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Activities of Iran's Consular Services in the Caucasus in 1905–1911: According to Iranian Sources

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Abstract: The authors analyze the activities of Iran's consular services in the Caucasus, their role in Russian-Caucasian diplomatic relations, in particular, in the processes of Iranian labor migrants' adaptation to host societies. The authors aim to expand historical knowledge of Iranians' staying in the Caucasus, to restore a complete picture of the history of migration processes in the region. There are revealed the features of Iranian-Caucasian diplomatic relations in the pre-Soviet period, the situation of migrants and their legal support, the activities of the consulates in preserving the Iranian cultural identity, internal and external problems in Iran's consular services. There have been introduced into scientific use the documents of political and consular missions of Iran in the Caucasus for 1905–1911 stored in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, materials of Iranian periodicals of the period under consideration, as well as the personal files of the vice-consuls stored in the Persian Table Foundation (f. 144) of the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire. They made it possible to determine the significant contribution of consular services to the development of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The conclusion is made about the greatest success of these relations in the Terek region, which is due to the favorable conditions of its developing economy for labor migrants and such subjective factors as the personal qualities of a number of vice-consuls, the level of their interaction with the Russian authorities. The activities of the vice-consuls successfully combined the promotion of the incorporation of migrants into the Russian economy and culture with the creation of conditions for the preservation of Iranian cultural identity.




Keywords: Persia, Russian-Iranian relations, labor migration, administrative and legal support of migrants

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Деятельность консульских служб Ирана на Кавказе в 1905–1911 гг.: по иранским источникам

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Аннотация: Анализируется деятельность консульских служб Ирана на Кавказе, их роль в российско-кавказских дипломатических отношениях, в частности, в процессах адаптации иранских трудовых мигрантов в принимающих обществах. Авторы ставят своей целью расширение исторических знаний о пребывании на территории Кавказа иранцев, восстановление полной картины истории миграционных процессов в регионе. Выявлены особенности ирано-кавказских дипломатических отношений в досоветский период, положение мигрантов и их правовое сопровождение, деятельность консульств в сохранении иранской культурной идентичности, внутренние и внешние проблемы в иранских консульских службах. В научный оборот введены документы политических и консульских миссий Ирана на Кавказе за 1905–1911 гг., отложенные в Архиве Министерства иностранных дел Исламской Республики Иран, материалы иранской периодики рассматриваемого времени в совокупности с личными делами вице-консулов, хранящимися в фонде «Персидский стол» (Ф. 144) Архива внешней политики Российской империи. Они позволили определить весомый вклад консульских служб в развитие дипломатических отношений двух стран. Сделан вывод о наибольшей успешности этих отношений в Терской области, что связано с благоприятными условиями ее развивающейся экономики для трудовых мигрантов и такими субъективными факторами, как личные качества ряда вице-консулов, уровень их взаимодействия с российскими властями. Деятельность вице-консулов удачно сочетала содействие инкорпорации мигрантов в российскую экономику и культуру с созданием условий для сохранения иранской культурной идентичности.

Ключевые слова: Персия, российско-иранские отношения, трудовая миграция, административно-правовое сопровождение мигрантов

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Introduction

From the moment oil was discovered on the Absheron Peninsula and in the port of Baku in 1871, there began the economy growth. Various industries that emerged in the Caucasus (including the development of copper mines, the production of cement, the construction of roads and development of the railway network) needed labor in the region. It should be noted that the local traditions of agriculture and land ownership did not prompt peasants to work at the opening factories and enterprises of the towns

of the Caucasus. At the end of the 19th century due to the turbulent internal situation, the population of Iran suffered from unemployment, hunger, poverty and disease, which caused a powerful flow of Iranian labor migrants in search of work to the Caucasus.

In a short period of time, a significant part of Iranian migrants were employed as workers in the oil industry and other sectors of the economy; some were engaged in seasonal farming. At the same time, skilled workers and process engineers were citizens of other nationalities, such as Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians.

