

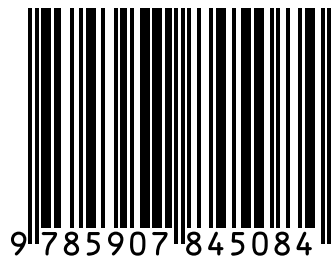


Russia-Africa Cooperation: Outlook and Objectives

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ISBN 978-5-907845-08-4



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Russia-Africa Summit and follow-up

Russia-Africa relations have become more substantive and regular over the past year, with development strategies, plans, roadmaps and summit meetings, that have become regular despite the challenges and plans for annual Russia-Africa ministerial conferences. The range of the key Russian actors in Africa has changed, the list of Russia's privileged African partners has been expanded and Russia's contribution to the sovereignty and development of African countries has become more substantial.

A system of Russian-African relations is gradually taking shape from chaos, dissonance and competing initiatives. Political signals are increasingly often complemented with practical efforts in various spheres. However, there is still room for a closer alignment of Russia's political and economic interests in the region, considering that political dialogue with some countries is developing more actively than economic cooperation. The current task is to streamline the areas of substantive cooperation with the friendliest countries, which should add stability to new partnerships.

However, in 2024, even our opponents no longer describe Russia's policy towards Africa as inconsistent or opportunistic. Moscow does not miss the opportunities that arise due to the mistakes and miscalculations of its rivals in the region, while some success stories are complemented by a broad system of contacts based on a shared vision of the future. There are evidences of Russia's more comprehensive agenda and actions in Africa, including a trust-based dialogue with Algeria for a settlement in the north of Mali and with South Africa for discussing the African Peace Initiative for Ukraine.

This is clearly reflected in the first summit, which was held in Sochi in 2019, that kicked off the process and was used as the declaration of intentions, while the second summit held in St Petersburg in the summer of 2023 demonstrated interim results in the development of bilateral and multilateral efforts to boost the Russian-African relations and made a substantial contribution to stimulating bilateral ties. The summit was followed by the visits by the presidents of Equatorial Guinea, South Sudan, Chad and Guinea Bissau and many African ministers to Russia after the 2023 summit, as well as the development of ties at other levels and the work of intergovernmental commissions.

During the 2023 summit, the participants focused on discussing political instruments for the development of trade and economic relations, whereas their business communities took a more practical view of their capabilities.¹ Russian exporters, who can use their substantial resources to invest in Africa and get hold of African markets were especially

¹ Свиридов В.Ю. Повторное знакомство: как Россия и Африка встретились в новых условиях // РСМД. 2023. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/povtornoe-znakomstvo-kak-rossiya-i-afrika-vstretilis-v-novyykh-usloviyakh/>

visible. Rosatom proposed a consistent vision for developing relations with African countries. However, Russian oil and gas companies refrained from making ambitious statements, even though they attended events held on the side-lines of the summit.

In the absence of new large investment projects and initiatives, the agenda focused on the development of bilateral trade. Economic Development Minister Maxim Reshetnikov said that “our goal for 2030 is to at least double trade.”² The events of 2020–2022, which took place between the first and second summits, changed the international stage so radically that the partners had to look for common grounds again.

Meetings held at the top level during the 2023 summit reaffirmed the complementarity of the Russian and African agendas. The heads of African states spoke about cooperation in agriculture, fisheries, energy, the training of personnel, mining, transport, exploration, and space research.³ Nearly all of them called for the creation of conditions for uninterrupted fertiliser and food supply chains. Some African presidents expressed hope for more active ties with the BRICS New Development Bank.⁴

One of the main topics on the agenda was digitalisation as the underlying element of future cooperation in the main spheres, which aligns the political and economic aspects of Russia’s dialogue with its priority partners in Africa. A milestone event in that sphere was the presentation of an initiative on knowledge sharing in the field of state governance proposed by the Innopraktika non-governmental development institute and the Higher School of Economics.⁵

The documents that were adopted following the second summit outlined the main spheres for the development of Russia-Africa relations until the next summit scheduled for 2026. They include the Declaration of the Second Russia-Africa Summit, the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan 2023–2026, the Declaration on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, the Declaration on Strengthening Cooperation in the Fight Against Terrorism, and the Declaration on Cooperation in the Field of International Information Security. In the Declaration of the Second Russia-Africa Summit, the participants expressed the intention to hold annual political consultations between the Foreign Minister of Russia

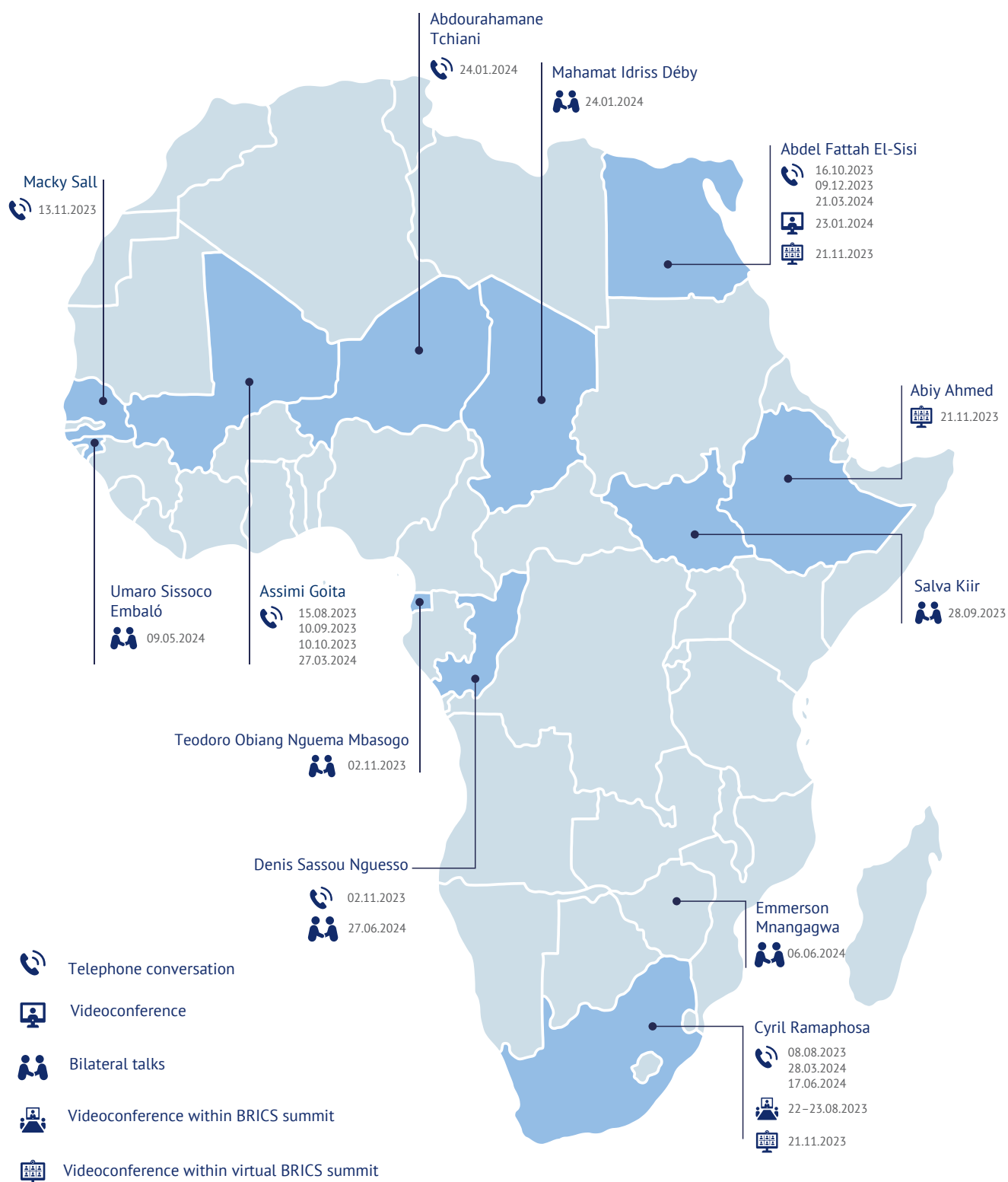
² Решетников призвал удвоить товарооборот с Африкой // Парламентская газета. 2023. URL: <https://www.pnp.ru/economics/reshetnikov-prizval-udvoit-tovarooborot-s-afrikoy.html>

³ More information about potential Russia-Africa ties in space exploration available at: Свиридов В.Ю. Снятся ли им рокот космодрома? Заметки о перспективах стран Африки в космосе // РСМД. 2023. URL: <https://rus-siancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/snitsya-li-im-rokot-kosmodroma-zametki-o-perspektivakh-stran-afriki-v-kosmose/>

⁴ В ЮАР заявили, что страны Африки рассчитывают на встречу с руководителем Банка БРИКС // ТАСС. 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/18374689>

⁵ Центр изучения Африки ВШЭ и «Иннопрактика» представили Программу по обмену знаниями в сфере цифровизации государственного управления на саммите Россия – Африка // Иннопрактика. 2023. URL: <https://innopraktika.ru/news/2649/>

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S CONTACTS WITH AFRICAN LEADERS AFTER THE 2023 SUMMIT



Compiled by the HSE Centre for African Studies based on data from Kremlin.ru

and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, as well as between the foreign ministers of Russia and African states and the African Union Commission in addition to the existing format of dialogue with the present, former and future Presidencies of the African Union. The declaration on information security stipulates “a regional Russia-Africa meeting on security in the use of information and communications technologies.”

The economic part of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan 2023–2026 can be seen as a roadmap for cooperation between the summits. It is based on the sectoral principle of developing trade and economic interaction in agriculture, energy, industry, transport and ICT. In the future, this sectoral approach will allow the parties to develop comprehensive sectoral initiatives comprising educational, humanitarian aid, trade and economic components.⁶

A major distinguishing feature of the third Russia-Africa summit scheduled for 2026 is the opportunity to take stock of the tangible outcomes of such practical cooperation. The Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan includes ambitious tasks, and the quality of their implementation will show if the parties’ efforts are enough to advance Russia-Africa relations to a new level.

