



RUSSIA'S PIVOT TO AFRICA

In October 2019, the first Russia-Africa summit was held in the Russian resort city of Sochi, chaired by the presidents of Russia and Egypt, Vladimir Putin and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the latter in his capacity of the current chair of the African Union. In total, 43 heads of state and government arrived in Sochi, and another 11 countries were represented at different levels. First of all, this summit was considered as a great success of Russian diplomacy as it was a challenging task to gather so many heads of African states at one place and one time. More importantly, the summit has become a symbol of Russia's "return" to Africa, from where it left after the collapse of the USSR. It is obvious that the intensification of the African direction of Russian foreign policy is associated not only with Moscow's political and economic interests, but also with its geostrategic goals. This is part of Russia's strategy to enhance its clout and compete with the West all over the world, be it Africa, Europe, Latin America or the Middle East.

In the historical perspective, the Soviet Union generally had a good image in Africa, and Russia attempts to actively use this heritage. The USSR actively supported the struggle for independence on the African continent, including in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, and courted leftist regimes, such as in Ethiopia. However, all those activities ended after 1991, and Russia was practically absent in the continent until the mid-2010s, when the Russian economy grew stronger and its foreign policy ambitions significantly increased. Initially, Russia was particularly active in developing relations with South Africa that subsequently joined the BRIC.

Thus, Russia is gradually increasing its presence in Africa, primarily in the military sphere. Moscow has buttressed its involvement in Africa through participating in peacekeeping operations and the international anti-piracy task force off the coast of Somalia. As Russia moves "deeper" into the continent, it signed an agreement on military cooperation with the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2018. Based on this agreement, groups of Russian military and civilian instructors are sent to the CAR to train the armed forces, in addition to supplies of weapons and ammunition. Reportedly, the two countries are in negotiations on the opening of a Russian military base in the CAR. It is also noteworthy that Russia is a leader in arms supplies to Africa. In 2018, Russia supplied African countries with arms worth more than \$2 billion. North African countries are the main customers

of Russian weapons – this region accounted for about 75% of Africa's total arms imports from 2014 to 2018.

The latest developments suggest that the Russian establishment has decided to expand its presence in Africa's economic and political fields. Since Africa accounts for approximately 30% of the world's mineral reserves, Russia's economic interests are related to the extraction of precious metals and other natural resources, the development of gas and oil fields, and projects in the field of peaceful atom. Russia does not produce equipment for the development of mineral deposits, but certainly possesses relevant experience and technology in these areas and even has comparative advantage in the development of nuclear energy. African economies will require a steady increase in energy supply, so the construction of nuclear power plants is a tangible prospect for Russia.

The next key aspect is that Africa may become an important market for Russian goods. After the imposition of Western sanctions against Moscow, Africa is the only region that has been increasing imports from Russia. Besides, after the introduction of counter-sanctions, the Russian agro-industrial sector has significantly increased its capacity in the absence of competition and due to sizable government funding and currently needs new markets for its products. The trade turnover between Russia and Africa in 2018 amounted to about \$20.4 billion, \$17.4 billion of which are Russian exports. For instance, the Russian companies Uralchem and Uralkali plan to increase their annual exports of fertilizers to Africa from about 100,000 tons to 500-600,000 tons.

In the political realm, Russia will try to follow the example of China and actively use the potential of African countries in the UN, since the continent has 55 votes at the UN General Assembly. The Russian political system and ideological platform as a whole are very close to those of most African regimes. Moreover, unlike U.S. and European partners, Moscow will not attach requirements to respect human rights and maintain transparency in financial transactions to arms trade deals, loans or other assistance. Therefore, it is easier for the Russian leadership to find a common language with many African countries, especially with those part of the political elite of which studied in the Soviet Union.

However, Russia has a number of problems that may interfere with its ambitious goals in the African direction. Due to persistent economic problems, Russia does not have an opportunity to significantly

increase its investment in Africa, and their volume today is about \$3 billion, far behind China, the United States and the EU. African countries need infrastructure development, therefore they actively cooperate with China within the Belt and Road Initiative. In September 2018, at the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in Beijing, Xi Jinping announced a new financing package for Africa of approximately \$60 billion and soft loans, which are issued at reduced or zero interest rates.

