters surrounding Somalia, and supporting the EU civil mission – EUCAP Nestor. Till October 2015 Djibouti City was also a headquarters for EUCAP Nestor, then it was moved to Mogadishu (Somalia). M.O. Farah, 'Japan Opens Military Base in Djibouti to Help Combat Piracy', *Bloomberg Business*, 8 July 2011, at <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-07-08/japan-opens-military-base-in-djibouti-to-help-combat-piracy>>, 25 October 2015; D. Styran, *Djibouti...*, p. 4, 11-13; EUCAP NESTOR, at <<https://www.eucap-nestor.eu/en/xpl3jcydxnknnu50>>, 30 October 2015.

³² A. Kedir, 'Ethiopia: Perspectives Beyond Growth and Poverty' in: E. Aryeetey et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Economics of Africa*, Oxford 2014, pp. 487-490; J. Záhořík, 'Ethiopia's Hegemony in the Horn of Africa: Internal Tensions and External Challenges Before and After Meles Zenawi', *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2014), pp. 23-38, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2014.881704>>.

³³ R. Teztlaff, 'Committed Political Leadership Matters! Ethiopia under Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the Question of Continuity of Political Leadership' in: E.-M. Bruchhaus, M. M. Sommer (eds.),

is the Ethiopian government's reaction toward the Oromo³⁴ people protesting against the introduction of the 'Addis Ababa Integrated Regional Development Plan', aimed to expand the capital, Addis Ababa³⁵ into Oromia regional territory, which resulted in exacerbation of police violence, killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and documented cases of tortures³⁶. Nevertheless, after 1991 one can observe Ethiopia's efforts to regain its past hegemonic position in the Horn of Africa. Today, despite a range of internal problems, it is perceived as one of the most stable African countries. Moreover, according to the International Monetary Fund, it is also believed to be the fastest growing economy among the non-oil producing Africa's countries. Its political position may grow not only in the region but also on the whole continent. Ethiopia already hosts headquarters of some most important regional and international organizations (i.e. the African Union). Also the United States' attitude towards Ethiopia is, similarly to the Djiboutian case, very positive. The US view Ethiopia nowadays, especially in the face of the still unstable political and security situation in Egypt after the Arab Spring, as an important regional security partner in the global war on terror³⁷. Ethiopia became their political and security beachhead, while Djibouti is a military one, both countries seem then crucial for the realization of the American policy towards the Horn of Africa region.

Good relations with the United States are one of many aspects of the community of interests experienced by Djibouti and Ethiopia in the international context, especially in its regional dimension, since the Horn of Africa still represents one of the most fragile regions of the world – in the last quarter century the region experienced 32 interstate conflicts and 179 conflicts with non-state actors. Ethiopia's neighborhood is then a much destabilized one: the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, very unstable situation in Somalia, Kenya – threatened with terrorism, and Sudan and Eritrea – isolated on the international arena. On this panorama the tiny Djibouti is an exceptionally reliable partner, both in political and economic issues. Good relations between these two

Hot Spot Horn of Africa Revisited. Approaches to Make Sense of Conflict, Berlin 2008, p. 109 (*Afrikanische Studien*, 37).

³⁴ Ethiopia's largest ethnic group that represents 34.5 per cent of the population.

³⁵ Finfinne – in the Oromo language.

³⁶ The protests against the so-called "Master Plan" (the popular name for the Integrated Regional Development Plan) started in 2014, but their culmination was observed in November-December 2015. The protests continued even after the government dropped the plan in mid-January 2016. Amnesty International, *"Because I am Oromo". Sweeping Repression in the Oromia Region in Ethiopia*, London 2014; Human Rights Watch, 'Ethiopia: Lethal Force against Protesters', 18 December 2015, at <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/18/ethiopia-lethal-force-against-protesters>>, 18 January 2016; 'Ethiopia Cancels Addis Ababa Master Plan after Oromo Protests', BBC News, 13 January 2016, at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35300471>>, 31 January 2016; S. Foltyn, 'Ethiopia: Oromo Protests Continue Amid Harsh Crackdown', Al Jazeera, 24 March 2016, at <<http://www.aljazeera.com/in-depth/features/2016/03/ethiopia-oromo-protests-continue-harsh-crackdown-160321082451685.html>>, 25 March 2016.

