

FAKE ELECTION
OBSERVATION AS
RUSSIA'S TOOL
OF ELECTION
INTERFERENCE:

The Case of AFRIC

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Introduction

In November 2018, the European Platform for Democratic Elections published a report titled “The Globalisation of Pro-Kremlin Networks of Politically Biased Election Observation” that analysed two cases of politically biased international observation at elections in Cambodia and Zimbabwe.¹ In the case of Zimbabwe, the report focused on the Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC), which sent around 40 observers to monitor the Zimbabwean elections. Some of the members of AFRIC’s mission to Zimbabwe had a history of involvement in various pro-Kremlin efforts, including previous participation in politically biased and/or illegitimate electoral monitoring missions organised by Russian actors, cooperation with the Russian state-controlled instruments of disinformation and propaganda, and dissemination of pro-Kremlin narratives on social media.

At the time of publication of the above-mentioned report, there was no evidence that Russian officials or experts had been involved in coordinating AFRIC’s mission in Zimbabwe. Later, however, investigative journalists would reveal that AFRIC was organised by the people and structures linked to a Russian businessman, Yevgeniy Prigozhin. Dubbed “Putin’s chef” for providing restaurant services to the Kremlin and various Russian government agencies, Prigozhin was most recently involved in two international scandals. First, the US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned Prigozhin for his attempts to subvert American democratic processes with the help of the Internet Research Agency (better known as the “troll factory”) that he created.² Second,

- 1 Anton Shekhovtsov, “The Globalisation of Pro-Kremlin Networks of Politically Biased Election Observation: The Cases of Cambodia and Zimbabwe” (Berlin: EPDE, 2018), <https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/the-globalisation-of-pro-kremlin-networks-of-politically-biased-election-observation-the-cases-of-cambodia-and-zimbabwe-1686.html>.
- 2 “Treasury Targets Assets of Russian Financier Who Attempted to Influence 2018 U.S. Elections”, *US Department of the Treasury*, 30 September (2019), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm787>.

Prigozhin funded the so-called “Wagner Group”, a private military company that first participated in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, then fought on the side of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war, and later became involved in different campaigns across Africa.³

The employment of the “Wagner Group” in Africa is determined by the need to protect Prigozhin’s business interests either literally (safeguarding operations) or indirectly (providing military support for loyal politicians).⁴ The latter activity overlaps with non-military support for particular African politicians and political forces that are seen by Prigozhin and his team of political consultants as useful for his endeavours.

AFRIC is part of these endeavours, and this report aims to provide insights into the creation, development, and workings of AFRIC. The author of the report is grateful to the Dossier Centre for the data support and cooperation, and to African journalists (unnamed here for safety reasons) for the valuable information they provided.

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- 3 Kimberly Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2019), pp. 181-204; Nathaniel Reynolds, “Putin’s Not-So-Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics, and the Wagner Group”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 8 July (2019), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/07/08/putin-s-not-so-secret-mercenaries-patronage-geopolitics-and-wagner-group-pub-79442>; Kimberly Marten, “Into Africa: Prigozhin, Wagner, and the Russian Military”, *PONARS Eurasia*, January (2019), <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/africa-prigozhin-wagner-and-russian-military>; Michael Weiss, Pierre Vaux, “Russia’s Wagner Mercenaries Have Moved Into Libya. Good Luck with That”, *The Daily Beast*, 28 September (2019), <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russias-wagner-mercenaries-have-moved-into-libya-good-luck-with-that>.
- 4 See, for example, Dionne Searcey, “Gems, Warlords and Mercenaries: Russia’s Playbook in Central African Republic”, *The New York Times*, 30 September (2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/30/world/russia-diamonds-africa-prigozhin.html>; Tim Lister, Sebastian Shukla, “Russian Mercenaries Fight Shadowy Battle in Gas-Rich Mozambique”, *CNN*, 29 November (2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/29/africa/russian-mercenaries-mozambique-intl/index.html>.

The creation of AFRIC

A Russian-language PowerPoint presentation produced in April 2018 by the Russian consultants behind the creation of AFRIC⁵ imagined its nature and activities as follows: (1) “expert groups in African countries”, (2) “development and promotion of expert evaluations and opinions beneficial to Russia”, (3) “a source of information for the media and international organisations”, (4) “an alternative to organisations controlled by the US and EU and working on the African territory”. According to the organisers, AFRIC would function as a “network of agents of influence” comprised of experts from African countries, as well as an Internet platform (www.afric.online) that would publish “news and analysis produced in accordance with our assignment”. AFRIC would also organise forums and seminars, and send “reports and inquiries to international organisations and the media”.

The presentation also described the financial aspect of the workings of AFRIC: “The funding will be provided in the form of anonymous donations in cryptocurrencies (Monero, Zcash, DASH) – it will be impossible to know who finances AFRIC”. The presentation continued: “Experts register on the website, write articles and reports, organise events in accordance with our assignments and, for this, receive money in a cryptocurrency”. In conclusion, the presentation listed the advantages of AFRIC: “anonymity; no need to register as a legal entity; no need for a public leader; activities are performed under the authority of the AFRIC platform, a community of independent experts; a ‘smoke screen’ and a cover for events; attractive modern format”.

To sum up the presentation, AFRIC was envisaged as a Russian front organisation that would pretend to be an authentic African initiative but would effectively promote Russian political and economic interests in Africa.



Many political consultants involved in Prigozhin's structures in 2018-2019 have known each other for a long time. A St. Petersburg team of political consultants at a forum in 2015: (second from the left) Mikhail Potepkin, one of the key figures in Prigozhin's African project; (sixth from the left) Petr Bychkov, the head of the back office in St. Petersburg; (seventh from the left) Inga Burikova, an employee of Prigozhin's structures; (eighth from the left) Yaroslav Ignatovsky, an assistant to Bychkov; (ninth from the left) Valentin Bianki, a member of Prigozhin's African project; (sixth from the right) Alexander Seravin, a "friend and colleague" of AFRIC's José Matemulane; (fourth from the right) Valeriy Porubov, a member of Prigozhin's African project.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/seravin.aleks/posts/713515812081370>

AFRIC's website, run in English and French, was registered on 13 April 2018, but it is unclear where the website is hosted or who registered it, because it is protected by Cloudflare Inc., a US company that proxies its traffic and makes it impossible to determine the location of the webhosting company.

Officially, AFRIC describes itself as "a community of independent researchers, experts and activists", and its declared goals are to create "a platform for elaboration and dissemination of objective analytical information, first-hand

opinions”, and to establish “direct communication and cooperation”.⁶ The AFRIC website also claims to be “supported by anonymous donations” that allow “researchers to make publications, conduct research and receive remuneration for interesting materials”. Explaining its use of cryptocurrencies, the website claims that “AFRIC demonstrates its independence from outdated financial and banking systems, [and] shows the real freedom of opinions and analysis on the internet”.⁷

A Russian operative who seems to be originally responsible for setting up the AFRIC project is Yulia Afanasyeva, an employee of Prigozhin’s back-office dealing with Africa, a manager of the Centre for Social and Cultural Initiatives (co-founded by Petr Bychkov, who headed the back office),⁸ and a project manager at the International Anticrisis Centre, yet another project of Prigozhin’s team. According to Afanasyeva’s documents,⁹ she would order notepads and pens with the AFRIC logo, coordinate the writing of articles for the AFRIC website, and formulate assignments for AFRIC members. In one communication, she wrote to her Russian addressees that she was looking for journalists and lecturers for the AFRIC project – those who could be international observers at the general elections in Zimbabwe on 30 July 2018.

One of the AFRIC experts with whom Afanasyeva exchanged messages about contributions to the AFRIC website was Russian-born Catherine Terekhova, who was based in France. Terekhova, whose professional background is in international trade, was the first person to have registered on LinkedIn as an employee of AFRIC, indicating that she started working for the organisation as an economic analyst in January 2018. One communication between Afanasyeva and Terekhova suggests that an African coordinator of AFRIC would provide a list of topics they were interested in and Afanasyeva would forward them to Terekhova so she could write on some of those topics in French.

It is unclear what African coordinator Afanasyeva referred to in her message to Terekhova, but it was most likely the Mozambican academic José Zacarias Samuel Matemulane, who at that time worked as Assistant Professor at the Mozambique Pedagogical University in Quelimane and is currently president of AFRIC. Matemulane has a long history of involvement with Russian institutions and individuals. In the period between 2002 and 2012, he studied at four Russian universities and received a doctoral degree from the St. Petersburg

6 “About AFRIC”, AFRIC, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180815142259/https://afric.online/about/>.

7 Ibid.

8 Ilya Rozhdestvensky, Michael Rubin, Roman Badanin, “Master and Chef. How Russia Interfered in Elections in Twenty Countries”, *Proekt*, 11 April (2019), <https://www.proekt.media/investigation/russia-african-elections/>.

9 Provided to the author by the Dossier Centre.

State University. In June 2013, Matemulane registered a company, ATV Export Ltd., two of whose other co-founders were Russian citizens, Victor Prokopenko and Vitaly Solovyev.¹⁰ On his Facebook page, Matemulane often posts messages praising Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Defence Ministry.¹¹ Matemulane's LinkedIn page suggests that he became AFRIC's president in November 2017,¹² but this is doubtful as AFRIC appeared only in 2018.