Apart from China, there are also the United States and the EU, which have so far made significant investments in Africa and are actively involved in humanitarian operations, such as the fight against Ebola. Similar to Moscow, Washington can always increase arms sales to African countries by closing eyes to ideological issues, as it often happens with the Middle East. Thus, it appears that Russia needs to offer the African continent some alternative strategy, different from China, Europe, and the United States. However, the summit in Sochi has not outlined or formulated any common features of such a strategy. At the time, the Soviet Union used an anticolonial ideology and was well-known for doing many things for free, although its assistance was subject to conditions. Obviously, present-day Russia cannot afford that kind of policy.

On the other hand, Russia's proactive involvement in Africa can cause a disgruntled reaction in China that tries to behave as a world power in its relations with African countries. In 2013, Beijing acted as a mediator in the South Sudanese civil war, its first attempt to influence domestic political processes in another country. Gradually, China will increasingly face a need to act as a leader in Africa and use its growing influence. In this context, interests of Russia and China may collide, but a conflict is unlikely as for Russia today its relations with China are more important. If in the case of Central Asia Moscow has many advantages and reasons to take risks, the African continent is far away and Russia's interests there are not so critical.

Ultimately, the Sochi summit had more of a political agenda than an economic one. For Russia, it was one more manifestation of its status of a great power. It was also related to the internal political agenda and foreign policy: to demonstrate to its own population and the outside world that Russia is not isolated on the international arena. In any case, if Russia continues to pursue a consistent policy towards Africa, it may succeed in occupying its niche and increasing the volume of trade, which may positively affect the country's economy.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process 8th Ministerial Conference was held in Istanbul, under the theme “Peace, Partnership and Prosperity”. The event participants reaffirmed their commitment to peace and development in Afghanistan and endorsed the Implementation Plan for Agriculture Development Confidence Building Measure, welcoming Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan’s willingness to lead this initiative (Hurriyet Daily News 10.12.2019).
- During the 14th international high-level meeting on Syria held in Nur-Sultan, the delegations of Iran, Russia, Turkey, the Syrian government and the Syrian armed opposition addressed the situation on the ground in Syria. In their joint statement, the three guarantor states rejected all attempts to undermine Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemned Israel’s continuing military attacks in Syria (MFA of Kazakhstan, 11.12.2019).
- According to the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan, three attempted terrorist attacks were prevented in the country in 2019, two in Almaty and one in the Karagandy region. The perpetrators were in possession of firearms and components of explosive devices, and their possible targets included buildings of law enforcement agencies, large shopping centers, cultural facilities, and financial institutions (Tengrinews, 12.12.2019).
- During his official visit to the United States, Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Mukhtar Tileuberdi held talks with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on ways to deepen bilateral enhanced strategic partnership. The minister also met with the U.S. National Security Council officials and congressmen from the Friends of Kazakhstan caucus, and visited the World Bank headquarters to discuss relevant cooperation issues (MFA of Kazakhstan, 12.12.2019).
- The ninth annual meeting of deputy foreign ministers of the Central Asian states organized by the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia was held in Tashkent. The participants exchanged views on challenges to stability and security in Central Asia and ways to address them, paying particular attention to extremism and terrorism, water/energy nexus, connectivity, socioeconomic development, and interaction with Afghanistan (UNRCCA, 14.12.2019).
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, in collaboration with the Italian Institute for International Political Studies, organized an international conference “Italy and Central Asia: Strengthening Mutual Understanding, Cooperation and Partnership” in Rome. The parties discussed priority areas of cooperation between the regional countries and Italy, including in the framework of the new EU strategy for Central Asia (ISPI, 13.12.19).
- During their meeting in Kiev, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed an agreement on the creation of a bilateral strategic council. The council will cover four fields – politics, trade and economy, defense and security, and cultural and humanitarian cooperation (Agenda.ge, 13.12.2019).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The 18th meeting of the Azerbaijan-Russia intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation was held in Baku. The parties discussed prospects of bilateral trade and investment cooperation, including the development of the North-South international transport corridor, and signed a number of documents, including the programs of cooperation in the agro-industrial and tourism sectors for 2020-2022 (Azertag, 09.12.2019).
- The meeting of the heads of government of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, the member states of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM, was held in Kiev. The parties reviewed opportunities for expanding mutual cooperation and developing the public-private partnership in the implementation of GUAM projects and initiatives in trade and transport (GUAM, 12.12.2019).
- As part of the visit of the delegation of Iranian government officials and entrepreneurs, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan hosted a business forum of the two countries in Tashkent. During the event, representatives of leading Uzbek and Iranian companies discussed prospects for developing bilateral trade, economic and investment projects in various areas (UzA, 13.12.2019).
- During his working visit to London, Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Askar Mamin met with President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Suma Chakrabarti to discuss bilateral cooperation in the implementation of public-private partnership projects. Following the talks, the parties signed a memorandum of understanding on the implementation of the Comprehensive Program for the Modernization of Healthcare Infrastructure in Kazakhstan (Government.kz, 12.12.2019).
- During the talks in Nur-Sultan, the representatives of the Kazakh Ministry of National Economy and the Turkish Eczacibasi Holding discussed the implementation of new joint projects. In particular, the holding expressed interest in implementing projects in Kazakhstan for the production of consumer goods, geological exploration, as well as development, mining and processing of minerals (Trend, 10.12.2019).
- In accordance with a memorandum signed by KazakhExport and Wuhan Asia Europe Logistics in November 2019, the Zhongshang supermarket chain in the Chinese city of Wuhan inaugurated the first thematic department in the Kazakh national style. It will sell food products and beverages produced by Almaty Product, Arba Wine, Eurasian Foods Corporation, Raimbek Botlers, Rakhata, RG Brands, Sultan Marketing and other Kazakh companies (Kazinform, 13.12.2019).
- Moldova and Ukraine signed the memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of natural gas supply security. The document that provides for information exchange and coordination of activities to prevent, mitigate and manage emergency situations is aimed at ensuring a stable supply of gas to Moldovan consumers, including through reverse gas flows, in case of a termination of Russian gas transit via Ukraine (Moldpres, 13.12.2019).

