

**СОФИЙСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ  
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**POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF  
BULGARIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA  
(1918 – 1925)  
(according to documents kept in Bulgarian archives and the Armenian press)**

## **AUTHOR'S ABSTRACT**

of a DISSERTATION THESIS

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# **I. GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION PAPER**

## **1. Object and subject of the research**

The object of this research are the political and diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Republic of Armenia in the period 1918 – 1925, reviewed within the context of the international climate following World War I and the dynamics of the regional politics in the Balkans and Caucasus.

The subject-matter of the research comprises the particular diplomatic actions, initiatives and institutional relations between both countries, including the role of the Armenian community in Bulgaria as an active initiator in this process. The analysis is based on the Armenian periodicals issued locally, and documents kept in Bulgarian archives which throw light on the mechanisms, challenges and the achievements in the development of the official bilateral relations.

## **2. Aims and tasks of the research**

The purpose of this research is to examine and analyse the political and diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Republic of Armenia within the period 1918 – 1925 based on the Armenian press and documents stored in Bulgarian archives. In terms of interpreting those sources, this research aims at clarifying the dynamics and the essence of bilateral relations by focusing mainly on the proactivity of the Armenian part in the process of establishing official diplomatic ties.

The research aims at following the way the Armenian community in Bulgaria actively strived to build official diplomatic institutions, to represent the interests of the young Armenian statehood and to gain international recognition in terms of its political and social structures. The study examines the diplomatic initiatives and the attempts for relation institutionalization, including the activity of the Armenian National Society and the establishment of an Armenian Consulate General in Bulgaria.

In this regard, the factors which have influence on the Bulgarian-Armenian relations: the international situation following World War I, the domestic policy processes in both countries and the humanitarian aspects, related to the Armenian refugees, are analysed. In doing so, the study essays to contribute for complementing the existing historiography by placing the relations between Bulgaria and Armenia in the broader context of the post-war

European transformation and the search of international legitimacy on behalf of the newly emerged Armenian country.

The following fundamental tasks need to be performed in order to achieve the aim of this research:

- Historical context and prerequisites:
  - To follow up the development of the relations between Bulgarians and Armenians before and during World War I by highlighting the significance of historical relations and the common fate under the Ottoman domination.
  - To analyse the political and socioeconomical environment in the Republic of Armenia after World War I and the reasons for which the establishment of diplomatic relations with Bulgaria were initiated on Armenian behalf.
- Diplomatic relations and political activity:
  - To explore the process of establishing the Armenian National Society in Bulgaria, its role as a primary diplomatic relations initiator and its importance for the mobilization of the Armenian community.
  - To analyse the activity of the Armenian National Society in view of sending diplomatic letters, resolutions and telegrams to Bulgarian authorities and the Great Powers and to evaluate the effect of such actions on the recognition of Armenian independence.
  - To follow up the opening of the Consulate General of Armenia in Sofia, its functions and the reasons for its closure within the context of the changed international situation.
- International context and influence of external factors:
  - To examine the influence of the international factors, including those of the Great Powers and the Triple Entente over the political fate of the Republic of Armenia and the respective effect on the diplomatic relations with Bulgaria.
  - To study the participation of Armenian diaspora in Bulgaria in the diplomatic efforts for the recognition of Armenian independence and the protection of Armenian interests.
- Terminal evaluation and conclusions:

- To summarise the results of the research with respect to the nature and the dynamics of the political and diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Armenia within the period 1918 – 1925.
- To assess the role of the Armenian part as an initiator in developing such relations.
- To draw up conclusions regarding the significance of those relations for the growth of the Armenian community in Bulgaria and for the Bulgarian foreign policy against the background of post-war Europe.

### **3. Methods and Approaches of the Research**

To achieve the tasks and aims herein, a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach was applied which combines the basic methods and methodological approaches:

- Heuristic method

The method is used to trace, accumulate and systemize documents, kept in Bulgarian archives (Central State Archives /CSA/ and other funds) and in the Armenian periodic press, the *Haiasdan* in particular, which underlie this research. This method assists the buildout of an authentic body of sources which disclose the specific measures of the Bulgarian-Armenian political and diplomatic relations between 1918 and 1925.