However, over time the increase in the number of migrants led to oversaturation of the labor market, deterioration of the living conditions and the moving of Iranians to the North Caucasus, Terek and Dagestan regions, the active economic development of which required new labor resources – workers, merchants, artisans.

The complex processes of adaptation to the household and cultural environment that the migrants faced were exacerbated by their lack of knowledge of the Russian language and Russian laws. Many of them arrived illegally; they did not have passports and residence permits; therefore they were outside the legal environment of the country. It was the Iranian consulates that were supposed to provide administrative and legal support for the settlers, but due to the growth of migration, they did not cope well with their tasks. Therefore, there arose the issue of opening vice-consulates which made a significant contribution to streamlining the lives of migrants and to the development of Russian-Iranian relations in general.

The history of Iranian migrants in the Caucasus did not attract researchers' attention for a long time. In recent years, due to the establishment of Russian-Iranian scientific contacts, studies on many aspects of Iranians' life in the Caucasus have been carried out. In particular, there have been described in detail the history, causes and routes of labor migration, the processes of economic adaptation of Iranians to the urban environment of Vladikavkaz and the towns of Dagestan.¹ There have been revealed socio-political ties in the 19th – early 20th centuries and kinship relations of Iranians with the peoples of the North Caucasus.² A number of publications have dealt with the history of vice-consulates, the system of appointing consuls and its reforming, activities to provide migrants with the necessary documentation³; the names of unknown vice-consuls have been identified, their role in the organization of religious and educational fields in the sphere of their influence has been determined.⁴ The research results are also reflected in a number of generalizing works.⁵

¹ Z.V. Kanukova, Z.T. Plieva, and B.V. Tuaeva, "Persidskoe naselenie Terskoi oblasti vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XX vekov," *Nauchnyi dialog*, no. 11 (2021): 379–394; S.I. Musaeva, "Primorskii Dagestan v istorii kul'turno-ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva Rossii i Irana," *Izvestiya SOIGSI*, no. 34 (2019): 73–83. <https://doi.org/10.23671/YJZ12019.73.43107>

² I.B.T. Marzoev, "Osetino-persidskie social'no-politicheskie sviazi i rodstvennye otnosheniia v XIX – nachale XX vv.," *Kavkaz-Forum*, no. 2 (2020): 74–82.

³ Z.T. Plieva, Z.V. Kanukova, and B.V. Tuaeva, "Persidskie vice-konsuly na Severnom Kavkaze (1894–1920)," *Kavkaz-Forum*, 10 (2022): 84–95.

⁴ D.V. Khapsaeva, "Persidskaia diaspora Vladikavkaza (po materialam periodicheskoi pechati vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX veka)," in *Ot Firdousi do Pushkina: russkii iazyk kak sredstvo mezhdunarodnoi*

However, the advantages of international Russian-Iranian cooperation opened up new opportunities in involving Iranian archival materials, among which important documents on the history of migrants and the activities of consulates in the Caucasus were found.

An important source for studying the socio-political situation related to the migration of Iranian citizens to the Caucasus and the problems of their life order, legal and cultural adaptation in the region are the documents of Iran's political and consular missions in the Caucasus for 1905–1911. The identified sources contain information about the living conditions of Iranian settlers in the Caucasus, their number, working and living conditions, the consequences of the conclusion of the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, the actions of the Iranian authorities to protect the rights of Persian subjects in this region and the role of Iranian consular services in preserving the heritage and values of the Iranian-Islamic culture.

The purpose of the article is to expand historical knowledge about the stay of Iranians in the Caucasus by introducing into scientific use a set of Iranian documents, which, along with Russian sources, contribute to the restoration of a complete picture of the history of migration processes in the Caucasus.

Iranian-Caucasian diplomatic relations in the pre-Soviet period

The relations between Tehran and Petrograd were fully controlled by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the one hand, the ministry was entrusted with the function of coordinating the activities of the Russian embassy in Tehran; on the other hand, there was constant communication with the Iranian embassy.⁶

The increase in the number of Iranian citizens in Russia certainly raised the issue of their consular support. The need to maintain contact and resolve issues related to the stay of numerous Iranian citizens living in the Caucasus prompted the Iranian government to expand the embassy in the capital of the Russian Empire. To create representative offices and consulates in the Caucasus, the Iranian Consulate General in Tiflis was involved as a general coordinator.