³⁷ R. Kłosowicz, 'The Role of Ethiopia in the Regional Security Complex of the Horn of Africa', *Ethiopian Journal of Social Sciences and Language Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2015), pp. 84-86.

countries can be of added value for the entire Horn of Africa region, becoming the axis of stability in a destabilized and insecure environment³⁸.

The Ethio-Djiboutian relations are also influenced by historical regional issues, as well as the more locally-focused Afar-Issa conflict. After the Second World War Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I wished to continue Ethiopian expansionist policy in the region (dated back at least to the times of Menelik II), claiming Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti as authentically Ethiopian lands and referring to the past Ethiopian "grandeur". However, in the Djiboutian case he definitely failed as this territory, although small, was of strategic importance to France³⁹. Therefore the common problem for both Ethiopia and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa region is Somali nationalism. Since 1960 when Somalia became an independent state, it claimed right to all Somali-inhabited territories, so in fact, to both Djibouti⁴⁰ and the Somali Region of Ethiopia (historically known as Ogaden)⁴¹. This means that although both countries are committed to the peace process and stabilizing efforts in the neighboring Somalia, on the other hand in their vital interest is that strong, united and centralized Somali state will never revive⁴².

Over the years the relations between Ethiopia and Djibouti could have been affected by the often difficult coexistence of the two ethnic groups that inhabit both territories: the Somalis (from the Issa clan) and the Afars. However, as one can observe the mutual animosities between these groups did not have a significant negative influence on the Ethio-Djiboutian relations. In all probability, it did not happen, because of the fact that both these groups number only a very small percentage of the Ethiopian population, thus their conflicts and problems are not the state's priority. Two out of nine ethnically-based regional states of Ethiopia border on Djibouti: the Afar Region and the Somali Region. The two ethnic groups that consist the majority of their inhabitants: the Afar people and the Somalis also shared two major ethnic groups with Djibouti (according

³⁸ Idem, 'Etiopia oraz jej polityczne i militarne znaczenie w Rogu Afryki' in: Ł. Fijałkowski, E. Stadtmüller (eds.), *Normy, wartości i instytucje we współczesnych stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Vol. 2, Warszawa 2015, p. 230.

³⁹ In the case of Somalia the problem lays in the strong Somali nationalism and the United Nations efforts aiming at leading Somalia toward independence. A. Bariagaber, *Conflict and the Refugee Experience. Flight, Exile, and the Repatriation in the Horn of Africa*, Aldershot 2006, p. 26 (*Contemporary Perspectives on Developing Societies*).

⁴⁰ The Western Somali Liberation Front – a separatist rebel group that operated on the eastern Ethiopian territory in the 1970s and the 1980s had several divisions, of which one was intended to occupy and annex Djibouti. J. Markakis, 'Anatomy of a Conflict: Afar & Ise Ethiopia', *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 30, No. 97 (2003), p. 447.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴² This fact may be well-illustrated by the 2006 Ethiopian intervention in Somalia which ousted quite successfully the Islamic Courts Union government. F. Oluoch, 'Frontline States Join Amisom to Protect Interests in Somalia', *The East African*, 22 January 2012, at <<http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Frontline+states+join+Amisom++to+protect+interests+in+Somalia+/-/2558/1311952/-/11vmdz/-/index.html>>, 22 December 2015; A.O. Abdillahi, 'Géopolitique de Djibouti: des incertitudes de la naissance à l'espérance de l'âge adulte' in: A. Saïd Chiré (ed.), *Djibouti contemporain*, Paris 2013, pp. 143-144 (*Hommes et Sociétés*).

