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Russia-Venice Relations in the Late 18th Century: Imperial Ambitions and Political Realities

Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the history of relations between the Russian Empire and the Venetian Republic in the 1780s. The research is based on materials from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (АВПРИ) and dispatches of the Venetian envoy in St. Petersburg, Ferigo Foscari. In 1783, the two states conducted a mutual accreditation of envoys for the first time. The Collegium of Foreign Affairs believed that establishing permanent diplomatic contacts would contribute to the formation of a military-political alliance. St. Petersburg's victory in the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774) opened prospects for solving strategic tasks related to the development of Black Sea trade and the expansion of Russian influence in the Mediterranean. An alliance with Venice could positively affect the implementation of these projects. An analysis of the prevailing conditions makes it possible to formulate the aim of the study: comparing the expectations of the authorities of the Russian Empire with the political realities of Europe. To



achieve this, the international situation is examined, the strategies of interaction between St. Petersburg and Venice analyzed, and the stages of the formation of the personality of Count Semyon Romanovich Vorontsov (the Russian envoy to Venice), his role in the development of bilateral relations, and the problems he faced during his service are considered. S.R. Vorontsov sought from the Venetian authorities the establishment of a ceremonial protocol appropriate for the reception of envoys of the second rank. The diplomat insisted on the correct use of the monarch's title in official correspondence, emphasizing the importance of this requirement for bilateral relations. The envoy defended the interests of Greeks — citizens of the Republic — who sought to strengthen Russian positions in Venice. Count Vorontsov also focused his efforts on establishing an alliance with the Republic. In conclusion, the author comes to the conclusion that the tasks formulated by the imperial government were difficult to realize.

Keywords:

Venice, Russia-Venice relations; S.R. Vorontsov, Ferigo Foscari, the Mediterranean Sea, Russian foreign policy in the XVIII century

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Russia-Venice diplomatic and commercial relations have a history spanning centuries. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Republic attempted to persuade the Russian state to participate in the struggle against the Ottomans¹. One direction of Venetian policy was deliberate rapprochement of the Orthodox Greek community of the city with “Muscovy”². Confessional ties contributed to finding allies and proponents of Moscow Rus’ political interests among the Western Greeks.

Between 1680–1720s, the influence of the Russian state (later the Russian Empire) on the configuration of the military-political balance of forces in Europe intensified and expanded. These changes transformed the character of diplomatic relations and principles of interaction with Venice. In the eighteenth century, the authorities of the emerging empire were acting as initiators of forming an anti-Turkish coalition, attracting both the Greek population and the aristocracy of the Republic³. The Venetian political elite, fearing the loss of state sovereignty due to military weakness, adhered to principles of neutrality in relations with more influential powers⁴. In the 1710s, Peter I sought to intensify contacts and ties with the Republic, sending his representatives there⁵. The first Russian emperor not only set the goal of reaching the Mediterranean Sea but also outlined strategies for international interaction in this region. Cather-

¹ *Матасова Т.А.* Русские посланники в Венеции на рубеже XV–XVI столетий (по известиям Марино Сануто) // Древняя Русь. Вопросы медиевистики. 2013. № 2. С. 67–68.

² *Longworth P.* Russian-Venetian Relations in the Reign of Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich // The Slavonic and East European Review. 1986. Vol. 64. № 3. P. 398.

³ *Уляницкий В.А.* Русские консульства за границей в XVIII в.: Ч. 1. М., 1899. С. 23.

⁴ *Лейн Ф.* Золотой век Венецианской республики / пер. с англ. Л.А. Игоревского. М., 2017. С. 555; *Канделоро Д.* История современной Италии. История Рисорджименто / Пер. с итал. Т.С. Золочевской и др. М., 1958. С. 86; *Pancieri W.* La Repubblica di Venezia nel Settecento. Roma, 2014. P. 42–47.

⁵ *Ястребов А.О.* Венецианское направление внешней политики Петра I и Прутский поход // Вестник МГИМО-Университета. 2021. № 14 (6). С. 178–179.

ine II, following the course of her predecessor, sought to strengthen the empire's influence in the Black Sea and the Levant⁶.

The Russian Empire's victory in the war with Turkey (1768–1774) created preconditions for expanding its strategic presence in the Mediterranean Sea. In St. Petersburg, the Venetian Republic was assessed as a promising ally in the context of implementing long-term foreign policy in the region. An analysis of the historical conditions of the second half of the eighteenth century allows formulating the objective of the research: to correlate the diplomatic initiatives of the empire to form a Russian-Venetian alliance with the views of Venice's ruling elite and the foreign policy interests of the leading European powers in the 1780s. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have to be addressed: one has to study the political priorities of leading states; to analyze the main goals and principles of interaction between the Russian Empire and the Republic; examine the stages of formation of the personality of Count Semyon Romanovich Vorontsov (Russian envoy to Venice) and trace his role in the development of bilateral relations; to investigate the problematic aspects of S.R. Vorontsov's diplomatic activities.

The research was conducted using materials from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Empire (АВПРИ). The instruction and messages for Count S.R. Vorontsov, compiled in the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, and his response dispatches form the source base of the research. Venice's position regarding St. Petersburg's policy is analyzed through the reports of Ferigo Foscari, the Republic's envoy to the Russian capital during the period from 1783 to 1790.