- Historical method

This method is applied to follow up the evolution of the diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Republic of Armenia during the examined period, by taking into consideration the interrelations between the internal political and international events. The method enables the analysis of the diplomatic and political processes in their historical sequence and context.

- Document analysis

The method includes critical study of publications in the Armenian press, along with diplomatic correspondence, state treaties, memoranda, resolutions, protocols, telegrams and official letters, kept in Bulgarian archives. In terms of this method, raw data were retrieved which enabled the restoration of diplomatic initiatives and political processes.

- Cultural and historical analysis

The method is used to examine the role of the Armenian community in Bulgaria, its social organisation and cultural activity (*The Haiasdan* gazette for instance) and to analyse the humanitarian aid and the cultural interactions between both peoples. This method contributes for the overall understanding of the cultural and political environment where bilateral relations were formed.

- Sociological and demographic approach

The approach is applied to examine the social and economic aspects of Bulgarian-Armenian relations, including the migratory flows, the social status of Armenian refugees, and their adaptation mechanisms in Bulgaria. This approach contributes for the assessment of the social foundation the diplomatic relations were built on.

- International analysis

This method is used to analyse the legal documents and the international treaties which refer to the establishment of the diplomatic relations and recognition of the independence of the Republic of Armenia. It makes it possible to rationalize the legal framework of these relations.

The combination of these methods and approaches ensures the comprehensive, thorough and multilayered examination of Bulgarian-Armenian political and diplomatic relations within the context of post-war Europe, which was the basis for achieving the research tasks set forth.

#### **4. Relevance of the topic**

The study of Bulgarian-Armenian political and diplomatic relations within the period 1918 – 1925 is of paramount importance for the interpretation of the historical processes which underlie the contemporary interrelations between both nations. This period comprised key moments such as the end of World War I, the declaration of the independence of the First Republic of Armenia and the development of the diplomatic ties between Bulgaria and Armenia.

A special focus is given to the fact that the initiative for building diplomatic interaction in those relations had been mainly on Armenian part, who actively sought international recognition and support in the complex climate of post-war Europe. This peculiarity makes the study of Bulgarian – Armenian relations even more intriguing and important as it throws light on the diaspora's role, the refugee issues and the humanitarian aid as factors for the development of a diplomatic representation.

The relevance of the topic is backed up by the modern context of international relations, where historical analyses serve as a valuable point of reference for both diplomats and politicians. In a globalized world, where diplomatic and cultural relations play an increasingly more important role, such studies contribute for enhancing the understanding of how small nations may stand for their interests and influence the regional and global stability.

This research provides new perspectives for the modern diplomats and analysts, engaged in the strengthening of international cooperation and understanding between Bulgaria and Armenia. Furthermore, the research highlights the significance of historical documents as a primary source for restoring the diplomatic relations and focusing on new aspects in studying the international policy of the Balkans and the Caucasus following World War I.

## **II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS**

The thesis work is structured in compliance with the aims and tasks set forth. It consists of 250 pages, of which 211 pages comprise the scientific text, 23 pages of appendices and 12 pages of references comprising 170 titles, differentiated in sources and specialised literature in Bulgarian, Russian, Armenian, English and French. It includes an introduction, a reference review, three main chapters, a conclusion and a total of 17 appendices containing copies of a sample of *The Haiasdan*, maps and archival records.

### **Introduction**

The introduction acquaints the reader with the subject of the research, by outlining the major problems, related to the diplomatic and political relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the First Republic of Armenia within the period 1918 – 1925. It specifies the relevance of the topic and its significance in the light of the international relations during the period into question. The object and subject-matter of the study are defined, which include both historical prerequisites and particular political manifestations of the bilateral relations. The introduction contains well defined aims and tasks, focused on disclosing the mechanisms, stages and results of those relations. The introduction also reveals the methodological approaches used in the analysis of the archival records and the materials

from Armenian periodicals, while providing the basis for a thorough and comprehensive examination of the subject.

### **Review of references and sources**

The section dedicated to the review of references and the available sources of the research focuses on three major groups.

The first one comprises works and publications which consider various aspects of Bulgarian-Armenian relations and relationships. The historical ties between both peoples, their cultural interactions along with certain political moments, which underlie the subject matter, are regarded herein.

