

SOUTH AFRICA has finally appeared on the map of Soviet Africanists, political scientists and others who have specialised in southern Africa as a geographical and political entity.

Some of them are focusing on the country as a subject of research interest and will visit South African universities on travel grants and fellowships. Some are looking for employment, while their more enterprising colleagues are trying to convince South African business-
es to invest in the former Soviet Union.

This new focus of interest has resulted in the development of a number of South African societies, whose formation is marked by all the peculiarities of the turbulent events in Russia in 1991.

As the Soviet Union fell apart, first into the Union of Sovereign States and then into the Commonwealth of Independent States, an army of Soviet political scientists, historians and economists suddenly found themselves faced with the prospect of unemployment. Especially affected were members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the research institutes for area studies attached to the Soviet Academy of Sciences, all of whom had been brought up on Marxist-Leninist dogma.

This signalled a curious new trend in the history of the brain drain from the Soviet Union. For the first time in 70 years it is not the dissidents, the intellectuals, who will be jobless, but the apparatchiks-ideologues, who have to look Westwards in search of employment possibilities.

To some extent, this process was already under way at the beginning of perestroika. American universities have been inundated since 1987 with visitors from Soviet universities and research institutes. These visitors were mostly sent to propagate the ideas of glasnost, democratisation and the "new thinking".

Then came the period of the semi-official visitors, coinciding with the split of the Soviet political elite into the so-called "democrats" (of Western, free-market orientation) and the Russian nationalists. Both groups found ready listeners in the West, but only the democrats and the free-market economists were regularly given support in the form of generous research grants.

With the chaos brought by the fall of the Soviet Union and its institutions, and uncertainty as to which of the Soviet research institutes will be taken over and financially supported by the new Russian state, researchers will be turning to the West in search of financial resources, be they in the form of research fellowships, contract employment, the "joint venture" so popular in Russia today, or simply to sell their "know-how" — a buzzword of the new entrepreneurial spirit of the past two years.

The South African-Soviet Society was

The new Russia discovers the White South

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The post-Gorbachev Russia has discovered South Africa.

Joint Russian-South Africa societies are sprouting all over Moscow. It's as if apartheid never existed

By PROFESSOR

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formed in Moscow in June 1991 by Africanists from the Academy of Sciences, Moscow State University, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute of Countries of Asia and Africa. It included representatives of the newly emerged Moscow business communities and delegates from other republics were also present.

The society's aims were to promote business, economic and tourist links between the countries and to concentrate on the exchange of information and specialists in various fields.

The society immediately came under attack for including ideologues of the old regime among its members. A journalist from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (Independent Newspaper) denounced the founding members for "their links with, and accountability to, the Central Committee and the KGB". She specifically had in mind the Africanists from the Institute of Countries of Asia and Africa and the African Institute at Moscow State University.

After the August coup, Russian President Boris Yeltsin aimed to incorporate Soviet infrastructures on Russian territory into the

new Russian political institutions. Educational institutions and the research institutes of the Academy of Sciences went through a period of uncertainty, but finally they too were taken over by the Russian state.

In October a new society was registered, called the Russia-South Africa Society. Its aims are identical to those of the earlier South African-Soviet Society.

In an account of the founding meeting in the journal *Echo Planety* (Echo of the Planet), representatives of South Africa's biggest business corporations who attended the meeting were quoted as saying that their major commitments were in South Africa, but if they found feasible business propositions in Russia they would consider them. The article commented that the Soviet Union had suffered great losses through the application of sanctions.

Other societies formed at this time include the Good Hope Society (Russian Federation-South Africa) and the Russian-Southern African Information Agency, both located in Moscow. The Good Hope Society states its aim as "to foster economic relations, academic, cultural and human contacts", while the Information Agency offers "to put you in touch with Russian organisations and business partners ... on (a) commercial basis".

While some of these new societies are apolitical, some are alarmingly ideologised. Russian nationalism leaves its mark on many.

An interview with the president of the Siberian branch of the Russia-South Africa Society, published in October in *Molodost' Sibiri* (Siberia's Youth), bore the title "Blacks are better off in Russia, Whites are better off in Africa".

The president of this society calls South Africa a "great country which does not have and never had apartheid". He declares that apartheid was invented by the Americans, who had an economic interest in keeping South Africa and its rich mineral resources out of the hands of its competitors. He suggests that Russian specialists should emigrate to South Africa, where they will receive a house, a car and a settling-in payment of R50 000.

In the Russian press, in articles authored by founding members of the Russia-South Africa Society, South Africa is acquiring the image of a country with no political past.

The author of an *Izvestia* article expresses surprise that after the friendship between the Russians and the Boers at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, it took decades for the two countries to get together — as if there had been no such thing as apartheid to keep South Africa isolated from the international community in general, and from the Soviet Union in particular.

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