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## RUSSIAN “SOFT POWER” IN THE NORTH-EAST AFRICA

### Abstract

The article builds on the Russian understanding of the “soft power” concept as a complex of tools and methods to reach the foreign policy aims through public diplomacy, information and communication technologies, humanitarian assistance and cultural initiatives, civil society interactions, and religious and inter-religious dialogues. “Soft power” tools are regarded as an addition to the traditional diplomatic methods. The article will critically consider the range of Russia’s contemporary “soft power” assets in its foreign policy dialogue with the countries of North and East Africa. The aim is to analyze the aspirations, implementation (during the last decade), results and further prospects of Russia’s “soft power” initiatives within and towards the indicated regions.

**Keywords:** Russia, Africa, “soft power”, North Africa, East Africa, foreign policy

### Introduction

The concept of “soft power” in Russia was for the first time at the highest level introduced by President Vladimir Putin in his article “Russia and the Changing World” in 2012. He defined this concept as “a set of tools and methods of achieving foreign policy goals without the use of weapons, but with the help of information and other leverage”. What is particularly noteworthy about this definition is that it differs substantially from the classical definition given by Joseph Nye, which coined the term “soft power” in 1990. He regarded it as “the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment”<sup>2</sup>.

Such Russian vision of “soft power” was reflected in the Russian foreign policy concepts of 2013 and 2016. The 2016 Concept notes that “the use of “soft power” tools for solving foreign policy problems becomes an integral part of modern

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- 2 Joseph Nye, Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept, *Palgrave Communications*, Vol. 3, 2017.

international politics; first of all, it means the possibilities of civil society, information, communication, humanitarian and other methods in addition to the traditional diplomatic methods<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the Russian concept of “soft power” is closer to the concept of “public diplomacy”. However, a range of Russian political scientists (for example, Marina Lebedeva) indicate that public diplomacy is “one of the most common tools for the implementation of “soft power”, and it can be carried out through official channels (public speeches of officials, for instance), as well as unofficial channels (NGOs, universities, etc.)<sup>4</sup>. Such understanding of “soft power” and its instruments is as well reflected in Russia’s policy towards Africa. In this article we will consider through the lens of “soft power” concept how Russia interacts with the countries of North and East Africa. Statistical data for 2018 showed that North Africa accounted for 76 percent of Russian-African trade, one Egypt – for 40% of it<sup>5</sup>.

Particularly noteworthy is the state and prospects for the development of co-operation between Russia and Egypt due to the geopolitical role that belongs to these countries in the Middle East and the world as a whole<sup>6</sup>. Meetings and contacts between the presidents of the two countries in recent years adopted a regular character. Egypt played a key role in helping Russia organize its first Russia – Africa summit. The partners intend to return tourism to the former high indicators as one of the priority areas of cooperation in the near future, to promote cooperation in science, culture and humanitarian spheres. As for East Africa, almost with all countries of the region Russia develops significant projects in recent years. Ethiopia as a country with a large, fast-growing market is one of the leaders in the region. In December 2020 Russian Federation and the Republic of Sudan signed the agreement on the establishment of a logistics point for the Russian Navy in the Red Sea. This will strengthen Russia’s presence in Africa in future.

### **“Rossotrudnichestvo” as a main tool of Russia’s “soft power” and public diplomacy abroad**

The Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (“Rossotrudnichestvo”) was established in 2008 and today operates in 80 countries around the world. As for Africa, Russian Centers for Science and Culture (RCSC) – affiliates

3 “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016)”, December 1, 2016, available at: [https://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCK-B6BZ29/content/id/2542248?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_CptlCKB6BZ29&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_CptlCKB6BZ29\\_languageId=en\\_GB](https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCK-B6BZ29/content/id/2542248?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_CptlCKB6BZ29&_101_INSTANCE_CptlCKB6BZ29_languageId=en_GB) (date accessed: 1.10.2020).

4 Marina Lebedeva, “Soft power”: concept and approaches, *Bulletin of MGIMO-University*, Vol. 54, No. 3, 2017, p. 212.

5 Konstantin Volkov, “Stat’ blizhe k Afrike”, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, February 10, 2020.

6 Sergei Volkov, Aleksandr Tkachenko, *Ehkonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo Rossii so stranami Severnoi Afriki, Mirovaya ehkonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, Vol. 63, No. 7, 2019, p. 65.

of the agency – have been opened in Egypt, Zambia, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Morocco, Tanzania, Tunisia and Ethiopia; a representative of the agency works at the Russian Embassy in South Africa. In September 2018, a representative of the Agency announced that new Russian centers of science and culture in African countries would be opened in the coming years<sup>7</sup>, however, by now it did not happen. RCSCs can only be opened in those states with which Russia has concluded intergovernmental agreements.

One of the most important priorities of Russian cultural centers in Africa is their work with young people (both with Africans and with young compatriots, immigrants from Russia and their descendants). Russian Centers for Science and Culture aim at promotion of the Russian language, culture and Russian higher education. They also work with graduates of Soviet / Russian universities. If Russian diaspora in the world is estimated at 30 million people, then the number of graduates of Russian (Soviet) universities exceeds 500 thousand. There are communities of Soviet/Russian women and their children in many African countries. They connected their destiny with Africa mostly through marriage to African citizens<sup>8</sup>.

### **Popularization of Russian culture in Africa**

RCSCs in Africa regularly organize various events aimed at acquainting the audience with the achievements of Russian culture. For example, on December 6, 2018, at the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), an opera concert by Russian vocalists Olga Sosnovskaya and Alexei Yurkovsky was held with great success. At the initiative of the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Tanzania, in July 2019, at the 23rd Zanzibar International Film Festival, the audience saw a new film by Russian producer Karen Shakhnazarov "Anna Karenina. Vronsky's story". It should be noted that this is Africa's largest multidisciplinary arts festival. Russian films were shown at this film forum in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and after a long break, African audience had the opportunity to see Russian movies again. This center holds cultural events dedicated to significant dates in Russian history and culture – the jubilees of Alexander Pushkin and Nikolay Gogol, the anniversaries of Yuri Gagarin's first space flight, the memorable events of the Great Patriotic War. The center also supports the artistic talents of the host country – for example, on October 11, 2018, an exhibition of young artists from Tanzania opened in one of the halls of the RCSC in Dar es Salaam. The aim of the joint project of the "Rossotrudnichestvo" affiliate and the art studio "Day" was to help the country's creative youth to present themselves.

The RCSC in Lusaka (Zambia) in February 2018 celebrated the Days of Russia, which included a number of cultural, educational and sports events. In Septem-

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7 "Rossotrudnichestvo otkroet kul'turnye tsentry v Latinskoj Amerike i Afrike", *TASS*, September 6, 2018.

