

RUSSIAN-MOROCCAN RELATIONS: PAST AND PRESENT*

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Russian-Moroccan relations are traditionally friendly. For the first time Russian readers found out about Morocco in December 1732 from the message "On spanish fortress Ceuta, besieged by the army of King of Morocco".¹

Bilateral relations were established in July 1778. They were initiated by Sultan of Morocco Mohammed III (1757-1790), who proposed to the Russian Empress Catherine II (1762-1796) to establish bilateral trade. This action was followed by the exchange of letters with an expression of mutual wishes to establish relations of peace and friendship. Mohammed III expressed his willingness to accept the Russian representative in Morocco.

In July 1782 Mohammed III sent new message to Catherine II, in which he confirmed his friendly attitude and giving Russian national MFN treatment. In her reply, Catherine II also confirmed the compliance with MFN in respect of subjects of the Sultan of Morocco.²

In the XIX century relations between Russia and Morocco evolved, but in 1891-1897 the interests of Russian citizens in Morocco have been entrusted to the representative of Spain. Only on October 20, 1897 State Council took a decision to establish in Tangier, which was a diplomatic capital that time, a Consulate.³ Consulate General of the Russian Empire in Tangier was founded in November 1897, the first Russian diplomatic representative in Morocco in the rank of Minister-Resident became Vasily Romanovich Bakherakht.⁴ He arrived to Tangier in May, 1898. "The report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire dated 1898 noted that the V.R. Bakherakht was met in Morocco with appropriate honors and solemnity.<...> Stay of V.R. Bakherakht in Tangier gave rise to Sultan (Abd-al-Aziz (1894-1908)) to send to the distant Russia emergency mission headed by Foreign Minister Sid Abd al-Karim Be Slimane..."⁵. On May 14th, 1898 Morocco became the first Arab country with which Russia established diplomatic relations and the only Arab state with which the diplomatic relations were established before the October Revolution.

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1 Livotova O.E., Portugal V.B., Orientalism in the publications of the Academy of Sciences 1726-1917: Bibliography. M., 1966, p. 26 (№ 205).

2 Russia — Morocco: History of relations of two countries in documents and materials (1777–1916). M., 1999, p. 6.

3 Ibidum, p. 4.

4 AVPRI. F. 151, op. 482, d. 2731, 5398.

5 Russia — Morocco..., p. 10.

Bakherakht served in Tangier eight years.⁶ In September 1907 he was replaced by a new resident minister Peter Sergeevich Botkin (the son of a prominent doctor S.P. Botkin).⁷ In May 1910 the Russian government has transformed the consulate general in Tangier into the diplomatic mission.⁸

After transformation of Morocco into the protectorate of France and Spain in 1912 and the partition of the country to the relevant areas, "relation between Morocco and Russian could be carried out only through Paris and Madrid. <...> Under these condition the departure of P.S. Botkin from Tangier (March 1912), the abolition of Russian diplomatic mission (February 1913) and its replacing by diplomatic agency and the Consulate General⁹, the refuse of Russia from the capitulations in Morocco (February 1914), which in practice wasn't used by it were quite natural¹⁰.

On November 18, 1955 the Kingdom of Morocco became an independent state. The Soviet Union recognized the independence of Morocco on July 11, 1956 and diplomatic relation were established on September 1, 1958.

Since 1961, diplomatic contacts of the highest level were established between the Soviet Union and Morocco. Thus, on February 9, 1961 the city of Rabat was visited by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR L.I. Brezhnev, where he had a meeting with the King of Morocco Mohammed V (1927-1961).

The efforts to strengthen the international prestige of the country and to increase its influence, in the first place, among Arab and African states on the basis of "multilateral orientation" became the basis of the foreign policy of Morocco in the mid-1960s. The implementation of idea of reliance on the "triangle" - France, USA, USSR, according to the plan of King Hassan II (1961-1999) was to ensure Morocco place among one of the leading developing countries. Of course, this "triangle" was not equilateral, taking in account the inclination of Morocco to the Western countries. However, the King could not reckon with growing political and economic influence of the Soviet Union in the world.¹¹

On August 27, 1963 Morocco joined the Moscow Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in Three Environments. King Hassan II, who paid the USSR with an official visit in October 1966, noted that negotiations with the leaders of the Soviet state "gave fruitful results in the fields of trade, economic and cultural relations, as well as scientific and technological cooperation"¹². In the frames of the visit an Agreement on Cultural Cooperation and Agreement on Technological and Economic Cooperation in the establishment of industrial enterprises in Morocco and other treaties were signed.

With a return visit Morocco was visited by the Chairman of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR N.V. Podgorny in April, 1969. In August permanent Soviet-Moroccan intergovernmental commission was established. In February 1967, Consulate General of the USSR was established in Casablanca and in 1970 Society of Friendship was founded in Morocco, what became an indicator of the rapidly developing relations between these two countries.

