

NIGERIA AND RUSSIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS: THE POST-COLD WAR EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Post-Soviet Russia pursues very difficult foreign policy objectives in its relations with African states and in doing so it often draws on the relationships, partnerships, and formal and informal networks forged during the Cold War. Russia has abandoned its promotion of socialism to pursue crude economic interests via its business elite, based on values that appear to be in stark contrast to the conventions of Western liberalism. Undoubtedly, the Nigeria-Russia bilateral relations during the Post Cold War have had both good and difficult experience. This study therefore is an assessment of the Nigeria and Russia economic ties from the historical point of view relying on traditional diplomatic theory as a tool to trace the existing diplomatic ties between the two countries. In conclusion, Nigeria-Russia relations have come of age, despite some psychological differences and suspicions, there are lots of gains and work is still needed to be done in the direction of media and cultural exchanges and some trade favorable policies on the part of Russian government to allow more Nigerian exports, while it is desirable that Nigeria and Russia move their bilateral relation to a new level of active cooperation in important and strategic economic sectors. The study therefore recommends among others that the economic relations between the two countries should be strengthening and make more emphasis than before on the development of cooperation at the level of small and middle-size enterprises.

Keyword : Post Cold War, Economic Relations, Cooperation, Prospects, Challenges

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relations between Nigeria and the defunct Soviet-Union, tended to highlight the dilemmas of Nigeria in relating with Moscow and wider communist Eastern European states in the immediate years of Nigerian independence in 1960. Despite the establishment of diplomatic relations, the tense international climate of Cold War at the time ensured that relations with USSR were constrained. Even though Nigeria had subscribed to the Bandung framework of nonalignment, impartial relations with the East and West were never realized as the professed nonaligned position was largely superficial. This is because Nigerian successive leaders with a few exceptions displayed a strong proclivity toward Western world. These perhaps stemmed from a morbid of communism and communists in filtration and subversion which stemmed from Nigeria's insecurity born out of Institutions and Military weakness (Poliakov, 2009). Thus, the formal diplomatic exchange between the Soviet Union and Nigeria failed to translate into cordial and effective relations. A combination of Western ideological orientation of the national leaders, colonial legacy, and the nature of Nigerian political and economic systems ensured that the Soviet Union would not be welcomed in Nigeria with open arms. Therefore, Soviet Union and Nigerian relations could be described as ranging from cold to lukewarm (Onafowokan, 2010). Matusевич (2019) explains that, during the Cold War, the USSR established itself as a moral partner against racism and even supported anti-apartheid militias in Africa. In the early 1970s, it also supported the Organization of African Unity, implemented "extravagant" development

projects such as a steel mill in Nigeria, and became an African ally at the United Nations. Strategically, Russia was interested in securing economic cooperation and international support in its competition with the West. Matusevich (2019) argues that there are "continuities" between Cold War-era and current Russian policies towards Africa and that there are some overarching objectives across both periods, such as Moscow's pursuit of international support. However, he provides little explanation regarding specific economic and political interests during the Cold War. He further amplified the importance of personal connections between key Russian and African leaders, which have facilitated Russia's re-entry into the region. Not only were many politicians and African business leaders trained in the Soviet Union, but also many prominent Russian leaders were former intelligence officers, some with African connections. Although a lack of ideological objectives distinguishes current Russian policies from those of the Cold War era, there are other goals that transcend both periods. The 1991 declaration of the disintegration of the Soviet Union brought an end to the 74 years of the Soviet rule which moved the 'cold war' to the heap of history. Russia emerged as an independent sovereign state, so did the other fourteen union republics that constituted the then Soviet Union. Russia opted for democracy and democratic culture which was to replace centralization with decentralization, the closed economy to the market economy, fusion of power to separation of power, the single party system to the multi-party system and above all the emergence of fundamental human rights together with freedom of the press as well as freedom of speech. It was a dawn of a new world order (Agubamah, 2014).