Russia’s policy towards Africa is structured around sectoral initiatives in agriculture, energy, industry, transport and ICT. Most of Russia’s initiatives are of a pan-African nature.

The countries of North Africa have been Russia’s crucial trading partners for many years. Strategic partnerships with Algeria and Egypt represent some of the most important aspects of Russia’s policies, and they are acquiring an increasingly regional dimension. Dialogue with Tunisia and Morocco continues, and economic cooperation is expanding; Russia has also played a significant role in resolving conflicts in Libya and Sudan.

Since the beginning of the 2020s, West Africa has become a high-priority region in Russian foreign policy. The political dialogue and cooperation on security issues with the Sahel region is developing, and Russian exports of grain, food, and energy resources have been growing. Due to the relatively good transport accessibility of West Africa, Russian products have found new market niches. Therefore, our report has a separate section dedicated to relations with West African countries.

⁶ Маслов А.А., Свиридов В.Ю. Африка: перспективы развития и рекомендации для политики России. Доклад по итогам ситуационного анализа под эгидой МИД РФ // Международные отношения. 2021. URL: https://globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/doklad_afrika_perspektivy-razvitiya.pdf

However, the eastern part of the continent continues to grow faster than other regions and is increasingly attracting the attention of Russian businesses. The logistic accessibility of markets in East Africa remains a major challenge, making it harder for Russian products to compete there compared to the west coast. Therefore, Russian exporters place great hopes on the development of the North-South logistics corridor through the Caspian Sea and Iran.

It is also important to note that the countries of East Africa are an attractive destination for Russian tourists. It is crucial that the region remains a vast “core of stability”, despite the encroachment of instability from the north (Sudan and northern Ethiopia), the south (Mozambique), and the west (Democratic Republic of Congo).

Tanzania could strengthen Russia’s economic presence in the continent due to its strategic location, stable political system, strong reputation in Africa and the world, and historically friendly relations with the USSR and Russia.

Tanzania’s economic performance has been impressive, with the average annual growth of 6% over the past decade. Unlike, for example, Kenya, where growth was 4.5% or Ethiopia (which posted 8%). Stable GDP growth in Tanzania was not accompanied by a dramatic increase in the debt burden of the state or the economy as a whole. There is every reason to believe that this positive trend will continue in the future, at least until the end of the decade. Additionally, large investments in transportation, energy, and mining projects may further boost Tanzania’s impressive economic performance.

However, the issue of credit dependency burdening East African economies continues to be significant. China has almost cut off its loans inflow to Africa, amid an increase in public debt-to-GDP ratios in most countries of the region. As a result, for China, recovering funds previously invested in Africa (primarily before 2017) could become the focus of its economic engagement with regional governments. Against this background, the United States, while continuing to accumulate its own national debt, demonstrates its readiness to lend to Africa (at a higher interest rate), due to which a number of countries, such as Zambia, fall into the orbit of this policy of “containing” China and Russia.

The increased investment from the United Arab Emirates in East Africa in recent years suggests that there is a potential alternative to Chinese investment, and the region’s economic growth is likely to continue. This growth is primarily driven by the expansion of consumer markets, the promotion of import substitution, the development of infrastructure, and mining.

Russia's partnership with West African countries

In the past 12 months, Russia's security cooperation with the countries of the Sahara-Sahel region (primarily with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) has been one of the main sources of news from the Russia-Africa track. The noticeable presence of Russian companies in Nigerian and Senegalese markets has now been supplemented with political agenda, which have been safe to refer to as government-coordinated since mid-2023.

In addition to their deep-rooted cultural, historical and economic ties, most West African countries are also linked by ECOWAS membership. ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) is a regional umbrella association that currently comprises of Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The membership of the Republic of Guinea, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso was suspended following the seizure of power by the military regimes. The remaining ECOWAS members made repeated attempts to keep these states within the integration organisation, creating bureaucratic hurdles and issuing political ultimatums.

ECOWAS has been a heterogeneous organisation since its inception. Outsiders tend to divide the participating nations by religion (Christian or Muslim) or language (Anglophone or Francophone), although economics and geography are clearly more important divisive factors: weak mutual trade and investment, isolated infrastructure, and the coastal states' focus on commodity exports and profiting from the transit shipment of goods to the landlocked markets of the Sahel.⁷

ECOWAS has a functioning monetary mechanism: WAEMU (West African Economic and Monetary Union) – an organisation of eight West African states, previously French colonies, also known as the CFA franc zone. In addition, the introduction of a common ECOWAS currency, the eco, is projected within the framework of the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ).

In the past, Nigeria, one of Africa's economic leaders and a regional hegemon, was the mastermind behind the ECOWAS concept. Today, its

⁷ Engel J. and Jouanjean M.A. Political and economic constraints to the ECOWAS regional economic integration process and opportunities for donor engagement // ODI, EPS-PEAKS. 2015. URL: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08997e5274a31e000017a/Political_and_Economic_Constraints_to_the_ECOWAS.pdf

potential and capabilities raise concerns on the part of other regional players, something external players are readily exploiting to their own advantage. France continues to use its ties with the regional countries to exert pressure on Nigeria, including through the ECOWAS mechanisms, although French influence is gradually decreasing as these countries are turning to other external partners including Russia.

Nigeria's economic protectionism displeases the European Union and eventually derailed the economic partnership agreement (EPA) between ECOWAS and the EU. Hoping to take advantage of disagreements within ECOWAS, Brussels signed separate EPAs with Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire with a view to use these countries as entry points into the sub-regional market.⁸

Almost a year after the second Russia-Africa summit, several shifts have become apparent in Moscow's relations with West African countries.

In 2023, Russia announced its plan to sign defence cooperation agreement with Senegal.⁹ In addition, Roman Chekushov, Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Licensing in Foreign Trade at the Ministry of Industry and Trade, announced Russia's interest in creating a logistics hub in that country.¹⁰ During a visit to Russia in March 2024, Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar expressed interest in expanding military-technical and economic cooperation with Russia across the board,¹¹ and announced President Tinubu's visit to Russia; before then on, the head of the Nigerian Competition and Consumer Protection Commission proposed signing a memorandum of cooperation with Russia's Federal Anti-Monopoly Service. Official representatives of the Gambia have also declared interest in expanding military ties with Russia. In September 2023, Sierra Leone and Russia began negotiating fertiliser imports, while the country's ambassador put forth an initiative to establish a partnership with RosGeo, Russia's state geological exploration and prospecting company. The most important negotiations and deals remain outside the public domain, but

⁸ The ECOWAS–EU Economic Partnership Agreement: Towards Inclusive Development? // Acheampong, Theophilus & Ortsin, Ernest. 2019. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332238437_The_ECOWAS-EU_Economic_Partnership_Agreement_Towards_Inclusive_Development

⁹ РФ заключит военные соглашения с Сенегалом и с Сан-Томе и Принсипи // ТАСС. 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/19200105>

¹⁰ Россия рассматривает возможность создания портов в Танзании, Сенегале, Алжире и Египте // ТАСС. 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/20626561>

¹¹ Нигерия планирует развитие отношений с Россией в рамках ВТС // РИА Новости. 2024. URL: <https://ria.ru/20240307/nigeriya-1931621460.htm>

our partners' trade statistics reveal an overall growth and expansion of the range of goods in mutual trade.

Russia has noticeably strengthened and expanded cooperation with the three Sahel nations – Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In each of these countries, the recent transfer of power to military governments was largely due to the local army elites' and the population's dissatisfaction with France and the United States' performance as security guarantors. Among other things, that dissatisfaction added to the growing anti-colonial sentiments.¹² A military government coming to power on the wave of anti-Western resentment opens an attractive window of opportunity. However, one should bear in mind that, in global experience, military regimes are short-lived, and the ruling group can be replaced by another one at any time.

This dictates the need for a new and longer-term approach aimed at harmonising the interests of West African countries and Russia. This can be achieved if cooperation goes beyond defence-related projects.

However, expanding ties with West African countries, both quantitatively (engaging more countries in the region) and qualitatively (designing economic cooperation projects) remains below experts and decision makers radar.

It would be deeply erroneous to view the three Sahel nations as total outcasts as opposed to the rest of the region. Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, despite their harsh rhetoric against the rebel countries, continue to transit goods to Mali and Burkina Faso through their ports. The current sentiment in the regional society and elites paves the way for deepening ties between Russia and other regional players.

The presidency of **Ghana**, one of the most influential countries in the region, is likely to pass from the ruling New Patriotic Party (*NPP*) to the National Democratic Congress (*NDC*) after the December 2024 election. The *NDC* was in power between 1992 and 2000, and between 2008 and 2016.¹³ This projection is shared by most regional experts, as well as the most prominent polling centres working in Ghana. While incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo, who represents the *NPP*, blames the current economic crisis in

¹² Эксперт: Россия имеет ресурсы, чтобы помочь странам Сахеля решить проблемы безопасности // ТАСС. 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18523987>

¹³ John Mahama to lead main opposition into Ghana's 2024 polls // EIU. 2023. URL: <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1023260085&Country=Ghana&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=Election+watch>

Ghana on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the new frontrunner, *NDC* leader John Mahama, has more moderate views, arguing that the *NPP* government's policies should be considered as the main cause of the country's economic problems. John Mahama attended a university in Moscow, which makes him a closer and more understandable partner for Russian companies and the government. Ghana, as one of the regional leaders, remains an important link between the Sahel states and world markets.

Nigeria, which claims to be the undisputed regional leader, is also showing readiness to expand cooperation with Russia. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has taken a tough stance against the initiators of military coups in the region, lobbying for a harsh sanctions regime, primarily against Niger. But the economic restrictions he imposed, and his preparations for a possible intervention were met with extreme disapproval by the elites and the population of the country's northern regions, which form a single socioeconomic space with Niger.¹⁴ The traditional leaders of those regions have asked Tinubu not to allow the deployment of French and American military bases in the country.¹⁵ In March 2024, Nigerian Foreign Minister Yousuf Tuggar paid an official visit to Moscow, launching a discussion on the Nigerian President's first trip to Russia in decades outside the framework of international forums.