In historiography, it is noted that the Venetian ruling elite sought to restrain the intensive foreign policy activities of the Russian Empire. The Republic's government kept rejecting proposals for forming a military-political alliance⁷. However, Italian historian G. Та-

⁶ Гребенщикова Г.А. Россия в системе международных отношений во второй половине XVIII в. // От царства к империи. Россия в системах международных отношений. Вторая половина XVI — начало XX века. СПб., 2015. С. 145.

⁷ Preto P. Venezia e i Turchi. Roma, 2013. P. 224–225; La Repubblica di Venezia nell'età moderna. Dal 1517 alla fine della Repubblica / Ed. G. Cozzi, M. Knapton. Torino, 1992. P. 582–584.



Венеция. Дворец Дожей и Моло. Худ. Франческо Гварди, ок. 1770 г.
From open sources

bacco gives a different assessment of Russian-Venetian relations. The researcher points out that not all nobles sitting in the Senate were opponents of rapprochement with St. Petersburg. He emphasizes the existence in the advisory body of a “Greek party” — noble politicians who advocated strengthening contacts with Russia⁸. This group of aristocrats expressed disagreement with the course of Andrea Tron (the de facto leader of Venice’s diplomacy), aimed at rapprochement with the Habsburg Monarchy. If A. Tron, through maintaining close ties with Vienna, wanted to preserve the status quo and the Republic’s policy of neutrality, then his opponents insisted on reviving Venice’s lost military and political power⁹. They believed that the Russian Empire was capable of contributing to the restoration of the Venetian Republic’s positions in the region.

The Collegium of Foreign Affairs positively assessed the potential of interaction with the Venetian Republic for expanding the influence of the Russian Empire. The 1783 instruction, compiled for the plenipotentiary minister to Venice¹⁰, Count Semyon Romanovich

⁸ *Tobacco G.* Andrea Tron e la crisi dell’aristocrazia senatoria a Venezia. Verona, 1980. P. 107–109.

⁹ *Ibid.* P. 107–109, 113–115.

¹⁰ Minister-dignitary, elected and empowered by the sovereign to manage state affairs” (*Dictionary of the Russian Academy*. Part IV. St. Petersburg, 1793.



Семен Романович Воронцов. Худ. Томас Лоуренс.
From open sources

Vorontsov, is a key source for understanding Russian-Venetian relations and the international situation in the 1760s–1780s. The document noted that the Russian court appointed Marquis Pano Maruzzi as charge d'affaires to the Republic in 1768 in preparation for the Archipelago Expedition¹¹. Count Ivan Andreevich Osterman, formal head of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs and author of the instruction, indicated that Venetian timidity before the Turks and, probably, their intention to be of service to Russia's enemies had complicated Maruzzi's work and had prevented the establishment of firm diplomatic contacts¹².

The Russian Empire's victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774 brought changes to the balance of power in the Old World. Rus-

P. 139). In the 18th century, including the Petrine period and throughout the whole century, the general term used for a Russian diplomatic representative abroad was “minister”, irrespective of the actual rank. (История внешней политики России. XVIII век (от Северной войны до войн России против Наполеона). М., 1998. С. 247).

¹¹ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 8; Велижев М.Б. Итальянские государства и Россия в годы русско-турецкой войны 1768–1774 гг.: дипломатия и политика // Россия в Средиземноморье. Архипелагская экспедиция Екатерины Великой / Под общей редакцией Е.Б. Смилянкой. М., 2011. С. 239.

¹² АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 8.

sia significantly strengthened its authority among the great powers. The Empire gained access to the Black Sea, creating conditions for developing political-economic projects in the Mediterranean. Historian G.A. Grebenshchikova notes that the “St. Petersburg system of international relations” became a universally recognized factor in European politics¹³. The instruction to Count S.R. Vorontsov outlined the official position explaining the reasons for the integration of the Crimean Peninsula in 1783¹⁴. This integration predictably became a subject of concern for the great powers. Russia’s strengthening in the Black Sea region caused a conflict between its foreign policy interests and the aspirations of Great Britain and France, which fought for control over this strategically important crossroads of Eurasian communication¹⁵.

Britain, seeking sole dominance in the Mediterranean, supported Russia’s expansionist aspirations from the 1760s to weaken Paris’ influence in the Levant¹⁶. However, in the context of war in the North American colonies, relations between the two powers deteriorated. British naval forces forcibly detained Russian ships in the Mediterranean and Atlantic¹⁷. In response, Catherine II issued a manifesto on “Armed Maritime Neutrality”¹⁸ and refused assistance to London during hostilities¹⁹. British authorities, concentrat-

¹³ *Гребенищикова Г.А.* Россия в системе международных отношений во второй половине XVIII в. С. 148.

¹⁴ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 19.

¹⁵ *Смилянская Е.Б.* Заключение // Россия в Средиземноморье. Архипелагская экспедиция Екатерины Великой / Под общей редакцией Е.Б. Смилянской. М., 2011. С. 477.

¹⁶ История внешней политики России. XVIII век (от Северной войны до войн России против Наполеона). М., 1998. С. 115.

¹⁷ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 22–23.

¹⁸ Armed Neutrality — a form of cooperation between Russia, Denmark, and Sweden, along with several other states, established in 1779–1783 (in connection with the American War of Independence) and again in 1800–1801, with the aim of protecting the maritime trade and shipping of neutral countries (Diplomatic Dictionary / Ed. A.A. Gromyko et al. Moscow, 1985. Vol. 1. P. 217).

¹⁹ *Гребенищикова Г.А.* Россия в системе международных отношений во второй половине XVIII в. С. 166.



