

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. PhD Petar Nikolov Goliyski

on a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree “doctor”, in the professional field 2.1. Philology, Scientific Major “Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia” (PhD in “Armenian Social Studies”) with the title:

“POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN TSARDOM OF BULGARIA
AND REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA IN THE PERIOD 1918-1925
(based on documents preserved in the Bulgarian archives and the Armenian press)”

presented by Eojeni Kevork Sakaz

The candidate

Eojeni Kevork Sakaz graduated in 1996 with a master’s degree in “History of International Relations” from Yerevan State University. In the period 1998–2010 she was a part-time Lecturer, and since 2010 she has been an Assistant Professor of Armenian language in the Armenian and Caucasus Studies Degree Programme, in the Department of “Classical East” of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology. She teaches the following disciplines: Practical Armenian Language, Theory and practice of Translation, Cultural Studies, Armenian Civilization, History of Armenia, History of Armenian Church, History of Armenian Diplomacy, History of the Armenian Question, Origin and development of Armenian Communities around the world, Armenian Linguistics.

Eojeni Kevork Sakaz was enrolled as an independent doctoral candidate on 15.10.2024 by order ПД 20-1953/14.10.2024 in the professional field 2.1. Philology, Scientific Major “Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia”, PhD programme “Armenian Social Studies” at the department of “Classical East”. She was withdrawn prematurely on 16.06.2025 by an electronic report of the Dean of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, with incoming No. 70-04-658/18.06.2025.

During her doctoral studies, the candidate has passed examinations in the five disciplines included in her individual plan with excellent results and has provided the required number of publications related to the dissertation topic. In compliance with the requirements of the Higher Education Act, The Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Eojeni Kevork Sakaz has submitted a dissertation and has fulfilled all formal requirements. She has provided complete and proper documentation for this procedure.

The dissertation

The work entitled “*Political and Diplomatic Relations between Tsardom of Bulgaria and Republic of Armenia in the period 1918–1925 (based on documents preserved in the Bulgarian archives and the Armenian press)*” comprises 232 standard pages without the appendices (16 in number) and the scholarly apparatus. The scholarly apparatus includes: 15 archives of the Central State Archives, 1 archive of the National Library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”, 1 archive of the State Archives – Varna, 1 archive of the National Archives of Armenia, 12 collections with documents, 3 statistical yearbooks, 5 pieces of memories and

memoirs, the full circulation of the newspaper “Hayasdan” for 1919–1925, other press – 7 issues and 115 monographs, studies and scientific articles. Structurally, the dissertation is well organised, comprising an Introduction (including Aim and Objectives, Topic Relevance, Research methodology), Literature and Sources Review, Chapters 1–3, each with its own subchapters, Conclusion, Contributions, Bibliography and Appendices.

The first chapter reviews the relations between Bulgarians and Armenians from the Late Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20th century, emphasising their cultural, economic, and political intertwining. The cooperation during the Bulgarian Renaissance was particularly significant, when Armenian printers in Constantinople such as Tatevos Divitchyan and Harutyun Minasyan published textbooks and books in Bulgarian. In the context of the national liberation struggle, the Armenian community in Bulgaria demonstrated solidarity through moral, logistical, and armed support. Armenians assisted and sheltered Bulgarian revolutionaries, and even took part directly in the liberation acts. The pinnacle of this solidarity was the formation of the Armenian volunteer company during the Balkan War (1912–1913), which was awarded the “Order of Bravery”.

The second chapter is dedicated to the historical development of the Armenian lands from the 17th to the beginning of the 20th century, when they were divided between the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Israel Ori’s early diplomatic efforts to attract European support for Armenia’s liberation are traced, as are the stages of Russian conquests in the Caucasus that led to Russia’s annexation of Eastern Armenia. The same chapter analyses the process of formation of the Armenian Question, which arose in the context of the reforms in the Ottoman Empire and the pursuit of national liberation. Special attention is paid to the emergence of Armenian political parties and their role in the resistance against the Ottoman Empire. The chapter ends with the First World War, the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the collapse of the Russian and Ottoman Empires – events and processes that played the role of a catalyst for the construction of the modern Armenian national idea.

The third chapter, which is the main part of the dissertation, is focused on the political and diplomatic relations between the Tsardom of Bulgaria and the First Armenian Republic in the period 1918–1925, developing against the backdrop of profound geopolitical changes during and after the First World War. Armenia’s efforts for international recognition are well outlined, as are the reactions of the Bulgarian state, which hesitates between its sympathies for the Armenians and its allied commitments to Germany, which, because of the course of historical events, finds itself in the camp of the opponents of the Armenian cause.