The Consulate General worked together with the Iranian Embassy in Petrograd and consulates in Russia, as well as vice consulates in other cities and regions of the Caucasus: Baku, Ganja, Vladikavkaz, Astrakhan (Astara Khan), Yerevan and Batum.

At first, Iranian migrants were under the care of the Persian consul in Astrakhan,⁷ where Iranians settled back in the 17th century and opened a vice-consulate in the 1870s. In the period from 1886 to 1890 the care of the migrants passed to the Consulate General

kommunikatsii. Sbornik materialov Rossiisko-iranskoj nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii (Vladikavkaz: SOGU Publ., 2021), 107–112.

⁵ *Etnograficheskij atlas respubliki Severnaya Osetiya-Alaniya* (Vladikavkaz: Severo-Osetinskiy institut gumanitarnykh i sotsial'nykh issledovaniy im. V.I. Abayeva Vladikavkazskogo nauchnogo tsentra RAN i Pravitel'stva RSO-A, 2020).

⁶ Kaveh Bayat, *Toofan bar faraz-e Qafqāz* [Storm over the Caucasus] (Tehran: Center for Diplomatic History and Documents Publ., 1380).

⁷ E.M. Dalgat, "Iransy v gorodakh Dagestanskoi oblasti vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XX v." *Izvestiya SOIGSI*, no. 34 (2019): 54–62 <https://doi.org/10.23671/UJH.2019.73.42914>

of His Majesty the Shah of Persia in Tiflis.⁸ In the Terek region, Persian subjects were patronized on behalf of the Caucasian viceroyalty by its leadership which assisted the settlers in obtaining national passports and tickets for free stay in the region and in acquiring citizenship.

Due to a substantial increase in the Iranian population, it was decided to create a vice-consulate of His Imperial Majesty the Shah of Persia of the Terek and Dagestan regions with a seat in Vladikavkaz. In 1894, the Governing Senate, in agreement with the Persian Consul General, appointed Khalil Khan as the first Persian Vice-Consul; Iranians living in Vladikavkaz, Petrovsk and in the Dagestan region came under his control.

Prince G.S. Golitsyn, the Head of the Caucasus, decided to change the system for appointing consuls, vice-consuls and their agents, unifying these rules with those that were in force in relation to all other countries and provided for coordination with the government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 1897, by the Decree of His Imperial Majesty, the Governing Senate appointed Yahya-Bey as the Persian Vice-Consul in Vladikavkaz and Petrovsk with the expansion of his placement to the entire Dagestan region; he was famous for his activity in protecting the Shiite mosque of Vladikavkaz.⁹

In 1901, Davud-Khan, the most famous and authoritative vice-consul, was approved as vice-consul; he succeeded in founding in Vladikavkaz of the Russian-Persian new-method school “Navruz,”¹⁰ “Khimmat,” the Society for the Benefit of Poor Persian Subjects in Vladikavkaz and the Terek region, the female gymnasium in Temir-Khan-Shura, the Persian house in Vladikavkaz. The vice-consul built good relationships with the authorities of the Terek region, town administrations, the Islamic clergy of the region, the heads of national and religious communities. Every year, he hosted ceremonial receptions on the days of Persian national holidays, to which many of his friends were invited. Davud-Khan held his position longer than all the vice-consuls; he put roots down in Vladikavkaz by marrying a representative of the noble Ossetian family of the Tuganovs. Under Davud Khan, the Iranian community in the North Caucasus was significantly strengthened organizationally and materially; it created institutions that supported the preservation and strengthening of ethnicity; and at the same time it merged into the local socio-cultural environment.