The post-Soviet Russia was concerned with the task of building a new structure to match its new political philosophy. It was indeed a very difficult time for it as a nation. The challenges were enormous but the most significant was a need to have a new constitution, as the Soviet laws were not only obsolete but also inadequate. The Khasbulatov-led Duma, which was constituted under the Soviet system, was uncooperative and confrontational with Boris Yeltsin, the first post-communist president of Russia. Besides, the country suddenly became a lawless state with all attendant social vices. The crime rate was growing exponentially and there was unemployment throughout the country. The gate that had kept corruption shut for more than 74 years got loosed while the very few privileged ones who succeeded in gaining of state properties came to be known as noviruski (New Russians); oligarchy turned into a strong force to contend with, holding the economy of the country in their hands (Abiodun, 2017). More so, there have thus been some fundamental changes in the dynamics of international relations and the positions of all actors in the system. However, that of the Russian Federation was peculiar, particularly because of the many challenges of transition from a socialist system to a capitalist and liberal democratic one. The challenges posed by this development greatly impacted on Russia's relations with other countries, including Nigeria. In addition, Russia seemed to have recoiled into itself as it tried to redefine its vision in the new era. Consequently, this study examines the Nigeria and Russia Economic ties in the Post Cold War era.

Objective of the Study

It has been held in Foreign Policy Circles that Nigeria bilateral relationship with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic now Russia Federation at Independence in 1960 was lukewarm mainly on the ideological ground (Poliakov, 2009). In addition after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the volume of trade still remained abysmally low with visible trade imbalance and several unexplored potentials of mutual benefits to both nations. In light of this assertion, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Investigate the causes of the lukewarm bilateral relations between Russia and Nigeria at independence.
2. Account for the low economic and business relations between the two nations in the post-Soviet era.
3. Access the pattern of Nigeria's external relations in its bilateral relations with Russia.
4. Provide enduring panacea for purposeful and enduring robust economic relations between Russia and Nigeria.

Obasekola (2011) argues that the new stance of Russia on Nigeria and Africa in general was not unconnected with the exit of Comrade Nikiti Khrushchev from the helms of affairs of Russia in 1964; the Soviet quickly denounced his policy approach to foreign affairs, a more balanced and less ideological approach was promulgated, by the late 1960s, the Soviet leadership became more disinterested in revolution in African states and more interested in the political support for those states in their struggle to find their space in the international system and for economic benefits based on mutual cooperation irrespective of the nature of their internal regimes. This new Soviet Pragmatic Foreign Policy enabled the country take the side

of the Federal government of Nigeria when Col Odumegwu Ojukwu in May 30, 1967 proclaimed the secession of the Eastern Region of the country to form a sovereign Republic of Biafra, which culminated in the fratricidal civil war which started in July 6, 1967, the demands of the civil war persuaded the Federal Government of Nigeria to court USSR. Numerous joint documents have since been signed between Nigeria and Soviet (Russia). These documents include Agreements on an air communication (1967), agreement on economic, scientific and technical cooperation (1968), Agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation and exchanges (1970), Protocol on the equivalence of scientific degrees, diplomas and certificates issued and awarded by the educational institutions of the parties (1973), Agreement on economic and technical cooperation in the construction of a new metallurgical enterprise in Nigeria (1976), Trade agreement (1987), Agreement on the establishment of intergovernmental commission on trade, economic and scientific and technical cooperation (1989), Protocol on political consultations (1990), and Agreement on cooperation against illegal drugs and Psychotropic substances (1999). These agreements have led to different degrees of Soviet (Russian) involvement in Nigeria's metallurgy, petroleum industry, geological surveys, public health services and personnel training. Two systems of oil pipelines of 920 km with total output of 18.7 million tons per year were constructed by the USSR in 1977 - 1982 on conditions of general contract in Nigeria. (Obasekola: 2011).