From the attached and analysed documents, it is clear that supporting the Armenian cause brings several real or potential benefits for Bulgaria: penetration of its influence in the Caucasus region, strengthening its humanitarian image and strengthening ties with the important and well-organised Armenian diaspora, represented by the Armenian Patriarchate and the Armenian People’s Union in Bulgaria. The latter also performs para-diplomatic functions in Sofia. In 1921, an Armenian General Consulate was opened in the Bulgarian capital, but its activities were discontinued in 1925 due to the change of regime in (Soviet) Armenia and the new international realities.

Research Contributions

The topic “Political and Diplomatic Relations between the Tsardom of Bulgaria and the Republic of Armenia 1918–1925 (based on documents preserved in the Bulgarian archives and the Armenian press)” of the dissertation by Eojeni Kevork Sakaz is not only interesting but also previously undeveloped. Only very narrow specialists know that the already small number of

publications on Armenian-Bulgarian relations until the end of the 19th century suddenly stopped with the onset of the 20th century. The only exception to this pattern is Zohrab Kasabyan's "Essays on the History of the Armenian Community in Bulgaria (1896–1970)". Although interest in Armenian-Bulgarian topics was rekindled after 1991, the first half of the 20th century has once again been largely overlooked by scholars. This academic reality is well outlined by the doctoral researcher in her survey of the existing literature. Therefore, the chosen topic makes the dissertation of Eojeni Kevork Sakaz truly relevant and fills a completely unexplored niche.

However, the relevance of a scholarly work would be of little value if it is not well written. And here, Eojeni Kevork Sakaz has succeeded remarkably well. First of all, I would like to highlight the enormous work done by the doctoral student in researching, selecting and only then analysing a huge number of archival units. 49 archival records passed through her hands, of which 15 were used for writing the dissertation, and the remaining 34 were abandoned as "useless." The situation is like the study of the flow of the newspaper "Hayasdan" from the period 1919–1925. Neither the newspaper "Hayasdan" nor the archival records have so far been the subject of research by Armenologists. Personally, I, who have been dealing with documents in original or translation since 2002, am very impressed by such "fieldwork" because it reveals a very serious approach to the task and goals of the work.

Speaking of goals and objectives, the significant volume of the first two chapters – "Bulgarian-Armenian Historical Relations XVII – Early XX" and "Armenia during the Period of Ottoman and Iranian Rule until the Collapse of the Russian Empire" is striking. This "disproportion" is intentional, since the Bulgarian audience knows very little about Bulgarian-Armenian relations during the period XVII – early XX, and knows practically nothing about what was happening across the Black Sea at the same time. So, the first two chapters, besides being introductory to the issues of the third chapter, which is the focus of the dissertation, also have value as independent texts.

The significant contribution of Eojeni Kevork Sakaz's dissertation is, first of all, that it is the first comprehensive systematic study of the political and diplomatic relations between the Tsardom of Bulgaria and the First Armenian Republic in the period 1918–1925. This includes an analysis of diplomatic initiatives, institutional forms of cooperation and the role of the Armenian community in Bulgaria. The other major contribution is the introduction into scientific circulation of new or previously unused archival data, shedding light on the political and diplomatic relations between the two countries. No less significant contribution is the study of Armenian periodicals in Bulgaria, and in particular the current of the newspaper "Hayasdan" and their introduction into scientific circulation. The dissertation shows that "Hayasdan" has a special status. It is not only a media organ but also an instrument of political representation in the absence of an official Armenian diplomatic mission. Thus, the newspaper proves to be a key source for reconstructing the processes of institutionalisation of the Armenian community and building bilateral relations with the Bulgarian state.

In the course of her work, the doctoral student came across truly interesting documents, both official and personal. Among the latter is, for example, a letter from the head of the Armenian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, Avetis Aharonian, to Simeon Radev and his wife, dated February 1, 1921, discovered in the Family Archive of Simeon and Bistra Radev. Despite the unknown occasion of the letter, it reveals the warm professional and personal relationship between Radev and Aharonian (Chapter 3, p. 127).

Personally, I find the most engaging parts of the dissertation to be the reports of the Bulgarian Plenipotentiary Minister in Constantinople, Dr Nedyalko Kulushev, from the summer of 1918. On the one hand, they show that Bulgaria, being the weakest link in the Central Powers, inevitably had to manoeuvre and balance between its interests and its sympathies for the

Armenian cause on the one hand and the interests of the allies Turkey, Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other (Chapter 3, pp. 136-137).

