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**FRANCE AND RUSSIA IN AFRICA: HAS PARIS BEEN  
PUSHED BACK THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT? PART 2  
*FRENCH AND RUSSIAN ECONOMIC PRESENCE  
IN AFRICA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF  
FRANCOPHONIE***

FRANCIAORSZÁG ÉS OROSZORSZÁG AFRIKÁBAN:  
PÁRIZST VISSZASZORÍTOTTÁK A DÉLI KONTINENSEN?  
*2. RÉSZ FRANCIA ÉS OROSZ GAZDASÁGI JELENLÉT  
AFRIKÁBAN ÉS A FRANKOFÓNIA FONTOSSÁGA*



# KKI POLICY BRIEF

**Abstract:** France, both as a representative of Western civilisation and as a former colonial power on the African continent, finds itself confronted with Russia, a country that follows radically different principles. The confrontation between France and Russia goes beyond the rivalry between the two countries, as the African continent is an unavoidable site for the global and regional assertion of power for these two opponents. The confrontation can be clearly traced through the means the countries have used to gain advantage and influence, and in the way it is set out in their national strategies, including the development of military commitments and economic relations. A crucial question is to what extent the centuries-old French linguistic and cultural influence and its cohesive force in Africa can resist the aggressive new superpower ambitions, including a growing Russian penetration. What is happening in Africa requires special attention due to the implications it has for the future of Europe. This analysis is divided into two parts, with the first part covering state strategies and military engagements, and the second part discussing economic policy and the opportunities offered by Francophonie.

**Keywords:** France, Russia, Africa, EU, NATO, OPEX, Wagner, influence

**Absztrakt:** Franciaország, mint a „nyugati” civilizáció képviselője, de egyben egykori gyarmattartó az afrikai kontinensen szemben találja magát a gyökeresen más elveket valló Oroszországgal. A francia-orosz konfrontáció túlmutat a két ország közötti rivalizáláson, hiszen az afrikai kontinens megkerülhetetlen helyszín a szemben álló felek globális és regionális szintű érvényesülése szempontjából. A konfrontáció jól nyomon követhető az előnyyszerzés, a befolyásolás eszközein keresztül, a nemzeti stratégiákba lefektetett módon többek között a katonai szerepvállalások és a gazdasági kapcsolatok alakulása területén. Nagy kérdés, hogy a bő évszázados francia nyelvi és kulturális hatás és ennek kohéziós ereje mennyire ellenálló az agresszív új nagyhatalmi törekvésekkel, köztük az orosz fokozott térnyeréssel szemben. Az Afrikában zajló folyamatok különleges figyelmet igényelnek, mivel Európa jövője szempontjából is meghatározó következményekkel járnak. Az elemzés két részben kerül bemutatásra. Az első rész az állami stratégiákat és a katonai szerepvállalásokat, míg a második rész a gazdaságpolitikát és a frankofónia adta lehetőségeket írja le.

**Kulcsszavak:** Franciaország, Oroszország, Afrika, EU, NATO, OPEX, Wagner, befolyásolás

Continuing the analysis of the Franco-Russian rivalry started in the first part of this paper, commercial and economic interests also enjoy a prominent place in addition to the strategic approaches and military presences on the African continent. Relationships



based on commercial and economic interests often exist in parallel with military interventions, and they can be integrated into grand state planning. One way in which attempts are made to influence African states is pursuing economic interests, with the clear priority to obtain raw materials and minerals. Despite the various tricks of influence used by the parties, the strength of Francophonie can create a stable basis between France and the African states, whereas Russia lacks these cultural qualities. Thus, Francophonie can offer the opportunity to bridge the influence gap, tipping the scales in the French direction and pushing the Russian side out of the continent. Although in the short term, it looks as if it is France that is going to be pushed out of the continent, in the long term, it is not at all certain that Russia will succeed in completely relegating the former colonial power to the background. In recent days, [President Macron has been preparing to strengthen French influence](#) in Africa on the basis of dialogue.

Many elements are at play in the Franco-Russian power game, and Africa is one of the main victims of this game. This analysis sets out to paint a realistic picture of the overall situation, pointing the way to a better understanding of it.

