

## RUSSIA – AFRICA

*Research article*

### **RUSSIA-AFRICA SUMMITS IN THE CONTEXT OF A CHANGING WORLD: A VIEW FROM THE AFRICAN CONTINENT**

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**Abstract.** Since the beginning of the 21st century, Africa has once again become a space of competition between the great powers in the context of a new geopolitical configuration of the world. Despite the formal independence of the continent's countries in the 1960s, Africa is still *de facto* dependent on the major actors of world politics, which calls into question its subjectivity in international politics. The search for a change in relations with the countries of the continent is reflected, *inter alia*, through the organization of "African" summits by major world powers.

The organization of Russia-Africa summits in 2019 and 2023 confirms the thesis that Africa is a strategically important platform in the search for a balance of power between the great powers. However, in all these diplomatic initiatives, Africa has the right and the opportunity to determine for itself the key issues that will help it to effectively embed itself in the new geopolitical system while strengthening its economic, social, and political importance. Even if the socio-economic context remains dependent on numerous endogenous and exogenous factors, the new formula that Africa is facing today can now be achieved not necessarily through multilateral meetings alone. Africa's role as a systemically important component of the international system has been limited by its relatively low level of participation in world trade and GDP. It therefore seems appropriate for the various Russia-Africa summits to move beyond the traditional framework in which the continent is underrepresented and redefine the boundaries of the partnership towards mutual dynamics, both politically and economically, which are the main thrusts of the Russia-Africa summits.

**Keywords:** Russia, Africa, summit diplomacy, multilateral relations, Great Power Rivalry, economic partnerships, Russian foreign policy

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## INTRODUCTION

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the USSR two years later, the Americans, as the French geopolitician P. Boniface notes, preferred to be the winners of the Cold War rather than the builders of a new world order, hoping to live in a unipolar world with no rivals [Boniface 2018: 39]. The disappearance of the Soviet bloc opened the way for the triumph of liberal ideas, the market economy, and the domination of Western transnational corporations on a global scale [Sur 2004: 104]. According to the Beninese scholar and public figure V. Topanou, the unipolar world was understood as an international system in which the majority of power is concentrated in the hands of a single superpower [Topanou 2017: 39]. According to this thesis, American hegemony was perceived not only as an obvious fact but also as a positive tool to ensure the stability of the international community, its democratization, and progress.

However, after a decade of dominance, the US has come under pressure from the new demands of globalization. It is not so much about the decline of America itself as about the changes in the international system *per se*, where new centers of influence began to form and the need for economic and political diversification and integration emerged, where one state can no longer single-handedly determine the agenda and rules for the rest of the world [Garcin 2001: 178]. Moreover, within the international community, it was not American hegemony but, on the contrary, resistance to American hegemony that was becoming the organizing principle [Boniface 2018: 131].

In general, the beginning of the 21st century did not justify hopes for peace and stability but, on the contrary, was marked by the beginning of a new conflict page in the socio-economic and political history of the world<sup>1</sup>. The most pressing global problem is the issue of security and confrontation with international terrorism. This became evident after the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, a new escalation of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, this time with the participation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and the invasion of Iraq by the US-led military coalition in 2003. These events prompted most states, regardless of their size and weight in the international system of relations, to search for new approaches to ensuring their internal and external security. Especially since no state can cope with cross-border terrorism alone, and joint and synchronized action is required.

In the face of the global challenges of the early 21st century, Russia's role is becoming increasingly important. The coming to power of President V.V. Putin in the early 2000s allowed Russia to overcome the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet bloc [Perspectives diplomatiques 2017: 10]. The Russian president defined the collapse of the Soviet Union as one of the worst geopolitical catastrophes of the 20th century<sup>2</sup> and began to reconsider his country's position on the international arena. As the French expert N. Moulin notes, today Russia's foreign policy is based on two main concepts. On the one hand, Russia positions itself as a stronghold of conservative forces, which sees its mission in the fight against liberal ideas imposed on the world by the United States and

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<sup>1</sup> Rapport 2018 sur la pauvreté et la prospérité partagée: compléter le puzzle de la pauvreté. *Banque Mondiale*. <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/research/brief/poverty-and-shared-prosperity-2018-piecing-together-the-poverty-puzzle-frequently-asked-questions> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>2</sup> Putin explained why he considers the collapse of the USSR the biggest catastrophe of the 20th century. *RIA Novosti*. 13.06.2017. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20170613/1496353896.html?ysclid=m4mv63pjlb920209622> (accessed: 12.11.2025)

Europe. On the other hand, there is the so-called “Russian world,” which today extends beyond Russia’s national borders [Perspectives diplomatiques 2017: 30].

