

SA AND THE EASTERN BLOC

Looking with new eyes

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As the decade draws to a close, southern Africa could at last be heading for peace. Namibia is on the verge of independence; negotiations are under way to settle the conflicts in Angola and Mozambique. At the same time, events are pointing to a more relaxed relationship between Pretoria and the Eastern bloc.

President De Klerk's promise of "a new SA, free from the antagonisms of the past," has not gone unnoticed in the Soviet Union. That's according to Gennadiy Gerasimov, head of the information directorate of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Speaking in a BBC programme, Gerasimov said the Soviet Union would welcome steps to carry out the intentions voiced by De Klerk.

The political scene in SA has changed rapidly since De Klerk took over (see *Leaders*) and SA is being viewed by some Eastern bloc members with more than curiosity. Already, say informed sources, both Hungary and Poland, fresh from their dramatic rejection of communist rule, have been making overtures to Pretoria — if only to consider the establishment of "interest offices" in those countries.

Writing in *Soviet Review*, published by the Institute for Soviet Studies at Stellenbosch, researcher Nicholas Anderton (formerly of the University of Glasgow) says the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Budapest and Pretoria is a possibility in the medium term. The Hungarians have moved fast this year to establish ambassadorial contact with South Korea and Israel and a Chilean consulate-general was revived in Budapest.

"The level of trade between Hungary and SA does not yet justify reciprocal trade missions," says Anderton, "but recent commercial, tourist, academic and media contacts could pave the way."

The unusual business activities were underlined this week, with the visit to SA of a former deputy premier of Hungary, Joseph Marjia; he is now the chief adviser to the Hungarian PM. Marjia was the personal guest in Cape Town of Cape Gate Fence &

Wire chairman Mendel Kaplan, whose company is planning to establish a branch office in Budapest. Marjia also had discussions with Johannesburg brokers and JSE officials.

Political commentators, including Anderton, will not be surprised if Foreign Minister Pik Botha visits Hungary early in the New Year. He is usually quick to pounce on such opportunities. However, no formal decision on "interest offices" can be taken without Cabinet discussion and approval.

† On the media front, SA has been an attractive destination for Soviet journalists. A frequent visitor to this country is

Izvestia's southern and eastern Africa correspondent, Boris Piliatskine. He is based in Maputo and covered all the meetings of the joint com-

mission which monitors the Angolan-SA situation.

In journalistic circles it has been said that the Soviets would be keen to place in SA a permanent correspondent of *Pravda*, the State-controlled newspaper. It's unlikely that Pretoria would agree to this — unless Moscow accords the same privileges to, say, a representative of Sapa.

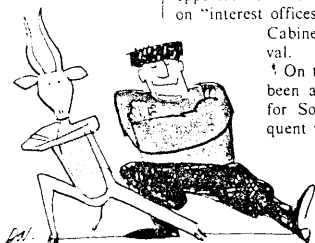
On the diplomatic front, contact between Pretoria and Moscow still seems far off. Apartheid continues to play a decisive spoiling role and "therefore, it is still untimely to announce the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and SA," says Yuri Yukalov, the head of the newly unified African department in the Soviet foreign ministry.

But Yukalov says representatives of certain sectors of Soviet society (scientists, for instance) do maintain ties with counterparts in SA, including whites who speak out against apartheid.

"I would like to say," added Yukalov, "that we certainly have contacts with representatives of SA's foreign policy department, in the framework of the joint commission to monitor the settlement in Namibia. Such contacts are inevitable and, in my view, useful."

It is early days yet. But Philip Nel, director of the Institute of Soviet Studies, believes the USSR has a role to play in future negotiations for an internal settlement in SA. "The current Soviet leadership is ideally placed to play such a role in conjunction with other governments. To achieve this, it is not only necessary for Moscow to maintain and

strengthen its good ties with Lusaka, but also to extend informal contacts with decision-makers in SA."



Nel