In the 1970s Soviet-Moroccan relations were very active. For example, in October, 1971 Morocco was visited by the Chairman of the Council of Minister of the USSR A.N. Kosygin. In January, 1973 the

6 In 1906 г. V.R. Bakherakht represented Russia at the Algeciras Conference.

7 AVPRI. F. 151, op. 482, d. 2752.

8 Russia — Morocco ..., p.14.

9 Headed by A.L. Voevodsky.

10 Russia — Morocco..., p. 5, 15.

11 The Kingdom of Morocco. M., 1991, p. 93.

12 Lutskaya N.S., Pavlutsкая E.V. Morocco. — Book: Modern history of African Arab countries, 1917–1987. M., 1990, p. 411.

USSR was visited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Morocco A.T. Benhima and in March, 1978 - Prime Minister of Morocco A. Osman.¹³

The Soviet Union supported the decision of FEZ meeting of the heads of the Arab states and governments, in the frames of which in 1981-1982 was adopted a plan, which became an official position of Arab states on the Middle East.¹⁴

Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced recognition of the Russian Federation by the Kingdom of Morocco on December 30, 1991.

Bilateral trade agreement have been concluded from April, 1958 before the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Morocco¹⁵, including such areas as air traffic (1962), fisheries (1978) and phosphates (1978).¹⁶ A number of industrial facilities was constructed in Morocco with the help of Russia and Soviet Union (dam and hydroelectric power station "Nurbaz" TPP "Jerada" waterworks "Mansour al-Dahbi" HPP "Moulay Youssef"). In 1998, Morocco has been put in the guarantee operation hydroelectric complex "Al-Wahda" (one of the largest in Africa), for the construction of which was allocated Russian loan of 100 million ECU and constructed with the help of "Teknopromexport". This HES provides 30% of the production of hydroelectric power produced in Morocco.¹⁷ Both parties are interested in the development of accumulated experience of cooperation in the construction of hydro technical structures.

In April 1998, an Agreement on Cooperation was concluded in Rabat between ITAR-TASS and Moroccan news agency MAP.

More than 10 thousand Moroccan citizens graduated from Soviet and Russian universities. At present, about 2,5 Moroccans study in Russia.

Sphere of high technologies is a promising area of cooperation with Morocco. An important step in this direction was the successful launch of Moroccan satellite "Maroc-Tubstat" from the Baikonur on December 10, 2001, which has been put into orbit by a Russian carrier. Thus, the beginning of cooperation in the military-technique sphere was established.

In the recent years, legal base of Russian-Moroccan bilateral cooperation was significantly strengthened, including thanks to the entry into force of the Agreement on the avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and wealth, signed in Moscow on September 4, 1997. In Kremlin, on October 15, 2002 in the presence of the President of Russia V.V. Putin and the King of Morocco Mohammed VI a number of intergovernmental agreements was signed, including the Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Morocco, the Agreement on visa-free travel for diplomatic and service passports, the Agreement on cooperation in the field of post and telecommunications and information technology, the Agreement on Cooperation in marine fisheries, the Cooperation Agreement between the Chamber of Commerce (CCI) of the Russian Federation and Chamber of Commerce (FTP) of Morocco, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Russian Aviation and space Agency and the Royal Centre for Remote Sensing and space Research Centre on cooperation in the field of exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. An agreement on cooperation between the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (Employers)

13 Diplomatic dictionary. Book. III. M., 1986, p. 243–244.

14 Lutsкая N.S., Pavlutsкая E.V. Morocco..., p. 408.

15 USSR and Arab countries, 1917–1960: Documents and Materials. M., 1961, p. 477–478.

16 Diplomatic dictionary. Book III, p. 245.

17 Luzyagin S.G. Eastern politics of V. Putin. M., 2006, p. 64.

and the General Confederation of Enterprises of Morocco was signed on April 19, 2004 and on June 8, 2006 Agreement between the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Morocco on establishment of Russian-Moroccan Business council.

In February 2004, in Rabat, the first meeting of the Russian-Moroccan Intergovernmental Joint Commission on Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation was held, the second one on June 2006 in Moscow and the third in April 2008 in Rabat.

Generally, in the 2000s bilateral Russian-Moroccan contacts have intensified. Thus, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and cooperation M. Benaissa visited Moscow on January 29-30, 2002. On May 8th, 2003 was a meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs I.S. Ivanov and the Minister of State of Morocco A El Fassi, who came to Moscow as a special royal representative. A. El Fassi gave a personal message of Mohammed VI addressed to V.V. Putin. On September 21th, 2004 a meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and cooperation of Morocco M. Benaissa was held in New-York as a part of the 59th session of the UN General Assembly.

An important step in the development of Russian tourism in Morocco was the decision of the Moroccan government on the unilateral establishment of the visa-free regime with Russia from June 13, 2005.