The second group includes a short review of the history of the Armenian periodicals in Bulgaria with special focus on the *Haiasdan*, which started to appear in 1915 and after a short interruption its publishing was resumed between 1919 – 1925. The periodical was used as a main tool of analysis of the Armenian press because of its high extent of conservation, periodicity and thematic scope. Not only was *Haiasdan* an information media, but a key tool which formed and maintained the political identity of the Armenian community in Bulgaria. Due to the regular publications, the intended concepts and contents, letters of address and chronicles, related to the activity of the Armenian National Society (ANS), the newspaper provided for the restoration of the goals, structure and the institutional dynamics of the organisation. The *Haiasdan* thus gained a foothold as a valuable source document in the study of the diaspora's role in the development of the Bulgarian-Armenian relations in the aftermath of the war.

The third group regards the archival documents kept in the Central State Archives (CSA) and St. Cyril and Methodius National Library (CMNL) as well as some documents from the National Archives of Armenia. Those documents are the main basis of the study and contribute for the comprehensive understanding of the political and diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the First Republic of Armenia.

## **CHAPTER I: Bulgarian – Armenian historical ties in the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The first chapter of the study outlines the deep roots of the Bulgarian – Armenian relations and traces their development from the early Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The frame of the chapter is the understanding that those relations did not appear spontaneously, but stemmed from a century-old tradition of cohabitation, cultural exchange, solidarity and mutual support.

The process of the establishment and development of the Armenian diaspora in the Bulgarian lands during the Ottoman period is first examined. The major migratory waves between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted in the formation of compact Armenian communities in key towns such as Plovdiv, Sofia, Varna and Ruse, are described. In the setting of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian community managed to preserve its religious, cultural and language identity, while integrating in the social and economic life of the local population. The historical relations between Bulgarians and Armenians created the foundation of future political and diplomatic ties which would be further activated at a later stage.

The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the cultural interactions between both peoples in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the primary focus being on the role of Armenian printing houses and printers for Bulgarian enlightenment. The Armenian contribution in the dissemination of Bulgarian literature and letters especially through the printing houses in Constantinople was significant. Individuals like Tatevos Divitchian and Harutyun Minassian were important brothers-in-arms of Bulgarian revivalists. Their activity facilitated the formation of the modern Bulgarian national identity and built a solid foundation of trust and mutual aid between both communities.

The third thematic unit is dedicated to the support, which the Armenian community rendered in the Bulgarian fight for liberation. The study presents particular manifestations

of empathy on behalf of the Armenian clergy, merchants, craftsmen and intellectuals towards the Bulgarian revolutionary movement. It focuses on the aid to figures such as Georgi Rakovski and Vasil Levski and on the participation of Armenians in the April Uprising and the Russo-Turkish War. Events of diplomatic and moral support are described, including such of saving Bulgarian revolutionaries from repressions.

The last part of the chapter reviews the cooperation between Armenians and Bulgarians within the framework of both peoples' liberation movements in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a result of the Armenian massacres, Bulgaria became a shelter for the Armenian refugees, migrants and revolutionaries. The study analyses the relations between Macedonian-Adrianople committees and the Armenian revolutionary organisations and the participation of the Armenian volunteer company in the First Balkan War on the side of the Bulgarian army. Those events affirm the Bulgarian-Armenian cooperation as a symbol of similar fate, common ideals and profound mutual trust.

Several basic conclusions on the nature and significance of Bulgarian-Armenian relations till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be drawn based on the presented historical review. In the first place, the historical ties between Bulgarians and Armenians reveal a sustainable tradition of peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange and mutual respect. These were rooted yet in the early Middle Ages, had developed under the Byzantine and Ottoman dominations and reached a new level of rapprochement during the ages of Bulgarian National Revival. This historical heritage provided for prerequisites of mutual understanding and cooperation of crucial stages of both peoples' development.

In the second place, the Armenian diaspora in Bulgarian lands gained the reputation of a vivid and well organised community, which managed to both preserve its cultural and religious identity and adequately integrate in the social and economic structure of the local society. Armenians took an important place in the urban life of a number of Bulgarian

centres, maintaining at the same time active relations with the Armenian clerical and national circles.

