

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

**Alexander Sivilov**

Assist. Prof. Dr. in Russian History and History of Latin America

Faculty of History of Sofia University

Coordinator of Eurasia center VIA EVRASIA

### **THE FORBIDDEN TANGO – USSR AND ARGENTINA 1917-1991**

The tango emerges in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is born in the brothels of Buenos Aires<sup>1</sup>. The people who dance it are the low life of Argentina and Uruguay. That is why the dance is long forbidden for the high classes of the society<sup>2</sup>. The main cause for this attitude towards it are the frequent, sort-lived, love affairs which sparkle because of the tango. Slowly it gathered momentum and conquered the dancing halls of all the continents, but its forbidden passion never disappeared. I refresh its history in order to highlight two important features. The first one is the passion,, always chased by the interdiction.

The relations between USSR and Argentina remind of the tango in many aspects. On first hand they receive recognition very difficult, and even when it is achieved it is undesired and nearly hidden by the both countries. At the same time despite all the obstacles USSR and Argentina have the best cooperation compared to the other states in the region. Their collaboration is so fruitful that resembles the passion of the tango.

The Soviet Union succeeds to become permanent foreign partner of Buenos Aires even when this seems impossible. The period of the rule of the military junta of gen. Videla 1976-1983 is a time of repression against the left. The army leaders are convinced anti-communists. They erase the whole leftist movement in the country killing more than 30 thousand people. Their regime is more cruel than the one in Chile. At the same time there is a significant difference – the Eastern bloc never stigmatized the rule in Argentina. The USSR continued to contribute with the generals and starts its forbidden tango.

---

<sup>1</sup> Merrit C. *Tango Nuevo* (University Press of Florida, 2012), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

Here comes the question - How is achieved such political decision in the middle of the Cold War? I will try to give the answer in this research.

The start of the connections between the USSR and Latin American countries is quite difficult. The main reason for this is the Monroe doctrine applied by the US since the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1823. It makes possible the deep influence of Washington in the political systems of these countries. That

causes a process of capsulation and coordination of their foreign policy with the USA<sup>3</sup>. United States are the last one of the influential countries which recognizes the USSR<sup>4</sup>.

That is why the Soviet Union succeeds in achieving diplomatic relations with only two Latin American countries before the World War II – Mexico and Uruguay<sup>5</sup>.

Argentina has a special place in the foreign relations of Moscow in this period. Soviet diplomats see Buenos Aires as a base for broadening of the trade influence in other South American countries like Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Peru<sup>6</sup>.

Although there are no political agreements between the two countries USSR establishes in the Argentinian capital the main office of the soviet trade company Amtorg<sup>7</sup>. The branch in Buenos Aires is dealing with the economic penetration

---

<sup>3</sup> Blasier C. *The Giant's Rival* (University of Pittsburgh press, 1987), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Обмен нотами между Народным Комиссаром Иностранных Дел СССР М.М. Литвиновым и Президентом США Рузвельтом об установлении дипломатических отношений между СССР и США, Документы Внешней Политики СССР, т. 16, Москва 1970, с. 641.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Blasier C., op. cit, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Amtorg was created as jointventure which was aimed at controlling the trade with the USA but soon transformed in control center for all Soviet economic activities on the - <http://www.electric-history.com/~zero/434b-Amtorg.html> . 14.10.2014.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

in the whole South American continent<sup>8</sup>. Surprisingly the results are so good that the soviets decide to create an independent branch of the company – Iujamtorg<sup>9</sup>.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1931 the Argentinian police closes the office with the accusation of covert communist propaganda<sup>10</sup>. The bureau is moved in the Uruguayan capital Montevideo. This act interrupts the relations between the two states. Another problem for the connections during the early 40's is the close ties and expressed admiration of the Argentinian president Juan Domingo Peron towards the Axis.

The end of the mutual isolation comes with the end of World War II. At this time almost all states in the western Hemisphere were friendly towards the Soviet Union

because of its role in the fight against the Nazism and the fact that it was in an alliance with the USA. The echo of the victory is still not overshadowed by the deepening of the Cold War.

The diplomatic recognition of USSR and Argentina became fact on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1946<sup>11</sup> and since then the relations of the two countries remain intact.

It is very interesting how are developed the ties between the regime of Juan Domingo Peron and the Soviet Union. The ideas of the Argentinian leader are “borrowed” from the corporatism of the Italian fascism. That makes the country a great place for escape of the Nazi military criminals after the war. That fact could not be unnoticed by the soviet diplomacy. Nevertheless another feature of the peronist ideas became attractive for the USSR – the strong anti-

---

<sup>8</sup> The office of the company was opened in 1925 in the capital of Argentina - Blasier C., op. cit, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> The change happened in 1927. Then the USSR received the opportunity for Amtorg to trade in Argentina – Декрет Президента Аргентинской Республики, разрешающий функционирование акционерного общества „Южамторг“, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 71-72.