8 Natalia Krylova, *Sovetskaya zhena afrikantsa. Portret ehpokhi "Kholodnoi voiny"*, *Uchenye zapiski Instituta Afriki RAN*, No. 4, 2019, pp. 29-45.

ber 2019 they organized a first large-scale Russian-Zambian youth festival. The event was organized by in joint cooperation with the Youth section of the Russian Compatriots' Association and the Zambia-Russia Alumni Association. Festival brought together over 250 young Russian compatriots and Zambian youths through a series of sports and social networking events and activities. It will now be held annually.

### **Russia's "soft power" interaction with African youths**

The "New Generation" project is a landmark in this direction. Every year "Rosotrudnichestvo" gathers delegations of young people from different countries, including African ones. These young people (25–35 years old) are leaders in their respective fields. They visit Russia, where they meet their colleagues, participate in various workshops or schools. It should be added that Russian Federal Agency for Youth Affairs ("Rosmolodezh") is also partially involved in interaction with the African youth. So, it was this department that was involved in the preparation and holding of the XIX World Festival of Youth and Students (October 2017) together with the "Roscongress" Foundation. This festival was the third one held in Russia. Earlier, the VI WFYS took place in Moscow in 1957 and the XII WFYS in 1985.

The festival brought together 20 thousand participants from 180 countries, young leaders from various fields: representatives of youth NGOs, young journalists, creative and sports youth, young designers and engineers, leaders of youth organizations of political parties, young university teachers, leaders of student structures, young scientists, as well as compatriots and foreigners who study the Russian language and are interested in Russian culture.

As part of the festival, Africa Day was held, during which guests from this continent introduced the participants to their culture. It is important that about two thousand foreign participants of the festival in the first days (from 14 to 17 October 2017) took part in the regional program of the XIX WFYS, which was organized for the first time. They visited Vladivostok, Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, Simferopol, Sevastopol, Kaliningrad and other cities in 15 regions of Russia. One of the touching moments of the festival's closing ceremony was the performance of its participant, professional musician from Chad Ndolegulom Jsrabe Herve. "We are scattered all over the world, but we are united and can solve our problems together. Hello Russia!" – the song in his native language has become the unofficial anthem of the festival<sup>9</sup>.

### **Promotion of Russia' higher education in Africa and scientific co-operation**

Deputy Head of "Rosotrudnichestvo" A. Radkov noted in 2019 that Africans

<sup>9</sup> "Kak zakryvali Vsemirnyi festival' molodezhi i studentov", *Sputnik*, October 22, 2017.

were showing a growing interest in obtaining university education in Russia and in studying the Russian language. In 2019, Africans submitted almost 30,000 applications to study at Russian universities, and the quota for scholarships was only 1,819 people<sup>10</sup>. During the summit "Russia – Africa" in October 2019 President Vladimir Putin told the audience: "We will think how to increase this number"<sup>11</sup>. He also mentioned that at that moment military personnel from twenty African states were studying at the universities of the Russian Ministry of Defense and underlined that Russia is determined to continue to train servicemen and law enforcement officers of African countries in Russian specialized institutions.

Every year "Rossotrudnichestvo" selects promising young people in different countries of the world and sends them to study at People's Friendship University of Russia (PFUR, Moscow) and other well-known Russian universities (in total, 450 Russian universities participate in the program) at the expense of the Russian federal budget. About 20 thousand students from Africa study in Russia (data of the 2016-2017 academic year), of which 15 thousand are on a contract basis (74% of the total)<sup>12</sup>. Students from sub-Saharan Africa today account for 5.3% of all foreign students studying in Russia, students from the Middle East and North Africa - 8%<sup>13</sup>. In the period 2003-2017, the number of African students in Russia has tripled<sup>14</sup>.

The authors of the "Russia - Africa Vision 2030" report believed that it was in the interests of our country to increase the number of quotas for African students by at least 12% annually, as well as their distribution in accordance with a transparent system of principles and criteria, including the given African country's weight in trade with Russia and the dynamics of indicators, the number of self-financed students coming from the same country, and data on their academic performance and employment after graduation<sup>15</sup>.

Young Africans are showing interest in studying in Russia, including courses taught in English. In recent years Russian universities tend to offer such courses and programs more often. The most popular areas of training among applicants from Africa are medical, engineering and management specialties. In terms of admission of students from Africa among universities, as of 2019, the leaders were the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Tambov State University, Kursk State Medical University, Nizhny Novgorod State University, North Caucasus Fed-

10 Alexander Rad'kov, "V osnove razvitiya rossiisko-afrikanskikh otnoshenii – družba, doverie i uchet interesov drug druga", Rosotrudnichestvo official website, May 28, 2019.

11 "Sammit Rossiya – Afrika", Official website of the President of the Russian Federation, October 24, 2019.

12 Andrey Maslov, Evgeny Korendyasov, Russia–Africa: Analytical Materials Prepared by the team of Russia–Africa Shared Vision 2030 Report, 2019, p. 20, available at: <http://duma.gov.ru/media/files/e2SgJ0Aq8cFHwxD5zXN8HiQD0ctEiar5.pdf>, (date accessed: 5.10.2020).

13 Alexander Ruchkin, "Ehksport rossiiskogo obrazovaniya v strany Afriki: vyzovy i resursy razvitiya", *Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie*, No. 2, 2019, p. 25.

14 Ibidem.

15 Andrey Maslov, Evgeny Korendyasov, Russia–Africa: Analytical Materials Prepared by the team of Russia–Africa Shared Vision 2030 Report... p. 20.

eral University, Nizhny Novgorod State Medical Academy, Belgorod State University, Ryazan State Medical University, Belgorod State Technological University.

At the current stage in Russia there is a large-scale program “Export of Education”, the main goal of which is to popularize domestic education abroad. The project started in the spring of 2017 and will last until the fall of 2025. Within its framework, it is planned to increase the number of international students who study full-time in Russian universities by more than three times: from 220 to 710 thousand<sup>16</sup>. It is also expected that the number of foreign students or listeners of online courses of Russian educational organizations will increase over the same period from 1.1 million people to 3.5 million<sup>17</sup>. The project will focus on the development of new forms of joint educational programs and programs in English, online education for foreigners, educational tourist routes and summer training programs for foreigners. The creation of a single Internet navigator for the Russian education system is intended to facilitate progress towards the goal. By 2021, all universities in the country should have international services to support foreign students<sup>18</sup>.

The export of educational services of the Russian Federation, an increase in the number of foreign students studying in Russia serve to strengthen not only the potential of the “soft power” of the country, but also its economy. Indeed, as experts point out, “even a place provided to a foreign student for free [tuition fee financed from Russian state budget] is a multiplier for the economy and the budget with an immediate positive effect, and not just as a long-term investment in human capital”<sup>19</sup>. It should be noted that Russian proposals in the field of university education are highly competitive in terms of price / quality ratio.

The Russian-African cooperation in the field of science is also gaining momentum in recent years.