However, after he left office, a period of personnel reshuffle began. In 1908, as the temporary managing vice-consul there was appointed Mirza Isaac Khan, in 1909 – Mirza-Mohammed Riza Khan, a few months later - Mirza Ghaffar, in 1910 – Mirza Ibrahim Khan, then Sadiq Khan, in 1911 – Mirza Ali Ekber Shahsuvarov, then Mirza Ibrahim-Khan; in 1912 there returned Mirza Ghaffar Khan.¹¹ The available documents con-

⁸ L.A. Dadaeva, “Persidsko-poddannoe naselenie v Dagestane vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XX vekov: sotsial’no-ekonomicheskii aspekt,” *Izvestiia Dagestanskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta. Obshchestvennye i gumanitarnye nauki*, no. 4 (2014): 13–16.

⁹ Z.T. Plieva, Z.V. Kanukova, and B.V. Tuaeua, “Persidskie vice-konsuly,” 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹¹ Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii (henceforth – AVPRI), f. 144, op. 488, d. 3362–3368.

tain no information about any merits of these persons, but the frequent reshuffle suggests that there were problems in the Consulate General and even in the Iranian government.

The scale of the activities of the Iranian missions depended on the number of Iranian citizens in one or another part of the Caucasus, as well as on the type and scope of business relations and the specialization of the region.

The Government reports and telegrams exchanged between the officials of the consulates and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were of an official nature, but among them there are narrative documents that allow us to analyze various incidents and events related to Persian subjects in the Caucasus.

Iranian researchers note a very frequent reshuffle of diplomatic officials in the Caucasus. At the same time, each subsequent consul or vice-consul often criticized the activities of his predecessor and pointed out that in comparison with the latter his work was better and more professional.

The statistics of issuing identity cards to Iranians who went to the Caucasus at the end of the 19th century show a significant increase in the number of migrants. The fact that there were several consulates and representative offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Persia in the region testifies to a large number of Iranians who worked permanently or seasonally in the Caucasus in various fields and regions. However, it is impossible to calculate how many Iranians migrated to the Russian Caucasus, because the number of illegal ones was several times higher than the number of registered Persian migrants. The information on the number of official migrants varies. Thus, the Russian consul in Urmia indicated the figure of 15,615 people in 1891, 22,861 people – in 1897 and 59,121 people – in 1900 from the consulate of Russia alone. This consulate in Urmia issued visas to enter Russia for 22,861 people in 1904.¹²

In the correspondence of the Iranian consulates in the North Caucasus, the issue of transit and problems with the legalization of the stay of Persian subjects in Russia was one of the most discussed.

The reason for the creation of the Iranian Consulate General in Tiflis was not only the increase in the number of migrants, but also the fact that it was there that the residence of the Caucasian governor in the Caucasus was located. Obviously, the political significance of the Iranian Consulate General in Tiflis was multifaceted, given the geopolitical location and the exchange of political information carried out through the Caucasian diplomatic offices.¹³ For example, Saed Al Zareh was entrusted with the task of declaring Iran's political line directly in Tiflis.¹⁴ The mediating role of the Iranian consulates in relations between Tehran and St. Petersburg in coordinating some cooperation

¹² Abbas Rezapour, "Asnādi ax vaz'iyat-e irāniyān dar Qafqāz va a mallard-e namāyandegihā-ye Irān tey-ye sālḥā-ye 1323-1329 ghamari [Documents on the situation of Iranians in the Caucasus and the functioning of Iranian embassies during the lunar years 1329–1323]," *Faslnāme-ye tārikh-e ravābet-e khāreji – Yearbook of Foreign Relations*, no. 54 (2012): 75–99).

¹³ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Tehran (henceforth – AMFA), b. 5, d. 4. 1910; b. 5, d. 33. 1910.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, b. 12, d. 5. 1911

projects was considered very important. Among them was the construction of the Caucasian pass road with the final destination in one of the cities of Iran; there are also mentioned instances such as the purchase of ammunition.¹⁵

Iranian sources on the situation of migrants and their legal support

There were many problems inherent in the mass migration of the population when Persian citizens crossed the border and were distributed in the Caucasus region. The newspaper “Habal al-Mateen” testifies to the hardships of migrants. It notes in particular:

This year, in late autumn, more than 500 poor families of Hamadan, Azerbaijan and other regions of Iran, intending to move to Russia, took refuge from the severity of the cold and lack of money in shelters and mosques. 30 of them die every day due to severe hunger and nakedness¹⁶.

