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## Russia's Soft Power in Africa: Potential and Challenges of Russian-speaking Women's Communities

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**Abstract.** The article refers to one of the integral parts of the of Russian soft power foreign policy, which lies in its interaction with the Russian-speaking women's communities on the African continent. This topic has not previously been given an appropriate consideration in the domestic scientific discourse. The processes of current social and political transformations in the African countries require the significant increase in soft power, which could become the instrument of developing and consolidating relations between Russia and new African elites and African people. The Russian-speaking communities in Africa and organizations they create are largely composed of women and are developing thanks to their own initiatives. The potential of Russian-speaking women's communities in Africa, as well as of associations of African graduates of Soviet/Russian educational institutions as prospective soft power providers is quite significant, yet seriously underestimated and untapped properly. Today a variety of associations, clubs, fraternities, unions comprised of Russian-speaking women is widely occurring in the majority of African countries. There are such associations in Zambia, Cameroon, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Uganda, Togo, Angola, Mauritius, Madagascar, Senegal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Mali, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, and other countries. Russian-African mixed families are considered as the most probable potential mediators in Russian and African societies, cultures and markets. At the same time, the development of ties with the Russian-speaking diaspora in Africa would contribute not only to supporting the foreign policy activities of the Russian Federation on the continent, but also to the implementation of such important national priorities of our country as supporting compatriots abroad and promoting the "Russian world." This acquires particular importance on the threshold of the second Russia — Africa summit in 2023.

**Key words:** Africa, Russia, soft power, diaspora, compatriots, adaptation, Russian language culture, emigration, women's associations, state policy

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## «Мягкая сила» России в Африке: потенциал и проблемы русскоязычных женских сообществ

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**Аннотация.** Рассматривается один из элементов «мягкой силы» Российской Федерации (РФ), заключенный в ее взаимодействии с русскоязычными женскими сообществами на Африканском континенте. Эта тема ранее не получала должного рассмотрения в отечественном академическом дискурсе. Сегодня процессы социально-политических трансформаций в странах Африки как никогда требуют существенной активизации «мягкой силы», которая стала бы инструментом восстановления и укрепления взаимодействия между Россией и новыми африканскими элитами и африканскими народами. Русскоязычные сообщества в Африке и создаваемые ими объединения в большинстве своем состоят из женщин и развиваются благодаря их инициативам. Потенциал «мягкой силы» таких женских объединений в Африке, как и ассоциаций африканцев-выпускников советских/российских учебных заведений, весьма велик, но остается недооцененным и не используется в должной мере. Сегодня в Африке действует множество структур, разнообразных по формам (ассоциации, клубы, землячества, союзы и т. д.) и объединяющих русскоговорящих женщин. Такие объединения есть в Замбии, Камеруне, Тунисе, Алжире, Марокко, Нигерии, Уганде, Того, Анголе, на Маврикии, Мадагаскаре, в Сенегале, Нигере, Руанде, Мали, Республике Конго, Кот-д'Ивуаре, Мозамбике и других странах Африки. Русско-африканские смешанные семьи по многим параметрам могут рассматриваться как наиболее реальные потенциальные посредники российского и африканских обществ, культур, рынков. Вместе с тем развитие связей с русскоязычной диаспорой в Африке внесло бы свой вклад не только в поддержку внешнеполитической деятельности РФ на континенте, но и в реализацию таких важнейших общенациональных приоритетов нашей страны, как поддержка соотечественников за рубежом и развитие «Русского мира». Особенную значимость это приобретает в преддверии Второго саммита «Россия — Африка» в 2023 г.

**Ключевые слова:** Африка, Россия, мягкая сила, диаспора, соотечественники, адаптация, русская языковая культура, эмиграция, женские объединения, государственная политика

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### Unrecorded “Asset” of Russian Soft Power in Africa

In recent years, the importance of the concept and tools of soft power in planning and implementing the Russian Federation’s foreign policy has increased markedly.

The need to pay attention to “soft power” methods was voiced at the highest level back in 2012. In his article “Russia and the Changing World,” President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin described soft power as “a set of tools and methods for achieving foreign policy goals

without the use of weapons, but through information and other levers of influence.”<sup>1</sup> Then this term was also included in the 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation. In particular, the 2016 strategic document noted that “the use of soft power tools to solve foreign policy problems is becoming an integral part of modern international politics.

<sup>1</sup> Putin V. V. Russia and the Changing World // Moscow News [Путин В. В. Россия и меняющийся мир // Московские новости]. February 27, 2012. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.mn.ru/politics/78738> (accessed: 19.09.2021).

First of all, we are talking about the possibilities of civil society, information and communication, humanitarian and other methods and technologies in addition to traditional diplomatic methods.”<sup>2</sup> Moscow joined the global “soft power game” quite late, but, nevertheless, made soft power an integral tool in its desire to return Russia the status of a great power (Rutland & Kazantsev, 2016).

It should be stressed that the interpretation of soft power in the Russian sense has its own specifics and is closely linked to the concepts of protecting national sovereignty, the cultural code, promoting the “Russian world” sphere abroad, and supporting traditional family values, which resonates in Africa (Laruelle, 2021, p. 26).

The report “Africa: Prospects for Development and Recommendations for Russia’s Policy,” prepared in 2021 by the National Research University Higher School of Economics, emphasized that Russian-African cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian spheres has seen noticeable successes, as civil society interaction and educational exchanges have developed. Thus, in 2018 and 2020, two Russian-African public forums took place, organized by the African Business Initiative Union and the World Alumni Association. The number of African students studying in Russia increased from 9,000 in 2008 to 24,000 in 2018 and 27,000 in 2021 (Karaganov, 2021, p. 83). At the same time, the authors of the report describe the cultural and humanitarian cooperation between Russia and Africa as uneven, pointing out that it is developing without officially defined priorities and any strategic documents, mainly at the expense of private and individual state initiatives, and the presence of “soft power” institutions of the Russian Federation, primarily the Russian centers of science and culture as

branches of *Rossotrudnichestvo*, is clearly insufficient on the continent (Karaganov, 2021, p. 84).

In Russian and foreign scientific literature, much attention has been paid to almost all aspects of the manifestation of Russian soft power in Africa (public diplomacy, NGO activities, humanitarian and cultural initiatives, educational cooperation, and much more) (Trunkos, 2021; Pichon & Russell, 2019; Wilson, 2015; Clifford & Gruzd, 2022).

However, one important element for unleashing the full potential of Russian soft power in Africa has remained practically unexplored until now. In this article, we focus on it — the potential of Russian-speaking women’s communities in Africa. In fact, Russian and Russian-speaking communities, as well as their organizations on the African continent, which largely exist thanks to women’s initiatives, have long been underestimated as a powerful resource for supporting our country’s policy in Africa. The situation has only recently begun to change.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov highly appreciated the contribution of women-compatriots in the preservation of the Russian language and culture in their families. He stated in 2019 that Russia would continue to promote the further integration of compatriots into the global women’s movement.<sup>3</sup>

In 2021, for the first time, the program of the Third International Eurasian Women’s Forum in St. Petersburg included the section “Russian Women-Compatriots Abroad.” In the course of its work, the role of the dialogue of women compatriots in the development of international cooperation was emphasized, which, in turn, contributes to the expansion of trade and economic interaction and cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation “On Approval of the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation” // President of Russia [Указ Президента Российской Федерации «Об утверждении Концепции внешней политики Российской Федерации» // Президент России]. November 30, 2016. (In Russian). URL:

<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201612010045.pdf> (accessed: 10.02.2022).

<sup>3</sup> Lavrov Appreciated the Contribution of Compatriots to Ensuring the Continuity of Generations // RIA Novosti [Лавров оценил вклад соотечественниц в обеспечение преемственности поколений // РИА Новости].

There is now a growing Russian media presence on the African continent, including social media (Limonier & Laruelle, 2021). This is an important area for strengthening soft power (Kulkova, 2021, pp. 113—115), and much remains to be done.

Women-compatriots and graduates of Russian universities permanently residing in the countries of the continent can contribute to the development of information exchange between Africa and Russia. In particular, there is a plan to use their assistance in creating the so-called Single Internet Space Russia — Africa, that is, collecting in one place the entire existing array of information on the Russian-African agenda, said in May 2021 the executive director of the Association of Economic Cooperation with African States (AECAS) A. Belyaeva.<sup>4</sup>

There is no doubt that the issues of humanitarian cooperation, public diplomacy and the realization of Russia's full potential of soft power should be reflected in the forums of 2nd Russia — Africa Summit, which will be held in 2023.<sup>5</sup>

We hope that our article will contribute to its academic backing and will draw attention to a little-known but effective “tool” of Russian power in Africa — the potential of women's Russian-speaking communities on the continent.

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October 30, 2019. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20191030/1560383441.html?in=t> (accessed: 19.09.2021).

<sup>4</sup> TASS Discussed the Need to Increase Russia's Information Presence in Africa // ROSCONGRESS [В ТАСС обсудили необходимость увеличить информационное присутствие России в Африке // РОСКОНГРЕСС]. May 21, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://roscongress.org/news/v-tass-obsudili-neobhodimost-velichit-informatsionnoe-prisutstvie-rossii-v-afrike/> (accessed: 15.09.2021).

<sup>5</sup> Decree on the Organizing Committee for the Preparation and Holding of the Second Russia — Africa Summit and Other Events in the Russia — Africa Format // President of Russia [Указ об Организационном комитете по подготовке и проведению второго саммита Россия — Африка и других мероприятий в формате Россия — Африка // Президент России]. July 21, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/news/69041> (accessed: 25.07.2022).

## **Russian Compatriots — the Demanded Potential of the Russian World**

The crisis processes on a global scale have required the mobilization of internal resources of many groups of the population, including the Russian-speaking diaspora, consisting mainly of women-compatriots from the USSR/Russian Federation permanently residing in the countries of the African continent. It is they who today play a significant role as a conductor of Russia's humanitarian influence in African countries, representing one of the main components of Russia's soft power on this continent.

Soviet and later Russian women-compatriots took over (albeit with certain reservations) the baton of Russian emigrant culture in Africa, settling in African countries in the last 50—60 years (Krylova, 2006; 2018; Davidson & Mazov, 1999; Sukhova & Sukhov, 2019, pp. 4—34). This branch of emigration has a distinct gender character. The overwhelming majority of the modern Russian-speaking diaspora in Africa are groups of Russian and Russian-speaking women who marry residents of African countries and demonstrate, in general, the ability to successfully adapt to the world of their African husbands.

The beginning of this type of emigration coincides in time with the years of the national liberation struggle on the continent and with the formation in Africa of a number of independent states, to which the USSR provided various forms of assistance, including in education and training of qualified personnel. Of course, today's realities expand the scope of the diaspora as a group of people united by a common ethnic origin, but at the same time living outside their country of origin. Now the concept of “compatriots” includes new categories: representatives of small businesses, doctors, teachers, engineers, and other specialists working in African countries on long-term contracts (both Russian and local). This is also a numerically large group of children from mixed marriages

represented in more than one generation. Those who, due to political and historical circumstances, once became citizens of Ukraine, Belarus, and other former Soviet republics, also consider themselves Russians in Africa. And yet, the main backbone of the Russian-speaking community on the African continent is made up of Russian women — wives of African citizens.

At the origin of this group were women-representatives of the military and post-war generations. Later, representatives of the USSR of a long “stagnant” period joined them. For both, the problem of parting with their historical homeland was dramatic, marriage with a foreigner required great courage and strength. They were also perceived ambiguously by domestic diplomatic missions accredited in the African countries (Krylova, 2019). The situation of the current generation of women-compatriots, replenishing the female Russian-speaking community, is organizationally easier, but new times have brought them new difficulties: political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental crises “at home” and in Africa, unclear legal relations with their homeland and the homeland of their husband, etc.

As half a century of experience has shown, the diversity of personal destinies of Soviet/Russian compatriots, as well as the reasons, places and living conditions in different countries of the continent, ultimately did not become an obstacle to understanding common goals and interests, involvement in the development of the “Russian world,” to the desire to preserve the values of Russian history and culture and pass them on to the next generations.

Today in Africa there are many structures in various forms — associations, clubs, communities, unions, etc. uniting Russian-speaking women, wives of African citizens. There are such associations in Zambia, Cameroon, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Uganda, Togo, Angola, Mauritius, Madagascar, Senegal, Niger, Rwanda, Mali, Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Mozambique, other African countries. These organizations are a

historically relatively new phenomenon and are created primarily due to the desire of compatriots to unite in order to protect their rights and status in the country of residence.

### **The Russian Diaspora in African Countries. Ways and Forms of Formation**

It must be admitted that thanks to the process of consolidation that has been actively taking place in recent decades, many Russian associations and organizations in Africa have structurally “stood on their feet,” have earned a positive reputation in the host society, contributing to the practice of Russian-African intercultural interaction. Today they are quite capable of conducting an open and competent dialogue on a partnership basis with representatives of Russian education, business, culture and sports.

The most institutionalized and socially active are the organizations of compatriots living in the countries of North Africa (Krylova, 2017b). Despite the fact that the share of the Russian-speaking community in the total population of the Maghreb countries is insignificant, its social weight has grown in recent years. Only in Egypt there are six public associations of compatriots and a number of commercial educational and cultural centers. From the total number of citizens falling under the concept of “compatriot,” from two to three thousand people live in Cairo; in Alexandria — about 600 compatriots.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it even rallied compatriots to a certain extent, giving impetus to the development of social activities. New formats of work were mastered and interaction with the Coordination Councils (CC) of African countries

<sup>6</sup> Sh. D. Utoev: “The Russian Diaspora in Egypt Has Been Formed.” Interview with the Consul // Moscow Komsomolets in Egypt [Ш. Д. Утоев: «Русская диаспора в Египте сформировалась». Интервью с консулом // Московский комсомолец в Египте]. 2009. No. 1. (In Russian). URL: <https://mkegypt.net/arhiv-gazeti/2009-new/61-01-2009> (accessed: 20.04.2022).

and the countries of the Middle East (Lebanon, Tunisia, Palestine, etc.) was expanded.<sup>7</sup> In 1989, the Association of Russian Women was created in Algeria. Today it has over 2,000 members.<sup>8</sup> The main goal of the association is to preserve the Russian language and culture. Every year the Association holds country conferences, which are attended by women from other cities in Algeria. This helps to bring compatriots closer, coordinate joint actions, and develop ties between the Coordinating Councils of compatriots<sup>9</sup> of African and Middle Eastern countries aimed at protecting their rights and promoting a positive image of Russia. In 2013, a youth organization was established on the basis of the Association.<sup>10</sup>

About 5,000 compatriots live in the Tunisian Republic. The vast majority of them are citizens of the former USSR and Russia, married to Tunisians, who were educated in Soviet and Russian universities, as well as their children. Most of the women have higher and secondary education, and they adequately represent their

historical Motherland in all spheres of social life and activity. Since 2002, the Club of Compatriots “Zharkiy” has been actively operating at the Russian Center for Science and Culture (RCSC) in the capital of the country (Akulova-Konetskaya, 2012). Its goal is to maintain ties with Russia, familiarize Tunisians with its history and culture, and assist compatriots in adapting to life in Tunisia.

More than 5,000 compatriots currently live in Morocco. And here it is also, first of all, the wives of Moroccan subjects who studied in Soviet and Russian universities. Organizations of compatriots (there are at least five of them), united by the Coordination Council, regularly hold cultural events, charity events, which receive wide coverage among the residents of the recipient country. The CC brings together associations and clubs active in Agadir, Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier and Fes, i.e. in cities with the highest concentration of immigrants from Russia and the CIS countries (Sukhov, 2019, p. 73). The largest and most active is the Association of Russian-speaking women in Morocco “Women-Compatriots.” The Association has established partnership relations with some foreign and Russian public organizations. “Women-compatriots” from Morocco became part of the initiative committee, which is organizing round tables and conferences, implementing international cooperation programs dedicated to topical problems of the Russian diaspora. With the participation of the association, a virtual alliance of Russian-speaking women “Dobrodeya” was created.

Thanks to the positive image of the “Russians,” municipal and non-governmental organizations of the countries of the region meet the needs of the associations of our compatriots. The role that the latter play in the social and cultural life of these countries receives extensive coverage in the local media. Reports about the historical contribution of Russians to the development of Morocco, Tunisia, and about the place of our compatriots in today’s life in these countries appeared on local TV channels. The

<sup>7</sup> Coordination Council of Russian Public Organizations of Compatriots in the ARE // KSORS [Координационный совет российских общественных организаций соотечественников в АРЕ // КСОРС]. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.rks-afrika-blijnyvostok.com/страна-региона/египет/ксорс-египта/> (accessed: 19.10.2021).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The Coordinating Council (CC) of Russian Public Organizations of Compatriots is an open consultative, advisory and information body created at the embassies of the Russian Federation on a voluntary basis. The main objectives of the CC: consolidation of the Russian diaspora in the country of permanent residence; coordination of interaction between compatriots; support of compatriots in the process of adaptation and integration, protection of their interests; preservation of the Russian language, culture, spiritual values, traditions; development of a dialogue of cultures and cooperation with other organizations supporting the Russian language and culture, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Final Resolution of the XI Country Conference of Russian Compatriots Living in Algeria (November 16, 2019, Algeria) // KSORS [Итоговая Резолюция XI страновой конференции российских соотечественников, проживающих в Алжире (16 ноября 2019 г., Алжир) // КСОРС]. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.rks-afrika-blijnyvostok.com/страна-региона/алжир/ксорс-алжира/> (accessed: 19.09.2021).

local press constantly publishes articles about Russian culture and education, interviews with our compatriots and Arab graduates of Soviet/Russian universities (Sukhov, 2019, p. 86).

The share of women among our compatriots immigrating to South Africa also increased significantly due to marriage emigration, the peak of which occurred at the beginning of the 21st century (Gorelik, 2004, p. 57). The first formal association of immigrants from the former USSR appeared in South Africa in 1998 at the initiative of the Russian Embassy, and in 2003 it was transformed into the South African Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> Its main activities are to promote the support and development of the Russian diaspora, the Russian language and culture, to strengthen ties with the historical homeland, to promote the protection of the rights and freedoms of compatriots and their implementation.

And even if in African countries the CC of compatriots was created quite recently, as, for example, in 2018 in Uganda, its base was again laid by the “Association of Russian-Speaking Women” (the latter unites 30 people). Most compatriots in the Republic of the Congo are the wives of Congolese educated in the Soviet Union and Russia. More than 7,000 of its citizens are graduates of Soviet and Russian universities. Most of them are united in the Association of Citizens of Russia and the CIS countries (“Amikal” in Brazzaville and “Soyuznik” in Pointe-Noire). In 2012, a CC of compatriots living in the Congo was created, headed by the Honorary Consul of Russia in Pointe-Noire M. Nguebana.<sup>12</sup> The country conference of

associations of Russian compatriots in the Republic of the Congo was held here on August 15, 2020. It is significant that the event was held on the day of the National Day, when the Congolese and all the inhabitants of the country celebrated the 60th anniversary of the liberation from the colonial oppression of France in 1960.<sup>13</sup>

A small but close-knit diaspora exists in Cameroon. Its main composition is Russian-speaking women who married Cameroonians and have an active social position. The main activity of the Association is focused on the mutual support of the participants and the education of children of mixed families in the spirit of Russian culture and tradition.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Role of the Orthodox Church in the Life of the Russians in Africa**

The social and cultural life of compatriots in African countries is not only dealt with by secular organizations. The symbol of the historical Motherland and at the same time the center of spiritual and social life for many compatriots is the Orthodox Church and its

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KSORS [Координационный совет российских соотечественников. Соотечественники в Республике Конго // КСОПС]. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.rks-afrika-blijnyvostok.com/страна-региона/конго/ксорс-конго/> (accessed: 04.11.2021).

<sup>13</sup> The Republic of the Congo Elected the Chairman of the Coordination Council of Compatriots Living Abroad // World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [В Республике Конго выбран председатель КСОПС // Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом]. June 30, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://vksrs.com/news/v-respublike-kongo-perezibran-predsedatel-ksors/> (accessed: 16.10.2021).

<sup>14</sup> Beinenson A. Coordination Council Member Olga Gogolina: “Russia Is Perceived in Cameroon as a Defender of Peace” // World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [Бейнenson А. Член КС Ольга Гоголина: «Россия воспринимается в Камеруне как защитница мира» // Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом]. June 20, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://vksrs.com/publications/chlen-ks-olga-gogolina-rossiya-vosprinimaetsya-v-kamerune-kak-zashchitnitsa-mira/> (accessed: 21.10.2021).

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<sup>11</sup> Lomtev P. Compatriots in South Africa. Far from the Motherland, But Still United // World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [Ломтев П. Соотечественники в ЮАР. Вдали от Родины, но все так же едины // Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом]. November 16, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://vksrs.com/publications/sootchestvenniki-v-yuarvdali-ot-rodiny-no-vse-tak-zhe-ediny/> (accessed: 03.10.2021).

<sup>12</sup> Coordination Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots. Compatriots in the Republic of the Congo //

churches, operating in a number of countries on the continent.

Orthodox parishes in Tunisia and Bizerte are working on the spiritual enlightenment of compatriots, organizing events on the occasion of Orthodox holidays. The parish council of both churches closely cooperates with the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Tunisia (Makhrova, 2008, p. 174; Makhrov, 2008).

The largest Russian community center in South Africa is the Church of St. Sergius of Radonezh — the only Russian church in Africa south of the Sahara. The parish founded and has been publishing since 2001 the Russian Orthodox magazine “Vestnik,” addressed primarily to compatriots. A Sunday Russian school operates at the church, and members of the parish annually celebrate not only Orthodox, but also secular holidays existing in Russia (Gorelik, 2007, pp. 173—174). Russian communities, to the best of their ability, support the burials of Russians in their countries of settlement. The Russian Community and the Orthodox Church in Morocco is one of the oldest organizations of compatriots in this kingdom. Created in 1927, it still remains the basis of the parish community of the Church of the Christ’s Resurrection in Rabat (Sukhov, 2019). Here, on the basis of the parish and with the assistance of the embassy school, the young generation of mixed families receives spiritual and moral education and religious enlightenment.

There is no Orthodox church in Cameroon. But in 2011, a Sunday school of the Russian language was opened here.<sup>15</sup> It significantly diversified the life of Russian compatriots, the “Russian House” appeared, a place where children and adults can speak and listen to

Russian speech, join Russian traditions and culture.

The social and professional activity of Russian compatriots manifests itself in different directions. Their humanitarian mission is not only diverse, but also extremely complex, since such a cultural and civilizational dialogue involves representatives of different cultures, confessions, having different, often dissimilar values and worldview attitudes. A significant part of Russian compatriots who permanently live with their children in almost all countries of Africa also have in common the focus on harmonious integration into the society of the country of residence for successful self-realization and in the interests of the family without giving up their own identity, cultural heritage and the best traditions of Russian society.

### **Mixed Family:**

#### **A Partnership of Cultures and Markets**

Many women-compatriots who permanently live in Africa are distinguished by an increased susceptibility to the ideals of goodness, harmonious being, which unites such different ways of life and culture in a “mixed family.” At the same time, we should not forget that these women are not only our compatriots. They are the wives of African citizens, integrated by fate into society with a complex system of social, interpersonal relationships and connections that regulate their opportunities and forms of self-realization. Therefore, in interaction with these groups of compatriots, it is necessary to take into account that the status of an African wife can significantly influence the manifestation of her social activity, distributing it between the home and the public activities.

The Afro-Russian family is a unique mini-community of its kind. And the peculiarity of a mixed Afro-Russian marriage is expressed in the fact that the husbands of our compatriots, graduates of Soviet/Russian universities, are also the potential for deepening Russia’s relations with the African world. According to the Russian

<sup>15</sup> Beinson A. Coordination Council Member Olga Gogolina: “Russia Is Perceived in Cameroon as a Defender of Peace” // World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [Бейнenson А. Член КС Ольга Гоголина: «Россия воспринимается в Камеруне как защитница мира» // Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом]. June 20, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://vksrs.com/publications/chlen-ks-olga-gogolina-rossiya-vosprinimaetsya-v-kamerune-kak-zashchitnitsa-mira/> (accessed: 21.10.2021).



Africanist O.V. Konstantinova, maintaining links with graduates of Soviet/Russian universities is one of the most important areas for strengthening Russian “soft power,” since many of them now hold important posts and positions in their native African countries, have certain political weight and influence (Konstantinova, 2020, p. 8). For example, the Commander-in-Chief of the Angolan Air Force, General Francisco Lopes Gonzales Afonso (military pseudonym “Anga”) is a legendary figure in the Angolan armed forces. In the early 1980s, after studying at a flight school in the USSR as a lieutenant, he commanded the first Angolan squadron, mastered several types of aircraft, including the MiG-17, MiG-19, MiG-21, Su-22M) and more than 20 years was the head of the Angolan Air Force. Lieutenant General Fabian Msimang also became the Commander-in-Chief of the South African Air Force, who from 1986—1991 underwent flight training on Mi-8 and Mi-25 helicopters at an aviation school in the capital of Soviet Kyrgyzstan, the city of Frunze (now Bishkek). Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, ex-Syrian President Hafez Assad, Mozambique Air Force Commander Ahmed Hussein became graduates of the Frunze Pilot School in different years (Krylova, 2017a). Most of them have a positive attitude towards Russia and its people, which can help in promoting Russian initiatives and business on the continent.

The careful preservation of the Russian language against the background of the inevitable bilingualism of children became an incentive for the emergence in the 2000s of the most of the above-mentioned public organizations. African husbands also take great part in their activities, often supporting Russian culture and the Russian language not less energetically than their Russian-speaking wives. It is these groups that largely form the image of the “Russians” and Russia on the African continent, becoming, thanks to their integration into the families and societies of these countries, the very soft power that modern politicians are looking for (Sukhov, 2009).

The experience of previous years has shown that the Afro-Russian family has significant potential for establishing the necessary contacts and mutually beneficial economic and cultural relations between Russia and African countries. These families can become a real support in building relations between our countries, examples of a positive image of Russia, a benevolent, economically and politically constructive attitude towards a country in which African husbands were educated and thanks to which, for the most part, they were able to enter the social elite, occupying leading positions in various fields of politics, economics and culture of their country. Many Africans who have returned from the USSR and are returning today from Russia expect to continue and expand the contacts and business ties established during their studies. A certain role in organizing these relations can be played by their Russian wives, who are familiar with the peculiarities and psychology of the market of their homeland and master the specifics of economic and interpersonal relations in the country of their current residence, able to multifunctionally use ties with their homeland (Krylova, 2006, pp. 395—399).

Russian wives of Africans raise funds for the construction of monuments in their homeland Russia, for the elimination of the consequences of environmental disasters and earthquakes, send medicines to children (for example, it happened during the earthquake in Armenia in 1988). Women participate in volunteer work as stand attendants in Russian pavilions at exhibitions; provide service to the Russian delegations in consular districts. Our women-compatriots are actively showing themselves in the field as professionals. Basically, these are medical workers, teachers, engineers, surveyors, and economists — that is, specialists of interest to the economy of modern African countries. They teach at local universities, schools and colleges, establish national parks, and make their mark in the humanitarian field, working in educational institutions related to culture and the arts. Thus, one of the Russians who have been living in the

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire for a long time represented this country at two international congresses, participated in many internships and seminars organized by international organizations. A six-volume National Bibliography of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (Ayé-Pimanova, 1982) was published under her name.

Russian-African mixed families in many respects can be considered as real potential mediators of two societies, two cultures, two markets. An excellent example of such a dialogue is the initiative of the Russian Business Center Association in Cameroon, which was established in 2014 with the support of the Russian Embassy in order to develop economic and humanitarian projects between the two countries.<sup>16</sup> Its members work with Cameroonian entrepreneurs at forums in Russia, assist in finding partners, conducting negotiations, work with Russian companies that come to Cameroon, attend specialized exhibitions or plan negotiations. In parallel, the Center is engaged in humanitarian projects, cooperation with universities in Cameroon. Today, Russian language courses are already open at the University of International Relations of Cameroon. "The interest in the Russian language is due to the fact that the foreign policy of the Russian Federation is very popular in Cameroon, especially in the light of the Syrian events... And the role of Russia is quite clear — it is perceived as the protector of these countries, despite the fact that Western channels give completely different information. But it is precisely the local African channels that explain Russia's policy."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Beinson A. Coordination Council Member Olga Gogolina: "Russia Is Perceived in Cameroon as a Defender of Peace" // World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [Бейнсон А. Член КС Ольга Гоголина: «Россия воспринимается в Камеруне как защитница мира» // Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом]. June 20, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://vksrs.com/publications/chlen-ks-olga-gogolina-rossiya-vosprinimaetsya-v-kamerune-kak-zashchitnitsa-mira/> (accessed: 21.10.2021).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Speaking in 2016 in the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation at the round table "Russian compatriots living in Cameroon: business cooperation and public diplomacy," O. Gogolina, President of the Association "Russian Business Center," spoke about the opportunities for Russian business in Cameroon, backing up her words with specific economic projects in which local authorities expect Russia's active participation. Among them, she singled out the possibility of exploiting nickel and cobalt deposits, participating in the construction of woodworking enterprises, the production and export of cocoa beans, as well as the construction of the infrastructure of a new seaport.<sup>18</sup>

### **Russia — Africa: New Approaches to Partnership with the Diaspora**

The processes of global transformation cannot but affect the degree of social activity of compatriots, and these realities require new approaches to building their relations with their homeland. This was discussed a lot and constructively at international and domestic academic platforms and socio-political forums in Russia and the countries of the African continent. The first Russia — Africa Forum, held in Sochi in October 2019, opened a new era in the interaction between the Russian Federation and African states, revived the rich experience of international cooperation that was created by joint efforts of domestic state and public institutions in the 20th century.

In this regard, we cannot but note the importance of the inclusion in the Russian Constitution of an amendment concerning compatriots living abroad.<sup>19</sup> M. Drozdov,

<sup>18</sup> Lomtev P. Russia and Cameroon Develop Bilateral Cooperation // International Affairs [Ломтев П. Россия и Камерун развивают двустороннее сотрудничество // Международная жизнь]. October 14, 2016. (In Russian). URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/16151> (accessed: 19.05.2021).

<sup>19</sup> "The Russian Federation provides support to compatriots living abroad in exercising their rights, ensuring the protection of their interests and preserving the

Chairman of the World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad, stressed in his speech at the VII World Congress of Compatriots on October 15, 2021 that its adoption will open a new “window of opportunity” for many processes associated with the interaction of Russia with compatriots and give the green light to new initiatives associated with this work.<sup>20</sup>

A year later, Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 611 of September 5, 2022 “On Approving the Concept of the Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad” again emphasized that in the implementation of the humanitarian policy of the Russian Federation abroad, providing support to compatriots living abroad is one of the priorities. “The Russian Federation provides support to compatriots living abroad in exercising their rights, ensuring the protection of their interests and preserving the all-Russian cultural identity” (p. 62).<sup>21</sup> At the same time, “the role of organizations of compatriots living abroad remains significant in popularizing the Russian language, culture and science in the development of bilateral cooperation in the humanitarian sphere and intercultural dialogue” (p. 64).<sup>22</sup> “An important component is also interaction with

graduates of Russian educational institutions of higher education — citizens of foreign states who make up the political and intellectual elite of these states” (p. 45).<sup>23</sup>

All these landmark documents testify to the need to expand the scope of work with our compatriots who today make up the “Russian world,” stress the importance of this segment in strengthening political, economic and cultural ties between Russia and African countries.

At the same time, the search for the most effective forms of building work with compatriots permanently residing outside their historical homeland obliges the Russian side to take into account its cumulative specifics, both de jure and de facto, since these groups of women are noticeably different in their civil and social statuses, objectively narrowing the possibilities of fighting for their interests.

The sociocultural frontier in which the groups of Russian-speaking women who permanently live outside their historical homeland exist generates an increase in their creative potential in various fields — social, cultural, informational. Therefore, in the conditions of a long-term stay in a foreign language environment, a carefully thought-out cultural and information policy is of particular importance, which can and should be helped by the historical homeland of our compatriots through its local representations. These are the activities of the Russian-language media; national holidays of Russia, which are celebrated within associations of compatriots and at interethnic, international levels; the activities of Russian theaters and other creative teams, the prose and poetry of diaspora representatives and their access to the level of international contacts and events, etc.

Undoubtedly, Russia is “returning” to African countries and considers it one of its promising leading partners in the world. In turn, Africa not only loves Russia, believes in it, but also expects real cooperation from it in new forms and scales dictated by the times.

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all-Russian cultural identity” (clause 3, article 69). See: Article 69 // Constitution of the Russian Federation [Статья 69 // Конституция Российской Федерации]. (In Russian). URL: <https://base.garant.ru/10103000/e3b4936b9aad06dabb2a6618c97197da/> (accessed: 19.05.2021).

<sup>20</sup> Drozdov M. Processes of Global Transformation Affect the Movement of Compatriots // Institute of the Russian Diaspora [Дроздов М. Процессы глобальной трансформации влияют на движение соотечественников // Институт Русского Зарубежья]. (In Russian). URL: <https://ruskie.org/articles/protsessy-globalnoy-transformatsii-vliyayut-na-dvizhenie-sootchestvennikov/> (accessed: 05.05.2022).

<sup>21</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation “On the Approval of the Concept of the Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad” // President of Russia [Указ Президента Российской Федерации «Об утверждении Концепции гуманитарной политики Российской Федерации за рубежом» // Президент России]. September 5, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/G3CkAuMhZXio8AzNaweT3wTGTaEA16OU.pdf> (accessed: 06.09.2022).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

At the same time, the results of a number of country, regional and international events show that a comparison with the intensive and regular work to preserve and promote the Russian language and culture, which is carried out by our country in all areas in Europe, is obviously not in favor of the situation in the countries of the African continent, where our compatriots, especially their second and third generations, are unfairly left out.

Thus, the introduction in 2015 of the “Russian School Abroad”<sup>24</sup> program developed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Rossotrudnichestvo, a structure that is directly involved in the problems of compatriots abroad and has its offices in only 10 African states,<sup>25</sup> can

<sup>24</sup> Vladimir Putin approved the concept of “Russian School Abroad” // World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad [Владимир Путин утвердил концепцию «Русская школа за рубежом» // Всемирный координационный совет российских соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом]. November 9, 2015. (In Russian). URL: <https://vkrsr.com/news/vladimir-putin-utverdil-kontseptsiyu-russkaya-shkola-za-rubezhom/> accessed: 21.09.2021).

<sup>25</sup> Russian Centers for Science and Culture (RCSC) today operate in Cairo and Alexandria (ARE), Ethiopia, Tanzania, Morocco, Tunisia, South Africa, and the Republic of the Congo. In 2022, Russian houses were also

hardly be called effective in relation to these groups of compatriots. In many cases, the personal initiatives of the latter are implemented on their own enthusiasm, since they are often deprived of the support of the “center.”

Without questioning the extensive activities of many domestic organizations, working with compatriots living abroad, including in Africa, their undoubted and indisputable authority, the above circumstances require a targeted policy (primarily from a gender perspective) providing more intensive and diverse informational and organizational support to these associations of our compatriots on a continental scale and strengthening their interaction with the Russian side. All this requires a high degree of coordination and optimization of state, public and academic efforts.

opened in Sudan, Mali, Algeria and another one in Egypt. Next in line are Angola and a second center in the capital of Mali. See: Rossotrudnichestvo Announced the Expansion of Its Presence in Africa // Izvestia [Россотрудничество сообщило о расширении присутствия в Африке // Известия]. November 07, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://iz.ru/1421584/2022-11-07/rossotrudnichestvo-soobshchilo-o-rasshirenii-prisutstviia-v-afrike> (accessed: 08.11.2022).

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