On November 6, 2018, for the first time in Africa, the Center for the Russian language teaching and pre-university training of Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia was opened in Zambia. This is a joint project with Copperbelt University (Zambia). Students from Zambia and neighboring countries (including Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Tanzania and Botswana) got the opportunity to complete the preparatory faculty program without leaving their home countries<sup>20</sup>. This center is part of the RUDN University project to create an educational and industrial cluster “Africa. South”. A set of educational materials on Russian as a foreign language is being prepared especially for the English-speaking

16 “Prezident poruchil izuchit’ vopros uvelicheniya kvoty dlya obucheniya inostrantsev v Rossii”, June 1, 2019, available at: <https://russkiymir.ru/news/257779/>, (date accessed: 7.10.2020).

17 “O prioritetnom proekte ‘Ehksport obrazovaniya’”, Russian Federation government website, available at: <http://government.ru/info/27864/>, (date accessed: 2.10.2020).

18 Ibidem.

19 Andrey Maslov, Evgeny Korendyasov, Russia—Africa: Analytical Materials Prepared by the team of Russia—Africa Shared Vision 2030 Report. . . p. 20.

20 Maina Waruru, “Universities team up to teach Russian in Africa”, December 3, 2018, available at: <https://thepienews.com/news/zambian-university-in-partnership-to-teach-russian-in-africa/>, (date accessed: 5.10.2020)

countries of Africa. It will take into account the lack of a linguistic environment, cultural features, phonetic specificity.

Representatives of PFUR University and Copperbelt University also agreed on cooperation in the field of medical and engineering projects. On a return visit, the delegation of the leading technical university of Zambia visited the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia on December 12-14, 2018<sup>21</sup>. A work program was signed with the PFUR Medical Institute for the development of the Center for Simulation Education in Zambia. Professor Neison Ngoma, Rector of Copperbelt University, said: "Thanks to PFUR University, Zambia will have modern equipment for simulation training that will increase the level of competence of our medical students and doctors in the country as a whole. We also embarked on the next stage of cooperation with the PFUR Medical Institute in the field of engineering. We have a lot of joint work ahead"<sup>22</sup>.

Implementation of joint projects in the field of science, education and technology between Russia and the countries of North and East Africa is underway. For example, in 2019 Russia and Uganda signed the cooperation agreement and have developed two scientific and educational initiatives on work in agriculture and earth sciences with the aim of development of the mineral resource base. These projects are not just on paper, they are practically implemented, said Mikhail Kotyukov, Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation at the Russia-Africa summit in 2019<sup>23</sup>. In future it is possible that Russia, in coordination with African counterparts, can open permanent operating representations of the Russian Academy of Sciences in African states. It is also important for Russia and its African partners to create a certain fund of scientific initiatives, to take for a start at least 10 directions, underlined Yuri Balega, Vice-President, Russian Academy of Sciences, during 2019 Summit in Sochi<sup>24</sup>.

## **Promotion of the Russian language**

According to "Rossotrudnichestvo", 1.3 million people speak Russian in the Middle East and North Africa, and 0.1 million in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>25</sup>. Russian cultural centers in Africa offer Russian language courses and support Russian schools in various formats. "Rossotrudnichestvo" centres in Africa hold cultural, educational and scientific-methodological events aimed at popularizing the Russian language and stimulating the interest of foreign citizens to studying it, as

21 "RUDN i Universitet Kopperbelt (Zambiya) podpisali rabochuyu programmu po meditsine", December 19, 2018, available at: <http://www.rudn.ru/media/news/international-cooperation/rudn-i-universitet-kopperbelt-zambiya--podpisali-rabochuyu-programmu-po-medicine/>, (date accessed: 5.10.2020).

22 Ibidem.

23 "Round table 'Russia - Africa: science, education and innovation for economic development'", Economic Forum Russia – Africa, October 23, 2019, available at: <https://roscongress.org/sessions/africa-2019-rossiya-afrika-nauka-obrazovanie-i-innovatsii-dlya-razvitiya-ekonomiki/discussion/>, (date accessed: 5.11.2020)

24 Ibidem.

25 "Ukreplenie pozitsii russkogo yazyka", available at: <https://www.rs.gov.ru/activities/9>, (date accessed: 6.11.2020).

well as increasing the level of its teaching in the host countries.

There is also a variety of the so-called “Russian schools” in the world. The former head of “Rossotrudnichestvo”, Eleonora Mitrofanova, in her 2018 interview, explained that the term “Russian school” (not only in Africa, but around the world) can mean very different types of schools<sup>26</sup>:

- Schools at Russian embassies (in which children of diplomats, children of Russian compatriots, from mixed families can receive education);
- Sunday schools where children come in their free time from the main school to study the Russian language, history, Russian culture (available in Paris);
- Schools in the CIS (they have nothing to do with the embassies), where they teach according to Russian programs. (for example, the school named after Pushkin in Ashgabat);
- Schools with the Russian language (they work according to the methods and programs of the host countries, with a very large number of hours of the Russian language, when many subjects are taught in it, the type of special schools);
- A kind of “Russian school” – an educational institution where a lot of Russian-speaking children study. The teaching rules and education standards are local there, but all subjects are in Russian, and the language itself is taught as a native language, unlike schools where Russian is taught as a foreign language;
- Parish schools, which “Rossotrudnichestvo” helps with manuals and other materials (about 850 on a global scale). For example, in Johannesburg there is a Russian Orthodox church of the Moscow Patriarchate in honor of St. Sergius of Radonezh, at which there is a Sunday school with the study of the Russian language, and
- Schools where only mathematics and physics are taught in Russian and according to Russian programs (available in California).

Russian schools under the auspices of the Russian embassies work in Algeria, Angola, Guinea, Egypt, Zambia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Tunisia, Ethiopia, South Africa<sup>27</sup>. Africans, as a rule, have a pragmatic approach to learning Russian language – they show a greater interest in mastering it if large Russian companies do business in their particular African country, and also if there are prospects for the practical application of this language knowledge.

Nowadays Russia is actively developing digital technologies for teaching the Russian language (online courses and libraries, organization of the online competitions, the winners of which are invited to Russia). In August 2016, the State Institute of the Russian Language named after Alexander Pushkin was visited by

26 “Fan-zona russkogo. Interv’yu s EHeonoroi Mitrofanovoi”, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, No. 148 (7611), July 10, 2018.