When asked by journalists, Matemulane was first reluctant to reveal any information about the financial aspects of AFRIC's foundation, but speaking to a Mozambican journalist Alexandre Nhampossa, he stated that "the only Russian businessman who [had] been important in giving money" was Alexander Seravin, whom Matemulane described as a "mentor and tutor" as well as a "friend and colleague" – the two met in Russia when Matemulane was doing his postgraduate study work in psychology at the Saint Petersburg State University.¹³

Alexander Seravin is a director of the research programmes of the St. Petersburg-based expert group "PiteR", which provides political consultancy and public relations services and is headed by Polina Sharonova. Seravin is an influential figure in the world of Russian political consultancy. During the 2018 presidential campaign, he was Vladimir Putin's chief political strategist in St. Petersburg.¹⁴ The Russian Presidential Administration engaged with him several times over the years and seems to be pleased with his services. In 2019, Seravin was one of the chief political strategists of Alexander Beglov, a member of the High Council of the ruling "United Russia" party, who was running for (and eventually won) the position of the Governor of Saint Petersburg.¹⁵

After the publication of the investigations into Prigozhin's activities in Africa, most notably two investigations by the *Proekt* website,¹⁶ Seravin wrote a post on Facebook in which he essentially confirmed the involvement of Prigozhin's

10 "ATV Export, Limitada", *Boletim da República*, No. 52, 2 July (2013), pp. 56-58.

11 See José Matemulane's account on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jose.matemulane>.

12 See José Matemulane's account on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jose-matemulane-90002623/>.

13 "Afric Ran Mozambique Election Poll, but Denies Interference in Elections", *Zitamar*, 12 November (2019), <https://zitamar.com/russia-backed-think-tank-admits-illegal-poll-denies-prigozhin-connection/>.

14 Mariya Karpenko, Maksim Ivanov, Natalya Korchenkova, "Shtaby idut po shtatnomu raspisaniyu", *Kommersant*, 20 November (2017), <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3472992>.

15 "Reyting vliyatel'nosti Sankt-Peterburga – 2019", *Fontanka*, https://www.fontanka.ru/longreads/rejting_best_people_2019/.

16 Ilya Rozhdestvensky, Roman Badanin, "Master and Chef. How Evgeny Prigozhin Led the Russian Offensive in Africa", *Proekt*, 14 March (2019), <https://www.proekt.media/investigation/evgeny-prigozhin-africa/>; Rozhdestvensky, Rubin, Badanin, "Master and Chef".

teams in African countries. Moreover, Seravin praised Prigozhin for this involvement:

One of the strongest modern centres of applied geopolitics is currently based in St. Petersburg and is related to Prigozhin. And, by the way, he is the only actor of this calibre in Russia. [He deals with] more than 30 countries simultaneously, including Africa, CIS countries, Asia, Latin America, and the Arab world, as well as European countries – he is the largest employer for practitioners in [Russia], more than 300 specialists are working outside of the country in one capacity or another, and even more people are supporting this activity here [in Russia]. [...] Prigozhin is already a brand, both inside the country and across the world. [...] Some country leaders are afraid of him and consider him an enemy, others are already dreaming of working with him. Prigozhin's technologists [i.e. consultants] have a number of convincing victories over American, Chinese, and French specialists to their names.¹⁷

17 Seravin Aleks, "V otvet na mnogochislennye publikatsii...", Facebook, 17 May (2019), <https://www.facebook.com/seravin.aleks/posts/1848198441946429>.

Key figures of AFRIC

Apart from Afanasyeva, Matemulane, and Terekhova, AFRIC is represented today by a number of people, many of whom, to various extents, have had relations with Russian individuals and institutions.

Mikael Cheuwa is the co-founder of AFRIC and its project coordinator. He was born in Cameroon and graduated from the University of Technology of Douala. He later studied at the Belgorod State Technological University (Russia), which he finished in 2015. An investigation by *Proekt* refers to Chewa as Afanasyeva's friend.¹⁸

Clifton Ellis is AFRIC's strategist and one of its project coordinators. He is based in the UK and founded, in 2018, the International Sustainable Energy Organisation, which claimed to work in Botswana, Central African Republic, Kenya, Republic of South Africa, and Tanzania.¹⁹ However, after joining AFRIC in 2019, Ellis' organisation became inactive.

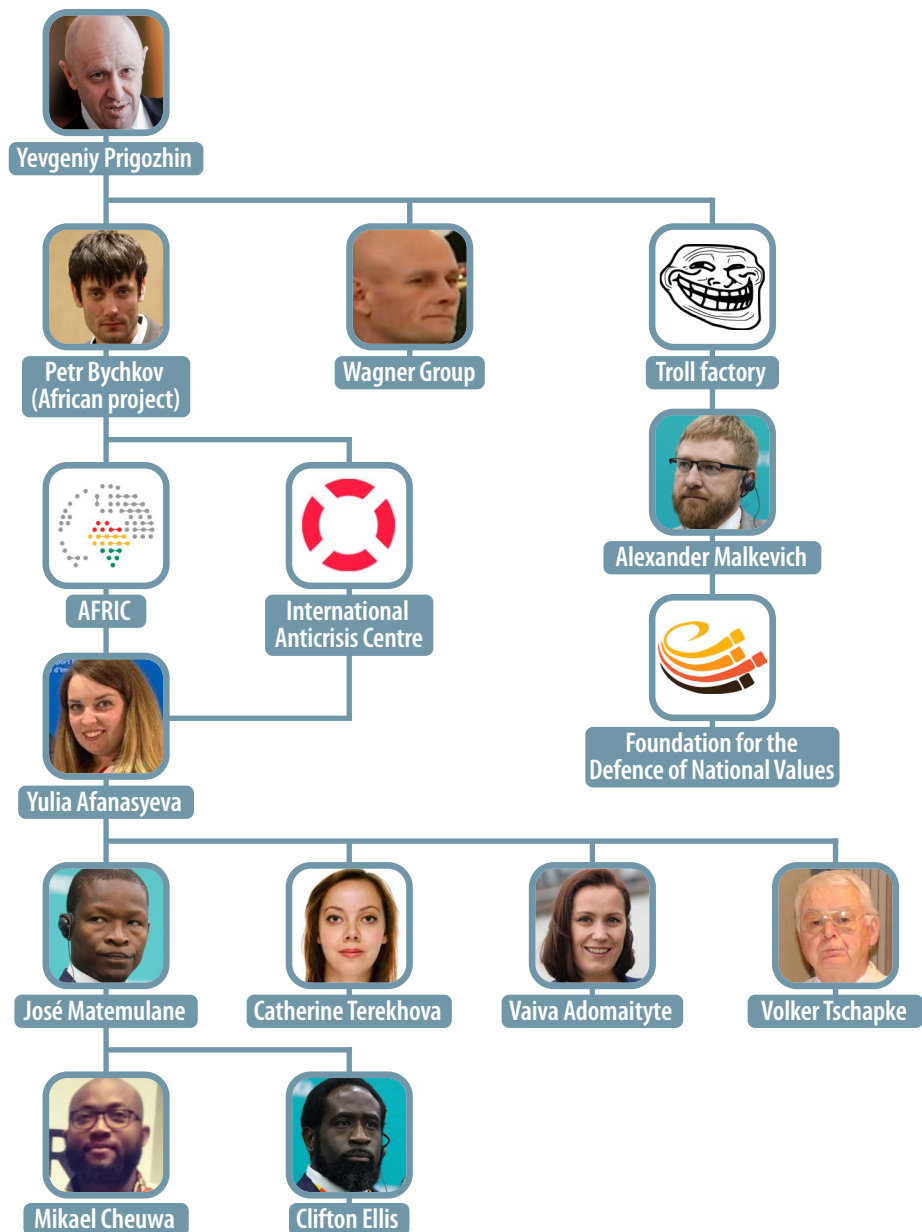
Vaiva Adomaityte joined AFRIC's administration in 2019. She is a Lithuanian citizen residing in the UK, where she founded, in 2017, ADMIS Consultancy Limited.

Volker Tschapke is the founder of the far-right Germany-based "Prussian Society". He began his career in AFRIC as an ordinary member of AFRIC's "observation" mission in Zimbabwe, but would later start coordinating its projects.

18 Rozhdestvensky, Rubin, Badanin, "Master and Chef".

19 "Clifton Ellis", *Roscongress*, <https://roscongress.org/en/speakers/ellis-klifton/biography/>.

AFRIC and its place in the structure of Yevgeniy Prigozhin's main "foreign policy" projects



AFRIC's election observation missions

As demonstrated earlier, AFRIC was originally imagined as a network of agents of influence and a platform that would disseminate Africa-related narratives beneficial to the interests of the Russian state. However, in the period between 2018 and 2019, AFRIC became engaged in yet another activity that did not seem to be originally projected, namely politically biased, or fake, observation of elections in Africa. Fake observation is a form of political activity performed by international actors with the aim of advancing interests of certain politicians and political forces by imitating credible election monitoring during electoral processes. Aims of domestic and third-party organisers of politically biased election observation include, but are not limited to:

- Whitewashing electoral fraud for domestic and international audiences;
- Legitimising electoral processes considered illegitimate or illegal by the international community;
- Delegitimising and weakening the institution of free and fair elections;
- Subverting and/or relativising findings of credible election observation;
- Weakening political rivals;
- Building networks of influence not necessarily related to electoral processes.

AFRIC's function as a fake election observation organisation is reflected in its description on the list of Prigozhin's "global projects": "AFRIC is a controlled community of loyal authors and public figures from African and European countries who produce analytical materials and observation missions".²⁰

20 "Iz Rossii s lyubovyu: kak MID RF pomogaet 'chestnym' vyboram i kiberbezopasnosti v Evrope i Afrike", *Dossier*, <https://dossier.center/from-russia-with-love/>.

