

➤ Is Russia Back? Realities of Russian Engagement in Africa

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Russia occupies a unique place among the so called ‘emerging actors’ in Africa. On one hand, Russia is not as active in Africa as China or Brazil; on the other hand, it is not a newcomer to the continent and it maintained intensive relations with many African countries during the Soviet period. This piece discusses the evolution of the Africa policies of the Soviet Union/Russia, including the reasons for their regression and new upsurge in the 21st Century. It pays special attention to the current state of Russia’s relations with Africa, both bilateral and multilateral, in various spheres ranging from growing direct investments (primarily in mining) to peace-keeping.

Russia’s historical connection with Africa is an important asset in developing its contemporary relations with the continent. Although Russia never had colonies in Africa, it made essential contributions to Africa’s decolonisation and the eradication of apartheid. Two episodes of pre-revolutionary Russia merit mention. First, Russia supported Ethiopia’s (then called Abyssinia) sovereignty and provided practical assistance in its struggle against Italian aggression in late 19th Century. It did so not only because of its geostrategic interests, but also because of the proximity between the Russian and Ethiopian Orthodox churches. At about the same time, more than 200 Russian volunteers supported the Boers in their war with the UK. In both cases, Russia gave support to those seen as the victims. ‘Old’ Russia also maintained several diplomatic missions in Africa and re-established relations with Egypt, Ethiopia and South Africa during World War II.

THE COLD WAR: THE SOVIET UNION IN AFRICA

Active ties to Africa developed from the late 1950s onwards, when African countries began to gain independence. This coincided with a significant turn in Moscow towards the Afro-Asian world. Josip Broz Tito played an important role here as he maintained close personal contact with statesmen such as Abdel Nasser and Jawaharlal Nehru and ‘recommended’ them to Nikita Khrushchev as champions of socialism. Moscow welcomed the emergence of the Afro-Asian movement, as signified by the convening of the Bandung conference in 1955.

In 1956, the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union confirmed the turn towards Africa as it pointed out the ‘collapse of the colonial system of imperialism’¹ and emphasised the role of the Soviet Union in the ‘irreconcilable struggle against colonialism’.² This was reiterated when Moscow initiated the adoption of the UN Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in December 1960.

¹ ‘20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (trans.),’ (Moscow: State Publisher of Political Literature: 1956), 24.

² Ibid, 28.

Three cases of Soviet involvement in Africa during the Cold War deserve analysis. The first is Moscow's support of Egypt during the Suez crisis in 1956. In addition to the US' negative attitude towards what became known as 'tripartite (British-French-Israeli) aggression', the Soviet Union's involvement led to the withdrawal of foreign troops and confirmation of Egyptian control over the Suez Canal.

The second case is Moscow's support for Lumumba's government in Congo and its allies in Africa, which facilitated the development of relations with a number of African countries. Whilst Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah had at first shown a reluctance to become close to Moscow,³ he later invited a Soviet military specialist to advise him on plans to create the united African Armed Forces in early 1961.⁴

At a recent conference in Moscow, Ben Amathila, one of the founders of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the ruling party in Namibia, stated the following: 'Again, the demonstration that the Soviet Union was ready to intervene and rescue the weaker in Africa did not miss our attention. Two of my colleagues in Namibia in 1961 during the Congo crisis, recognising the potential [of] the Soviet Union have sent a telegram to Mr. Khrushchev to send troops to Namibia...' ⁵ As naïve as this request may seem, it shows the appreciation for Moscow's role in the Congo crisis.

The third case involves the Soviet Union's involvement in the dramatic events in Angola in 1975-1976. The Soviet Union lent its support to the government of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which faced opposition not only from domestic actors but also from South Africa and Zaïre. In his speech at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in January 1976, Murtala Muhammed, head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, compared the policy of the Soviet Union and the US:

We are all aware of the heroic role which the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries have played in the struggle of the African people for liberation. The Soviet Union and other Socialist countries have been our traditional suppliers of arms to resist oppression, and to fight for national liberation and human dignity. On the other hand the United States which now sheds crocodile tears over Angola has not only completely ignored the freedom fighters whom successive United States administrations branded as terrorism, she even openly supported morally and materially the fascist Portuguese Government.⁶

Moscow policy in Africa has also seen failure, such as the 1966 coup in Ghana that toppled the government of Nkrumah and the political somersaults by Anwar Sadat in Egypt and Siad Barre in Somalia. Nevertheless, it was quite successful overall.