Russia was trying to regain momentum following the elimination of the old political order, whereas Nigeria on its part was under military dictatorship, which began in 1983. It was making efforts to gain legitimacy and recognition in the comity of nations where military governance was unpopular and unacceptable. Consequently, during this era, Nigeria was unable to conduct meaningful and purposeful international relations. Despite this, the Nigerian military junta displayed a high level of disrespect of human rights especially the obnoxious Decree 4 of 1984 that censors all forms of freedom of expression. Several media outlets were proscribed; journalists and activists were plunged into prisons, and generally, life became unsafe and insecure apart from the crumbling economy resulting in inadequate physical and social infrastructures. This persisted until 1999 when a new democratically elected government was inaugurated. Incidentally, it coincided with the change of government in Russia when Vladimir Putin emerged as the second democratically elected president of the Russian Federation (Abiodun, 2017). The coming to power of Russian President Vladimir Putin and the inauguration of Obasanjo as a democratically elected president of Nigeria brought about the reestablishing of diplomatic ties between Russia and Nigeria, which opened a new window of opportunities for the two nations to exploit the potentials of their cooperation in the political and economic spheres. Russia sent a representative to attend former president Obasanjo's inauguration who delivered an invitation to visit Russia. This invitation was honoured and Obasanjo paid a state visit to Russia March 5–7, 2001 which reactivated Nigeria-Russia bilateral relations (Agubamah, 2014). On March 6, 2001 there was signed the Declaration on Principle of Friendly Relations between the two countries. This led to the eventual establishment of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Scientific-Technical Cooperation (ICESTC) which laid the foundation for forging mutually beneficial relations and helped deepen their ties. This commission was to meet regularly to discuss on a wide range of issues concerning Nigeria-Russia bilateral relationship (Waliyullahi, 2016).

Obasanjo made a commitment to ensure improved mutually beneficial and enduring relations with Russia. This position was further strengthened in 2008 by the personal contact between Musa Ya'adua who took over from Obasanjo and Medvedev, the successor to Putin (2008–2012) in Toyaka, Japan during the G-8 summit. As a follow up to that meeting, President Dmitry Medvedev came to Nigeria on a state visit in June, 2009. That was the first visit of a Russian Head of State in history which gave a boost to the evolving Nigeria-Russia relationship. After the meeting of the Nigerian-Russian Heads of State in Abuja, the following agreements were signed on June 24, 2009 among others: (1) Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement, (2) Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy, (3) Memorandum of Understanding in the Field of Exploration of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes, (4) Agreement of the Transfer of Persons Sentenced to Imprisonment, (5) Memorandum of Association on Joint Venture between NNPC and GAZPROM, and (6) Legal cooperation between the Nigerian and Russian Ministries of Justice (Abiodun, 2017). Codel International Limited of Nigeria and Asen of Russia signed an agreement at the Nigerian Embassy in Moscow on the construction of the Gas Turbine Electricity Generation Plant in Bayelsa state, Nigeria, in 2005. The Thermo Power Station in Kwara State had earlier been constructed by this same Russian company. This further displays the interest and confidence of Nigeria in Russian technology. This position was affirmed in a statement by Steve Azaiki, the Secretary to the Bayelsa State government while

signing the agreement in Moscow on behalf of his State government. As a result of President Medvedev's visit that led to the signed agreements, there emerged several new initiatives (Agubamah, 2014). The Russians were working with the National Commission on Atomic Energy to build an Experimental Research Nuclear Plant in Abuja. There was also the agreement on the Russians providing technical assistance for beefing up Nigeria's peacekeeping and peace-support operations. In this regard, several security operatives from Nigeria had been sent and are being sent to Russia for special training to boost its defense capacities. Part of the new level of scientific and technological cooperation between the two countries, in August 2011, Nigeria launched Nigeria SAT 2 and Nigeria SAT X spacecrafts into orbit aboard the Russian Dnerpr rocket from a launch pad in the town of Yasny, southern Russia. In a bid to foster mutually beneficial relationship between Nigerian and Russian business people, Glades Sasore, a special adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria (2010–2015) on export promotion, visited Moscow to showcase products made in Nigeria, ranging from quality agricultural commodities, timber, solid minerals, gemstones and tanned leather. At her meeting with the Russian chambers of commerce and industry, Sasore emphasized the interest of Nigeria in Russian technology to boost industrialization drive. In August 2016, concession was given by the Russian chambers of commerce to exclusively import cashew from Nigeria (Waliyullahi, 2016).