<sup>10</sup> Blasier C. op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> Соглашение об установление дипломатических отношений, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 73.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

Americanism. At the start of the Cold War it was a great opportunity for influence in a vital region for the US.

It should be stressed that the time when the diplomatic relations started is time when most Latin American countries began to revise their attitude towards Moscow. The beginning of the Cold War had a rejuvenating effect on the ties with Argentina.

The soviet diplomats are accepted and honored by the president in Buenos Aires, and the Argentinian ambassador Leopoldo Bravo is the only one Latin-American ambassador to be accepted in person by Stalin on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1953<sup>12</sup>. In their talk the soviet leader admired the independent foreign policy of Argentina. They discussed the economic and cultural relations between their countries. Bravo is very impressed by the fast recovery of the USSR and the huge construction sites that he saw.

“With force you can make people build, but the soviet people themselves want to build and that makes the whole task easier”, says Stalin<sup>13</sup>.

The result of the talks is the acknowledgment of Argentina as main economic partner of the USSR in South America. This position is preserved from then on no matter of the political changes in the both countries.

The death of the soviet leader in the next year did not affect the ties, although it has changed significantly the soviet foreign policy as a whole. The main factor in the diplomatic and economic relations remained the changes in the Argentinian government. The removal of Juan Peron in September 1955<sup>14</sup> worsened the political connections but did not affect the economic ones.

The government of gen. Frondizi accepted the soviet offer for a 100 million dollar loan for a shipment of soviet equipment for oil drilling and refineries<sup>15</sup>. The economic ties became so close that in 1960 the Argentinian capital is visited

---

<sup>12</sup> Запись беседы с послом Аргентины Леопольдо Браво 7 февраля 1953 г., в Сталин, И. Полное Собрание Сочинений, т. 18, Тверь 2006, с. 591.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 592.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, J. *A brief History of Argentina* (University of Texas Austin, 2010), p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> Prizel, I. *Latin America through Soviet eyes* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 171.

ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2 

by soviet government delegation headed by the first deputy primer Alexei Kosygin<sup>16</sup>. The negotiations led to the opening of a new credit line amounting 56 million dollars.

The next shift in the rule in Buenos Aires and the establishing of a right military regime decreased the exchange between the countries. It had its lowest levels during the rule of gen. Juan Ongania(1966-1970)<sup>17</sup>. The political situation in the country became complicated. The military disrupted the work of the soviet embassy. Their support towards Washington and the policy of the containment of the communism was full. The government adopted a law against communism. In the sphere of foreign relations it developed the idea of the “ideological frontiers”<sup>18</sup>. According to it the communist ideology has dissolved the national boundaries of the countries and should be stopped with any means. It led to open confrontation with the Eastern bloc.

The tension rises so much that the Argentinian secret policy tried to kidnap a soviet diplomat<sup>19</sup>. The government banned the communist party, but it continued its work underground<sup>20</sup>. At that time emerged several leftist movements - pro-Chinese and guevarists but until 1976 they had little impact on the political life. The main part of the workers political opposition was concentrated in the peronist party. Although they won the 1973 election anonymously<sup>21</sup> the situation inside the organization is complicated. On the occasion of the meeting of Juan Peron from his return from the exile in Spain the split started. Supporters of the right wing opened fire in the crowd of the left peronist, who gathered to meet

---

<sup>16</sup> Сообщение о пребывании правительственной делегации СССР во главе с первым заместителем Председателя Совета Министров СССР А. Н. Косыгиным в Аргентинской Республике, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 98.

<sup>17</sup>Vacs, A. *Soviet Relations with Argentina and Brazil, in The USSR and Latin America* (edit. Mujal-Leon, E., London, 1989), p. 324.