In the third place, activation in the cultural and intellectual ties between both communities was observed during the National Revival. Armenian printers and intellectuals played a significant role in the dissemination of Bulgarian enlightenment literature, which contributed for the formation of Bulgarian national self-awareness. This cultural contribution was supplemented by particular manifestations of solidarity during the struggle for liberation – assistance to revolutionaries, providing shelter, logistic support and moral engagement.

In the end, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the relations between Bulgarians and Armenians took on a new cooperation dimension – joint actions within the framework of the national liberation movements and sharing political ideals. Armenian refugees and revolutionaries found a secure shelter and active support in Bulgaria, and the common struggle against oppression contributed for strengthening mutual trust.

All those aspects – cultural, political, social and ideological, laid down the foundation of a deep and multilayered interaction, which would facilitate the formation of interstate relations between Bulgaria and Armenia in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the examined period became an irreplaceable background for the interpretation of the further diplomatic and political ties between both countries.

## **CHAPTER II: Armenia during the period of the Ottoman and Iranian domination until the collapse of the Russian Empire**

Chapter Two examines the fateful changes in the development of Armenian history since its division between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran and until the collapse of the Russian Empire in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout this long period, the Armenian people had been under the domination of different empires, which entailed significant social, cultural and political transformations. The division of historical

Armenian territories, legalized by the Treaty of Zuhab (1639), put Armenians in two different imperial systems; the Ottoman Empire and the Iranian Empire, each one of these setting specific conditions for their existence. In that context, the Armenian Apostolic Church, through institutions such as the Catholicos of Echmiadzin and the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople played a decisive role in the preservation of the national identity and cultural integrity.

Particular attention is drawn to the deed of Israel Orli, an early visionary of the Armenian national liberation movement, who made diplomatic efforts to engage the European powers with the Armenian cause. Regardless of the limited practical success, his activity significantly promoted the formation of the contemporary political thought.

The gradual annexation of Eastern Armenia to the Russian Empire commenced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a process which radically changed the political geography of the region. The migration of Armenians from Iran and the Ottoman Empire to the new Russian territories laid down the foundations of a partial national unification and provided a relative stability to Eastern Armenia.

Against this historical background, occurred the so called Armenian question, a sign of the aspirations of the Armenian people towards security, cultural survival and political emancipation. The various historiographical interpretations of the notion are reviewed, along with its evolution in a global context. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the pressure of the Great Powers and within the common reformation processes in the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian community expressed hopes in a series of reforms, beginning with the Tanzimat and spanning to the Armenian National Constitution of 1863.

However, the reformation initiatives proved to be ineffective especially under the ruling of sultan Abdul Hamid II, and the subsequent international treaties (the San Stefano Treaty and the Berlin Treaty) did not result in any real improvements for the Armenians.

In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the basic Armenian political parties were formed; Armenakan, Hunchakian and Dashnaktsutyun, which mobilized the Armenian population in their struggle for autonomy and protection of the national interests.

The political activation was enhancing against the background of severe repressions, including large-scale massacres and terror. The attempts for international reforms between 1895 and 1914 were futile - the promises of the Great Powers remained unfulfilled, and the latest significant administrative reform project in 1914 failed with the onset of World War I.

The concluding part of the chapter presents the dramatic impact of the war and the Russian Revolution over the Armenian people. Armenians survived the 1915 Genocide within the Ottoman Empire, while the collapse of the Russian domination in Eastern Armenia resulted in a vacuum in ruling and new challenges. The participation of Armenian volunteers in the Russian army, the attempts for establishing a local self-government and the resistance against the Turkish offensive of 1918 revealed the last desperate efforts of the Armenian people to survive and preserve their statehood. These events paved the path for the proclamation of the First Republic of Armenia, a new stage in history, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The division of Armenia between the Ottoman Empire and Iran laid the foundations for the century-long self-identification of Armenians, who began since then seeking ways of liberation from foreign oppressors. The revival of the national identity and the nascence of the national liberation movements, starting with the initial efforts of Israel Ori, and later of other figures, evidenced the increasing awareness of the Armenians about the necessity of self-identification and independence.

The issue of Armenian liberation posed to the peoples of Caucasus and the Middle East an important historical challenge, whereas a major part in its resolution played not only the Armenians' inner efforts, but external factors as well, such as the Russian interference and the interests of the great European countries. Regardless of the attempts for reforms and

diplomatic efforts for improving the situation of the Armenians, the Turkish violence and repressions, aimed against the Armenian community as part of the *Armenian Question* created during the Ottoman Empire, continued to determine the fate in these lands.