Nigeria is increasingly becoming a key business partner to Russia in Africa. The volume of trade grew from Three Hundred Million to 1.5 billion dollars in 2010, in favour of Russia according to the Central Bank of Nigeria. The major Russian companies have commenced operation in Nigeria. RUSSAL – the Russian aluminum giant bought a 77.5 per cent stake in Nigeria's aluminum smelter, ALSCON. Gazprom, the Russian National Energy Company, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) on the exploration and exploitation of the nation's huge gas reserves with a new joint venture company to be known as NiGaZ Energy Company, with an agreement to also take part in several other critical infrastructural development projects, including the training of Nigerians among others. Both companies were expected to invest up to 2.5 billion US Dollars in the joint venture. The Russian oil giant Lukoil also worked to expand its operation in Nigeria's oil markets. The Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces General Valery Gerasimov, met Nigerian Defense Minister Mansur Muhammad Dan-Ali in Moscow to discuss the bilateral agenda in the field of the military-technical cooperation on the 2012 agreement on joint project to design, develop, construct, operate and commission a nuclear power plant scheduled to be completed in 2025 (Agubamah, 2014). These are good indicators to the dynamic Nigeria-Russia relations, and it has led to though slow but steady growth of the bilateral trade and promotion of direct contacts between Nigerian and Russian officials, institutions, agencies and companies opening up opportunities for further cooperation. In June 2016, in Lagos, Nigeria, there was launched RuNiTrade (Russia Nigeria e-commerce platform) out of the partnership between Lagos Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Trail Trans Logistics Group of companies in Russia. The focus was to strengthen the bilateral trade relations between Russia and Nigeria and boost the economic activities between the two countries by providing information about business opportunities in the two countries. This was to stimulate the investments flow between the two nations. In August 2015, there was launched Soyuznik (Association of Soviet/Russian trained professionals who worked or are still working in different sectors in Nigeria and abroad) under the leadership of Shina Fawole who later handed over to Jerome Okolo. This organization has been disposed to rejuvenating Russia-Nigeria relations. The productive exploitation of Ajaokuta Steel Rolling Mills built during the Soviet era has been a cause for serious concern to this organization (Waliyullahi, 2016).

However, according to Kohnert (2022), the main reason behind contemporary Russian engagement in Africa and Nigeria in particular is to counter Western influence, particularly as Moscow feels chastised by Western sanctions for its actions in Ukraine, its human rights abuses, its malicious cyber-activities, and interference in foreign elections, among other activities. The Russians believe Africa can be a stage where it can find partners to create a multipolar world and reduce Western global dominance. By forging new relationships across Africa, Russia would gain new allies within multilateral organizations, particularly at the UN General Assembly (UNGA). For example, when the UN voted in 2014 on a resolution criticizing Russian hostilities in Crimea, twenty-nine countries from Africa either voted against the resolution or abstained and Russia garnered much of this support through debt relief. The Soviet Union focused a large portion of its economic aid towards large-scale projects. For example, Nigeria did not have socialist inclinations, but the Soviets wanted to maintain good relations with the country because it had the largest

