

Russia's Historic Initiative In Sochi, the First Russia-Africa Summit

by Christine Bierre

Oct. 25—The Russian city of Sochi hosted the first ever Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum on October 23 and 24. Representatives of all 54 African countries attended this summit to discuss increasing cooperation with Russia in all fields—political, economic, security, cultural, and in particular, aid in setting up civilian nuclear power facilities (see the following article). Heads of state and government and other officials were present, along with representatives of the Russian, African and international business communities, and the public sector and cooperation organizations of the African continent. All in all, more than 3,000 participants attended the event.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt co-presided at the event with President Vladimir Putin. In a welcoming statement he noted that the African countries were ready for such cooperation, following their July decisions to ratify the creation of an African Continental Free Trade Area, and the launching of its operational phase at the extraordinary summit of the African Union (AU) in Niamey, Niger, on July 7. “This is one of the main objectives of the 2063 Agenda whose aim is to respond to the demands for more prosperity and dignity of the African population,” he stated.

Former president Obama, arrogantly, liked to depict Russia as a regional power. With his timely intervention into Syria, to stop the regime change against Assad and create the conditions for peace, and with this comeback to Africa to contribute to its development through nuclear power, President Putin has created the conditions



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Russian President Vladimir Putin (foreground) and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, on Putin's left, at the Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum in Sochi, Russia on October 23, 2019.

for Russia to play once again the role of a world power. The summit, Putin said,

is a starting point for building a fair partnership relation based on equality and mutual practical interest. . . . Our country has played a significant role in the liberation of the continent, supporting the struggle of its peoples against colonialism, racism and apartheid. . . . Later on, we helped the Africans to protect their independence and sovereignty, gain statehood, form the basis for national economies, and create capable armed forces . . . Soviet and subsequently Russian specialists built important infrastructure facilities, hydroelectric power plants, roads and industrial plants in Africa while thousands of Africans received a quality professional education at Russian universi-



Vladimir Putin addressing the plenary session on October 23.

ties. . . . This is well remembered by many current African leaders, who value our support. We too keep the memory of those pages of history.

Former “communist allies,” such as Ethiopia and

Angola, were among the most important participants, but also more recent friends, such as the Central African Republic and some West African states. Many African leaders have been going to Moscow recently, reports *Le Point* in France: Mozambique’s president Filipe Nyusi, Sassou Nguesso of Congo-Brazzaville, and João Lourenço of Angola, and others.

Russia to Double Trade with Africa

In his opening statements to the Summit, Putin went through the great effort that preceded it, indicative of Russia’s determination:

Multiple events on specific fields of Russian-African cooperation have been held over the past year. They include an economic conference and a meeting of the African Export-Import Bank’s Board of Directors in Moscow last June.

The program of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum included a special ses-

Putin: Russia Favors ‘Civilized Competition in Africa’

In an interview with the Russian News Agency TASS on October 20, ahead of the Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin, drew a picture of Russia’s trade and development policy with respect to Africa. The interview, headlined, “Putin: Russia Ready To Compete for Cooperation with Africa,” is posted on the websites of the Kremlin and Tass.

In that interview, Putin laid down clearly the kind of cooperation Russia wants to have with Africa, in contrast to that of the Western imperialists, saying:

We are not going to participate in a new “repartition” of the continent’s wealth; rather, we are ready to engage in competition for cooperation with Africa, provided that this competition is civilized and develops in compliance with the law. We have a lot to offer to our

African friends. This will be discussed, among other things, at the forthcoming summit.

We see a number of Western states resorting to pressure, intimidation, and blackmail against governments of sovereign African countries. They hope it will help them win back their lost influence and dominant positions in former colonies and seek—this time in a “new wrapper”—to reap excess profits and exploit the continent’s resources without any regard for its population, environmental or other risks. They are also hampering the establishment of closer relations between Russia and Africa—apparently, so that nobody would interfere with their plans.