The formation of the Armenian political parties and revolutionary movements during this period, such as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) and others, contributed for the establishment of a new Armenian national identity and strengthened the struggle for independence, which would continue in the decades to follow. Notwithstanding the serious contradictions in those organizations and the discords on strategy matters, the primary goal of the Armenians remained clear: to liberate their Fatherland from the foreign rule and to ensure social, political and economic stability thereof.

The processes which started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century intensified during World War I, when Armenians became not only participants in the major geopolitical events, but also victims of the brutal political games of both Ottoman and Russian Empires. The collapse of the second one as a result of the revolutions in 1917 was a game-changer, but the Armenians in Caucasus and Western Armenia had still to face the new challenge: to protect their physical existence, their rights, to establish new state forms and to achieve complete independence.

### **CHAPTER III: Political and diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Armenia (1918-1925)**

Chapter Three is dedicated to the development of the political and diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the First Republic of Armenia within the period 1918 – 1925.

This was a period of severe political transformations for both countries - establishment of new political subjects and the struggle for international recognition at a time when empires were collapsing.

Armenia strived to establish itself as an independent country following the proclamation of its republic in May 1918, whereas Bulgaria, who suffered the defeat of World War I, was in diplomatic isolation and was looking for new opportunities for regional cooperation. The first attempts for building up official diplomatic ties between both countries began in this very setting. Attention is drawn to the initial political ties, which started as early as 1918, when the Armenian government officially informed Bulgarian authorities of its independence. The efforts of Armenian representatives to engage Bulgaria with the humanitarian and political cause of the young republic are described and the attentive and balanced response on Bulgarian part, who was trying to combine its commitments as an ally with the understanding of the fate of the Armenian people, are described. Particular focus is given to the preparation for the Constantinople Conference in 1918 during which Bulgarian diplomacy analysed the strategic significance of Armenia, assigning to Zadig Khanzadian to draw up a report summarising the geographic, military and economic specifics of the country.

The analysis highlights the role of the Armenian community in Bulgaria and the establishment of the Armenian National Society (ANS), which was a key figure in the paradiplomatic structure over the years, when Armenia had no official representation in the country. ANS's activity and its newspaper, the *Haiasdan* created channels for communication between the Armenian diaspora, the Bulgarian institutions and the international allies. The organisation took active part in coordinating the humanitarian aid, the representation of Armenian interests and the development of a positive public and political image of Armenia with reference to Bulgaria.

In 1921, after the fall of the First Armenian Republic and its inclusion within the composition of Soviet Russia, a Consulate General of Armenia was opened in Sofia. This paradoxical act conceived explanation with the needs of the numerous Armenian communities in Bulgaria and with the willingness of the Bulgarian country to continue the relations so far established. The appointment of the merchant Hagop Mavian for an Honorary Consul General was promptly approved by Bulgarian authorities, who underlined

his good reputation, bulgarophilic attitude and former experience as an Iranian diplomatic representative. The consulate functioned until 1925 while performing important administrative, legal and social functions.

This-period analysis evidenced that regardless of its short existence, the First Republic of Armenia was able to blaze a trail for significant diplomatic channels with Bulgaria. This stemmed from the combination of active Armenian diplomacy, strategic interests on behalf of Bulgaria and the support of well-organised diaspora. Armenia demonstrated consistency toward international legitimation, and Bulgaria responded positively thereto, lead both from empathy to the Armenian tragedy and from its aspirations for new geopolitical and trading horizons in the conditions of post-war instability.

The diplomatic relations between both countries within the period 1918 – 1925 revealed a meaningful and pragmatic cooperation, where political aims intertwined with humanitarian concepts. Regardless of their interruption following Armenia's sovietization, those relations remained an example of solidarity, political insight and mutual support between those two peoples, who had experienced both national tragedy and embraced the hope for a new beginning.

The period from 1918 and 1925 was a benchmark in the development of Bulgarian-Armenian relations where notwithstanding the complex international climate and the instability in the region, consistent steps were made towards the establishment of official diplomatic connections between both countries. Especially active cooperation in this process was rendered on the part of Armenia, both in terms of the institutional activity of the First Republic of Armenia, and in terms of the active role of the Armenian diaspora in Bulgaria, organized about the Armenian National Society.

