**SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"**

**FACULTY OF HISTORY**

**Department of History of Bulgaria**

**Angel Mitkov Orbetsov**

Part-time PhD student in Contemporary Bulgarian History

Specialty code: 05.03.06

**ABSTRACT**

at

Dissertation on:

**BULGARIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS FROM THE LIBERATION**

**TO THE END OF THE 1950S**

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Valeri Kolev

Sofia, October 2021

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**I. General Characteristics of the Dissertation**

Bulgaria and Iran are two of the most ancient countries on their continents and are centres of cultures with influence beyond their borders. Their peoples have enjoyed centuries-old cultural and economic ties, facilitated by geographical proximity, going back to antiquity and vibrant throughout the ages. Things look differently, however, when it comes to inter-state relations. History has so decided that whenever one of the two states flourished in ancient and medieval times, the other was still absent from the political map or under foreign rule. A brief exception from that matrix occurred in the 9th-10th centuries, when the First Bulgarian Kingdom experienced its Golden Age while the Iranian lands witnessed the revival of their statehood from the embrace of the Abbasid Caliphate. The reign of the mighty Safavid dynasty in Iran spanned the late Middle Ages, but in the 19th century under the Qajars, Iran lost its former splendour under the onslaught of European powers, even though without formally losing independence. During this period, the Bulgarian lands were suffering from the oppression of the five-century Ottoman rule and the Bulgarian yearning for independence was crowned with success in the late 19th – early 20th centuries, when prerequisites for the development of inter-state relations with Iran were also created.

Iran was the first Asian country outside the Ottoman Empire to establish diplomatic relations with the Principality of Bulgaria, back in 1897, ranking just behind the Great Powers and neighbouring countries. Further, relations passed through various stages, including Iranian diplomatic presence in Bulgaria with intermittent accreditations from neighbouring countries and the functioning, albeit briefly, of the first Bulgarian legation in Tehran. Relations between the two countries were severed during the Second World War and their mutual representations were entrusted to third-country missions that took care of their subjects. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations some 20 years later marked the beginning of turbulent development that outlasted the dramatic events in both countries – the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the democratic changes in Bulgaria in 1989-90 and the reorientation of its foreign policy, and the unfolding of the Iranian nuclear issue since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The history of our bilateral relations with Iran has never been the subject of a dedicated academic study. Brief, chronologically arranged information is contained in Bulgarian scholar Maria Mateeva's monographs on the country's diplomatic and consular relations in historical perspective, which contain sections on Iran and present a schematic view of Bulgarian-Iranian diplomatic and consular relations. Due to the reference and limited nature of these studies, they cannot be expected either to dwell upon bilateral relations in all their aspects – political, economic, cultural, people-to-people contacts, or to address some problematic points that need to be illuminated by searching and comparing available sources. Making sense of the overall development of bilateral relations and formulating assessments and conclusions requires a systematic approach involving materials of different nature, analysing them and placing them in the context of political processes in the two countries during any particular period.

On the occasion of the two latest round anniversaries of diplomatic relations (115 and 120 years), a number of events – conferences, seminars and exhibitions – were organized in Sofia and Tehran by the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs and their diplomatic institutes, as well as by Bulgarian and Iranian academic units, and the materials were published in several collections. Along with the documents exhibited and presentations made, among them reports by the author of these lines[[1]](#footnote-1), what made an impression in the course of those events was the strong interest shown by both sides in the past of their relations and its use to strengthen the Bulgarian-Iranian friendship regardless of the international conjuncture. As a result of consultations with Iranian counterparts, a bilateral study was launched in the summer of 2021, based on my project, to shed more light on the initial 25-year period of bilateral relations after Bulgaria’s Liberation, including contacts between monarchical institutions, mutual high-level visits, Iranian consular presence and the opening of the first Iranian diplomatic mission in Bulgaria. The main task of the study is to verify the relevance of the date 15 November 1897, which so far has been perceived as marking the beginning of diplomatic relations.

The original idea in writing the present work was to cover the whole period from the Liberation up to date. However, in the process of work in the Central State Archives, a considerable number of archival materials were found and processed, which makes it possible to saturate the very first stages in the development of bilateral relations with sufficient detail and to make the appropriate analyses and draw conclusions. That is why it was agreed upon, in communication with the scientific supervisor and the management of the PhD programme *"History of Bulgaria" – Contemporary Bulgarian History*, to divide the study into two parts according to the chronological principle, the first of which would be submitted for defence and the second would be developed later. The chronological framework of the first part presented here covers the period up to the end of the 1950s. The distinction between the two periods is justified by the re-establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations in 1961, which saw a qualitatively new stage in their development. It was characterised by the establishment and continued maintenance of diplomatic presence in the two capitals and the systematic development of bilateral relations in all areas, with Iran occupying a prominent, sometimes first, place among our country's partners in the Third World.

The present work is divided into *eight chapters*, structured on a combination of chronological and thematic principles. Accordingly, each chapter consists of a number of thematic paragraphs, the aim being to go beyond diplomatic contacts and cover all aspects of bilateral relations. The *First Chapter* covers the period up to the beginning of the twentieth century and describes the contacts between the missions of the two countries in Constantinople, the Iranian consular presence in Bulgaria, the establishment of diplomatic relations and the activities of the first Iranian legation in Sofia, as well as a significant event in bilateral relations – the transit visit of Iranian monarch Mozaffar ed-Din Shah to our country. In the second period, until the outbreak of the Second World War, Iran remained the more active party in maintaining bilateral ties, having diplomatic and consular presence in Bulgaria despite the difficulties caused by the wars of 1912-1918, as discussed in *Chapter Two*. Bulgarian diplomacy during this period showed growing interest in and knowledge on Iran-related topics, and its outreach activities are therefore addressed in a separate *Chapter Three*. The following *Chapter Four* enriches the knowledge of the same period with information on trade, scientific, cultural and people-to-people contacts. A special *Fifth Chapter* is devoted to the first Bulgarian legation in Tehran and its activity in the political sphere and especially among the Bulgarian emigrant community in Iran, which was formed in the mid-1930s. For greater clarity, the economic aspects of the Legation's work are included in Chapter Four. The breakdown of diplomatic relations in 1941 led both countries to turn for protection of the interests of their subjects to the Swedish legations in Tehran and Sofia, whose activities during the Second World War and the first post-war years are presented in *Chapter Six*. The last two chapters enter the Cold War period, and the division between them is thematic. *Chapter Seven* examines the political sphere in the context of broken diplomatic relations – attempts to re-establish them, the protection of the interests of both countries by third legations, contacts along youth and party lines, and the coverage of the Iranian issue by Bulgarian diplomacy. *Chapter Eight* deals with contacts in other areas – economy, culture, sports, social affairs, with a major focus on the production of Persian carpets in Bulgaria as one of the products of cultural and economic interaction between the two nations.

The eight chapters mentioned above, which for the most part describe and analyse previously unexplored events and phenomena, are preceded by *two introductory sections*. *The first* of these provides an overview of Iranian history from antiquity to the mid-twentieth century, introducing and explaining a number of concepts such as the terms *Iran/Iranian* and *Persia/Persian*. This historical overview, based on the research of world-renowned scholars, is designed to facilitate insight into Iranian topics that remain relatively little known in Bulgarian scholarly circles. In the *second introductory section*, an attempt is made to sort out the layers of cultural and historical contacts between the two peoples over the centuries, using mainly studies by Bulgarian authors in a number of fields. The aim is to show that bilateral relations, which in the period under consideration acquired an inter-state character, were a natural continuation of a steady process rather than "stepping on bare feet".

Archival materials – more than 350 archival units collected at the Central State Archives – have played a major role in composing this work, providing an opportunity to compile an overview of the development of bilateral relations and to translate their history into a narrative that attempts to achieve coherence. Collections on foreign policy and statistics on Bulgaria's foreign trade, decrees of the Council of Ministers published in the State Gazette, etc. were also used as auxiliary documentary sources. Of course, there are still a number of gaps, some of which have been filled by some 70 documents from the Iranian archives, which became available to the author thanks to the above-mentioned bilateral exhibitions and collections. Deciphering them constituted part of the research work, which posed a considerable challenge given the heavy style and complex handwritten Persian script of many of them. Some of the most important documents from the Bulgarian and Iranian archives are included in the Annexes, while those in Persian are accompanied by the author's translations. Due to the COVID crisis, the author's agreed mission to Tehran to study the Iranian archives did not take place, which prevented a possible refinement of some details. The joint project launched with the Iranian side could shed light on some of the unresolved points of the early period of bilateral relations.

The exposition of the collected documentary array represents the first element of the methodology used in this paper. Next is the placement of the studied phenomena, events and personalities in the context of the political processes in the two countries and the international setting, for which relevant scholarly literature is drawn upon. With regard to Bulgaria, one can mention Volume IV of “The History of the Bulgarians” series edited by Emil Alexandrov, the monographs by Elena Statelova, Radoslav Popov and Vasilka Tankova and by Aleka Strezova on the history of Bulgarian diplomacy until the beginning and the end of the First World War respectively, by Marko Dimitrov on Bulgarian economy between the two world wars, by Emanuil Emanuilov on Bulgaria's place in the politics of the Great Powers in 1939-1947, by Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova on the Bulgarian transitions in 1939-2010 and the post-war decade of Bulgarian foreign policy, etc. As to Iran, works by Iranian, Western and Soviet authors came into use, such as the two monographs by Abdor-Reza Hushang-Mahdavi, Volume VII of the Cambridge History of Iran and the collection “Twentieth Century Iran” featuring studies by Gavin Hambly, Rose Greaves, Amin Saykal and a number of other scholars, the monograph “History of Iran” by M. S. Ivanov, books by S. М. Aliyev, S. L. Agayev, etc. Diverse sources on Iranian history make it possible to follow events and processes from different, often opposing points of view and contribute to greater objectivity of assessments. Based on the documents analysed and placed in their respective historical context, findings and outcomes are drawn in each chapter and summarized in the Conclusion. This is the third element of the methodology used, the aim being to move from gathering empirical material to drawing conclusions, rather than to set out ready-made findings and seek evidence for them.