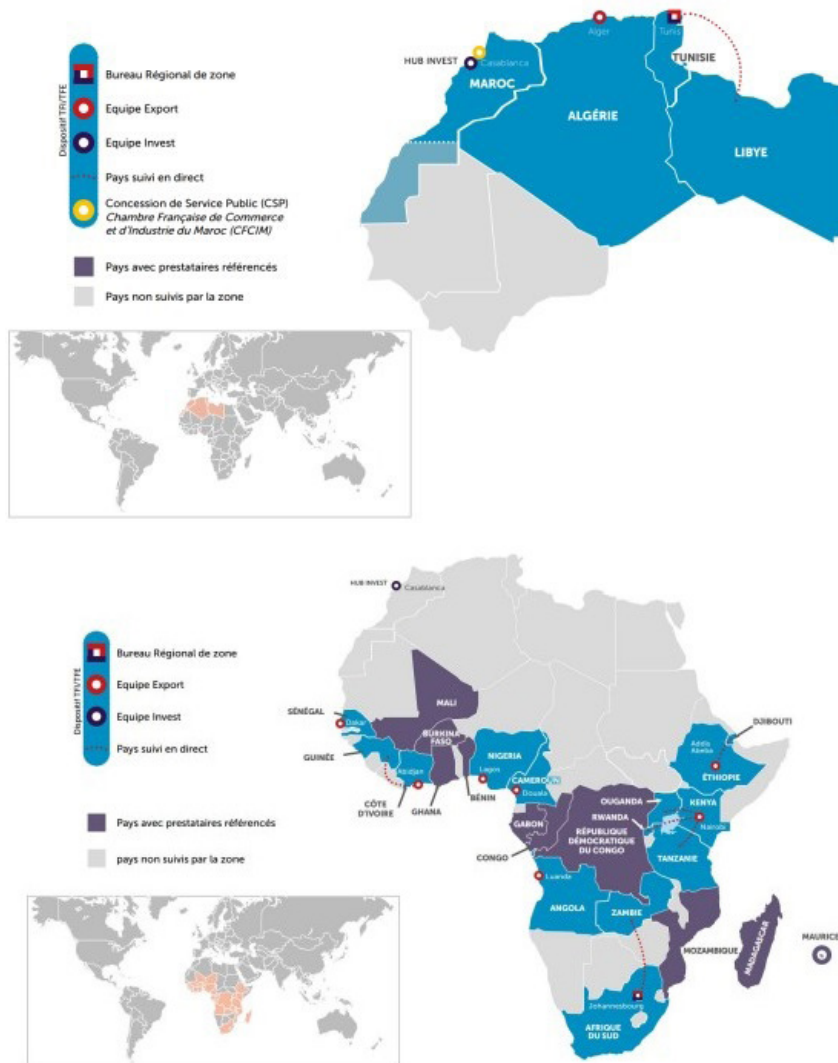
## Competition in economic policy

In addition to the strategic and military issues, there is also well-documented confrontation between Russia and France in the economic field. Although the crisis caused by COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the global economy, the African states have recovered relatively quickly from this difficult situation. Economic recovery resumed from 2021, and it even increased in 2022. As a result of this resumption of growth, demand has picked up, multiplying opportunities for local and foreign companies. Naturally, players from all over the world are trying to make the most of this situation, and it is also an excellent opportunity for French companies, giving them the opportunity to strengthen their position in many sectors, to break into new locations, or take on additional roles. This is particularly true in North and West Africa due to France's colonial past, but the French initiative is also evident in the centre of the continent.

Already in his speech in Ouagadougou on 28 November, 2017, President Emmanuel Macron formulated a [new approach to the partnership between Africa and France](#). The aim is to create a win-win relationship, where balanced success can be achieved. The economic and commercial importance of the region is reflected in regular high-level meetings between France and various African states, including meetings between heads of state. Most recently, [Ambition Africa 2022](#) was held in Paris on 4-5 October, 2022, bringing together [French and African ministers and business delegations](#). On this occasion, the dialogue took the form of seventeen sectoral and horizontal thematic round tables, followed by targeted business meetings, with networking as the key element. The event focused on the African economic situation, the business environment, finance, skills training, and the sectors most in need of investment, such as agriculture, health, urban mobility, water and waste, energy access, innovative technology, telecommunications, infrastructure and logistics, tourism and hotel industry, resources and extractive industries, Euro-African value chains, and the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Exports and investment to Africa welcoming African investors in France, cross-partnerships, and cooperation in all its forms provide opportunities for building renewed economic and business links between Africa and France. In addition, France is linked to fifteen African countries through [monetary cooperation agreements](#), a solidarity mechanism that is unique in the world.