to the 2007 Census in the Afar Region 90 per cent are Afars and in the Somali Region slightly over 97 per cent of population are ethnic Somalis)⁴³. The conflict between Afar people and Somalis from the Issa clan is a common feature in the Djiboutian and Ethiopian ethnic divisions. In Ethiopia in the 1980s and 1990s constant clashes between the Afar and the Issa⁴⁴ herdsmen were mostly over water issues. It was especially difficult as there was no traditional conflict resolution mechanism between these two groups and the Ethiopian government. The civil war in Djibouti although by many perceived rather as a power struggle between Afar and Issa urban elites, on the other level, however, could have been interpreted as an extension of the ongoing Afar-Issa conflict inside Ethiopia. The Ethiopian-Eritrean War which came after (1998-2000) was fought partly in northern Afar Region, and this caused serious problems for the local population and, in consequence, became an additional factor to the already existing tensions between these two ethnic groups. In the years that followed, the Shinile Zone inhabited mostly by the Somali Issa clan struggled with the ban on animal imports from the Horn of Africa imposed by Saudi Arabia in 2000, due to an outbreak of the Rift Valley fever. The Issas were major exporters of sheep and goats to the Arabian market, so when this export stopped, they were hit very hard by its consequences. The Shinile Zone became overstocked and overgrazed, what forced the Issas to enter deeper into the Afar territory. The drought of 2002-2003 hit both populations almost equally and the struggle over water resources flared up again, even stronger than before. However, after the war of 1998-2000 the Ethiopian federal government finally noticed the problem, as in the situation of losing the access to the sea through the Eritrean coast, it was determined to turn its attention toward Djibouti. So at this point Addis Ababa appealed to both sides to refrain from hostilities and tried to engage the academics to help find the solution to the problem⁴⁵. Ethiopia feared that the ongoing conflict between Afar and Somali Issa populations could be viewed as a kind of obstacle for the planned development of very good and close relations with Djibouti⁴⁶, towards which Ethiopia was somewhat forced by after-war circumstances. Just before the Ethiopian-Eritrean War when the Addis-Ababa – Djibouti railway was already in decline, Ethiopia was totally dependent on the Eritrean port of Assab⁴⁷, as 80 per cent of its trade of that time passed through this

⁴³ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Population Census Commission, *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census*, Addis Ababa, December 2008, at <http://ecastats.uneca.org/aicmd/Portals/0/Cen2007_firstdraft.pdf>, 27 November 2015.

⁴⁴ In Ethiopia the Issas inhabit mostly the Shinile Zone – one of nine zones of the Somali Region, bordering on the Oromia Region, Dire Dawa city (they naturally spill into the city), and the Afar Region. J. Markakis, *Ethiopia. The Last Two Frontiers*, Woodbridge 2011, p. 324 (*Eastern African Studies*).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁴⁶ As noted by Kassahun Berhanu – the major structural cause of conflict in Djibouti was the perception of political and economic marginalization by the Afar population. K. Berhanu, 'Conflicts in the Horn of Africa and Implications for Regional Security' in: R. Bereketeab (ed.), *The Horn of Africa...*, p. 77.

⁴⁷ And to a lesser extent on the port of Massawa. However, it should be noted that in the colonial time until the early 1960s Djibouti was, thanks to the functioning Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway link, the most important transit port for Ethiopian trade. In 1963 49% of Ethiopian exports and 41% of its imports went through the port of Djibouti, while through the port of Assab and the port of Mas-

Eritrean port, there were then certain differences about the special position of Ethiopia in the use of the port – which was one of the economic problems that arose before the war and contributed to the already tensed pre-war situation⁴⁸. Moreover, the intensification of the Afar-Issa conflict had also more tangible effects as the road to Djibouti crosses through Afar territory and the railway link through the Issa territory, making the sole way for the landlocked Ethiopia to the sea basin dependable on the peace on the Afar-Issa borderland⁴⁹.

IS IT NEW AFRICAN COOPERATION? VARIOUS ASPECTS OF ETHIO-DJIBOUTIAN RELATIONS

Ethio-Djiboutian relations which after the Eritrean-Ethiopian War assumed the form of well-developed interstate cooperation – first of all in the economic, then also in political dimension – are of exceptional nature, not only because of the fragile regional environment in which they were born, but also due to a truly wide range of forms in which they are being realized. What draws attention is also the fact that the large and populous Ethiopia needs the tiny Djibouti probably as much as Djibouti needs Ethiopia, and although it is hard to evaluate whether the gains for both countries are of the same magnitude, they are definitely mutual – a requirement that according to Helen Milner has to be met, if we want to talk about real ‘interstate cooperation’.