The 2024 presidential election in **Senegal**, ECOWAS's fourth largest economy, was won by Bassirou Faye, one of the leaders of the left-wing Patriots of Senegal (*PASTEF*) party. The main goals of the *PASTEF* political programme are to reduce the country's dependence on France and the influence of Western corporations, as well to consider leaving the CFA franc zone. And although Faye predictably softened his rhetoric after the elections, and is still far from implementing his plans, his victory shows that such ideas are in demand in society.

Other ECOWAS countries tend to look for opportunities to diversify their foreign partnerships. For example, one cannot fail to mention Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoco Embaló's visit to Moscow to attend the Victory Parade – this was his third visit to Russia in two years.

It is clear from the above that, according to numerous indicators, a window of opportunity has opened to widen long-term ties between West Africa and Russia. To keep it open, it is crucial to initiate projects that

¹⁴ Nigeria's President Tinubu faces backlash over military intervention in Niger // BBC. 2023. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66430113>

¹⁵ Don't allow US , France to site military bases in Nigeria // The Cable. 2024. URL: <https://www.thecable.ng/northern-leaders-to-tinubu-dont-allow-us-france-to-site-military-bases-in-nigeria/>

would align with regional economies and make a tangible contribution to improving the living standards for the local population. The prospects of Russia's relations with Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, as well as Algeria, which remains one of Russia's most important allies and partners with shared vision at the regional and global level – also depends on Russia's ability not only to gain a foothold in the Sahara-Sahel region, but to help the regional states ensure security and achieve economic growth, social progress, and improvement in living standards. Russia's success in the Sahel could be as pivotal as its assistance in ensuring Syria's security, which has led to the expansion and deepening of ties with regional powers, and the growth of mutual interest and trust between Russia and regional leaders.

Sustainable trade and economic cooperation

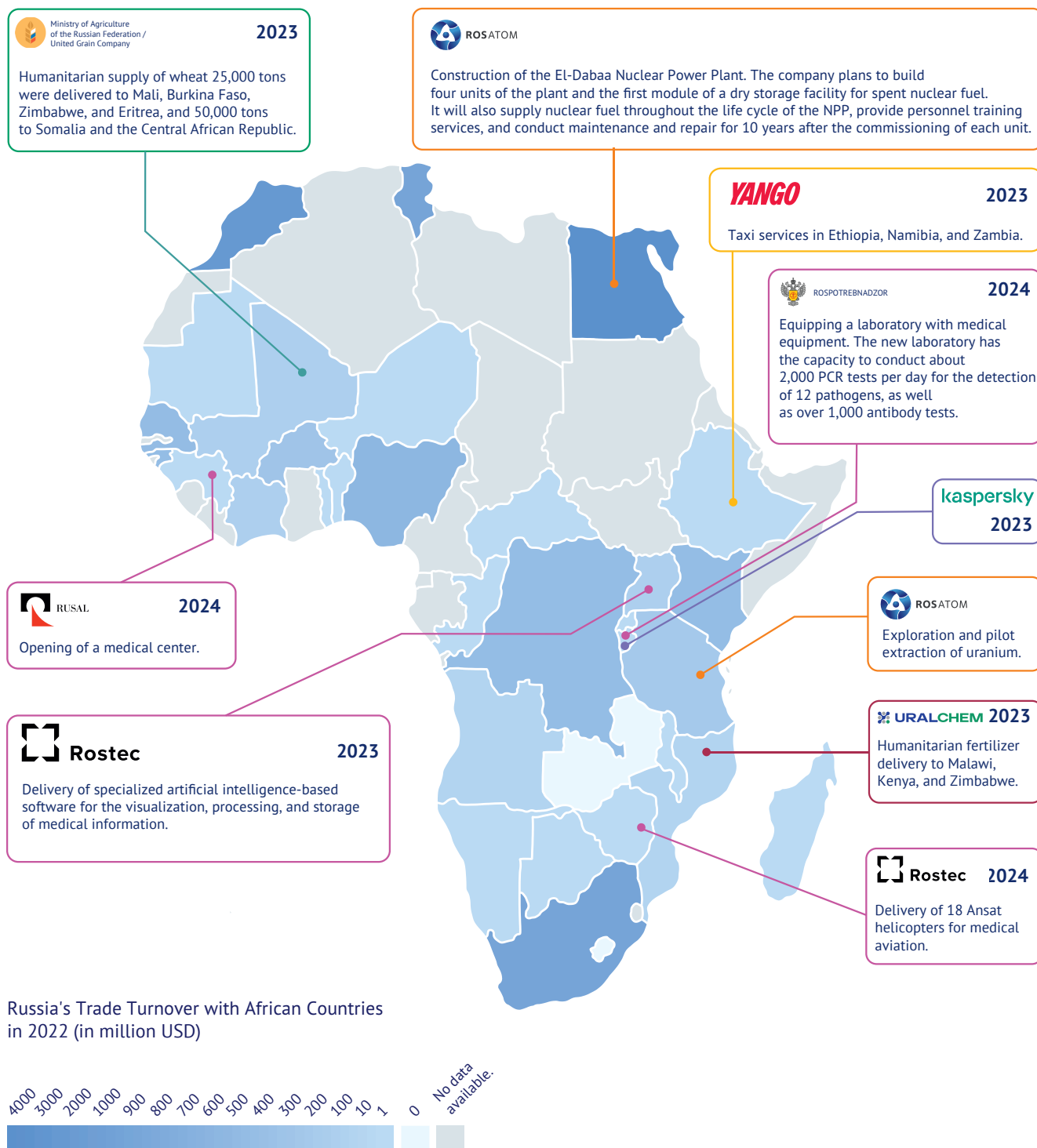
Investment projects

Two trends dominate Russia-Africa economic cooperation;: the focus on trade and a decline in the number of investment projects. These tendencies began before the Covid pandemic, and since then they have persisted and even increased over the past few years. ALROSA, VTB Bank and Norilsk Nickel, which had been the largest Russian investors in Africa for decades, had to scale back their operation in anchor countries because of external complications. Russian oil and gas companies shifted their attention to the projects which they have controlled since the 2010s. In addition, restrictions imposed by third countries are complicating the search for funding and limiting the range of potential partners, primarily Western ones.

The corporate agenda is gradually improving. Russian businesses have taken a more realistic view of their potential, recognising the need for a serious examination of projects before entering African markets, as well as an analysis of country risks associated with regulatory policies, logistics, insurance and investment protection.¹⁶ In addition, a successful execution of

¹⁶ Маслов А. А. Центр силы: чего Африка ждёт от России и что Россия может получить от Африки? // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/czentr-sily-afrika/>

SOME PROJECTS OF RUSSIAN COMPANIES IN AFRICA IN 2023–2024



Mirror statistics used (data provided by the African partner country).

Compiled by the HSE Centre for African Studies and Intex LLC based on data from ITC Trade Map, companies and media

Russian projects in Africa would be impossible without support from African counterparts, including the setting of environment for infrastructure projects focused on the domestic market and exports, and investment protection guarantees.

As of 2024, Russia's largest investment project in Africa is the construction of the El-Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant in Egypt, which Rosatom launched in the summer of 2022. Rosatom will build four 4.8GW power units and the first module of a nuclear waste dry cask storage, supply nuclear fuel for the whole life cycle of the NPP, help train personnel, and provide maintenance and repair services for 10 years after the launch of every power unit. The project is mainly financed by a Russian loan

There are plans for many large-scale projects. For example, Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin has announced that there is a pipeline of over 30 potential energy projects in Africa that are at different stages of development.¹⁷ In November 2023, media reported the signing of an agreement between Mali and an unidentified Russian investor on the construction of a gold refinery with the capacity of 200 tonnes a year.¹⁸ In April 2024, the government of Nigeria relaunched talks with Tyazhpromexport, a Rostec company, on the reconstruction of the Ajaokuta Steel Plant. Nigeria stopped financing the project when the Soviet Union fell apart in the early 1990s.¹⁹ However, projects such as the Ajaokuta plant are regarded as a high risk. They can only be implemented with investor own funds under decades-long development strategies for the relevant and related industries, as well as with the host country's loan and investment guarantees. Economic feasibility of such projects remains questionable for both Russia and the host countries. Bombastic rhetoric seldom expedite their implementation, while refusal to implement such projects and agreements can affect the reputation of Russian business reputation as a whole.

As for medium-term investment projects, the demand is the highest for Russia-assisted strategic infrastructure projects, primarily port

¹⁷ Россия прорабатывает более 30 энергопроектов с африканскими странами // РИА Новости. 2024. URL: <https://ria.ru/20240314/energoproekty-1932980481.html>

¹⁸ Mali signs agreement with Russia to build gold refinery // Reuters. 2023. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/mali-signs-agreement-with-russia-build-gold-refinery-2023-11-22/>

¹⁹ Нигерия начала переговоры с РФ о возрождении проекта металлургического комбината // ТАСС. 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/20668267>

infrastructure, as well as individual projects integrated with production chains within Russia. New Russian investments in Africa are likely to be more and more often coordinated with government agencies and require state support.

Overall, the most pressing issue up till now is the low quality of project design and risk assessment, as well as inadequate information about investment opportunities in Africa. Its solution not only depends on Russia but also on African governments that continue to rely on the recommendations of international consultants who are guided by the Western agenda and the concept of the international division of labour, where Africa is only perceived as a source of raw materials. This is why more oil export projects are approved, like the Uganda-Tanzania and Niger-Benin oil pipelines, despite the shortage and high prices of petroleum products in the local markets. These projects are regarded as well-designed, even though they are designed to serve the interests of foreign companies and banks and disregard the interests of African people. African governments should pay more attention to independent work on their development strategies, industry-specific roadmaps and related projects that could receive state support and guarantees. Such projects, if offered to Russian investors in a finished or near-finished state, would bolster the development of cooperation and simplify dialogue.