Among the works used in the historical survey on the ancient period are the monographs of Walter Hinz on the history of Elam, of I. М. Dyakonov on the history of Media, of Matt Waters on the history of the Achaemenid Empire, enriched with the classical works of Herodotus and Thucydides and studies on the history of the ancient East. Studies of great value on the Sassanid dynasty, the Arab invasion into Iran, and the revival of Iranian statehood, are the monographs by Richard Frye and Edward Brown, while medieval history has been explored extensively in the study of Pigulevskaya, Yakubovsky, Petrushevsky, Stroyeva, and Belenitsky, with a significant focus on economic development, and in Donald Wilber's monograph. From the Safavid period onwards, an indispensable source are the aforementioned works of Iranian author Hushang-Mahdavi on Iranian foreign policy and international relations. Studies by Peter Avery and John Perry have come into use in the description of the reign of Nader Shah and the Zand dynasty, while the narrative on the Qajar period and the Pahlavi dynasty has been compiled on the basis of monographs by M. S. Ivanov, D. А. Anarkulova, Ervand Abrahamyan and Sepehr Zabih, memoirs by Jeanne Dieulafoix, articles by Nikki Keddie and Mehrdad Amanat, Wilfrid Knapp, Ronald Ferrier, Malcolm Yapp, etc. References on Zoroastrianism include monographs by Farhang Mehr and Jalal ed-Din Ashtiani, on Islam – studies by Yordan Peev, Henri Corbin, S. А. Merkulov, etc. On the culture and art of Iran from antiquity to the most recent times, the comprehensive study of Habibollah Ayatollahi, recently translated into Bulgarian, and on the development of Iranian languages, in particular Persian – the three-volume work of Parviz Natel Khanlari have been mostly used. Sources on the history of the Arab Caliphate and Islamic nations, the Ottoman Empire, India, Afghanistan, Mongolia, China and Thailand have also been drawn upon.

The section on the development of Bulgarian-Iranian relations over the centuries is based mainly on the works of famous Bulgarian scholars, including Alexander Fol, Dimitar Angelov, Ivan Duichev, Vladimir Georgiev and others. A prominent place among the literature used in this section, as well as in Chapters Four and Eight, where cultural relations are also discussed, is occupied by the specialized studies of our Iranology and Orientalist scholars Ivo Panov, Stoyanka Kenderova, Jemshid Sayyar, etc. in the fields of literature, language, and medieval manuscripts. In recent years, the Iranian connection in Bulgarian history and culture has been intensively developed in Bulgarian-Iranian collections as well as in separate monographs, to which there are numerous references.

At a number of places in the study, materials from Bulgarian periodicals, especially the Bulgarian Renaissance press, the press of the 1898-1902 period, and several newspapers of the 1930s and the socialist period, have been drawn upon as additional sources. An enormous number of personalities and events required clarification and explanation, which necessitated the use of electronic publications – encyclopaedias like Wikipedia, Britannica, and Iranica (published by Columbia University in New York), the encyclopaedic guide *Bulgarian State Institutions 1879-1986*, etc. Some Wikipedia articles in Persian are not listed with their electronic address for technical reasons.

**II. Contents of the dissertation**

**Introductory Part**

**The first section** of the Introductory Part presents an overview of Iranian history from ancient times to the mid-twentieth century, thus including the period under study. Iran is one of the most ancient countries in the world, with thousands of years of history. The first traces of human habitation on the Iranian Plateau date from the 15th to the 9th millennium B.C. In the late 4th millennium B.C., the state of Elam, which was associated with the Mesopotamian civilization, emerged in the southwest of the country. The Iranian peoples settled on the Plateau in the 2nd to early 1st millennium BC, beginning their statehood with the establishment of Media. Later in the 6th century BC, the Persian kingdom of the Achaemenids became one of the centres of ancient civilization. The Parthian state (3rd century BC – 3rd century AD) and the Sassanid dynasty (3rd-7th century AD) argued for supremacy with Rome and Byzantium. In the middle of the 7th century, Iran was conquered by the Arabs, laying grounds for its Islamisation. In the 9th-10th centuries, a number of dynasties restored the Iranian statehood in the conquered Iranian territories of the Arab Caliphate. In the 9th and 15th centuries, the country was subjected to Turkic and Mongol invasions. In the early 16th century, Iranian lands were united by the powerful Safavid dynasty, which rivalled the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the 17th century, the Qajar dynasty came to power, under which Iran fell under dependence on England and Russia. As a result of the 1905-1911 revolution, the first constitution was adopted and a parliament was established. After 1925, the country was ruled by the Pahlavi dynasty. Under its last monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran joined the CENTO bloc and became the West's most powerful ally in the Middle East region.

The term *Iran* has ethnonymic origins and goes back to the self-designation *Aryan* of the peoples of the Indo-Aryan and Iranian groups of the Indo-European language family since ancient times. After the dispersion of the Iranian peoples (Persians, Medes, Parthians, Bactrians, Sogdians, etc.) in the 3rd-2nd millennia BC, the term also acquired a toponymic character, gradually replacing and unifying the former names of the settled lands, whose history can be traced back to deeper antiquity. The establishment and expansion of Iranian statehood in the ancient period led to the spread of Iranian influence to neighbouring areas such as Mesopotamia, the Armenian Plateau and Asia Minor. Thus, the notion of *Iran* is loaded with cultural and civilizational meaning in addition to its other connotations - ethno-linguistic, geographical and state-political.

Iran is distinguished by cultural and civilizational unity from antiquity to the most recent times, despite the many vicissitudes through which the Iranian lands have passed over the ages. Its main bearer is the Persian ethnic group, although the country has been subjected to cataclysmic foreign invasions and the ruling dynasties have often been headed by leaders of non-Iranian tribal entities. At the basis of this unity lies a system of values, nurtured over centuries by Iranian cultural tradition and mythology, which have shaped the worldview of Iranians as a people with a unique historical destiny. The Iranian epic, as set out in the ingenious poem *Shah-nameh*, which contains an explanation of the creation of the world and the historical development of Iran from the mythical dynasties of the Pishdadids and Kiyanids to the Sassanid kings described in semi-legendary colours, has long cemented Iranian society along the lines of a parallel view of the historical process beyond the actual scientifically established facts and events. It is as if from the depths of Iranian antiquity that springs the dichotomy between Iran and Turan, between good and evil, and the celebration of the national festival of Nowruz, which not only transcends all historical epochs, but also links the surrounding geographical areas to Iranian culture. An integral part of the Iranian spiritual space is the art of the Iranian lands, whose most vivid manifestations – monumental architecture elaborated with original decorative techniques, Persian miniature painting and Persian carpets – display a striking vitality. No less significant is the literary tradition, which reached its apogee with Persian classical literature but also found a worthy continuation with the development of new genres in modern and contemporary times.

The monarchical institution, to which the tradition of ancient Mesopotamia has attributed divine origins, has emerged as a pillar of Iranian statehood over the centuries. The Achaemenid Empire, which had a profound influence on the development of the ancient world, remained an example to emulate after its collapse, despite the processes of Hellenization under the Seleucids and cultural synthesis under the Parthian Arshakids. The drive to replicate it was particularly marked during the Sassanids, who for the first time used the title "shahan-shah of Iran and non-Iran" and in turn made their early medieval empire a standard to follow in the coming ages. The radical politico-religious changes following the Arab invasion failed to erase from public consciousness the memory of the strong Iranian monarchy from which the dynasties that revived Iranian statehood in the lands of the disintegrating Abbasid Caliphate, especially those of the Samanids and the Buyids, drew inspiration. The fulminant Turkic and Mongol invasions were gradually "tamed" by Iranian statesmanship and subjected to age-old traditions. In the late Middle Ages, the monarchical institution reached a new peak under the Safavids, who set a solid pattern of government that neither Nader Shah, the 'last conqueror of the East', nor the Zands were able to surpass. Iran entered modern times under the wing of the weakened Qajar dynasty, which, in the face of modernity, managed to retain legitimacy by adopting the principles of constitutionalism. Coexistence with Parliament, later supplemented by the Senate, proved problematic both for the Qajars and for the last Pahlavi dynasty, whose first ruler, Reza Shah, drawing on past glories, sought to shake off foreign dependencies and lead the country to economic and cultural ascendancy. Mohammad Reza Shah was about to undergo a similar experiment before the millennia-old monarchical institution collapsed.

An equally important dimension permeating Iranian historical development is religion, given its fundamental role in shaping the worldview of the people of antiquity and the Middle Ages, and to a significant extent in the modern era, at least as far as the East is concerned. Here again, the revolutionary changes from pagan beliefs to Zoroastrianism and then to Islam, thanks to the amazing creativity of Iranian philosophical thought, did not result in total negation of previous religions. In the case of Zoroastrianism, the tolerant attitude of the Arshakids led to the resurrection of cults of pagan deities such as Mithra and Anahita in the form of manifestations of Ahura Mazda, and its codification as a state religion under the Sassanids did not prevent the emergence of unorthodox currents such as Zervanism, Manichaeism, and Mazdakism. In turn, all of these, together with the accumulated cultural layers, influenced significantly the Iranian perception of Islam, contributing to its transformation into a universal religion. The transmission of Islam to Iranian soil also resulted in the choice of the Shiite denomination as the one best suited to the Iranian cultural-religious tradition, a choice that crystallized in the Middle Ages to reach its complete form under the Safavids. Shiism became a central feature of the Iranian national profile and remained so throughout the modern era, fuelling diverse movements, including traditionalist, reformist, revolutionary, and radical, that gained strength and intervened rapidly in political life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In parallel, however, another, predominantly secular trend, experiencing also foreign influence, developed and had various manifestations, from the secular reforms of Reza Shah to the nationalism of Dr. Mosaddeq and the leftist movements that underwent a major evolution from the early to the mid-twentieth century.

During the Safavid era, Iran encountered the West, which would later have a key impact on its development. At first, the relationship was relatively equitable, albeit to the detriment of Iranian interests in the Persian Gulf, and did not supplant Iran's main priorities – struggles for supremacy with the Ottoman Empire in the west and with the Uzbek Khanate and the Mughal Empire in the east. Missions were then exchanged to establish relations with European states, develop trade and form anti-Ottoman coalitions. In the 18th century, however, the supremacy of the West, brought about by its rapid economic development after the Industrial Breakthrough, a phenomenon not experienced in the East, became increasingly apparent, although the denouement was delayed by the campaigns of Nader Shah and the protectionism of Karim Khan Zand. Iran's weakness became evident from the early 19th century in the context of its defeats in the Russo-Iranian wars and its becoming a playground for the expansionist ambitions of Russia, England and France. By the end of the century, the first two had placed Iran in semi-colonial dependence, and on the eve of the First World War, they divided it into spheres of influence. Unlike most Eastern countries, however, Iranian statehood never completely disappeared, but demonstrated a will to strengthen under Reza Shah and to survive the hardships brought about by the Anglo-Soviet occupation in World War II. During the nationalization of the oil industry in the early 1950s, Iran defied the Great Powers in the context of the Cold War, but subsequently aligned itself with the Western camp led by the United States. This single-minded orientation provoked resistance in society that foreshadowed modifications but also upheavals in the coming period.