27 Olga Konstantinova, *Perspektivy razvitiya rossiisko-afrikanskogo sotrudnichestva v kul’turno-gumanitarnoi sfere, Uchenye zapiski Instituta Afriki RAN*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 2020, p. 7.



the President of the University of Carthage (Tunisia) Lasad Al-Asmi and the director of the Tunisian Institute of Foreign Languages Vannas Al-Hafyan<sup>28</sup>. Al-Asmi noted that trade and economic relations were actively developing between Russia and Tunisia, and in recent years the flow of Russian tourists coming to Tunisia has significantly increased. In this regard, the country is interested in increasing the number of specialists who speak Russian, who could work in the field of business, agriculture and tourism. The level of Russian language teaching in Tunisian schools and the University of Carthage is one of the highest in Arab countries, Vannas Al-Hafyan said. The Institute of Foreign Languages is the only university in the country where Russian is taught as a specialty language. Various prospects for cooperation were discussed, including the creation of a Russian language department on the basis of the University of Carthage (under the guidance of the Pushkin Institute). In future it could become a center of Russian studies on the African continent.

In April 2019, Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation of the Republic of Uganda visited the Pushkin Institute. He emphasized, in particular, that "many people in Africa, in Uganda know Russian, but after returning home, they did not have the opportunity to speak Russian. If schools are organized in Western, Eastern and Southern Africa, where it would be possible to study Russian, it would be a great opportunity"<sup>29</sup>. The President of the Pushkin Institute Academician Vitaly Kostomarov replied: "We very much hope that there will be people in Uganda who will be interested in Russia, its culture, its possibilities and will study the Russian language. We are ready to do everything to make this happen"<sup>30</sup>. About 100 people from Uganda study Russian online on the "Education in Russian" website. Institute's staff is also ready to conduct training webinars for any university in Africa and introduce its teachers to existing online-resources for learning the Russian language.

### **Expanding Russia's media presence on the continent**

The presence of Russian media in Africa is growing, but there is a lot more to be done in this respect. Russian experts underline that it is vital to change for the better the information background and representation of Africa in Russian media and Russia's image and news in African media. Russian media still tend to give more negative news from Africa (wars, terrorism, hunger, and so on), rather than positive ones – about successes of African business, about the everyday life of the continent (culture, industry and so on). African media also in many cases just copy the fairly sceptic Western publications on Russia's foreign and domestic

28 "Vstrecha s rukovodstvom vuzov Tunisa", August 5, 2016, available at: <https://www.pushkin.institute/news/detail.php?ID=5289>, (date accessed: 15.11.2020)

29 "Ministr Ugandy v Institute Pushkina", April 11, 2019, available at: <https://www.pushkin.institute/news/detail.php?ID=22154>, (date accessed: 10.11.2020)

30 Ibidem.

policy without much of their own proper analysis<sup>31</sup>.

One of the most known Russian media outlets in Africa is “Russia Today” TV channel. According to the company “Ipsos”, its weekly audience in the Middle East and Africa, as of 2018, was 11 million people<sup>32</sup>. After one of the two Russian main TV channels “Rossiya”, began broadcasting its international version (“Planeta RTR”, a Russian international satellite TV channel, created in 2002), its audience has grown significantly. The 24-hour program of the RTR-Planeta TV channel is designed for an audience of different ages and interests, for each Russian-speaking viewer. It is aimed at everyone who speaks Russian and lives abroad. The daily program of this international channel contains the entire range of the most important Russian TV programs. Now its programs, which can also be watched online, are viewed by residents of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as Mozambique and South Africa.

Russia’s “Sputnik”, international news agency and radio, broadcasts and maintains news resources in 32 languages. In July 2019, it joined the Global Compact for Cooperation between the UN and the Media on Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agency and radio providing news resources in 32 languages will play a vital role in raising awareness of the importance of the SDGs with its international reach.

There is also an international project “SputnikPro” supported by “Rossotrudnichestvo” federal agency. Project is aimed at journalists, students of foreign universities studying journalism, members of press pools. Its goal is to facilitate the exchange of experience with foreign colleagues, the development of international communications in the media and intercultural relations between journalists. In 2018, over 120 young journalists from Latin America, Asia and Africa took part in this project<sup>33</sup>. The number of participating countries and delegates is constantly increasing.

It is vital to assist in establishing business contacts between private and state media structures of Russia and African countries, opening Russian media outlets in African countries, as well as providing expert consultative support to the Russian media<sup>34</sup>. Noteworthy that in September 2020 Director General of ITAR-TASS headed the newly created working group that will work out a strategy to cover Russia’s cooperation with Africa<sup>35</sup>. TASS is Russia’s leading state news agency with 116 years’ history. Agency plans to expand its network and open new offices in Africa soon. Plans were also announced to organize photo exhibitions, thematic

31 Konstantin Volkov, “Stat’ blizhe k Afrike”, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, February 10, 2020.

32 “RT weekly TV audience grows by more than a third over 2 years; now 100mn – IPSOS”, April 3, 2018, available at: <https://www.rt.com/about-us/press-releases/ipsos-market-research-rt/>, (date accessed: 12.11.2020).

33 “Glava Rossotrudnichestva vysoko otsenila programmu dlya zhurnalistov SputnikPro”, July 31, 2019, available at: <https://ria.ru/20190731/1557052499.html>, (date accessed: 12.11.2020).

34 Galina Sidorova, “Rossiya i Afrika: novye perspektivy sotrudnichestva”, *Afrika v usloviyakh formirovaniya polititsentrichnogo mira*, edited by Sergey Volkov, Tatiana Deich and Sergey Nenashev, Institute for African Studies RAS, Moscow, 2020, p. 121.

35 “Gendirektor TASS vozglavit rabotu nad strategiei osveshcheniya partnerstva Rossii i Afriki”, September 9, 2020, available at: <https://tass.ru/politika/9414323>, (date accessed: 10.11.2020)

conferences, press tours of Russian journalists to Africa.

Professor Irina Abramova, Director of the Institute for African Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences), notes that Russian Federation needs to use "Internet diplomacy" more effectively to promote its interests in Africa<sup>36</sup>. Using the possibilities of the Internet (primarily social networks) for the purposes of public diplomacy and "soft power" projection in Africa will enable Russia to effectively translate its views and values to the African audience and to defend its foreign policy positions in the African social media.

### **Russian International Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid to African countries**

Russia's International Development Assistance is implemented by several government departments: "Rossotrudnichestvo", the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and other federal executive authorities. Russian activities in this area are global in nature and include assistance to sub-Saharan Africa, development of cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa. Since 2007, the desire to participate in international development assistance has become a part of Russian foreign policy, which indicates Moscow's growing interest in harnessing the potential of "soft power".

Since 2013, Russia has begun working to make its development assistance more targeted, bilateral and visible. African recipients of Russian aid going through international programs are often unaware that the aid actually came from Russia. In 2014, the "Concept of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of International Development Assistance was adopted"<sup>37</sup>. The volume of Russian assistance to Africa in 2017 exceeded a \$1 billion, President Putin noted at the BRICS summit in South Africa in 2018<sup>38</sup>. According to the president, Russian contributions to the World Food Program fund were regularly growing. Russia was the fifth largest contributor to the UNIDO Industrial Development Fund. Moscow also directs a lot of funds to WHO to combat non-communicable diseases in Africa.

