

With the "rooi gevaar" rapidly fading from recent memory, former political enemies South Africa and Russia are reaching out to each other as both countries go through the turmoil of major political and social reform, writes Weekend Argus Reporter, **WILLEM STEENKAMP.**

SOUTH Africa has found a major new global partner in world trade — ironically a partnership with its former sworn enemy the Soviet Union which has since evolved into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Where in the past swords were drawn on opposite sides of the battlefields of Africa with Russians supplying weapons and advice to South Africa's enemies north of the Namibian border, deals are now cut in the boardrooms of businessmen in the two countries.

And spokesmen of both countries are quietly optimistic that the new, warm and open relationship between the two countries could eventually lead to lucrative trade deals.

Several Russian delegations have visited South Africa over the past months to talk about the exchange of technology, mining ventures and expanding trade between the two countries.

A trade agreement has already been signed and consensus reached on the exchange of science technology. The two countries recently also signed a declaration of intent providing for wide-ranging co-operation in the development and marketing of mineral technology.

South African exporters also feel there is a lucrative market for exports to Russia and a local hosiery company has recently signed a deal to export 12,5 million pairs of pantihose to Russia over the next 12 months.

Business people are also excited about the importation of comparatively cheap consumer goods from Russia to South Africa.

One well known group of local chain stores has already started importing toys from Russia at very cheap prices and re-packaging them for the local market.

The number of visits of Russian ships to South African ports has increased tremendously over the past couple of months with repairs and maintenance work being undertaken in Cape Town and Durban harbours.

The South African freight carrier Safair also recently signed a deal with a Russian company to use a number of Soviet built aircraft on African routes.

The first direct flight between Moscow and Johannesburg was also recently instituted and regular direct flights will be undertaken once a week between these two countries by the official Russian Airline.

In an interview with Weekend Argus, Russia's recently appointed ambassador to South Africa, Mr Eugeny Goussarov, said South Africa was high on their list of trading partners.

"Obviously trade and other business ventures are not going to take off overnight, but we feel that the future for trade, and other areas where we can work together, holds great promise for both our countries.

"Because we also are in period of transition we know, probably better than anyone in the world, how difficult and painful this transition is. Some of our problems are very similar, but some also very different to yours.

"Our reform is both political and economic and in many respects it is even more painful than the process unfolding here. One thing we have in common is that, like South Africa, we are re-entering the world community of nations.

"For many decades both our countries were in isolation. You were in one sort of isolation while we sealed ourselves off from the outside world with an iron curtain. But today both countries face the challenge of becoming part of the world community.

"In terms of our relationship we have a lot of catching up to do. We are, after de-

CADES of isolation, suddenly faced with the prospect that we can do business together, we can establish dialogue on many important issues and in the context of both bilateral relations and international affairs, I attach particular importance to the development of links between Russia and South Africa.

"In many areas there are opportunities not only for trade deals but also for some sort of a joint venture on research and exploration, particularly in reference to raw materials. We are both major exporters of certain items and this calls for discussion and an attempt to act in co-ordination, rather than as competitors, with the world market.

"The pragmatic approach for this development is that we have to create the infrastructure that will allow businessmen on both sides to get in touch with each other in order to establish mutually advantageous projects.

"But a problem both countries have is that both are in need of investments, and neither country is considered today to be the most reliable in terms of political stability.

"Hopefully the time will come when indeed the notion of working closely together will pay off and bring its benefits to both countries. We are very serious about that and intend to pursue this goal very vigorously," said Mr Goussarov.

Mr Cor Nortje, deputy director of the Department of Foreign Affairs, responsible for matters relating to the Commonwealth of Independent States, said currently relations between South Africa and Russia were going through a stage of consolidation and the creation of proper structures on which agreements can be concluded.

Mr Nortje said South Africa seemed to be a popular destination for Russians and there was a steady stream of inquiries

from people wanting to visit this country — especially now that all travel restrictions on Russian citizens had been scrapped.

He said there was currently no concerted drive to draw skilled labour from Russia to South Africa.

"The current bad economy, and also the fact that we have a duty to employ our own people first before importing skilled labour from elsewhere, are the main reasons for not trying to bring skilled Russians here.

But, said Mr Nortje, the main difference between South Africa and Russia was in the economic sphere, where South Africa had a free market system, while this was to a large extent still absent in the Russia.

He agreed, however, that relations between South Africa and Russia could in the long run bring benefits to both countries.

Deals cut to get out of the Red!

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Picture, ROY WIGLEY, Weekend Argus.

GOOD RELATIONS: A group of Russians toast the Mother City on a recent visit to Cape Town. Increasing numbers of Russian ships and fishing trawlers are making use of the facilities of South African ports with the opening up of relations between the two countries.