However, Kolushev's report of July 31, 1918 also reveals an unsuspected, less provincial Bulgaria, a country with interests outside the traditional triangle delineated by Morava Region, the Aegean, and the Danube. With the idea of not falling behind Turkey, Germany, and Austro-Hungarian Empire in penetrating Transcaucasia, where Russian power had collapsed after the collapse of the Tsarist empire, Kolushev proposes to the government in Sofia to send "*a Bulgarian military representative to Erivan.*" As Kolushev notes with concern, "*we know nothing or very little of what is happening in the Caucasus in general and in Armenia in particular. And the situation in that country can serve as one of the means by which we will regulate our relations with Turkey.*" In the same report to the government in Sofia, Kolushev proposes "*that this officer should not be a very young and inexperienced man and should know at least one of the local languages*" (Chapter 3, p. 155).

In his next report of August 16, 1918, Kolushev alarmed Sofia for showing passivity in the Transcaucasian region, that the Austrians had already appointed people to represent them in Armenia and Azerbaijan, while "*our military delegates quickly went and returned. This did not create a permanent connection between Bulgaria and the Caucasus, because of which Bulgaria remained a stranger to everything that was happening there*" (Chapter 3, p. 159).

Therefore, in the same report, Kolushev proposes, making no additional commitments to the peoples there, that Sofia replicate the political approach of Austro-Hungarian Empire: "*Let us send a joint representation to the Caucasus with sufficient personnel, which, in agreement with the representations of our allies, will advocate for the common allied cause, will contribute to controlling the Turks and, mainly, will use the opportunity to make purchases for the army and the population*" (Chapter 3, p. 160).

The last phrase, as the doctoral student correctly noticed, is a kind of request for economic penetration into Transcaucasia and an attempt to mitigate the acute food and economic crisis that affected Bulgaria in 1918. These plans actually imitate German and Austro-Hungarian practices in Ukraine, which, after the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, became the major source of raw materials for their agonizing economies.

It remains unknown whether anyone would have implemented Kolushev's proposals because Bulgaria suffered military collapse and capitulated a month later. In any case, as Kolushev points out, Bulgaria's plans would have benefited because "*we have better conditions for working among the Georgian and Armenian populations, since the name of Bulgaria enjoys special respect in these countries*" (Chapter 3, p. 160).

These traditionally good relations eventually led to the opening of an Armenian diplomatic mission in Sofia. And, as Eojeni Sakaz's work shows, Bulgaria's agreement was not the result of purely idealistic motives:

"The establishment of diplomatic relations, formalised with the opening of an Armenian Consulate General in Sofia in 1921, resulted from both political aspirations and specific economic considerations. For Armenia, a young and vulnerable state seeking international recognition and support, Bulgaria appeared to be a reliable partner and like-minded person, capable of providing a diplomatic channel to Europe and the Balkans. For Bulgaria, for its part, cooperation with Armenia was an opportunity to expand its trade horizons and seek an outlet to the Caucasus and the Middle East – especially in the context of the Treaty of Sèvres, which provided for Armenia's strategic access to the Black Sea. These relations fit into the country's broader aspiration to emerge from economic isolation and overcome the consequences of the post-war crisis." (Chapter 3, Conclusion, pp. 207-208).

Agreeing with these conclusions, I will also make the following remark to the doctoral student. The statement, which is generally true, about Bulgaria's attempt to escape economic isolation through cooperation with the Republic of Armenia, needs to be argued in more detail.

Namely, after World War I, hostile neighbours surrounded Bulgaria, practically blockading it. The only friendly neighbour, Turkey, was in a state of chaos and war with Greece. Austria-Hungary, a traditional pre-war trading partner, no longer exists, and the other major European partner, Germany, was in a very difficult economic situation. Only Czechoslovakia was well-intentioned towards Bulgaria, but it was separated from it by the hostile Yugoslavia and Romania. Therefore, Armenia turned out to be, although insufficient, but still some potential alternative to the pre-war markets lost by Bulgaria.

Conclusion

Despite my last remark, I believe the dissertation achieved and fulfilled its goals and objectives, and its contributions are undoubted. The doctoral candidate shows the dissertation has practical value for historians, diplomats and researchers who are interested in the foreign policy of Bulgaria, the history of Armenia and its diaspora. However, I will add one more thing – the dissertation not only has practical value for diplomats, in fact, it can serve as a textbook for diplomats. Therefore, without hesitation, I propose to the members of the esteemed scientific jury to award the candidate Ass. Prof. Eojeni Kevork Sakaz the educational and scientific degree of “doctor” in professional field 2.1. Philology, Scientific Major “Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia” (PhD programme “Armenian Social Studies”).

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