Иван Андреевич Остерман. Худ. Пер Крафт Старший.
From open sources

ing efforts on resolving contradictions in the New World, allowed the Russian Empire to implement its foreign policy projects in the Mediterranean region.

The interconnections of Russia and France in the early 1780s were characterized in the instruction to S.R. Vorontsov as exceptionally good-natured. Nevertheless, the count was advised to “in any case observe with a wakeful eye all the deeds and negotiations of the French cabinet”²⁰. In government circles, the hostile initiatives and actions undertaken by Louis XV were not forgotten: in the 1760s, he had sponsored the Swedish parliament, hoping to initiate a war between Russia and its northern neighbor. France discovered in Turkey favorable conditions for spreading anti-Russian sentiments and unleashing hostilities²¹.

The accession of Louis XVI to power in 1774 opened new prospects in Russian-French relations. The French bourgeoisie

²⁰ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 17.

²¹ Гребенщикова Г.А. Россия в системе международных отношений во второй половине XVIII в. С. 157–159.

was interested in establishing trade ties with the Russian Empire through Black Sea ports. Disagreements of both powers with London were a fertile ground for rapprochement and strengthening of mutual contacts. Catherine II sought to distance herself from the confrontation in North America. The French political elite sought to expand their overseas possessions, countering British hegemony²². Active support for the liberation movement in the North American colonies contributed to the realization of Paris' strategic tasks.

The instruction to S.R. Vorontsov emphasized that Russia's participation in the preparation of the Treaty of Teschen (1779) contributed to strengthening diplomatic and political ties with German states²³. G.A. Grebenshchikova notes that Catherine II helped King Frederick II of Prussia prevent the excessive strengthening of Austria²⁴. Vice-Chancellor I.A. Osterman noted that Russia continued to maintain a defensive alliance and close friendship with Prussia²⁵. Thus, maintaining peaceful relations in the west allowed St. Petersburg to concentrate attention and forces on the southern direction.

In the 1760s–70s, the Austrian Monarchy feared Russian strengthening in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth²⁶. The Habsburgs, together with Louis XV, supported the Saxon dynasty²⁷. To weaken St. Petersburg's positions in the western direction, Vienna contributed to fanning the flames of the Russian-Turkish war. M.A. Petrova believes that the Russian-Turkish peace of 1774 forced the political elite of the Austrian Monarchy to recognize the inevitability of

²² Черкасов П.П. Екатерина II и Людовик XVI. Русско-французские отношения, 1774–1792. М., 2004. С. 78–79, 82, 84, 89, 91, 92, 270, 271.

²³ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 16.

²⁴ Гребенищикова Г.А. Россия на Тешенском конгрессе 1778–1779 годов // Россия на международных форумах и конгрессах XVII – начало XX века / Отв. ред. А.В. Виноградов. М., 2021. С. 209, 221.

²⁵ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 14.

²⁶ История внешней политики России. XVIII век (от Северной войны до войн России против Наполеона). С. 116.

²⁷ Всемирная история. Т. 4: Мир в XVIII веке / отв. ред. С.Я. Карп. М., 2013. С. 534.

Russian advancement into the Black Sea and Balkan regions. The threat of direct military conflict forced Vienna to seek rapprochement with Russia²⁸.

In 1780, in Mogilev, Austrian Monarch Joseph II and Catherine II met, agreeing on interaction within far-reaching plans. The Russian Empress sought to realize the “Greek Project”, connected with the division of the Porte and the establishment of the kingdoms of Dacia and Greece headed by her grandson, Grand Prince Constantine Pavlovich²⁹. P.V. Stegnyy refers to the opinion of A.A. Bezborodko, the de facto head of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, that Austria should also gain access to the Adriatic. However, A.A. Bezborodko excluded Venetian possessions in Istria and Dalmatia from these expansionist plans³⁰.

A question arises: why were Russian politicians so concerned about preserving the territory of the Republic on the Balkans? The answer is found in the instruction to S.R. Vorontsov: “to make the Republic a reliable friend of the Russian Empire, so that at any time, especially in case of a new war with the Turks, to have on its shores and islands a reliable and safe haven for our military squadrons and ships”³¹. The Collegium also emphasized that Venice’s accession to the “Armed Maritime Neutrality” treaty could ensure the protection of its maritime navigation and international trade³². The emphasis on these principles in the instruction indicated St. Petersburg’s course to include the Republic in its sphere of influence and to shield it from external pressure from other countries. Russia, not allowing Austria and other powers into Venice, wished to use its coastal territories to solve its own geopolitical tasks. The political elite of the Republic was to re-

²⁸ Петрова М.А. Екатерина II и Иосиф II: формирование российско-австрийского союза, 1780–1790. М., 2011. С. 99.

²⁹ Стегний П.В. Еще раз о греческом проекте Екатерины II. Новые документы из АВПРИ МИД России // Новая и новейшая история. 2002. № 4. С. 112–118.

³⁰ Ibid. С. 112–118.

³¹ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 8.

³² Ibid. Л. 23–24.



Александр Андреевич Безбородко. Худ. Иоганн-Баттист Лампи Старший.
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gard St. Petersburg as the priority partner, limiting the influence of other states.

The instruction noted that Russia did not threaten Venice — on the contrary, the Republic, surrounded by strong powers, cannot resist them and is forced to endure offenses. However, “now, thanks to the wisdom and strength of the Empress”, Venice had a chance to change its fate. Conclusion of an alliance with Russia would not only save Venice from threats but would also strengthen its international position³³.