According to Putin,

Interest in developing the relations with African countries is currently visible not only on the part of Western Europe, the United States, and the People’s Republic of China, but also on the part of India, Turkey, the Gulf states, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Israel, and Brazil.

sion on advancing cooperation with the African continent. There have been many other themed exhibitions, seminars, Russian-African business mission exchanges, and in-depth and engaged discussions of prospective joint projects in trade, investment and industry-specific programs.

To reiterate, African countries are becoming increasingly attractive for Russian businesses. This is largely due to the fact that Africa is becoming a global economic growth centre. According to experts, Africa's GDP will have reached \$29 trillion by 2050.

Russia-Africa trade more than doubled over the past five years and exceeded, as our colleague just said, \$20 billion. Is that a lot or a little? A colleague of ours said this is a good figure. I cannot agree with this. I think it is way too little. After all, ladies and gentlemen, keep in mind that Egypt accounts for \$7.7 billion, or 40 percent, of these \$20 billion. We have many potential partners in Africa, lots of them. They have good development prospects and enormous growth potential. Of course, this is not enough.

Russian enemies in the west are deriding Putin's efforts, spreading the idea that Russia is only capable of exporting weapons, which Putin rejects. Even though an in-depth exchange is planned on matters of coordination of anti-terror measures and the fight against trans-national criminal and other challenges and threats to regional and world security, Putin noted that the product range of trading is expanding, and the share of agricultural and industrial products is increasing relative to weapons:

Russia is among the top ten suppliers of food to the African market. We are now exporting more agricultural products than weapons to the markets of third countries. Weapons account for \$15



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The heads of delegations to the Summit. Vladimir Putin is in the front row center, with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to his right and President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa on his left.

billion of our exports, whereas agricultural products are nearing \$25 billion in sales.

Integration processes unfolding in Africa provide additional opportunities for cooperation. We welcome the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area as part of the African Union and are willing to work with this new entity.

We support establishing close working contacts between the AU Commission and the Eurasian Economic Commission, which will sign a memorandum of understanding tomorrow. As an active participant in the EAEU [Eurasian Economic Union], Russia will do its best to facilitate the convergence of trade regimes in the African Free Trade Area and the EAEU common market.

Notably, bilateral intergovernmental commissions and business councils established with many African countries are working energetically on the economic agenda of Russia-Africa ties, and Russia plans to expand its trade mission network, to support businesses and to establish new contacts.

The Coordinating Committee for Economic Cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa, created under the auspices of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry ... assists Russian entrepreneurs in accessing the African markets and

helps businesses implement joint investment projects. . . .

Gazprom, Rosneft, and Lukoil are already implementing promising oil and gas projects on the continent. Alrosa is developing diamond deposits; Yandex is present in the markets of a number of countries, and helps African states address information security challenges and develop the digital economy. Rosatom is willing to build the nuclear industry for its African partners as a turnkey project and to build research centers based on multi-purpose reactors.

The construction of the Russian Industrial Zone in Egypt is nearing completion. This is a major site in the Suez Canal Economic Zone, where Russian companies will be able to localize their production facilities. About 20 Russian companies will participate in this project. This is the current estimation and I am quite certain there will be more of them.

Industrialization, Science Dominate Forum

Reports on the agreements reached during the Russia-Africa Economic Forum held on October 23 are beginning to come in. One thing is clear: The African nations are thinking big, and Russia is stepping up to support them. Some examples: the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) is considering establishing offices in a number of African countries, particularly in Ethiopia, South Africa, Egypt, and Uganda, RAS Vice President Yuri Balega told Tass.

Alexey Likhachev, head of Rosatom, Russia's nuclear power corporation, told Tass that he had had the honor of participating in all the bilateral meetings President Putin held with African leaders on October 23—with at least eight countries, according to the Kremlin website—and in “all meetings the question was raised of advancing our cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear power.” Likhachev continued,

I can say that we have created a full-fledged regulatory basis with a third of African countries. About half of the African states are discussing, or have already concluded, concrete contracts and launched joint projects with us. As for the



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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and African Union Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat shake hands after signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Oct. 24 that outlines basic principles of relations and cooperation.

other countries, we are still in talks with them, hopefully with chances of success.