The establishment of diplomatic relations, formalized with the opening of the Armenian Consulate General in Sofia in 1921, resulted both from political aspirations and from particular economic reasons. To Armenia, a young and vulnerable country, seeking international recognition and support, Bulgaria was that reliable partner and adherent, who

could ensure the diplomatic path to Europe and the Balkans. To Bulgaria, on the other hand, the cooperation with Armenia was an opportunity to expand its trading perspectives and to seek outlet to Caucasus and the Middle East – especially with respect to the Treaty of Sèvres, which had set forth a strategic access of Armenia to the Black Sea. Those relations integrated in the broader endeavours of the country to get out of the economic isolation and to overcome the consequences of the post-war crisis.

On behalf of Bulgaria a consistent support of the Armenian cause was observed, both as regards foreign policy gestures, and as regards humanitarian policy. Not only did Bulgarian authorities respond positively to Armenian political initiatives, but they also provided a legal and social framework for the integration of Armenian refugees. In doing so, they created an atmosphere of trust and reciprocity, where the Armenian party saw not only temporary support, but a long-term partnership, based on historical connectivity and cultural closeness.

Despite the efforts made, the sovietization of Armenia and the modified international situation resulted into a gradual interruption of the official relations. The closure of the Armenian consulate in Sofia in 1925 symbolized the end of a short, but significant stage in the history of the bilateral ties. The dialogue achieved, however, and the relations developed during that period remain substantial and a testimony of common interests, political presence and solidarity between both peoples who had underwent historical hardships.

## **CONCLUSION**

The history of the First Republic of Armenia (1918 – 1920) which had been long neglected in the scientific and public discourse, is nowadays gaining increasing importance both in Armenian historiography and within the international studies, related to Eastern Europe and Caucasus. This republic emerged in the setting of a dramatic historical transition – after the collapse of the Russian Empire, under the conditions of a civil war, international intervention and the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide in 1915. Officially established

on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1918, the First Republic of Armenia emerged as a last resort of political survival of the Armenian people, who encountered physical extermination and political isolation. The Republic faced a multitude of internal and external challenges – territorial disputes, hunger, diseases, refugee crises and military conflicts with all the neighbouring countries. Irrespective of its short existence, it made efforts for the development of a modern statehood, gaining of international recognition and stood for the rights of the Armenian people on the world scene.

The Kingdom of Bulgaria on the other side, was in a similar vulnerable situation – the country had lost World War I, had suffered political instability, diplomatic isolation and a severe economic crisis. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, both countries attempted to build official diplomatic relations, motivated by a geopolitical expedience and by historical sympathy and common interests in the region.

The research intends to throw light on this process by focusing on the not so comprehensively studied issues of the political and diplomatic relations between the First Republic of Armenia and the Kingdom of Bulgaria between 1918 and 1925. Derived from an extended archival material and periodicals, especially the Armenian press in Bulgaria and mostly *The Haiasdan* newspaper, which was the organ of the Dashnaktsutyun party and later of the Armenian National Society, key events of the building of bilateral ties were restored, where the Armenian diaspora played a particular role. Apart from documenting the current events, the newspaper reflected the political standpoints of the diaspora; it contributed for its internal consolidation and provided information about the decisions and the actions of the Armenia National Society. In doing so, *The Haiasdan* performed an important function for the mobilization of the community, the preservation of the national identity under the conditions of a crisis and became a valuable source of study of the social attitude and political initiatives of the Armenians in Bulgaria during the period under consideration.

The study reveals that the Armenian community in Bulgaria was not a passive political object. It actively participated in the processes of developing interstate relations. With the establishment of the Armenian National Society (ANS), the Bulgarian Armenians were able to institutionalize their government and to turn it into an effective political mediator between Yerevan, Sofia and the international community. This initiative was significantly important in the climate of a political instability, where the lack of a steady diplomatic mission, put the diaspora in the position of an intermediary and speaker of the Armenian cause. Until the establishment of the Armenian Consulate General in Sofia in 1921, it was the ANS in particular, which maintained the official diplomatic communication with the Bulgarian state, performing the function of a temporary representative of the Armenian interests. Following the opening of the Consulate, these functions fell within the scope of its jurisdiction, which marked a new stage in the development of the bilateral relationships.

