

## OPINION

**regarding:** the dissertation of Eozheni Sakaz “*Political and Diplomatic Relations between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Republic of Armenia, 1918–1925 (based on documents preserved in Bulgarian archives and the Armenian press)*”, submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree **Doctor** in professional field 2.1. Philology, scientific specialty “*Literatures of Europe, America, Africa and Australia (Armenian Studies)*”

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The submitted dissertation contains: an **Introduction** (pp. 5–11), **Review of the Literature and Sources** (pp. 12–27), Chapter One: “*Bulgarian-Armenian Historical Relations, 17th – early 20th century*” (pp. 28–49), Chapter Two: “*Armenia during Ottoman and Iranian Rule until the Collapse of the Russian Empire*” (pp. 50–113), Chapter Three: “*Political and Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Armenia, 1918–1925*” (pp. 114–208), **Conclusion** (pp. 209–213), **Contributions** (pp. 214–215), **Appendices** – 16 in total (pp. 216–238), **Bibliography** (pp. 239–250), divided into four parts: *Sources* (in Bulgarian, Russian, and Armenian), *Periodicals, Specialized Literature* (in Bulgarian, Russian, English, French, and Armenian), and *Electronic Sources* – 8 in total. The **Bibliography** section includes 148 titles in 5 languages. Additionally, 11 archival collections comprising over 30 inventories have been studied and processed from the Central State Archives, the State Archives in Varna, and the Historical Archive of the National Library “Sts. Cyril and Methodius.”

I deliberately emphasize the number of titles and archival collections processed, as this is essential to the nature of the work presented. While the title of the dissertation points mainly to a historical-political problematics, the research and processing of such a large body of scholarly literature and documentation highlights the fundamentally philological dimension of the dissertation. The volume of processed works and archival documents also speaks to the immense effort invested—an effort lasting likely a decade or more. This is evidence of the seriousness and persistence with which Eozheni Sakaz approached the chosen topic.

### **Commentary on the Content of the Dissertation**

The interdisciplinary nature of Eozheni Sakaz's research makes a strong impression. It encompasses fields of knowledge such as philology, archival studies, history, diplomacy, social sciences, cultural studies, sociology, and international law. All these areas testify to the broad scope and depth of the research, and they reflect the rigorous approach taken by the doctoral candidate toward her own work.

In the **Introduction**, the author presents the aim of the dissertation—namely, the Bulgarian-Armenian political and diplomatic relations during a defined stage in the existence of the two states—as well as the goals and objectives of the research, its subject and scope, and the methods and approaches applied. The introduction ends with the section “*Relevance of the Topic.*” Here, in a concise yet convincing manner, Eozheni Sakaz sets out four points substantiating the topicality of her chosen theme.

In the **Review of the Literature and Sources**, the doctoral candidate organizes the material into several sections. The first, “*Scholarly Research on Bulgarian-Armenian Relations,*” identifies 12 authors who have written monographs on the subject in Bulgarian and Armenian. The author not only lists these works but also characterizes them and thus provides her own evaluation. The second section, “*The Armenian Periodical Press in Bulgaria,*” offers a detailed overview of Armenian newspapers and magazines published in the country, as well as of the first Armenian printing house in Bulgaria. Particularly striking is the editorial article of this press, published in the first issue of the newspaper *Nadezhda (Hope)*, in which the Armenian community thanks the Bulgarian government for its support and solidarity. Eozheni Sakaz also discusses the thematic diversity of the Armenian press in Bulgaria, covering literary, scholarly, socio-political, cultural-educational, humorous, sports, and children's topics. Remarkably, 72 Armenian periodicals were published in Bulgaria from the Liberation until 1944. The third section, “*Archival Materials and Diplomatic Documents,*” presents the archival units already mentioned. I draw deliberate attention to this part in order to highlight the enormous and multifaceted work undertaken by Eozheni Sakaz.

**Chapter One: “Bulgarian-Armenian Historical Relations, 17th – Early 20th Century”** covers nearly four centuries, though it is more concise than the other two chapters, as it serves as an introduction to the study. However, the doctoral candidate does not limit herself strictly

to this time frame. Her research gains comprehensiveness by reaching back to the 5th century, when the first evidence appears of Armenians settling in the Balkans. Several forced resettlements of Armenians by Byzantine emperors between the 6th and 12th centuries—including to Bulgaria—are traced. Yet throughout the centuries, Armenians also voluntarily migrated to Bulgaria, fleeing tragic events in their homeland. Armenian settlement in Bulgaria became particularly active during the Ottoman period. As Sakaz concludes: “*These communities, who built churches, schools, and charitable societies, laid the foundation for the active diplomatic role of the Armenian diaspora in Bulgaria during the 20th century*” (p. 26).

The chapter continues with the section “*Bulgarian-Armenian Contacts during the National Revival. The Work of Armenian Printers.*” The main conclusion drawn by the doctoral candidate is that Armenian printers in Constantinople and Vienna played a crucial role in shaping Bulgarian literary culture, working closely with Bulgarian revivalists to publish textbooks, books, and periodicals. The dissertation contributes by identifying the Armenian printers who supported the Bulgarian educational cause. Sakaz also identifies which Bulgarian intellectuals and educators collaborated most actively with the Armenian diaspora, including Neofit Rilski, Nayden Gerov, Ivan Bogorov, Dragan Tsankov, Petko R. Slaveykov, Nacho Yambolov, Ivan Yambolov, Hristo Bachvarov, and Iliya Blaskov.