V.V. Putin gave a return visit to Casablanca on September 7th, 2006, where met with Mohammed VI. The heads of the states discuss the situation in the Middle East and other topical international issues as well as bilateral cooperation. After the talks in the presence of V. Putin and Mohammed VI the following bilateral documents were signed: the Convention on the transfer of persons sentenced to imprisonment, the Agreement on cooperation in the field of marine fisheries, the Agreement on cooperation in the field of tourism, the Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Cooperation, Agreement on cooperation in the field of mass communications, the Agreement on cooperation in the field of plant quarantine, the Agreement between the Ministry of Health and social Development of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of health of the Kingdom of Morocco on cooperation in the field of health, a memorandum of cooperation in the field of physical culture and sports between the Federal Agency for Physical Culture and sport of the Russian Federation and the Sector for Sports Kingdom of Morocco, a Memorandum of Understanding between Vnesheconombank of Russia and the Bank of Foreign Trade of Morocco.¹⁸

Morocco is one of the largest trading partners of Russia on the African continent. The main Russian exports to the Moroccan market are oil, ammonia, sulfur, nitrogen and potash fertilizers, timber and metal. The main imports to Russia traditionally are citrus, extracts and concentrates of coffee and tomatoes.¹⁹ In 2008, the trade turnover between Russia and Morocco totaled \$2 billion. Thus, Morocco became second most important partner for Russia among Arab countries and the first among the countries of the African continent.²⁰

Increased activity in the area of bilateral economic and trade cooperation is accompanied by constant constructive dialogue at the political level. Thus, in the period June 15-17th, 2010 the 4th meeting of the Russian-Moroccan Intergovernmental Commission headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco T.F. Fahri and the Minister of Justice of Russia A.V. Kononov was held in

18 www.mid.ru.

19 www.russarabbc.ru.

20 http://www.lihachev.ru/pic/site/files/Dip_Programma/022_Abdeljkader_Lesheheb_lek.pdf

Moscow. During the meeting, which was held in businesslike and constructive atmosphere, the parties discussed the main issues of the Russian-Moroccan economic cooperation, trade, industry, energetic, finance, agriculture, mining, as well as cooperation in the field of space, transport, education, vocational training, culture, health and tourism.²¹

An agreement on construction of a highway between the towns of Taza and Al Hoceima was signed by the Russian and Moroccan representatives on June 16th, 2011. The project, which is scheduled for the period from 2011 to 2015 is estimated at 2/5 billion Moroccan dirham (about 280 million US dollars) and aimed at modernization of transport infrastructure, as well as socio-economic development of remote areas. It is assumed that within the period about 420 km of highway will be built and 36 bridges will be reconstructed.²²

On June 10, 2014 Moscow hosted Russian-Moroccan Forum "Morocco - a strategic partner of Russia" participated by the Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Russian Chamber of Commerce, in the frames of which the prospects for deepening and expanding Russian-Moroccan relations in the field of trade, investments, industry, tourism, agriculture and fisheries were discussed. The forum was participated by senior officials of Russia and Morocco, as well as Russian and Moroccan entrepreneurs.²³

Cultural cooperation is being developed between Morocco and Russia. Thus, in October, 2007 were conducted Days of Culture of the Kingdom of Morocco in the Russian Federation. In the framework of event were held some performances of Moroccan art groups, exhibitions of works and cinematographic shows. In November, 2007, Russian Film Week was organized in Marrakesh for the first in post-soviet period.²⁴

On June 15-17, 2010 the aforesaid Russian-Moroccan Intergovernmental Commission considered various ways of enhancement and development of cooperation in the frames of agreement signed in Rabat in March, 2010 by the representatives of Ministries of Culture of both countries. Experts of the commission made a detailed assessment of the shortcomings and prospects for partnership in the field of culture. The results of these discussions are reflected in numerous joint projects of public and private institutions. The implementation of projects in such areas as higher education, sports, humanities and social sciences, arts, youth, cultural heritage and the study of Russian language. In line with the decisions Russian Center of Science and Culture in cooperation with the Association of Teacher of Russian Language in Morocco and the International Association of Russian Language held in the framework of the World Festival of Russian Language in Rabat on November 8-13th, 2010, Russian Language Week in Morocco.²⁵

The meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco T.F. Fahri with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V. Lavrov in the frames of the above-mentioned Russian-Moroccan Intergovernmental Commission revealed the similarity of their positions concerning international and regional issues, including the settlement of conflict in the Middle East and the establishment of the Palestinian state, the peaceful settlement of the conflict using political and diplomatic means, promotion of the sustainable development of the African continent countries and the fight against

21 <http://10session.russarabbc.ru/ru/rusmorocco/>

22 Ibidum.

23 <http://rdadm.com>

24 www.mid.ru.

25 http://www.lihachev.ru/pic/site/files/Dip_Programma/022_Abdeljkader_Lesheheb_lek.pdf

terrorism and religious extremism.²⁶

Russia considers Morocco as a reliable partner in international affairs, particularly taking in account political weight and authority of Rabat in the Arab and Islamic world. Approaches of our countries to the topical issues of world politics, including crisis management, counter-terrorism are close or coincide. It is also related to such issues as the formation of multipolar world, enhancing the role of the UN in international affairs, security and stability in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East.²⁷

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²⁶ Ibidum.

²⁷ www.mid.ru.