It is important to point out that Bulgaria recognized the independence of Armenia before the fall of the republic under the Soviet domination, while the opening of the consulate in Sofia took place after the country was included in the composition of Soviet Russia. This paradox was a sign of both the rapid pace of the diplomatic processes and the dramatic instability of the age.

The documental evidence stored in the Central State Archives of Bulgaria clearly indicate, that the Bulgarian state apprehended the Armenian diplomatic activity with a moderately positive attitude. Though official ties remained within the frames of a restricted diplomatic form, Bulgaria actually recognized Armenia's independence with the act of opening the Armenian Consulate General in Sofia and the diplomatic correspondence kept with the ANS representatives. This was a demonstration of the pragmatic course of the Bulgarian foreign policy in the post-war period – the search of new alliances and trade partnerships against the background of economic isolation and international instability.

The political relationships between Bulgaria and Armenia for the said period were not limited to a formal exchange of diplomatic communication only. These were an expression

of a more comprehensive political interest on behalf of both countries. To Armenia, who was in the course of a struggle for international recognition and territorial survival, the support on behalf of Bulgaria was a paramount diplomatic asset. The Bulgarian country was interested in the potential commercial and political opportunities stemming from cooperation with Armenia, particularly with respect to the Treaty of Sèvres, which provided for a strategic access of Armenia to the Black Sea. In this regard, the Armenian country was apprehended as a potential trading corridor and a bridge to Caucasus and the Middle East. Meanwhile, Bulgaria was aware of the limited possibilities of the newly established republic and manifested a cautious approach in building long-term commitments.

The research confirmed that the diplomatic relations between Armenia and Bulgaria were not only limited to the official notes and consular missions. They developed on a large scale of informal and semi-diplomatic interactions, including cultural and humanitarian initiatives. The Armenian press in Bulgaria played an important part not only as an information channel, but as a tool for the internal mobilization and a foreign-policy pressure. ANS, on the other hand, took functions, inherent to a temporary legitimate representative body, including the issue of travel documents and passports, an act which testified for silent institutional recognition on behalf of Bulgarian administration and allied authorities.

The emotional aspect of Bulgarian-Armenian relationship should not be disregarded. The letters and resolutions addressed to Bulgarian government clearly revealed the hope, that Bulgaria would become an anchor and an advocate of the Armenian Question. Bulgaria, on the other hand, who also underwent political and economic tremors, expressed certain empathy to the cause of the small Caucasus country even under the conditions of reserved diplomatic activity.

In summary, this study shows, that regardless of the limited resources and the complex international situation the relationships based on mutual respect, historical proximity and political expedience were developed between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the First

Republic of Armenia. Due to geopolitical reasons those relationships did not reach stability, but remained a valuable historical precedent and an example of how the diaspora could be a strategic stakeholder in bilateral diplomacy.

The presented conclusions affirm the necessity of a new perspective in studying the diplomatic relations of the small countries in periods of transition, where the informal participants' role, such as diaspora organizations and local communities took a core place.

In this regard, this study does not only offer a reconstruction of a particular age of the Bulgarian - Armenian relations, but provides a model of more enhanced consideration of the foreign policy as a collective process in which institutions, communities and individuals take equal parts in the development of the international legitimacy and cooperation.

This work does not close the book, but opens vistas for further researches. They could comprise the non-examined documents in foreign archives and records and analyse the economic aspect of bilateral relations.

Lastly, this study not only restores a little-known chapter of the history of Bulgarian-Armenian relations, but also offers a higher view to the role of the small countries and diaspora communities within the context of international diplomacy in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It reveals that even in periods of political vulnerability and geopolitical turbulence the efforts for establishing partnerships based on mutual respect and historical proximity may create a lasting impact on collective memory. The exploration of these processes is important both for understanding the past and for considering contemporary challenges, which international relations are faced with, and the place of historical memory therein.