At the first Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi in 2019, speaking at the opening of its Economic Forum, President Putin said: "Russia on a systematic basis provides assistance to the development of the African continent. We provide trade preferences, cooperate within international structures, for example, through the World Food Program, the International Civil Defense Organization, and the World Health Organization. Our country participates in the initiative to relief the

36 Irina Abramova, *Rossiia – Afrika: vyzovy i vozmozhnosti v novykh global'nykh realiyakh*, *Asia and Africa today*, No. 12, (725), 2017, p. 7.

37 "Ob utverzhenii Kontseptsii gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v sfere sodeistviya mezhdunarodnomu razvitiyu", No. 259, 20.04.2014, available at: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/38334>, (date accessed: 10.11.2020).

38 "Putin: Rossiya budet i dal'she okazyvat' pomoshch' stranam Afriki", July 27, 2018, available at: <https://mir24.tv/news/16315760/putin-rossiya-budet-i-dal'she-okazyvat-pomoshch-stranam-afriki>, (date accessed: 10.11.2020).

debt burden of African countries. To date, the total amount of debt write-offs exceeds \$ 20 billion. Joint programs have been launched with a number of states, involving the use of debt funds to finance national economic growth projects<sup>39</sup>.

Russia was one of the first countries in the world to respond to the Ebola epidemic in Africa, allocating over \$ 60 million to fight it<sup>40</sup>. With the continued support of Russian government and the Russian company "RUSAL" in the fight against Ebola in Guinea, significant progress has been made since 2014 in preventing the spread of the disease in the country. The Russian vaccine "GamEvac-Combi" became the world's first officially registered and approved for clinical use vaccine against Ebola. It was developed by order of the President Vladimir Putin, after the President of the Republic of Guinea Alpha Conde requested help from Russia at the end of 2014. As of December 2018, two thousand people received this vaccine in Guinea<sup>41</sup>. In the midst of the Ebola epidemic, in 2015, RUSAL built a special scientific clinical diagnostic center for epidemiology and microbiology – the only one of its kind in the entire West African region in terms of the use of the latest technologies and equipment. The company has invested more than \$ 10 million in this project. The center helped to vaccinate and organize treatment for local residents. In addition, it has become a platform for the study and prevention of infectious diseases in Guinea and a training center for future epidemiologists. A new vaccine against the Ebola virus was presented by Russia in 2019<sup>42</sup>.

For Russia and Africa, 2020 was a time of testing the strength of growing political, economic, cultural and human relations. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, Russia has in fact confirmed its intention to build a genuine partnership with the African continent. More than 30 African states have asked Russia for help in fighting the new disease, and support in various forms has been provided – the transfer of test systems, laboratory supplies, personal protective equipment, mobile laboratories and medical devices. The supply of the Russian coronavirus vaccine "Sputnik V" to the African continent has begun in November 2020<sup>43</sup>. It has good prospects in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Russia supports African countries in their initiatives to alleviate debt payments during the pandemic and will continue to help the continent in overcoming the challenge of the coronavirus and its consequences.

39 "Plenarnoe zasedanie ehkonomicheskogo foruma Rossiya – Afrika", October 23, 2019, available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61880>, (date accessed: 10.10.2020).

40 Ibidem.

41 "Minzdrav Rossii i RUSAL zavershili vaksinatuyu rossijskim preparatom ot likhoradki Ehbola v Gvinee, December 13, 2018, available at: <https://minzdrav.gov.ru/news/2018/12/13/10167-minzdrav-rossii-i-rusal-zavershili-vaksinatuyu-rossijskim-preparatom-ot-lihoradki-ebola-v-gvinee>, (date accessed: 11.10.2020).

42 "Rospotrebnadzor predstavil unikal'nyu vaksinu protiv Ehbol", July 2, 2019, available at: <https://ria.ru/20190702/1556103613.html>, (date accessed: 11.10.2020)

43 "V MIDe zavayili o nachale postavok vaksiny "Sputnik V" v Afriku", *Izvestiya*, November 27, 2020.

## **Russian foundations working in Africa and civil society initiatives**

The "Russkiy Mir" Foundation, which was established by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin in 2007, is actively working with African countries. The purpose of the Foundation is to popularize the Russian language and support programs for its studies and abroad. The Foundation implements the "Russkiy Mir Cabinet" program, which aims to provide foreign partners with access to specialized online resources for learning and teaching Russian language. Such offices exist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Zambia, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, South Africa. "Rossotrudnichestvo" and "Russkiy Mir", as well as the State Institute of the Russian Language (Pushkin Institute) often interact as partners. They organize various cultural projects, develop a specific resource of "soft power" – the power of historical memory.

The all-Russian public organization "Russian Committee for Solidarity and Cooperation with the Peoples of Asia and Africa" (RCSCAA) is also strengthening friendly ties with African countries. It is the legal successor of the Soviet Committee of Solidarity with the Countries of Asia and Africa established in 1956. It is also a member of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) which is a mass non-governmental organization with national committees in more than 90 countries in Asia and Africa, and has associate member committees in Europe and Latin America. AAPSO was founded in January 1957, with headquarters since then located in Cairo.

The main goal of the "Russian Committee for Solidarity and Cooperation with the Peoples of Asia and Africa" is to promote the strengthening of mutual respect, trust and solidarity between the peoples of the Russian Federation and the countries of Asia and Africa, as well as the development of comprehensive ties and cooperation between them. The Committee has regional offices established in 45 constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Today, work is underway to revitalize their activities. The RCSCAA delegation took part in the 11th Congress of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia and Africa, held in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco on November 14-16, 2018.

In October 2018, the first Russian-African Public Forum<sup>44</sup> was held. This significant event was organized at the initiative of the World Alumni Association and the NGO "African Business Initiative". One of the key tasks of the forum was to attract the attention of various public organizations, the business community, as well as state institutions to the large-scale restoration of relations between Russia and Africa in all spheres of activity. Prominent Russian and African political and public figures, representatives of academia, business community, student and youth organizations were invited to the forum. The participants of the forum dis-

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44 "Rossiisko-Afrikanskii Obshchestvennyi Forum 2018", October 22, 2018, available at: <http://rcscaa.org/russian-african-social-forum-rasf-2018/>, (date accessed: 1.12.2020).

cussed issues of cultural, humanitarian and trade and economic dialogue, education and science, health care, agriculture, development of business relations and strengthening of historically established friendly ties between Russia and African countries.

On November 5, 2020, Moscow hosted the second Russian-African Public Forum. It was dedicated to the dialogue of civil societies of Russia and Africa as the driver of sustainable development and changes in the global order. Russian International Affairs Council prepared and held a special session on improving cooperation between Russian and African think tanks working in the field of foreign policy, the world economy and international security<sup>45</sup>. Heads of academic, educational, and non-governmental research centers of Russia and Africa attended the session.