Putin’s speech in Munich (Germany) in 2007 with a harsh criticism of the US-led unipolar world<sup>3</sup> was seen by many experts as a step towards the revival of Russia’s lost leadership role as the successor of the USSR. Putin set the task of defining his country’s rightful place in the international arena. The task did not imply the role of a secondary regional power; it contained the desire to build a power in accordance with its potential and capabilities, return to a position of equal dialogue with the United States, and implied, in particular, the search for new partners and going beyond the friendly ties inherited from the Soviet era [Saaf 2016: 8].

The grounds for Russia’s qualitatively new return to the international arena were confirmed by its direct involvement in resolving a number of subsequent conflicts and international crises: the South Ossetia-Georgia conflict in 2008, the problem of Crimea’s relations with Ukraine in 2014, control over the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea, the conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Russia demonstrated its capabilities at a certain stage of the Syrian crisis, when it managed to persuade President Bashar al-Assad to liquidate the arsenal of chemical weapons in 2014 and then openly act on his side with the participation of the Russian Air and Space Forces in the fight against the armed opposition and terrorist groups, without entering into direct conflict with the United States and Turkey, which were also fighting in Syria.

In this context, it was natural for Russia to turn its attention to Africa, whose role in the global economic and geopolitical space has changed significantly over the last thirty years of Russia’s absence there. In recent years, the issues of Russian-African cooperation in the context of summit diplomacy have been covered in the works of leading Russian Africanists, I.O. Abramova and L.L. Fituni [Abramova, Fituni 2019; Abramova, Fituni 2021; Abramova, Fituni 2022; Fituni 2023], as well as A.B. Mezyaev [Mezyaev 2020]. A Russian-language academic article summarizing the results of the Second Russia-Africa Summit has also been published [Andreeva et al. 2023]. Critical analyses of Russian summit diplomacy are presented in the works of Western Africanists [Bilban, Hainzl 2023; Droin, Dolbaia 2023; Dusoulier 2019; Duursma, Masuhr 2022; Kalika, 2019; Kanet, Moulioukova 2022; Vigne 2018], as well as Turkish experts [Acma, Tekang 2024]. Great power competition in Africa (“African geopolitics”) as well as perceptions of Russia’s African strategy by Africans themselves and other extra-regional players have also been reflected in a number of works [Ahcène 2022; Chena 2020; Hugon 2006; Issaev, Shishkina, Liokumovich 2022; Okoli 2024].

## REBALANCING

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s internal economic and political processes weakened its presence on the African continent. This was clearly evidenced by the closure of nine embassies and four consulates, trade missions, and cultural centers in Africa in 1992. As Belgian researcher E. Vigne notes: “The years following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 were marked by a sharp decline in Moscow’s involvement in Africa. Faced with a deep economic and financial crisis and serious internal problems,

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<sup>3</sup> Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy. *President of Russia*. 10.02.2007. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

the Russian state's primary focus was on overcoming the shock caused by the collapse of the Soviet system and the ensuing internal crisis" [Vigne 2018: 7].

However, it should be noted that after 1991, Russia did not completely withdraw from the continent and continued to develop co-operation with several countries in various economic, military, and cultural aspects. First of all, with Egypt, South Africa, Algeria, and Morocco. At the turn of the century, such Russian economic giants as Gazprom; Rosneft Oil Company; United Company Rusal; Lukoil, one of the largest Russian oil companies; ALROSA, the Russian diamond mining group; Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation; Yandex, a Russian multinational information technology company; and others also came to the continent.

At the same time, Russia's economic presence in Africa lacked political support and the state's strategy towards the continent as a whole. Therefore, during the same period, Russian-African contacts at the highest political level began to be restored: in the early 2000s, the heads of Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Gabon, Guinea, Nigeria, and Ethiopia paid official visits to Russia. In September 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited South Africa and Morocco. In 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited Angola, Egypt, Namibia, and Nigeria, and a number of agreements on joint implementation of major economic projects in Africa were signed.

Russia's new African policy, behind which the traditions of the USSR were seen, was expected on the continent. It is therefore necessary to briefly outline the differences in the history of Africa's relations with European countries (the so-called West) and Russia (the Russian Empire, the USSR). The Africa-Europe line can be divided into three phases: the era of traders, during which the continent developed trade with the Western world, including the painful period of the slave trade; then the era of missionaries, who changed the cultural and religious landscape of the African continent with the penetration of monotheistic religions; and finally, the emergence of colonial military administrations.