Likewise, many Russian initiatives and projects are hastily prepared and proposed without properly assessing risks, partner reliability, repayment mechanisms and the situation on the ground. As a result, the valuable resource of government support mechanisms is often squandered on the economically unfeasible projects. Thus, responsibility for a thorough designing of projects should be assigned to the businesses that intend to receive state support.

Trade

Trade has become the main driver of Russia-Africa economic cooperation in recent years, with Russian exporters trying to expand to new markets and importers looking at Africa for essential commodities, which were previously imported through European traders and intermediaries.

Since 2022, it has become impossible to properly assess the dynamics and structure of trade with Africa due to the absence of open-access

statistical data. Many Russian commodities, including basic export goods, are delivered to Africa from other countries, for example, the United Arab Emirates.²⁰ It was thanks, in part, to Russian commodities that the UAE became Africa's third largest trade partner, following China and India and overtaking the United States.

According to statements by Russian officials, trade with Africa soared from \$17.7 billion in 2021 to \$24.6 billion in value terms in 2023, despite payment and shipment issues (the previous all-time high of \$20.4 billion was reported in 2018). A rapid growth of trade with Africa, which doubled between 2009 and 2018, gave way to stagnation caused by the absence of vacant low-entry market niches and dwindling purchases of Russian weapons due to the completion of rearmament campaigns by Algeria and Egypt. In the meantime, Africa's imports have not been growing for nearly a decade because of falling global prices of the majority of raw materials that remain main source of foreign exchange currency for African countries. Besides, the positive effects of Africa's debt write-off in the mid-2000s have been exhausted, while many African countries started accumulating new debts. Another reason for declining imports was the import substitution programmes, which the majority of leading African countries are implementing more or less successfully.

Compared to the 43 percent growth in Russian exports to Africa, exports to Asia only increased by 5.6 percent and decreased by 40 percent to America and 68 percent to Europe. African countries account for 5 percent of Russia's exports and only 1 percent of Russia's imports.

Mutual trade in value terms has increased primarily due to rising prices of raw materials and foods (petrochemicals, grain and fertilisers).²¹ Another factor is the increase in oil and petrochemical exports²² when old delivery routes were closed by sanctions. Before that, Russian petrochemicals (diesel fuel and fuel oil) were delivered to African consumers via European intermediaries and traders. The situation started changing in the past few years, and now European consumers receive

²⁰ Глава делового совета заявил, что тысячи компаний из РФ выходят на рынок ОАЭ // ТАСС. 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/20999297>

²¹ Африка 2023. Возможности и риски: экспертно-аналитический справочник / А. А. Маслов, В. Ю. Свиридов и др.; под общ. ред. А. А. Маслова; Нац. исслед. ун-т «Высшая школа экономики», Центр изучения Африки. 2-е изд., доп. М.: Изд. дом ВШЭ, 2023.

²² Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in a statement that Russia doubled its hydrocarbon exports to Africa in 2023. According to the London Stock Exchange, Russia increased its diesel exports to Africa by over 300% to 10.2 million tonnes in 2023. The biggest recipients were North and West African countries: Senegal, Morocco, Libya, Togo, Tunis and Ghana.

Russian oil via African countries. Potentially, Russia could deliver oil directly to African refineries, but this market is limited in Africa because of a dire shortage of refineries.

Despite the demand for Russian energy export in Africa, non-commodity non-energy exports account for the bulk of Russian deliveries. In this decade increase in Russian agricultural imports to Africa, mainly grain, but also meat and dairy products, confectionery and fish, as well as machines, metals, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and wood and paper products would likely become the main driver of trade between Russia and Africa.

Russian exporters have secured the majority of strategic market niches in Africa and even managed to strengthen their positions in some of them. Russia-Africa trade has stabilised, its further growth and diversification depends on the Russian exporters' willingness to invest in strengthening their market positions through investing in the partial localisation of production, storage, retail marketing and related services and on settling payments issues.

Russia is looking for solutions to logistics and payments, the two main problems that are hindering the development of trade with Africa. For example, the Fesco transport group and Russian authorities are discussing the establishment of a transport and logistics hub in Africa.²³ Mutual settlements could be facilitated by the use of cryptocurrencies and digital financial assets (DFA),²⁴ but the use of the latter entails the creation of new regulation mechanisms.

Another promising sphere of cooperation is investment in infrastructure for marketing and processing Russian exports (grain and oil). Russia could increase exports to the markets of pipes, pipeline construction, components for electric transmission lines, and agricultural equipment, by that creating new markets for its commodity exports.

In the meantime, Russia's exports to Africa are seven times larger than imports from Africa. The fact that Russian exports to Africa are much larger than imports acts as a restricting factor in relations with African countries. First of all, African countries may tend to perceive Russia as a country that is using Africa in its own interests without giving much in return or contributing

²³ Fesco и Минпромторг обсуждают создание ТЛЦ в Африке // РИА Новости. 2023. URL: <https://ria.ru/20230912/tlts-1895709129.html>

²⁴ Россия обсуждает со странами Африки и Мьянмой расчеты в ЦФА 2024 // Известия. 2024. URL: <https://iz.ru/1651107/2024-02-16/rossiia-obsuzhdaet-so-stranami-afriki-i-mianmoi-raschety-v-tcfa>

to its economic development. So far, Africans seldom see Russia as a buyer or a promising market for their commodities.

In addition, a considerable trade deficit can also hinder the growth of exports, especially when it is based on the lifting of tariff and non-tariff barriers, because the buyers of Russian products are concerned about the balance of payments too. The absence or low volume of commodity flows are hindering the introduction of new payment mechanisms, lending facilities, especially with vital partners such as Senegal, Tanzania and Nigeria.

Strategic Russian industries could benefit from increasing certain imports from Africa, especially because most African imports do not compete with domestically produced goods (excluding potatoes, tomatoes, onions and wine). In several other spheres (cocoa beans, manganese ores, and some rare earth metals), Africa remains a critically important supplier for the Russian economy.

It would be reasonable to compile a list of African exports to Russia that would benefit both partners. This should be done to liberalise trade in these commodities in the near or medium term.

An African vector for BRICS

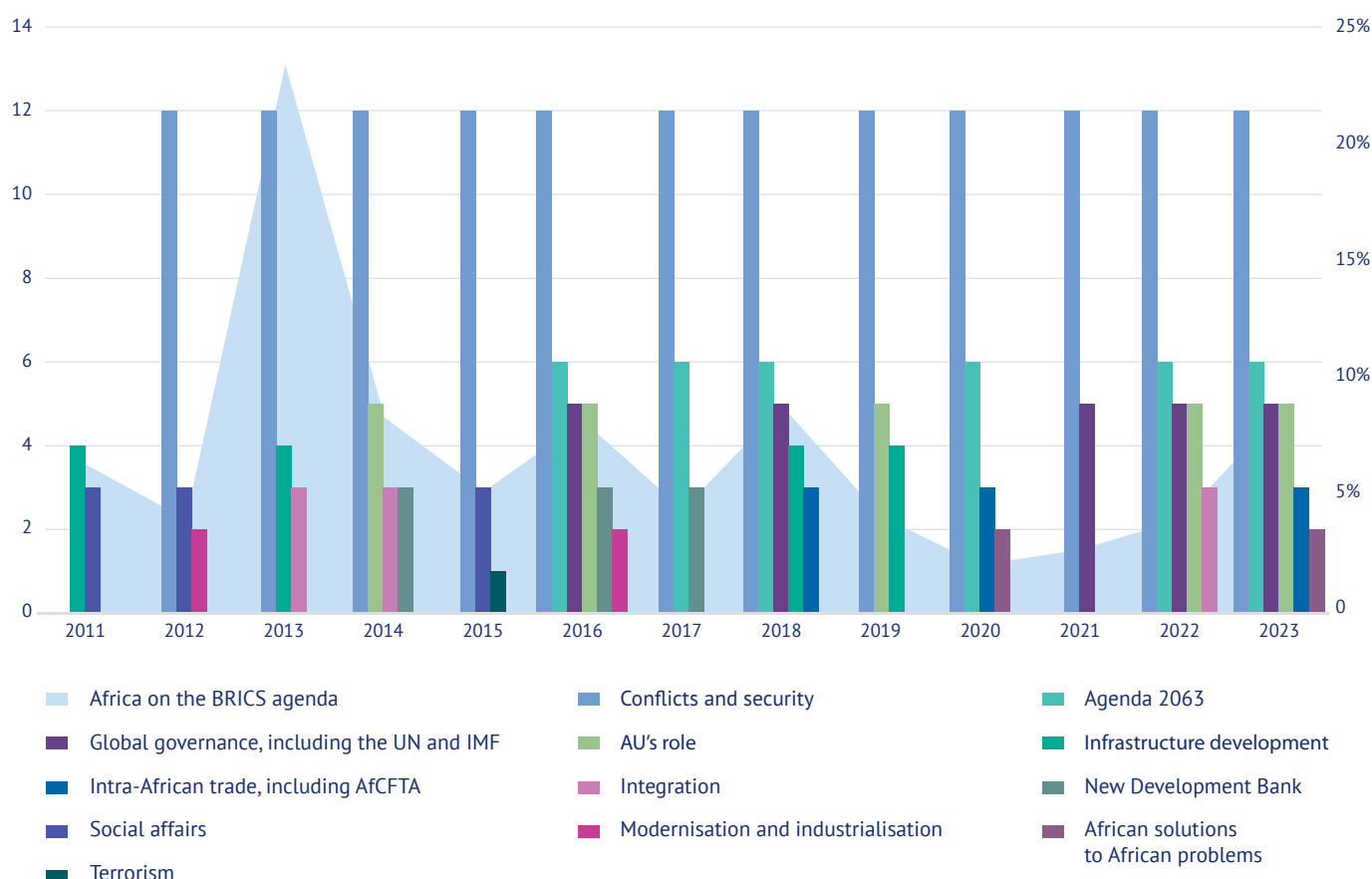
BRICS acquired the African vector after South Africa joined BRIC in 2011. This was when the club started working on the African agenda, which initially revolved around two main dimensions: to gain momentum in efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and to support infrastructure development under the auspices of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, or NEPAD.