During the meeting, representatives of African analytical centers expressed their wish to strengthen communication and information exchange, in order to identify and systematize issues for further development of cooperation. The proposals appeared to create a consortium of Russian-African analytical centers with headquarters in Moscow and Cairo to conduct research and provide information to government and business structures. However, in general, there are very few Russian foundations or civil society organizations having affiliates or realizing concrete projects in Africa together with African partners today, and the potential for development in this area is really great.

### **Initiatives of the Russian Orthodox Church on the African continent**

One of the most dynamically developing Orthodox communities has shaped today in Africa. Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria accounts for approximately 6 million Orthodox Christians on the continent, mainly in Egypt, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania<sup>46</sup>. Another 36 million Orthodox Christians live in Ethiopia (estimate as of 2017)<sup>47</sup> and belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Most of the Orthodox churches here are part of the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria, headed by His Beatitude Theodore (Theodoros) II, Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa. He is Greek by nationality, almost all of his assistants, bishops, are also Greeks. And the priests and parishioners are representatives of the local population. In February 2015 Patriarch Theodore II met Vladimir Putin, while Russian President visited Egypt. Russian President noted his Church's good, friendly relations with the Russian Orthodox Church. Patriarch, in his turn, expressed

45 "II Russian-African Public Forum 2020", November 6, 2020, available at: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/news/ii-russian-african-public-forum-2020/>, (date accessed: 1.12.2020)

46 Nelly Gromova, Monica Urb, Deyatel'nost' pravoslavnykh missionerov v Vostochnoi Afrike, *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, No. 1, 2016, p. 21.

47 Jeff Diamant, "Ethiopia is an outlier in the Orthodox Christian world", *FactTank*, November 28, 2017, available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/28/ethiopia-is-an-outlier-in-the-orthodox-christian-world/>, (date accessed: 1.12.2020).

warm feelings towards Russia where he spent several years in the past<sup>48</sup>.

The Russian Orthodox Church is not very active on the continent. However, there were a number of initiatives aimed at helping local believers (supply of items used during church services, books). In 2016, having visited Moscow, Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria and All Africa, on behalf of all Africans, thanked the His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia and Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for the help that Russian Church rendered to the church parishes of the continent, which were in a difficult financial situation<sup>49</sup>. However, in December 2019 The Russian Orthodox Church has taken a difficult decision to cut ties with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all of Africa Patriarch Theodore II after he recognized the creation of the new, another Ukraine's Orthodox Church separate from Russian Orthodox Church (while there is still Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchy). The move followed January's decision by Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who is considered first among equals in Orthodox patriarchy, to grant independence to the new Orthodox church of Ukraine.

Russia's Holy Synod also decided in December 2019 that its parishes in Africa will be removed from the Patriarchate of Alexandria's jurisdiction and made directly subordinate to the Russian Orthodox church's head, Patriarch Kirill<sup>50</sup>. It noted, however, that it will remain in communion with those clerics of his church who didn't support the decision of Patriarch Theodore II. Patriarch Kirill said in his speech on 11 December 2019: "We see that in the Greek church world, within the Churches of Alexandria and Greece, hierarchs, clerics and laypeople clearly expressed their opposition to the trample on the canons. For these people, just like for us, the unity of Churches is the absolute value; they consider it inadmissible to exchange this unity for the sympathy of the mighty of this world; they share the pain of and sympathize with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church jeopardized by the anti-canonical actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople"<sup>51</sup>.

In May 2018, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, His Holiness Patriarch and Catholicos Abune Mathias I during the official visit of the latter to Russia. Patriarch and Catholicos Abune Mathias was visiting Russia in the year marking the 120th anniversary of the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the states of Russia and Ethiopia. Patriarch Abune Mathias expressed interest in promoting cooperation in the educational sphere. As he indicated, many

48 "Vstrecha s Patriarkhom Aleksandriiskim i vseya Afriki Feodorom II". February 10, 2015, available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47652>, (date accessed: 1.12.2020).

49 "Patriarkh Aleksandrii: Afrika blagodarna Russkoi tserkvi za pomoshch' v nuzhde", November 19, 2016, available at: <https://ria.ru/20161119/1481718104.html>, (date accessed: 20.11.2020).

50 Vladimir Isachenkov, Russian Orthodox Church cuts ties with Alexandria patriarch, December 27, 2019, available at: <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2019/12/russian-orthodox-church-cuts-ties-with-alexandria-patriarch/>, (date accessed: 10.11.2020).

51 "Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the session of Supreme Church Council on 11th December 2019", available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5545894.html>, (date accessed: 10.11.2020).

Ethiopian students studied in Russia, and some of them later became bishops and archbishops, performing their archpastoral ministry in Ethiopia. During the meeting, His Holiness also raised the topic of theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches and the bilateral relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, such as church-society relations, social ministry, diaconia, and missionary activities. "It would also be beneficial to revive contacts between our theological educational institutions," His Holiness added, "We are ready to invite your students to study in Russia"<sup>52</sup>.

The head of the Ethiopian Church's delegation talked about the difficult situation of the African Churches, with extremists attacking church buildings, and with terrorists killing people, both Christians and Muslims, who refuse to accept their ideology. Noting the complexity and danger of the problem of terrorism, the Ethiopian Patriarch expressed his opinion that Christians ought to show solidarity in addressing this problem. The Patriarch-Catholikos of Ethiopia also made a short visit to Moscow and in December 2018. His Holiness arrived in Russia to participate in the opening ceremony of the first direct flight Addis Ababa - Moscow of Ethiopian Airlines, held at Domodedovo Airport<sup>53</sup>. In June 2019 Patriarch Kirill met the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ethiopia to Russia and noted: "We welcomed the arrival of the Patriarch of Ethiopia Abune Mathias to our country. I think it was an important meeting, because it helped to renew our relationship, which, of course, needed renewal. The visit of the Ethiopian Patriarch played an important role"<sup>54</sup>.

The Russian and Ethiopian Churches, despite certain differences in theological issues, have the prospect of a joint social mission, coordination of positions on a number of issues, and even the resumption of training for Ethiopian students in Russian church institutions. Temple in Johannesburg (South Africa) is the first Russian Orthodox Church in sub-Saharan Africa; it began to function in 2003. The Russian Patriarchate has a representative office in Africa. It was located under the Alexandrian Patriarchate in Cairo. There was also information that in 2010 the parish of the Russian Orthodox Church was registered in the Seychelles<sup>55</sup>.

There are also Old Believer Orthodox communities in Africa. Their study, as well as the study of Orthodox communities, was the focus of a project by scientists from the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences "Orthodox Christians and Old Believers in Uganda: Socio-Cultural Processes in Af-

52 "His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church", May 17, 2018, available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5206852.html>, (date accessed: 15.11.2020).