Figure 1.  
Major endpoints of the French economy in Africa in 2022



Looking back at earlier years, the African continent can be seen as a [pillar](#) of French foreign trade and business, mainly in the French-speaking countries. In particular, it is worth mentioning the presence of nearly [480 companies in the Republic of South Africa](#), the launch of the first 5G network in Africa by [French Orange in Botswana](#), and the recent announcement by the French Minister for Foreign Trade of the launch of the [AfricaFrance Entrepreneurship Community](#) in Côte d'Ivoire. Algeria, which gained independence in 1962, is a special case in French relations, as it is one of France's most



[important partners](#) for the supply of oil and gas. This is illustrated by the signing of an USD 4 billion oil and gas production-sharing contract between Eni (Italy), Occidental (US), [Total](#) (France) and the Sonatrach group (Algeria) in 2022.

Meanwhile, Russia's economic presence in Africa can mainly build on its contacts and locations from the Cold War era. [Russian exports](#) of arms and grain to the African continent vary widely in intensity, but Russia's annual trade with African countries amounts to approximately USD 20 billion. Typically, Russian parastatal or state-affiliated companies (Rosneft, Lukoil) negotiate and execute contracts for minerals, diamonds, and oil, and Russian technical expertise and financing capacity is outstanding in these sectors. It is impossible to determine the real value of the relevant contracts or to even estimate the sums paid into African treasuries, as these are not public, but it is assumed that Russia has natural resource contracts with at least twenty African countries. On the other hand, the [African arms trade and arms market](#) is well documented, with Russia occupying a prominent position with a 49% share. Its main arms export destinations include Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal, and Zambia. [African buyers](#) consider Russian weapons to be affordable, easy to maintain, and reliable, while there is also a growing willingness to buy more sophisticated equipment and weapons systems (fighter aircraft, helicopters, tanks, air defence systems). Arms exports offer an excellent opportunity for Russia to conclude contracts for the purchase of raw materials in return. Russia also seeks to penetrate the nuclear energy sector, negotiating with at least seventeen African countries, and having already successfully concluded preliminary nuclear project agreements with Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Zambia. Rosatom also provided an USD 25 billion loan for Egypt's first nuclear power plant in 2020.

French and Russian import and export activity with the African continent can be compared on the basis of the [available open-source data](#). Tables 1 and 2 illustrate trade activity for 2020, highlighting four main trading partners per area of activity:

Table 1.  
Import-export between France and Africa

Import-export between France and Africa (billion USD)			
Total import: 21 (~3.74% from global 562)		Total export: 26 (~5.51% from global 472)	
Morocco	6,125	Algeria	4,712
Tunisia	4,026	Morocco	4,699
Algeria	2,294	Tunisia	2,903
Nigeria	1,976	Egypt	2,505