During these three phases of African history, Western countries were able to establish themselves on the continent and create long-term systems of domination and influence. This policy towards Africa culminated in the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, which divided the continent among the European powers.

During this period, the Russian Empire, having all the means to appear on the continent, was represented only in Ethiopia [Degterev, Nigusie 2018]. Accordingly, Russia did not have the reputation of a colonial empire. The Soviet Union's penetration into Africa occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s under the conditions of a two-block world system. As part of this confrontation, Moscow insisted on the process of decolonization, including using UN mechanisms, and actively supported national liberation movements by various methods. Subsequently, this allowed many African countries to build relations with the USSR on a positive basis.

The ideological component of Soviet policy, based on the ideals of internationalism and justice, as well as large-scale programs of assistance to newly independent states, also played a role. The Soviet presence on the African continent continued from the 1960s to the 1990s.

The ideological and economic collapse of the Soviet Union with the subsequent disintegration of the state, the establishment of a market economy, and the pursuit of Western European policies could not maintain Moscow's previous relations with African capitals. But the very history of the USSR presence left a positive assessment in the mass consciousness and political culture of African states, as it was not of an imperialist nature and was closely connected with the development of industry, health care, and education.

The significant number of members of African elites (politicians, scientists, specialists, military officers) who had received their training in the Soviet Union was also important in anticipation of Russia's active emergence [Katsakioris 2019].

A significant factor in Russia's turn to the continent was the Kremlin's desire to change its role in the international arena, a desire to demonstrate that it has a vocation and the ability to influence major international issues in its status as a nuclear power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, an important participant in ensuring international security, including in the fight against terrorism, as well as a sovereign economic actor. A new positioning in the international arena without an African strategy was no longer possible.

The functioning of the international system has become significantly more complex; its unipolarity of the late 20th century has gradually become a thing of the past, which provided the Russian Federation with new opportunities with the corresponding openness of diplomacy towards the African continent [Charillon 2002: 177]. This was evidenced, for example, by the inclusion into the BRIC in 2011 of the country with the leading economy of the continent, the Republic of South Africa, the subsequent holding of the BRICS summit in South Africa in 2013, which was fully dedicated to the interaction and partnership of the association with Africa [Shubin 2015].

However, by this time, most countries claiming to change their geopolitical position were already systematically building their lines of strategic cooperation with Africa [Li, An 2021]. For example, the first China-Africa forum took place in 2000 and was held every three years. Since the same year, regular summits of the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) began, and in 2008 the first India-Africa and Turkey-Africa forums were held. In this list, the first Russia-Africa Forum of 2019 looks like a belated response to the ongoing geopolitical changes. Nevertheless, what matters is the substantive aspect of the summit and its implications, as well as Russia's demonstrated understanding and ability to build new relations with the continent in a completely different context than it did thirty years ago under the USSR.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, cooperation with Africa has been an important factor of international influence for the world's leading countries. Firstly, participation in solving African problems is a prerequisite for changing or restoring one's status in the global world system. Secondly, the continent presents vast economic opportunities, especially in the fields of energy, transport, telecommunications, mining, and engineering. Thirdly, it is a growing consumer market that has crossed the one billion two hundred million mark and is expanding rapidly [Dusoulier 2019].

At the same time, the fundamental difference between Africa and other continents is the aspiration of African states to become a single geopolitical and macroeconomic actor. In 2015. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted a strategic document, Agenda 2063, thereby fulfilling the desire of the founding fathers of the continental organization of 25 May 1963 to unite states within a strong federal or confederal union. The 15 continental projects endorsed in Agenda 2063 are aimed at accelerating and ensuring progress in all major areas of development, from the economy to education. Africa is also special in that it has several sub-regional groupings that have been restructured and have become poles of attraction for common integration [Hugon 2006: 9].

Thus, the first summit and the associated Russia-Africa Economic Forum gathered in Sochi on 23–24 October 2019 in quite favorable geopolitical and macroeconomic conditions, accompanied by heightened expectations and mutual interest of the parties,

and provided an opportunity for Russia to effectively enter the continent under new conditions.