By the mid-1980s, the Soviet Union signed hundreds of agreements with African countries. About 25,000 Africans trained in Soviet universities and *technikons* in various fields, and thousands graduated from Soviet military and political schools. These alumni include the current presidents of Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique and South Africa. Soviets also trained at least 200,000 specialists on African soil. The Soviet Union made agreements with 37 African countries on technical and economic assistance, and with 42 countries on trade agreements.⁷

3 Sergey Mazov, *A Distant front in the Cold War. The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964*, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Press), 54.

4 Marshal V.G. Kulikov, 'Brezhnev, Zhukov, Rokossovsky,' <http://www.ogoniok.com/archive/2001/4701/26-20-21>. This specialist was Major-General Vassily Kulikov, future Marshal of the Soviet Union, Chief of the General Staff and Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact Forces.

5 *50 years of the Africa Year. Destiny of National Liberation Movements: View from Africa, Russia and Western Europe* (trans.), (Moscow: Eastern Literature, 2011), 192.

6 Patrick Wilmot, *Ideology and National Consciousness* (Ibadan: Lantern Books, 1980), 183-184.

7 Tatyana Deich ed., *Africa in the Foreign Policy Priorities of Russia* (trans.) (Moscow: Institut Afriki, 2003), 52. For more on the Soviet Union's cooperation with African countries see Evgeny Tarabrin, *USSR and Countries of Africa: Friendship, Cooperation, Support for Anti-Imperialist Struggle* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980).

Human capital development constituted an important part of the legacy of this cooperation and its influence on current bilateral relations. In 1985, for example, a group of five military commanders of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) 'were staying in an apartment on Gorki [Tverskaya] Street, Moscow' and undergoing highly specialised military training. Three of them became later ministers: Siphwe Nyanda, Charles Nqakula and Nosiviwe Maphisa-Nqakula (Nqakula's wife and current Minister of Defense).⁸

The Soviet Union also gave multifaceted support to liberation movements, primarily in southern Africa, over three decades.⁹ Its assistance was significant and often vital when others could or chose not to offer help.

What prompted Moscow to become active in Africa? The superpower rivalry of the Cold War was not the only factor. The Soviets never regarded the independent African countries and political bodies as 'proxies'. On the contrary, the constitution of the Soviet Union cited the support for the struggle of peoples for national liberation and social progress as one of the aims of its foreign policy.¹⁰ The national liberation movement was viewed as one of the 'detachments' of global anti-imperialist forces. While the Soviet Union did show a preferential attitude towards countries whose leaders claimed to favour one or another form of socialism, it also maintained good relations in various fields, including defence, with other countries such as Nigeria.

The changes in the political situation near the threshold of the 1990s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 in particular largely wasted this political capital. The deterioration of relations with Africa reflected a negative trend in Russia's foreign policy, although it suffered more than other vector in that time period. Apart from the demise of Russia's economy due to the IMF-proposed (or rather, imposed) reforms,¹¹ other factors, both political and psychological, contributed to this deterioration. The new rulers and the 'pro-Western' media often automatically held negative attitudes toward the friends of the former Soviet Union. When F. W. de Klerk made an official state visit to Russia in June 1992, Boris Yeltsin assured him that 'Mandela would not be received as the ANC President in Moscow but would be visiting the Russian capital as an international figure, a fighter for human rights'.¹²

In this period, Russian foreign policy largely abandoned the global South in general and Africa in particular. Russia also used Africa as a scapegoat for its problems, falsely claiming that Africans were 'eating Russia out of house and home'.¹³ Some people seemingly did not understand the derogatory and even racist character of their statements. For example, during his presidential electoral campaign in 1991, Boris Yeltsin remarked that socialist transformations took place in Russia, and that they should have tried it 'in some small African country'. Such pronouncements and claims encouraged manifestations of xenophobia and racism that unfortunately spread in 'new Russia' in the early 1990s.

