

TANYA MATANOVA

**Armenians in Bulgaria
since the 17th Century
and in Present Day:
Stereotypes and
Identifications**

TANYA MATANOVA

BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, INSTITUTE FOR ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE STUDIES WITH
ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM, SOFIA
TANYA.MATANOVA@IEFEM.BAS.BG

UDC 159.923.2-054.7](497.2=19)“16/...”“

316.647.8-054.7(497..=19)“16/...”“

<https://doi.org/10.32728/flux.2023.5.7>

Original scientific paper

Armenians in Bulgaria since the 17th Century and in Present Day: Stereotypes and Identifications¹

On the basis of empirical data and scientific literature related to people of Armenian and Armenian-Bulgarian origin, the following text will discuss how stereotypes about Armenians in Bulgaria have changed over time and how according to interlocutors, most of whom are of Armenian-Bulgarian descent, Bulgarians perceive the living in their land people with Armenian roots. Furthermore, it will be searched how individuals of Armenian origin identify themselves in different times and contexts. Last but not least, attention will be paid also to the European identification of Armenian-Bulgarians on Bulgarian territory as both states Bulgaria and Armenia are part of supranational structures as the European Union and the Eastern Partnership at the European Commission.

149

KEYWORDS:

Armenian migration, Armenians in Bulgaria, stereotypes, national identification, European identity

¹ The article is written as part of the research project 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions', funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (contract agreement No. КП-06-H50/6 from 30.11.2020.

Besides several works on tradition, culture, heritage, religion, migration, and identity published since the 1990s,² recent research on Armenians in Bulgaria focused on the life of interethnic and interreligious families,³ religious manifestations of the Armenian culture in urban contexts,⁴ coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic⁵ and on ethnic sponsorship and ethnic entrepreneurship.⁶ The following text, presenting stereotypes about Armenians in Bulgaria and their identifications, aims to fill some research gaps on Armenians in Bulgaria.

Data was gathered in 2022 via 23 questionnaires and 11 offline and online semi-structured interviews conducted in the Bulgarian language with 35 people, aged between 10⁷ and 65 (and older) of Bulgarian (4 persons), Armenian-Bulgarian (30 persons)⁸ or Armenian (1) origin, some of whom are representatives of Armenian structures in Bulgaria.⁹

Armenians in Bulgaria

Statistical data from the National Census show that in 2021 5,306 people identified themselves as belonging to the Armenian ethnic group.¹⁰

² Petya Bankova, "Armenians – History and Religion," *Bulgarian Ethnology* 2 (1995); Petya Bankova, "Bulgarians and Armenians in the Contact Area of the East and the West," in *The East – West Problem. Reincarnations in Modern and Contemporary Time*, eds. Tamara Stoilova, Violina Atanasova and Romyana Chukova (Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2005); Yura Konstantinova and Ivaylo Nachev, *With a Glance toward America: The Deportation of Armenians from Socialist Bulgaria* (Sofia: Fakel, 2019); Evgeniya Miceva, *Armenians in Bulgaria – Culture and Identity* (Sofia: IMIR, 2001); Evgeniya Miceva and Siranush Papazian-Tanielian, *The Armenians Tell about Themselves* (Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2007). Nadya Vladimirova, *Safeguarding and Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Armenians in Bulgaria: Current State and Problems* (Rousse: Avangard Print, 2018).

³ Svetlina Denova, *Family Holidays in an Inter-marriage (Materials from the Town of Plovdiv)* (Plovdiv: Imeon, 2005).

⁴ Zornitsa Prandzheva, *Religion as a Factor for Cultural Interactions in an Urban Setting (Materials from the Town of Plovdiv)* (PhD diss., Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski," 2018).

⁵ Tanya Matanova, "Armenian community in Bulgaria in the Time of Covid-19: Coping with the Challenge" in *Between the Worlds: Narratives and Notions of Pandemics*, ed. Yelis Erolova, Vanya Ivanova, Behrin Shopova, Yulia Popcheva (in print).

⁶ Tanya Matanova and Vladimir Penchev, "We Help Each Other... To the Best of Our Abilities.' Ethnoentrepreneurship and Ethnic Sponsorship among the Armenian Community in Bulgaria," in *Migrations, Communities and Cultural-Historical Heritage*, ed. Penka Peykovska, Yordanka Gesheva, Mila Maeva, Nadya Filipova and Stefan Dimitrov (Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2021); Tanya Matanova and Vladimir Penchev, "Armenian Ethnic Entrepreneurship in Our Country," in *Migration and Public Development*, ed. Penka Peykovska, Yordanka Gesheva and Mila Maeva *Migration and Public Development* (Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2022).

⁷ Even minors were interviewed with the permission of their parents their answers are not cited in the text.

⁸ Most of the interlocutors are of Bulgarian-Armenian origin as data is gathered in the frames of the above mentioned project for a study aimed at people of such origin.