In 2018-2019, AFRIC's loyal monitors "observed" the following elections, discussed in this section:

- Zimbabwean general election held on 30 July 2018
- Malagasy presidential election (first round) held on 7 November 2018
- Democratic Republic of the Congo general election held on 30 December 2018
- South African general election held on 8 May 2019
- Mozambican general election held on 15 October 2019

Although the Malagasy presidential election took place later than the Zimbabwean general election, Madagascar became the first African country where Prigozhin's structures became involved in the electoral process. As the Malagasy case is also the most indicative in terms of interference in African elections by Prigozhin's structures, this example will be discussed first.

2018 Malagasy presidential election

According to an investigation by *Proekt*, Prigozhin became interested in Africa around the end of 2017. At that time, he presented to Putin an idea of strengthening Russian influence in the world and finding opportunities to push China aside in the Third World countries.²¹ In January 2018, two political consultants from St. Petersburg, namely Oleg Zakhariyash and Valeriy Porubov, wrote a report – apparently commissioned by Prigozhin's structures – on the "political and socio-economic situation in the Republic of Madagascar".²² However, the report not only covered political history and developments in Madagascar, but also projected the "structure of a technological [i.e. political consultancy] group" that would work in the country in order to advance their Russian patron's interests during the 2018 presidential election. The group would feature 31 people, including a head of the team, analysts, a lawyer, media monitors, coordinators of a "troll factory" and a "call-centre", and interpreters. It is not clear whether this proposed framework was approved, but the "Malagasy project" was apparently set in action.

In March 2018, Hery Rajaonarimampianina, who was Malagasy President at that time, visited Russia and met with Putin and Prigozhin. According to one report, Harison E. Randriarimanana, a former agriculture minister who accompanied Rajaonarimampianina to Moscow, "said that after the meeting his

21 Rozhdestvensky, Badanin, "Master and Chef".

22 Provided to the author by the Dossier Centre.



AFRIC's José Matemulane (left) and Volker Tschapke (centre) in Madagascar.

Source: <https://afric.online/projects/presidential-election-in-madagascar-afric-observers-in-the-field/>

boss proudly announced that Mr. Putin had agreed to assist with his re-election campaign”.²³

The same month, 15-20 Russian political consultants headed by Zakhariyash arrived in Madagascar.²⁴ However, instead of directly supporting Rajaonarimampianina, Russian consultants split into several teams that aimed at assisting several presidential candidates in their campaigns. This can be explained by tactical considerations of supporting spoiler candidates who would be dropped at a later stage to channel all electoral support to one particular candidate. Yet another viable explanation is that Russian consultants and the Kremlin simply did not want to put all their eggs in one basket, especially against the background of poor understanding of the Malagasy politics on the part of the Russian operatives.

²³ Michael Schwirtz, Gaëlle Borgia, “How Russia Meddles abroad for Profit: Cash, Trolls and a Cult Leader”, *The New York Times*, 11 November (2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/world/africa/russia-madagascar-election.html>.

²⁴ Rozhdestvensky, Badanin, “Master and Chef”.

One Russian team, consisting of Andrey Kramar, Roman Pozdnyakov, and Vladimir Boyarishev, approached pastor *André Christian Dieu Donné Mailhol, the leader of the Apocalypse Church, and offered to fully fund his presidential campaign. Mailhol accepted the offer and the Russian team brought him around €5.000 in cash and paid around €12.000 for the deposit for the presidential campaign,*²⁵ *as well as wrote some of his speeches and paid for campaign posters and television advertising.*²⁶ *Mailhol knew that the Russian operatives supported several candidates, and even signed a contract with the Russian team promising to support one of those “Russian candidates” who would turn out to be more popular than others.*²⁷

*Yet another Russian team, which included political consultant Maxim Shugaley, approached former Prime Minister Jean Omer Beriziky and offered him just under \$2 million, but eventually paid less than \$500 thousand.*²⁸

Two Russian operatives approached Zafimahaleo Dit Dama Mahaleo Rasolofondraosolo and “tried to pressure him to support a delay in the election so that the incumbent [i.e. Rajaonarimampianina] had more time to campaign”. According to Rasolofondraosolo, he refused to cooperate with the Russian consultants.²⁹

Rajaonarimampianina himself denied that he took money from Russian consultants but he wrote a letter addressed to the leader of the Russian group in Madagascar, Oleg Zakhariyash, requesting Russian help to “to resist attempts by international institutions to interfere” in Madagascar’s election.³⁰ Rajaonarimampianina also argued that the Kremlin might have “worked to assist him without his knowledge”, which is difficult to believe given the outcomes of his meeting with Putin in March 2018 and the fact that Rajaonarimampianina’s campaign cooperated with the Russian consultants.³¹

An investigation by *Proekt* argues that Russian consultants tried to help four more presidential candidates: Jean Ravelonarivo, Saraha Rabeharisoa, Olivier Mahafaly Solonandrasana, and Andry Rajoelina.³²

AFRIC appeared in Madagascar in August 2018, i.e. shortly after its “election observation mission” in Zimbabwe in July that year. Its first official activity was the International Economic Forum “Madagascar 2018” that took place in Antananarivo. According to AFRIC’s report – which read as a bad translation

25 “Russia’s Madagascar Election Gamble – Full documentary – BBC Africa Eye”, *BBC News Africa*, 8 April (2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wH64iztZMQ>.

26 Schwartz, Borgia, “How Russia Meddles abroad for Profit”.

27 “Russia’s Madagascar Election Gamble – Full documentary – BBC Africa Eye”.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Schwartz, Borgia, “How Russia Meddles abroad for Profit”.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Rozhdestvensky, Badanin, “Master and Chef”.

32 *Ibid.*



Kémi Séba (bottom row, second from the left) and Mikael Cheuwa (bottom row, third from the left) at the International Economic Forum “Madagascar 2018”.

Source: <https://afric.online/fr/773-forum-economique-international-madagascar-2018/>

from Russian – the forum discussed “the position of Madagascar in the context of African countries” and assessed “the current situation through the prism of post-colonial experience of the country”, as well as considered options of “overcoming the infrastructure crisis” and “attracting investment”.³³ The true objectives of the forum, however, were different. First, AFRIC – in cooperation with the Russian political consultants – gave a platform to several presidential candidates supported by the Russian operatives, including Beriziky, Rasolo-fondraosolo, *Mailhol*, and Rabeharisoa. Second, the leadership of AFRIC used the forum to push its anti-Western narrative: they invited French-Beninese far-right activist Kémi Séba (real name: Stellio Gilles Robert Capo Chichi) to speak about the “harmful consequences of French colonialism” and “French financiers” who allegedly retained “influence on the economy” of Madagascar.³⁴ Russian operatives and AFRIC needed the anti-Western spin in order to discourage the Malagasy public from supporting pro-Western presidential candidates.

33 “International Economic Forum ‘Madagascar 2018’”, AFRIC, 27 August (2018), <https://afric.online/projects/embassy-of-transparency-and-legitimacy/>.

34 Ibid.

Anti-Western and anti-French messages were central to yet another conference, organised by AFRIC in cooperation with the pan-African TV channel Afrique Media and called “The Islands of Hope”. The conference hosted Mailhol and Séba, and urged France to return the Scattered Islands in the Indian Ocean “to their rightful owners”.³⁵ These islands constitute the 5th district of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands, but France’s sovereignty over them is disputed by Madagascar, Mauritius, and the Comoros. During his emotional speech, Séba, in particular, said:

France, get out of our territories, you have no right to be there! [...] Africans have more trust in Russia than in the US or France. [...] We don't need to ask the permission of the West to regain the lands that are our right. We just need to ally ourselves with good geostrategic and geopolitical forces. [...] The 21st century will be one of African independence. Free Africa or death. We will be victorious.

The day after the conference, Séba participated in an anti-French protest in front of the French Embassy. Addressing the Embassy and his alleged supporters, Séba shouted: “Madagascar has the right to own the Scattered Isles! France must stop giving the world lessons when they are colonisers! [...] France must leave Madagascar alone! France must allow Madagascar to have its own wealth! Down with colonialism! Down with imperialism!”. After the protest, it was revealed that the Russian consultants paid money to demonstrators for their participation in the protest. Moreover, because the protest was illegal (the organisers had not secured an official permit), police arrested Séba and the Russian operatives who worked with Mailhol, namely Kramar, Pozdnyakov, and Boyarishev, and later banned them from entering Madagascar.³⁶

The presence of Séba at the events organised by the Russian consultants in support of particular presidential candidates was hardly accidental. A convicted anti-Semite and Black racist, Séba had been for years promoting pan-Africanism and cooperating with various European far-right organisations with the aim of amplifying their anti-immigrant and anti-multiculturalist messages to persuade Black people to return to African countries.³⁷ On 13 September 2017, Séba met with a Russian fascist, Alexander Dugin, in Moscow to exchange ideas about their struggle against the West. Séba referred to Dugin as “the most important

35 “The Resolutions of the International Conference ‘The Islands of Hope’ (The Territorial Dispute of the Scattered Islands)”, AFRIC, 28 September (2018), <https://afric.online/projects/outcomes-of-the-international-conferences-the-islands-of-hope-the-territorial-dispute-of-the-scattered-islands/>.

36 “Russia’s Madagascar Election Gamble – Full documentary – BBC Africa Eye”.