The Venetian nobility, fearing the loss of independence, chose a foreign policy strategy of neutrality. The Republic categorically refused to join alliances during the wars for the Polish (1733–1735) and Austrian (1740–1748) successions. Several months of war could have plunged Venice into complete poverty and chaos³⁴. Russia, in turn, wanted to involve the Republic in the great political game to weaken its competitors.

The journey of Grand Prince Pavel Petrovich to Italy ‘became a happy beginning of new ties’, in the words of Venetian envoy

³³ Ibid. A. 10.

³⁴ *Pancierà W.* La Repubblica di Venezia nel Settecento. P. 47.



Великий князь Павел Петрович. Худ. Ф.С. Рокотов.
From open sources

to St. Petersburg Ferigo Foscarelli³⁵. Italian historian D. Berti noted that the visit of such a noble personage made it inconvenient for Venice to refuse to send diplomats. Despite all doubts, in 1782 the Republic appointed its representative to Russia³⁶. In the instruction to S.R. Vorontsov, it was indicated that F. Foscarelli would be received ‘according to protocol on an equal basis with the extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister of Holland’³⁷. The post of a diplomat corresponded in the Russian Empire’s protocol to the second class.

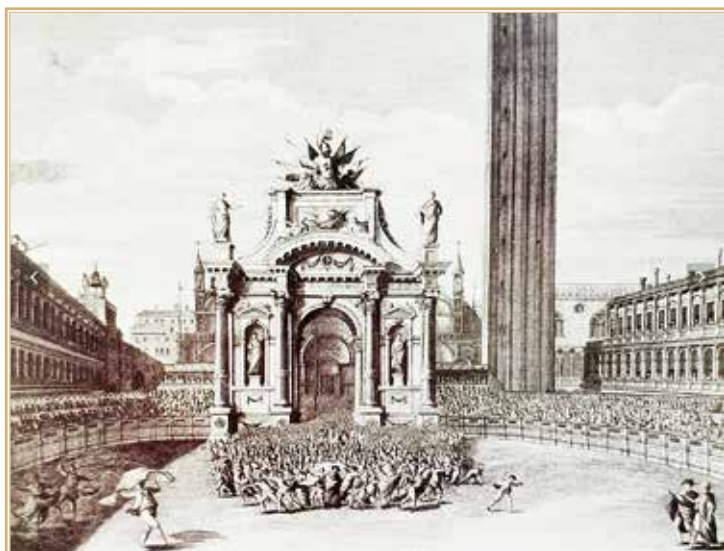
The Collegium of Foreign Affairs in 1783 appointed Semyon Romanovich Vorontsov as plenipotentiary minister to Venice³⁸. The appointment record noted the following composition of the mission: “<...> under the chargé d’affaires, a Titular Councilor and an

³⁵ Dispacci da Pietroburgo di Ferigo Foscarelli, 1783–1790 / ed. G. Doria. Venezia, 1993. P. 9–10.

³⁶ Берти Д. Россия и итальянские государства в период Рисорджименто. М., 1959. С. 81, 82.

³⁷ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 5.

³⁸ Пряшников М.П. С.Р. Воронцов в Венеции: начало дипломатической карьеры // Воронцовы — два века в истории России. Труды Воронцовского общества. Выпуск 15. Петушки, 2012. С. 125.



«Начало грандиозного праздника 24 января 1782 г. в честь визита графа и графини Северных на площади Сан-Марко в Венеции». Европейская гравюра.
From open sources

Actuary are assigned; furthermore, a Councilor of the Embassy is to be appointed with a corresponding salary <...>. The Chargé d'affaires is to remain there, as before, subordinate to this our Minister, in order to assist him in our service”³⁹.

Semyon Romanovich Vorontsov (1744–1832) came from a renowned aristocratic family. His father Roman Illarionovich was a member of the Senate in the early 1760s and received the rank of General-in-Chief⁴⁰. The daughter of Roman Illarionovich, Elizabeth, was the beloved favorite of Emperor Peter III⁴¹. Semyon Romanovich’s uncle, Mikhail Illarionovich, held the position of Chancellor of the Russian Empire, influencing the formation of the state’s foreign policy⁴². T.M. Fadeeva notes that Mikhail Illarionovich, traveling through Europe in the 1740s and seeking to develop trade ties between Russia and Venice, established contacts with the Maruzzi

³⁹ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 109. Л. 1.

⁴⁰ Захарова О.Ю. Жизнь и дипломатическая деятельность графа С.Р. Воронцова. М., 2013. С. 11.

⁴¹ Воронцов-Даишков А.И., Микешин М.И. Семен Романович Воронцов. Биография. СПб., 2020. С. 35.

⁴² Анисимов М.Ю. Российская дипломатия и Семилетняя война. М., 2020. С. 6.



Прием папой римским Пием VI графа и графини Северных 8 февраля 1782 г.
Офорт А. Лацарони.
Государственный музей-заповедник «Павловск»

banking house. The empire's patronage of the Maruzzi family allowed finding reliable agents and representatives in Italy⁴³.

Mikhail Illarionovich took direct part in the formation of S.R. Vorontsov's personality and education, compiled a study plan for his nephew, and instilled in him a desire for self-education⁴⁴. Family connections facilitated Semyon Romanovich's rapid advancement in service — from chamber page to lieutenant of the Guards. The young count, despite his successes, did not like court service and thought of a military career⁴⁵. In 1762, when Peter III was preparing for a conflict with Denmark, S.R. Vorontsov obtained permission from the emperor to serve in the army under the command of General-in-Chief P.A. Rumyantsev⁴⁶.