Djibouti and Ethiopia established their diplomatic relations in 1984, although their “renaissance” took place after the Eritrean-Ethiopian War (1998-2000) and was related, as it was mentioned before, to economic issues. For Djibouti the neighborhood with Ethiopia although often perceived as the possibility of a positive partnership that could stimulate economic growth, in some aspects can be problematic. A country which is relatively rich for the conditions of the region, Djibouti has attracted refugees and economic migrants from other countries of the Horn, including Ethiopia. The majority of Ethiopians living in Djibouti are illegal migrants. According to the data provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the number of refugees from Ethiopia living in Djibouti is quite low – in January 2015 it was 480 people, and in December 2015 – 600. These are not big numbers in comparison with other nationalities of the Horn (e.g. around 21,500-22,000

sawa these numbers were much smaller, respectively 27% and 26%, and 18% and 27%. The situation changed after 1967 when the construction of the refinery in Assab had been completed and the road connection to the Assab had been also ameliorated. A. Gascon, ‘Djibouti, un port entre continent et grand large. Base militaire, port de l’Éthiopie, de l’Afrique de l’Est, de l’Océan Indien?’ in: A. Saïd Chiré (ed.), *Djibouti contemporain*, Paris 2013, pp. 130-131 (*Hommes et Sociétés*).

⁴⁸ P. Woodward, *US Foreign Policy...*, p. 86; idem, ‘The IGAD and Regional Relations in the Horn of Africa’ in: R. Bereketeab (ed.), *The Horn of Africa...*, p. 147.

⁴⁹ J. Markakis, ‘Anatomy of a Conflict...’, p. 448. See more about the Afar-Issa conflict and its regional and interstate dimension: Y. Yasin, ‘Trans-Border Political Alliance in the Horn of Africa. The Case of the Afar-Issa Conflict’ in: D. Feyissa, M.V. Hoehne (eds.), *Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa*, Woodbridge 2010, pp. 85-96 (*Eastern African Studies*).

refugees from Somalia), however, the figures do differ in the case of asylum seekers. In this group Ethiopians constitute the largest number – 3,930 in January 2015 and 4,430 in December 2015 respectively. Having limited natural resources and experiencing almost continuous droughts, Djibouti finds this situation quite precarious, especially as this refugee/migrants crisis Djibouti is dealing with has a rather protracted character⁵⁰.

As it was mentioned before, currently about 90 per cent of Ethiopia's trade is carried out through the Djiboutian ports. At the same time Ethiopia receives 95 per cent of the regional exports of Djibouti (mainly sheep, goats, charcoal, salt and re-exports)⁵¹. As for the Ethiopian export to Djibouti, it mostly consists of electricity. The smallest state of the Horn of Africa, trying to meet its electricity needs, has started, however, to build photovoltaic farms, and there are also plans to use geothermal and wind energy. The Djiboutian authorities would like to produce all the country's power from renewable resources by 2020. Nevertheless, the situation of the energy dependence is not likely change in the coming years. The operative electric power interconnection agreement, signed in 2013, is worth \$2 billion and is aimed at increasing the affordability of electricity access in both countries. The new transmission line, financed with the help of the African Bank of Development, enables Ethiopia to export to Djibouti up to 75 MW of electricity, which today constitutes 65 per cent of Djibouti's electricity needs⁵².

Djibouti also undertook some changes in the way it administers its ports, having in mind that they became Ethiopia's windows on the world and the main founding of their bilateral relations. In 2012 in order to handle the growing cargo flowing to and from Ethiopia, it decided to privatize its ports, as well as to contract Dubai Port World – one of the world's best port operators. Currently, its port capacity is 1.5m 20ft⁵³-equivalent containers a year, however this capacity should increase with the progress of the undertaken modernization work. At Doraleh Djibouti has also built one of the biggest oil storage and handling complexes in Africa. These improvements are of great importance not only to Djibouti – which itself is an energy importer – but to the whole region, and especially Ethiopia. The establishment of the Free Trade Zone that adjoins the port is also a boost in further development of mutual economic relations. Djibouti Free Zone hosts over 100 regional and global companies and it has enabled to Ethio-

⁵⁰ UNHCR, 'UNHCR Global Appeal 2015 Update: Djibouti', pp. 1-2, at <<http://www.unhcr.org/5461e5ffb.html>>, 22 February 2016.

⁵¹ 'Djibouti', The Observatory of Economic Complexity, at <<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/dji/#Exports>>, 26 October 2015; A. Haythornthwaite, 'Djibouti: Ethiopian Prime Minister in Historic State Visit', *Geeska Africa*, 7 February 2015, at <<http://www.geeskaafrika.com/djibouti-ethiopian-prime-minister-in-historic-state-visit/7981/>>, 15 November 2015; N. Yassin, 'Ethio-Djiboutian...'