37 Cristiano Lanzano, “Why Are Italian Fascists Approvingly Quoting Samora Machel and Sankara?”, *Africa Is Our Country*, 9 September (2018), <https://africasacountry.com/2018/09/twisting-pan-africanism-to-promote-anti-africanism>.

theoretician and political adviser in Russia”,³⁸ while Dugin would write a preface to Séba’s book *L’Afrique libre ou la mort* [*Free Africa or Death*], in which he praised Séba for his opposition to Western “mental colonialism” and for being “not just a chance for Africa” but also “a hope for all the forces of multipolar resistance”.³⁹

In recent years, Dugin has been working for a Russian ultranationalist businessman, Konstantin Malofeev, who has been sanctioned by the EU and US for his material and financial support of violent pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Malofeev expressed his interest in investing in African countries, and in July 2018 began pushing a narrative about Russia and Africa that was very similar to the ideas that Séba promoted in Madagascar:

*Africa is a very important issue of the 21st century. Africa got liberated from the colonial rule 40-50 years ago, but it still suffers from economic colonial dependence on former metropolises and the West in general. It is very important for Russia not to blunder Africa away. [...] Africa possesses natural resources, and the West and the Chinese will all be out for them, so we need to be present there for the balance and because the Africans trust us most of all.*⁴⁰

According to *Proekt’s* investigation, it was around this time that the Russian consultants working in Madagascar started to cooperate with Séba and amplify his anti-Western and anti-French narratives with the aim of undermining pro-Western presidential candidates.

In the beginning of November 2018, just a few days before the first round of the presidential election, it emerged that AFRIC partnered up with yet another controversial election observation mission, namely CIS-EMO, which is arguably the oldest Russian organisation that has been involved in international politically biased election observation since 2003-2004.⁴¹ AFRIC claimed that it sent 36 international observers from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, France, Gabon, Germany,

38 Ignace Sossou, “Russie: Kemi Seba reçu par Alexandre Douguine, l’idéologue de Vladimir Poutine”, *Benin Web TV*, 13 December (2017), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190420051539/https://beninwebtv.com/2017/12/russie-kemi-seba-recu-alexandre-douguine-lideologue-de-vladimir-poutine/>.

39 Alexander Dugin, “Free Africa or Death!”, *Geopolitica*, <https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/free-africa-or-death>.

40 “Malofeev: Afrika – eto pole dlya geopoliticheskikh bitv XXI veka”, *Tsargrad TV*, 1 August (2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IqW95LVsVs>.

41 See more on CIS-EMO in Anton Shekhovtsov, “Far-Right Election Observation Monitors in the Service of the Kremlin’s Foreign Policy”, in Marlène Laruelle (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 223-243.



CIS-EMO mission in Madagascar.

Source: <http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/news/mezhdunarodnye-nablyudateli-obsudili-predstoyashchie-vybory-prezidenta-madagaskara>

Mongolia, Mozambique, Portugal, Russia, Senegal, and South Africa.⁴² In its turn, CIS-EMO's representatives reported that they deployed a team of 55 international observers from Bulgaria, Poland, Nigeria, and Russia to monitor the presidential election in Madagascar.⁴³

CIS-EMO and Prigozhin's team are connected to each other through the background of some of its members. Executive director of CIS-EMO Stanislav Byshok is a former activist of the Russian neo-Nazi group "Russian Image", the leader of which was given a life sentence for a number of serious crimes, including ordering assassinations. At the same time, several members of Prigozhin's structures were members of the "Russian Image". For example, Anna Bogacheva, a former member of this neo-Nazi group, was even sanctioned by the US for

42 "Presidential Election in Madagascar: AFRIC Observers in the Field", *AFRIC*, 6 November (2018), <https://afric.online/projects/presidential-election-in-madagascar-afric-observers-in-the-field/>; Catherine T. [Terekhova], "Presidential Elections-2018 in Madagascar: A Diary of Monitoring Mission", *AFRIC*, 12 November (2018), <https://afric.online/projects/presidential-elections-2018-in-madagascar-a-diary-of-monitoring-mission/>.

43 "Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli obsudili predstoyashchie vybory prezidenta Madagaskara", *CIS-EMO*, 6 November (2018), <http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/news/mezhdunarodnye-nablyudateli-obsudili-predstoyashchie-vybory-prezidenta-madagaskara>.

“material and technological support” to the Internet Research Agency.⁴⁴ Moreover, Mikhail Potepkin, one of the key figures in Prigozhin’s team dealing with Africa, has extensive social contacts among former members of the “Russian Image”.⁴⁵

On 5 November, AFRIC and CIS-EMO held a joint press conference. At this event, the two organisations revealed that they were going to conduct an exit-poll on the voting day with the help of a local company called Safidiko Madagasikara.⁴⁶ This revelation drew questions from Malagasy journalists and criticism from the Independent National Election Commission (Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante, CENI-M), because not only is the Malagasy population unaccustomed to exit-polls, but the latter are also illegal in Madagascar. AFRIC and CIS-EMO requested an authorisation from the CENI-M to conduct an exit-poll. Having received no such authorisation, and despite having been warned by the CENI-M about the illegality of the exit-poll, they forged the documents allegedly issued by the Malagasy electoral office allowing them to proceed.⁴⁷ The forgery was revealed when the pollsters hired by AFRIC and CIS-EMO were met with protests from the Malagasy voters who were shocked by the fact that the pollsters asked them about their voting preferences. After these protests drew attention of the public, a representative of the CENI-M went on air urging the pollsters to immediately stop their activity and requesting the police to take necessary actions against the pollsters.⁴⁸ As a result, AFRIC and CIS-EMO did not see their accreditation renewed by the CENI-M,⁴⁹ and – since the vote on 7 November could not establish a winner of the presidential election – they were forbidden to observe the second round of the election on 27 December, and left Madagascar.

This fiasco did not affect the activities of the Russian consultants who were working with several presidential candidates. They had a different problem, however: none of “their candidates” made it to the second round of the presidential election. In anticipation of this failure, Russian operatives decided to

44 “Treasury Sanctions Russian Cyber Actors for Interference with the 2016 U.S. Elections and Malicious Cyber-Attacks”, *US Department of the Treasury*, 15 March (2018), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0312>.

45 Mark Krutov, Sergey Dobrynin, Aleksandr Litoy, “‘Russkiy obraz’ Prigozhina”, *Radio Svoboda*, 2 October (2019), <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30195584.html>.

46 “Revue de presse du 8 novembre 2018”, *PEV Madagascar*, 8 November (2018), <https://www.pevmadagascar.eu/main/post/article/1235>.

47 “Sondages: des enquêteurs sement le trouble”, *NewsMada*, 8 November (2018), <https://www.newsmada.com/2018/11/08/sondages-des-enqueteurs-sement-le-trouble/>.

48 “Revue de presse du 8 novembre 2018”.

49 Mission d’observation électorale de l’Union européenne, *Madagascar 2018: Election présidentielle, 7 Novembre 2018. Rapport final*, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/moeuemada18_rapport_final_fr_0.pdf.

support a presidential hopeful, Andry Rajoelina, apparently even without his consent, just to create the impression that Russia was helping him. Russian consultants asked “their candidates” to drop out of the race and support Rajoelina, but none of them agreed.⁵⁰ Eventually, Rajoelina won the second round and Russian operatives brazenly took credit for his victory. For example, Alexander Seravin complimented Prigozhin’s political consultants on not letting “the pro-American candidate Marc Ravalomanana with unlimited funding” win the election.⁵¹

2018 Zimbabwean general election

In Yulia Afanasyeva’s above-mentioned letter, in which she wrote that she was looking for international observers for the general election in Zimbabwe, she also mentioned that she would be travelling to the Republic of South Africa and Zimbabwe in June-July 2018. Indeed, Zimbabwe was one of the African countries where political consultants connected to Prigozhin’s structures interfered in elections.⁵²

Prigozhin’s involvement in the Zimbabwean general election was preceded by a number of high-profile contacts between Russian and Zimbabwean officials. For example, in March 2018, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Zimbabwe’s capital Harare and met with President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who led a coup d’état in November 2017 that ousted President Robert Mugabe, who had headed the country for 30 years. During his visit, Lavrov passed on a message from Putin, who “expressed his support for Mnangagwa’s efforts to stabilise domestic developments, consolidate the society, and develop international cooperation”.⁵³ Already then, it was evident that the Kremlin supported the re-election of Mnangagwa in the general election. Later that same month, the head of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Priscilla Chigumba and Mnangagwa’s special advisor Christopher Mutsvangwa visited Moscow. Chigumba met with a member of Russia’s Central Election Commission, Nikolay Levichev, and “discussed issues of electoral sovereignty [and] technological instruments used to conduct elections in different countries”.⁵⁴

50 Schwirtz, Borgia, “How Russia Meddles abroad for Profit”; “Russia’s Madagascar Election Gamble – Full documentary – BBC Africa Eye”.

51 Seravin, “V otvet na mnogochislennye publikatsii...”.

52 Henry Meyer, Ilya Arkhipov, Aina Rahagalala, “Putin’s Notorious ‘Chef’ Is Now Meddling across Africa”, *Bloomberg*, 20 November (2018), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2018-11-20/putin-chef-yevgeny-prigozhin-is-now-meddling-in-africa>.

53 “Lavrov provyol peregovory s zimbabviyskim kollegoy Moyo”, *RIA Novosti*, 29 June (2018), <https://ria.ru/20180629/1523690145.html>

54 “Chlen TsIK Rossii Nikolay Levichev provyol vstrechu s glavoy izbirkoma Zimbabwe Pristsilloy Chigumba”, *TsIK Rossii*, 22 March (2018), <http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/39421/>.