⁴³ *Фадеева Т.М.* Греческий проект в лицах: маркиз П. Маруцци, княжна З. Гика, братья А.Г. и Ф.Г. Орловы в русско-турецкой войне 1768–1774 гг. // *Е.Р. Дашкова в кругу современников: исторические личности и эпоха* / Ред. Л.В. Тычина и др. М., 2013. С. 240–241.

⁴⁴ *Воронцов-Дашков А.И., Микешин М.И.* Семен Романович Воронцов. Биография. С. 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* С. 34–35.

⁴⁶ *Захарова О.Ю.* Жизнь и дипломатическая деятельность графа С.Р. Воронцова. С. 16.

The palace coup and Catherine II's accession to power negatively affected the subsequent fate of the Vorontsov family. The family maintained loyalty to the previous monarch. Semyon's father, Roman, was exiled to Moscow and deprived of a significant portion of his estates. His sister Elizabeth was temporarily placed under house arrest. The Empress retired Vorontsov's uncle, Chancellor Mikhail Illarionovich⁴⁷. Under these circumstances, Semyon Romanovich wanted to leave service. Mikhail Illarionovich prevented the realization of his nephew's intentions and helped him find a position as a court councilor at the embassy in Vienna in 1764. Ambassador D.M. Golitsyn was to provide patronage to S.R. Vorontsov⁴⁸.

In the second half of the 1760s, the count did not hold state offices⁴⁹. Mikhail Illarionovich's death in 1767 motivated S.R. Vorontsov to move from Moscow to St. Petersburg⁵⁰. The beginning of the Russian-Turkish War of 1768 prompted Semyon Romanovich, based on personal and civic convictions, to enter military service⁵¹.

During the hostilities from 1768 to 1774, S.R. Vorontsov served under the command of P.A. Rumyantsev and at the end of the combat operations held the rank of General-Lieutenant. The count was one of the translators of the peace treaty text into Italian⁵². In 1777, he compiled for P.V. Zavadovsky, the cabinet secretary of Catherine II, a detailed report that highlighted the assistance of Venetian aris-

⁴⁷ Воронцов-Дашков А.И., Микешин М.И. Семен Романович Воронцов. Биография. С. 38.

⁴⁸ Воронцов-Дашков А.И., Микешин М.И. Семен Романович Воронцов. Биография. С. 41; Захарова О.Ю. Жизнь и дипломатическая деятельность графа С.Р. Воронцова. С. 20; Родина Т.А. ВОРОНЦОВ СЕМЁН РОМАНОВИЧ // Большая российская энциклопедия. Электронная версия (2023). URL: https://old.bigenc.ru/domestic_history/text/1929316 (Accessed 03.09.2025).

⁴⁹ Захарова О.Ю. Жизнь и дипломатическая деятельность графа С.Р. Воронцова. С. 21.

⁵⁰ Воронцов-Дашков А.И., Микешин М.И. Семен Романович Воронцов. Биография. С. 50.

⁵¹ Захарова О.Ю. Жизнь и дипломатическая деятельность графа С.Р. Воронцова. С. 24.

⁵² Ibid. С. 30.

toocrat of Greek origin D. Mocenigo to the Russian fleet during the Archipelago Expedition⁵³.

In 1778, S.R. Vorontsov returned to St. Petersburg. He was in retirement until 1782⁵⁴. A.A. Bezborodko, at Catherine II's behest, convinced the count to accept the appointment as Russian representative to Venice⁵⁵. The appointment of S.R. Vorontsov instead of P. Maruzzi as envoy to the Republic could be explained as follows. Russia's military successes of the 1770s and Grand Prince Pavel Petrovich's journey to Italy raised the priority of forming long-term ties with Venice. To demonstrate the special significance of these diplomatic relations, representation of the highest-born aristocrats was required⁵⁶. At court, the most prepared for this mission was S.R. Vorontsov, who understood the specifics of the Republic's political life. Count Bezborodko, in a letter to Semyon Romanovich, emphasized that the mission "requires from her [Catherine II's] side the naming to this place of a person of notable birth and outstanding abilities"⁵⁷.

The beginning of S.R. Vorontsov's diplomatic service in Venice was complicated by differences in protocol traditions between the two countries. Observance of ceremony reflected to a large extent the depth and content of bilateral relations. The instruction emphasized requirements according to which S.R. Vorontsov was to be received in the Republic: "<...> [to agree] on suitable terms of ceremony, which should not be the same as with ambassadors, nor with residents, but a middle ground between these two qualities"⁵⁸. If there were no norms in the Republic for receiving a second-rank envoy, then "a new ceremony for his reception was to be estab-

⁵³ Пряшникова М.П. С.Р. Воронцов в Венеции: начало дипломатической карьеры. С. 119.

⁵⁴ Захарова О.Ю. Жизнь и дипломатическая деятельность графа С.Р. Воронцова. С. 33.

⁵⁵ Пряшникова М.П. С.Р. Воронцов в Венеции: начало дипломатической карьеры. С. 117–121, 131–132.

⁵⁶ История внешней политики России. XVIII век (от Северной войны до войн России против Наполеона). С. 253.

⁵⁷ Архив князя Воронцова. Книга XIII. М., 1879. С. 28.