The **second section** of the Introductory Part traces briefly the relations between Bulgaria and Iran over the centuries. The layers of historical interaction are highlighted in order to create a sense of its depth and multiplicity. Bilateral ties over the centuries have affected different components of the two nations and aspects of their existence. The ethno-linguistic kinship between the Slavic and Iranian peoples dates back to the distant past within the Indo-European language family. In the ancient era, the Thracians came into interaction with Iranian peoples, and from the late 6th century BC, they were invaded by the Achaemenid state. This contact led to common features in art, economic contacts and imitation in state structure. Later, the Mithraic religious cult, which spread widely in the Roman Empire, including in the present-day Bulgarian lands, originated in Iran. The Proto-Bulgarians came into tangible contact with Iranian peoples during their migration across the Eurasian steppes, and some elements of their name system, artefacts and cosmogonic notions gave rise to theories about their Iranian origins. Slavs, Thracians and Proto-Bulgarians entered the maelstrom of military-political confrontation between the Sassanid state and its rivals from the west – the Roman and then the Byzantine Empire. In the early Middle Ages, Iranian borrowings were observed in Bulgarian monumental architecture, as well as a connection between unorthodox religious and philosophical movements such as Manichaeism and Bogomilism. At the time when the Arab Caliphate held the palm of world science and culture, Arab-Persian scholar-geographers and poets also showed interest in the Bulgarian lands, and trade relations developed in parallel. During the long period of Ottoman rule, a large number of Persian words from various fields of knowledge entered the Bulgarian language alongside Turkish and Arabic lexemes, while trade, economic exchange, cultural and architectural influences became increasingly systematic. Iranian consular presence in Bulgarian lands within the Ottoman Empire also came into being. Bulgarian Renaissance press, through a number of publications, introduced Iran-related topics to the Bulgarian public in a relatively detailed manner.

**Chapter One**: Diplomatic and Consular Relations between the Principality of Bulgaria and Iran until the beginning of the 20th century.

The first chapter, covering a time horizon of about a quarter of a century after Bulgaria’s Liberation, sheds light on the initial stage of Bulgarian-Iranian relations. It is marked by several key moments, including the beginning of correspondence between the monarchical institutions and the interaction between the diplomatic missions of the two countries in Constantinople, the question of the status of Iranian subjects and the Iranian consular presence in the Principality of Bulgaria. The eve and the first years of the twentieth century saw an upsurge in bilateral relations, with the main manifestations being the accreditation of the first Iranian diplomatic agent in Bulgaria, the opening of an Iranian diplomatic mission in Sofia and the transit visit of the Shah of Iran.

The establishment of official contacts (1879-1880) and subsequently of diplomatic relations (1897) between the two countries at such an early stage after the Liberation meant that their political elites were aware of the importance of the other country in the context of their interests. Of course, one cannot speak here of a top priority for either side. The young Principality was primarily preoccupied with the problems of unifying the Bulgarian lands, shaking off the tutelage of the Ottoman Empire and achieving full independence, and settling border issues, while the nationalisation and construction of railways were the main focus in the economic field. Relations with the Great European Powers and the neighbouring Balkan countries were of paramount importance. As to Iran, in the late Qajar period the country had fallen into dependence on Britain and Russia, which in fierce competition with each other overwhelmed its politics and economy, frustrating its timid attempts to seek a foothold in a third power. Iran’s relations with the Ottoman Empire remained delicate, though the rivalry between the two Islamic states was no longer crucial for shaping the region’s fortunes. Against this backdrop, the establishment of Bulgarian-Iranian relations fitted in with the desire of both countries to diversify their foreign relations, while standing on the fertile ground of the centuries-old acquaintance between the two peoples. Given the role of monarchical institutions in international politics at the time, it was essential to build friendship between the two monarchical courts, which began with the exchange of messages in 1879-1880, in which Nasser ed-Din Shah encouraged Prince Alexander of Battenberg towards an independent development of Bulgaria. Further contacts continued under Prince Ferdinand and culminated in the momentous, albeit transit, visit of Mozaffar ed-Din Shah to the Principality in September 1900, which mobilized the efforts of Bulgarian diplomacy and provided an opportunity for the first live meeting between the two countries' senior statesmen. The exchange of decorations, which contributed to creating a favourable atmosphere for the development of bilateral relations, should not be underestimated, as well as the attraction of public attention through reports of the visit in the Bulgarian press. A constant factor in the interaction between the two countries was the maintenance of permanent contacts in Constantinople, which served as an important venue for meetings of most capable diplomats and politicians from both sides. Extremely useful were the friendly relations forged between Iranian ambassadors and Bulgarian diplomatic agents based in that city, in spite of disagreements on certain consular matters. Mohsen Khan interacted with Dragan Tsankov, Marko Balabanov and Dr. Georgi Valkovich; Asadollah Khan with Peter Dimitrov; Mahmud Khan with Dimitar Markov and Ivan St. Geshov. Bilateral dialogue in the aftermath of the establishment of diplomatic relations was maintained through contacts of the Iranian agents in Sofia with the head of the Prince’s Secret Cabinet Strashimir Dobrovich, as well as talks of Iranian envoy Ohanes Khan with Prime Minister Grekov in 1899 and his acquaintance before that with Bulgarian diplomat in Belgrade Dr. Shishmanov.

The date of the establishment of diplomatic relations, accepted by both sides, 15 November 1897, is not linked to a specific act, be it an agreement, a declaration or an exchange of notes. The turning point has been taken to be the delivery of a note, informing about the agrément given to the first Iranian diplomatic agent in the Principality, Mirza Hossein Khan. This assumed date might be questioned in view of the fact that long before that, the two countries had maintained official relations through their missions in Constantinople and official correspondence between the monarchs, and Iranian consuls had been active in the Principality. On the other hand, despite some ambiguities in the documentation found from this period, the research proves unequivocally the functioning of an Iranian diplomatic representation in the country in 1898-1902, which puts in question the previously accepted thesis that no Iranian agency was opened in Sofia and the first Iranian diplomats Mirza Hossein Khan, Montazеm os-Saltaneh and Sadiq ol-Molk were accredited from Belgrade. This impression was probably created by the visit of dragoman Ohanes Khan from Belgrade to Sofia in July 1899. Thus, the study could provide an impetus for reconsidering some well-established notions on the initial period of diplomatic relations – first official contacts, establishment of diplomatic relations, opening of the first Iranian mission in the country. A joint project with the Iranian side is under way on these issues, which is expected to culminate in a joint report and a bilateral arrangement along the lines of the one Bulgaria has with Japan.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Thanks to its well-established statehood, nurtured in the course of a centuries-old tradition, Iran took the leading role in bilateral relations at this earliest stage, despite the fact that at the end of the 19th century it had fallen significantly behind European states in political and socio-economic terms and had been reduced to semi-colonial dependence. Iran's leading role was manifested first in the establishment of consular presence in the Principality and later in the initiative to appoint a diplomatic agent, the opening of the first diplomatic mission in Sofia and the implementation of the first ever highest-level visit. Iran's activism was driven primarily by care for its subjects in the Principality, but it can also be seen as part of a broader strategy for increasing its presence in the Balkans, which was initially guided by the Iranian embassy in Constantinople and from 1901 onwards was reinforced by the newly opened Iranian legation in Bucharest. At the same time, the country's internal weaknesses predetermined the lack of consistency in its foreign policy actions, which were rather episodic in nature and necessitated recourse to the help of European powers (Russia, France, Great Britain, Belgium, and Greece) to protect its interests in Bulgaria.

Iran's consular interest, channelled through the country's embassy in Constantinople, was mainly directed to north-eastern Bulgaria (Rousse, Varna, Shumen, Silistra), where the bulk of Iranian subjects were concentrated, although consular cases were not lacking in other regions of the principality as well – Vidin, Nikopol, and after the Unification of 1885 also Plovdiv, Sliven, Burgas, etc. In the first years after the Liberation, Iran apparently sought to continue the missions of its consuls in the Bulgarian lands from Ottoman times. The study traces, as far as possible on the basis of the documents found, the actions of appointing Iranian consuls, vice-consuls and honorary consuls with their main centres in Rousse and Varna, as well as the activities of those of them who were confirmed by the princely authorities – Peter Suhora and Agop Mavi in Varna, Antoine Yaldizji and Haji Muhammad (Mohammad, Mehmed) Agha in Rousse and Shumen. A number of applications for various reasons did not receive exequaturs from the princely authorities; attempts to open consulates in Sofia and Burgas also failed. In some cases, the consuls operated outside their consular district, but in others, they were denied the opportunity. It was common practice to entrust consular functions to deputies or local persons who did not have the necessary stature vis-à-vis the relevant authorities. There is a perceived lack of information in many places, which prevents a coherent chart of the Iranian consular presence. A point of reference in this regard is the case of (consul) Biberian, mentioned in several documents: no information or records about his credentials are available, but the princely government declared that it recognised him as Iranian consul in Rousse, while the Iranian side ignored him, presenting another candidature – the one of Mardiros Papazian.

In the reaction of the princely government to Iranian activity in the consular field, there was an abiding desire to assert the right to its own judgment of the merits of the candidate concerned and the necessity of consular presence in a given area. The aspiration to get rid of the Ottoman trusteeship of the Principality's foreign policy activities materialized in the non-recognition of consuls left over from Ottoman times (Riza Bey, Haji Mehmed Ali, Dimitri Busetil) and the insistence that especially those of them who were Turkish subjects be replaced by authentic Iranians. The princely authorities sought to completely seize from the suzerain the competence to issue consular exequaturs, subjecting the submitted candidates to careful local examination. In this respect, there was continuity between the frequently changing Bulgarian cabinets in the period 1879-1883, while a downgrading of consular interaction between the two countries occurred around the time of the turbulent events in Bulgaria in the mid-1880s (the Unification, the Serbo-Bulgarian War, the abdication of Prince Alexander and the so-called Bulgarian crisis). Under Stambolov's government, guided by the doctrine of state nationalism, strict rules and procedures were established and followed for the approval of consular nominations; a distinction was made between the terms "consul" and "honorary consul", with a local subject able to occupy only the latter position. Then came the Circular Order of the Ministry of Justice of 3 October 1887, by which the subjects of four countries, incl. Iran, were placed under Bulgarian jurisdiction. Iranian representatives (a special envoy and a consul) were not allowed to interfere in the settlement of inheritances of Iranian subjects.

Problems with Iranian subjects were related to commercial activities, inheritances, crimes committed, etc. Most typical, however, were cases of persons from minority groups (mainly Armenians and Jews) acquiring Iranian citizenship in order to evade military service and other obligations in the Principality or to obtain privileges. These vicious practices were brought to the attention of the Iranian side, and some Iranian files show an understanding of the host country's right to prevent such conduct. There were also consuls, such as Antoine Yaldizji in Rousse, who refused to recognize such subjects. Disputes of principle surround the extension to Iranian subjects in the Principality of the regime of capitulations in accordance with the Treaty of Berlin, as well as of the *1875 Turkish-Iranian Convention*, which regulated on a reciprocal basis the status of Iranian and Ottoman subjects within each other's borders. Both the Bulgarian side, through Minister Dimitar Grekov, and the Iranian side, through its ambassador in Constantinople, Mahmoud Khan, presented substantiated positions. In the end, the Bulgarian government, charged with a strong impulse to overcome the harmful consequences of the Berlin Treaty for the sovereignty of the country, succeeded in protecting Bulgarian interests in a dispute not only with the Iranian side, but also with the French and British representatives who undertook its defence.

