

on its way out... We wouldn't want a negative perception of the USSR among our people. ²⁶"

But in spite of Shevardnadze's assurances, during the very period when the several decades of the anti-apartheid struggle brought the first fruits, the Soviet relations with the ANC and its allies started to "cool down" and later to deteriorate. By that time Gorbachev was playing a double game. Contrary to his promises, given to Tambo earlier, he established direct contacts with the South African government, behind the back of the ANC and of the CPSU that he (at least on paper) was still heading.

The situation deteriorated further when Boris Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev in the Kremlin. In his paper "From Gorbachev to Yeltsin: Moscow-Pretoria Relations at a Time of Change" Nicholas Anderton of the University of Stellenbosch claimed that "after the accession to undisputed power in the Kremlin of President Boris Yeltsin in December 1991, a clearly defined policy towards South Africa, based exclusively on Russia's national interest emerged..." ²⁷ The reality, however, was rather the opposite: after that date the policy was largely determined by personalities or groups that either acted in their narrow interests, or under the blinkers of "reideologisation", rather than in "Russia's national interests".

On many major issues of foreign policy Yeltsin's Government followed the steps of the West, but as far as South Africa is concerned it went even further. While major Western powers were doing their best to build or to broaden the bridges to the ANC, Yeltsin's government was in a hurry to develop ties with Pretoria at the expense of the ANC. Such steps involved the establishment of diplomatic relations with Pretoria in February 1992 on the one hand, and the dropping of the financial support to the ANC office in Moscow and sending away most of the ANC cadres on the other.

²⁶ ANC Lusaka Collection. Mayibuye Centre Historical Papers, University of the Western Cape.

So, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Moscow's cessation of both political and practical assistance to the ANC in late 1991 undoubtedly had a negative effect on the talks. It is hardly accidental that the government of the day adopted an intransigent position in 1992 after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Moscow and the assurances given to De Klerk by Yeltsin in the Russian capital. Moreover, the collapse of the "second world" harmed prospects of deep social and economic transformation in the interests of the majority in South Africa.

However the twist in USSR/Russian policy towards South Africa did not remain unchallenged. When Yeltsin was welcoming De Klerk in May 1992 in the Kremlin, Themba Thabethe, the Head of the ANC Mission, was invited to the House of Soviets - the premises of the Russian Parliament where he discussed with the Co-ordination Council of the Opposition "the present stage and the prospects of political, economic and cultural relations between Russia and South Africa". A message to Nelson Mandela, signed by a group of the opposition leaders, was forwarded to the ANC envoy²⁸.

Nevertheless lacking a broad anti-apartheid movement in Russia, the actions of the opposition, though they irritated Yeltsin's government and forced it to think twice before taking further steps towards Pretoria, could not have a decisive impact on its policy. It was the developments in South Africa itself, the ANC's victory in the 1994 election, that caused later some positive changes in Moscow's policy towards South Africa. The prospects for the development of the South Africa's relations with Russia have been strengthened after the defeat of the overtly pro-Western political forces in the recent Russian election.

²⁷ M. Anderton. *From Gorbachev to Yeltsin. Moscow-Pretoria Relations at a Time of Change*, University of Stellenbosch, 1994, p.1

²⁸ Press Release. The meeting between a leading member of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and the ANC Chief Representative in Moscow, 4 June 1992.

Let us try to sum up. Not only was the volume of Moscow's assistance to the ANC and its allies very significant, but what is more important, the USSR was capable and willing to render assistance at the time and in the fields when and where other countries were not ready and not able to do it. This happened in 1963-1965 when mass training of the MK cadres was organised in the Soviet Union, in 1969 when the core of the MK had to be "evacuated" from Tanzania to Simferopol and other places in the USSR, and even much later, in 1988 when Moscow was still the safest place for Oliver Tambo's meeting with the head of the ANC underground machinery Mac Maharaj.

Yet the author strongly believes that Moscow's most important contribution to the elimination of apartheid in South Africa was not material assistance, training facilities or other steps, as described above, but the encouragement of non-racism in the ANC ranks.

