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Рецензия / Book review

**Yányshev-Nésterova I. *Canarias en las relaciones hispano-soviéticas, 1965–1991* [*The Canary Islands in the Spanish-Soviet relations, 1965–1991*].
Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Ideas Publishing House, 2019, 472 p.**

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**Яньшев-Нестерова И. Канарские острова
в испано-советских отношениях, 1965–1991.
Санта Крус де Тенерифе: Идеас, 2019, 472 с.**

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Some dozens of books dedicated to the history of the Soviet Foreign policy were already published, as also there are some significant works on the Spanish-Soviet Relations in different periods. However, the reviewed book written by Irina Yányshev Nésterova managed to fill a gap still existing in the historiography of bilateral relations of Spain and the USSR. The author is focusing her attention in, rather, very particular issue – the history of “Sovhispan,” a joint venture which had been created in Canary Islands by Madrid and Moscow years before the official reestablishment of diplomatic relations.

That is not just a history of local episodes and of inter-regional cooperation as one can imagine. The “Canary Islands in the Spanish-Soviet Relations, 1965–1991” is a splendid analysis of economic and geopolitical convergence of two ideologically and politically opposite regimes, the Spain under Francisco Franco and the USSR under Leonid Brezhnev. The author shows to the lecturers quite complicated involvement of the Soviet and Spanish foreign policy into the context of the Cold War. While Moscow was seeking the expansion of its influence and growth of its trade with different nations at the moment of the partial opening of the Soviet economy for market approaches at the détente epoch, Madrid’s reasons for approximation with the USSR were different ones. For Spain it was the time of gradual abandoning of autarchy and political isolation and of the reestablishment of political ties with the world. Madrid was not only interested to restore the relations with the powerful Western bloc and the United States of America, but was also searching better relations with the leader of opposite bloc, the USSR, with a purpose of balance in Spain’s foreign relations. The JV proved to be the best option how to find approximation with Moscow without broadening political contacts too much.

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The USSR, in turn, managed to obtain a perfect base for its fishing fleet at the geo-strategic region in Central-Eastern Atlantic. That was not only about economy, since the US Air Force Military base was located at the Azores Archipelago in Northern Atlantic. Thus, any economic project carried out by one of the competing superpower was converting in a geopolitical game, and Spanish government was aware of this fact. The story of “Sovhispán” was not only the story of Soviet-Spanish bilateral relations, but also of relations within the triangle the USSR – Spain – USA, and of other political, diplomatic and geopolitical configurations of the Cold War.

The reviewed book contains four chapters. One of them starts with the analysis of the USSR politics and economic system followed by the explanations of how the Soviet fishing industry and fishing fleet were functioning. This part is quite important for the lecturers as the Soviet economy still looks as an enigma for many lecturers in the Western countries.

Later, Irina Yanyshv Nesterova continues with a comprehensive study of the Soviet-Spanish relations since the beginning of the process of its normalization in 1968 till the official reestablishment of diplomatic relations in 1977, during the period of Democratic Transition after the death of Spanish caudillo Francisco Franco.

The third chapter is for nothing typical for historical books. This is a micro-economic research of the joint venture “Sovhispán,” including detailed explications of the composition of directing bodies and share capital. Irina Yanyshv Nesterova also makes a thorough study of the study of the process of decision-making in “Sovhispán” since the foundation of the referred JV till the early 1990s when this enterprise ceased to exist due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the collapse of big part of its industrial complex and the change of the previous economy pattern. It is worth to say, that the benefit of formation of the author as Historian and at the same time as Economist let her to combine approaches of different sciences and to create a book attractive for those interested in Diplomatic History and Politics as also in the History of Economics.

Finally, fourth charter is devoted to the impact of Spanish-Soviet cooperation project on the economy of the Canary Islands. This remote Spanish province not only became the place for repairing of many Soviet fishing vessels providing the local population with jobs and income. The Soviet fishermen converted into customers leaving millions of pesetas in local stores decades. Thus, this political and geopolitical issues important for two countries, Spain and the USSR brought obvious economic benefit for the inhabitants of the Canary Islands many of whom were not very interested in politics, but were aware on economic possibilities of the cooperation with other countries.

This is micro- and macro-economic and at the same time historical-economic research. However, that is not just a research of main mechanism of functioning of this JV, the book gives for lecturers a broader perspective of Soviet-Spanish relations and of the USSR and Spain’s relations with other countries involved in the context of the Cold War (the US, and Socialist bloc, first of all).

One of the excellent part of this study is its broad use of primary sources. The author managed to collect a lot of materials in the Moscow State Economic Archive (it contains recently opened for researchers documents of the Soviet Fishing Fleet until 1975) and the National Archive of Catalonia (it holds the documents of Philippines Tobacco Company which was one of the shareholders of “Sovhispán”).

Today’s Canary islands have a lot of tourists, and Russians are one of the most numerous groups among them. The ports and cities already lost or almost lost the material signs of existence of Sovhispán. However, this joint venture is still present in memories of dozens of hundreds of local citizens who worked together with the Soviet fishermen or in areas related to the Soviet fleet and marines.

The book by Irina Yányshev Nesterova shed some more light on the hidden (before recently) history of bilateral relations explaining that the Russian presence in the islands was much more crucial for local economy decades before. But the significance of the researched topic goes far beyond the impact on the Canary's economy. The Canary islands and JV "Sovhispan" located in this region became a place for promotion of the contacts between two governments and the basis for further expansion of diplomatic ties. The reviewed book shows to the lecturer how the very limited (originally) episode of economic cooperation managed to convert into one of the determining factors for development of Spanish-Soviet relations.

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