population and second-largest army in Africa. The Soviets funded the construction of a major pipeline in Nigeria as well as the construction of an iron and steel complex. The total amount of global economic aid provided by the Soviet Union declined in the early 1980s, from \$8.1 billion from 1975-79 to just \$2.5 billion in 1980-81, an average reduction of \$367 million per year. Several factors influenced the Soviet Union to reduce economic aids to Africa in the 1980s. First, the Soviet Union was facing its own economic struggles, making it difficult for it to continue providing aid to developing countries (Onafowokan, 2010). Also, Gorbachev's reforms, which started in the mid-1980s, allowed for a more open press, which criticized the Soviet Union's policy towards Africa. According to an EU Parliament brief, Soviet interest in the region declined in the 1980s because of economic hardship coupled with improved relations with the West. The Soviets benefited as much from economic aid as they invested in it. Their primary goal in Sub-Saharan Africa was to promote socialism, a path few countries pursued. However, their expenditures were negligible. Soviet aid in 1979 was less than one percent of global development assistance, and less than one (1) percent of the USSR gross national product. The one important gain was the international recognition the USSR received for funding large-scale infrastructure projects (Kaplila, 2010).

Today, Russia uses development assistance as part of its strategy to establish a multipolar world order and regain the status it had during the Cold War in Sub-Saharan Africa. Russia claims to pursue normative foreign aid goals such as eradicating poverty, but it uses development assistance to exercise political influence and solidify its position in Nigeria. By providing development assistance, Russia legitimizes its status as a great power that could assume a global leadership role (Waliyullahi, 2016). Russia's political motives are also evident through its prioritization of food security and health assistance programs. In terms of food security, Russia sources its contributions from domestic producers, which further consolidates its position as one of the largest wheat suppliers in the world. In terms of health assistance, Russia funds medical projects that include training elements, which allowed it to maintain a long-term physical presence in the recipient country (Ukiyedeikimie, 2023). Russia distributes its development assistance primarily through international organizations. According to a 2011 Russian national report, it channeled most of its development assistance through the UN, World Bank, World Health Organization, and International Civil Defense Organization. By providing aids, Russia presents itself as a major power capable of assisting countries in need. Russia distributes approximately 60 percent of aids through international organizations and the rest through bilateral agreements (Waliyullahi, 2016). Russia provides very little development and humanitarian assistance overall, but it broadly advertises when it does to promote its image as a major donor. The limited use of development assistance is a Russian characteristic that has continued from the Cold War era. The Soviets did not provide much aid to Nigeria and got as much in return, which perhaps influenced Russia's current disposition towards development assistance (Omotuyi, 2019). Russia is unlikely to change this trend, creating opportunities for the United States to counter Russia. The United States could, for example, reallocate portions of its development assistance budget to countries where Russia is trying to make inroads.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The theory this study used is the Traditional Diplomatic Theory. This theory is based on state-qua- state diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy refers to the interaction of states through their permanent ambassadors or specially appointed diplomats. Permanent bilateral representation is the core of traditional diplomacy (John, 1998). Traditional diplomacy sees states as the only actors in the international arena. They argued that even when non-state actors engage in international relations, they do that through the guidance of states. The main proponents of this theory are Woodrow Wilson, Basil, and Hedley. Traditional diplomacy is influenced by historical tradition. Traditional diplomacy emerged in Europe following the ultimate cessation of the thirty year war in 1648. The emerging state system needed a method to mitigate the conflict that had dominated Europe, for a large part of the 17th Century. This method was traditional diplomacy. Both diplomacy and the state system emerged and evolved in mutual reciprocity. The fundamental tenets of sovereignty, national interest, state representation and national security lie at the heart of traditional diplomacy. This is the aim of both Nigeria and Russia in relating with each other. The fundamental issues of sovereignty, national interest, state representation and national security lie at the heart of traditional diplomacy. There are some necessary qualifications for traditional diplomacy to function. The first qualification is that there must be more than one state. These states must be sovereign political units, able to exercise supreme authority within, and independence outside the unit (Hedley, 1997). A second qualification is the existence of shared values and

interests, which allow states to develop some regular pattern of interaction. In addition, Sharp (2009) argues that the demand for diplomacy, and the need for the insights of diplomatic theory are on the rise, he identified a diplomatic tradition of international thought premised on the way people live in groups, the differences between intra- and inter-group relations, and the perspectives which those who handle inter-group relations develop about the sorts of international disputes which occur. It is a fact that the fundamental tenets of sovereignty, national interest, and national security lie at the heart of traditional diplomacy and this is the main objective of Nigeria and the Russian federation; traditional diplomacy was more formal and protocols were extended to show the goodwill gestures, Russia/Nigeria diplomatic relations are centered on state relations and hence the justification of the theory to the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prospects of Nigeria-Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War