### **III. KEY CONTRIBUTIONS**

This research on Bulgarian-Armenian political and diplomatic relations within the period 1918 – 1925 features the following key contributions:

**1. Introduction into scholarly discourse of a new archival material**

This work uses and presents for the first time in a systematized manner a considerable number of documents from Bulgarian archives, which have not been examined and brought to light so far. It allows a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of the bilateral relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Republic of Armenia during the period in question.

**2. Analysis of the Armenian press in Bulgaria and the contribution of the *Haiasdan* newspaper**

For the first time in scientific studies the Armenian periodicals in Bulgaria, and particularly the *Haiasdan*, have been consistently and thoroughly studied as a primary source for historical reconstruction. The research explains that through the pages of this newspaper in particular, the activity of the Armenian National Society and its diplomatic initiatives, internal organisation and public function among other things, were documented and analysed. The newspaper is considered not only as a mass medium, but as an important tool for internal diaspora mobilization and political representation in a situation where no official Armenian diplomatic mission exists. Therefore, the *Haiasdan* is recognised as a key source for the reconstruction of the institutionalization processes of the Armenian community and the development of bilateral relations with the Bulgarian state.

**3. First comprehensive exploration of the subject**

This research is the first comprehensive academic attempt to systematically examine the political and diplomatic relations between both states between 1918 and 1925. It comprises an analysis of the diplomatic initiatives, the institutional forms of cooperation and the role of the Armenian community in Bulgaria.

#### **4. Throwing light on the diplomatic role on the Armenian part**

For the first time in Bulgarian historiography the dominant initiative on the Armenian part in the development of the diplomatic relations with Bulgaria is clearly outlined.

#### **5. International context of the bilateral relations**

This work examines Bulgarian-Armenian relations not only on a bilateral scale, but within the broader context of the international policy after World War I, including in view of the system of treaties of Versailles and Sèvres and the impact of the Great Powers on Armenia's international recognition process.

#### **6. Clarification of the activity of the Armenian diaspora in Bulgaria**

The study focuses on the active part of the Armenian community in Bulgaria as a mediator in the diplomatic relations between Sofia and Yerevan, including as regards humanitarian aid, repatriation and consular affairs.

#### **7. Institutional frame of the bilateral relations**

Such analysis of the process of the establishment and functioning of the Consulate General of Armenia in Bulgaria is made for the first time and, what's more, it is presented as a unique diplomatic precedent for the examined period.

#### **8. Practical relevance**

This work is of practical significance to historians, diplomats and researchers who are interested in the foreign policy of Bulgaria, the history of Armenia and its diaspora, and of the small countries' mechanisms on a global scale in the aftermath of the war.

#### IV. PUBLICATIONS ON THE SUBJECT

1. *Процесът на отчуждаване на старата арменска църква „Света Богородица“ в София и построяването на новия храм*  
Сборник доклади от конференция „Арменският духовен живот в България“, София, 2015 г., стр. 121-131
2. *Познатият и непознат Аветис Ахаронян. Още един шрих към неговото творчество*  
Сборник от XIX научна конференция на нехабилитирани преподаватели и докторанти във Факултета по класически и нови филологии  
Университетско издателство "Св. Климент Охридски", София, 2023, стр. 58-67
3. *Българо-арменските отношения в началото на XX в. по документи на централния държавен архив*  
Сборник от XXI научна конференция на нехабилитирани преподаватели и докторанти във Факултета по класически и нови филологии, 2024 - Службена бележка
4. *„ Арменските търговци в Иран през XVII в. дипломатически и културни посредници“*  
Сборник с доклади от Международна научна конференция „30 години българска иранистика“ – Службена бележка
5. *Един непубликуван „Доклад по арменските въпроси“ от 15 септември 1918 г.*  
Сборник „България, българите и Европа – мит, история, съвремие“, т.19  
Университетско издателство на Великотърновски университет „Св. св. Кирил и Методий“, 2024 – Службена бележка
6. *Под печата на историята: Арменският периодичен печат в България и началото на българо-арменските дипломатически отношения (1918-1925)*  
Сборник на ФКНФ, 2025 – в очакване на Службена бележка
7. *Под печата на историята: Вестник „Хаясдан“ и установяването на българо-арменски дипломатически отношения*  
Сборник от XXII научна конференция на нехабилитирани преподаватели и докторанти във Факултета по класически и нови филологии  
Университетско издателство "Св. Климент Охридски", София, 2025 – Службена бележка