<sup>18</sup> Vacs, A. *Discreet Partners: Argentina and the USSR Since 1917* (University of Pittsburg Press, 1984), p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Prizel, I., op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, J., op. cit., p. 236.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

the leader. According to the official data in the “Izeiza Massacre” were killed 16 people and 433 were injured<sup>22</sup>. Although Peron was furious he supported the political process and the right wing militants. The left wing which formed in the period 1969-1973 around the student protest and guerrilla movement “Montoneros”<sup>23</sup> was seen as too extreme. He tried to isolate them from the party and left this political testament to his second wife.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1974 the most significant figure of the Argentinian political 20<sup>th</sup> century died<sup>24</sup>. His place was inherited by Isabel Martinez de Peron. Under her rule the split in the peronist party became inevitable. The isolation of the Montoners from the political life and the severe pressure from the government started a guerrilla war in the main cities of the country. The attacks of the leftists were aimed as well as at the administration and the ruling party as at the foreign companies, who were accused of spreading influence. Mostly American enterprises were assaulted. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1975 the Montoneros kidnaped and killed the American consul at the town of Cordoba<sup>25</sup>. The country eventually entered state of unclaimed civil war. In it participated the right paramilitary organizations known as “the Three A’s”<sup>26</sup>, the Montoneros and another left political faction – the Peoples Guevarist Revolutionary Army. This political instability triggered the intervention of the military.

In 1975 under the pressure of the army Isabel Peron appointed as Commander – in – chief gen. Jorge Rafael Videla. He wanted a strong handed rule and approves the participation of the army against the left guerrillas. The military were inspired by the example of the regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1976 they made a coup d’état and ended the democratic political system in the country<sup>27</sup>. The self - declared president gen. Videla stated

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> More about the origins of the movement see - Brown, J., op. cit., p. 234-236.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.p. 237.

<sup>25</sup> More about the origins of the movement see - Brown, J., op. cit., p. 234-236.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, J., op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 240.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

as the main goal of his rule – “the full transformation of the conscience of the society”<sup>28</sup>.

Soon the army organized death squads and hit the guerrillas as fiercely as it could. Until the end of the 1977 the Montoneros were exterminated. The same happened with the Guevarist left. The military used the system of disappearance as main instrument because it left the court with no evidence and no possibility to start investigation or a trial<sup>29</sup>. Soon nearly all left forces in Argentina are destroyed. Some of the left wing peronists searched for salvation in Havana. From there they tried to intervene in the country without any success. The international public as a whole soon was against the military Junta. The main reason was the start of the disappearing of foreign citizens. According to the last studies as result of the military activities about 30 thousand people had disappeared<sup>30</sup>. Together with the officially claimed deaths among the left guerrillas the number of the victims rises to 50 thousand<sup>31</sup>. In comparison to what happened in Chile we can sadly say that the Argentinians surpassed their teachers<sup>32</sup>. The regime annihilated the opposition in the cruelest way. Here we can ask ourselves, why in Bulgaria everyone knows about the stadiums in Santiago which were transformed into concentration camps, but only few people have heard about the atrocities in Buenos Aires?

The answer is simple. The Eastern Bloc did not organize a huge campaign against the Argentinian Junta, as it had done against Pinochet. The main reason for this are the Soviet interests in the country. The return of the peronists to

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 241.

<sup>29</sup> The idea for using this system of state terror probably is not Argentinian. It is practiced in the whole Latin America after 1975 when started the functioning of “Operation Condor” initiated by col. Manuel Contreras leader of the Chilean secret police DINA.

<sup>30</sup> *Memories from Darkness, Archaeology of repression and Resistance in Latin America* (edit. Funari P., Zarankin A., Salerno M., New York, 2009), p. xix.

<sup>31</sup> Most of the authors quote only the number of the officially killed victims of the regime which is about 19 thousand people. Despite the numerous investigations and researches more than 30 thousand people are still missing.

<sup>32</sup> According to the investigation of the Rettig Committee in Chile were killed and missing 3428 – *Truth Commission: Chile 90* - <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-chile-90>, 16. 05. 2013.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

power in 1973 gave the USSR the opportunity to refresh the economic ties. In February 1974 was signed a treaty for development of trade and scientific cooperation<sup>33</sup>. On its base in May in Moscow was concluded an economic agreement<sup>34</sup>. USSR sent machinery to Argentina. The newly built and the biggest power plants were equipped with soviet systems. The cooperation in the chemical industry, shipbuilding and the building of ports started<sup>35</sup>. In return USSR received agricultural goods which satisfied the food shortages. In 1974 was signed an agreement for development of the sports<sup>36</sup>.

The coup even increased the levels of economic exchange between the two countries. In 1977 Argentina negotiated soviet participation in the construction of the biggest hydro-power plant at Salto Grande<sup>37</sup>. The project was realized with Uruguay, where at that time ruled a military regime which was as severe as the Argentinian. That was the first participation of the soviet energetics in such big projects on the continent. Later USSR built two more power plants in Argentina – “Costa Negra” totaling of 310 megawatts and “Bahia Blanca” – 620 megawatts<sup>38</sup>. It is interesting that the impulse in the energetics was not influenced by the political trends. In 1984, after the fall of the Junta the new democratic government negotiated with the USSR the construction of the

---

<sup>33</sup> Соглашение между правительством Союза Советских Социалистических Республик и правительством Аргентинской Республики о развитии торгово – экономического и научно-технического сотрудничества, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 120.