Society and Culture

- The opening ceremony of the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS) headquarters in Nur-Sultan took place in the building of the Astana International Financial Center. On the same day, the IOFS held the fourth regular meeting of its executive board to discuss current activities of the organization aimed at enhancing practical cooperation between the OIC member countries in the field of food security (MFA of Kazakhstan, 12.12.2019).
- Almaty hosted the first regional seminar “Network of Strong Cities” on the prevention of violent extremism. The event was attended by practitioners and experts from the Central Asian countries, as well as representatives of international organizations. In particular, the participants examined the role of interaction between municipal authorities, civil society and local communities in the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning from war zones (MFA of Kazakhstan, 11.12.2019).
- During his visit to Budapest, TURKSOY Secretary General Dusen Kasseinov met with high-level Hungarian officials to discuss issues pertaining to the development of cultural cooperation between the organization and Hungary. The parties agreed upon the participation of Hungarian artists and intellectuals in TURKSOY activities such as Nevruz celebrations, the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World, and commemorative events to be carried out in 2020 (TURKSOY, 10.12.2019).
- The first concert of the tour “Melodies of the Turkic World” dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Yunus Emre Institute was held in Budapest. The event, organized in cooperation with the TURKSOY, introduced traditional Turkic music and dance performances to the audience in Hungary with an orchestra gathering artists from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkey along with Uyghur Turks (TURKSOY, 11.12.2019).
- The traditional Turkish archery was inscribed on the UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as Turkey’s 17th element. This was announced during the 14th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Bogota, Colombia (Anadolu, 13.12.2019).
- A ceremony marking the inauguration of the Belarus Friendship Square was held in the Bakirkoy district of Istanbul with participation of city officials, Belarusian diplomats, and representatives of business and public organizations. The Belarusian Polifonika choir performed a folk-based program as part of the ceremony (Belarus24, 11.12.2019).
- The Belarusian city of Brest held a ceremony of passing the title of the CIS Capital of Culture over to Kazakhstan’s city of Shymkent that will celebrate its 2,200th anniversary in 2020. “The CIS Capital of Culture” is the interstate program, under which the CIS member states share knowledge of history and culture in an effort to promote peace, friendship and interaction between peoples (BelTA, 10.12.2019).