⁵⁸ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 5.

lished”⁵⁹. Strict control of ceremony observance was connected with maintaining state prestige. Observance of these rules by the receiving side demonstrated the degree of respect for the representative of another state.

In a letter dated October 4, 1783, the diplomat noted that in the Republic, the “distinctions that appear to be shown to me, are completely illusory”⁶⁰. He wished to achieve a ceremony corresponding to his rank and the dignity of the court that appointed him.

In another letter dated November 28, Vorontsov emphasized that “<...> as for me, if, by giving me only ‘Lei’ [polite “you” in Italian], as they suppose, considering that this should distinguish me from residents, they do not add in the course of their responses various polite expressions with which they are as generous with ambassadors as they are stingy with residents, I shall not consider myself distinguished”⁶¹.

In the Republic, ambassadors, compared to residents, were granted inviolability of their homes and two adjacent buildings, as well as the right to visit boxes in leading theaters. In a letter from January 1784 to Alexander Bezborodko, the minister emphasized: “<...> for the government here could, of course, provide me with a house without a (theater) box, or a box without a house. But on equal terms with ambassadors — since our envoys also enjoy this privilege in the same rank as ambassadors — they are given either just the boxes on the same tier as ambassadors or a single house and boxes on the second tier <...>”⁶². So, Semyon Vorontsov refrained from formal accreditation, awaiting instructions and clarifications from St. Petersburg regarding the remarks he had made⁶³.

F. Foscari in a letter dated November 12, 1783, mentioned that Count A.I. Osterman had presented similar claims. The Venetian representative responded that appropriate measures had been taken immediately after the first request. The diplomat added that

⁵⁹ Ibid. Л. 6.

⁶⁰ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 115. Л. 2–4.

⁶¹ Ibid. Л. 21.

⁶² АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 128. Л. 2.

⁶³ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 115. Л. 4.

Vorontsov was even granted distinctions not inherent in accepted practice. The requirement for boxes and inviolability of buildings applied only to ambassadors, not to plenipotentiary ministers. Despite the clarifications, Count Osterman insisted that the request be satisfied as a sign of good mutual respect and friendship⁶⁴.

In a message dated November 28, 1783, Vorontsov noted that he refused to accept answers from the Venetians where instead of *Sa Majesté Impériale* (“Her Imperial Majesty”), *la Zara* (“the Tsarina”) was repeatedly written. He emphasized that “answers to proposals of such a great court deserve the most important attention”⁶⁵.

S.R. Vorontsov indicated the inconsistency of his status and the necessary protocol until January 1784. In a report to A.A. Bezborodko, he noted that having received certain distinctions, he had submitted his credentials. However, the minister considered these privileges insufficient. Explanations for the absence of differences between boxes on the first and middle tiers seemed unconvincing to him. Vorontsov believed that it would be pointless to keep a plenipotentiary minister in Venice and it would be sufficient to have a resident⁶⁶. In February 1784, Foscari clarified to Count Osterman the details of the box question⁶⁷. I.A. Osterman in a dispatch to Vorontsov explained that the Republic’s government would be glad to make concessions, “if it did not fear that by giving Your Excellency a box in the first tier, where they are allocated only to ambassadors, the latter would consider themselves offended and compared completely with ministers of the second degree”⁶⁸.

Diplomatic protocol and forms of address to monarchs and their representatives demonstrated the degree of mutual respect of the parties and recognition of a state’s foreign policy prestige. Understanding the significance of these aspects for bilateral relations, S.R. Vorontsov noted in his report of January 12, 1784, that

⁶⁴ Dispacchi da Pietroburgo di Ferigo Foscari, 1783–1790. P. 10–12.

⁶⁵ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 115. Л. 21.

⁶⁶ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 128. Л. 1, 2, 3.

⁶⁷ Dispacchi da Pietroburgo di Ferigo Foscari, 1783–1790. P. 22–25.

⁶⁸ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 131. Л. 3.

Catherine II was indifferent to which privilege they chose in the Senate — the inviolability of homes or the boxes. The Empress considered it important that differences between the status of an envoy and a resident be clearly demonstrated. The diplomat also emphasized the weight of this principle regarding the use of titles⁶⁹. Russia's policy in the sphere of ceremony reflected a general desire for dominance in bilateral relations. Factors of pressure and international influence became instruments for imposing an alliance. The political elite of Venice, fearing conflicts both with Russia and other great powers, had no grounds for direct refusal and were forced to give delicate responses and maneuver flexibly. The Republic made minor concessions, adhering in main issues to the principle of neutrality. The Collegium of Foreign Affairs understood the sentiments of the Venetian elite and refrained from further discussions, agreeing to compromises. In the dispatch of April 10, 1784, S.R. Vorontsov wrote that, having received clarifications from St. Petersburg, he would accept boxes on the second tier in Venetian theaters⁷⁰.

The activities of Venice's envoy to the Russian Empire, Ferigo Foscari, confirm this observation. The diplomat, in a dispatch from October 1783, emphasized the need for an unhurried and detailed analysis of the economic realities of the state⁷¹. Foscari's position demonstrates that certain representatives of the Republic and the ruling elite in general did not seek rapprochement with St. Petersburg and occupied a waiting position. Nevertheless, he transmitted to Venice information about the riches and abundance of the empire⁷². In a dispatch sent already in October 1784, after describing the state's economic development, F. Foscari concluded that these developments "now make extremely urgent an important recognition of this internal power"⁷³. The Republic's envoy did not note the potential for trade contacts, but pointed to Russia's might. The concentration of attention on the power and influence of the state

⁶⁹ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 127. Л. 4.