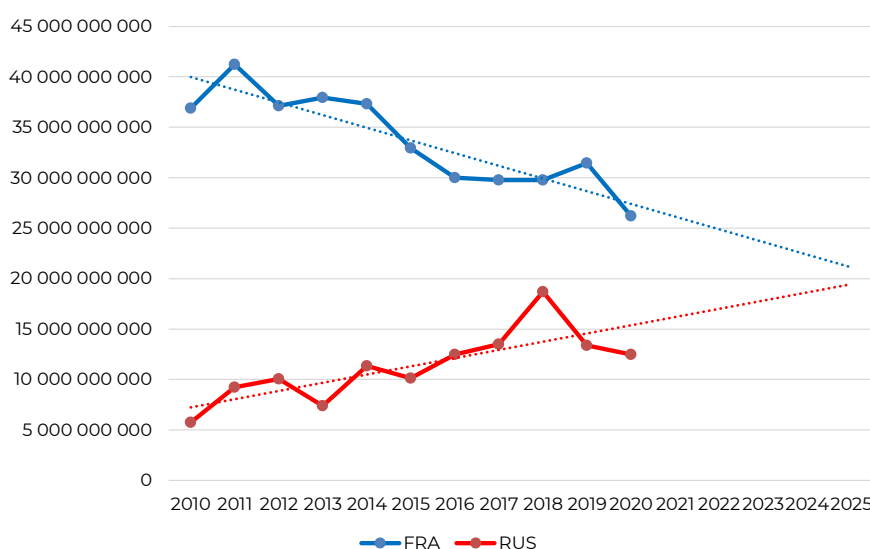


Table 2.  
Import-export between Russia and Africa

Import-export between Russia and Africa (billion USD)			
Total import: 2.38 (~1.08% from global 220)		Total export: 12.5 (~3.79% from global 330)	
Rep. of South Africa	5,871	Egypt	5,137
Egypt	5,037	Morocco	1,353
Morocco	3,443	Nigeria	1,019
Ivory Coast	2,197	Algeria	0,922

Figure 2 illustrates the volume of exports from France and Russia to Africa between 2010 and 2020. In this ten-year interval, there is an overall downward trend for France, clearly reflecting a decline of USD 10 billion since 2010. Russia, on the other hand, increased its export activity significantly, by almost USD 7 billion over the ten-year period. Even though France is still the larger exporter to the African continent of the two exporting countries, Russia is catching up and has reduced its export gap from 6.4 times in 2010 to 2 times in 2020. Given the current trend, the export value of the French and Russian sides could become equal in 2025, and Russian exports could eventually exceed those of the French.

Figure 2.  
French and Russian export activity on the African continent (2010-2020)

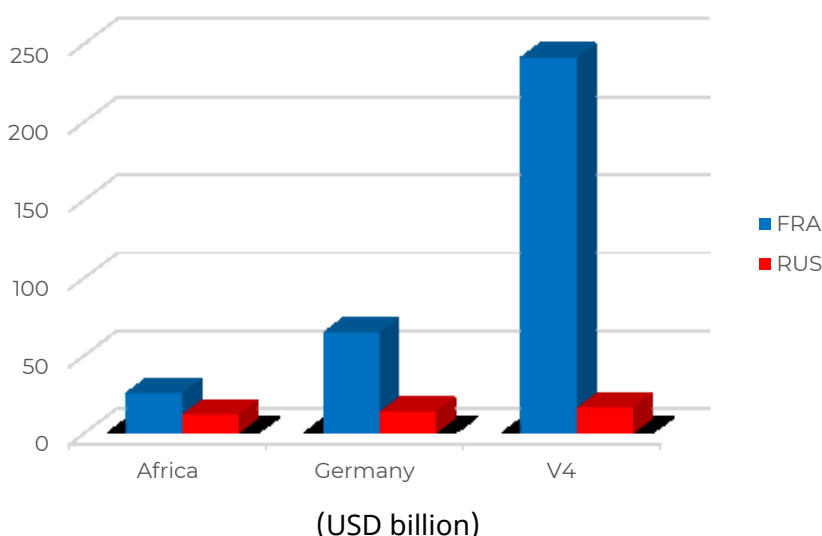


Looking at the year 2020 from the perspective of France and Russia (Figure 4), one interesting fact is that France's export activity to Germany (USD 65.24 billion) and the V4 countries combined (USD 241.42 billion) is still much higher than its exports to Africa



(USD 26.2 billion). Overall, French exports to Germany is nearly 250% of the African countries exports, while exports to the V4 countries are 920% of the African exports. Thus, African exports are important, but they can quickly dwarf those of European countries. At the same time, Russia's export activity to Germany (USD 14.19 billion), the V4 countries combined (USD 16.75 billion), and Africa (USD 12.48 billion) shows negligible difference.