Around the beginning of June 2018, a St. Petersburg-based political consultant, Valentin Bianki, who was connected to Prigozhin's African projects,⁵⁵ presented a report on the upcoming election in Zimbabwe.⁵⁶ The report was based on research apparently conducted in the period between 25 May and 8 June 2018, and analysed the political landscape in the country. In particular, the report identified two main presidential candidates, namely Mnangagwa and the leader of the opposition Nelson Chamisa. Bianki noted that Zimbabwean users of social networks largely supported Chamisa, who had managed to unite the opposition was indirectly supported by the ousted Mugabe. The report also suggested that the legitimacy of the election was low and projected that – were Mnangagwa's victory to be announced already in the first round – the opposition would organise an continuous protest in Harare.⁵⁷ In order to secure Mnangagwa's re-election, Bianki proposed, in particular, the following: to employ an anti-Western narrative in an appeal to the nation: "Let us not allow the US and UK to colonise us again, to bleed our resources dry"; to disclose "a connection between Chamisa and Mugabe [...], and declare it illegal", which is to be followed by criminal prosecution or Chamisa's withdrawal from the elections"; and to introduce "spoiler candidates in order to undermine support for Chamisa".

In order to enhance "the external legitimacy of the elections", Bianki's report suggested to involve "observers from Russia, and countries from Africa and Europe". Bianki could not have been unaware of the fact that already in April 2018, Zimbabwe's Ministry for Foreign Affairs declared that it would invite international observers from the EU, Commonwealth of Nations, United States, and Australia, among other countries, ending the ban on Western observation of Zimbabwean elections introduced by Mugabe in 2002, as he believed that Western observers favoured his opponents. What Bianki's report implied was that it would be difficult to legitimise Mnangagwa's victory already in the first round of the presidential election, and it was the legitimacy of that particular outcome that needed enhancing with the help of loyal observers.

55 Olga Churakova, "V stranakh Afriki rabotayut do 200 polittekhnologov, svyazannykh s Prigozhinym", *TV Rain*, 20 March (2019), https://tvrain.ru/news/v_stranah_afriki_rabotajut_do_200_polittehnologov_svjazannyh_s_prigozhinym-482346/.

56 Provided to the author by the Dossier Centre.

57 Indeed, Mnangagwa's victory was announced already after the first round. The opposition started a protest, but the Zimbabwean army loyal to Mnangagwa violently cracked down on the protests killing six demonstrators, arresting and beating up dozens of others. See Krista Mahr, "Zimbabwe Politics Is Still in Turmoil as Opposition Challenges Election Results", *Los Angeles Times*, 21 August (2018), <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-zimbabwe-election-20180821-story.html>.



AFRIC's mission in Zimbabwe.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/aariika/>

To “observe” the election in Zimbabwe, AFRIC dispatched – as it claimed – 43 monitors from Cape Verde, Germany, Mongolia, Mozambique, Republic of South Africa, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine. Even before the election took place, it became clear that AFRIC directly supported Mnangagwa. For example, two days before the election, Matemulane declared that Mnangagwa “was sticking to his promises of a free, fair and credible election”, and stressed that AFRIC’s presence in Zimbabwe aimed “to fulfil the goals of acting as the real embassy of transparency and legitimacy of the upcoming election process”. Moreover, Matemulane also played an anti-Western card – fully in accordance with Bianki’s suggestions – when he indirectly attacked the US and EU: “We fully share and strongly embrace the belief that African problems require African solutions on the contrary to ‘Euro or Amero-Africanised’ solutions which are brought and implemented by Western States financing organisations and are used to get incredible profits for themselves”.⁵⁸

58 Felex Share, “ED Walks the Talk – AFRIC”, *Chronicle*, 28 July (2018), <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/ed-walks-the-talk-afric/>.

On the eve of the election, Chamisa claimed that Mnangagwa was working with Russia to win the election, but the authorities naturally dismissed Chamisa's claims.⁵⁹ Mnangagwa won the election with 50.8% of the vote, while Chamisa obtained 44.3%. In its statement on the Zimbabwean election, the EU Election Observation Mission concluded that "the elections were competitive, the campaign was largely peaceful and, overall, political freedoms during the pre-election campaign, including freedom of movement, assembly and speech, were respected". At the same time, the EU Mission noted that "the misuse of state resources, instances of coercion and intimidation, partisan behaviour by traditional leaders and overt bias in state media, all in favour of the ruling party, meant that a truly level playing field was not achieved, which negatively impacted on the democratic character of the pre-electoral environment".⁶⁰

As one might expect, AFRIC praised the Zimbabwean election. For example, Mirjam Katharina Zwingli "was positively impressed by the organisation [of] the presidential election".⁶¹ In her opinion, the election was "a symbolic gesture that Zimbabwe ha[d] come to international standards in terms of holding democratic processes". Another AFRIC "observer", Rishabh Sethi, thanked the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission "for conducting elections in a very successful manner". In his comment, Russian political consultant from Prigozhin's team Fedor Turygin stated that Mnangagwa had "kept his word" to hold transparent, competitive, and legitimate elections.⁶² In its joint statement, AFRIC declared that its "observers" had noticed "no signs of electoral fraud, voter intimidation or external interference in the process".⁶³ It is hardly surprising that comments from AFRIC were actively disseminated by state-owned, pro-Mnangagwa media such as *The Herald* or *The Chronicle*.

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- 59 Felex Share, "Chamisa Threatens Anarchy", *The Herald*, 12 July (2018), <https://www.herald.co.zw/chamisa-threatens-anarchy/>.
- 60 "EUEOM Zimbabwe Final Report on the 2018 Harmonised Elections", *European Union External Action*, 9 October (2018), https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/science-diplomacy/51896/eueom-zimbabwe-final-report-2018-harmonised-elections_en.
- 61 Tendai Mugabe, Muchaneta Chimuka, "Observer Teams Give Polls Thumbs up", *The Herald*, 1 August (2018), <https://www.herald.co.zw/observer-teams-give-polls-thumbs-up/>.
- 62 Fedor Turygin, "As a Part of AFRIC Team, Our Group of International Observers Went to Matabeleland", *Zimbabwe Today*, 1 August (2018), <https://www.facebook.com/ZimbabweTodayLive/posts/2139352939654144>.
- 63 "AFRIC Observers Mission Statement", *AFRIC*, 1 August (2018), <https://afric.online/607-afric-observers-mission-statement/>.

2018 Democratic Republic of the Congo general election

On 30 October 2018, the Congolese newspaper *Le Potentiel* published an article that accused Russia of meddling in the forthcoming general election in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) by supplying military equipment to the DRC's Independent National Electoral Commission.⁶⁴ The 2018 election in the DRC was the first election since 2011, when Joseph Kabila won the presidency. Kabila's second and last presidential term expired in 2016, but for two years he was unwilling to leave his post and hold a new election, and only due to domestic and international pressure he was eventually forced to schedule the election for the end of 2018.

After the publication of the article in *Le Potentiel*, Russia denied any interference or supply of military equipment, but acknowledged that it had delivered trucks to meet the logistical needs of the election.⁶⁵ However, Russian meddling was one of the talking points for the opposition to Kabila and the presidential candidates he presumably supported. One of the opposition leaders, Martin Fayulu, said that Kabila was "desperate for outside help", adding that it was not surprising that Russia was "moving into the Congo, given our vast mineral wealth".⁶⁶

While the full extent of Russian interference in the 2018 DRC election is yet to be uncovered, it has been established that AFRIC sent its monitors to "observe" the Congolese election, which took place on 30 December, after its fiasco in Madagascar, when the authorities had forbidden AFRIC and another Russian organisation, CIS-EMO, to observe the second round of the presidential election. According to AFRIC, it deployed to the DRC 35 monitors from Belarus, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Germany, India, Malaysia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Republic of South Africa, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey, and UK.⁶⁷

According to official results, Félix Tshisekedi won the election by securing 38.57% of the vote, while his nearest competitor Martin Fayulu obtained

64 "Processus électoral en RDC: l'ingérence russe se manifeste", *Le Potentiel*, 30 October (2018), <https://lepotentielonline.net/2018/10/30/processus-electoral-en-rdc-ingerence-russe-se-manifeste/>.

65 "O statye v kongolezskoy gazete 'Le Potentiel' na temu yakoby rossiyskogo vmeshatel'stva v vybory v DR Kongo", *Posol'stvo Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Demokraticheskoy Respublike Kongo*, https://drc.mid.ru/home/-/asset_publisher/19b1R1GqnEb5/content/o-fejkovoj-novosti-v-gazete-le-potentiel-.

66 Meyer, Arkhipov, Rahagalala, "Putin's Notorious 'Chef' Is Now Meddling across Africa".

67 "Report of the International Observation Mission of the Presidential Elections in DR Congo of December 30th, 2018", *AFRIC*, 11 January (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/international-election-observation-mission-report-in-dr-congo-of-december-30th/>.

34.83%. However, Fayulu challenged the election results claiming that outgoing President Kabila had made a deal with the President-elect Tshisekedi and that the results of the election had been “rigged, fabricated and invented” and did “not reflect the truth of the ballots”.⁶⁸ Fayulu’s claims were supported by several institutions and countries. A joint investigation by *The Financial Times* and *France 24* revealed as massive electoral fraud: an analysis of “a trove of election data [...] representing 86 per cent of total votes cast across the country” showed that “Mr Fayulu won 59.4 per cent of the vote. Rival opposition candidate Mr Tshisekedi, who was declared the surprise winner last week, finished second with 19 per cent”.⁶⁹ The Catholic Church, which posted 40 thousand election observers, also said that the official results did not match its findings.⁷⁰ Furthermore, France and Belgium challenged the results,⁷¹ while the Southern African Development Community (SADC) called for a recount of the votes, hoping that it “would provide the necessary reassurance to both winners and losers”.⁷²

As one might have expected, while the AFRIC mission did notice “a number of irregularities” during the voting process, it stated that “overall, the elections was [sic] organized in accordance with the electoral law of the country”.⁷³ Equally unsurprising was that Russia hailed Tshisekedi’s alleged victory,⁷⁴ and – together with China – “led calls at the United Nations Security Council [...] for world powers to stay out of an election dispute in the Democratic Republic of Congo”.⁷⁵

On 12 January 2019, Fayulu filed a court appeal disputing the official results of the election, but the Constitutional Court rejected his appeal on 20 January.

