

# O PINION

## EDITORIAL

## BANYANA SHINE THE WAY FOR SA FOOTBALL

BANYANA Banyana this week delivered a dose of national pride for the nation when they dispatched Algeria to qualify for the Africa Women's Cup of Nations (Awcon) in Morocco in July.

The women's national football team is quickly becoming a perfect blueprint for all junior national teams, and Bafana Bafana as well.

Banyana have been a beacon of light for South African football, qualifying for major tournaments with regularity at both continental level and the world over, the last being an illustrious appearance at the 2019 Women's World Cup in France.

Fifty-eight-year-old coach Desiree Ellis is in her seventh year as the Banyana mentor. Her record as the national team coach has further advanced the subject of local coaches taking charge of national teams and delivering success.

Her influence and contribution to the growth of the national women's football team in that period is one that should never be underestimated, even more so if one considers that the world's strongest national teams have implemented a "long-term project" approach within their structures.

The greatest national teams of all times were able to establish their foundations with a specific core of players, a tricky blend of local and overseas-based players merged together to form a solid unit, an achievement Banyana has been able to attain.

The likes of Janine van Wyk, Noko Matlou and Refiloe Jane have been a part of the set-up for a long time, and that enables young guns like Thembi Kgatana, Linda Motlalo and Bambanani Mbane, the perfect support structure, to integrate into Banyana's vision for the future with ease.

Banyana have firmly established themselves as the team to support, both spiritually and financially, from a corporate perspective.

The US women's football team recently won their case for equal pay with their male counterparts. Banyana could make a similar argument and, in truth, deserve more than they currently earn at international level.

They have represented the country well, and with pride.

It is time the country afforded them the same attention as they do their male counterparts.

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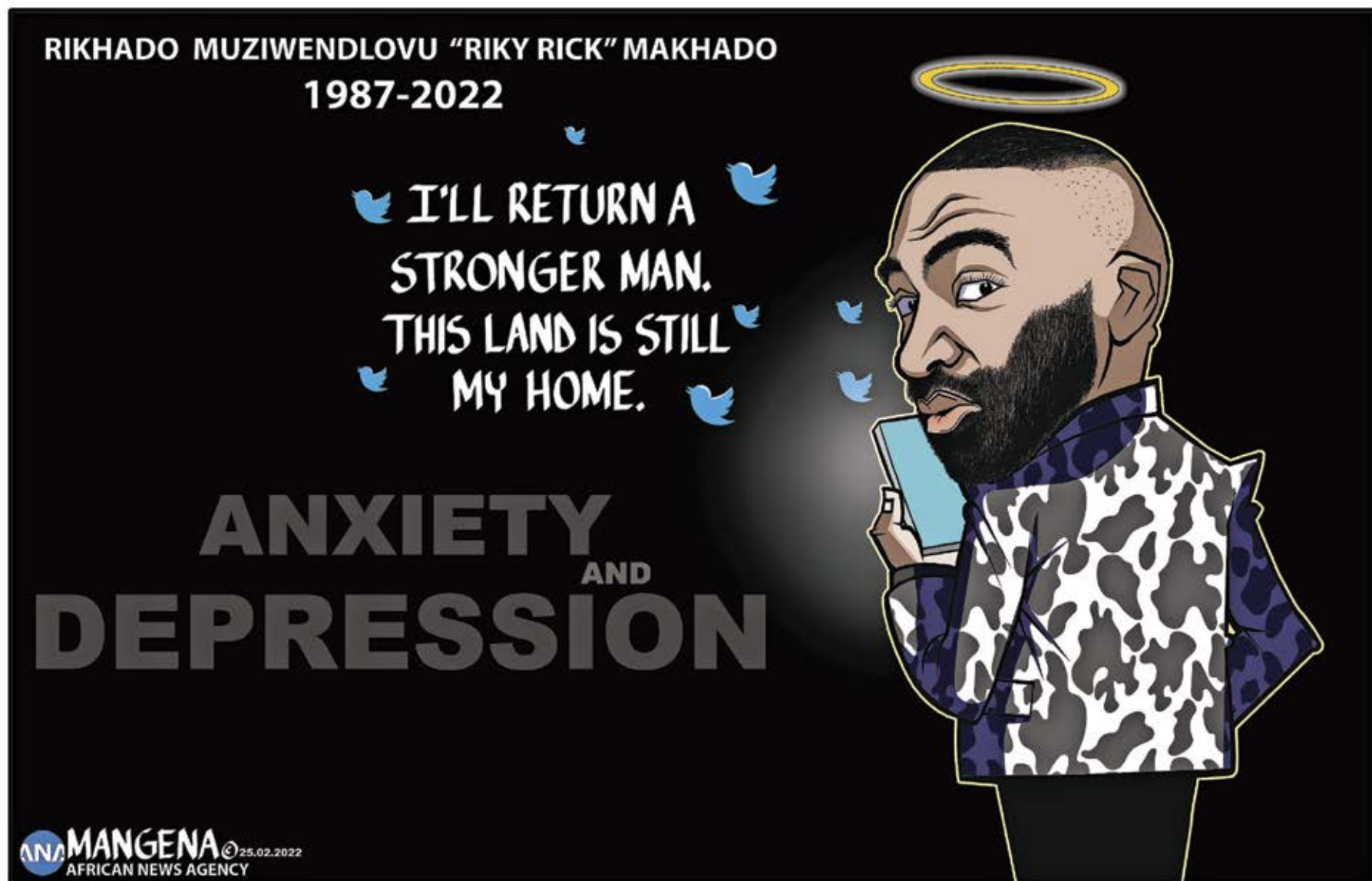