### ON THE OUTCOME OF THE FIRST SUMMIT: AMIDST TURBULENCE

The 2019 Russia-Africa Summit met expectations: representatives of 54 African countries were present, delegations from 45 countries were present at the level of heads of state and government, leaders of the African Union and six sub-regional integration associations participated in the work, and 92 agreements totaling more than 1 trillion rubles (\$12.5 billion) were signed<sup>4</sup>. The Summit Declaration outlined the friendly ties between the Russian Federation and African states and recalled the traditions of the joint struggle for decolonization and independence of African countries as the basis for partnership, long-term and mutually beneficial relations<sup>5</sup>. In order to coordinate the development of Russian-African relations, the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum was established with a supreme body, the Russia-Africa Summit, to be held once every three years. Between the summits, it was envisaged to hold annual political consultations between the foreign ministers of the Russian Federation and African states that are current, past, and future chairmen of the African Union [Kalika 2019: 21].

In relations with the countries of the continent, an equal dialogue was declared on the basis of the multilateral nature of the world order. The UN and the Security Council were identified as the most important instrument of interaction, including reforming the UN Security Council to make it more representative by ensuring broader participation of African states. Russia promised to promote the deepening of the BRICS-Africa partnership within the framework of the multipolar system of international relations and to intensify Russian-African inter-parliamentary contacts.

It is extremely difficult to assess the geostrategic impact of the summit and its significance in Russian-African relations: in just a few months, the world would focus on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation would stabilize by the end of 2021, with significant economic and social losses for all countries of the world. During these years, Africa was particularly challenged by the worsening food supply and the lack of its own vaccine to counter the pandemic. Geostrategic rivalry between the world's major centers of influence included such areas as the registration and use in Africa of the Russian vaccine Sputnik V and of Chinese and Western vaccines. Most countries on the continent have recognized several variants, with only South Africa notably opposing Sputnik<sup>6</sup>.

Nevertheless, the instruments of engagement laid out in the 2019 summit declaration were not fully utilized: the envisaged annual political consultations of foreign ministers took place only once in video format. The events of 2022, namely the launch by the Russian Federation of a special military operation (SMO) in Ukraine, which escalated into a protracted armed conflict, cast doubt on the very possibility of holding the summit in that year and subsequently radically changed the entire geopolitical situation in the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Outcomes of the first Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum. *Roscongress*. <https://summitafrica.ru/en/about-summit/summit-outcomes-2019/> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>5</sup> Declaration of the first Russia-Africa Summit. *Roscongress*. 24.10.2019. <https://summitafrica.ru/en/about-summit/declaration/> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>6</sup> South Africa rejects Russian Sputnik vaccine over HIV fears. *AfricaNews*. 18.10.2021. <https://africanews.com/2021/10/18/south-africa-rejects-russian-sputnik-vaccine-over-hiv-fears/> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

The reaction in Africa to the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the ensuing polarization of the international community was not unambiguous and definite, which was reflected in the votes on UN General Assembly resolutions. In addition to global security issues, the countries of the continent faced the problem of food shortages: both sides of the conflict were the largest suppliers of wheat, for some countries up to 70% or more (Algeria, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, and others), and with the extension of sanctions to Belarus, the supply of fertilizers to the continent was also sharply reduced. It should be noted that the grain problem was initially being resolved with the participation of the UN and active mediation of Turkey and remained a priority during 2022 and 2023.

Sanctions by the EU, the US, and other Western bloc countries were a significant obstacle to the realization of economic projects with Russian participation announced at the 2019 summit, but at the same time, opportunities were opening up for African companies to substitute their previous suppliers with Russian gas and oil, as well as to participate in parallel imports to Russia. It should be borne in mind that after 2019, internal political instability has been growing on the continent itself due to military coups in Mali, Guinea, Sudan, and Burkina Faso. Nevertheless, political contacts between Russia and African countries have not ceased, both on the platforms of international organizations and bilaterally.

The essential role of Africa in global processes has become even more evident. In this regard, significant are the meetings of the President of the Russian Federation, V.V. Putin, with the Chairman of the African Union, President Macky Sall of Senegal and the Chairman of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, which were conducted in Sochi on 3 June, 2022<sup>7</sup>; and Putin's talks with President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Oumarou Sissokou Embalo, which took place on 25 October 2022 in Moscow<sup>8</sup>.

The Kremlin's position was based on the history of the USSR's support for the fight against colonialism, the long-standing friendly relations of the USSR, and then Russia, with the countries of the continent, and the recognition of its growing role in the world. The African side recognized Russia's role in gaining independence and its interest in continuing friendly ties and cooperation, noting the heterogeneous positions of the continent's countries and the pressure exerted on them from outside. Negative consequences of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine for the African continent became the key topic of the negotiations, while the issues of peace and food security were prioritized.