It is important to note that all declarations following BRICS summits always refer to the African agenda. While the priorities and focus areas may have shifted over time, Africa stands out as the only region to get this kind of treatment in these documents.²⁵

The historical summit in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2023 resulted in the BRICS expansion. By hosting it, South Africa demonstrated the

²⁵ Маслов А. А. Африканское измерение саммита БРИКС // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/afrikanskoe-izmerenie-briks/>

AFRICA AND KEY AFRICA-RELATED TOPICS ON BRICS AGENDA



Compiled by the HSE Centre for African Studies

maturity of its diplomacy in terms of its ability to deliver on objectives at a global scale, since it acted as a focal point for adopting this decision, while being pressured by the West and still managing to remain on good terms with the Western countries. On the other hand, this expansion has deprived South Africa of its role as Africa's sole voice within BRICS. In fact, prior to the expansion, South Africa could articulate the African agenda within BRICS on its own by placing the emphasis as it deemed fit. It was also free to pick other countries for working with them within the BRICS Outreach format. But now it will have to coordinate and agree on these decisions with Ethiopia and Egypt despite all the differences they may have between them. However, in a way, the fact that these countries joined BRICS can be viewed as South Africa's victory. After all, Egypt mostly focuses on the

Middle East in its policy, while Ethiopia is not as heavyweight as Nigeria and has its own domestic challenges, even if it may aspire to becoming a regional leader, especially since its capital, Addis Ababa, hosts the African Union's headquarters.

As a continent, Africa has the most participants in BRICS since Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE joined the association. Brazil retained its monopoly and remained the only Latin American country after Argentina backed out of the BRICS, while the fact that Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE became part of this group did not affect the status of other participants. All it did was make the Middle East a new regional pillar for BRICS.

Both Egypt and Ethiopia accepted the invitation to join BRICS with great enthusiasm. There is now a proactive effort underway to harmonise diplomatic approaches among these and other new BRICS participants. Chaired by Russia, the upcoming summit in Kazan is expected to demonstrate the cohesion of this bloc in its new format and its ability to deliver on its targets and ambitions. The summit will also show whether BRICS has a regional group within it which would articulate Africa's development goals or present the African agenda in a new light. All BRICS countries will have to facilitate these efforts.

The 2023 Johannesburg Summit Declaration offered a general outline for the African agenda by addressing the representation of African countries and their involvement in the global agenda, achieving the goals and objectives of the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, including by promoting effective integration, launching AfCFTA and, finally, promoting peace and stability across the continent. It is quite possible that in 2024 these three topics will find their way into specific action plans and initiatives, which, in turn, would be a first step towards shaping a common BRICS policy for Africa and pave the way to joint practical initiatives targeting Africa as a whole.

Fuelling growth through the New Development Bank

It is obvious that apart from shaping policy, the new BRICS participants will also be looking forward to working with the founding countries on an alternative financial infrastructure in order to finance joint projects, as well

as carrying out mutual payment settlements.²⁶ Today, the New Development Bank, or NDB, can be viewed as the main achievement on this track. However, it remains part of a unipolar, dollar-centric international financial system, even if its very purpose is to offer an alternative. Moreover, the NDB has to abide by the restrictions imposed by the United States and its allies on Russia. It had to de facto suspend its projects in Russia, while projects in third countries with Russia's involvement have yet to get off the ground. Considering the lack of progress in reforming the quota system within the World Bank and the IMF, which currently privileges the so-called developed countries in their ability to designate priorities, NDB plays a special role for the developing countries. One thing worth mentioning is that NDB created a regional centre in Africa, which demonstrates the importance of promoting development in African countries on the BRICS agenda.²⁷

However, the parameters governing the way the BRICS newcomers will participate in the NDB remain work in progress. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa have 100,000 subscribed shares and 100,000 exercisable votes each as the NDB founding members. However, now that the UAE and Egypt acquired 5,560 and 11,960 exercisable votes, respectively, the bank will have to specify the way it will be managed. Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and Iran have yet to join the NDB.²⁸ For now, the shareholding for the new BRICS countries varies from 1.06 percent to 2.27 percent, which places them far below the original five in terms of the voting power (18.98 percent each).

However, their ability to undertake specific projects within the NDB is even more important. At this point, they are underway in six countries only: the founding five plus Bangladesh. It may well be that Egypt and the UAE will get their projects soon, since they have already entered the bank's shareholding structure. There is no doubt that the agenda of the Kazan summit will include NDB's work in other countries, for example Ethiopia. So far, NDB has limited its African projects to South Africa where it funded over 20 projects.

²⁶ Маслов А. А. Африканское измерение саммита БРИКС // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/afrikanskoe-izmerenie-briks/>

²⁷ Maslov A., Sukhova D. BRICS expansion: What's in it for Africa? // RT. 2023. URL: <https://www.rt.com/africa/582200-expanding-brics-summit-africa/>

²⁸ Plus Bangladesh, which, not being a member of BRICS, has 9,420 votes. See New Development Bank. Shareholding. URL: <https://www.ndb.int/about-ndb/shareholding/>

For example, having the NDB finance projects dealing with food security and logistics could serve as a major impetus for expanding Russia-Africa cooperation, fighting hunger and dealing with the vital issues affecting Africa's most vulnerable countries. However, the bank has been sticking to an extremely cautious and conservative approach so far by refraining from making any bold moves or assuming risks.

Education and knowledge sharing for a better future

Educational cooperation has been a major topic in the relations between Russia and Africa. Nevertheless, it was mostly viewed as a supplemental domain rather than a core pillar of cooperation. However, this is about to change, which demonstrates Russia's long-term strategic commitment to its Africa policy. Knowledge sharing is about to become central to forging a mutually beneficial relationship, ensuring humanitarian and political leverage and building a foundation for future achievements.²⁹

By prioritising education, Russia could create an incentive for African countries to consider Russia as a major foreign policy priority. This could also help the two sides harmonise and align their respective institutional frameworks, which would have a positive impact on the most promising areas of cooperation and contribute to expanding trade.³⁰

During the 2022-2023 academic year, over 34,000 African students studied in Russia. In fact, this number has been increasing from one year to another.³¹ Russia has also increased the quotas for the government scholarships it awards to African students to enable them to enrol in Russian universities. There were over 4,700 scholarships for the 2023-2024 academic year, up from over 2,300 in 2022-2023. The total number of African students may well reach 50,000 on the back of Russia's efforts to step up its political ties with Africa.³² In fact, there is everything it takes to reach this threshold

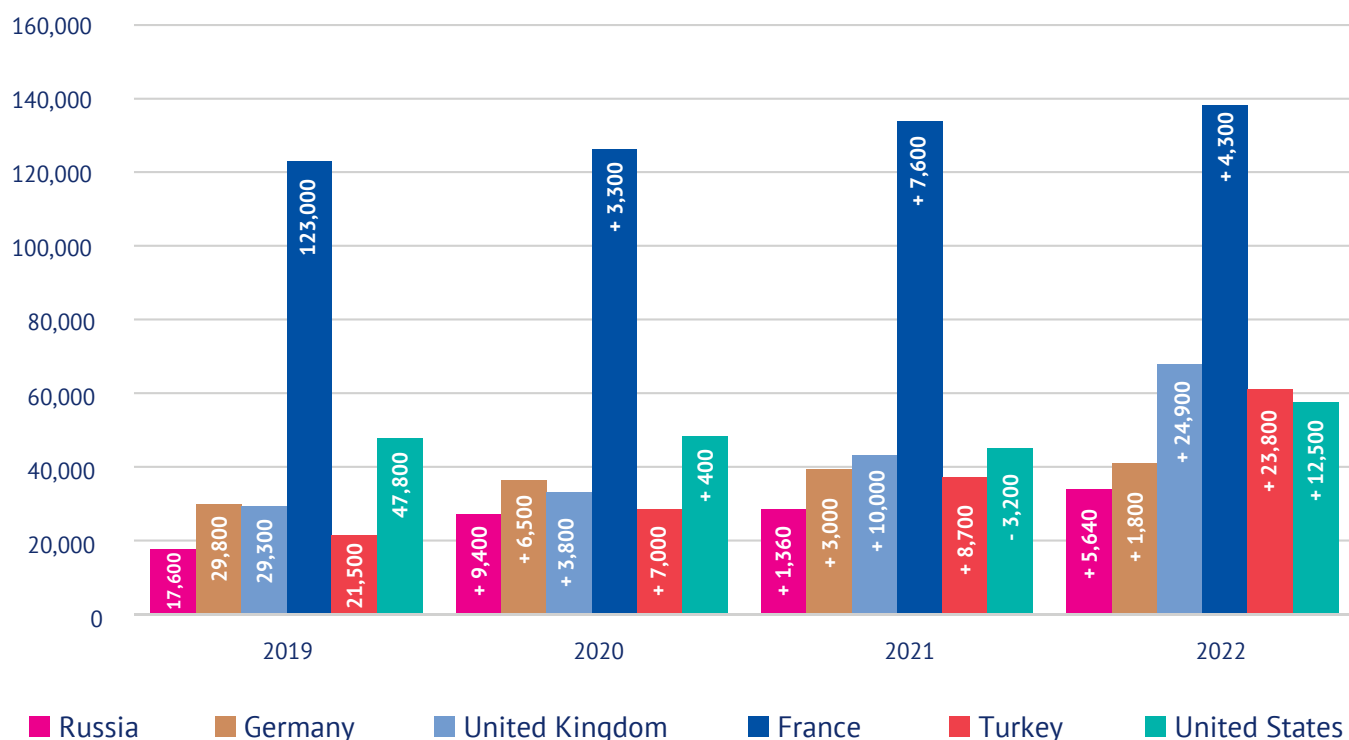
²⁹ Маслов А. А. Центр силы: чего Африка ждёт от России и что Россия может получить от Африки? // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/czentr-sily-afrika/>

³⁰ Африка 2023. Возможности и риски : экспертно-аналитический справочник / А. А. Маслов, В. Ю. Свиридов и др.; под общ. ред. А. А. Маслова; Нац. исслед. ун-т «Высшая школа экономики», Центр изучения Африки. 2-е изд., доп. М.: Изд. дом ВШЭ, 2023.