<sup>34</sup> Совместное советско – аргентинское коммюнике, в Внешняя политика СССР 1974, Сборник документов, Москва 1975, с. 56.

<sup>35</sup> Там же, с. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Соглашение о принципах сотрудничества между СССР и Аргентинской Республики в области спорта, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 141.

<sup>37</sup> Hydroelectric plants in Argentina - <http://www.industcards.com/hydro-argentina.htm>, 19.05. 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Kornyshev V. Commercial and Economic Relations between the USSR and Argentina Are in Full Swing, *Soviet and Eastern European Foreign Trade*, Vol. 21, No. 1/2/3 (Spring, 1985), p. 248



## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

biggest, to present days, power plant in the country – Piedra del Aguila<sup>39</sup>. It was finished in 1993, when the Soviet Union no longer existed. Nevertheless the technologies which are used in the plant are soviet<sup>40</sup>.

In 1979 the leadership of the USSR decided to start an operation in installing of a left regime in Afghanistan. The invasion of the soviet army caused an immediate reaction of the USA. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1980 the president Jimmy Carter addressed the Americans and said - “Neither the United States nor any other nation which is committed to world peace and stability can continue to do business as usual with the Soviet Union”<sup>41</sup>. In his speech he stated that the USA will stop their grain exports towards the USSR and that they were thinking about boycott of the Olympic games which were held in Moscow<sup>42</sup>.

Surprisingly the deterioration of the relations with Washington led to improvement of the economic ties with Argentina. In this process is hard to find the leading side, because both countries had interest in it. The Soviet Union has had for almost a decade a problem with the grain supplies mainly for the livestock. Usually the quantities needed were bought from the US. In this case the soviet leaders felt some political discontent since had to admit in front of their worst enemy that they had no capacity to satisfy their own demand. The import from Argentina made possible elimination of this political issues. On the other hand the government in Buenos Aires started to face economic difficulties. The financial team of the military led by Jose Martinez de Hoz had the opportunity for receiving huge foreign credits in the period 1976-1977. The debts could not be repaid because of the high corruption levels and the fact that the money were not used for investment<sup>43</sup>. In combination with the financial crisis which started in Mexico, the Argentinian government could not underestimate such significant financial flow which came from the grain trade

---

<sup>39</sup> *Hydroelectric plants in Argentina*, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> The main turbines are for with power of 350 megawatts each. They were produced by the soviet company Electrosila – Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Carter J. *Address to the Nation on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan* (January 4, 1980), at - <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32911>, 20.05.2013.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, J., op. cit., p. 241.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

with USSR. That is why the regime in Buenos Aires for the first time after it was established crossed the policy of the USA. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January the Foreign Ministry of Argentina announced its position towards the sanctions against the Soviet Union. In it is written – “The destiny of the Republic of Argentina is inextricably bound with the western civilization and its values... . Relying on the same virtues we refuse to participate in decisions and sanctions taken without our participation and knowledge and in a place outside of the boundaries of our country.”<sup>44</sup>. At the same time in the document is made an allusion that the state will follow the political decisions of its Western Bloc allies. An example for this is the boycott of the Olympics in Moscow. It was supported by the Argentinian sportsmen who refused to travel to the soviet capital. At the same time the trade between Buenos Aires and USSR flourished. It was made mainly by the mediation of big international corporations. In 1979 were established first direct transactions. This fact was difficultly accepted by the US diplomacy and it increased its pressure on the military government. The Pentagon sent to Buenos Aires gen. Andrew Goodpaster with the hope that he could influence the Argentinians<sup>45</sup>.

In 1980 the deliveries of Argentinian grain for the USSR amounted almost 60% of the whole grain export of the country<sup>46</sup>. In 1981 was signed a treaty for 60 to 100 thousand tons of beef meat per year for the market of the USSR<sup>47</sup>. Buenos Aires started the deliveries immediately.

The soviet statistics reports that in 1980 2.6% of the whole import coming from the developing countries is from Argentina<sup>48</sup>.

---

<sup>44</sup> Заявление Министерства иностранных дел и культа Аргентинской Республики, 11 января 1980, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 154.