## SECOND SUMMIT: PREPARATION AND OUTCOME

Among other things, during the 2022 meetings, Putin announced the holding of the Russia-Africa summit in July 2023 in St. Petersburg. Preparations for the summit were accompanied by an unprecedented African tour of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov: in January, February, and May 2023 he visited 10 countries (South Africa, Angola, Eswatini, Eritrea, Mali, Mauritania, Sudan, Kenya, Burundi, Mozambique)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Meeting with African Union Chairperson, President of Senegal Macky Sall. *President of Russia*. 03.06.2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68564> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>8</sup> Meeting with President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau Umaro Sissoco Embalo. *President of Russia*. 25.10.2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69675> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>9</sup> Kogalov Y. How Sergey Lavrov's African tour went. *Rossiyskaya gazeta*. 03.06.2023. (In Russ.). <https://rg.ru/2023/06/03/kak-proshlo-afrikanskoe-turne-sergeia-lavrova.html> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

June 2023 was marked by an event that symbolized a fundamentally different, unusual, and largely unexpected for the world centers of power role of the African Union: the emergence of the “African Peace Plan” for the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Africa signaled its aspirations and opportunities to participate in the end of the armed confrontation and, for the first time, formulated its position on “European affairs.” A delegation consisting of the President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa, Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Union of Comoros Azali Assoumani, President of Zambia Hakainde Hichilema, President of Senegal Macky Sall, Prime Minister of Egypt Mostafa Madbouly, Minister of State and Director of the Cabinet of the President of Congo Florent Ntsiba, and Special Envoy of the President of Uganda for Special Duties Ruhakana Rugunda travelled to Kiev and Moscow. On 16 June, they were received by President V.A. Zelensky of Ukraine and on 17 June, by President V.V. Putin of Russia.<sup>10</sup>

The Peace Initiative included 10 points, the essence of which was an early ceasefire, achieving peace through diplomacy, ensuring the sovereignty of countries and peoples in accordance with the UN Charter, and creating security guarantees for all countries. Without going into the details of the discussions and deliberations during the delegation’s meetings with the leaders of the conflicting parties, it is necessary to highlight the significant obstacles to the implementation of the initiative. Ukraine has made the withdrawal of Russian troops from all of its territory a condition for a ceasefire and negotiations. Russia stated that it had never refused to negotiate and presented a draft of the Istanbul Agreement of March 2022, as well as said that the food crisis was not a consequence of the CFE but a result of the economic policy of Western countries.

A formal assessment of the AU initiative may suggest that it failed, but it stimulated the resolution of the humanitarian problems of the armed conflict. With the exchange of prisoners of war and the return to their families of children separated by the conflict, the African Union has strengthened its status as a promising negotiating platform, impartial and independent of other actors in the world political system. This is evidenced by the joint statement following the meeting between Putin and the leaders of the African Peace Initiative during the Russia-Africa Summit on 28 July 2023, as well as the content of the meeting itself<sup>11</sup>. The peace mission of African leaders was also supported in the final declaration of the BRICS Summit on 24 August 2023<sup>12</sup>.

The second Russia-Africa Summit was held on 27–28 July 2023 in St. Petersburg, Russia, and was paired with economic and humanitarian forums. It was also preceded by a parliamentary conference, “Russia-Africa in a Multipolar World,” held in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in March 2023.

Compared to the first summit, there was an understandable decrease in the number of official delegations and the status of representatives (48 countries, with 27 of them represented at the level of the head of state or the second highest official); representatives of five integration organizations of the continent were present<sup>13</sup>. Unlike the Sochi summit, there was a large number of side events, such as the Media Forum, the Congress

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<sup>10</sup> Meeting with heads of delegations of African states. *President of Russia*. 17.06.2023. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71451> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>11</sup> Meeting with heads of African delegations on Ukrainian agenda. *President of Russia*. 28.07.2023. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71835> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>12</sup> Second Johannesburg Declaration of the BRICS countries. *President of Russia*. 24.08.2023. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72103> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>13</sup> Recap of the Second Summit and Russia–Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum. *Roscongress*. <https://summitafrica.ru/en/news/podvedeny-itogi-vtorogo-sammita-i-ekonomicheskogo-i-gumanitarnogo-foruma-rossija-afrika/> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

of University Rectors, a rich youth, cultural, and sports program. The shift of emphasis on the humanitarian sphere was reflected in the final documents and signed agreements: out of 161 agreements, 56 concerned international and interregional cooperation, 51—education and science, 10—scientific and technical cooperation. The amounts of the agreements were not disclosed.