On reaching the Caucasus, the settlers often found themselves in unacceptable living conditions. The professional specialization in such a situation did not matter – migrants were forced to accept the most menial and hard work, which the locals refused.

Iranian researchers point out that one of the reasons for the situation on the labor market for Iranian workers was the upbringing of Iranians in an internal authoritarian environment that did not allow them to assert their rights. Therefore, they did not participate in protests against long hours and low wages; for this reason employers hired them eagerly. Worker Kasimov described the difficult conditions of migrants’ existence as follows:

People had to live in groups of 40 and 50 people in a modest house without bathrooms. There was always a risk of infectious diseases, and the food was very poor, often leftovers. We were beaten with sticks; we could not complain to anyone. The police were always on the side of employers.¹⁷

The wages of foreigners were significantly lower than those of other workers. For example, porters received from 50 to 60 kopecks per day for 13 hours of hard work, that is from 15 to 20 rubles per month. Coalminers were paid from 20 to 25 manats for about 9 hours of work. Miners enjoyed such benefits as free housing and water, and some other privileges, whereas for the porters, mostly Iranians, all this was inaccessible.¹⁸

Iranian migrants contributed to the economic prosperity of the Caucasus with their hard work, but they often faced humiliation of the local population. Jafar Pishvari who immigrated to Baku with his family as a child noted that

Caucasians and the local population considered Iranian citizens contemptible <...> They humiliated Iranians and did not let them into restaurants and places of public entertainment¹⁹.

The increase in the number of migrants in the Caucasus put the issue of protecting the rights of Iranians and their consular support on the current agenda. The reports that were sent from the Caucasian consulates to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that

¹⁵ AMFA, b. 12, d. 5. 1911.

¹⁶ *Jabal-al-Matin*, February 7, 1907 (from the 24th month of Zihaj 1324 AH).

¹⁷ Abbas Rezapour, “Asnādi ax vaz’iyat-e irāniyān,” 83.

¹⁸ “Zeynol’ābedin Marāghei,” in *Siāhatnāme-ye Ebrāhim Beyk* (Tehran: Asfar Publ., 1986), 18.

¹⁹ “Ja’far Pishhourī,” in *Tārikhche-ye hezb-e edālat* (Tehran: Elm Publ., 1981), 16.

most Iranians living there were ordinary workers who often unintentionally violated the Russian legislation, not knowing the language and local laws. This made them vulnerable to the police and created a lot of problems for the consulates that had to spend time dealing with issues such as unauthorized border crossings, lack of a legitimate contract with local employers, labor insurance, and job insecurity. Even if they had required documents, the judicial investigation was expensive and took months, and the outcome of a case was often unsuccessful.²⁰

Over time, Iranians realized that it was better to assert their rights using the privileges that Russian entrepreneurs had, so a large number of people appeared who wanted to acquire Russian citizenship, to add the suffix “ov” to the surname, and convert to Orthodoxy.²¹

To consider complaints between Iranians and Russians, an administrative organization known as the Foreign Court operated under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which considered claims taking into account the provisions of the Treaty of Turkmenchay,²² issues of discrimination and conviction of Iranian subjects, especially abroad. Materials on these issues were prepared by the consulates and consular departments, including those in the North Caucasus.

The Persian consulates urged that the Iranian government should act within the framework of peaceful and friendly relations, maintain regular communication with Russian officials, organize receptions and give gifts, as these steps facilitated the process of consular office work.²³

Taking into account the emerging problems and the need to resolve them, Saedu Al Zari, the Iranian Consul in Baku sent an appeal to the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the following content:

In the Caucasus, one hundred thousand Iranian citizens, of which 90 thousand are workers and merchants, due to ignorance of the correct laws or corruption among some Iranian officials, get trapped. They are caught and imprisoned here. It is necessary to appoint a proper official lawyer who, if necessary, would go to the courts and to the homes of Persian subjects. According to the local legislation, he would have to protect the rights of the citizens, and the consulate also needs its own doctor.²⁴

Role of Iranian Consulates in preserving Iranian cultural identity

A topical issue in the processes of Iranians' adaptation in Russia was the preservation of their Iranian and Islamic identity in the context of the processes of integration and assimilation of migrants, as well as the policy of spreading pan-Turkism of the Ottoman government. The task of creating conditions for the preservation of cultural values, morals, national customs and religion in the Caucasus was entrusted to official Iranian representatives in the region and in Russia as a whole.