³¹ Число африканских студентов в РФ увеличилось за год более чем на 10% // ТАСС. 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/18580233>

³² Что изучают в России студенты из стран Африки // Ведомости. 2023. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2023/06/16/980633-cto-izuchayut-v-rossii-studenti-iz-stran-afriki>

AFRICAN STUDENTS AROUND THE WORLD



Source: Compiled by the Higher School of Economics Centre for African Studies based on data from the media, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and foreign ministries of the relevant countries

since candidates are eager to study in Russia and are willing to compete for these scholarships. According to the latest open data, Africans filed over 11,000 applications in 2022-2023.

However, one should not confine its educational cooperation with Africa to attracting its students. There is a growing number of initiatives of all kinds to promote closer ties between universities. In July 2023, several higher education institutions came together to establish the *Subsoil of Africa* consortium for training specialists in mining sector.³³ Representatives from nine African countries – Ghana, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Angola, Mali, Namibia, Zambia, Nigeria, and South Africa – signed the agreement, with St Petersburg Mining University representing Russia. Also in 2023-2024, the Russian-African Network University (RAfU) has been making great strides in its development with the number of participating universities reaching 63 for Russia and 31 for Africa. In December 2023, the Kazan Federal University and the St Petersburg State University opened their branches in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. Over 350 students are currently enrolled in these institutions, with most of them studying medicine.

³³ Санкт-Петербургский горный университет. Соглашение о намерениях о создании общественно-профессионального сообщества технических университетов Африки «Недра Африки». 2023. URL: <https://unesco.spmi.ru/sites/default/files/files/MoU.PDF>

According to the Ministry of Education, there are five joint projects underway in science and technology. They benefited from special grants and involve Russian entities and their African partners from Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Egypt, and Guinea. In May 2024, a programme to award grants for research projects carried out in cooperation with African countries summed up its results. In April, MGIMO University hosted the 3rd international youth forum titled *Russia-Africa: What's Next?* Its mission consists of promoting stronger youth-to-youth dialogue between Russia and Africa and offering a platform for prominent Russian and African speakers.³⁴

There will be more demand for economists, legal experts and managers who know their way around African countries as Russia and Africa build a stronger relationship. To address this challenge, the Higher School of Economics established a dissertation committee in April 2024 designed to deal with and promote African studies. It became the first committee of this kind for Russia. In 2023, the same university started offering more courses on working with Africa and is now training economists and political researchers with a focus on working with the countries from this region and applied research.

In fact, educational cooperation can well serve as a conduit for bringing together government institutions, businesses, academia and society at large. Apart from enabling universities to work closer together and attracting more African students to Russian universities, one must put a greater emphasis on developing relations on the ground by focusing on the domains that matter the most for both Russia and African countries.

When taking the floor at various bilateral events, African speakers tend to focus on the need to address the key practical matters, including the mutual recognition of academic credentials and publications in Russian and African academic journals, scholarships to students from their countries, as well as undertaking mobility programmes for students and faculty members. There is also the acute issue of easing visa restrictions for key partner countries, including Algeria and Egypt.

African countries have also voiced interest in hosting laboratories and attracting Russian specialists who would undertake educational initiatives and contribute to promoting the most relevant areas of studies, including science and innovation. This kind of cooperation could include

³⁴ Форум «Россия — Африка: что дальше?» // МГИМО. URL: <https://mgimo.ru/about/structure/student-org/forum-russia-africa/>

joint research projects in engineering, agriculture, food security, logistics, the digital transformation, as well as efforts to give local laboratories a bigger role in carrying out these hands-on initiatives.

Again, educational cooperation between Russia and Africa should not be confined to training students. Advanced professional education for the specialists who already work in their respective sectors are equally important. In fact, knowledge sharing programmes could create a framework for expanding economic and technological partnerships while also being an effective tool as part of the development diplomacy.³⁵ Knowledge sharing creates an opening for transitioning from simply selling goods, services, introducing specific solutions and technology to facilitating long-term development, promoting capacity building for the recipient countries and enabling them to become **self-reliant** by benefiting from the experience and possibilities of their partner country. This framework perfectly suits Russia considering its readiness to share its technical expertise free from interference in domestic politics.

Studying the local context and adapting the existing solutions and knowledge to meet the needs of specific partner countries, including through knowledge sharing with the local experts, must be a priority for programmes of this kind.³⁶ This would be an effective way to receive feedback from local experts along with information about the way reforms are advancing, and the obstacles they face, as well as external influence and interference. This feedback could enable the parties to adjust their policies. Traditionally, knowledge sharing used to be carried out along the North-South axis. However, there has been positive momentum lately in South-South and South-North knowledge sharing, as well as various trilateral initiatives involving both North and South donors. This, in turn, paves the way to closer ties between African partners, among other things enabling them to replicate and master each other's best practices and solutions.

In December 2023, Moscow hosted the Winter E-Governance Knowledge Sharing Week for African officials organised by the Higher School of Economics Center for African Studies with the support from the Russian Government and its Foreign Ministry.. It brought together

³⁵ Африка 2023. Возможности и риски : экспертно-аналитический справочник / А. А. Маслов, В. Ю. Свиридов и др.; под общ. ред. А. А. Маслова; Нац. исслед. ун-т «Высшая школа экономики», Центр изучения Африки. 2-е изд., доп. М.: Изд. дом ВШЭ, 2023.

³⁶ Knowledge and Learning Group, Africa Region. Capacity Enhancement through Knowledge Transfer: A Behavioral Framework for Reflection, Action and Results // World Bank. URL: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/831571468204561755/pdf/628580WP0Capac00Box0361494B0PUBLIC0.pdf>

government officials from African countries for exchanging best practices and knowledge in the digital transformation of public administration. The initiative was part of the e-Governance Knowledge Sharing Program. This event demonstrated that there is a lot of demand for Russia's educational programmes for government officials: 44 representatives from 22 countries and three international organisations (the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, IGAD and the Economic Community of Central African States) completed the training course.³⁷

Humanitarian cooperation

Humanitarian ties

Humanitarian ties have emerged as an increasingly important part of Russia's relations with Africa. In fact, Russia has been making a meaningful contribution to mitigating the humanitarian challenges in this region for quite a while now. Its key initiatives included writing off Soviet-era debt in the 2000s, contributing to the UN Development Programme, delivering humanitarian aid through its Emergencies Ministry, as well as sending Russian specialists to fight epidemic outbreaks in Guinea, the Republic of the Congo and other countries. That said, Russia has been channelling most of its humanitarian aid through international organisations such as the World Food Programme, the World Health Organisation and the World Bank by focusing on funding specific projects. This basically led to the erosion of Russia's contribution while the oversight over the way these funds were used was extremely poor.

Russia's humanitarian cooperation with Africa made a major step forward last year when Russia sent its grain and fertilisers there. Uralchem's first humanitarian deliveries to African countries in late 2022 and early 2023 offered an opportunity to test the mechanism enabling Russia to deliver food products to Africa for free. This paved the way to the initiative to send between 25 and 50 tonnes of grain to each of the following countries: Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Mali, Somalia, the Central African Republic and Eritrea. President of Russia Vladimir Putin announced this initiative during the Russia-Africa Summit in St Petersburg.

³⁷ E-Governance Knowledge Sharing Week Connects African Digitalization Leaders // E-Governance Knowledge Hub. 2023. URL: <https://e-governancehub.ru/2023/12/22/e-governance-knowledge-sharing-week-connects-african-digitalization-leaders/>

In this context, this becomes something more than just a humanitarian or reputational matter. According to various estimates, grain deliveries to Africa could be worth between \$40 million and \$85 million,³⁸ while fertiliser deliveries were equal to about \$60 million or even more than that. Moreover, Russian companies and government institutions gained experience working with African and international institutions, chartering ships and deciding where to send supplies on its own. One can assume that corporate interests also played a role in Uralchem's choices considering its priorities in terms of expanding the foothold of its target markets. This also included distributing the supplies and delivering them to end consumers. There is an effort to devise and test several frameworks for delivering humanitarian aid, including state-run and private initiatives.

In the future, one need to transition from one-off humanitarian campaigns to systemic initiatives. This would primarily entail creating the required infrastructure for these deliveries.³⁹

Strategic consulting can play a key role in facilitating these developments. This could include helping developing countries draft national development strategies, plans for developing their economies and specific sectors. The effort to provide strategic consulting could also include helping African countries draft laws and regulations as well as create information systems and formal structures for supporting the decision-making process. There is also the issue of training personnel, both on the ground and by offering scholarships. This way, consulting and knowledge sharing could serve as one of the main tools in the pursuit of long-term interests in terms of foreign economic relations and foreign policy. One should put a premium on humanitarian initiatives in the main sectors in trade and economic relations such as agriculture, ICT, energy, manufacturing and transport.

People-to-people dialogue

People-to-people ties between Russia and Africa and efforts to facilitate cultural ties and dialogue between civil societies are just as important as humanitarian aid and projects. More Africans are coming to Russia, and there is more news coming from Africa too. As develop relations are developing, there will be even more African students studying in Russia.

³⁸ Щедрый подарок: Путин пообещал поставить в Африку меньше процента от урожая зерна // Forbes. 2023. <https://www.forbes.ru/prodovolstvennayabezopasnost/493647-sedryj-podarak-putin-poobesal-postavit-v-afriku-men-se-procentaot-urozaa-zerna>

³⁹ Маслов А.А., Свиридов В.Ю. Гуманитарно значимый экспорт – основной интерес России в Африке // Международный дискуссионный клуб «Валдай». 2023. URL: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/gumani-tarno-znachimyy-eksport/>

There could be also more labour migrants. And all this demonstrates the need to make sure that people in Russia get to know Africa better.