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# West must share the blame for Ukraine crisis

IT IS very unfortunate that many in the West, and also in South Africa, are inclined to want to place all the blame for the recent developments in Ukraine on Putin and Russia.

Based on my own experiences with various Russian governments (ie meetings with President Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev) and people over many years as part of the South African delegations of presidents Mandela, Mbeki and Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma to Russia, it was very evident back then that the current crisis has a long and complex history, from both Western and Russian perspectives.

The crisis was caused by complicated reasons, including Nato's continued aggressive expansion that caused concrete security threats to Russia and other non-Nato countries in the region. So it would be grossly unfair to simply blame and accuse one side.

The Russian narrative conveyed to our South African delegations over a long period in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union was that the West deceived them and acted in a way that left them out of a post-Cold War Europe.

It was more than evident that it was going to be hard to bridge these positions which let emotions run high, given the fact that Russia strongly reached out to the West at the time, but was "rudely ignored", with the result that Russian hopes more than 30 years ago of being part of Europe didn't materialise. So the current crisis is an ongoing fallout from the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early '90s.

We as the South African delegations were often reminded by the Russians during discussions on multi-lateral affairs, that after the Cold War Russia showed an initial interest in "associating and working with Nato", but the request was summarily wiped off the table by Nato. Furthermore that Nato promised Russia that it would not expand, but failed to keep its promise. The Nato expansion has brought strong pressure on Russia as Nato con-

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GERT GROBLER

tinued to deploy weapons and missile defence systems in countries around Russia, and this has undermined the nuclear strategic balance in Europe.

At the same time, however, it appeared that the Americans were consistently trying to convince the Russians that their concerns about Nato would be respected. Jim Baker, the US Secretary of State at the time, pledged in Moscow on May 18, 1990, that the US would co-operate with the Soviet Union in the "development of a new Europe". And in June 1990, according to talking points prepared at the time for then president George Bush, the latter was telling Soviet leaders that the US sought "a new, inclusive Europe".

President Yeltsin wrote then president Bill Clinton a letter in September 1993 stating "that it is important to take into account how our public opinion might react to that step" (the expansion of Nato).

But Yeltsin also cited what he cast as assurances given to Soviet officials during the negotiations on German unification, by adding that "the spirit of the treaty on the final settlement ... precludes the option of expanding the Nato zone into the East".

Four years later, in an effort to assuage Moscow's concerns, Nato and Russia signed the Russian and Nato Founding Act, a political agreement stating, among other things, that "Nato and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries". In 2002, Nato and Russia agreed to set up a joint consultative council, ostensibly as a

mechanism to resolve disagreements.

But the sad thing was that the US and Nato were not serious about implementing meaningful dialogue. The 1997 Founding Act was well intentioned, as was the 2002 creation of the Nato-Russia Council, but these agreements have never worked, because Nato often continued to take actions that affected Russian or regional security without consulting Moscow.

In fact, a few years later, Nato underwent its largest expansion in its history, admitting seven more Eastern European countries, including the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which had been republics of the Soviet Union. While it wasn't the first time a Nato member bordered Russia or the Soviet Union, now a Nato member's troops potentially could be located just 625km from Moscow.

Russia's insecurity is compounded by the fact that Russia's defence budget amounts to 8% of that of the US, whereas Nato as a whole spends 20 times what Russia spends on its military.

As far back as 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, which I happened to attend, Putin unleashed vehement criticism against Nato, as well as the US, accusing the alliance of duplicity and of threatening Russia.

He stated: "I think it is obvious that Nato expansion has no relation with the modernisation of the alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust."

Putin desperately asked "what happened to the assurances our Western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those guarantees and declarations today?" A remark that prompted some headscratching, because the debate had focused almost exclusively on remarks made before the Warsaw Pact fell apart.

Even the last US ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock, had repeatedly insisted, both in congressional testimony and later, that

Gorbachev had received assurances that if Germany united, and stayed in Nato, the borders of Nato would not move eastward.