Russia decreased its diplomatic presence in Africa as it closed nine embassies, three consulates, most of its trade missions and 13 of its 20 cultural centres. It also terminated most of its development projects, such as a multi-million steel plant in Ajaokuta, Nigeria that had neared 98 percent completion, which proved even more damaging.¹⁴

8 Siphwe Nyanda, (e-mail communication with Vladimir Shubin, 10 December, 2002).

9 Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot 'Cold War': The USSR in Southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

10 Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (adopted at the Seventh [Special] Session of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union Ninth Convocation on 7 October, 1977), <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons01.html#chap04>.

11 According to former foreign minister and then prime minister Evgeny Primakov, the losses of the Russian economy between 1992 and 1998 were twice high than the losses during World War II; see *M. Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 15 January, 2008, <http://www.rg.ru/2008/01/15/primakov.html>.

12 *Ibid.*, 2 June, 1992.

13 Alexey Vassilev, *Africa: A Stepchild of Globalisation* (trans.) (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2003).

14 Tatyana Deich (ed.), 2003, 52.

However, the failure of this one-sided policy and the loss of hope for Western economic assistance eventually encouraged a turn to realism. Many attribute the changes in Russia's foreign policy to the replacement of Boris Yelstin by Vladimir Putin on the eve of 2000. In actuality they began several years earlier in 1996 when Evgeny Primakov became foreign minister. The rise of the Russian economy and accumulation of huge currency and gold reserves also placed it in a position to conduct independent policy on major international issues such as Africa. Russia's admission to the G8 in 1998 encouraged further attention to Africa as the continent regularly appeared on G8 summit agendas; it also meant that it had effectively joined the 'club' of those who historically colonised and exploited Africa. Nevertheless, Russia's G8 membership lost its significant as the world economic crisis highlighted the G8's growing inefficiency and obsolete nature.

The new turn in Russian foreign policy became quite visible. Aside from South African President F.W. de Klerk's reception in June 1992, heads of African states did not begin to go to Russia until 1997.

RUSSIA IN AFRICA TODAY

There is a general consensus in Russia on the multi-dimensional nature of its foreign policy, which has strengthened in the last decade as several electoral defeats have marginalised openly 'pro-Western' political forces.

Several documents outline Russia's current foreign policy. The most important is the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, which President Vladimir Putin approved on 12 February 2013. This document replaced an earlier version signed by Dmitry Medvedev in 2008.¹⁵ The new version reflects a 'rapid acceleration of the global processes in the first decade of the 21st century, strengthening of the new processes in the world development' that requires a reassessment of the priorities of Russia's foreign policy. It also speaks proudly of Russia's 'increased responsibility for the formation of the international agenda and fundamentals of the international system'.

The Concept cites the 'deployment of a broad and non-discriminatory international cooperation, promoting the emergence of flexible network alliances that transcend blocs' as one of the main aims of Russia's foreign policy. It is worth noting that the G8 is mentioned as third (after the G20 and the BRICS) in the list of 'formats' where Russia 'will make itself more fully engaged', rather than as the first as five years earlier.

Still, as in the previous version, Africa remains far from the central scene. The Concept essentially repeated previous promises by declaring that 'Russia will expand its multipronged interaction with African States at the bilateral and bilateral basis with a focus on, improved policy dialogue and promotion of mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation, and facilitate the settlement and the prevention of regional conflicts and crisis situations in Africa. An important part of this line is the development of partnerships with the African Union and sub-regional organisations.' In contrast, the document gives extensive coverage to developments in 'the Middle East and North Africa'.¹⁶

Another important document is Russia's National Security Strategy (adopted in 2010 and valid until 2020). This document states that 'Russia will increase its interaction with multilateral forums such as the G8, G20, RIC (Russia/India/China), BRIC (Brazil/Russia/India/China), and will likewise capitalise on the potential of other informal international institutions'.¹⁷ However, it almost completely neglects Africa as it mentions it only once in the following statement: 'The situation in a number of African countries will continue to exert a negative influence on the international situation'.¹⁸