The *Bulgarian-British arrangement* concluded by Konstantin Stoilov's cabinet in 1897 was an undoubted success for Bulgarian diplomacy. It stipulated strict rules for the recognition of Iranian subjects. Unfortunately, the clauses in this arrangement for convening a commission to deal with controversial cases surrounding Iranian subjects were not implemented due to the lack of capacity on the Iranian side, but also most likely in view of the denunciations made for the sale of Iranian passports. Nonetheless, the objective of thwarting attempts to legalise and impose on the Bulgarian state an unacceptable interpretation of its international obligations was achieved. Of course, Iran by no means renounced the priority of protecting its subjects, as evidenced by the mission of the consular officer at the first Iranian legation in Sofia, Mirza Ali Mohammad Khan, who inspected the Iranian colony and compiled a list of persons with Iranian citizenship. This meant adopting a more organized approach to the matter, which no longer claimed privileged treatment based on international treaties.

**Chapter Two**: Iranian Representatives in Bulgaria and Political Ties from the Early Twentieth Century to World War II

The beginning of the said period was marked by significant events in both countries – the declaration of the Independence of Bulgaria in September 1908 and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran of 1905-1911. Thereafter followed the turbulent war years, which for Bulgaria began in 1912 with the First Balkan War and for Iran after World War I turned into a revolutionary unrest, exacerbated by the intervention of Soviet Russia and Britain, which lasted until the early 1920s. Bilateral relations were inevitably affected by these events, but overall were characterised by increasing intensity during the period. They are dealt with in Chapter Two exclusively in terms of the Iranian activity vis-à-vis Bulgaria, and the picture of their overall development is supplemented by new aspects in later chapters. Following the withdrawal of Iranian diplomatic agents from Sofia, the Iranian side moved towards accreditation from its legation in Bucharest and the appointment of honorary consuls in the country, while opting to maintain its legation office in Sofia. In 1918-1928, a second phase of the functioning of the Iranian legation in the Bulgarian capital took shape, and Iran subsequently sought new options for representation in Bulgaria.

Iran continued to be the more active side in terms of diplomatic presence, a situation that persisted until the late 1930s. At the turn of the century, Iranian diplomacy attempted to map out a strategy for representation in the Balkans, while relieving its overburdened embassy in the Ottoman Empire of these duties and establishing a beachhead in its newly opened legation in Bucharest. The Romanian capital was preferred to Sofia in the choice of Balkan representation probably because the host country had achieved full independence earlier and its diplomacy showed greater activity towards Iran. At the same time, Ministers Plenipotentiary Ebrahim Khan de Ghaffari and Mirza Ali Mohammad Khan *Moadel os-Saltaneh*, and Chargé d’Affaires Count Anton Monteforte were by no means oblivious of the diplomatic office in Sofia, which they sought to staff with suitable personnel. Particularly successful was the appointment of Paul Botalico, who performed his duties with impressive orderliness and dedication. Iran’s vision was evolving due to domestic reasons as well as events in the Balkans: first, at the end of World War I, Monteforte moved his headquarters to Sofia; second, in 1919, Minister Plenipotentiary Ali Akbar Khan Bahman, initially posted to Athens, settled back in Bucharest; third, in 1929, followed a renewed orientation towards the Iranian Consulate General in Constantinople; fourth, the then closed Iranian legation in Bucharest resumed its activities and Ministers Plenipotentiary Mohammad Ali Moqaddam and Mohsen Rais included Bulgaria in their responsibilities. These changes were undoubtedly also an indication of internal weaknesses natural to an eastern country, but it cannot be denied that the Balkans, including Bulgaria, were now permanently put on the list of Iranian interests.

Special mention should be made of the second Iranian legation in Sofia (1918-1928, with a break in 1920-1921) headed by naturalized Italian Count Monteforte, who received the honorary title *Montazem ol-Molk* and remains the longest serving Iranian diplomat in Bulgaria in the entire history of inter-state relations. Already during his stay in Bucharest, he was duly appreciated by the Bulgarian government, which then advocated the continuation of his mission and awarded him the Order of St. Alexander. Worth noting, is the meaningful conversation he had with King Boris III during an audience in September 1921, which confirmed their mutual desire to maintain friendly relations and contained discussion on an important political issue pertaining to Iran's relations with Soviet Russia. Monteforte made considerable efforts to replenish the legation and strengthen the Iranian presence in Bulgaria by opening honorary consulates in Rousse and Plovdiv. During the war years, he also tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to help recognize Iranian consuls in the new Bulgarian territories in Western and Eastern Thrace acquired during the wars. Monteforte's mission went through a number of vicissitudes, caused by both objective circumstances and fluctuations in the attitude towards him on the part of the various Iranian governments during the turmoil accompanying the coming to power of the new Pahlavi dynasty. The analysis of his long sojourn in the Kingdom should not overlook the family connection (his wife was the daughter of a Bulgarian general), which definitely helped his activities and facilitated Sofia’s positive perception of his personality. Unfortunately, the last years of his mission are poorly documented, which prevents a more comprehensive assessment of his role in the development of bilateral relations.

Care for Iranian subjects continued to be present in the motivation for the Iranian presence in Bulgaria, especially as a petition to protect their rights appeared with the start of the Balkan War. The figure of about a hundred Iranian subjects in Bulgaria was taken for granted when it was decided to open diplomatic and consular missions. In addition to the office in Sofia, which acted as a full-fledged legation during part of the period under review, honorary consulates were also functioning in Rousse and Plovdiv, where local persons of Iranian descent from minority communities were appointed, such as Sahak Altiparmakian, Shalom Shoev, Yeprad Papazian, and others. As in the initial period of the relations, there were also cases of refusal of consuls' recognition, which, in addition to the consulates mentioned, also concerned the incumbent Iranian consuls in Dedeagac (Alexandroupolis) and Adrianople during the Bulgarian rule in Western and Eastern Thrace, where political considerations intervened. Unfortunately, even then, there was inconsistency and turnover in consular appointments, and there were also cases of interruptions in connection with offences committed by consuls. At certain times, the protection of Iranian interests was again entrusted to foreign missions – most often the Belgian and French legations in Sofia, but also the consulates of Great Britain and Russia. By 1932, the Iranian side was poised to select a Bulgarian subject as honorary consul in Sofia, due to the lack of a suitable Iranian subject with the necessary profile, but its efforts in this direction did not bear fruit for the time being. Among the consular problems that preoccupied the Iranian side were the already familiar acquisitions and renunciations of Iranian citizenship, summons to military service, settlement of inheritances, added to which were cases of complaints of ill-treatment by the Bulgarian authorities during the war years, extradition for political reasons, non-admission of refugees, civil status acts, etc.

An internal report by a long-time Iranian consul in Salonika and Adrianople, dated 1910, features for the first time a frank explanation of the advantage Iran would enjoy from maintaining friendly relations with Bulgaria, presenting motives of a political, geostrategic and civilizational nature. Central among these was the neighbourhood of the two countries with the Ottoman Empire. Although there is no record of official visits of the type of the Shah's visit to Bulgaria in 1900 (not to be counted here is the transiting of an Iranian delegation led by the Minister of Justice in 1933), numerous diplomatic contacts were made during the period under review through the Iranian legation in Sofia, the representations of the two countries in Bucharest, Constantinople, Ankara and other capitals, which are explored in more detail in the next chapter. Official correspondence between the Heads of State on various ceremonial occasions became more regular; letters were also written on behalf of Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Accurate clarifications were exchanged on how to refer to the monarchs for protocol purposes, and the annual sending of congratulatory telegrams was channelled. On the eve of the Balkan War, Bulgaria appealed to Iran to declare neutrality, to which no formal reply was recorded, but there was no hint either of any Iranian intervention. A Bulgarian delegation was preparing to travel to Tehran in July 1914 for the crowning ceremony of the last Qajar ruler, Ahmad Shah, but the visit was probably cancelled because of the outbreak of the First World War. The Iranian diplomacy duly followed the most important events in Bulgaria and the Balkans, also reporting on the coverage of the Iranian issue in the Bulgarian press.

**Chapter Three**: Bulgarian Diplomatic Activity towards Iran from the Late 19th Century until the Eve of World War II

The content of Chapter Three fits chronologically into roughly the same period as Chapter Two, but brings a new aspect to the study – an analysis of Iran-related processes through the lens of Bulgarian diplomacy. Our representations abroad devoted due, albeit non-priority attention to Iranian issues. They were interested in internal events such as the assassination of Nasser ed-Din Shah, revolutionary processes, reforms and economic development under Reza Shah, as well as in Iran's foreign relations and its place in international politics. The narrative is divided thematically and chronologically into eight parts: events in Iran in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) and its concomitant developments; the First World War period; Iran-related issues of the late 1920s and early 1930s; Turkish-Iranian relations; the Saadabad Pact of 1937; Iran's candidacy for membership of the Council of the League of Nations in the 1937-1939 period; Iran's place in the system of international relations in the run-up to and the early years of World War II.

The approach to the Iranian topic was naturally in line with the tasks of Bulgarian foreign policy and Bulgaria's international positioning. In this, naturally, the Turkish-Iranian relations occupied a primary place, starting from the Turkish invasion and clashes with the Entente in Western Iran and Transcaucasia during the First World War, passing through the activities of the Iranian ambassador to Turkey, Mohammad Ali Foroughi, and his visit to Bulgaria already as foreign minister in 1932, and ending up with the ideological and political rapprochement between Reza Shah and Mustafa Kemal, crowned by the Iranian monarch's state visit to Turkey in 1934. The border disputes and the signed Turkish-Iranian agreements were examined in detail, with analysing the characteristics of bilateral relations and exploring the possibilities for expanding trade and economic relations and for opening the Trabzon-Erzurum-Tabriz land link, in which Bulgaria was interested. In addition to the Turkish-Iranian issue, considerable attention was paid to the preparation and signing of the Quadruple Pact of Saadabad in July 1937, preceded by the settlement of Iran's disputes with two of its member states, Iraq and Afghanistan. The relevance of the pact (and therefore of Iranian activity in it) for Bulgaria was determined by its proximity to the Balkans and the role of the Soviet Union and Great Britain in its formation. Iran's place in the confrontation of Great Powers England, Russia/USSR and Germany and the military-political blocs in the two world wars was also of deserved interest, and its illumination helped to better understand the international environment. Issues of specific nature, such as some elements of Iran's Gulf policy, its relations with Hejaz and Egypt, and Iranian demarches and initiatives in the League of Nations, including its election to its Council, were also covered, raising the awareness of Bulgarian diplomacy and prompting its adequate reactions.