The final declaration of the summit significantly expanded the areas and principles of cooperation in the political and legal spheres, more rigorously outlining opposition to neocolonialism, terrorism; in ensuring the security and sovereignty of African states, observance of UN principles<sup>14</sup>. The list of mechanisms for implementing the Summit decisions was supplemented by annual political consultations between the Russian Foreign Minister and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and the establishment of a permanent Russian-African dialogue mechanism at the highest level, operating within the framework of the Strategy for the Development of Multilateral Partnerships of the African Union. In addition to deepening the BRICS-Africa partnership, the African Union's dialogue with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was announced. An important outcome was the agreement on the Action Plan of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum for 2023–2026<sup>15</sup>, which designates the African Union as the subject of relations in the implementation of the plan. In general, the adopted documents defined the equality of relations between the Russian Federation and the African Union, interaction with the leading integration economic associations with significant Russian participation (including through the Eurasian Economic Union) and with the leading regional organizations in Africa.

The 2023 Summit needs to be seen in conjunction with the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, chaired by South Africa, which followed a month later. The key decision at the end of the summit was to invite Argentina, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and two countries of the African continent, Egypt and Ethiopia, to join the BRICS as permanent members. Taking into account Russia's, along with China, leading roles in the association, it can be said that Russia had thus strengthened its position both on the continent and in the process of forming a new influential and resourceful geopolitical centre, especially since there was no doubt that Russia would chair BRICS in 2024 and hold the next BRICS summit in Kazan.

The three most important events of 2023 on the Russia-Africa line allow us to say that, thanks to Russia's return to the African continent, albeit belated, it has managed to avoid political isolation, demonstrate its key role in ensuring food security of the continent, and, to a certain extent, restore its position in the global geopolitical system. This was possible due to the timely assessment of Africa's potential and the fundamental difference between Russia's foreign policy and the former colonial states of Europe.

#### IN THE RUN-UP TO THE NEXT SUMMIT: INCREASING GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war significantly changed the geopolitical landscape. There was a sharp division of the international

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<sup>14</sup> Declaration of the Second Russia-Africa Summit. *President of Russia*. 28.07.2023. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5972> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>15</sup> Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan 2023–2026. *President of Russia*. 28.07.2023 <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5971> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

community along the lines of support or condemnation of the actions of the parties and assessment of the causes of the conflict. The events in Israel had a significant impact on the African continent, and the positions of the countries were also sharply divided. With the general assessment of the inadmissibility of solving the Israeli-Palestinian problem through violence and terror, some countries openly sided with Palestine, which has had observer status at the AU since 2013. At the same time, it was relatively recently that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union, had severed relations with Israel after the October 1973 war. Out of the 54 countries of the continent, 44 recognize Israel's statehood<sup>16</sup>, and Israel was granted observer status at the AU only in 2021, but then it was suspended.

The shift of the current international agenda towards the Middle East, the transition of the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict to a positional stage, and the intensification of Western sanctions pressure on Russia have affected the opportunities for African-Russian cooperation.

Among the significant events of late 2023–early 2024 that embody the relations between the continent and Russia, it is necessary to highlight the formation of the African Corps by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation with its planned deployment in Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, CAR, and Niger. The information in open sources about the formation of the corps followed the trips of the Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, to the countries of North and West Africa in the fall of 2023. After his September tour to Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the creation of a military “Alliance of Sahel States” was announced, which suggests Moscow's active participation in its formation<sup>17</sup>. On the one hand, in this process one can again see the return of the traditions of the USSR's African policy, on the other hand, an obvious strengthening of Russia's position on the continent, demonstration of serious intentions in the implementation of agreements on the whole range of relations, despite the opposition of the West. Active cooperation in ensuring the security of the continent's countries and countering terrorism became possible as a result of the 2023 Russia-Africa summit, which provided direct and constructive contacts between the leaders of the Sahel states and the Russian leadership, as well as demonstrated the differences between Russian and Western European policies.

The main international event of 2024 that was organized by Russia and directly related to Russia-Africa relations, was the BRICS summit in Kazan from 22 to 24 October 2024, already in an expanded format, whose final declaration noted the role of the summits and the Russia-Africa Ministerial Conference<sup>18</sup>. The status and scale of the event ensured unprecedented attention from the international community and global media. Thirty-six delegations arrived in Kazan; from the African continent, in addition to the leaders of the BRICS member countries—President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi of Egypt, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali of Ethiopia— there were the heads of Algeria and the Republic of Congo, as well as the Chairperson of the African Union and President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania,

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<sup>16</sup> List of countries and status of diplomatic relations with Israel. *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 15.02.2023. [https://www.gov.il/en/pages/israeli\\_relations](https://www.gov.il/en/pages/israeli_relations) (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>17</sup> Lakstygol I. What is known about Russia's “African Corps.” *Vedomosti*. 22.12.2023. (In Russ.). <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/12/22/1012398-cto-izvestno-ob-afrikanskom-korpuse-rossii> (accessed: 15.12.2024).