²⁰ AMFA, b. 12, d. 5. 1911.

²¹ Abbas Rezapour, “Asnādi ax vaz’iyat-e irāniyān,” 89.

²² “Turkmanchayskiy mirnyy dogovor mezhdru Rossiyei i Iranom,” *Istoricheskii fakul'tet MGU im. M. Lomonosova*, August 15, 2022, <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/FOREIGN/turkman.htm>

²³ AMFA, b. 12, d. 5. 1911.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, b. 120, d. 12. 1910.

During the period of active migration of the Persian population at the turn of the 20th century, employees and heads of the Iranian consulates made efforts for political and spiritual support, for preserving Iranians' cultural, linguistic, religious and historical ties with their homeland.

In the towns there were established Persian schools which were entrusted with the task of teaching and preserving the Persian language; there were organized trade missions as well as charitable societies to support students, to take care of orphans and poor Iranian citizens; efforts were made to publish newspapers in Persian. Such events were typical of all diaspora groups, but Iranians believed that this was an integral part of the Iranian government activities in order to prevent propaganda against it.²⁵

The correspondence of representatives of the Persian consulates in the Caucasus also contained gratitude, in particular, gratitude from the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the efforts to create charitable organizations to take care of poor Iranian patients, for reimbursement of expenses for burials. The documents also contain calls on Iranian entrepreneurs to participate in charity by fund raising.²⁶

In some cases the activities of Iranian consulates in the Caucasus effectively helped prevent ethnic and religious confrontations and reduce tension in the region. For such merits, there were sometimes requested awards and distinctions for Iranian subjects²⁷. The procedure for awarding Iranians was quite long, since it required a reference from the place of residence in Iran. In the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire, there is a case of awarding the Order of St. Stanislav of the third degree to Ali Bek Irzabekov, a Persian citizen, director of the Grozny branch of the regional committee of the guardianship society for prisons.²⁸

In some cases the Iranian consulates participated in the consideration of issues related not to the Persians, but, for example, to Caucasian Muslims – Azerbaijanis; these were issues related primarily to refugees.

Citizens of European countries such as Sweden, Norway and Denmark did not have representative offices in the Caucasus, despite the presence of consulates general of Germany, the Ottoman Empire, Austria and France. The serious constructive actions of Iranian officials to protect the rights of their subjects in the Caucasus prompted the citizens of the above-mentioned European countries to prefer to be supervised by Iranian officials.²⁹

Internal and external problems in the activities of the Iranian consular services

In addition to the sincere efforts of the majority of the offices of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to solve the problems of Iranians in the Caucasus, one cannot but pay attention to other factors – external and internal which caused the loss of confidence of Iranian citizens in the consulates.

²⁵ Abbas Rezapour, "Asnādi ax vaz'iyat-e irāniyān," 77.

²⁶ AMFA, b. 6, d. 3. 1911.

²⁷ AVPRI, f. 144, op. 488, d. 1162, l. 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ AMFA, b. 55, d. 4. 1911.

The external factors include: chaos caused by the weakness of the central government, indifference of the Iranian government to the problems of people abroad, unfriendly actions of Russian and foreign officials against Iranians. Another problem was the need to cover the costs of unexpected events such as natural disasters, riots and revolutions, which was not unusual in the Caucasus region and was a heavy financial burden for the Iranian consular services.

The internal factors include the insufficient budget of the missions and untimely distribution of rights and responsibilities among staff.

The reports of consular offices signaled various abuses (in particular, the appropriation of the property of Iranian citizens who died in a foreign land).