<sup>45</sup> Blasier C. op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> Prizel I., op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>47</sup> Соглашение между правительством Союза Советских Социалистических Республик и правительством Аргентинской Республики о поставках мяса, 22 апреля 1981, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 165.

<sup>48</sup> Народное хозяйство СССР в 1988г. Статистический ежегодник, Москва 1989, с. 651.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

Besides the economic cooperation at the end of the 70's emerged the political too. The first steps were made by the USSR. In 1977 they vetoed the UN resolutions which condemned the cruelties of the military regime<sup>49</sup>. The campaign is initiated by the American president Jimmy Carter. That gave the opportunity to the soviet diplomacy to contradict only on the bases of the traditional conflict. There are hints that Moscow has convinced the generals in Buenos Aires not to destroy the Argentinian Communist Party<sup>50</sup>. It continued its activities semi-legally in the way that most of the extreme right parties had been saved. The only direct actions against the communists are the closures of the newspapers. At the same time the rest of the Left is destroyed.

The Soviet Union made full informational black out about the terror in Argentina. In Eastern Europe no one knew about the death squads and the tortures in the secret camps of the police. In August 1979 on a film festival in Moscow is presented Swedish film about the political immigrants from Argentina. The authorities punished the people who had organized the show and the soviet embassy apologized to the Junta<sup>51</sup>.

The Soviet press represented the military government as consisted of two groups – the moderate one headed by gen. Videla and the right who were called “pinochetists”. This perception of the political situation in Argentina gave Moscow the opportunity to alter its attitude towards Buenos Aires according to the pressing diplomatic topics. Usually was taken in mind who was on leading positions in the Junta. The political situation of the Argentinian government was very perplexed. At the beginning of the 80's it began to lose support from the USA, mainly because of the attempts of the president Carter to make the US a headlight of the struggle for human rights in South America. In this case the cooperation of USSR in the international institutions proved to be a good way to preserve the positions of the Junta.

---

<sup>49</sup> Miller N. *Soviet relations with Latin America 1959-1987* (Cambridge, 1989), p.156; Vacs A. *Argentine-Soviet Relations*, in *Soviet-Latin American Relations in the 1980's*, edit. Varas A., Westview press, Boulder Colorado 1987, p.180.

<sup>50</sup> Miller N., op.cit. p.156.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 157.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

At the same time the relations between the two countries were not so good as it seemed. In 1977 a fleet of soviet and Bulgarian fishing boats were arrested by the Argentinian NAVY. They were accused of trespassing into territorial waters of the

country. In Buenos Aires was held a massive media campaign lightening the “stroke against the communists”<sup>52</sup>.

The Soviets reacted immediately and paid all the guarantees need for the release of the boats and the crews although there was not real evidence that the border was violated. In Moscow this incident was presented as attempt of the right-wing military to worsen the relations. Although it became a serious issue USSR reacted in surprisingly calm way. There were no special attempts for pressure or intervention which were common for some directions of the soviet diplomacy. The Argentinians forgot about their eagerness in the fight against communism quite soon. It is possible that this incident is connected to the Falkland Island dispute because it happened near to the site<sup>53</sup>.

The South Americans made a show off campaign and at the same time were interested in keeping the close ties with the USSR. During the next two years joint actions continued in several aspects. In 1978 were implemented permanent diplomatic visas for representatives of the two countries<sup>54</sup>. On the next year was sign a double taxation treaty concerning the sea and air transport<sup>55</sup>. It was annoying for the USA to learn that by the end of the year a delegation from the

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 158; Розин А, Вблизи Фолклендских островов, на - <http://alerozin.narod.ru/Argen.htm>, 27.05.2013.

<sup>53</sup> Розин А., Цит. съч.

<sup>54</sup> Нота Министерства иностранных дел и культа Аргентинской Республики посольству СССР в Аргентинской Республики от 28 июня 1978 года, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 149.

<sup>55</sup> Соглашение между правительством Союза Советских Социалистических Республик и правительством Аргентинской Республики обустранении двойного налогообложения в области международных морских и воздушных перевозок, 30 марта 1979 г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 150.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

Argentinian military schools visited soviet academies<sup>56</sup>. At this time were even discussed purchases of weapons from the USSR. Moscow and Buenos Aires deepened their contacts and in 1980 Aeroflot started direct cooperation with the Argentinian airlines<sup>57</sup>.

At the same time on the political field the relations were not so cloudless. The hardships began in December 1981 when the head of the Junta was shifted and gen. Leopoldo Galtieri took charge. He was closely tied with the USA. The newly appointed foreign minister was Nicanor Costa Mendez who implemented the “ideological boundaries” doctrine in the Ongania era<sup>58</sup>. Argentinians even started weaponry shipments for the government of El Salvador despite that they were aware of the soviet position in the conflict<sup>59</sup>.