Russia and Africa have gone a long way and achieved meaningful results on that path. There have been more exhibitions on Africa in Russian museums, as well as screenings of African films. The Museum of Oriental Art announced its initiative to establish the Museum of African Culture.⁴⁰

At the same time, more Africans have been able to learn information about Russia and get to know its culture. Russian media outlets, primarily RT and Sputnik, played a key role in achieving this objective by expanding their footprint in Africa, along with various Russian companies and entities. For example, during the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit, Innopraktika and the University of Dakar (Senegal) signed an agreement to create a Russian media library and lecture hall at the university.⁴¹ Good old Soviet-era tradition of playing exhibition football matches also re-emerged. In autumn 2023, Russia played against Cameroon and Kenya and these events took place in a very warm and friendly atmosphere.

Taken together, all these initiatives help prevent xenophobia and racism which can undermine cooperation. This is why one must make sure to keep these matters on our radar.⁴²

African neutrality

Since February 2022, African countries have consistently adopted a neutral position regarding the crisis in Eastern Europe. Over the past year Africa has not changed it despite the growing Western pressure.

Unlike the West, Russia does not require African countries to unconditionally support what it does in Ukraine, even though part of Africa's political elite does support Russia's policy and rhetoric.⁴³ On the contrary,

⁴⁰ Музей культуры стран Африки появится в Москве // Министерство культуры Российской Федерации. 2023. URL: https://culture.gov.ru/press/news/muzey_kultury_stran_afriki_poyavitsya_v_moskve/

⁴¹ В Университете Дакара создадут Русскую медиатеку - лекторий «Иннопрактики» // ТАСС. 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/18396959>

⁴² Маслов А. А. Центр силы: чего Африка ждёт от России и что Россия может получить от Африки? // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/czentr-sily-afrika/>

⁴³ Африка 2023. Возможности и риски: экспертно-аналитический справочник / А. А. Маслов, В. Ю. Свиридов и др. ; под общ. ред. А. А. Маслова; Нац. исслед. ун-т «Высшая школа экономики», Центр изучения Африки. 2-е изд., доп. М.: Изд. дом ВШЭ, 2023.

Western countries have been trying to force African countries to stop working with Moscow. Moreover, over the past two years, Ukraine has gone to great lengths to gain a bigger diplomatic presence in Africa by allocating \$25 million to open new embassies there, and has already inaugurated missions to DR Congo, Rwanda, and Cote-d'Ivoire. These initiatives are mainly designed to exert more pressure on Russia in international organisations and on other platforms.

When the crisis was still in its early days, the West relied on hardball tactics in its attempts to force African countries to give up on their neutrality by threatening them with sanctions and drafting legislation for countering Russia's regional presence, even if these initiatives never materialised because African countries refused to be treated this way. The West also sent its senior government officials to tour the region and persuade African countries to stop supporting Russian projects, condemn the special military operation and even supply weapons to Ukraine. If the past two years are any guide, this kind of pressure failed to deliver the desired results.⁴⁴

On the contrary, some African countries, just like the Persian Gulf monarchies, assumed the role of convenient economic agents and mediators, and filled the niches on the European markets, for example, in terms of energy supplies, which were left vacant after Russia was forced out of them. Africa's main goal is to prevent this global confrontation from affecting its countries without hurting its relations with the West or with Russia, considering the latter's major role in guaranteeing its food and energy security. Africa achieved this objective without incurring any major losses.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other senior government officials have visited Africa on several occasions, which made a meaningful contribution to maintaining a stable relationship with the countries across this continent. Meetings held as part of these visits focused on the Ukraine issue and other global challenges.⁴⁵ It is quite telling that sensitive issues such as the future of the grain deal or Vladimir Putin's participation in the BRICS Summit in South Africa, did not result in any insurmountable differences between the parties who were able to compromise on these and other matters.

One can expect this neutral and overly positive attitude towards Russia to prevail among African countries in the future regardless of

⁴⁴ Маслов А. А., Свиридов В. Ю. От созвучия риторики к практическим шагам // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. Т. 21. № 2. С. 197–206. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/ot-ritoriki-k-praktike/>

⁴⁵ Панин Н. Когда Африка не за горами // РСМД. 2023. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/kogda-afrika-ne-za-gorami/?sphrase_id=143832559

Russia's confrontation with the collective West. Demanding that African governments refuse to work with the United States, European countries, Japan, South Korea and the like would be unreasonable and short-sighted. They will preserve a meaningful influence in the region despite all the miscalculations, mistakes and failure to take note of Africa's efforts to strengthen its sovereignty. The series of government coups that swept the Sahara-Sahel region, as well as the fact that Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso asked US and French troops to leave their countries demonstrated that the Western approaches to its relations with the region are going through a crisis, rather than the West is doomed to vacate Africa for good.

This is by far not the first crisis of this kind and it is quite possible that it has been provoked by the West itself. For example, reducing France's military presence in Africa from over 10,000 personnel to under 1,000 makes it possible to shift responsibility for security in the Sahel region from France to local governments and other actors, such as Russia. This move could also free up resources, including military personnel, which could be redeployed elsewhere, for example, in Ukraine.

Considering Russia's commitment to facilitating the development of its friendly African countries and making them stronger, it is essential that Russia prevents its standoff with the West from spilling over into African territory. This is something the West has been eager to achieve. In the long run, what benefits Africa will inure to Russia's benefit too.⁴⁶ Therefore, the fact that African countries maintain their ties with the West should not be viewed as a risk or a threat.

There is a tradition in African politics to refrain from taking sides in any given conflict as long as possible and reject the zero-sum game. Building closer ties with one power does not mean that one have to detach oneself from others.⁴⁷ Africans do not accept European-style narrow-minded linear and polarised mindset, which is something Russia could learn from Africa.

⁴⁶ Маслов А. А., Свиридов В. Ю. От созвучия риторики к практическим шагам // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. Т. 21. № 2. С. 197–206. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/ot-ritoriki-k-praktike/>

⁴⁷ Маслов А. А. Становление африканской цивилизации и африканизация мира // Россия в глобальной политике. 2023. Т. 21. № 4 (122). С. 180–191. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/afrikanizacziya-mira/>

Expanding Russia's physical presence in Africa

The general drive to develop Russia-Africa relations has helped Russia expand its continental presence in all its aspects. Having closed its embassies in Burkina Faso and Equatorial Guinea back in 1992, Russia re-established its diplomatic presence in Burkina Faso in December 2023, while preparations for opening an embassy in Equatorial Guinea are entering the final stretch. And there are plans to open diplomatic missions in other African countries too.

In addition, Russia has increased the headcount at the existing embassies by sending more diplomats there, including agricultural attachés. Moreover, the Russian Ministry of Digital Development sent its digital attaché to the embassy in South Africa to promote Russian ICT solutions.⁴⁸ There were also decisions to set up trade missions in Nigeria and Ethiopia. In the long run, this effort to inflate the staff numbers and enhance the institutional capacity of the Russian diplomatic missions will enable these embassies to move beyond their current focus on politics and representations by prioritising efforts to expand trade and economic relations.

Another thing worth mentioning is the fact that Burkina Faso and Niger officially confirmed that the Russian military specialists were present on their territories as a logical follow-up to the effort to breathe new life into Russia's presence in the Sahara-Sahel region and its commitment to an open, reasonable and consistent policy. The next step is to normalise the presence of Russian military specialists in Mali.

The gradual effort to expand the network of Russian Houses across Africa constitutes another important track. These institutions operate as the representative offices of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation of the Russian Federation, also known as

⁴⁸ Чернышенко сообщил о назначении российских «цифровых атташе» в шести странах. ТАСС. 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/17893907>

Rossotrudnichestvo, or its authorised structures in Africa. As of May 2024, there were eight official Rossotrudnichestvo offices in Africa: in Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa and the Republic of the Congo. The fact that there are so few of them has been viewed as one of the key challenges in terms of enabling Russia and Africa to forge closer humanitarian ties. This way, Russian embassies have had to shoulder an additional burden by assuming the responsibilities of these Russian Houses. This included, for example, allocating scholarships according to the assigned quotas. To address this issue, Rossotrudnichestvo decided to rely on a network of privately-owned Russian Houses funded by the interested private entities.⁴⁹ The first house of this kind opened in Burkina Faso in January, and there are plans to open similar institutions in Sierra Leone, Algeria, and other countries.

The idea of delegating some functions to non-state structures in African countries is not new and many other countries, including in the West, have used this approach by having non-profit and other civil society organisations and foundations act in the interests of various extra-regional actors within their area of purview. There must be a clear strategy for this policy to effectively coordinate all state and private stakeholders, especially considering that the funding for these initiatives either comes entirely from the state budget or its affiliated structures.

Meanwhile, Russian businesses have noticeably expanded their regional presence in Africa. For example, Kaspersky Lab opened its Transparency Centre in Kigali, Rwanda, in late 2023.⁵⁰

Russia has also gradually improved its transport connectivity with the African countries to enable more tourist flows. In particular, Aeroflot launched direct flights to Mauritius in late 2023 and increased the number of flights to the Seychelles. Nordwind is working on launching direct flights from Russia to South Africa.⁵¹ Addis Ababa remains Africa's main travel hub for people travelling from Moscow, while Mauritius and the Seychelles do not operate as regional transport hubs, depriving the direct flights there of their multiplier effect. In addition to Addis Ababa, Russia and its partners need a hub for ensuring better connectivity with other airports across the continent. This role could be potentially played by Kigali or Algiers. Direct flights between Russia and African countries could be operated primarily by African airlines such as Air Maroc, Air Algérie, Rwanda Air, and others.

⁴⁹ В Буркина-Фасо появится негосударственный Русский дом // Россотрудничество. 2023. URL: <https://rs.gov.ru/news/v-burkina-faso-poyavitsya-negosudarstvennyj-russkij-dom/>

⁵⁰ Global Transparency Initiative update // Kaspersky daily. 2024. URL: <https://www.kaspersky.com/blog/gti-update-april-2024/51094/>

⁵¹ Посол ЮАР допустил, что прямые рейсы из РФ в республику может запустить Nordwind // ТАСС. 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/20090323>

Considering that more Russian tourists are willing to travel to Africa and the growing business and cultural contacts, Russia will need to operate more direct flights to African countries. This entails a whole host of related matters, including devising payment mechanisms and easing visa restrictions.