⁷⁰ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 127. Л. 56.

⁷¹ Dispacchi da Pietroburgo di Ferigo Foscari, 1783–1790. P. 9–10.

⁷² Ibid. P. 9–10, 43–45.

⁷³ Ibid. 41–43.

reflected rather the fear and concern of the Venetian over the strengthening of the new empire. Members of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs took this trend into account.

In the instruction to S.R. Vorontsov, it was noted that Russia's Black Sea trade could develop successfully without Venice's participation. Moreover, the text emphasized the inconsistency of the Republic's government. First, Venetian representatives in Paris, The Hague, and London proposed to the Russian side to renew discussions of a trade treaty, but then they themselves refused dialogue, fearing Turkey and other powers⁷⁴.

F. Foscari connected Russia's state development with the activities of the Empress and her associates⁷⁵. The diplomat drew attention to the modernization of the fleet and army⁷⁶. The Venetian representative noted that among both sailors and support staff there was a significant number of foreigners⁷⁷. Nevertheless, the authorities were also training national personnel. F. Foscari praised Catherine II's wise decision to expand the Engineering Cadet Corps, noting the creation at the same time of other military educational institutions in the capital⁷⁸. The diplomat's description allowed his correspondents to conclude that Catherine II sought to achieve autonomy in the training of military and naval specialists, creating the appropriate material base for their education.

The Venetian envoy also touched upon questions of foreign policy in his reports. Foscari emphasized that the publication of the "Armed Neutrality" manifesto increased Russia's international influence⁷⁹. The Republic's representative noted changes in diplomatic contacts between St. Petersburg and Istanbul⁸⁰. Analysis of the Russian Empire's foreign policy in this direction made it possible to determine changes in the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions. The

⁷⁴ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 12.

⁷⁵ *Dispacci da Pietroburgo di Ferigo Foscari, 1783–1790*. P. 43–45.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* P. 45–47.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* P. 45–47.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* P. 29–31.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* P. 43–45.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* P. 14–17, 18–22, 54–55.

aristocracy of Venice, adhering to the principle of non-interference and refusal of alliances, assessed the risks of maintaining the balance of power in Europe.

A dispatch that Foscari sent to the Senate in July 1784 demonstrates the adaptability of Venetian foreign policy. The envoy indicated that he had brought to the attention of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs information about the pardon of Count Dmitry Mocenigo and the possibility of visiting the Republic unimpeded⁸¹. Venetian authorities had convicted the count from the island of Zakynthos with exile because of his disobedience to orders. Mocenigo, ignoring local administration directives, had provided support to the Russian squadron in the Adriatic Sea during the Russian-Turkish War⁸². Foscari emphasized that the Republic's authorities' desire for justice and the persistent intercession of Catherine II became the basis for this decision⁸³. The government of the Republic thus demonstrated that it was willing to make concessions to the stronger power, seeking to maintain good relations with it.

Reference to materials concerning Mocenigo makes it possible to investigate the realities of St. Petersburg and Venice relations. S.R. Vorontsov, in a dispatch from June 9, 1784, noted that he had directed a memo to the Senate of the Republic, but over two months had not received an answer. The diplomat indicated that he was forced to submit a new petition, emphasizing: "I consider this improper on its [the Republic's] part and disrespectful to Her Imperial Majesty"⁸⁴. In a report from June 16, the count informed the Collegium that procurator Contarini had had a long discussion with senator Riva, seeking Mocenigo's acquittal. As a result, the meeting voted for pardon, agreeing with the Empress's demands. The count wrote about opponents of this decision: "The objecting [Riva] remained in ridicule, as he deserved, there were two more who declared they would argue against Russia's demands, but dared not say a word because of Riva's utter failure; in short, besides him and his like, all the

⁸¹ Ibid. P. 36.

⁸² Архив князя Воронцова. Книга XVI. М., 1879. С. 160–162.

⁸³ Dispacci da Pietroburgo di Ferigo Foscari, 1783–1790. P. 36–37.

⁸⁴ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 127. Л. 114.

most respected members of this government certainly worked for a successful conclusion of this matter”⁸⁵. In Venice’s Senate response to S.R. Vorontsov’s memo, it was indicated that the Empress’s insistent requests were taken into account due to the Republic’s special disposition and desire to emphasize its friendly relations⁸⁶.

In Russia, it was understood that declarations of goodwill were ambiguous. On the one hand, senators agreed to compromises, but on the other, considerable efforts had to be made to uphold the Russian interests. The Collegium of Foreign Affairs took into account the support of some politicians advocating strengthening ties with Russia, but at the same time noted the instability and internal contradictions in the Venetian aristocracy.

In the reports of S.R. Vorontsov to A.A. Bezborodko for the period from June to July 1784, there were examples of benevolent perception of Russian policy by senators. Influential Venetian aristocrats gave recommendations to the envoy concerning the protection of the interests of the Greek population in the Republic. They advised the count, when presenting a recredential, to certainly refer to the will of the Empress, expressing her desire to “preserve the tranquility and spiritual independence of her co-religionists”⁸⁷. The diplomat stated: “I see with astonishment and joy that the most important members of so distrustful a government themselves imprudently propose to us a way to attach to ourselves several hundred thousand of their subjects”⁸⁸. In the instruction to S.R. Vorontsov, he was also prescribed to protect the interests of the Orthodox population in Venice⁸⁹. St. Petersburg officials and their representatives considered support for the Greek population strategically important given the possibility of a future military conflict with the Ottoman Empire.