- 68 “The Latest: Opposition Candidate Fayulu Denounces Results”, *AP*, 10 January (2019), <https://apnews.com/64b3de3ee8e1482682d16654b20f517e>.
- 69 Tom Wilson, David Blood, David Pilling, “Congo Voting Data Reveal Huge Fraud in Poll to Replace Kabila”, *Financial Times*, 15 January (2019), <https://www.ft.com/content/2b97f6e6-189d-11e9-b93e-f4351a53f1c3>. See also “DR Congo Presidential Vote Plagued by Fraud, Media Investigation Finds”, *France 24*, 17 January (2019), <https://www.france24.com/en/20190117-dr-congo-election-fraud-kabila-fayula-tshisekedi>.
- 70 “DR Congo Presidential Election: Church Questions Results”, *BBC*, 10 January (2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46827760>.
- 71 “France, Belgium Cast Doubt on DR Congo Election Result”, *Al Jazeera*, 10 January (2019), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/france-belgium-cast-doubt-dr-congo-election-result-190110091040088.html>.
- 72 “Regional Body SADC Calls for DR Congo Election Vote Recount”, *Al Jazeera*, 14 January (2019), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/regional-body-sadc-calls-dr-congo-election-vote-recount-190113143558375.html>.
- 73 “Report of the International Observation Mission of the Presidential Elections in DR Congo”.
- 74 Henry Foy, “Russia Hails Tshisekedi as Congo Election Winner”, *Financial Times*, 21 January (2019), <https://www.ft.com/content/a503cbe8-1d81-11e9-b2f7-97e4dbd3580d>.
- 75 “Russia, China Push UN to Stay out of DR Congo Poll Dispute”, *France 24*, 11 January (2019), <https://www.france24.com/en/20190111-russia-china-push-un-stay-out-dr-congo-poll-dispute>.

2019 South African general election

The contents of Afanasyeva's letter cited above make it clear that Prigozhin's team started working on the 2019 South African general election already in 2018. Documents produced by Prigozhin's team with regard to South African election⁷⁶ reveal that Russian political consultants supported the governing African National Congress (ANC) and attacked the opposition, namely the Democratic Alliance and Economic Freedom Fighters. The documents also show that Russian operatives started passing their recommendations to the representatives of the ANC on how to advance their party and damage the opposition as early as autumn 2018. These recommendations included, in particular, talking points to be used by the ANC, descriptions of methods of discrediting the opposition, as well as explanations of how to approach different social and age groups.

In early April 2019, i.e. about a month before the election that took place on 8 May, Afanasyeva wrote a brief summarising the activities of Prigozhin's team in South Africa.⁷⁷ The brief, among other matters, stated: "A group of Russian specialists renders continuous consultancy services providing recommendations and cases for the campaign and public speeches, supporting the ANC and discrediting the DA [Democratic Alliance] and EFF [Economic Freedom Fighters], as well as analysis of the ways to undermine the growth of support for smaller parties". In Afanasyeva's words, the consultancy services were underpinned by loyalty to Russia and aimed at developing two projects of Prigozhin's team – namely the International Anticrisis Centre and AFRIC – that conducted research and provided recommendations to the ANC. The same brief mentioned that 25 AFRIC monitors would observe the election in South Africa.

However, other documents – including AFRIC's website⁷⁸ – suggest that AFRIC deployed 20 monitors. A cost sheet covering AFRIC's "observation" mission in South Africa and presumably approved by Petr Bychkov, the head Prigozhin's back office in St. Petersburg, indicated that AFRIC's monitors travelled from Benin, Germany, India, Mongolia, Mozambique, Serbia, Sweden, and

76 Roman Popkov, "Yuzhnaya Afrika: kak polittekhnologi Prigozhina pomogayut na vyborakh pravayshchey partii", *MBKh Media*, 7 May (2019), <https://www.mbk.news/suzhet/yuzhnaya-afrika-polittehnologi-prigozhina/>; Ferial Haffajee, "Exclusive: Did Putin's 'Chef' Attempt to Interfere in South African Election?", *Daily Maverick*, 7 May (2019), <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-05-07-exclusive-did-putins-chef-attempt-to-interfere-in-south-african-election/>.

77 Provided to the author by the Dossier Centre.

78 "South Africa: AFRIC Association Deploys Observers for Coming Elections", *AFRIC*, 4 May (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/south-africa-afric-association-deploys-election-observers-for-coming-elections/>.

Switzerland.⁷⁹ The cost sheet also provided information on the financial aspect of AFRIC's monitors: they received \$800 (around €715) for six days of their activities in South Africa and \$40 (around €36) for subsistence per day. Interestingly, the same document specified the costs for notepads, pens, vests, and memory sticks – all featuring AFRIC's logo – in Russian roubles, in contrast to all the other costs indicated in US dollars, which implies that these accessories were purchased most likely in Russia.

Established international missions representing the African Union, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, and SADC generally commended South Africa for the conduct of the election.⁸⁰ AFRIC's statement was no different, as it considered the election “largely transparent, free and fair”.⁸¹ The ANC, which Prigozhin's team supported, won the election by obtaining 57.50% of the vote. This was the lowest result for the ANC since 1994, when the first election after the end of apartheid took place, but it was still higher than what Afanasyeva expected in her above-mentioned brief: she wrote that it would be difficult for the ANC to obtain more than 50% of the vote. On the other hand, she mentioned in the same brief that the ANC was polling between 55% and 59%; therefore, it is possible that she deliberately underpredicted the ANC's prospective election results in order to attribute its eventual electoral performance to her team of political consultants. However, an investigation by the South African newspaper *The Daily Maverick* seems to be doubtful of AFRIC's activities: “The Russian-owned Afric Centre appears to have gotten out of the blocks too late, as there is no evidence of meaningful or organised disinformation in the South African 2019 election campaign”.⁸²

79 Provided to the author by the Dossier Centre.

80 “African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to the Republic of South Africa 8 May 2019 National and Provincial Legislative Elections Preliminary Statement”, *African Union*, 10 May (2019), <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20190510/african-union-election-observation-mission-aeom-republic-south-africa-8-may>; “EISA Election Observer Mission to the 2019 National and Provincial Elections in South Africa”, *Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa*, <https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/sou2019eom0.pdf>; “The SADC Election Observation Mission Releases its Preliminary Statement on the 2019 National and Provincial Elections in the Republic of South Africa”, *South African Development Community*, 12 May (2019), <https://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/sadc-election-observation-mission-releases-its-preliminary-statement-2019-national-and-provincial-elections-republic-south-africa/>.

81 “2019 South African General Election: IEC Commends the Role of AFRIC as an Observer”, *AFRIC*, 12 May (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/2019south-africa-general-election-iec-commends-the-role-of-afric-as-an-observer/>.

82 Haffajee, “Exclusive”.

2019 Mozambican general election

On 20 August 2019, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi arrived in Moscow. Nyusi would participate in a business forum featuring, among others, Mozambican businessmen, and eventually meet with Putin. At that time, Russian authorities were preparing for the first Russia-Africa Summit, planned for 23-24 October 2019, and as the Mozambican election was to be held on 15 October, Putin thought that Nyusi would not be able to take part in it. However, Putin expressed his hope that “Mozambique [would] be represented at a good level at the forum” and wished Nyusi good luck in the election.⁸³

In the beginning of October, it became evident that Prigozhin’s team was involved in the Mozambican election. First, AFRIC announced that it deployed approximately 62 monitors from Belarus, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Japan, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mongolia, Republic of South Africa, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe to observe the election in Mozambique.⁸⁴ Second, already in second half of September, AFRIC conducted a public opinion poll ahead of the election, but since polls are illegal in Mozambique during the campaign period,⁸⁵ the results of the poll were published on 4 October on the website of the International Anticrisis Centre, run by Prigozhin’s team.⁸⁶ The poll predicted that Nyusi would win the election with 62.3% of the vote, while his party Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) would obtain 60.5% of the vote. The analysis accompanying the results of the poll made AFRIC’s agenda clear, as it stated: “Russia officially supports the legitimately elected President Filipe Nyusi and FRELIMO party and seeks to maintain peace, sustainable development, sovereignty, and political stability of the Republic of Mozambique”. The same analysis also tried to discredit the opposition to Nyussi with the help of anti-Western narratives: “representatives of Western countries, including the U.S., actively support MDM [Democratic Movement of Mozambique] candidate Daviz Simango, using their standard set of support-the-opposition technologies, by radicalizing society, organizing protests, primarily in the capital, spreading false information via media outlets, as well as using social networks to instigate conflicts between

83 “Russia-Mozambique Talks”, *President of Russia*, 22 August (2019), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61352>.

84 “AFRIC – Mozambique Observation Mission Press Release”, *AFRIC*, 1 October (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/afric-mozambique-observation-mission-press-rel/>.

85 “Russian Think Tank Publishes Illegal Pro-Frelimo Opinion Poll”, *Zitamar*, 10 October (2019), <https://zitamar.com/russian-think-tank-publishes-illegal-pro-frelimo-opinion-poll/>.

86 The poll was later deleted from the website, but can still be found here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200108211745/http://anticrisis.cc/2019/10/04/forecast-for-general-election-results-in-the-republic-of-mozambique/>.



AFRIC's press conference in Mozambique.