In the absence of Bulgarian diplomatic representation in Iran until 1939, when the first Bulgarian legation was opened in Tehran, the Iranian theme was mostly covered by our missions in Turkey and Russia/USSR, geographically closest to Iran. Moreover, the Bulgarian agency in Constantinople, which was upgraded to a legation after the declaration of Independence, functioned intermittently for one year during the two Balkan wars and for five years from the end of the First World War, and in 1932 it passed the baton to the newly opened legation in Ankara and continued functioning as Consulate General. Much longer was the interruption in our diplomatic presence in Russia, where our legation in St. Petersburg ceased to exist after Bulgaria's entry into World War I and the severing of relations with the Entente countries, and our legation in Moscow actually started working in 1934 after the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Our missions in London and Bern and the consulate in Alexandria also made significant contributions to Bulgarian diplomatic activity concerning Iran, while the legations in Stockholm, Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Athens, and the consulate in Odessa were involved more episodically. Worth mentioning among the Bulgarian diplomats who excelled in analysing Iran-related issues are Dimitar Stanchov and Dimitar Tsokov (Petersburg and London) and Stefan Paprikov (Petersburg) from the turn of the century, Nedyalko Kolushev (Constantinople) from the end of the First World War, Pancho Hadjimishev (London), Todor Pavlov and Todor Hristov (Ankara), Georgi Balamezov (Constantinople), Dimitar Mikhalchev (Moscow), Nikola Antonov (Ankara, Bern and especially Moscow) from the late 1920s and the 1930s. The information and details they provided and the analyses and generalizations they made, although in some cases on the eve of the Second World War they succumbed to the prevailing political line, are useful to researchers of this period, as they add considerably to the understanding of developments concerning Iran and the actions of its diplomacy.

Apart from the purely informative reports, Bulgarian diplomatic activity in a number of cases also included assessment and reaction to the processes in and around Iran, positions on Iranian demarches and initiatives, proposals for making use of suitable opportunities to promote Bulgarian interests, as well as certain interactions with Iranian diplomats. Following this line of thought chronologically, reference could be made to assessments of the Constitutional Revolution that were important for reacting to an Iranian demarche before the National Assembly. During the First World War, two actions through Bulgarian territory are worth highlighting. The first one, undertaken by Dr. Bachvarov, who was in charge of the Bulgarian consulate in Alexandria, at the request of his Iranian counterpart, consisted of transporting a team of medical and humanitarian aid in March 1915 for the distressed Iranian population following the Turkish advance during the First World War. The second one, initiated a year later by our legation in Constantinople, attempted to organize the repatriation of Iranian subjects residing in Turkey, but did not materialize due to Bulgaria's entry into the war.

A remarkable relationship of trusting friendship, established between our consul in Smyrna from the period of the First World War Ivan Hamamjiev and his Iranian counterpart Mirza Esmail Khan, led to a proposal to the Bulgarian side to take over the protection of Iranian interests, which, however, remained unfulfilled due to the closure of our consulate a short time later. Our Minister Plenipotentiary in Constantinople Nedyalko Kolushev, in his reports, was impressed by the enthusiastic comments of the bravery of the Bulgarian troops in Iran; on the other hand, he showed sympathy for the Iranian population subjected to aggression and the Iranian position on the independence of Azerbaijan, appealing to take advantage of the Turkish-Iranian controversy in Bulgarian favour. Bulgarian diplomacy analysed objectively Iranian demarches and initiatives in the LN on the Anglo-Hejaz treaty of 1927, the Iran-Iraq territorial dispute, the steps taken to conclude the Saadabad Pact (1937), and Iran's candidacy for election to the LN Council (1937-1939), providing historical references and in some cases sympathizing with Iranian positions. There are a good deal of personal contacts and interactions of the late 1920s and 1930s that should be highlighted. Among them are the friendship between Nedyalko Kolushev and Mirza Mahmoud Khan in Constantinople, the productive contacts in Constantinople and Ankara of our representatives Todor Pavlov and Georgi Balamezov with the Iranian Ambassador and later Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Foroughi, and the intensive interaction in Bern and Moscow between Ministers Plenipotentiary Nikola Antonov and Anushirvan Sepahbodi. Antonov became perhaps most profoundly aware of the depths of Iranian politics among our diplomats and saw the advantage for Bulgaria of cooperation with Iran, going so far as to recommend that Bulgarian workers benefit from the economic opportunities in that country.

The growing capacity of Bulgarian diplomacy allowed it to gradually move out of the passive role in bilateral relations characteristic of their initial stage. Iran remained the leader in terms of diplomatic presence on the ground or accreditation, but Bulgarian missions in third countries were gaining knowledge and potential, thanks to which Bulgarian foreign policy, regardless of the priorities pursued in the Balkans and Europe, was paying more attention to Iran. This development was largely due to the professionalization of Bulgarian foreign policy, which reached a high level especially in the 1934-1940 period, when career diplomats were appointed as foreign ministers, and the strengthening of the network of diplomatic missions took on a more complex form with the opening of legations in Ankara and Moscow.

**Chapter Four**: Bulgarian-Iranian Trade and Economic Relations, Cultural and Scientific Contacts from the Early Twentieth Century until World War II

In Chapter Four, political contacts in the period leading up to the Second World War and the notion of a growing activity of Bulgarian diplomacy towards Iran are complemented by the economic and cultural spheres. This helps substantiate the impression that bilateral relations were becoming more comprehensive and complex, however fragmentary and inexhaustive the accounts of commercial, cultural and scientific contacts may look. The commercial sphere is touched upon by revealing attempts to conclude a Bulgarian-Iranian trade agreement, stimulated mainly by the export of Bulgarian silkworm seed, exploring possibilities of diversifying Bulgarian exports and of importing Iranian goods. Moreover, for the convenience of the discourse, the activities of the Bulgarian legation in Tehran in the economic field are included here before its full presentation, which is the subject of the next chapter. The remaining parts of the chapter are devoted to bilateral visits and contacts in various fields, the production of Persian carpets in Bulgaria as a product of Iranian cultural and economic heritage, and the first translations of Persian literary works into Bulgarian.

In the trade and economic field, the Bulgarian side took interest in and attempted to occupy certain niches of the Iranian market, the most successful of which was the supply of Bulgarian silkworm seed, exported in the 1920s almost entirely to Iran. Subsequently, opportunities for the export of chemical preparations, railway wagons, tobacco, cement, etc. were persistently sought, not least with the help of the first Bulgarian legation in Tehran. Bulgarian business was active both in finding partners in Iran and in influencing the state institutions to create favourable conditions for the development of bilateral trade – export as well as import of certain products such as cotton and wool. On the Iranian side, there were some, albeit less active efforts to export traditional items, such as Persian carpets, as well as a certain readiness to respond positively to some proposals made by the Bulgarian legation in Tehran. Some research was conducted on Iranian trade and customs regulations, which marked the beginning of a more systematic approach to economic relations. The Iranian side displayed a similar approach by requesting data on Bulgarian trade, and took interest in the Bulgarian carpet industry with the idea of making investments. The Bulgarian legation in Tehran worked hard to develop transport routes to Iran, which were of vital necessity for putting bilateral cooperation on a sound footing. The Bulgarian side realized the benefit of its positioning as a transit point in conducting the European-Iranian trade. On the other hand, Iran was also seen as a transit country to more distant Asian destinations, whose products were needed by the Bulgarian industry. The development of trade and economic relations in general faced a number of obstacles, including the protectionist environment in both countries, the lack of convertible currency, transport difficulties and dependence on third countries.

Particular attention in Chapter Four is paid to the first attempt in 1929-1930 to place bilateral economic relations on a legal basis by concluding a trade agreement, in tandem with a treaty of friendship. Unfortunately, the attempt was unsuccessful because of the lack of sufficient justification, the haste to resolve a specific issue and, ultimately, the divergence of interests and expectations of the two parties. The Iranian side was particularly disheartened by a prohibitive Bulgarian law on the import of luxury goods in force since 1924, which in practice prevented almost all Iranian exports. When the issue of the trade agreement was raised for a second time in the late 1930s, the Bulgarian side made a more thorough study of Iranian trade and customs legislation, clearing agreements in force, and trade on a compensatory basis with other countries. The study acknowledged the low volume and monocultural nature of bilateral trade and did not confirm the need for a trade agreement. In spite of the unsuccessful conclusion of the negotiations on the two documents, the friendly contacts established by the Bulgarian Minister Plenipotentiary in Constantinople, Todor Pavlov, and later by the Foreign Minister in the second Democratic Alliance government, Atanas Burov, with the prominent representative of the Iranian political and intellectual elite Mohammad Ali Foroughi, had a beneficial influence on the inclusion of economic issues and also some political matters in the bilateral agenda, especially since the Iranian diplomat was sympathetic to the Bulgarian positions. The experience gained in this regard was useful for the next stages in the development of economic cooperation.

The interconnection between economic and cultural aspects is perhaps best traced in the entry of the Persian carpet in Bulgaria not only as an imported item, but also as a product of the talent and craftsmanship of Bulgarian manufacturers. The town of Panagyurishte emerged as the largest production centre, where a number of entrepreneurs set up their textile workshops. A notable role in the dissemination of the art of the Persian carpet in Bulgaria, which reached deep socio-cultural layers, was played by the entrepreneur of Iranian origin Boris Persiyski, who also enjoyed a solid position on the foreign market. Cultural ties were substantially enriched by translations of Persian written word, especially world-famous works of Persian classical literature. Excerpts from Nezami's poems, Saadi's moral collections, Ferdowsi's epic poem and Omar Khayyam's quatrains became available to the Bulgarian reader, raising the knowledge on and the attractiveness of Iran's culture in Bulgarian society. Significant contributions in this respect were made by famous and unknown translators, among them the literati Nikolai Raynov and Stefan Andreichin and the poets Geo Milev and Leda Mileva.

No less important are the contacts between people in various fields, the study of which can by no means be considered complete. A number of facts and hagiographies are becoming known and popularized in our time, long years after the life span of their participants. The Bulgarian subjects discovered and included in the discourse, who contributed to the building up of bilateral ties and the rapprochement between the two peoples, each in his own sphere of activity, are probably only a small sample of those worthy of mention. Among them are economic geographer Anastas Beshkov, civil engineer Lyuben Trnka, medical doctor Alexander Atabekyan, investor Marko Danchev and famous travellers, lecturers and ambassadors of Bulgarian culture Anka Lambreva and Lyuba Kutincheva. Their contribution convincingly shows that the notion of bilateral relations not only goes far beyond official contacts, but also its real significance is measured by the established lasting cultural ties, the frequency and quality of contacts between people.