In the next report, S.R. Vorontsov described to A.A. Bezborodko the injustice of the Venetian administration regarding another distinguished Greek attached to Russia — Mr. Benaki. He had been

⁸⁵ Ibid. Л. 129–130.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Л. 134–135.

⁸⁷ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 128. Л. 26, 27.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Л. 26, 27.

⁸⁹ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1783 г. Д. 17. Л. 13.

arrested and deprived of property. The count emphasized that effective achievement of goals in light of Venetian political specifics was possible exclusively through pressure and coercion⁹⁰. According to the diplomat's observations, the Venetian political elite showed respect only to those states that, having strength, also possessed the art of threats and persuasion⁹¹. S.R. Vorontsov concluded that power and the degree of influence were the primary factors in building relations with the Republic.

Analyzing the situation concerning Venice in his final report, the envoy noted the dependence of politicians' decisions on Viennese court influence. The danger of direct conflict with the Austrian Monarchy was regarded as the main risk to the Republic's sovereignty⁹². The nobility hated France, too, yet aristocrats viewed Paris as a possible partner, secretly hostile to the Habsburgs. The danger of conflict with Vienna did not allow concluding any agreement with Versailles. Troops from France in case of conflict might not reach the Lagoon in time⁹³. Because of this, Venetian nobles rejected a political course towards limitation of Russian activity in the Adriatic region, which was being imposed by Paris⁹⁴. Rapprochement of Venice with one of the great powers held the danger of open confrontation with another and threatened the destruction of the established system of diplomatic equilibrium based on neutrality. The Collegium of Foreign Affairs sought to take advantage of existing contradictions to implement an anti-Turkish strategy. The political elite of Venice assessed the intentions of the Russian Empire generally negatively, fearing the collapse of the fragile republican structure⁹⁵.

The envoy noted, however, that not all leading figures of the state were set against Russia. Morosini, the influential procurator of St. Mark's Cathedral, defended in the Senate the idea of close cooperation with St. Petersburg. His political opponent was procurator

⁹⁰ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 128. Л. 30.

⁹¹ Ibid. Л. 31.

⁹² Ibid. Л. 38.

⁹³ Ibid. Л. 39.

⁹⁴ Ibid. Л. 39.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Л. 39.

Andrea Tron, who determined the foreign policy course of the Republic⁹⁶. If Morosini proposed (even before the Russian-Turkish War of 1768–1774) to assist Russia, then Tron sought to maintain good relations with Vienna, which then opposed St. Petersburg. The Senate supported Tron's position, fearing Austrian Monarchy's displeasure, which bordered closely on the Republic. S.R. Vorontsov noted that Morosini, despite the defeat, continued to adhere to a course of Russian-Venetian rapprochement⁹⁷. The count also indicated in one of the dispatches that procurator Morosini supported the "Armed Neutrality" manifesto, noting its importance for maritime peoples⁹⁸. The diplomat drew attention to the fractional nature among the highest patriciate of Venice. The disunity of the Venetian ruling elite on foreign policy questions formed the prerequisite for effective advancement by the Russian Empire of its political interests.

Conclusion

The history of Russia and Venice relations encompassed many centuries. Nevertheless, the establishment of full diplomatic relations with mutual accreditation of permanent representatives occurred only in the 1780s. The formation of systematic contacts was delayed due to the episodic character of political and economic interaction of the states. Problems in Central and Northern Europe did not allow St. Petersburg to concentrate sufficient attention and forces on the southern direction. The assertion of the "St. Petersburg International System" as a result of the successful Russian-Turkish War (1768–1774) allowed Russia to expand the sphere of its interests to the Mediterranean Sea and in particular, the Adriatic. Realization of geopolitical interests in conditions of rivalry with the Ottoman Empire, French and Austrian monarchies necessitated building alliance relations with independent states in the region. Venice's con-

⁹⁶ La Repubblica di Venezia nell'età moderna. Dal 1517 alla fine della Repubblica. P. 585.

⁹⁷ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 128. Л. 39.

⁹⁸ АВПРИ. Ф. Сношения России с Венецией. Оп. 41/3. 1784 г. Д. 127. Л. 47.

sent to exchange embassies was assessed by the Russian court as the basis for a potential military-political alliance. Russia wanted to cooperate with both the elite of the Republic and its Greek population, solving its strategic tasks in confrontation with the Porte. The ruling elite of the Venetian Republic, concerned about the growing influence of the Russian Empire and potential threats from neighboring states, directed efforts toward preserving the existing order and maintaining control over colonial possessions. The Greeks, for their part, sought religious autonomy and political independence.

The Russian Empire nurtured ambitious projects in the early 1780s for creating an alliance with the once-great maritime power — the Venetian Republic. The priority task of imperial authorities was the creation of naval bases in the Adriatic Sea and ensuring their effective functioning for countering Turkish influence. St. Petersburg planned to convince the political elite to restore the Republic to its former grandeur, relying on the military-political power of Russia. The establishment of direct bilateral diplomatic contacts was considered a condition for the successful realization of this project. Part of the Venetian aristocracy supported the prospects of joint interaction and cooperation. The predominant part of senators, though, adhered to a foreign policy strategy that presupposed either forming alliances with the Habsburg Monarchy or France, or strict observance of neutrality principles. The prevalence of these positions among Venetian politicians testified that the foreign policy ambitions of the Russian Empire were scarcely realizable in the existing political realities.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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