Given the current serious crisis in Ukraine, it is a fact that Nato's enlargement could have been "managed" in a much more effective and honest manner to minimise misunderstandings.

It is generally stated by international commentators that it was possible to both enlarge Nato and avoid conflict. The chance was, however, missed and today we see a worsening conflict with possible devastating global consequences.

Putin, having the support of the overwhelming part of the Russian population, increasingly continues to put forward the narrative to the Russian people that Russia was deceived by Nato and the US, in fact presenting Russia as a victim of broken promises.

There are many worthwhile books on this topic that reflect the trauma, humiliation and broken pride of the Russian people in the post-Soviet period.

I would recommend to all those who tend to place all the blame on Russia that they read a book by Svetlana Alexievich, titled *Second-hand Time*, for which she received the Nobel Prize for literature.

It provides a fascinating insight and emotional understanding of Russia and its people during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

*Second-hand Time* is a masterpiece – not only for what it says about the fall of the Soviet Union, but for what it suggests about the future of Russia and its former satellites. If only the West had read this book!

All parties concerned should, however, continue dialogue and consultation, and seek reasonable solutions to the Ukraine crisis, to address each other's concerns on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

There is no other option!

*Grobler is the former South African ambassador to Madagascar*

## COMMENT



ZHU MING

## Will EU's new Africa investment promises bear fruit?

LAST week, the two-day Sixth EU-AU Summit was held in Brussels. As for concrete outcomes, the most eye-catching one is surely an Africa-Europe Investment Package of at least €150 billion (about R2.5 trillion).

Regardless of the EU's former and not ideal records of keeping investment promises in Africa, the €150bn investment package is, at most, a new package but with very little outlook of extra financial resources for Africa. In other words, we could label the new offer as kind of "old wine in a new bottle" or a "game of numbers".

Why? First, we need to figure out how much of the investment package would be used annually. In other words, how long is its implementation period?

The answer is not mentioned in the summit documents, but is easy to guess. As the EU side claims that the Africa-Europe Investment Package is within the Global Gateway Investment Package initiated by Brussels in 2021, it is probable that they share the same implementation period, which is as long as seven years.

An amount of €150bn over seven years means that the annual average scale would be around €21.4bn.

Second, let's figure out the annual financial flows from Europe to Africa. What has been publicly disclosed is mostly composed by ODA (official development assistance). Team Europe (EU institutions plus its 27 member states) is Africa's biggest donor, and the total volume of ODA is more than €20bn in recent years.

We could make an early prediction that the just-made Africa-Europe investment promise would easily be fulfilled in the next seven years without any difficulties.

This is because ODA resources from Team Europe are enough to meet the investment target, not to mention Team Europe's billions in private investments in Africa annually.

But there could be some risks if Team Africa fails to keep its promises. Since the finance resources would be from Team Europe, which is composed of 28 actors, there have been no detailed contribution plans among the group yet.

What is more, there are no concrete protocols to regulate Team Europe when it fails to keep its promises.

It is clear that the €150bn package is an easy task for Team Europe amid this huge number.

But there exist some risks of breaking the promise, with the risk that the EU escapes its responsibilities without making any *de jure* promises related to itself.

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SENEGAL'S President Macky Sall holds a press conference at the Sixth EU-AU summit in Brussels, Belgium, last week. I EPA

## LETTERS

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## South Africa's forgotten refugees

The Congolese Civil Society of South Africa represents and protects people who have sought refuge in South Africa from the Congo. During the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant economic crises, refugees were all but barred from humanitarian aid by the South African government.

Added to this was a government-endorsed xenophobic narrative, which has resulted in force and intimidation being used to remove foreigners, such as the Dudula Movement. In addition, because recent changes in the Identification Act have placed obstacles in the way of valid employment and documentation, refugees are left without recourse. Reliance has had to be placed

on civil society, specifically non-profit organisations, to donate food and clothing. African refugees were left out of food and financial assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. In a state of disaster, all refugees who have registered as such should be classified as South African and be able to count on government services.

Often individuals and organisations come out saying they condemn xenophobia, but we must ask how strong such condemnation is if the appropriate institution does not remedy the problem with immediate effect? The Congolese Civil Society of SA believes that Africa belongs to all who live in it, and that any "refugee"

should be seen as a brother or sister separated previously by colonial borders and pursuing the same "greener pasture" journey we all want.

It understands that the objective of South Africa's Home Affairs Department is to establish order through the registration of all refugees, but recognises that the archaic system of waiting in long lines at a distant and severely understaffed refugee centre is a major obstacle to the ability of refugees to get legally registered. The society calls on Home Affairs to find a solution to accommodate refugees who do not have the funds or time to register in person, so that they may legally seek employment and contribute to South Africa's economy.

**ISAIAH MOMBILO** | Chairperson: Congolese Civil Society of South Africa