**Chapter Five**: Bulgarian Labour Emigration to Iran and the Activities of the First Bulgarian Mission in Tehran

Chapter Five recounts a brief but meaningful and dramatic episode in Bulgarian-Iranian relations. It pertains to the preparation and opening in April 1939 of the first Bulgarian legation in Tehran and its work in the political and consular field. The main motive for this decision of the tsarist government was the numerous Bulgarian colony, which had formed in Iran and was in dire need of consular support. Unfortunately, the activity of the Bulgarian mission in Tehran coincided with an extremely tense period in world politics – the eve and the beginning of the Second World War, which made a tangible impact on the orientation and development paths of both Bulgaria and Iran. Due to the war-related developments, the episode in question ended up in less than two and a half years with the abrupt severance of diplomatic relations, the closure and evacuation of the Bulgarian legation.

The middle and the second half of the 1930s were marked by a completely new phenomenon in bilateral relations – the formation of Bulgarian labour emigration in Iran. Bulgarian workers in search of a more dignified livelihood in the face of the still persisting global economic crisis, thanks to their professional skills, enterprise and daring, as well as the relative geographical proximity, found themselves at the forefront of the cohort of European workers for whom Iran became a centre of attraction during the intensive economic activities undertaken by Reza Shah Pahlavi, especially the large-scale infrastructure construction. The Bulgarian emigrants in Iran were mainly masons, construction workers and general labourers by occupation, although there were also examples of painters, carpenters, mechanics and even engineers, decorators and contractors. The vast majority of them were employed mostly by Western companies and consortia in the construction of the Trans-Iranian Railway and highways throughout the country. The largest contingent came from the central part of the Pre-Balkan – the Dryanovo, Tryavna, Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo, and Sevlievo regions, known for their construction traditions. The number of Bulgarian subjects working in Iran probably peaked at 1500-2000 – quite a significant figure for the Bulgarian scale. Behind this figure were people with difficult destinies, who with their selfless work left a lasting mark in the efforts for the economic uplift and modernization of the Iranian state. They often put their survival skills and the resilience of their families to a severe test, and sometimes their courageous missions ended tragically.

The existence of a large and growing Bulgarian community in Iran provided the main motivation for the accreditation of a Bulgarian diplomatic representative in Iran, a matter that had been on the radar of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations (MFARD) since the second half of the 1930s. The remittances of Bulgarians in foreign currency to their families in the country were another important factor. Initially, options for opening a consulate in Tehran (professional or honorary) were considered, which was strongly advocated by our diplomats and representatives of Bulgarian business circles in Turkey; the issue was also raised by Bulgarian labour emigration to Iran itself through applications, petitions and publications in the Bulgarian media. In parallel, the accreditation of a Minister Plenipotentiary from a neighbouring Bulgarian mission was being considered. Ultimately, taking into account also the opinion of Iranian diplomats in third countries, the considerations for a Bulgarian diplomatic legation in Tehran with a titular administrator prevailed. This mission was entrusted to the 45-year-old Counsellor Dimitar Dafinov – an experienced diplomat with a university degree in law and over 21 years of experience in the MFARD and four foreign missions (Rome, Budapest, Berlin and Bucharest). What is more, during his service in the Bulgarian legation in Bucharest, he became familiar with a number of consular cases concerning our subjects in Iran. The opening of this first Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Iran in the history of bilateral relations, composed of one diplomat, two other Bulgarian officials and a local dragoman, represents the highest point of engagement of Bulgarian foreign policy with this country up to that moment. Taking into account the closure of the Iranian legation in Sofia eleven years earlier, the hesitancy of the Iranian diplomacy in covering relations with Bulgaria since the late 1920s, and the relative passivity of the Iranian legation accredited from Bucharest, the perception that the Bulgarian side was seizing the initiative in the development of bilateral ties was reinforced.

From the very beginning, the Legation started providing valuable support to the Bulgarian colony in Iran. An alphabetical catalogue of Bulgarian subjects was compiled, which laid the foundation for their filing. Dafinov initiated the establishment of the Bulgarian Cultural and Charitable Society as an auxiliary body of the Legation and a rallying point for the protection of the interests of our compatriots. He took on the task of solving their problems, including overdue passports, inability to transfer their savings, unpaid debts and arbitrary deductions by employers, etc., and in many ways achieved success. He put in considerable effort into securing death certificates, tracing heirs and settling inheritance issues, on the latter issue working towards a bilateral settlement on a reciprocal basis. The ideological orientation of the Bulgarian ruling elite and the political struggles in Bulgarian society, which had their projection on the composition of the emigration to Iran, had an inevitable impact on the work with the Bulgarian colony. Dafinov strictly followed the government's approach to the identified group of dissenters, some of them polymigrants who had passed through the Soviet Union and supported its policies. He sought to neutralize their influence on the Bulgarian community and sent relevant reports to the Police Directorate. Less intensive was the work of the Legation in issuing visas for visits or transit through Bulgaria to Iranian subjects, accompanied by proposals for fixing visa prices on a reciprocal basis.

The Legation embarked vastly on research, exploratory talks as well as economic initiatives as discussed in the previous chapter. The inability to make payments in currency stood out as one of the main obstacles to trade, which is why the Legation turned its attention to compensatory transactions. Dafinov also made an authentic contribution to the analysis of events in Iran and the wider region in the run-up to and during the Second World War. Of interest are his accounts of the behaviour of the Saadabad Pact countries, which, while not really allied, had an obligation to consult with each other on political matters. Unlike Turkey, which in the months before the war had sided with Britain, Iran felt a gravitation towards "absolute neutrality" and feared the attempts to bring the Soviet Union closer to England and France and the interpretation of the term "indirect aggression". The Bulgarian diplomat also presented valuable reports on the internal shifts in the affiliations of Iranian ruling circles, and of Soviet, British, and German diplomatic activity in Iran against the backdrop of its pursuit of neutrality. The Iranian government followed Soviet actions with anxiety, but after the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, signed the long-delayed trade treaty with Moscow under German influence. The head of the Bulgarian legation paid particular attention to Iran's radically altered international positioning after the German attack on the USSR, and its reaction to Anglo-Soviet pressure for the extradition of German subjects seen as a "fifth column."

The closure and evacuation of the Bulgarian legation in Tehran in September 1941 was fraught with tension. It was not caused by the will of either the Bulgarian or the Iranian government, or by any bilateral problem, but was due to a factor external to both countries – the invasion of the Iranian territory by Soviet and British troops, which dealt a blow to Bulgaria's interests because of its allied relations with Nazi Germany. The abrupt end of this first Bulgarian mission in Iran and on the entire Asian continent outside Turkey was burdened with additional difficulties caused by the later addition of Bulgaria to the list of countries of the fascist coalition with which Iran was forced to break diplomatic relations. The closure of the legation and the evacuation of its staff as part of a German column, accompanied by a Soviet representative to the Iran-Turkey border, is traced in the chapter with all the hardship and sufferings based on Dafinov’s evidence. His reports on the activities of the legation and the state of the Bulgarian colony in Iran, written after his return to the Foreign Ministry in Sofia, are also examined. In spite of its short existence, the diplomatic mission affected deeply the Bulgarian presence in Iran and the development of bilateral relations, especially considering the lack of Iranian diplomatic representation in the country at that time. The knowledge and experience accumulated by the legation was subsequently used by the sections for the protection of Bulgarian interests of the legations of Sweden, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Problems were identified and ideas and areas for the development of bilateral ties were set out, which would be made use of after the restoration of diplomatic relations in December 1961 and even in the contemporary period.

**Chapter Six**: The Bulgarian Community in Iran and the Iranian Community in Bulgaria under the Protection of the Swedish Legations in the Two Countries

Chapter Six enters for the first time into a period when diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed, a state of affairs that lasted for about two decades. The protection of Bulgarian interests in Iran and of Iranian interests in Bulgaria was undertaken by the Swedish legations in Tehran and Sofia with a time frame from 1941 to 1946 and to 1948 respectively. The choice of the Bulgarian side fell on Sweden because of its neutrality during the war, initially favourable to Germany, as well as because of the upward development of Swedish-Iranian relations, which received a boost with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship in 1929 and the visit of a high-ranking Swedish delegation to Iran in 1934. The chapter focuses on the work of the Swedish legation in Tehran, opened in 1936, with the Bulgarian colony and the fate of Bulgarian subjects in Iran. Separate sections reflect the efforts to repatriate Bulgarian subjects, the internment of many of them in camps by the British forces during the Second World War and the thrust to liberate them after the end of the war. Finally, the problems of the Iranian community in Bulgaria are also addressed.

The war period, in which Bulgaria became closely aligned with Germany in the Hitlerite coalition and Iran joined the Allied nations, was fraught with tension as it generated reprisals against each country's subjects on the other's territory. The case of the Bulgarian subjects in Iran is particularly painful because it contrasts sharply with the previous period when they had been attracted as labour force in the implementation of Iranian infrastructure projects. Added to the adversity caused by their treatment as enemy elements, the loss of their jobs and the difficulty of repatriating them was the acute problem of deportation, mostly to British India, an area even more remote from their homeland. In the case of the Iranian subjects in Bulgaria, the worries were mainly along two lines – the coercive measures against persons of Jewish origin and the restrictions on commercial activities against foreigners from enemy countries. Some reassurance at this critical period was brought by certain gestures on both sides aimed at some alleviation of the plight of their subjects, which, however, could not lead to lasting solutions before Bulgaria left the Hitlerite bloc. It was only under the Fatherland Front government that the repeal of the discriminatory laws in Bulgaria became possible and an attempt was made to solve the problems on a reciprocal basis.

The Swedish legation in Teheran, which undertook the protection of Bulgarian interests at very short notice and without the necessary preparation, worked relentlessly to address the concerns of Bulgarian subjects. Its nearly five years of activity are convincingly documented by the enlistment of Bulgarian subjects, whose number reached 242 in the most extended version, compiled in October 1943. Numerous files on consular matters relating to those subjects give a good idea of the state of the Bulgarian colony during the war. The steps taken by the Swedish legation to repatriate Bulgarian subjects, which included coordination with the local authorities, the occupation forces, the Bulgarian MFARD and the transit countries, as well as the organization of the Bulgarian colony, deserve high praise. Despite the difficulties during the war, the Bulgarian government showed concern for the fate of the Bulgarian subjects – both the ones remaining on Iranian territory and the ones interned. It was facilitated by the persistence of the Swedish legation, the expertise of the former head of the closed Bulgarian legation in Tehran, Dimitar Dafinov, the actions of the relatives of the Bulgarian subjects and the reports of Bulgarians returning from Iran. As a rule, the Bulgarian government granted repatriation permits to those who wished them, regardless of their political affiliation. The Swedish legation was supplied with budgetary funds from Sofia on a fairly regular basis, priority being given to the expenses for repatriating Bulgarian subjects. Not so, however, with the repeated insistence of the Swedish legation on the subsistence allowances for the unemployed and destitute countrymen, which sometimes prompted Swedish diplomats to set aside personal funds but also made them hesitant in the success of their mission. The Swedish mission received full recognition in Bulgaria, as demonstrated by the Fatherland Front government's awarding of several Swedish diplomats, including the head of the Swedish legation in Tehran, Harald Pousette, and Legation Counsellor Gunnar Jarring.