⁵² A. Haythornthwaite, 'Djibouti...'; 'Djibouti Launches Solar Power Project, Plans for Wind Project', Reuters, 15 January 2016, at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/djibouti-electricity-idUSL8N14Z322>>, 27 January 2016; 'By 2020, Djibouti Can Meet 100% of Energy Demand through Renewables', International Renewable Energy Agency, 25 May 2015, at <<https://irenaneewsroom.org/2015/05/25/by-2020-djibouti-can-meet-100-of-energy-demand-through-renewables/>>, 20 February 2015.

⁵³ The twenty-foot equivalent unit is an inexact unit of cargo capacity often used to describe the capacity of container ships and container terminals.

pian enterprises to operate in the proximity of the port and under a fiscal regime as conducive as the one they operate under in Ethiopia. Moreover, Djibouti itself was able to offer a wide range of services within the created zone⁵⁴. Nearly 80 per cent Djibouti's GDP is attributed to the ports or port related activities⁵⁵.

Despite the fact that Djibouti will remain the major port for the Ethiopia, the Ethiopian authorities try to diversify their transport corridors, in February 2015 it was announced that five to ten per cent of the country's imports are planned to come through the port of Berbera in Somaliland⁵⁶. It seems especially important as despite all the improvements introduced by the Djiboutian authorities and good bilateral relations, this "port-dependence" experienced by Ethiopia happens to be burdensome, as for example, the recent problem of food aid supplies destined for 10 million Ethiopians affected by the consequences of the *El Niño* phenomenon. The Djiboutian ports became congested because of the shortage of trucks able to transport the food out of the port area. In consequence emergency food shipments for starving Ethiopians are delayed for weeks⁵⁷.

Despite these difficulties both countries' commitment to major infrastructural projects is clearly visible. The best example is the renovation of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway link (or in fact the construction of a new electric line that runs along the old one). The new/renovated 752 km-long railway link will reduce the travel time from Djibouti port to the Ethiopian capital from two days to less than ten hours. With a capacity of 3,500 tons it exceeds seven times the capacity of the old line at its peak. The fact that will undoubtedly contribute to the economic development of Ethiopia's hinterlands and help relieve the countries' road networks. In the future this rail link is planned to serve as a key component of the proposed trans-continental East to West African Railway Network⁵⁸. The commissioning of this new/renovated railway link, which is expected in the first half of 2016, is a new beginning for Ethiopia, which until recently could rely only on the road transport – long lines of trucks after leaving Djibouti's Doraleh Container Terminal, headed south to Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa⁵⁹. The renovation of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, but also the new Chinese-built electrified Ethiopian railway project will be used for both freight and passenger transport, replacing the slow and costly truck transport. The trains can be very profitable, as one machine could replace 10 trucks in terms of throughput. The planned electric railway will be one of the first electric trains in East Africa and will run at a speed of 120

⁵⁴ 'A Partnership for Progress', *New African*, 20 June 2012, at <<http://newafricanmagazine.com/a-partnership-for-progress/>>, 28 October 2015; A. Gascon, 'Djibouti, un port...', pp. 139-140,

⁵⁵ D. Moore, 'Djibouti's Logistic Boom', *New African*, No. 552 (2015), p. 67.

⁵⁶ N. Norbrook, 'Transport: East Africa's Rail to the Rescue', *The Africa Report*, 17 July 2015, at <<http://www.theafricareport.com/East-Horn-Africa/transport-east-africas-rail-to-the-rescue.html>>.

⁵⁷ Y. Merga, 'Stranded – Ethiopia's Struggle to Feed the Needy', Deutsche Welle, 19 February 2016, at <<http://www.dw.com/en/stranded-ethiopias-struggle-to-feed-the-needy/a-19060382>>, 28 February 2016; 'Food Aid Destined for Ethiopia's Hungry Stuck in Djibouti Port', *TesfaNews*, 24 March 2016, at <<http://www.tesfanews.net/ethiopia-food-aid-stuck-djibouti-port/>>, 28 March 2016.

⁵⁸ 'A Partnership for Progress'.