53 "Glava Ehfiopskoi Tserkvi posetil s kratkim vizitom Moskvu", December 20, 2018, available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5326974.html>, (date accessed: 13.11.2020).

54 "His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ethiopia to Russia", June 11, 2019, available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5452756.html>, (date accessed: 13.11.2020).

55 Nelly Gromova, Monica Urb, Deyatel'nost' pravoslavnykh missionerov v Vostochnoi Afrike... p. 27.



rican Christian Communities." (2017–2019)<sup>56</sup>. Scientists have already undertaken several expeditions to Uganda. The head of the expedition, Professor Dmitri M. Bondarenko, noted that Old Believers appeared in Uganda recently: since 1991. In 2013 a small group of Ugandan Orthodox Christians was taken over by Moscow Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Church. However, the number of parishioners is growing<sup>57</sup>.

It is worth noting that the Russian Orthodox Church was one of the first to publicly condemn the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and Africa in recent years. From the very beginning of the "Arab Spring", the Moscow Patriarchate expressed serious concern over the situation of the Christian population in the region. For example, the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate noted in 2015: "For several years now, the Russian Orthodox Church has raised its voice against the egregious facts of persecution and discrimination against the Christian population in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Another brutal murder of 30 Ethiopian Christians in Libya once again draws attention to the tragic situation in this country. Before the beginning of the events called the "Arab Spring", about 100 thousand Christians lived in Libya. The events of 2011 led to disastrous consequences: the resulting chaos and permissiveness untied the hands of the extremist forces. Christians were the first victims of extremists: the number of Christians in Libya has decreased many times. In this sorrowful hour, the Russian Orthodox Church expresses solidarity with the persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. The flagrant violations of fundamental human rights by extremists in Libya deserve unconditional condemnation and immediate action by the entire world community to completely eradicate the plague of extremism that gripped the Middle East and North Africa"<sup>58</sup>.

The Russian Orthodox Church has a broad network of joint actions and contacts with representatives of the Islamic world. On July 23, 2019, Patriarch Kirill met with the Secretary General of the Islamic World League Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Issa in Moscow. Welcoming the guest, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted: "You are taking care of vulnerable people who need aid and support in Asia and especially in Africa. Therefore, thanks also to your contribution to the work of the Islamic World League, it has gained authority not only in the world of Islam but also become renowned and respected for its work in the Christian community as well"<sup>59</sup>. He underlined that for Russian Orthodox Christians contacts with Moslems were very natural because for one thousand

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56 "Second field research in the first Old Believer communities of Africa", November 12, 2018, available at: <https://www.inafran.ru/en/node/739>, (date accessed: 15.11.2020).

57 Dmitri Bondarenko, *Iz Rossii s veroi: povaylenie staroobryadchestva v Ugande kak otrazhenie kul'turnykh protsessov v sovremennoi Afrike*, *Sibirskie istoricheskie issledovaniya*, No. 1, 2018, p. 168.

58 "O massovom ubiistve ehfiopskikh khristian v Livii", available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4049852.html>, (date accessed: 15.11.2020).

59 "Patriarch Kirill meets with Islamic World League Secretary General Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Issa", July 23, 2019, available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5477248.html>, (date accessed: 16.11.2020).

years they have lived together with Moslems in our country. "We are brothers and fellow citizens who have never had conflicts or discords between them. And since Orthodox Christians and Moslems belong to the Eastern culture, the relationships of our communities are always simple and sincere".

As it can be seen, the ties of the Russian Orthodox Church with the fellow believers in Africa in recent years both developed and suffered from many serious challenges. However, Russian Orthodox Church through its activities and contacts helps to promote Russian "soft power" though to a relatively modest extent, and makes its contribution to the interreligious dialogue both Russia and abroad.

### **Sports diplomacy and "soft power" in Russian-African relations**

Since the beginning of the 21st century the world championships in ice hockey (2016) and football (2018), as well as the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi (2014) were successfully held in Russia. Such events had a positive effect on the country's image. This served to attract tourists and gives them the opportunity to get acquainted with Russian culture and its values.

For example, the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia was marked by the participation of many African football teams and African fans coming to Russia as tourists. Africans and Russians are united by the love of football. A number of African heads of state visited Russia during the championship. Thus, the world championship became an occasion to visit Russia for the President of Senegal, Macky Sall – he became the first leader of this African state to visit Kremlin<sup>60</sup>. The opening ceremony of the sports forum on June 14 in Moscow's "Luzhniki" stadium was attended by Rwandan President Paul Kagame. On the eve of the opening ceremony of the world championship, he met with Vladimir Putin. FIFA President Gianni Infantino said in July 2018: "This is the best World Cup ever. I would like to thank everyone who was involved in the organization and preparation of the tournament"<sup>61</sup>. It should be noted that in October 2018, Rwanda hosted a meeting of the Council of the International Football Federation (FIFA), at which its participants officially awarded the status of the best world football championship in the history of its holding to the championship held by Russia in the summer of 2018.

Russia should engage more prominent athletes to represent and communicate meaningful ideas and ideals to foreign audiences outside of sporting events. For Russia, this experience is new, and therefore not yet very widespread and popular, while in the United States it is being successfully applied. At the same time, individual steps in this direction are already being taken within the framework of Russian sports diplomacy.

60 "Vyigryvayut vse': kak chempionat mira po futbolu predemonstriroval rost diplomaticheskogo vliyaniya Moskvyy", *Russia Today*, July 15, 2018.

61 "FIFA ofitsial'no nazvala luchshii chempionat mira za vsyu istoriyu", October 27, 2018, available at: [https://ee.sputniknews.ru/fifa\\_2018/20181027/13416412/FIFA-chempionat-mira-futbol-Russia.html](https://ee.sputniknews.ru/fifa_2018/20181027/13416412/FIFA-chempionat-mira-futbol-Russia.html), (date accessed: 16.11.2020).

## **Informal trade ties and initiatives, inter-parliamentary ties between Russia and Africa**

The non-governmental aspect of Russian economic diplomacy is associated with the role of international business councils operating under the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI). The CCI has established international business councils with a number of African countries (Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, South Africa, Zimbabwe) and the Coordinating Committee for Economic Cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa. The business councils support activities that facilitate networking between the Russian and African business communities. Thus, Russia's "soft power" is revealing itself in mutually enriching business dialogue, where both Russian and African businessmen can learn from each other. In addition, in March 2016, the NGO "African Business Initiative Union" began its work. It implements its initiatives in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation with the support of a number of Russian companies, the African diplomatic corps and the academic community<sup>62</sup>.

Inter-parliamentary ties between Russia and Africa are also developing intensively, as showed the parliamentary conference "Russia – Africa" in July 2019, held within the framework of the II International Forum "Development of Parliamentarism". Olga Timofeeva, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, noted that the African delegation was represented by 300 parliamentarians and 50 experts<sup>63</sup>. Russian and African parliamentarians discussed such issues as the development of trade, economic and political interaction between the Russian Federation and the continent's countries, joining efforts in the fight against international terrorism, drug trafficking, cybercrime and climate change.