Figure3.  
French and Russian exports to Africa, Germany, and the V4 in 2020



## French cultural influence and Francophonie

As a result of their colonial past, Africans use French as an official language in many countries, and the French language has often been a bridge between the countries and regions of the continent and France. French is also an important link in economic, business, and military terms, and so it is not surprising that France uses Francophonie to seek language and cultural rapprochement with African countries. This is partly the aim of the International Organisation of Francophonie (OIF), which regularly publishes reports about French in the world. According to its most recent analysis, French is one of the top five most widely spoken languages in the world, making it a [global language](#) spoken by nearly 300 million people worldwide. Africa still has the largest number of French speakers in the world today ([120 million in 24 countries](#)), and French is the only official language in eleven African countries and the second official language in ten other African countries.

Building on this, the French government launched a [global campaign for French](#) in 2018, defining communication, culture, and creation as the basis of the campaign, and highlighting the importance of French in Africa. This is underlined, for example, by the organisation of [Ambition Africa's](#) annual business forum and the networking conducted through the [Chambre de Commerce International](#). Most recently, world



Francophone leaders met at the OIF Summit in Tunisia in November 2022 to discuss the [growing instability and popular discontent in Francophone Africa](#). The meeting concluded by calling for more effective action to tackle global crises, while President Emmanuel Macron underlined his condemnation of Russia for fuelling anti-French propaganda in Africa. However, on the sidelines of the summit, the Elysée was asked to respond to critics who claim that France is exploiting historic economic and political ties with its former colonies to serve its own interests. It is therefore clear that Paris is facing growing mistrust as it tries to act in the interests of African states even when it has no apparent ulterior motive. There is a growing number of African countries that want to hold the former colonial power accountable for the perceived and real grievances of their populations. Russia is exploiting this to the extreme, threatening the stability of the entire continent.

It is therefore clear that, even though France and some African countries share a common language, the acceptance of the French and their culture is not automatic. This relationship is particularly sensitive due to their colonial past, although the OIF could still be a means for Paris to gain a decisive influence in the region. This is also the ambition of French President Emmanuel Macron. However, real cooperation can only be achieved today if there is respect for diversity based on shared values, and if there is a clear sense of equality in bilateral relations. People on the African continent are increasingly aware that Francophonie is no longer the only way to make their mark in the world, and that there are other alternatives. Moreover, it is clear that it is not only Africans who have a need for Europe, but vice versa, which is prompting a rethinking of relations.

## Conclusion

The French-Russian rivalry on the African continent is now increasingly visible, as the competition between the two countries has become a key issue in achieving global and regional hegemony. Through the Wagner Group, disinformation warfare, the propaganda machine, and elite-based diplomacy, the local environment provides an extremely fertile ground for the [Russian ambitions](#). Due to the opacity induced by Moscow from behind the scenes, Russian interventions typically only entail marginal costs. As Russian influence is spread behind the scenes in a clandestine and risk-free manner, information on the Russian activities is incomplete, which has a [highly destabilising effect](#) on the politics and sovereignty of African states. The Russian approach does not allow for a long-term partnership, although this does not seem to worry Moscow or the African states, and the stability of the African states does not seem to be a priority for Russia. On the contrary, it sees the continent as a kind of confrontation zone, where it can effectively act through France against the “West”, which represents democratic principles and ideology.

At the same time, Paris can be seen as a representative of classical Western values in Africa, seeking to forget its colonial past while at the same time trying to take account of the interests of the people living there. France is also pursuing a genuine partnership in Africa alongside its own interests, although it is facing increasing difficulties even in French-speaking areas, and it is also visibly losing economic influence.





Nevertheless, Paris is aware that Russia's geostrategic position in the Franco-Russian rivalry places a heavy responsibility on France, which represents Western ideology and values. On the African continent, French policy prefers to promote European or Western cooperation in the conflict zones, preferably by taking a leading role based on its historical links with Africa and the spread of Francophonie, particularly in the western part of the continent. The big question is to what extent France's ambitions and linguistic and cultural embeddedness in Africa can stand up to and survive an increasingly aggressive Russian offensive, which is more difficult to sustain in the long term. This question is even more important because although events in Africa have an impact on Europe first and foremost, they also influence world events more broadly and are connected to the ongoing Ukrainian-Russian war.

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