Credit: Alexandre Nhamossa. [He gave his permission to use the picture]

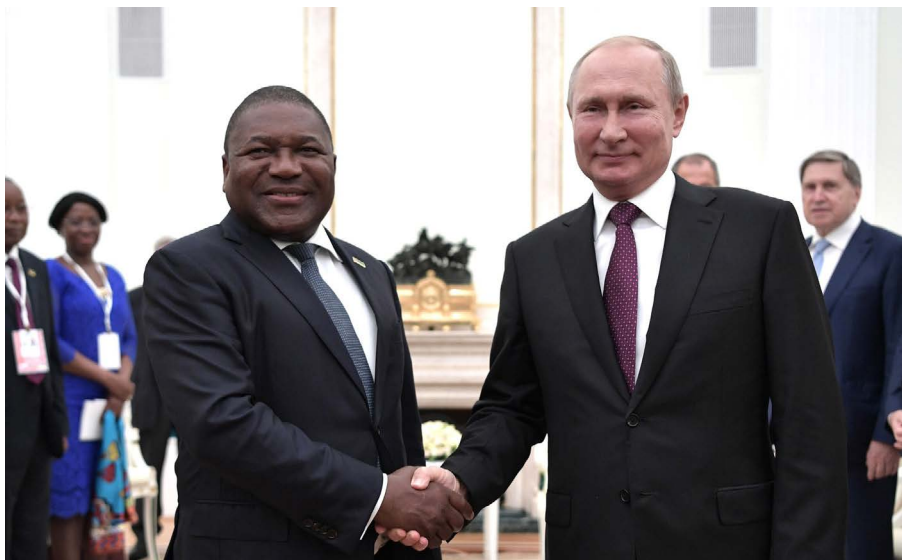
different population groups”. According to the *Mozambique Political Process Bulletin*, the link to AFRIC’s poll was widely (and illegally, according to the Mozambican law) shared by supporters of FRELIMO.⁸⁷

The actual results of the election once again proved that Prigozhin’s team under-predicted Nyusi’s and FRELIMO’s results: President Nyusi was re-elected with 73.46% of the vote, while FRELIMO obtained 71.28%. Russia was the first country to congratulate Mozambique on the election, even before the official publication of the results.⁸⁸ A press release by Russia’s Foreign Ministry stated that “no serious violations were detected” during the election and that it welcomed “the success of such an important event in Mozambique’s domestic political life”, adding that the election was yet “another significant step in the advance of Mozambican society along the road of political stability and socio-economic development”.⁸⁹

87 “Mozambique Political Process Bulletin 70: Administrator Car Burned; No Plans to Shut Internet”, *Zitamar*, 10 October (2019), <https://zitamar.com/mozambique-political-process-bulletin-70-administrator-car-burned-no-plans-shut-internet/>.

88 Communication with a Mozambican investigative journalist Alexandre Nhamossa.

89 “O vseobshchikh vyborakh v Mozambique”, *Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, 21 October (2019), https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3858655.



Russian President Vladimir Putin meeting his Mozambican counterpart Filipe Nyusi in August 2019.

Source: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61352>

African Union and SADC observers praised the election “for being peaceful and well organised”,⁹⁰ while AFRIC, too, said that the election complied with “the international standards for democratic elections” and that, “despite minor violations of the electoral law, the electoral campaign process was generally peaceful and transparent”.⁹¹ This praise for the 2019 Mozambican election was in stark contrast to the evaluations of the EU Election Observation Mission. In its final report on the Mozambican election, the Mission stated: “The electoral process took place in a polarised and challenging environment where inter-party violence was prevalent. Constant features throughout the process included high levels of mistrust between the main political parties, and a lack of confidence that the electoral administration (the National Election Commission – CNE and

90 Manuel Mucari, “EU Blows Whistle on Mozambique’s Election, but African Observers Disagree”, *Business Day*, 17 October (2019), <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2019-10-17-eu-blows-whistle-on-mozambiques-election-but-african-observers-disagree/>.

91 “The International Election Monitoring Mission Statement and Preliminary Conclusions of Mozambique Elections 2019”, *AFRIC*, 18 October (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/the-international-election-monitoring-mission-statement-and-preliminary-conclusions-of-mozambique-elections-2019/>.

the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration – STAE) and the judiciary were independent and free from political influence”.⁹²

Shortly after the election, newly re-elected President Filipe Nyusi – despite earlier reservations – travelled to Russia to take part in the Russia-Africa Summit. AFRIC’s president José Matemulane, a Mozambican citizen, was reportedly a member of Nyusi’s official delegation.

92 European Union Election Observation Mission, “Final Report. General and Provincial Assembly Elections 15 October 2019”, *European Union External Action*, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eueom_moz2019_final_report_en.pdf.

AFRIC beyond fake election observation

Conceived as a Russian network of agents of influence, AFRIC's activities – apart from its website – were mostly limited to promoting African politicians apparently useful for Moscow under the veneer of election observation. However, starting from summer 2019, AFRIC became involved in other influence operations.

On 29-30 July 2019, AFRIC held a conference titled “Africa 2040: Vision of the Future” at the Hilton Hotel in Berlin. As AFRIC stated, the conference brought “experts, NGO leaders, influencers and diplomats from all walks of life to deliberate on the following issues: Africa’s economic development, governance, energy security, infrastructural development and investment, agriculture, social policies and culture and education”.⁹³ AFRIC claims that the event was attended by representatives and ambassadors of Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Republic of South Africa, Senegal, and Uganda.⁹⁴ As internal communications between members of AFRIC suggest,⁹⁵ the conference was hosted by Volker Tschapke.

The conference “Africa 2040: Vision of the Future” featured Yulia Afanasyeva, AFRIC’s strategist Clifton Ellis, AFRIC’s administrator Vaiva Adomaityte, Purnima Anand (president of the BRICS International Forum), Stefan Keuter (a German MP from the far-right party Alternative for Germany, AfD),⁹⁶ Nathalie

93 “Africa Vision-2040: AFRIC Discusses Africa’s Emergence in Berlin”, *AFRIC*, 13 July (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/africa-vision-2040-afric-discusses-africas-emergence-in-berlin/>.

94 “AFRIC – Berlin Foresight Session on Africa’s Transformation”, *AFRIC*, 30 July (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/afric-berlin-foresight-session-on-africas-transformation/>.

95 Provided to the author by the Dossier Centre.

96 On the relations between the European far right and Russian state and non-state actors see Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).



AFRIC's delegation at the Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/laurylndong/>

Yamb (a member of the liberal LIDER party in the Ivory Coast), and two journalists: Eric Topona (Deutsche Welle) and Urs Unkauf (German-Russian Forum). The agenda behind the conference was to promote the idea that that African countries should align with Russia rather than with “colonial powers that today still violate African countries’ sovereignty with impunity”.⁹⁷

Furthermore, AFRIC’s apparent rising prominence in the relations between Putin’s regime and African countries led to the participation of AFRIC’s members in the Russia-Africa Summit that took place in Sochi on 23-24 October 2019. AFRIC’s team featured, among others, Afanasyeva, Matemulane, Cheuwa, Ellis, Adomaityte, and Séba.

On the first day of the summit, Matemulane signed a memorandum on cooperation and coordination between AFRIC and the Foundation for the Defence of National Values (FDNV). The latter is headed by Alexander Malkevich, a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. In December 2018, Malkevich was sanctioned by the US for his attempts at targeting Americans with online

97 Clifton Ellis, Vaiva Adomaityte, Dolicia Ratovonkery, Julia Houlimi, “Africa 2040: Vision of the Future”, AFRIC, <https://afric.online/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AFRICA-2040-Full-version-ENG.pdf>.



José Matemulane.

Source: <http://photo.roscongress.org/ru/73/photos/list?PhotosContainerId=2792>

disinformation through the website *USA Really*, linked to Prigozhin.⁹⁸ In July 2019, Russian political consultant *Maxim Shugaley*, who used to work with Prigozhin’s team in Madagascar, was arrested in Libya as a member of Malkevich’s FDNV.⁹⁹ In Libya, Shugaley, as well as his partner Alexander Prokofiev (who escaped arrest), were accused of being “involved in ‘securing a meeting’ with Saif al-Islam al-Qaddafi, the fugitive son of the ousted dictator and a potential presidential candidate who enjoys the backing of some officials in Moscow”.¹⁰⁰

Officially, the memorandum between AFRIC and FDNV provides a framework for the exchange of information between the two organisations and “allows for the development of cooperation in the area of conducting independent research on the African continent and developing strategies and propositions based on

98 “Treasury Targets Russian Operatives over Election Interference, World Anti-Doping Agency Hacking, and Other Malign Activities”, *US Department of the Treasury*, 19 December (2018), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm577>.

99 Samer Al-Atrush, Ilya Arkhipov, Henry Meyer, “Libya Uncovers Alleged Russian Plot to Meddle in African Votes”, *Bloomberg*, 5 July (2019), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-05/libya-arrests-two-russians-accused-of-trying-to-influence-vote>.

100 Ibid.

traditional values and people's interests".¹⁰¹ In other words, the signing of the memorandum formalised cooperation between two organisations related to the activities of Prigozhin's team in Africa.