Small groups of Bulgarian subjects were successfully repatriated from Iran in 1942-1943 with the assistance of the Swedish mission in Tehran, while some of them made their way to Bulgaria independently. The dispatch of larger groups, which was prepared in several stages, encountered obstacles due to Bulgaria's status as a belligerent state from the Hitlerite coalition. This was evidenced by the halting of the two prepared convoys in the spring of 1942 by the Soviet occupation authorities, despite the prior consent obtained thanks to the preserved diplomatic ties with the USSR and the activity of the Bulgarian legation relocated in Kuibyshev. Most probably, the convoys were hindered out of solidarity with the British allies, who had embarked on deportation of Bulgarian subjects, without taking into account their ideological and political orientation. The internment of Bulgarian subjects mainly in the Dehra Dun camp in British India and in the Iranian city of Soltanabad was one of the main sources of concern. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs were involved in attempts to alleviate their plight. The ICRC sent detailed reports of visits by its staff to the British camps with descriptions of the state of the camp inmates and suggestions for improving conditions. The release of the internees was the longest-running problem with the Bulgarian subjects, which was settled after the signing of the Armistice Agreement.

The new government of the Fatherland Front, and more specifically the Armistice Implementation Commissariat headed by Foreign Minister Petko Staynov, entered into dialogue on the issue with the Allied Control Commission and the political representations of the Soviet Union and Great Britain. The process of repatriation, first of the Soltanabad camp inmates and the willing Bulgarian subjects residing in Iran, and then of the internees in Dehra Dun, began in 1945 and was not completed until 1947, when Bulgarian interests in Iran were already being protected by the Yugoslav legation. The groups from Iran benefited from the logistical assistance of the Soviet government, while those from British India were transported by British steamships. The dissenting Bulgarian subjects, listed separately by the former head of the Bulgarian legation in Tehran, found themselves "in the same boat" with the other Bulgarians. Several of those others too, mindful of the change of power in the country, manifested their sympathy with the Fatherland Front programme and blamed the wartime accession of Bulgaria to the fascist axis for their troubles.

The Swedish legation in Sofia was also active, seeking information about the situation of the Iranian subjects in Bulgaria, although relatively few in number, and assisting them in the settlement of inheritance issues. Swedish diplomats selflessly defended the cause of Iranian subjects of Jewish origin affected by expulsion from Sofia, as well as the rights of merchants who came under the legal restrictions against adversary subjects. Furthermore, from the point of view of the Bulgarian side, communication with the legation's administrators, Sven Allard and Erland Uddgren, was also important for liaising with the Swedish legation in Tehran, aligning the approaches towards Bulgarian subjects in Iran and Iranian subjects in Bulgaria, as well as for achieving reciprocity in their treatment in the implementation of Bulgaria's commitments under the Armistice Agreement. In this context, the role of the Bulgarian legation in Stockholm, which was instrumental in exchanging important messages with the Swedish Foreign Ministry also deserves appraisal.

**Chapter Seven**: Bilateral Political and Consular Relations from the End of World War II to the Late 1950s.

Chapter Seven covers the first 15 post-war years, which in Iran are subdivided into three stages. The first (up to 1950) started with sharp confrontation between conservative and leftist forces, and between the central government and autonomist movements, reinforced by the intervention of the war-winning USSR, the US and Britain and the beginning of the Cold War, and ended up with the formation of a coalition of political forces with patriotic orientation under the name of the National Front, which made a serious bid to govern the country. In the second phase (1951-1953), the NF took power under Prime Minister Dr. Mosaddeq and nationalized the oil industry, but engaged in an unequal struggle with Anglo-American interests that led to an economic stalemate and the military coup of Gen. Zahedi. In the third stage (1953-1960), a repressive regime was established in Iran, which undertook persecutions against opposition forces and in its foreign policy tied itself closely to the Western camp, becoming a co-founder of the Baghdad Pact and entering into alliance with the United States. Bilaterally, the period of broken diplomatic relations between Iran and Bulgaria continued, and negotiations for their restoration were successfully concluded at the beginning of the next period, in 1961. The chapter also deals with the coverage of the Iranian issue in Bulgarian political analyses in the first post-war years, the establishment and development of links between like-minded left parties and organizations.

In the context of broken diplomatic relations, the interests of the two countries in Tehran and Sofia, respectively, continued to be defended by third parties. There were definitely political motives in the Bulgarian choice of a foreign legation to substitute the Swedish one: Yugoslavia was chosen as a close and influential country in the emerging Eastern bloc, and when relations with it deteriorated, Bulgarian diplomacy turned to Czechoslovakia, also a close and friendly country with historical ties to Bulgaria. As far as Iranian interests in Bulgaria are concerned, the choice of the Belgian legation to replace the Swedish one rather draws on the tradition of previous years. During the period under study, the acuteness of consular problems related to the subjects/citizens of both countries on the territory of the other side, characteristic of the war years, was lifted. The Yugoslav legation in Tehran became involved in the last stage of repatriation of our compatriots and assisted in solving individual cases that arose during the war. On the other hand, the question of the adjustment of the returned Bulgarian citizens to the new situation in our country became topical. The Czechoslovak legation's main concern was to keep the Bulgarian citizens who remained in Iran in touch with their homeland. There is almost no information on the activities of the Belgian legation in Sofia in protecting Iranian interests; the absence of files on specific cases, although there is evidence that such cases were raised, indicates the absence of systematic problems with the Iranian subjects.

The post-war settlement ended for both countries at roughly the same time – for Bulgaria with the signing and ratification of the Peace Treaty in 1947, and for Iran with the withdrawal of allied troops in 1946 and the restoration of the sovereignty of the central government over Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and the southern tribal areas by early 1947. The political processes of this period in Iran were described with great insight and perspicacity by the heads of our mission in Ankara, Nikola Antonov and Varban Angelov, whose reports can be safely used as a source for the study of Iranian history. The two countries fell into opposing camps during the Cold War, which proved to be a deterrent to maintaining diplomatic contacts, as evidenced by the behaviour of the Iranian Embassy in Ankara toward Minister Plenipotentiary Antonov. The first steps towards the restoration of diplomatic relations were taken by the Iranian side during the National Front government, which attempted to move out of the orbit of Anglo-American influence. However, further contacts to find a formula for diplomatic representation did not yield results as the Bulgarian side did not find understanding in its quest to place it on an equal footing. A breakthrough was achieved only in the early 1960s, when Iran renewed its foreign policy doctrine and Bulgaria was now open to developing relations with the Third World.

Contacts between political parties and youth organisations that shared similar ideological platforms were a completely new phenomenon in bilateral relations. Whereas in Bulgaria it was a question of formations that embodied the new power and in the case of the Bulgarian Communist Party took over the governance of the country, their Iranian counterparts represented the left movement, which grew significantly in the post-war years with Soviet support, but subsequently found itself in opposition to the ruling elite and in certain periods was outlawed. The first links were established between youth organisations united by the World Federation of Democratic Youth, participating in youth festivals and other fora related to the Federation and appearing in its radio bulletins. The Bulgarian youth, represented by the Union of People's Youth, renamed in 1949 the Dimitrov Union of People's Youth (DUPY) was sympathetic to the struggles of the leftist youth and student forces in Iran, led by the Organization of Iranian People's Youth (OIPY), for their political and social rights. Since the mid-1950s, cooperation developed between the BCP and the Iranian People's Party ("Tudeh"), which, given the quasi-one-party nature of power in Bulgaria, engaged its senior state leadership. The illegal status of the IPP, whose members were smitten by repression, relegated the party to the position of a junior partner, relying on BCP’s assistance in accommodating its overseas cadres, expressions of solidarity with its declarations and political demands, and support for the appeal to free its activists from prison. An important avenue of interaction was the sharing of BCP's experience through lectures and seminars, which was reflected in a Persian language brochure about the party printed by Tudeh.

The studied documents illustrating the relationship between the BCP and Tudeh in the 1950s, many of which have been classified as secret, reveal important information about the organizational development and ideological views of Iranian Marxists, both historically and especially after the 1953 coup of Gen. Zahedi. The materials of the three plenums of the IPP Central Committee held in 1957-1959 during the underground period reflect the party leadership's assessments of Dr Mosaddeq's rule and the conduct of the leftist forces at the time, the crash of party structures in the Iranian army, the interaction with the Azerbaijan Democratic Party and a number of other internal issues. Information was shared on the organizational structure and shifts in the party’s ruling body and the positions of its leaders Reza Radmanesh, Abdos-Samad Kambakhsh, Iraj Eskandari, and others. The ideological drifts and vacillations in the party's actions were exposed and analysed in a self-critical spirit. An interesting document is a letter addressed to the BCP Central Committee by Tudeh veteran Bahrampour, who had found refuge in Bulgaria. It contains a self-generated opinion, unconventional in its devastating criticism of the processes unfolding in the Tudeh party, which is in sharp contrast with his adoration for the work of Georgi Dimitrov and the Bulgarian communists. Of extremely high value is the authentic description by a Bulgarian party functionary of the Fifth Plenum of the IPP Central Committee, held in Sofia in 1958, about which very little is known. In general, the Iran-related materials available in the archives of the BCP Central Committee constitute a remarkable source for enriching the understanding of the political life of the Tudeh Party, which may contribute significantly to research on this subject in the scientific literature.

**Chapter Eight**: Relations in the Fields of Economy, Culture, Sports and Social Affairs from the End of World War II to the Late 1950s.

Chapter Eight examines other aspects of bilateral relations during the same period, focusing mainly on economic relations and the expansion of Persian carpet production in Bulgaria and its exports. Cultural and educational ties, the beginnings of sports exchanges and contacts in the health and humanitarian fields are also touched upon.

The shattering events in the two countries in the early post-war years, accompanied by tangible intervention by the victorious Great Powers, focused their energies on resolving domestic issues and left little room for seeking partnerships beyond immediate priorities. The different political orientations of Bulgaria and Iran that emerged during the Cold War and the juxtaposition between the two military-political and economic blocs on the global scale predetermined to a decisive degree the weak contacts between them in possible areas of cooperation. Broken diplomatic relations over a prolonged period of 20-odd years produced an additional deterrent effect, as the lack of professional representations, whether resident or accredited from a third country, practically deprived cultural and economic ties of institutional support as well.