¹⁵ 'Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation,' <http://news.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d447a0ce9f5a96bdc3.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 'Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020,' <http://rustrans.wikidot.com/russia-s-national-security-strategy-to-2020>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Russia's new constitution, adopted after Boris Yeltsin's bloody 'victory' over the Russian parliament in October 1993, established an implementation mechanism for foreign policy.¹⁹ The constitution declares that 'the President of the Russian Federation shall: a) supervise the conduct of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation; b) conduct negotiations and sign international treaties of the Russian Federation; c) sign instruments of ratification; d) accept credentials and instruments of recall of diplomatic representatives accredited with him'.²⁰ While the implementation of the foreign policy is one of the government's functions, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is directly subordinate to the president, as are heads of the Ministry of Defence and the External Intelligence Service. The president chairs the Security Council, a lesser known body that 'assesses the challenges and threats to the national interests and security of Russia in the international sphere' and submits proposals 'for his decision on issues of foreign policy of the Russian Federation in the field of national security'.²¹

Other state bodies that deal with Africa include the Ministry of Economic Development, responsible for developing bilateral economic cooperation,²² and the Ministry of Industry and Trade, whose own Department of Foreign Economic Relations deals with 'strategy of state's export support'.²³ The parliament (the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, consisting of the Federation Council and the State Duma) has a rather limited power in practice. Apart from maintaining inter-parliamentary ties, it ratifies international treaties and plays a role in the appointment of ambassadors.

The current state of Russia-Africa relations in the political sphere, bilateral and multilateral, is generally positive. Forty Russian embassies operate in Africa, and 35 African countries maintain embassies in Moscow. Additionally, Russia has representatives in the African Union and in the regional economic communities — South African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and East African Community (EAC).

Still, top-level exchanges have not been intense. Russian presidents have visited only eight African countries over the past two decades. The choice of countries visited reflects Russia's geographical priorities on the continent: Putin went to Egypt, Algeria, South Africa, Morocco and Libya, and Medvedev went to Nigeria, Angola, Namibia and Egypt. Furthermore, the signing of agreements, even in the presence of top leaders, does not guarantee their realisation. Nigerian Ambassador to Russia Assam Ekanem Assam has affirmed that Russia has not fulfilled any of the six documents signed in Abuja during Medvedev's visit in 2009.²⁴

Russia has also had a limited interaction with the African Union. For example, Russia invited Jean Ping Alpha Oumar Konare, chairman of the African Union, to a visit in 2006. The visit failed to take place whilst he held that position, and his successor has yet to visit Moscow in this capacity.

Russia retains an interest in African peace and security in Africa and collaborates with African countries and the African Union on such issues. It participates in all UN peace-keeping missions in Africa and has trained Africa policemen in Russia since 2006.²⁵ Furthermore, Russian naval ships began safeguarding sea routes in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Aden in 2008.²⁶

19 The constitutional referendum was so controversial, that Gennady Burbulis, then a close confidante of Yeltsin, later stated that the new constitution was dragged 'through the arsehole'; see <http://ria.ru/analytics/20100804/261572775.html#ixzz2MNULYTbp>

20 'Constitution of the Russian Federation 1993,' www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm.

21 Ibid.

22 Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, Department of Asia and Africa, <http://www.economy.gov.ru/mined/about/structure/depAsiaAfrica/>.

23 Ministry of Industry and Trade of Russia Department of Foreign Economic Relations, 2013, <http://www.minpromtorg.gov.ru/ministry/structure/dep/inter/tasks>.

24 H.E. Assam Ekanem Assam, (presentation by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the Russian Federation, Institute for African Studies, Moscow, 19 December, 2012).

25 UN, 'Russia is training representatives of African countries for the participation in the UN peace-keeping operations,' <http://www.un.org/russian/news/story.asp?newsID=7123#.UTDyuzsU-NY>.

26 'Neustrashimyi Will Visit Somali Pirates Again,' <http://www.siliyan.ru/neustrashimiy>.