The diplomatic shift is connected to the interior problems of the government. The tensions were rising because of the economic problems caused by the financial crisis in Latin America<sup>60</sup>. As escape exit the military planned an operation which should have brought them the support of the whole society – the reclaiming of the Falkland Islands. The bad attitude towards USSR and the improvement of the relations with Washongton were consequence of these plans of the Junta. The military needed US support in order to overcome the British political reaction. The expectations of the Argentinian government were for the good will of the American President and the connections between gen. Galtieri and Ronald Reagan until the moment were giving hopes to the Junta. In a telephone talk on 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1982 the two of them discussed the problem. The American President was trying to show the general that he would not favor

---

<sup>56</sup> Сообщение о пребывании с официальным визитом делегации военно-учебных заведений Аргентинской Республики в СССР, 7 сентября 1979 г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 153.

<sup>57</sup> Соглашение о коммерческом сотрудничестве между Аэрофлотом (Советские авиалинии) и Аэролинеас Архентинас, 3 июля 1980 г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 156.

<sup>58</sup> Vacs. A., op. cit. p. 183.

<sup>59</sup> At that time USSR was supporting the guerrilla movement of Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front.

<sup>60</sup> Kosacoff, B. *Industrial development in Argentina*, in *The Economies of Argentina and Brazil*, edit. Baer, W., Fleisher, D. Northampton MA 2011, p.12.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

invasion of the islands<sup>61</sup>. At the same time his attitude was not shown in clear manner and that might have persuaded the leaders of the Junta in their success.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April the Argentinian army invaded the islands<sup>62</sup>. The Eastern bloc started a campaign in favor of “Anti-imperialist Argentina”.

On the meeting of the Security Council of the UN on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April USSR abstained, and did not support the resolution which was calling for withdraw of the Argentinian troops<sup>63</sup>. Some historians see this soviet reaction as a draw back in the backing of Buenos Aires, since Moscow could have stopped the document by using its veto power<sup>64</sup>. According to me the situation in the bilateral connections during the previous half a year should point us that this diplomatic step taken by the soviets is quite enough. At this time was already clear that the USA and Britain have united against the South Americans<sup>65</sup>. So USSR had no interest to confront openly its enemies. It was enough to have another zone of strain in the Western Hemisphere.

Moscow cooperated with Argentina about the conflict in other ways too. The Soviet reconnaissance aircraft was supplying the Argentinians with data about the movement of the British fleet<sup>66</sup>. The USSR had also other reasons to spy the English and it was the information about their military potential. It is interesting to notice that the USA surveyed both armies in the conflict very closely.

The political position of Moscow is well shown in the statement published by the information agency TASS – “In the region of the islands is going heavy

---

<sup>61</sup> *Draft Letter from Reagan to Thatcher: “Galtieri intends to use force”* – at Jason Saltoun-Ebin & Andrea Chiampan, "The Reagan Files: The Falklands Crisis," ([www.thereaganfiles.com](http://www.thereaganfiles.com)), 12. 02. 2014.

<sup>62</sup> For more information see – Brown J., op. cit., pp 250-252.

<sup>63</sup> UN Resolution 502 (1982) of 3 april 1982, at - <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/502>, 12. 02. 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Vacs. A., op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> Department of State Secret Cable, Secretary of State meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher, April 8: Falkland Islands Crisis, at - <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/329527-19820410-secretarys-meeting-with-prime-minister.html>, 12.02.2014.

<sup>66</sup> Розин А., Цит. съч.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

fighting between the armies of England and Argentina resulting in significant losses for the both sides. In this way the conflict has taken dangerous turn.

There is no doubt that the responsibility for this situation rests with Britain, which for many years has opposed the attempts of the UN to regulate the conflict in peaceful way”<sup>67</sup>. The official stance of the soviet diplomacy shown in the Security Council of the United Nations is not different from the mentioned above<sup>68</sup>.

The end of the conflict and the British victory led to the fall of the military regime in Buenos Aires. Under the pressure of the street protests the army promised to make free presidential elections in October 1983. Unexpectedly they were won not by the peronists but by the candidate of the Radical Party Raul Alfonsin<sup>69</sup>.