Overall, bilateral trade and economic contacts during the period were extremely scarce. Iran played a fairly weak role in Bulgaria's opening up to the developing world, which attached apparent priority to the non-aligned and critical of the West countries in the adjacent Middle East and South Asia region such as Egypt, India, Syria and Iraq (after the July Revolution of 1958). Among the few Iran-related Bulgarian foreign economic initiatives during the National Front government was the inclusion of Iran in a visit by a delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Trade to several regional countries in 1953, which resulted in designing transport routes to facilitate access to the region in order to increase trade. In the second half of the 1950s, as the ice melted in international politics, conditions were created for boosting bilateral contacts, and the first Bulgarian supply deals with Iran for export of flat glass and sodium bicarbonate were implemented. The figures of bilateral turnover tabulated in the chapter are of low value and the various forms of economic cooperation are still unknown. It is evident that the two countries did not give preference to each other even within their respective regions, which moreover lagged behind as a whole in the scale of their priorities.

In spite of the paucity of contacts during the period, the products of deep cultural and economic interaction between the two peoples saw internal dynamism. This is most true of the carpet industry in Bulgaria, in which Persian-type carpets occupied a prominent place. Its development underwent radical transformations, guided by the socialist economic doctrine, attempting to resolve problems specific to the new system, such as the shortage of raw materials, imperfections in pricing, accountability, rationing and categorization of the workers, quality improvement, etc. The main enterprise for the production of Persian carpets remained the Carpet Worker Producers Co-operative "Persian Carpet" in Panagyurishte, but state-owned industrial plants also sprang up, the largest of which were based in Panagyurishte and Plovdiv. Other, smaller co-operatives and state-owned enterprises also functioned in a number of settlements, mainly in the Sredna Gora region and the western part of the Upper Thracian Plain. The production of carpets was considerably increased and standardised as they established themselves on the international market. Contributing to this were a host of our noble professionals such as Luka Zumpalov, Stepan Zakaryan, Berch Tumayan and others, who, on the one hand, provided continuity with the previous period and, on the other, were the bearers of innovative ideas and initiatives, including the combination of Bulgarian and Iranian motifs. There was also awareness of the need to update the relationship with Iran and Central Asia as the homeland of the Persian carpet in order to exchange experiences.

Another dimension of the continued presence of Iranian cultural layers in the Bulgarian spiritual space is the collection of the valuable Islamic, including Iranian, manuscripts left in the Bulgarian lands, which was completed during the period in the newly established Oriental Department of the National Library "St. Cyril and Methodius" and the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The works of Persian classical literature still figured on the pages of our periodicals, and the appearances of renowned Iranian writer-humourist Mohammad Ali Afrashteh, who had moved to Bulgaria, received wide public recognition and infused fresh blood into bilateral cultural communication.

The first event in the field of cultural exchange was the invitation for Bulgarian participation in commemorative celebrations of the great Iranian medieval scholar and physician Abu Ali ibn-Sina (Avicenna), which did not take place for political reasons. The first attempts were made to host an Iranian exhibition in Bulgaria, but they failed because of the limited capabilities of Bulgarian diplomacy in the conditions of broken relations. Nonetheless, the first Iranian students received training in our country, which marked the beginning of educational cooperation, and sports exchanges started with two of the strongest sports for both countries – weightlifting and wrestling. Cooperation in the social sphere also took its first steps with the provision of Bulgarian humanitarian aid to Iran.

Cultural and economic ties, seen in their togetherness with political contacts and consular issues, shape the view of the period from World War II to the late 1950s as preparatory to a new stage when cooperation unfolded in full force. It is worth mentioning that the interest of the two countries in each other did not die out in the said period, and that the tradition was kept alive so that it could later bear rich fruit.

**The Conclusion** briefly summarises the judgements made at the end of each chapter and casts a glance at the 1960s and 1970s – a period that saw the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, the opening of legations and their subsequent upgrading to embassies, and a gradual upward development of bilateral relations in their entire range – visits at various levels, including the highest, full-blooded trade and economic cooperation, meaningful cultural, scientific and sporting exchanges, underpinned by a solid legal basis.

There are **13 annexes** enclosed at the end of the dissertation. The first and the second one refer to Chapter One and represent respectively a response letter by Nasser ed-Din Shah addressed to Prince Alexander of Battenberg on the occasion of the latter’s accession to the throne, accompanied by a translation from Persian, and a message from our diplomatic agent in Constantinople Dimitar Markov of 1897, confirming that he had informed the Iranian ambassador of the agrément given to the first Iranian diplomatic agent in the Principality of Bulgaria Mirza Hossein Khan. Two documents with translations from Persian are also attached to Chapter Two: the first one (Annex 3) is a report by the Iranian consul in Adrianople of 1910, containing an opinion on the need to strengthen friendship with Bulgaria, and the second one (Annex 4) is a report by Anton Monteforte, Chargé d’Affaires of the Iranian legation in Sofia, on his audience with King Boris III in 1921. Annexes 5-8 deal with the issues of Chapter Five. The first contains a copy of the credentials for the appointment of Dimitar Dafinov, head of the first Bulgarian legation in Tehran in 1939, and a response letter from the Iranian Foreign Minister Mozaffar Alam to his Bulgarian counterpart and Prime Minister Georgi Kyoseivanov concerning the audience on that occasion. The second (Annex 6) describes cases of Bulgarian subjects who lost their lives in Iran in the 1930s and early 1940s. The third (Annex 7) is an Iranian note of September 1941 requesting the closure of the Bulgarian legation and the evacuation of its staff, with a translation from Persian. The fourth (Annex 8) is a memo from the returning head of mission Dafinov concerning the Bulgarian colony in Iran with a list of "unreliable" subjects. Another list of Bulgarian citizens interned by the British forces and subject to repatriation is presented in Annex 9 to Chapter Six. Three appendices illustrate the issues of Chapter Seven. The first (Annex 10), dated 1946, reflects the Yugoslav legation in Tehran's assumption of the defence of Bulgarian interests. The second (Annex 11) contains Georgi Dimitrov's handwritten notes of a meeting he had in 1944 with representatives of the Tudeh party and the Iranian trade unions, and the third (Annex 12) is an extract from a brochure published by the Tudeh Central Committee on the history of the BCP, with a translation from Persian. Finally, the last Annex 13 to Chapter Eight is a facsimile of an article in the “Zemedelsko Zname” newspaper, dated 1958, on the Bulgarian carpet industry, including the production of Persian carpets.

**III. Publications on the dissertation topic**

1. Аятоллахи, Хабиболлах, *Книга за Иран. История на изкуството* [Ayatollahi, Habibollah, *Book of Iran. History of Art*], Bulgarian translation, edited by Angel Orbetsov, Sofia, Guttenberg, 2019, 476 pages.
2. Еспозито, Джон, *Ислямската заплаха: мит или реалност* [Esposito, John, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*], Bulgarian translation, edited by Angel Orbetsov, Sofia, Zlatorog, 2003, 400 pages.
3. Орбецов, Ангел, *Арабското нашествие и Арабският халифат в историята на Иран – приемственост и новаторство*, в сборника *Арабистика и ислямознание. Студии по случай 60-годишнината на проф. д.и.н. Йордан Пеев*, [Orbetsov, Angel, *The Arab Invasion and the Arab Caliphate in Iran’s History: Continuity and Innovation*, in the collection *Arab and Islamic Studies. Researches on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of Prof. Dr. Yordan Peev]*, Sofia, 2001, p. 69-82.
4. Орбецов, Ангел, *България и Иран: партньори през вековете*, в списание „Анамнеза“ [Orbetsov, Angel, *Bulgaria and Iran: Partners throughout the Centuries*, in Anamnesis Journal], year XV, 2020, vol. 4, p. 1-16.
5. Орбецов, Ангел, *История на установяването на дипломатически отношения между България и Иран* [Orbetsov, Angel, *History of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Iran*]*,* in International Conference *Iran and Bulgaria in the Mirror of History (Past, Present, Prospects)*, edited by Ivo Panov and Alireza Pourmohammad, Sofia, 2015, p. 25-34.
6. Орбецов, Ангел, Благой Проданов, *Българо-иранските отношения в политическата и икономическата област през 80-те години на ХХ в.*, в Международна конференция *Иран и Балканите в огледалото на историята (минало, настояще, перспективи)* [Orbetsov, Angel and Blagoi Prodanov, *Bulgarian-Iranian Relations in the Political and Economic Field in the 1980s*], in International Conference *Iran and the Balkans in the Mirror of History (Past, Present, Prospects)*, edited by Ivo Panov and Alireza Pourmohammad, Sofia, 2014, p. 87-99.
7. Orbetsov, Angel, *History of the Establishment of the Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Iran*, in *Bulgaria-Iran bilateral relations, Collected papers and historical documents*, ed. K. Sharif Kazemi, G. Petrov (Seminar papers and Exhibition of historical documents on the occasion of the 120th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Islamic republic of Iran, Tehran, 17 September, 2017 & Sofia, 27 November, 2017), p. 21-28.
8. Orbetsov, Angel, *The Beginning of Bulgaria-Iran Inter-state Relations: Facts and Challenges*, in Politeja Journal, Krakow, № 4(73), 2021, p. 205-219.
9. Orbetsov, Angel, Blagoi Prodanov, *Ravabet-e Iran va Bolgharestan dar zamine-ye siyasat va eqtesad tey-e salha-ye dahe-ye hashtad-e qarn-e bistom*, dar Majmue-ye maqalat-e Hamayesh-e *Iran va Balkan dar aine-ye tarikh* [Orbetsov, Angel and Blagoi Prodanov, *Bulgarian-Iranian Relations in the Political and Economic Field in the 1980s*, in Collection of Papers of the Conference *Iran and the Balkans in the Mirror of History (Past, Present, Prospects)*], translated and compiled by Ivo Panov and Alireza Pourmohammad, Sofia, 2016, p. 7-20.

1. Angel Orbetsov, *History of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Iran,* in International Conference *Iran and Bulgaria in the Mirror of History (Past, Present, Prospects)*, Sofia, 2015, p. 25-34; Angel Orbetsov and Blagoi Prodanov, *Bulgarian-Iranian Relations in the Political and Economic field in the 1980s* in International Conference *Iran and the Balkans in the Mirror of History (Past, Present, Prospects)*, Sofia, 2014, p. 87-100 and its Persian version *Iran va Balkan dar aine-ye tarikh*, Sofia, 2016, s. 7-20; Angel Orbetsov, *History of the Establishment of the Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Iran*, in *Bulgaria-Iran bilateral relations, Collected papers and historical documents*, Tehran, 2017, p. 21-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In 2014, a bilateral working group was set up at the Foreign Ministries of Bulgaria and Japan, which conducted research in the archives of both countries and came up with a report on the beginning of official contacts and the establishment of diplomatic relations. The report was endorsed by an exchange of notes in 2017 and further formed the basis for commemorating the respective anniversaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)