Nigeria needs Russian technology to boost industrialization just as Russia needs Nigeria as a market for its industrial products and military equipment. Many reasons have been advanced on why Russia should be a strategic partner for Nigeria like the one expressed by Poliakov (Russian Ambassador to Nigeria) that “Nigeria and Russia exhibit commonalities which include the practice of federalism, have almost the same population size, the two countries are advancing from autocratic to democratic rule apart from that, they are endowed with human and material resources including agricultural land, oil and gas” (Abiodun, 2017). Poliakov further stated that “Both countries even have “mission 2020” though with different goals: Nigeria aims to become one of the twenty most developed countries in the world while Russia is determined to be one of the world five largest economies”. The common features which Russia and Nigeria exhibit are more compelling than politics and economy, population size or natural endowments; Abiodun (2017) mirrored quite a number of similarities in the culture of these two nations which, in our view, if well explored should enhance their relationship. Particular attention was drawn to some of their traditions, mentality and way of life. Oshogbo – (god of water) in Nigeria, also, worship of iron in Russia is similar to ogun (god of iron) in Nigeria. Of particular interest is the tradition of marriage in these two countries. Among the Yorubas in Nigeria, for example, marriage is described as: “carry the wife” (gbe iyawo.) As a sign of love, the Russians do carry their wives in their hands and sometimes walk distance before they embark on what they call ‘gulanie’ (strolling) either in a park or any historical place from where they proceed to the reception (Obiozor, 2002). “To carry” in this case symbolizes taking full responsibilities for her. Apart from all these, in terms of character, the Russian and the Nigerian people like making themselves noticeable wherever they found themselves, which is always accompanied by ‘some excesses’ in terms of the spending habit. In the area of governance, the Tsarist era in Russia was a period of absolute power where the reign was passed from father to son. This is almost the same in the precolonial Nigeria even till date. This is well represented in Yoruba language: ‘ayeoba- aye- a –je- rorun’ which explains absolutism. In both countries leaders like being close to power; From Stalin in 1923 to Gorbachev in 1991, a leader either died while in power or was forced to abdicate office (Obiozor, 2002). Only Boris Yeltsin remains the first and the only Russian leader to have voluntarily left office. In comparison with Nigeria, since independence to date, no election had been free and fair until 2015. They had all been characterized by violence and chaos, because leaders are unwilling to relinquish power.

These attributes point to a number of similarities between the two countries. In spite of this, Russia is a developed nation, whereas Nigeria is not. The process that leads Russia to greatness is a path worthy of emulation by Nigeria. As noted by Agubamah, Russia has a lot to offer Nigeria in terms of technological support in several critical areas. In addition, Russia has a track record of nurturing several countries to industrial success through strategic partnership. Such countries include China, India and Egypt, to mention but a few. In March 2009, Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe visited Moscow to have talks with his Russian counterpart, Lavrov and had meeting with President Medvedev. Agreements were reached on activating the realization of the potentials both countries have in the trade and economic spheres, including execution of projects in infrastructure, ferrous and nonferrous metals industry, electric power generation, and nuclear energy. Russia and Nigeria are cooperating in a joint venture to exploit Nigeria’s vast gas reserves. Russia’s state-owned Gazprom has signed a \$2.5bn (£1.53bn) deal with Nigeria’s state operated NNPC, to invest in a new joint venture to develop, extract and transport gas from Nigeria’s fields, The agreement comes during a four-day African tour by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the contract, when fully

implemented would lead to the exchange of ideas and engagement of Nigerian armies of jobless youths (Waliyullahi, 2016). In November, 2010 Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov visited Nigeria to mark the 50th anniversary of Nigeria-Russia diplomatic relations. The agreements of the two countries to give a new impetus to their relations through strategic partnership on the strength of their 2009 agreements need to be accorded the deserved attention.