⁹ Armenian and Bulgarian-Armenians interlocutors are found through contact to people working in Armenian institutions in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians ones are part of the social network of the author. All empirical materials are archived as units (a. u.) at the Bulgarian National Centre for Intangible Heritage at the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in the audio archive corpus (FnAIF) and the transcription archive corpus (AIF I).

¹⁰ See Matanova, *Armenian Community*. In this text ethnic groups and other collective forms are understood as constructed units 'with altering boundaries, which are being set and re-set at every interaction of two or more persons of different ethnic origin on the basis

According to unofficial information nowadays they number about 30,000 people including Armenian citizens. More numerous are the communities in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, Haskovo, Rousse, Shumen, Silistra, Yambol, Pazardzhik, and Sliven with functioning at least one Armenian structure (church, school, community centre, restaurant, etc.).¹¹

The first Armenian settlements in Bulgaria were formed in the 5th and 6th centuries when Armenians came as men of the Byzantine army who guarded the Northern borders of Byzantium.¹² Devotees of the Paulician religious community settled down on the Southern Bulgarian territories during the next seven-eight centuries.¹³ Other documented mass migrations are after the attacks on the Armenian lands by Persians, Arabs, and Turks, but also as a consequence of the pest epidemic and the Ottoman-Persian war at the beginning of the 17th century.¹⁴ The final formation of Armenian communities in Bulgaria happened in the same century. In the contemporary towns of Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Rousse, etc. the number of Armenians increased substantially after the beginning of the Genocide. Armenians moved to Bulgaria also during and after the world wars but many of them re-emigrated in the 1940s–1960s to West Europe,¹⁵ the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic as well as to the US (via Lebanon).

The Armenians coming to Bulgaria in the 18th century, opened craft workshops – goldsmith, carpenter, tailoring, shoemaker, etc., as soon as they were able to, and sold their production there. Among them were also wholesalers (who traded on the domestic and the foreign markets); the first textile factories were opened by Armenians.¹⁶ Those fleeing the Genocide found it harder to make a living as artisans and worked as porters, carters, servants, and women and children – as hired workers in enterprises.¹⁷ Even Bulgarians say that “Armenians do not touch shovels,” those Armenians who settled down in villages had arable land or grew a garden.¹⁸ After World War II their professional conditions were improved: “As workers and employees they are engaged in state production plants in the newly established craft cooperatives. Many Armenians graduate in high schools and work as doctors, economists, engineers, lawyers, etc.”¹⁹ In those times Bulgarians

of the imagination of an “us”-group’ (Bettina Beer, “Ethnos, Ethnie, Kultur,” in *Ethnologie. Einführung und Überblick*, ed. Bettina Beer and Hans Fischer. 5th Edition (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2003), 55-57.

¹¹ See Miceva and Papazian-Tanielian, *The Armenians*; Tanya Matanova and Vladimir Penchev, “Armenian Ethnic Entrepreneurship in Our Country,” in *Migration and Public Development*, ed. Penka Peykovska, Yordanka Gesheva and Mila Maeva (Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2022), 229-55.

¹² Suren Ovnanyan, *Armenian-Bulgarian Historic Ties and Armenian Colonies in Bulgaria during the Second Half of 19th Century* (Sofia: Science and Art, 1972), 29-30; Vladimirova, *Safeguarding*, 23.

¹³ Vasko Arnaudov, “Paulicianism – the Armenian Heresy, and Its Influence on Bulgarian Territories,” in *Bulgarians and Armenians Together Over the Centuries*, ed. Garo Hayrabedian (Sofia: Tangra, 2001), 216-18.

¹⁴ Vladimirova, *Safeguarding*, 24.

¹⁵ Vladimirova, *Safeguarding*, 25.

¹⁶ Ovnanyan, *Armenian-Bulgarian Historic Ties*, 50-53.

¹⁷ Miceva and Papazian-Tanielian, *The Armenians*, 481-492.

¹⁸ Ovnanyan, *Armenian-Bulgarian Historic Ties*, 50-53.

¹⁹ Miceva and Papazian-Tanielian, *The Armenians*, 477.

were acquainted with Armenians and communicated with them mostly in the neighborhood or when they used the services of their craft and trade structures.

Stereotypes and relationships to Bulgarians till the last massive immigration in the 1990s

A “stereotype” in the text is defined as an objective trail of a given community, coded knowledge for the others that one could gain even without having contact with that community. It is usually based on “real characteristics which are exaggerated, distorted in the frames of the system of values of society and the existing conflicts. Sometimes these stereotypes evaluating the qualities of the communities diverge from reality.”²⁰