Nor does Russia have any intention of denying Africa the use of its fossil fuel deposits. The CEO of Lukoil, Vagit Alekperov, told reporters that “an array of agreements” for exploration cooperation, mostly offshore, were to be signed October 23. Requests from several countries for aid in developing downstream projects (e.g., refining) have been received, but he cautioned that those projects face more “challenging” considerations.

The topics of the numerous panels ranged from housing construction to securing economic and technological sovereignty, and included the possibilities for joint transport infrastructure projects, developing integrated processes and collaboration between the Eurasian Economic Union and Africa, possibilities for industry and energy cooperation, using minerals in Africa for the benefit of its people, healthcare—and much more.

The agenda set for the panel on “Russia and Africa: Science, Education and Innovation for Economic Development” characterizes the tenor of the entire forum:

The accelerated development of both Russia's and Africa's economic potential is inextricably linked to scientific output and the improvement of general education and training. The 21st century has heralded the rise of the knowledge

economy. Scientific research and development result in new products and industries, and are able to make a vital contribution to tackling current social and economic challenges facing our countries.... What can Russia offer today in terms of developing science and education in Africa, particularly as part of the African Union's Agenda 2063? What new opportunities does cooperation in science and education with countries of the African continent present to Russia?

More than 500 Deals Signed

At the end of the Summit, according to Russian presidential adviser Anton Kobyakov, "the number of signed agreements, memorandums, and contracts is more than 500; the overall worth of only those that we know about at this moment is more than 800 billion rubles. This is a little more than \$12 billion. But the meetings continue," Sputnik reported.

Earlier, Russia announced it is writing off more than \$20 billion in debt that African countries accumulated during the Soviet era. "It was not only an act of generosity, but also a manifestation of pragmatism, because many of the African states were not able to pay interest on these loans," Putin told Tass on the eve of the summit.

While Russia's relationship to Africa cannot be reduced to security matters, this is an important aspect of the partnership. Africa suffers badly from the spread of weapons and terrorism caused by the Obama-Sarkozy criminal military expedition against Gaddafi's Libya. Now Russia is said to have the intention to use its particular expertise in this matter to help the continent fight against the evil of Boko Haram. Russia is Africa's largest arms supplier, and Putin noted that its military cooperation extends presently to more than 30 African nations, and Russia could expand its training programs to military and security personnel. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, agreed to renew a lapsed military cooperation agreement with Moscow while at the same time establishing a joint venture between Nigeria's public oil company and Russia's Lukoil for deep offshore prospecting.

In his concluding statements, Putin expressed joy and hailed the Summit as "historic": "This event really opened a new page in relations between Russia and the States of the African Continent," he said. A sentiment shared by his African partners. South African International Relations Minister Naledi Pandor told the South

African Daily Maverick:

We're very clear; our big message is that we're ready for investment; we're ready for partnership. We want partnerships that are real, that will support us in advancing the objectives we have set for ourselves. I think the summit fits in with our president's and our country's objectives in the three or four key areas: first is our objective in greater economic growth and job creation; the second would be investing in sectors such as the marine economy, advancing innovation and technology development.

Perhaps as many as a hundred South African companies had registered for the Russia-Africa Economic Forum.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa commented, "What stands Russia in good stead in the eyes of many African countries is that Russia was never a colonial power."

Russia Offers Africa 'Atoms for Peace'

Oct. 25—On October 23, the Russia-Africa Economic Forum in Sochi hosted a special panel discussion on the "Contribution of Nuclear Technologies in the Development of Africa," with the participation of Director General of Rosatom, Alexey Likhachev.

This was one of the key topics of the forum's business program. Likhachev discussed the capabilities of nuclear technologies, and their potential roles in the development of the continent, with other session participants, including the IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the its Department of Nuclear Sciences and Applications, Najat Mokhtar; the head of the Zambia Atomic Energy Agency, Roland Msiska; the Minister of Infrastructure of the Republic of Rwanda, Claver Gatete; the Minister of Innovation and Technology of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Getahun Mekuria Kuma; and other representatives of relevant ministries and corporations.

The stark reality is that Africa is in dire need of energy: 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa together