

A Shift from Ideological to Soft Power Cooperation of Russia and African Countries in Arts, Education and Science

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Abstract—Russia has not colonized any African country, and its relationship with the continent is quite different as compared to other European countries like Britain or France. With the absence of language environment, there has been a need for creating new modern strategies of cooperation especially with President Putin's government shifting from USSR cooperation in education as an ideological strategy to current soft power tool. With a foreign policy of non-interference in domestic affairs of sovereign states Russia is steadily gaining ground in the continent. This article will explore the theory of soft power and analyze how Russia is using it as a tool for expanding its cultural and political influence in Africa through cooperation in arts education and science. It will also examine the changes from the USSR time to present Russian federation while exploring its foreign policy in relation to Africa, and lastly conclude with observations made and prospects.

Keywords—Russia; Africa; ideological; soft power; education

I. INTRODUCTION

Most African states cooperate with the western countries like Britain, France and the USA mainly because of colonization and common language. For countries like China and Russia, with no background of colonization and no common language, some might think they are at a disadvantage. But the international system is slowly shifting and the continent is slowly moving away from the traditional western countries to the East.

As stated in Russia's foreign policy of 2013 "The ability of the West to dominate world economy and politics continues to diminish. The global power and development potential is now more dispersed and is shifting to the East, primarily to the Asia-Pacific region." [3]

The shift is mainly because of the different approaches that these states use. With policies of respecting sovereignty

and non- interference with domestic issues they are slowly gaining ground in the continent.

It could be argued that whenever Russia is discussed most people think of it as a state that uses hard power. But Russia's cooperation with Africa as a continent is quite different. It has less background role as compared to most western countries but subtly using soft power it has been making its stride in the continent.

"The concept of "soft power" is actively discussed in Russia. Soft power has enormous potential. It can be applied not only by the civil society instruments (even religious institutions as civil society structures could be employed), but also through cooperation within international organizations, by media, in the form of economic assistance, via personal contacts, as a result of mobility process and by public diplomacy instruments" [1]

Bearing this in mind Russia's cooperation with Africa is quite different as compared to the west. Whereas the latter use hard power most often almost forceful with threats or sanctions. Russia has taken a different perspective of soft power in education, Science and arts and in the process marking its foot print in the continent albeit odds being against them.

As stated in their foreign policy "In addition to traditional methods of diplomacy, "soft power" has become an integral part of efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives. This primarily includes the tools offered by civil society, as well as various methods and technologies — from information and communication, to humanitarian and other types." [4]

Nye defined it as "Soft power is a state's ability to win others over, ensuring support for their agendas in international relations by demonstrating their cultural and moral values, their policies' appeal, and the efficiency of their political institutions" [9]

Whilst most states' use of soft power varies, "Europeans promote good governance; China champions "global

harmony” and regional hegemony; Moscow advocates sovereignty in international affairs”. [8] In their cooperation with African states, through education they will be able to spread their cultural values without forcing or imposing themselves.

“Big powers started to pay special attention and importance to the use of education as an effective instrument/source of soft power. Also, a successful national education system can help create a more favorable and lasting image among the international audience, thus further enhancing a country's soft power”. [2]

But as stated by President Putin, the use of education is not about empire but moving away from traditional methods of how Africa has been coexisting with other continents “This is not about empire, but rather cultural progress. Exporting education and culture will help promote Russian goods, services and ideas; guns and imposing political regimes will not. We must work to expand Russia’s educational and cultural presence in the world, especially in those countries where a substantial part of the population speaks or understands Russian” [11]

II. TRADITIONAL “IDEOLOGICAL” COOPERATION

“During the 1945-1990, the United States and Soviet Union employed various cultural and informational and educational tools to establish and maintain friendly political regimes in foreign states.” [14]

As such, “the USSR for a long time used higher education as a geopolitical tool and as an “ideological weapon” at the time of confrontation and the Cold War, long before the term ‘soft power’ was coined” [13]

This was done by foreign students being brought to Soviet Union to receiving their education whilst being exposed to Marxist Theory. “First, they selected foreign nationals to attend and receive instruction at American or Soviet educational institutions (mainly at the postsecondary level). Second, they exposed participants in such programs to ideas and practices in line with the dominant ideology of the American or the Soviet system” [14]

Since Russia did not colonize any African country, its programmes ideally started in earnest after the end of World War II and African countries gaining independence. “When an African country became independence, a delegation from the USSR, including politicians, officials, and scientists usually came to attend the celebration of independence. During such visits, the Soviet ambassadors had an opportunity to talk about Soviet achievements in agriculture, science and technology to show the advantages of the socialist economic system.” [6]

In countries like Kenya whereas the programme for scholarships in 1950’s to 1960’s to USA was coined “airlift”, the one to eastern socialist countries was coined “Aeroflot”. Kenya being a former colony of Britain, the students did not receive support from government hence did it in hiding going through Cairo to get their scholarships to USSR.

This was so because the British did not support communism. Regardless of all these hardships that former western colonies faced they still found ways to send their students to USSR which shows the zeal that Africans have for education.

Other than enrolling students, the Soviet Union universities designed courses which became attractive to African students like engineering, medicine and law. For example, “the program in comparative law, which primarily examined legal systems in capitalist and socialist countries, was designed to recognize the global political situation and solve problems in African countries by improving legal systems” [6]

III. A SHIFT TOWARDS MODERN SOFT POWER COOPERATION

With the collapse of USSR there was a decline in the cooperation for several years. “The USSR, for a number of years was, after the United States, the second most attractive destination for foreign students, Russia today only holds ninth place. [13]

But with Putin as the President there has been a significant improvement. When he took over presidency, he had a different perspective unlike his predecessor after the collapse of Soviet Union who was keen on just imposing western values on its people while forgetting Russia’s place in the world order through its culture and values.

“Putin saw Russia as a weak state, a state that had lost its glory, but a state that, nonetheless, deserved and was meant to have a place in the great power group” [12] But with Putin’s Foreign policy there has been a resurgence of the cooperation in accordance with the new changes of the modern world.

This does not mean the traditional method of foreign students being sponsored by either their respective governments or by Russia’s government has changed, No. But with globalization and advancement of technology the President has embarked on a project to restore Russia on the world stage through science and education.

On the backdrop of this, President Putin in 2012 on measures for the implementation of state policy in the education and science field, through the ministry of Science and higher Education of the Russian Federation embarked on a new project 5- 100 whose goal is “The goal of Project 5-100 is to maximize the competitive position of a group of leading Russian universities in the global research and education market” [7]

Other than that universities are also measured in number of foreign students hence “Recruiting foreign students to study at Russian universities, including joint (double degree) programs with international universities” [7]

Accordingly, universities, like Peoples Friendship University of Russia (RUDN) which is the leading university with foreigners, are moving away from traditional educational cooperation to new ones.

“For the first time in Africa, RUDN Centre for Russian Language and Pre-University Training opened. This is a joint project with the University of Copperbelt. Students from Zambia and 8 neighboring countries were given the opportunity to complete the program of the preparatory faculty, without going to Russia.” [10]

This is because of the realization that there are more English Speaking African countries and they will need a new approach in how the language will be taught. This is in relation with south-south cooperation in advancing sustainable development goals. With such center, it will mean that students will not have to travel to Russia there easing the financial burden.

“The center of the Russian language and pre-university training is part of RUDN project to create an educational and industrial cluster "South Africa". English-speaking countries in Africa will get special sets of training materials on Russian as a foreign language, taking into account the absence of the language environment, cultural features and phonetic specificity”. [10]

IV. CONCLUSION

According to UNESCO data the top 6 African countries that lead in mobile students in Russian federation are Morocco, Nigeria, Angola, Tunisia, Namibia and Ghana [5]. But for example Students mobility of Moroccans to Foreign countries, Russian is 7th favorite while France and Ukraine are the favorites, Nigeria, Russian federation is 15th, UK and USA still remain favorites in that order. While for Angola Russia is the 6th favorite whilst Portugal followed by Brazil is the favorites.

The conclusion can be that former colonizers still have an upper hand in matters education in African countries plus language plays a huge role as a deciding factor. Therefore, Russia still needs to do more to gain an upper hand in Africa.

So, not only the state that will make favorable policies for African countries, but also individual universities need to take up the challenge as well. Not only in recruiting foreign students but as noted mobility of foreign students also depends on language.

Hence it is a must for the universities to introduce more English programmes as well as French as they are the widely spoken languages in the continent. Other than that, the universities will also need to offer more individual partnerships with African states as exemplified by RUDN University.

As stated by the vice rector, RUDN is a bridge between Zambia and Russia in the field of science and education.

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