Russia also has aims to collaborate with Africa in the sphere of natural resources. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia found itself partly deprived of vital minerals for its economy. Imports cover its deficit of certain minerals: manganese (almost 100 percent), chrome (80 percent) and bauxites (60 percent).²⁷ It also has undeveloped deposits situated mostly in the remote areas of Siberia and far east. Currently, over 30 major Russian companies are involved in African natural resources development projects.

These projects have emphasised interaction with priority partners on the African continent, namely Angola, Guinea, South Africa, Namibia and Nigeria. For example, several major investment projects continue to be implemented in Guinea. These include the development of the bauxite and alumina deposits by RUSAL (the world's largest aluminium company), a mining and gold production project by Severstal and a palm oil development, manufacture and export project by Gammachim.

The case of Angola, one of Russia's priority countries, highlights achievements and challenges. A feeling of trust lingers towards Russians and Russian businesses due to the former Soviet Union's support for Angolan liberation. However, Russian companies often lack the experience and marketing skills necessary to enter the highly competitive markets, and they often lose competitions with stronger players.

A major success of Russian business in Angola is a deal by the VTB bank in Luanda, which offered \$1 billion credit with a seven year payment period from the Russian bank VTB Capital. The Angolan government is considering whether to issue \$2 million dollars in treasury bills in early 2013, a debt that the VTB Capital will commercialise. Andrey Kostin, the VTB group president, has stated that the new issue may require remuneration below the 7 percent rate required last August when VTB Capital privately placed \$1 billion (the first time Angola placed debt on international markets). The administration has approved the additional sale of a 15.9 percent stake in its Angolan subsidiary, Banco VTB-África, with Angolan investors now holding a 49.9 percent stake.²⁸ The Luanda-based VTB Africa has thus transformed from a commercial bank to an investment bank. The deal took place by negotiating the reduction of company's 66 percent share to a 50 percent plus one share in the bank, allowing VTB to remain in the market and create a good base for promising projects.

Another major project is ANGOSAT, which holds a contract of approximately \$327 million to create a satellite communication and broadcasting system. Negotiations for the project began in 2007 and ended two years later. It took a further two years to sign the credit agreement of over \$300 million from a consortium of Russian banks. The implementation of the ANGOSAT project began last December.²⁹

Alrosa, a major actor in Angolan diamond mining with seven on-going projects aside from Catoca and Gidroshikapa, broadly cooperates in geological research with Endiama, the leading Angolan company in the field. Cooperation has also penetrated education. Last year, Angola sent 55 graduate students and five doctoral students to Russian universities, as well as a significant number of military and policemen. However, trade turnover between Russia and Angola is only \$46 million.³⁰

Several companies thus successfully operate in southern Africa (EVRAZ, Renova, Renaissance Capital, Norilskiy Nickel, Rosneft, Gazprom Neft, RosAtom), as well as several banks (VTB, VEB, Gazprom Bank). Russia's foreign trade with Africa has recovered since the considerable drop of 2009 and the turnover was expected to reach up to \$10 billion in 2012. However, this figure represents less than 2 percent of all Russian trade.

27 *The World of Africa* 1 (2011), 17.

28 <http://www.macauhub.com.mo/en/2012/11/14/russia%E2%80%99s-vtb-capital-bank-may-place-more-angolan-debt/>.

29 'ANGOSAT Project Entered a Stage of Practical Realisation' (trans.), <http://avia.mirtesen.ru/blog/43508340776/Proekt-ANGOSAT-vstupil-v-fazu-prakticheskoy-realizatsii>.

30 'Russian-Angolan Trade Grew 4.5 Times in 2011,' <http://www.giac.ru/PressRelease/PressReleaseShow.asp?id=404212>.

The Russian state plays a vital role in strengthening ties with Africa. Even under conditions of the so-called 'market economy', developing broad economic ties with Africa requires support from the state, especially for medium and small businesses. Otherwise, only the most efficient Russian companies and businessmen would manage to find niches for exports. Bilateral inter-governmental commissions formed with a number of African countries, but many are simply not active enough to make a valuable contribution.