Argentina takes the road to democracy. At the same time USSR did not change its attitude to the new government. The soviet diplomacy even used the worsening of the relations before the Falkland war as a benefit in the connections with the democratic rule. Moscow presented itself among the Argentinian society as ally who supported the political interests of the country but at the same time was not in close partnership with the military regime. At the face of the international community the USSR again found the easy way out of the contradictive situation. In all of the statements in front of the UN and other international structures the soviet diplomacy claimed to be driven only by the principle of “decolonization”<sup>70</sup>.

The USSR demonstrated will to continue the full scale cooperation with the new administration in Buenos Aires and even send a delegation headed by the vice chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union for the

---

<sup>67</sup> Заявление ТАСС в связи с нападением Англии на Фолкледские (Мальвинские) острова, 24 мая, във Внешняя политика СССР 1982, Сборник документов, Москва 1983, с. 40.

<sup>68</sup> Выступление постоянного представителя СССР при ООН О. А. Троянского в Совете Безопасности ООН, 22 мая 1982 г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 169-172.

<sup>69</sup> Brown J., op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>70</sup> Выступление постоянного представителя СССР при ООН..., с. 41

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

inauguration of the president Raul Alfonsin<sup>71</sup>. During the visit the soviets met with the leaders of the parliament too. The Argentinians demonstrated their readiness to deepen the cooperation and to continue already started initiatives<sup>72</sup>. The leading part in the process again was Moscow. In May 1984 in the soviet capital was founded society for friendship USSR – Argentina”, which was aimed at broadening the cultural relations<sup>73</sup>. On the ceremony were underlined the high levels of the economic ties.

On the next year Soviet-Argentinian cooperation was broadened in the field of international policy too. The two countries several times started different initiatives for setting limits of the nuclear arms race. In this case the idea was brought forward by the government in Buenos Aires and other Latin American countries. The USSR joint them with special statement in June 1984<sup>74</sup>.

The coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985 transformed in full scale the Soviet foreign policy. All the allies of the Moscow in Latin America faced the diminishing of the support from the USSR. Gorbachev implemented “the new thinking” in the diplomacy<sup>75</sup>. It combined democratization and setting the relations on the surface of mutual interest<sup>76</sup>. States like Cuba and Nicaragua were left to deal with the pressure from Washington alone.

In the same time the relations with Buenos Aires remained on high levels. The main reason is that they fitted into the parameters set by the Soviet leader. On one hand USSR built the ties with the South American country on the basis of trade and economic cooperation. That is why Moscow did not have a need to change its attitude and approach in this field. The election of the President Alfonsin has accomplished the other direction sought by Gorbachev – the democratization.

---

<sup>71</sup> Сообщение о пребывании делегации СССР во главе с заместителем Председателя Президиума Верховного Совета СССР А. С. Баркаускасом в Аргентинской Республике, 15 декабря 1983г, в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990 с. 188-189.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>73</sup> Речь министра медицинской промышленности СССР А. К. Мельниченко на учредительном собрании представителей советской общественности, посвященном созданию Общества дружбы „СССР-Аргентина“, 23 мая 1984г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990 с. 191.

<sup>74</sup> Заявление правительства СССР, 2 июня 1984 г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990 с. 198-200.

<sup>75</sup> Горбачев, М., Перестройка и новое мышление, Москва 1988.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, 171.





These opportunities were used by the both governments in order to show their societies the pursuit of a new foreign policy. In this way was achieved the peak of the collaboration manifested by the visit of the Argentinian President to Moscow in October 1984. As occasion for it was used the 100 year anniversary from the start of the diplomatic relations between Argentina and Russia<sup>77</sup>. President Alfonsin visited not only the state institutions but also the Moscow University “M. Lomonosov”, where held a lection.

The whole visit was very important for the cooperation because for the first time the connections were made on such high political level. The main themes discussed by the state leaders were the limitation of the nuclear weapon race. Argentina backed the Soviet initiative for stopping of the nuclear tests<sup>78</sup>. USSR stated that it will support the work of the Contadora group which was searching for a peaceful solution of the Central American conflict. There were also achieved agreements on broadening of the cultural ties. President Alfonsin led with him big delegation of Argentinian entrepreneurs who were interested in investment in the USSR.

It is interesting that the Soviet Union continued its policy of importing Argentinian grain. At that time was signed a treaty envisioning purchase of 4.5 million tons to Moscow for the next 5 years<sup>79</sup>. The deal was estimated on nearly 400 million dollars<sup>80</sup>.

The good dialogue between the two leaders was due also to their personal contact. They managed to set friendly conversation and found many common topics. It is interesting that they have similar political background since both were democratizing their countries.