Problems of Nigeria-Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War

There are several challenges confronting Nigeria-Russia relations. For instance, in order for agreements among nations to become operational, they are to be passed by the National parliament and that forms their legal framework. The agreements signed with Russia are yet to be ratified by the parliament with particular reference to the Abuja agreement of 2009. Adequate knowledge and clear understanding of culture, history, language, mentality, world-view, capabilities and potentials of other nations are crucial to foreign policy making. It facilitates correct and accurate perception on which policies on diplomacy rests (Poliakov, 2009). There is weak indication that the two countries have sufficient and adequate knowledge of each other. This, in part, is responsible for the lack of the political will to fully implement their existing bilateral agreements. On the Russian side, in terms of foreign policy priority, Russia gave priority to the Magreb Union Countries in North Africa due to geographical proximity to Russia, geographical location in the Southern part of E.U Countries and national security considerations. The second area of priority is South Africa, while Nigeria is placed in the third position. Even so, it was argued that Angola might even come before Nigeria (Akinterinwa : 2013). The other problems of Nigeria – Russia relations are as follows:

- i. Political orientation. The majority among the Nigeria political elites are under strong influence of London and Washington whose interest is to distance Moscow from the affairs of African countries.
- ii. Trade imbalance. There should be created more adequate environment for Nigeria to increase its export to Russia. Tropical agricultural products like cashew, coffee, and cocoa could be sourced from Nigeria by Russian industries.
- iii. Inadequate information on business opportunities in Nigeria poses one of the major problems. Foreign investors including Russians have no access to up to date and reliable information on business prospects in Nigeria (Poliakov, 2009).
- iv. ALSCON, Nigeria's only aluminum smelting plant, handed over to Russian aluminum giant, United Company RUSAL PLC was closed down in 2014 placing more than 98 percent of its workforce out of job, most of them local hires (Abiodun, 2017).

Moreover, Waliyullahi (2016) argues that diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Russia have not been without its low moments. One of such moments was when some sailors, who were in the crews of a Greek-owned ship MT African Pride, charged for oil bunkering, illegal possession of Nigerian oil and economic sabotage, for which the punishment is death penalty, There were prolonged delays in the sailors' trial, which prompted protests from Russian government and strained diplomatic relations with Nigeria. Although, the sailors were eventually convicted by Nigerian court and each received six-month suspended sentences as part of a plea bargain, at the end, they were released because they have already spent nearly two years in pre-trial custody of the Nigerian Law Enforcement Agency. Another awful moment in the friendships was in June 2007 when six (6) Russian employees of Russian Aluminum Company (RUSALC) were abducted by the militants in the volatile Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria. After a long stay in captivity, the men were eventually rescued safely by a combined team of Nigerian Army and Police in August 2007. It was reported in Moskovsky Komsomolets daily of November, 24th, 2011 that a, Nigerian student, Mr. Akinola Olufemi, was found stabbed to death in southern Moscow with his ears cut off in a grisly murder, the victim was a student in the northern city of Arkhangelsk and that the crime appeared not to have been a robbery as his studys and wallet were left at the scene, the incident led to a strain in Nigerian Russian relations. In 2014, there were media reports that efforts to procure arms from Russia were unsuccessful owing to a slight weakness in the Nigeria's stance on Ukraine at the United Nations. However, this view was debunked by Russian envoy to Nigeria Amb. Nikolay Udovichenko who countered this position when He said: 'we see no reason why the situation around Ukraine should have negative impact on our relations with Nigeria which is traditionally a good friend and partner of Russia' (Omotuyi, 2019). Also in 2017, the Federal Government had alleged that low revenue, low output and dwindling demand for fish in Nigeria are because of the poor policing of the country's territorial waters, a development that had allowed illegal Russian and Chinese Companies free hand to fish illegally in the Country. In the words of Senator Heineken