⁵⁹ N. Norbrook, 'Transport...'

kilometers an hour. Its maintenance will be also easier and cheaper (it will be mechanized and rely on locally-produced hydropower)⁶⁰. It is worth highlighting here that Djibouti also invests in Ethiopia's hydroelectric program, which makes mutual relationships even closer. Djibouti is the largest foreign buyer of bonds issued by Ethiopia to finance the Abay River (Blue Nile) hydroelectric facility, while Djibouti's investment in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam amounts to \$1million⁶¹.

Surprisingly, water, so desperately needed by the desert nation of Djibouti⁶², can become one of the biggest discrepancies in mutual relations. In mid-2014 Ethiopia signed a 30-year agreement with Djibouti to enable it to extract fresh water from ground water resources free of charge in the Shinile Zone in the Ethiopian Somali Region (about 100 km from the Djiboutian border). Therefore Djibouti will be supplied with water in the amount of 103 thousand cu meters per day. According to the agreement, Djibouti was granted a plot of land in Shinile Zone and it can extract the water for free, just it has to run the water development project on the ground (the project is owned, financed and operated by Djibouti). However, the project itself has become a sort of controversial issue in the perception of the mutual relations. The critics raised the fact that the agreement had not been publicly discussed and had been kept confidential until its official announcement. First of all, it seems (and the Ethiopian government admitted it) that Ethiopia would not get any economic benefit out of it, so the question is if it serves to generate any indirect and not economic benefits, for example in terms of Ethio-Djiboutian cooperation in various fields. It was also commented that although with regard to Djibouti, Ethiopia is determined to ensure long-lasting and reliable port services, they are not for free and Djibouti derives a great amount of profit from this, so "no free service or a gift is expected on either side". Moreover, the local population inhabited in the area where the project was to be implemented was forced to move by the Ethiopian forces to the area 70 km away. The forced eviction of the residents could also surprise as this part of Ethiopia is rather sparsely populated and it was not made clear why it was necessary to evict local people from the technical point of view, as the residents do not have contact with deep-seated ground water, there is no big urban center in the area, and the evicted residents did not have big farms on which they could use chemicals that could pollute the waters underground. Last but not least, the Somali Region in general, and the Shinile Zone in particular, suffers from the scarcity of water, so the decision of the Ethiopian government is quite surprising, taking into

⁶⁰ 'Chinese-built Electric Railway...'; E. Grey, 'Improved Access for Ethiopia: Opening the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Line', *Railway Technology*, 7 April 2016, at <<http://www.railway-technology.com/features/featureimproved-access-for-ethiopia-opening-the-addis-ababa-djibouti-line-4836968/>>, 8 April 2016; 'Hurray! Gamechanger Djibouti-Ethiopia Railway Ready, Will Cut Goods Travel Time from Two Days to 10 Hours', *Mail & Guardian*, 9 June 2015, at <<http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-06-09-hurray-gamechanger-djibouti-ethiopia-railway-ready-will-cut-goods-travel-time-from-two-days-to-10-hours>>, 29 October 2015.

⁶¹ 'A Partnership for Progress.'

⁶² See more: H.-O. Rayaleh, 'L'eau à Djibouti ville: la gestion sociale d'une pénurie' in A. Saïd Chiré (ed.), *Djibouti contemporain*, pp. 263-292.

account the water problems experiences by the Ethiopian citizens in this area. To deal with the water problem several governmental and nongovernmental institutions had been working in the area and in 2012 the Somali Regional Government started drilling and developing 70 water wells in the Shinile Zone (in 2012 already 160 million Birr were spent on it), but these wells were about to operate on the same water, the Ethiopian Government wanted to donate for free to Djiboutians. The remaining question is whether the Ethiopian authorities are so desperate to ensure good and long-lasting relation with Djibouti and just went too far, or maybe there is a secret governmental deal behind it. The groundswell of discontent in the Internet after the announcement of the deal was alleviated when in July 2014 it was officially admitted that Djibouti would pay compensation to the Ethiopian residents affected by this water project⁶³.