Russian businesses interested in Africa have taken steps to self-organise, such as the 2009 formation of the Coordination Committee on Economic Cooperation with Sub-Saharan African Countries (Afrocom), chaired by Vladimir Dmitriev (chairperson of the state-owned Vnesheconombank - VEB) under the auspices of the Russian Chamber of Trade and Industry. In 2011, the VEB helped create the Russian Agency on Insurance of Export Credits and Investments,³¹ which aims to facilitate the activities of Russian companies in Africa by protecting export credits from entrepreneurial and political risks and, since 2013, investments from political risks.³²

Africa has many potential opportunities for Russian investments. However, Russian investment figures in Africa often differ because of the difficulty in identifying the origin of investments. For example, Renova Holding is registered in the Bahamas, Evraz plc in the UK and Gazprom International in the Netherlands.

The major areas of Russia cooperation with Africa include mineral resources, energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, fishing, education, health, tourism and defence.³³ Russia's arms trade sometimes attracts criticism. In the early 1990s, the so-called 'democratic' media in Russia launched a campaign against arms sales, portraying them as immoral and, along with the demise of Russian defence industry, as a cause of the loss of a number of traditional markets for Russian arms to the West and China. Overall arms export dropped almost tenfold between 1990 and 1994,³⁴ but rose to \$11 billion in 2011. However, only 10 percent of this figure corresponds to northern Africa and seven percent to sub-Saharan Africa. It is important to note that the Russian government has strengthened its control of the industry by channelling all arms deals through the state-owned Rosoboronexport to observe all sanctions and limitations imposed by the UN Security Council.

In regard to aid, Russia has made a major contribution to debt-reduction for Africa (around \$20 billion) and has introduced a preferential system for traditional African export commodities with no import duties or quota limitations. It has signed several agreements with African countries regarding the use of remaining debts to fund development projects.³⁵ The bulk of Russian aid is delivered through international organisations and funds. The Concept of the Russian Federation's participation in international development assistance was approved in 2007, which affirms that 'with creation and development of the national system of IDA [International development assistance]' Russia would provide aid 'in the form of bilateral assistance'.³⁶ However, no such system has appeared so far. Russia aims to provide a stable pattern of aid, reaching 0.7 percent of GNP, as recommended by the UN. However, it has a long way to go before reaching this goal.

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation declares that executive bodies cooperate on a permanent basis 'with political parties, non-governmental organisations, the expert academic community, cultural humanitarian associations, business circles and mass-media of Russia, assisting in their participation in international cooperation'.³⁷ Although the process of 'democratisation' should have enhanced civil society,

31 The annual meeting of the Coordination Committee on Economic Cooperation with Sub-Saharan African countries took place at the Chamber of Trade and Industry; see http://www.tpprf.ru/ru/news/about/index.php?id_12=36575.

32 'Export Insurance Agency of Russia Activity Profile,' <http://www.exiar.ru/about/profile/>.

33 'Russia's Economic Engagement with Africa,' *Africa Economic Brief*, 2 July, 2011.

34 The Soviet Union figure corresponds to 1990.

35 'Russia Forgave Africa \$20 Billion,' *Lenta*, 20 February, 2013.

36 <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/e2f289bea62097f9c325787a0034c255/00cc9154529e1c7fc32575bc002c6bb5!OpenDocument>.

37 Ibid.

reality looks somewhat different. Amongst 59 registered Russian political parties, only three or four have some bilateral contact with Africa. The Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee gave many African organisations political and practical support during the liberation struggle. In 1992, the committee was reorganised as the Society of Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity and Cooperation. It has since then centred on the problems of the Middle East and does not focus much on Africa.

Moscow has unfortunately lost many of its 'soft power' instruments. Several of them closed, including the Africa Service of Radio Moscow, Progress Publishers and the Friendship House in Moscow. Fortunately, the Russia Today channel still operates and maintains a positive reception in Africa. The Russian media's inadequate coverage of Africa developments presents another problem because it concentrates on armed conflicts, natural calamities or at best African nature and safaris. Most news comes from western sources as the Russian media has a limited number of African offices.

Regarding African studies in Russia, the major centre is the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, followed by the Centre for African Studies at the Institute of General History. Universities in Moscow, St Petersburg, Kazan, Yaroslavl and others also conduct multi-disciplinary studies. These studies have expanded their scope of research to include current 'burning' issues, in particular problems of political and economic integration, recent developments in northern Africa and new power alignments after the creation of BRICS.