<sup>18</sup> XVI BRICS Summit. Kazan Declaration. Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security. Kazan, Russian Federation. *President of Russia*. 23.10.2024. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/en/RosOySvLzGaJtmx2wYFv0lN4NSPZploG.pdf> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani. The most important event of the summit was the participation of UN Secretary General António Guterres. Russia has openly demonstrated that all attempts by the West to isolate it internationally have failed and that a multipolar world is becoming a reality.

The most important outcome of the summit was the approval of the BRICS “partner state” status, which was granted to 13 countries, including Algeria, Nigeria, and Uganda<sup>19</sup>. Thus, the leading economies and influential countries of the African continent are now either part of the association or actively involved in its activities as the organizational center of the Global South, built without the dominance of the “collective West.”

Two weeks after the conclusion of the BRICS Kazan Summit, the first ministerial conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum was held in Sochi on 9–10 November, as stipulated by the decision of the second Russia-Africa Summit. It became the main event of the year for the Russia-Africa relations<sup>20</sup>. According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, the conference was attended by 54 official delegations of African states and regional integration associations, more than 40 ministers from 23 states of the continent. The meeting brought together the heads of the foreign ministries of the Russian Federation and the continent’s states, the leadership of the African Union Commission, and the executive bodies of regional integration associations.

Common approaches to addressing global challenges and deepening cooperation towards the preparation of the third Russia-Africa summit in 2026 were recorded in four joint statements of the conference participants<sup>21</sup>: Joint Statement of the First Ministerial Conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum; Joint Statement on the implementation of the Declaration of the Second Russia-Africa Summit on strengthening cooperation in the fight against terrorism; Joint Statement on current issues of exploration and use of Outer Space for peaceful purposes; Joint Statement on measures to create a fair and equitable system of International Information Security.

In a general political statement, the conference participants noted with satisfaction the strategic level of Russia-Africa cooperation and positively assessed the pace of implementation of the agreements reached during the first (Sochi, 23–24 October 2019) and second (St. Petersburg, 27–28 July 2023) Russia-Africa Summits and enshrined in their final documents, including the Action Plan of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum for 2023–2026. The intention to “continue strategic-level engagement in order to achieve a world order that would ensure international peace and security for all, equal opportunities for the development of all States, preservation of their cultural and civilizational uniqueness regardless of differences in political, economic and social structures, geographical location, demographic, resource and military potentials” was reaffirmed<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> 13 countries have been granted the status of BRICS partner states. *Kommersant*. 24.10.2024. (In Russ.). <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7250515> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>20</sup> Press release on the First Ministerial Conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia*. 10.11.2024. [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/1980737/?lang=en](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1980737/?lang=en) (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>21</sup> Joint statements of the First Ministerial Conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum (Russian Federation, Sirius Federal Territory, 9-10 November 2024). *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 11.11.2024. [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/rossiya\\_afrika/1980801/?lang=en](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rossiya_afrika/1980801/?lang=en) (accessed: 15.12.2024)

<sup>22</sup> Joint Statement of the First Ministerial Conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum (Russian Federation, Sirius Federal Territory, 10 November 2024). *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. 11.11.2024 [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/rossiya\\_afrika/1980876/?lang=en](https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rossiya_afrika/1980876/?lang=en) (accessed: 15.12.2024)

Of importance is the statement's thesis of the readiness to coordinate actions in all areas of Russia-Africa relations underpinned by a mutual commitment—to strengthen dialogue and engagement within the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum—and based on the common interests of the countries and mutual benefit. The statement repeatedly refers to the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, adopted by the African Union in 2015, and speaks of the need to intensify efforts to achieve its priority development goals.

Many theses of the statements correlate with the Kazan Declaration of the BRICS Summit, which was chaired by Russia, thus the Sochi meeting became a kind of prolongation of the Declaration in relation to Russian-African relations. Among the peculiarities, we can single out the support of the conference for the initiative of the Russian Federation to hold the International Conference on Food Security in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) in 2025, with the participation of relevant structures of the Russian Federation and African states, major Russian suppliers of food and fertilizers, agricultural experts, and scientists. Noteworthy is also the assertion of the good potential for collaboration between the African Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), in which Russia plays a key role, in their contribution to ensuring and maintaining regional security and stability.