Generally speaking, it seems that both countries share a common vision of the regional development and are equally committed to the completion of the major infrastructure projects, such as: the rehabilitation of the Djibouti-Dire Dawa highway and the construction of the Northern Corridor (Dorra-Balho); the rehabilitation of the Djibouti-Ethiopian Railway and construction of a new rail corridor to the north – Tadjourah-Mekele; as well as the construction of the Port of Tadjourah itself⁶⁴. However, it must be emphasized that cooperation with Ethiopia is not only limited to the economic (or infrastructural) issues; it also includes cooperation at the political level and in the area of security. In 2013 Djibouti and Ethiopia signed an agreement about military cooperation, consisting in the exchange of military information, military training and cooperation in controlling the activities of smugglers, terrorists, human traffickers and other kind of problems that could appear in the border areas. The troops of both countries coordinated also their activities on the peacekeeping missions in which they both participate (such as AMISOM in Somalia). Moreover, a group of Djiboutian soldiers had been trained in Ethiopia⁶⁵.

On a historic visit in Djibouti in February 2015, already mentioned at the beginning of this article, Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn heard many warm words from Djibouti's president, among them the assurance that "Djibouti and Ethiopia are strong, strategic partners. We share the same values, culture and economic vision"⁶⁶. The official aim of the visit was to formalize economic and social integration.

⁶³ 'The Ethio-Djibouti Water Deal: the Lasting Game or the Last Game?', ZeHabesha.com, 12 June 2014, at <<http://www.zehabesha.com/the-ethio-djibouti-water-deal-the-lasting-game-or-the-last-game/>>, 10 February 2016; B. Geda, 'Ethiopia to Give Djibouti Underground Water for Free', *The Africa Report*, 4 July 2014, at <<http://www.theafricareport.com/East-Horn-Africa/ethiopian-to-give-djibouti-underground-water-for-free.html>>, 28 February 2016. See more on local water insecurity in Ethiopia: M. Dessalegn et al., *Voices from the Source. Struggles with Local Water Security in Ethiopia*, London 2013, WaterAid report, at <<http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/523ad22c4.pdf>>, 20 January 2016.

⁶⁴ 'A Partnership for Progress'.

⁶⁵ 'Ethiopia and Djibouti Review Joint Defense Activities', Addis Standard, 22 April 2014, at <<http://addisstandard.com/ethiopia-and-djibouti-review-joint-defense-activities/>>, 30 December 2015.

⁶⁶ A. Haythornthwaite, 'Djibouti: Ethiopian Prime Minister...' Some analysts try to explain the reasons behind these good mutual relations, using the so-called "genetic" theory, arguing that the above-

The three-day visit that was the first official state trip of a sitting Ethiopian prime minister was according to the Djiboutian President a milestone in the relations between the two nations. The leaders discussed ways to expand mutual cooperation even further, as well as policy coordination in international issues which are important for both countries, such as the fight against terrorism⁶⁷ or the promotion of regional integration in order to maintain stability in the Horn of Africa⁶⁸.

When we analyze the Ethio-Djiboutian relations in the 21st century there are several additional issues that appear. First of all, some argue that this kind of relationship we can observe at the moment is (or should be) just a prelude to further closer cooperation, and finally even a kind of integration or the unification of both countries. The Ethiopians that the Author talked with were willing to consider such a possibility and usually indicated that this sort of development of mutual relations would be very beneficial for Ethiopia which could gain sea access again. However, some of the interlocutors pointed to a risk that much bigger and populous Ethiopia would in the end totally dominate the smaller neighbor, what could transform any form of political or economic integration into an annexation of the Djiboutian territory and blurring any kind of the Djiboutian sense of national identity (due to aforementioned ethnic and cultural similarities)⁶⁹. It is also worth noting that although the Ethio-Djiboutian relations behind their obvious economic goals, are sometimes perceived as a quest for stability in the immediate neighborhood (not only already mentioned engagement in peace processes in war-torn neighboring countries, but, for example, pragmatic relations with Somaliland⁷⁰). However, this Ethio-Djiboutian cooperation could also contribute to some regional ten-

-mentioned similarities between the two nations are rooted in the fact that both major ethnic groups of Djibouti have their birthplaces/ancestral homes in Ethiopia: Afar people in Asaita (till 2007 the capital of the Afar Region in Ethiopia) and Somalis from the Issa clan in Ugaz, Greater Dire Dawa. G. Araia, 'The Unification of Ethiopia and Djibouti Will Be of Paramount Historical Significance', Tigray Online, 18 December 2014, at <<http://www.tigraionline.com/articles/ethiopia-djibouti-unity.html>>, 11 August 2015.