Lokpobiri Minister of State for Agriculture ‘they bribe officers who are on the high sea and then they fish as much as they want and go back’ (Omotuyi, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

The diplomatic relations between nations are established to serve national interests. Nigeria-Russia relations should be focused and geared towards the promotion of the cultural heritage, scientific, economic and technical/technological cooperation. A strive to facilitate good knowledge as well as correct and accurate perception of each other needs to be given a place of priority for maturity of their bilateral conceptions. All issues on the privatization of ALSCON to Russian RUSAL including the legal tussles require diplomatic solutions in a manner that would bring the company to function at its maximum capacity. Nigerians and Russians are friendly and sympathetic to each other. There are lots of Joint-Ventures involving private Nigerian and Russian businesses, operating on their level without any involvement of their governments. The nation newsstudy reported back in June 2015 about “Olalusi O. Victor, a Nigerian who led a team of other International students from Russia, Italy, Greece, and Morocco and bagged the “Best Captain of the Year” award at the University’s annual Quiz competition. His team – International United – won Silver at the University’s annual Quiz competition”. Nigerians are perceived to be brilliant, hard-working, intelligent and pleasant people in Russia, although not without exceptions. They have always been among the best minds in Russia, over the past five years, Nigerian students at the Russian National Research Medical University have consistently topped the graduation chat, bagging honours and contributing their wealth of knowledge to the University’s academic status. There is inherent prospect for robust bilateral relations between Nigeria and Russia. Nigeria needs Russian technology to boost industrialization just as Russia needs Nigeria as a market for its industrial products and Military equipment. There should be adequate information on business opportunities in Nigeria. This would provide foreign investors including Russians with reliable and update information on business prospects in Nigeria. During parliamentary visit of Bukola Saraki’s to Russia in July, 2018, it was observed that even though there exists good relations between Nigeria and Russia, on the political, economic, cultural and diplomatic spheres, that there was much space left to be covered in order to improve on the relationship. Saraki noted that as a fellow oil producing nation, we do believe that Russia has a keen insight on some of the challenges we face in Nigeria with regard to the economy, as well as our drive towards diversification.

Nigeria-Russia relations have come of age, despite some psychological differences and suspicions, there are lots of gains while additional work are required in the direction of media and cultural exchanges and some favorable trade policies on the part of Russian government to allow more Nigerian exports, while it is desirable that Nigeria and Russia move their bilateral relation to a new level of active cooperation in important and strategic economic sectors, both countries should take adequate stock of the disparity in capacities and ensure that this is not allowed to lead to lopsidedness and dependency, such as being witnessed in the economic cooperation with China, America, India and other developed economies. The biggest oil and gas company in the world is Gazprom, which is owned by Russia. Nigerian NNPC (Nigeria National Petroleum Company) can tap into the experience of this oil giant to enhance its capabilities, competence and service delivery. Russia can also help to address the problem of electricity supply which is mostly occasioned by the perennial shortage of gas to thermal power plants and weak transmission network which points to the need to construct a super transmission grid that can take huge power. Therefore, the study recommended that:

1. The economic relations between the two countries should be strengthening and make more emphasis than before on the development of cooperation at the level of small and middle-size enterprises.
2. There is a need to stimulate dialogue between business circles and other groups along with the inter-state relations. This dialogue is not necessarily limited to large-scale companies. Considering Nigeria’s advantage in small and medium-scale companies, efforts should be made to bring them into the dialogue as well.
3. It is likely that Nigeria will remain one of the major popular destinations for Russian tourist in the near future. However, Nigerian and Russian entrepreneurs should take advantage of this attention by broadening touristic activities, like developing culture tours or package programs along with the conventional combination of sea, sand, and sun.
4. The Russian policy of putting quota restrictions on large airline companies and keeping the number of destinations limited stands out as an important issue that Nigeria authorities should work on. As a

matter of fact, increasing the number of flights and destinations is already a necessity to advance bilateral relations.

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