The conference addressed a wide range of issues, including economic and humanitarian cooperation, interaction in agriculture, digitalization and information and communication technologies (ICT), food security, mining, peaceful space exploration, and counter-terrorism. Anton Kobayakov, Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation and Executive Secretary of the Organising Committee of the Russia-Africa Forum, said at the press conference: "For Russia, the role of security provider for the countries of the African continent is a practical, vital necessity. To date, Russia has signed agreements on regular military-technical co-operation with 33 states of the African continent."<sup>23</sup>

The global world events of the last two years and the escalation of tensions in different parts of the world have had a significant impact on Russian-African relations; nevertheless, the areas of interaction and cooperation, their principles and initiatives developed during the summits have shown great potential for development in 2024 in the interests of both sides.

## CONCLUSION

Russia's return to the African continent, as evidenced by the Russia-Africa Summits of 2019 and 2023, the implementation of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan for 2023–2026, together with the intensification of bilateral diplomacy, is a long-term endeavor. Russia can fully exploit its significant competitive advantages on the continent in the form of its positive Soviet legacy, favorable attitude of African public opinion towards Russia, the availability of in-demand high-tech industries, the absence of ideological dogmas, and its commitment to a multipolar world.

It seems that in the interests of its effective presence on the African continent, Russia needs to maintain its fundamental difference from the policies of other countries that have seriously established themselves here in the post-Soviet period (the US, the EU, the

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<sup>23</sup> Kobayakov: Russia has agreed on military co-operation with 33 African states. *African Initiative*. 09.11.2024. <https://afrinz.ru/en/2024/11/kobayakov-russia-has-agreed-on-military-co-operation-with-33-african-states/> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

UK, France, China, India, Turkey). African countries are trying to diversify their foreign policy partners and often consider Russia a subject of restoring their foreign policy balance, with no intention of refusing to cooperate with countries and international associations that are “unfriendly” to Russia.

At the same time, Russia’s fundamental difference may lie in the transmitted value bases of its policy, as it was in the Soviet period. Conservative, traditional values preached by Russia in recent years may find a wide response and support in African countries and become the basis for long-term, fundamental relations. The declarations adopted at the past summits have not yet paid sufficient attention to this aspect.

In a turbulent global environment, it is difficult to predict unequivocally what contour the new geopolitical reality will have, but it is clear that the partnership between Russia and Africa only strengthens the position and importance of both sides in this new world order, bringing closer the image of the future described in Agenda 2063: “Africa will emerge as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner with a bigger role in world affairs.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. AU. <https://au.int/agenda2063/> (accessed: 15.12.2024)

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## САММИТЫ «РОССИЯ – АФРИКА» В КОНТЕКСТЕ МЕНЯЮЩЕГОСЯ МИРА: ВЗГЛЯД С АФРИКАНСКОГО КОНТИНЕНТА

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**Аннотация.** С начала XXI в. Африка вновь становится пространством конкурентной борьбы великих держав в контексте формирования новой геополитической конфигурации мира. Несмотря на обретение странами континента своей независимости в 1960-х гг., де-факто Африка все еще находится в состоянии зависимости от крупных акторов мировой политики, что ставит под сомнение ее субъектность на международной арене. Поиск изменения отношений со странами континента отражается, в том числе, через организацию крупными мировыми державами «африканских» саммитов. Проведение саммитов Россия-Африка в 2019 и 2023 г. подтверждает тезис о том, что Африка является стратегически важной площадкой в поиске баланса сил между великими державами. Однако во всех этих дипломатических инициативах Африка имеет право и возможность сама определять ключевые вопросы, которые

помогут ей эффективно встроиться в новую геополитическую систему с одновременным укреплением своего экономического, социального и политического значения. Даже если социально-экономический контекст по-прежнему зависит от многочисленных эндогенных и экзогенных факторов, новая формула, с которой сегодня сталкивается Африка, уже не обязательно может быть достигнута только благодаря многосторонним встречам.

Роль Африки как системообразующего компонента международной системы была ограничена относительно невысоким уровнем ее участия в мировой торговле и в ВВП. Поэтому представляется целесообразным, чтобы различные саммиты Россия-Африка вышли за традиционные рамки, в которых континент недопредставлен, и пересмотрели границы партнерства в сторону взаимной динамики, как в политическом, так и в экономическом плане, что и является основными направлениями саммитов Россия-Африка.

**Ключевые слова:** Россия, Африка, саммитовая дипломатия, многосторонние отношения, великодержавная конкуренция, экономическое партнерство, внешняя политика России

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