President of the Senate of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea Teresa Efuá Asangono in her speech at the forum noted that cooperation with Russia in various fields – economic, political and social – is very important for her country. She supported the idea of holding the Russia-Africa conference on a regular basis, expressing the hope that its next meeting will be held on the African continent<sup>64</sup>. Chairman of the National Assembly of Djibouti Mohamed Ali Hummed noted during the forum that the Parliament of Djibouti would create a "friendship group" with Russia. The parliamentary conference "Russia – Africa" became an important preparatory stage for the upcoming summit of the Russian Federation – Africa<sup>65</sup>.

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62 "Africa Business Initiative UNION", <http://africabi.ru/en/about/>, (date accessed: 1.11.2020)

63 "Konferentsiya 'Rossiya — Afrika' pomozhet parlamentariyam naiti novye resheniya problem na dolgii srok", State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, July 3, 2019, available at: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/45561/>, (date accessed: 25.10.2020).

64 Ibidem.

65 Ibidem.

## **First Russia – Africa summit as a strong impetus to the development of Russian-African cooperation in all spheres**

First Russia – Africa summit took place in October 2019 in Sochi. It was a historic event long awaited by many in Russian and African political, academic and business circles.

First ever Russia – Africa summit gave a great new impetus for the development of our country's relations with African partners, including in "soft power" format. Representatives of all 54 African states and leading regional organizations attended the summit. The scale of representation from both sides convincingly testified to the mutual desire to develop contacts in all areas and to strengthen the multifaceted partnership. It provided Russia with a brilliant opportunity to project its "soft power" of attractiveness.

The political, scientific, business and economic programme of the summit was very thoughtfully organized. African delegates could learn a lot about what Russia can offer in culture, science and education agriculture, as well as engineering, space exploration, healthcare, finance, digital solutions, "smart cities", E-government, communications and much more. All in one place. There were many opportunities also to present production and services of the African countries themselves. And there was created a space comfortable for having meetings, negotiations and signing contracts. The event of such political and economic scale did not happen even in Soviet times in Russian-African relations. And it was a very strong signal of Russia's political will to develop the mutually beneficial partnership with the whole African continent and its diverse regions. Of Russia's readiness to invest in the prosperity of this partnership.

The first Russia-Africa summit strengthened political relations with African countries both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Participants of the summit adopted the joint declaration, which determined the goals and objectives of the further development of Russian-African cooperation in all its dimensions: politics, security, economy, scientific-technical and cultural-humanitarian spheres. A new dialogue mechanism was spelled out in the document – the Forum of Russian-African Partnership, the supreme body of which should be the regular, once every three years, Russia-Africa summit. The document also indicated that in the period between the summits of the Russian Federation, annual political consultations will be held between the ministers of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation and African states, who are the current, previous and future chairmen of the African Union.

During the summit, a Memorandum of Understanding was also signed between the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the African Union Commission (CAS) in the field of economic cooperation.

Russia is expanding its cooperation with the African Union, regional organizations of the continent, fully supports the creation and implementation of the

African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA). After the first Russia-Africa summit, the process of institutional organization of the partnership continued. In 2020 a new regular dialogue mechanism was established – the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum – and its main body, the Secretariat. The Association of Economic Cooperation with African states (AECAS) has also started its work in 2020<sup>66</sup>. It is a non-profit organization that seeks to promote Russian business on the African continent and unlock the continent's enormous potential. The Association coordinates political and diplomatic support for Russian business projects on the African continent and works in concert with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other specialized government agencies of Africa and Russia to foster productive dialogue between private and public sectors. In 2021 Russian-African partnership will gain momentum. Preparations will be made for the Russia-Africa summit in 2022, which is to take place on the territory of one of the African states.

## **Conclusion**

Russia seeks to project its "soft power", the power of attraction of Russian culture, science and education, towards the African continent, through a number of initiatives. Russia also does its best to bring up-to-date information about its politics and economy to Africans through its own media, to avoid its distortion in the "mirror" of Western media, but there is still a lot of work in this direction. Russia critically needs to strengthen its information presence in Africa, and to familiarize Russian public more fully and deeply with the realities of life on the African continent in the Russian media space.

However, Russia still needs to work out a clear political strategy in order to increase level of its "soft power" influence in Africa in the coming years. A more specific and detailed analysis of how Russia could more effectively promote its ideas and values, its language and cultural heritage on the African continent and how it can learn more about Africa could become an integral part of this strategy. Africa is one of the world's hubs with an intense interaction of representatives of different cultures, religions and civilizations. This regional feature increasingly calls for a complex and multidimensional model of Russian "soft power", in accordance with the specifics of the region. This indicates the need to train more scientists and experts with deep knowledge in the field of culture and social and political life of the countries of modern Africa. Perhaps it would be beneficial for the Russian "soft power" if number of Russian non-governmental, cultural, scientific and charitable organizations working in the African direction and in the African countries themselves increased and if they were more actively involved in joint projects with African civil society. Now there are quite few of such Russian organisations.

A comparative analysis of the use of "soft power" instruments by other exter-

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<sup>66</sup> "Association of economic cooperation with African states", available at: <https://www.africa-rus.com/>, (date accessed: 1.12.2020).

nal players on the continent can also be useful<sup>67</sup>, after which it will be possible to use more creatively Russia's own competitive advantages. There are academic attempts to compare, for example, Russia's and China's soft power in Africa<sup>68</sup>. It is also necessary to rely on the common values of Russian and African peoples and states – adherence to the polycentric world order, increasing the role of the emerging countries in global governance, protecting national sovereignties, and many more.

African peoples and governments are usually open towards Russia, as Russia was never a colonial power and helped Africa in its anti-colonial struggle. However, relying on this strong historical legacy, it is necessary to go further and propose new initiatives and formats of dialogue with the countries of the continent.

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## РУСКА „МЕКА МОЋ“ У СЕВЕРО-ИСТОЧНОЈ АФРИЦИ

### Сажетак

Овај чланак заснива се на руском разумевању концепта „меке моћи“ као сложеног инструмента и методе достизања спољно-политичких циљева у области јавне дипломатије, информација и комуникационих технологија, хуманитарне помоћи и културних иницијатива, али и у областима цивилних интеракција и међурелигијског дијалога. „Мека моћ“ се разуме као додатак традиционалним дипломатским методама. Овај чланак критички проматра опсег савремене руске „меке моћи“ у односу са земљама региона северо-источне Африке. Циљ чланка јесте анализа циљева, имплементације, резултата и будућих планова иницијатива у оквиру руске „меке моћи“ у овом региону.

**Кључне речи:** Русија, Африка, „мека моћ“, Северна Африка, Источна Африка, спољна политика

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