African migration

In 2023, 99,800 Africans entered Russian territory,⁵² setting a post-pandemic record. This upward momentum spilled over into 2024 – the number of Africans who travelled to Russia in the first quarter of 2024 increased by 5,000 compared to the same period in 2023. This means that we can well exceed the absolute record set in 2018 with 150,000 crossings in a matter of years. The purpose of these visits are evolving too: the number of students is growing, while the number of labour migrants has been on the rise as well.

Russia could try to partially offset the demographic challenges it faces, including labour shortages, by attracting qualified labour migrants from Africa. Climate change may come in handy for Russia as more of its territory becomes fit for living.

Most of the Africans leaving the continent were compelled to do so by economic factors. This is the case for 80 percent of these migrants. They tend to get jobs quite quickly and therefore contribute to the economic development of the receiving countries. For example, Africans account for 10 percent of medical staff in Germany. Considering that Russia is a long way from Africa,⁵³ illegal migration should not be a major challenge.

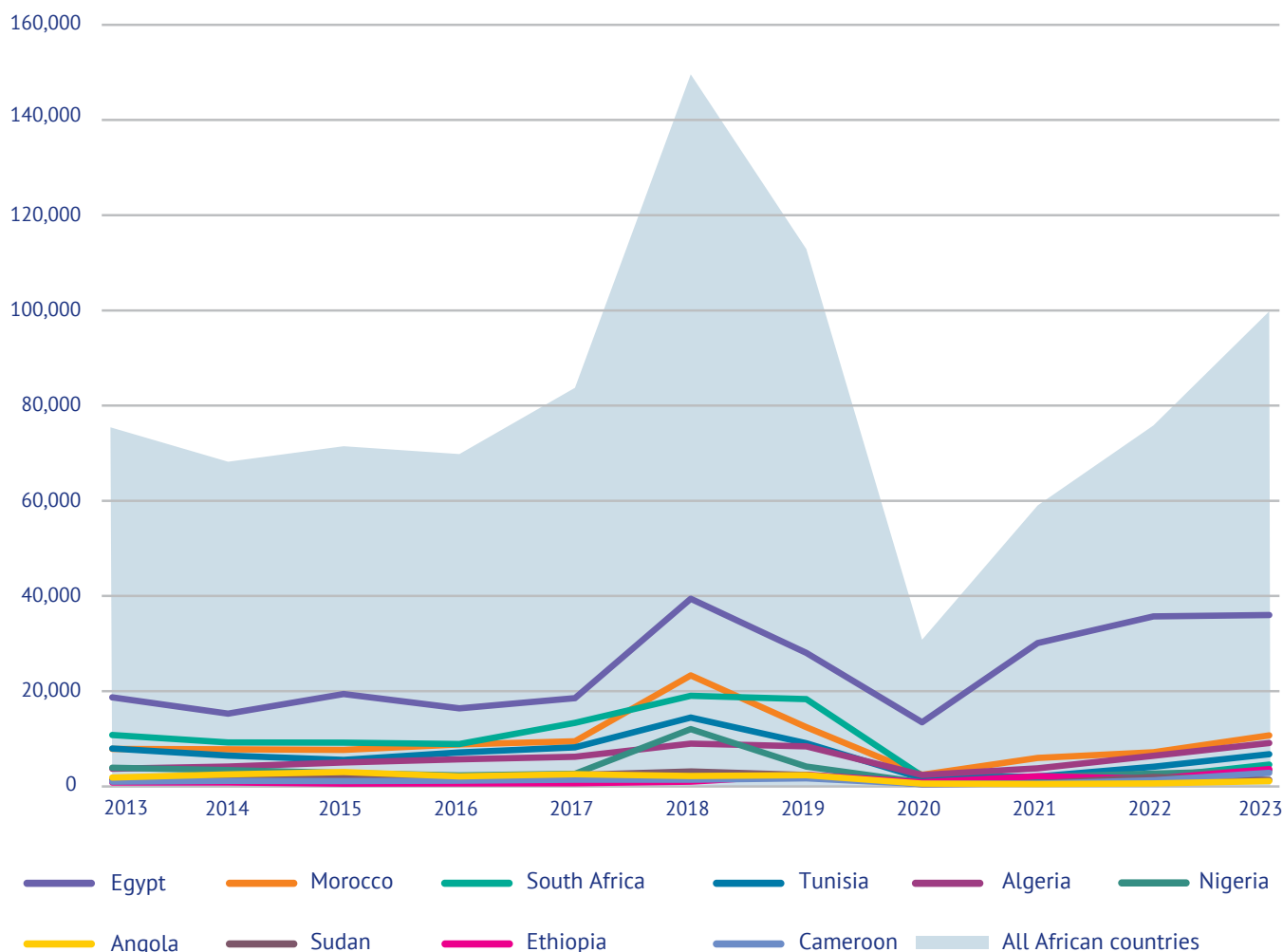
But it is already high time for Russia to act in order to promote social integration for African students to enable them to seamlessly transition into the labour force. This could include facilitating access to internships and offering them employment opportunities in Russian companies. If, in addition to studying in Russia, they get work there, this could be useful in terms of communicating with these African students once they go back to their countries.

Visa requirements are an essential element in Russia's relations with African countries, but so far this matter has failed to attract much

⁵² Въезд иностранных граждан в РФ // ЕМИСС. URL: <https://www.fedstat.ru/indicator/38479>

⁵³ Africa and Europe: Facts and Figures on African Migrations // Africa Europe Foundation. URL: https://www.friendsofeurope.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/AEF_Summit_African-Migrations.pdf

AFRICANS ENTERING RUSSIA



Compiled by the HSE Center for African Studies based on data from Fedstat.ru

attention. Russia and Africa have yet to tap the potential of easing visa requirements as a tool for expanding our trade, economic and cultural ties, although the Foreign Ministry has been undertaking system-wide efforts to enact visa-free travel for the holders of diplomatic passports. It is worth noting that in most cases countries offering Russians visa-free entry are small island states which play a relatively minor role in Russia's overall economic cooperation with Africa.⁵⁴

Improving visa regulations must go hand in hand with efforts by other authorities to offer direct flights to African countries, allocate more

⁵⁴ Маслов А.А., Свиридов В.Ю., Сулов Д.В., Мезенцев С.В., Зайцев В.Ю. Африка: перспективы развития и рекомендации для политики России: доклад по итогам ситуационного анализа. М.: Международные отношения, 2021. URL: https://globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/doklad_afrika_perspektivy-razvitiya.pdf

scholarships to African students and improve the conditions for living and working in Russia for Africans. Even when provided unilaterally, visa-free travel tends to have a positive impact on further negotiations with African countries on easing visa requirements for Russians, which can become a major factor considering the changing geographical preferences of the Russian tourists.

A to-do list for the next Russia-Africa summit

The first priority within the 2026 horizon would be to facilitate **Russian investment** in Africa by creating a favourable environment. Russia's annual trade surplus with Africa exceeds \$20 billion, which means that Russia could use at least 10 percent of this amount to launch new investment projects, including to further expand its exports.

The West has frozen about \$300 billion worth of Russian assets, which basically means confiscating this money, especially considering the decision, unprecedented and appalling as it is, to use the interest generated by these funds to support Russia's adversary. Therefore, the West can no longer offset the low investment yields by offering risk-free environment. In the long run, Russia is expected to retain its status as a global capital donor and step up its investment operations in Africa, including in terms of state and private investment. In fact, the state can play a major role in regulating this investment activity by offering guarantees, diplomatic support, as well as expert and analytical support and relying on a network of intertwined and complementary institutions for promoting investment.

However, Russian projects are being kept under the burden of high interest rates, which has become a constraining factor in terms of developing Russia-Africa cooperation. The already high interest rate of the Russian Central Bank plus several percentage points to address Africa-related risks make the Russian offer too steep and uncompetitive for Africa. This means that projects to expand Russian exports to Africa must benefit from subsidised interest rates. That said, to provide these subsidies, Russia must be sure to generate returns on these projects and carry out thorough feasibility studies.

African countries should not expect Russia to provide more European-style assistance such as loans, transfers or grants. All these allocations do is freeze the recipient's state institutions in their dependency and weakness and

create a lasting debt burden. Russia chooses a different path in its efforts to assist Africa. For example, its initiative to give exporters transport subsidies ensured that African buyers benefit from lower prices compared to French and US products. Therefore, another goal would be to align these support measures with Russia's political priorities and spread the word about them, considering that even those who benefit from these measures are often unaware of their existence.

Second, technology transfers and **knowledge sharing** must be high on the agenda, since these processes go hand in hand with efforts to expand trade and investment cooperation and are instrumental in terms of exporting technological sovereignty. Africa has an immense potential in terms of its workforce, which can help expand bilateral cooperation and even contribute to developing the Russian economy. Therefore, Russia must focus on training more qualified workers and specialists by making education in Russia more attractive. Enrolment competition can serve as a benchmark, while the best African students in Russia must benefit from scholarships. Meanwhile, Russia will have to offer more opportunities for studying Russian in African schools. All the investment Russia makes in capacity building and knowledge sharing must be treated as strategic investment in promoting comprehensive development and expanding cooperation rather than merely a humanitarian supplement to the political agenda.

Third, the fact that both Africa and Russia are destined to play a bigger role in global politics and economics is obvious. Africa is still quite a sparsely populated continent and continues to suffer from a huge deficit in terms of its infrastructure. In the 21st century, population growth and infrastructure development will define economic growth patterns there. Russia will also rely on the South and the East in terms of its demographics and development by focusing on new markets, infrastructure development and exports. Africa is expected to account for a larger portion of Russian exports. An increase in migration flows from Africa to Russia seems imminent too, which means that the parties must already act to make sure that integration of new naturalized Russians proceeds in an orderly and balanced manner.

Russia's efforts to reinforce its positions in Africa creates new opportunities for the continent. The same holds the other way around. In fact, instead of competing against one another, Russia and Africa need each other to be strong, stable and independent. Having a shared vision for the future in which economic freedoms and trade globalisation do not limit or infringe upon the diversity of values and political and civilizational systems is even more important. This forms the very foundation of our cooperation in the 21st century.

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