⁶⁷ Although for a long time Djibouti rather seemed to be free of a serious terrorist threat, the presence of the foreign military bases, as well as Djibouti's engagement in the Somali peace process, had to attract the attention of the regional terrorist groups, such as Al-Shabaab. In May 2014 a couple (later identified as Somali nationals, related to Al-Shabaab) blew themselves in a suicide attack in a restaurant in Djibouti Ville, frequented by the foreign military personnel. It was the first attack of this kind in Djibouti. Beside the bombers, one person died (Turkish national), while several others were wounded. Soon after, Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack. 'Djibouti Says Couple that Bombed Restaurant Probably Somali', Voice of America, 26 May 2014, at <<http://www.voanews.com/content/reu-djibouti-says-couple-that-bombed-restaurant-probably-somali/1922474.html>>, 30 August 2015; 'Al Shabaab Claims Responsibility for Djibouti Suicide Attack', Reuters, 27 May 2014, at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/uk-djibouti-attacks-idUSKBN0E72AA20140527>>, 31 August 2015. For more information about the changing challenges for Djibouti's security see: D. Styan, *Djibouti...*

⁶⁸ A. Haythornthwaite, 'Djibouti: Ethiopian Prime Minister...'

⁶⁹ Author's conversations with Ethiopian scholars during the 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies at the University of Warsaw, 24-28 August 2015.

⁷⁰ They are not willing to recognize it as a state but it does not mean that they cannot cooperate with it on the security or economic level.

sions. For example, one wonders if the border conflict over Ras Doumeirah in 2008 between Eritrea and Djibouti was in fact a result of the Eritrean resentment towards its neighbor that profits from the prosperous relations with Ethiopia⁷¹ and the United States⁷². The other side of the coin is the Ethio-Djiboutian cooperation presented as a sort of distraction from the real problems of the country – a method of dealing with public discontent with the internal situation. Both Djibouti and Ethiopia are often perceived as authoritarian regimes, dealing with some internal problems (e.g. the Oromo question in Ethiopia, two waves of the Arab Spring-inspired protests in Djibouti etc.). However, it should also not be forgotten that there are unresolved issues between the two countries that can in the future provoke some serious tensions. These include the question of citizenship in Djibouti where the rights to become qualified as a citizen do not emanate only from its legal framework, but are also dependent on the controversial incorporation into the patron-client system. In consequence, a large part of Djiboutian population is stateless, despite having been born on the Djiboutian soil and living there all its life. At the bottom of this “citizenship ladder” one can find economic migrants or their descendants, particularly Ethiopians, the majority of whom would never be able to receive Djiboutian citizenship⁷³.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that Djibouti is a tiny state, in the region of the Horn of Africa its importance is immeasurably greater. One of the reasons can be traced to its close trade and political relations with the largest country in the region – Ethiopia. Political and economic relations between these two nations influence the situation in the whole Horn of Africa – in some aspects they can be perceived as a source of stability and a great example of the African interstate cooperation, while in the others they can lead to further regional tensions – as in the case of Asmara’s attitude towards these close ties. Ethio-Djiboutian relations should be also considered in the context of the Somali crisis in which, both, Ethiopia as a strong regional actor and the United States as an outside Horn of Africa partner take actively part. The new infrastructural investments which are being planned or are already under construction – aimed to improve the mutual trade benefits – seem to confirm that the role of the Djibouti in the region and its importance for the Ethiopia, for the moment will be maintained, and in the future it can

⁷¹ However we put it, the Djiboutian port (and its extensions) replaced the Eritrean ones after the 1998-2000 war in providing service to Ethiopia.

⁷² B. Mesfin, *The Eritrea-Djibouti Border Dispute*, Institute for Security Studies – Situation Report, 15 September 2008, pp. 1-19, at <<https://www.issafrica.org/uploads/SITREP150908.PDF>>, 29 January 2016; J. Gettleman, ‘A Conflict’s Buffer Zone: Rocks, and Inches’, *New York Times*, 25 May 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/25/world/africa/25djibouti.html?_r=0>, 29 January 2016.

⁷³ For more information see: SA Bezabeh, ‘Citizenship and the Logic of Sovereignty in Djibouti’, *African Affairs*, Vol. 110 (2011), pp. 587-606, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr045>>.

even increase. However, there is also a range of issues that must be solved to avoid future tensions, such as mining fresh water for free deal from 2014 or the question of Djiboutian citizenship.

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