On the second day of the summit, AFRIC's leadership participated in the panel discussion "The Future of the African Continent: Sovereignty and Traditional Values as Crucial Elements of a Development Strategy". The panel was moderated by Malkevich and, apart from several members of AFRIC, featured Abdelrahman Noureldayem Saeed Abdelwahab, a member of the Sudanese Economists Association; Marie Noelle Koyara, Minister of National Defense and Army Reconstruction of the Central African Republic; Laurence Ndong, Vice-President of the International "Let's Turn the Page" Campaign; and Anton Morozov, Member of the Russian Parliament. The narrative of the panel was similar to the "Africa 2040" conference: unlike Western countries, Russia has never been a colonial power and respects the sovereignty of African countries; thus, cooperation with Russia is beneficial to African nations.¹⁰²

Following its performance at the Russia-Africa Summit, representatives of AFRIC also participated in the conferences "Made in Russia" (14 November 2019)¹⁰³ and "From Inequality to Justice: World Experience and Solutions for Russia" (10 December 2019).¹⁰⁴

African activities of Prigozhin's team in general and of AFRIC in particular did not escape the attention of international researchers and experts. As early as November 2018, the European Platform for Democratic Elections published a report titled "The Globalisation of Pro-Kremlin Networks of Politically Biased Election Observation", which analysed dubious activities of AFRIC during the 2018 Zimbabwean general election.¹⁰⁵ At the end of October 2019, the Stanford

101 "Fond zashchity natsional'nykh tsennostey zaklyuchil soglashenie o sotrudnichestve s Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC)", *Fond zashchity natsional'nykh tsennostey*, 23 October (2019), <https://fznc.world/zayavleniya-fonda/fond-zashchity-naczionalnyh-czennostej-zaklyuchil-soglashenie-o-sotrudnichestve-s-association-for-free-research-and-international-cooperation-afric/>.

102 "The Future of the African Continent: Sovereignty and Traditional Values as Crucial Elements of a Development Strategy", *Roscongress*, 24 October (2019), <https://roscongress.org/en/sessions/africa-2019-obraz-budushchego-afrikanskogo-kontinenta-suverenitet-i-traditsionnye-tsennosti-kak-vazhnye-elementy/discussion/>.

103 "AFRIC Make Strides towards Establishing a Reputation as a Business Matchmaker to Fuel African Development", *AFRIC*, 15 November (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/afric-make-strides-towards-establishing-a-reputation-as-a-business-matchmaker-to-fuel-african-development/>.

104 "AFRIC, Honorable Guest of the International Conference from Inequality to Justice", *AFRIC*, 13 December (2019), <https://afric.online/projects/afric-honorable-guest-of-the-international-conference-from-inequality-to-justice-world-experience-and-solutions-for-russia/>.

105 Shekhovtsov, "The Globalisation of Pro-Kremlin Networks of Politically Biased Election Observation".



Clifton Ellis.

Source: <http://photo.roscongress.org/ru/73/photos/list?PhotosContainerId=2792>

Internet Observatory published a report titled “Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa”, which linked AFRIC to Prigozhin’s structures.¹⁰⁶

On 30 October 2019, Facebook removed “35 Facebook accounts, 53 Pages, seven Groups and five Instagram accounts that originated in Russia and focused on Madagascar, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire and Cameroon”.¹⁰⁷ Nathaniel Gleicher, Head of Facebook’s Cybersecurity Policy, explained:

Although the people behind these networks attempted to conceal their identities and coordination, our investigation connected these campaigns to entities associated with Russian financier Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who was previously indicted by the US Justice Department. [...] The individuals behind this activity used a combination of fake accounts and authentic accounts of local

¹⁰⁶ Shelby Grossman, Daniel Bush, Renée DiResta, “Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa”, *Stanford University*, 30 October (2019), <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/prigozhin-africa>.

¹⁰⁷ Nathaniel Gleicher, “Removing More Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from Russia”, *Facebook*, 30 October (2019), <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/10/removing-more-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-from-russia/>.

*nationals in Madagascar and Mozambique to manage Pages and Groups, and post their content. They typically posted about global and local political news including topics like Russian policies in Africa, elections in Madagascar and Mozambique, election monitoring by a local non-governmental organization and criticism of French and US policies.*¹⁰⁸

AFRIC's official Facebook account was one of those pages removed by Facebook. On 9 November 2019, AFRIC registered a second account, but Facebook deleted it on 9 January 2020. Confused by Facebook's actions, AFRIC and Malkevich's FDNV held a roundtable discussion called "Freedom of Speech in Social Networks" at the Hilton Hotel in Berlin on 20 January 2020. The roundtable featured Afanasyeva, Malkevich, Ellis, Tschapke, Eric Topona, Nathalie Yamb (who by that time had already become an AFRIC-affiliated expert), Qemal Affagnon (the head of the West Africa division of Internet Without Borders), AfD's Stefan Keuter, German filmmaker Wilhelm Domke-Schulz (known for anti-Ukrainian propaganda), and a Latvian pro-Russian activist Jānis Kuzins.

The aim of the discussion was to portray AFRIC as a victim of censorship. Ellis used populist rhetoric to argue that the interests of the political establishment were diametrically opposed to the interests of "the citizens of many countries resulting in a zero sum situation culminating in the establishment doubling down on support for their agenda by demanding that extra judicial measures be implemented by social media companies to silent 'unfavourable' political speech".¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that yet another member of AfD, namely a member of the Berlin state parliament, Gunnar Lindemann, was present in the audience, which may mean that AFRIC has established contacts with this far-right German party.

However, if Facebook and international experts have been critical of the activities of Prigozhin's team in Africa, Russian elites, by contrast, appear to highly appreciate its work. AFRIC's participation in the Russia-Africa Summit, which the Russian authorities took very seriously, corroborates this assumption. Moreover, one Russian report suggests that people who worked on Prigozhin's African projects were issued state awards.¹¹⁰ For example, Russian political consultant Valentin Bianki, who wrote the analysis of the election in Zimbabwe, was apparently decorated with the "Order of Friendship",¹¹¹ which is awarded,

108 Ibid.

109 Clifton Ellis, "Freedom of Speech in Social Networks", AFRIC, 22 January (2020), <https://afric.online/projects/freedom-of-speech-in-social-networks/>.

110 Churakova, "V stranakh Afriki rabotayut do 200 polittekhnologov, svyazannykh s Prigozhinym".

111 Ibid.



Participants of AFRIC's roundtable discussion “Freedom of Speech in Social Networks” in Berlin. Left to right: Yulia Afanasyeva, Wilhelm Domke-Schulz, Clifton Ellis, Stefan Keuter, Nathalie Yamb, Alexander Malkevich, Jānis Kuzins.

Source: <https://afric.online/projects/freedom-of-speech-in-social-networks/>

in particular, “for special merit in strengthening peace, friendship, cooperation and understanding between nations”, “for fruitful work on the convergence and mutual enrichment of cultures of nations and peoples”, and “for great contribution to the implementation of joint ventures with the Russian Federation”.¹¹² Petr Bychkov, head of Prigozhin’s back-office dealing with Africa, and Fedor Turygin were presumably awarded with promotions. In November 2019, Bychkov was appointed a deputy head of the Office of Internal Politics of the Administration of the Pskov oblast, while Turygin was appointed an acting head of the public communications policy of the same Administration. It is highly likely that Seravin was instrumental in this promotion: he was the chief political strategist of the election campaign of Mikhail Vedernikov, who was elected the Governor of the Pskov oblast in 2018.¹¹³

112 “O vnesenii izmeneniy v Statut ordena Druzhby i v opisaniye ordena Druzhby, utverzhdyonnye Ukazom Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 7 sentyabrya 2010 g. N. 1099”, *Oftsiyal'nyy internet-portal pravovoy informatsii*, 7 September (2010), <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102154588>.

113 Mariya Karpenko, “Tochno v yabloko. Gubernatoru Pskovskoy oblasti porazhat' politicheskie tseli pomozhet peterburgskiy polittekholog”, *Fontanka*, 19 November (2019), <https://www.fontanka.ru/2019/11/19/084/>.

Conclusion

AFRIC was created in 2018 by Russian political consultants working for Yevgeniy Prigozhin, a Russian businessman close to Vladimir Putin. At the end of 2017, Prigozhin took interest in developing business relations with African countries. While his activities were underpinned, first and foremost, by self-interest, Prigozhin managed to convince Putin that Russia benefited from his work in Africa, as it allegedly contributed to Russia's pride and prestige on that continent, as well as strengthening Russia's global standing against the background of its conflict with the West.

Prigozhin's activities in Africa can be broken down into three categories:

- Concluding and executing business contracts with state and non-state entities;
- Providing private military contractors to secure Prigozhin's business interests;
- Providing different types of support for African politicians and political forces seen as useful for Prigozhin's endeavours.

AFRIC, as a network of agents of influence and loyal election "observers", belongs to the third category, as its activities aim at advancing political interests of particular African politicians and can be qualified as interference in electoral processes.

In the period between 2018 and 2019, AFRIC interfered in elections in five African countries: Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South African Republic, and Mozambique. In these countries, AFRIC closely coordinated its work with Russian political consultants from Prigozhin's team that had its back office in St. Petersburg, as well as with another Prigozhin's structure, International Anticrisis Centre, and loyal media. AFRIC's election

“observers” received remuneration for the services they provided and had all their expenses covered by Prigozhin’s team.

AFRIC and its monitors have been involved in the following activities in the five above-mentioned African countries:

- Organising conferences and other events with an objective of promoting particular candidates;
- Organising anti-Western protests to discredit and undermine perceived pro-Western politicians;
- Publishing public opinion polls with an aim to influence voters’ preferences;
- Whitewashing unfair and unfree elections for domestic and international audiences;
- Subverting and/or relativising findings of credible election observation.

Despite the Russian authorities’ apparently high appreciation of the work performed by Prigozhin’s operatives in general and AFRIC in particular, the results of this work do not seem to be meaningful. In the majority of cases, Russian consultants supported candidates who were expected to win (or “win” with the help of electoral fraud) anyway, without any assistance from Prigozhin’s team. To justify its helpfulness and usefulness, Russian operatives apparently underpredicted prospective election results of candidates and political forces they supported in order to attribute their eventual electoral performances to the work of Prigozhin’s team. In other cases, they would simply take credit for politicians’ victories or, at very least, try to create an impression that Russian operatives were somehow involved in the electoral success.



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