The chapter concludes with the section “*Armenian Assistance and Solidarity in the Bulgarian Liberation Struggle,*” in which Sakaz identifies the Armenians who contributed most to the Bulgarian national liberation movement. The dissertation becomes even more dynamic with several little-known episodes from the preparation of the April Uprising of 1876, in which Armenians bravely supported the revolutionary cause despite risks to their lives and families. The Armenian community also played an active role during the Russian-Turkish War, fighting on the Balkan and Caucasian fronts. Sakaz places special emphasis on the disappointment shared by Bulgarians and Armenians with the decisions of the Berlin Congress, which spurred them to closer unity against their common adversary, the Ottoman Empire. The culmination of Armenian solidarity with the Bulgarian cause came during the First Balkan War (1912–1913), when a specially organized Armenian volunteer detachment fought side by side with the Bulgarian army.

**Chapter Two: “Armenia during the Period of Ottoman and Iranian Rule until the Collapse of the Russian Empire”** examines the situation of the Caucasian country, which, according to the Treaty of Zuhab (16 May 1639), was divided between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran. The dissertation outlines the causes leading to this disaster for Armenia, as well as the subsequent political, economic, and social consequences. It also explains the circumstances that led to Russia’s conquest of Eastern Armenian lands in the 19th century.

This chapter is of great importance for illuminating the picture of interstate relations at that time. It highlights the role of Armenia’s neighbors—Ottoman Turkey, Safavid Iran, and Russian Kingdom—in the fragmentation of the country, while also noting the presence of “the great powers” Austria, France, and Great Britain on the world stage. Against this backdrop, Sakaz traces the unceasing struggle of the Armenian people for national identity and independence, as well as the emergence on the international scene of the crucial concept of the “*Armenian Question*.” She examines its essence and the various attempts to resolve it. The author reviews different interpretations of the Armenian Question, disagreeing with some, partially agreeing with others, which demonstrates her already well-formed personal position and critical perspective on historical events. She defines it precisely and categorically: “*Thus, the essence of the Armenian Question can be summarized as a complex set of political, historical, and social problems related to the national aspiration of the Armenian people to restore sovereign statehood on their historical territory.*”

A telling marker of the socio-political realities of the time—clearly discerned by Sakaz—was the creation of Armenian political parties and federations. The author presents in detail their ideological foundations and goals, as well as their socio-political activity.

A large part of the chapter is devoted to the Armenian Genocide, which Sakaz discusses with specific documentary evidence but also with undisguised sorrow. As a result of this genocide, the demographic landscape of the Middle East was drastically altered, and for Armenians it represents one of the darkest periods in their history.

**Chapter Three: “Political and Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and Armenia (1918–1925)”** represents the core of the dissertation, although it would not have been fully developed without the first two chapters. This period marks a turning point, during which the

first Armenian Republic was proclaimed. Both the Armenian and Bulgarian people were engaged in consolidating their statehood, seeking recognition on the international stage, and striving to establish their national identity. Against this backdrop, the relations between the two nations visibly strengthened at both societal and political levels.

The doctoral candidate examines a series of international treaties that legitimized the Armenian Republic, yet simultaneously curtailed its territory and limited its sovereignty. She also analyzes the initial diplomatic contacts and letter exchanges between the two countries, which eventually led to the establishment of the Armenian General Consulate in the Kingdom of Bulgaria. Particularly noteworthy is the classified correspondence accessed by Eugenie Sakaz, involving senior Bulgarian state officials and concerning the growing tensions among Armenians, Turks, and Germans in the Caucasus. As the doctoral candidate concludes: *“The report clearly reveals the multilayered nature of Bulgarian diplomatic engagement in the Armenian question and the complex dynamics of international relations in the region.”*

It is evident that Eugenie Sakaz demonstrates thorough familiarity with the diplomatic relations of countries influencing Armenia’s fate, offering careful analysis accompanied by accurate and substantiated conclusions.

In the **Conclusion**, the candidate synthesizes the key findings of her study, reaffirming the insights drawn throughout the research.

Overall, this dissertation can be regarded as a scholarly saga of two nations closely linked by fate, both oppressed for five centuries, yet managing to reclaim their independence and seek closer ties to strengthen their identity and statehood. One surprising omission, however, is Yavorov’s poem *“Armenians”*, which remains one of the clearest literary testaments to the deep solidarity of Bulgarians with the Armenian people, who shared a parallel history of suffering.

The topic is highly relevant, as it provides, for the first time in Bulgaria, a detailed study of previously little-known archival materials and intergovernmental documents, shedding light on diplomatic developments behind the scenes. The appendices are especially valuable and enhance the overall research.

The author's language is rich, vivid, and precise, and her scholarly and conceptual apparatus is of exceptionally high quality. The dissertation shows no evidence of improper use of foreign academic sources.

In light of the above, I am fully convinced that the dissertation "*POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF BULGARIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA 1918–1925 (based on documents preserved in Bulgarian archives and the Armenian press)*" possesses all the qualities of a serious academic study. I therefore recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury award Eugenie Sakaz the degree of *Doctor*.

Furthermore, I suggest that the Scientific Jury consider publishing Eozheni Sakaz's dissertation as a standalone volume. Should this proposal be approved, I recommend the following revisions before publication:

1. Throughout the dissertation, replace "*Bulgaria-Armenian...*" with "*Bulgarian-Armenian...*", in accordance with standard Bulgarian usage.
2. Minimize the use of "*се явява*", a Russianism, replacing it with the simple Bulgarian equivalent "*e*".
3. Correct the inconsistent use of short and long dashes, which appear frequently throughout the text.
4. The Safavid dynasty's name may be rendered as *Sefevidi* or *Safavidi*, but not *Safevidi*.

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