For first time in nearly half a century the next two years were not favorable for the development of the trade between them. The diminishing of the price of the ruble increased the costs of the import. At the same time the decreasing of the

---

<sup>77</sup> Речь Председателя Президиума Верховного Совета СССР А. А. Громико на обеде, данном Президиумом Верховного Совета СССР и правительством СССР в честь Президента Аргентинской Республики Р. Р. Альфонсина, 13 октября 1986 г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 286.

<sup>78</sup> Сообщение о советско-аргентинских переговорах, 15 октября 1986г., в СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 297.

<sup>79</sup>Выступление Президента Аргентинской Республики Р. Р. Альфонсина на пресс-конференции для советских и иностранных корреспондентов в Москве, 15 октября 1986 г., в. СССР (Россия) – Аргентина, Страницы истории 1885-1986 г., Москва 1990, с. 299.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem.

## ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2

customs barriers stopped<sup>81</sup>. This trend made Argentina unworthy trade partner for the USSR. All this process was combined with the difficulties in the payments of Moscow.

The internal problems in the Soviet Union caused a slowdown in the foreign relations which were not of crucial importance. Mikhail Gorbachev was interested just in the connections with USA and Europe.

At the same time Argentina continued its transition and implemented neoliberal reforms. In May 1989 the candidate of the Peronist party Carlos Menem won the elections gaining 47% of the popular support<sup>82</sup>. The economic situation after the rule of Alfonsín is complicated. The newly elected leader had the opportunity to put in practice the unpopular in the social sphere neoliberal methods in order to raise the productivity.

During the first year of his mandate he met with Mikhail Gorbachev<sup>83</sup>. The Soviet leader wrote in his memoirs that the conversations with Menem were the most interesting compared to the other meetings with Latin American leaders. According to Gorbachev Soviet Union and Argentina were facing similar economic and social problems<sup>84</sup>.

The next year was turbulent for the internal life of the USSR. At the same time the process of disintegration of the Eastern Bloc system started. All this made Gorbachev and his crew to completely lose the focus of the foreign relations of the country, especially the ones that were not vital for them.

In spite of the attempts to be reformed and saved the Soviet Union was dissolved in December 1991.

This event ended a whole epoch in the history of the contemporary European civilization – the era of the ideological contradiction – the Cold War. The personification of the politics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the USSR itself. The diplomacy of this superpower was leading for the forming of the stereotypes of the epoch.

---

<sup>81</sup> Александров, А., Малкова, Н., Россия – Аргентина: 55 лет дипломатических отношений, в - [http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/dip\\_vest.nsf/19c2fdee616f12e54325688e00486a45/2f4655c5f8c8e9dfc3256a80003e0ae8!OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/dip_vest.nsf/19c2fdee616f12e54325688e00486a45/2f4655c5f8c8e9dfc3256a80003e0ae8!OpenDocument), 12. 02. 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Brown J., op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>83</sup> The meeting has not got the status of official visit. It was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> 1990 in Rome when Menem was in the Italian capital for the games of the national football team and Gorbachev was travelling to his meeting with the US President – Горбачев М. С., Жизнь и реформы, Москва 1995, кн.2, с. 281.

<sup>84</sup> Ibidem.



It the connections between Soviet Union and Argentina we see a new undiscovered feature of the foreign policy of Moscow. In them on first place were the pragmatality and the economics. In no other diplomatic relations of the USSR the ideologization was on so backward positions.

Argentina became a strange exception. In the 70's the military regime exterminated the left political spectrum. Over 30 thousand people were killed in the repressions, but USSR cooperated to the Junta. The Eastern Bloc started a world wide campaign against the rule of Augusto Pinocet in Chile but spared the Argentinian military. The reason for this might be based in the good economic relations – the food supplies from South America were vital for the Soviet Union at that time. There is also the factor of political influence in the region. At this time most of the regimes on the continent were pro-American but at the end of the 70's the Argentinians were searching for independence. In this aspect the policy of the Junta could be compared to the system in Peru, which was also in close relations with Moscow.

It is clear that the leading position in the diplomatic process was always the one of the USSR. The Soviet Union stubbornly kept the ties with Argentina no matter of the political changes in the country. The only explanation for this I see at the traditions in the economic collaboration which were laid in the 20's. This example of the foreign relations is precedent in the Cold War era. It is a forbidden tango in which both sides cross the line but saved their dignity.

***ALMANACH VIA EVRASIA, 2013, 2***  
***RUSSIA BETWEEN THE SOVIET PAST AND THE EURASIAN***  
***FUTURE***

[www.viaevrasia.com](http://www.viaevrasia.com)

ISSN (online) 1314-6645