Russian academics vary in their assessment of the situation in Africa. Those dealing with global problems mainly have a negative outlook that claims that the continent 'will not be able to find its niche in the global economy and most probably will continue developing non-stable regimes of adaption to external and internal shocks'.³⁸ However, most African scholars in Russia are rather optimistic. They believe that the convergence of interests, positions and efforts is the main trend of the development of political relations between Russia and Africa, and they criticise what they still see as a lack of attention to Africa. According to Tatiana Deich: '... [M]any officials in the Russian government continue to be guided by old stereotypes of Africa as a continent of famine, disease and ethnic conflicts and, besides, the preserve of the West, that captured every aspect of its economy and dictates them policy'.³⁹

Often, Russia's 'come back' to Africa is seen in a competitive light vis-à-vis China. This approach has flaws, because Russia and China often have different in the field of economic relations. Russia is neither willing nor able to compete with China in exporting clothes or footwear. Also, the demographic nature of its interaction with Africa differs. For example, there are around 700 Russian citizens in Angola compared to 200,000 to 300,000 Chinese citizens. On the other hand, Russia remains strong in engineering and science and can fill markets in Africa in this respect. Northern African and some sub-Saharan African countries, especially their armed forces, are historically adapted to Russian products.

Finally, education presents good opportunities for cooperation. Soviet graduates hold important posts in nearly every African country. In 1996, the Russian government resumed granting of scholarships to citizens of developing countries. However, as they practically only cover tuition and students often refuse them. In any case, currently about 8,000 African students study in Russia, and about a half of them hold Russian government scholarships.⁴⁰

38 Alexander Dynkin, ed., *World Economy, Forecast until 2020* (trans.) (Moscow: IMEMO RAN, 2008), 84.

39 Tatiana Deich and Evgeny Korendyasov, eds., *Russian-African Relations and Russia's Image in Africa* (trans.) (Moscow: Institut Afriki RAN, 2007), 40.

40 Vladimir Fedotov (presentation, 'Russia's Relations with Sub-Saharan Africa,' Diplomatic Academy, Moscow, Russia, 31 October, 2012).

CONCLUSION

With a new interest in Africa, it has become clear that Russia and Africa need each other. Russia represents a vast market not only for African minerals, but also for various other African goods and products. At the same time, Russia's activity on the continent can strengthen the position of African countries vis-à-vis old and new external players.

Last February, a visit of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Algeria, South Africa, Mozambique and Guinea highlighted the new dynamism of Russia's Africa policy. Vladimir Putin's working visit to South Africa and his participation in the BRICS summit in Durban in March 2013 reinforced it. Putin and Zuma signed the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa.⁴¹ In addition, a package of bilateral intergovernmental documents on cooperation in various fields was signed in their presence. These fields included flight safety, mutual recognition of educational documents and academic degrees, astrophysics research and a cooperation programme for joint cultural projects. In the economic sphere, the two parties signed documents regarding cooperation in the energy sector, with respect to platinum group metals, fishing, ferroalloy production and solar energy.⁴²

The signing of cooperation agreements between the BRICS countries, especially on co-financing infrastructure projects in Africa and establishing the BRICS Business Council,⁴³ should encourage Russian business dealings with Africa. Apart from the BRICS summit, Putin took part in the 'Retreat', a meeting of BRICS leaders with the heads of African continental and regional bodies. During the meeting, Putin noted that BRICS countries jointly champion the rights and interests of African and other countries with emerging economies and spoke out in favour of increasing their role and influence within the global governance system, particularly within international financial and economic organisations. As to the role of Russia in Africa, Putin underscored debt relief and an intention to increase the number of scholarships provided to sub-Saharan African countries.⁴⁴

Putin's visit demonstrated a new impulse for Russia's involvement in Africa. It helped high officials and business people who accompanied him to better understand the realities and potential of Africa. Time will tell whether this impulse will bring about a steady process and what practical actions will follow the declarations made in Durban. ■

41 http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/98.

42 <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/5172>.

43 <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/5177>.

44 <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/5184>.