The documents of the Iranian consular services in the Caucasus contain correspondence on raising funds to compensate for additional expenses caused by unforeseen events in the region. Settlements on accounts and solution of financial difficulties (personal or administrative locally) in Tehran were carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on receipts, and in case of a shortage of money, they asked Iranian merchants and moneylenders and some local residents for help.

Effective were also loans from financiers in case salary of consular employees was not transferred from the capital on time, which gradually formed a special relationship between consular employees with merchants and moneylenders and the expectation from the latter to provide some services. Such actions testified to the independence of decision-making by officials; they also contributed to the spread of administrative and even political corruption. The correspondence also contains evidence that Iranian entrepreneurs expressed their dissatisfaction with such facts.

After the publication of a large number of articles in Iranian newspapers such as “Soraya,” “Khabalul Matin,” “Akhtar,” the Persian diplomats were forced to pay attention to the rights of their compatriots in the Caucasus.

In addition, officials received many letters and complaints, both personal and group ones. To solve issues and inspect the consulates, there were involved Belgian advisers in the Iranian government that appeared after Belgian Naous was appointed as head of the customs department in 1898.

During inspections by Belgian officials, it was confirmed that financial and administrative corruption was an integral part of the work of consulates in the Caucasus.

Addressing the Honorary Consul General of the Government of Iran in Tiflis, the Yerevan Consul wrote after such an inspection:

Over the past three years, when our state administration was turned on its head and the authoritarian rule was replaced by a constitutional system, the Persian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was supposed to have appropriate officials in its ranks to organize work in the new conditions. A diplomatic mission was formed and sent to the Caucasus. The diplomats immediately set to work, expecting that their service and efforts would be appreciated <...> But the diplomats were pressed so hard, that they tried to commit suicide. And I am one of those people who recently tried it several times, because the fifteen year-long service and all the earned property went down the drain. The government should be aware of such inappropriate actions. Yours faithfully.³⁰

³⁰ Abbas Rezapour, “Asnādi ax vaz’iyat-e irāniyān,” 84.

The study of the correspondence of consulates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows that personal abuses of state and administrative position, especially in the case of issuing national passports, were so widespread that their “breakthrough” from the closed space of consular office work into reports on the pages of periodicals was quite expected. There are also reports of corruption schemes and disorganization in various travel notes.

Javad Sad od-Dole, who twice held the posts of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister, turned to the heads of consular services in the Caucasus with an appeal to be extremely careful in issuing identity cards to Kurds and Russian citizens in the Caucasian missions; he also demanded accuracy in calculating the amounts of paid duties and expenses at the Caucasian consulates and accepting no report without careful verification.³¹

It is clear that in the context of the changing status quo and the conduct of business after the constitutional revolution in Iran in 1907–1911, it was impossible to put things in order in matters related to migrants by issuing several directives and instructions in a short period of time.

Conclusions

The Iranian consular services in Russia made a significant contribution to the development of diplomatic relations between the two countries; they achieved the most considerable success in the Terek region in the administrative and legal support of migrants. Showing concern for the employment of their citizens, they contributed to the development of local industry, trade and handicraft production, integration of their subjects into the economy and culture of the Russian Empire. On the other hand, they created conditions for the preservation of Iranian cultural identity.

The analysis of Iranian sources makes it possible to concretize the ideas of the activities of the consular services in the Caucasus that have developed in Russian historiography. In particular, it was revealed that Iranian migrants, fleeing the economic crisis and internal political chaos in their homeland, for the most part, arrived in the region illegally. They had many legal and organizational obstacles, from mentality to ignorance of local legislation and the Russian language, lack of insurance and valid labor contracts with local employers, ignorance of their rights in the host country. These problems concerned, above all, the consular services. However, during the period under review, the difficult political situation in Iran did not allow the country's government to pay due attention to the work of consulates and vice-consulates, the success of which was determined by the level of interaction with the Russian authorities, personal qualities of the consuls, and other subjective circumstances.

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³¹ Abbas Rezapour, “Asnādi ax vaz’iyat-e irāniyān,” 84.

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