Over the centuries, the relations between Armenians and the other population living on the Bulgarian lands are characterized as friendly and conflict-free.²¹ No stereotypes about Armenians could be found before the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule because in that period people communicated with each other locally, with their closest neighbors and friends as members of a social in-group,²² when no attention was paid to ethnic origin and otherness (and out-groups were not constructed at all). It was after 1878 and the beginning of the 20th century when Bulgarians started to look for and differentiate their “own ethnic” characteristics, which they needed for the construction of the national identity and the national state and began to look at the Armenians as “others,” as people of other ethnic origin.²³ Until the early 1930s, Bulgarians perpetuated social stereotypes of the Armenians as “diligent, humble, industrious workers and craftsmen,” in the years after that they expressed through jokes also their negative but non-aggressive stereotypes of the Armenians.²⁴ In the context of the joke, people of Armenian origin are described as uneducated, lacking Bulgarian language proficiency, and not sharing the cultural norms and values of the Bulgarians. On the one hand, they are derided for their insufficient Bulgarian knowledge, for their talkativeness and bluster, and on the other hand, Bulgarians appreciate their good sense of humor.²⁵

During the socialist period, representatives of all ethnic communities in Bulgaria were unified and respectively Armenians were seen mainly as Bulgarian citizens whose ethnic background was irrelevant for their

²⁰ Ilona Tomova, “Ethnic Stereotypes and Prejudices,” in *Seminar “Aspects of the Ethnocultural Situation in Bulgaria,” 8-10 November 1991*, ed. Valeriy Rusanov and Lilyana Lakesadrieva (Sofia, 1992), 90-92.

²¹ Ahavni Artyunyan-Topakbashyan, “Armenian Colony in the Town of Rouse in the end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries – historical-demographic characteristics,” in *Proceedings of the Rouse Regional Museum of History*. Vol. 14 (Rouse: Rouse Museum of History, 2011), 383.

²² Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, eds. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33-47.

²³ Stanoy Stanoev, “The Necessary Foreigner” in *Spaces of Otherness*, ed. Evgeniya Miceva (Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2005), 233.

²⁴ Vladimirova, *Safeguarding*, 37.

²⁵ Vladimirova, *Safeguarding*, 38.

perception in the Bulgarian society.²⁶ This could be a reason for the bridging of the social stereotype about them and the transformation of the anecdotal figures of Kirkor and Garabed into main characters in the joke culture and “jokes about Armenians are known and told not from the perspective of ethnic otherness but because of the interest in laughter dramaturgy.”²⁷

Stereotypes after the Fall of Socialism to the Present

Following the fall of socialism and the newfound opportunities for cultural engagements among the Armenian and other minority groups, the ethnic and cultural distinctions between Armenians and Bulgarians became more evident and publicized within Bulgarian cities’ cultural events. Within such a framework, the elements showcasing Armenian ethnic and cultural identity are not perceived intrusively or negatively, portraying Armenians as ordinary, rather than unfamiliar individuals. One such instance was the 2017 organized festival in Plovdiv titled “I Get to Know Armenia and My Friends Armenians,” featuring a culinary ethnic evening accompanied by music and dances at the city center. In this scenario, the preservation of Armenian ethnic self-awareness in the city occurs concurrently with the process of idealizing the past, specifically in emphasizing the exaggeratedly positive ethnic traits.²⁸

Also stemming from that period is the most recent substantial immigration, following the breakup of the USSR, when many Armenians migrated to Bulgaria seeking refuge from the economic crisis in the Republic of Armenia. They primarily earn their livelihood as traders, operating small-scale businesses, and some engage in illegal activities. Long-term local Armenians in Bulgaria, spanning several decades, do not always warmly welcome these newcomers. This reception is due, in part, to the newcomers potentially undermining the established positive stereotypes and, alternatively, because their mentality differs significantly from those who have lived as third-generation residents in Bulgaria. “They cannot adapt to our conditions as they have lived for over 70 years in a completely different way. The diaspora that came to Bulgaria after the massacres, is used to make their living in another way and they have no adaptation. The only thing they are happy about is that they Europeanize more easily. The local Armenians do not accept them. They look for contacts mainly in the church. There are also language barriers.” With time, Armenians manage to integrate, particularly in the realm of the arts, participating in charitable, cultural, and educational events, including concerts, dance performances, and theatrical productions.²⁹

Concerning the evolution of stereotypes, a 1991 study, testing Katz and Braly’s methodology in Bulgaria, indicates that after the socialist regime’s fall, Bulgarians held notably positive stereotypes of Armenians in the country. They were perceived as industrious, diligent, diplomatic, disciplined, resolute, and inquisitive - essentially, viewed as intellectual individuals and proficient

²⁶ Vladimirova, *Safeguarding*, 37-38.

²⁷ Stanoev, “The Necessary,” 242.

²⁸ Prandzheva, “Religion as a Factor,” 243.

²⁹ Miceva and Papazian-Tanielian, *The Armenians*, 564.

entrepreneurs (in fields like banking, trade, and jewelry craftsmanship). Their sustained presence, shared historical experiences (such as the Ottoman rule), and active involvement in Bulgaria's economic and social spheres contributed to a reduction in social distance. This led to the establishment of enduring trust-based relationships between the Armenian micro-community and the broader Bulgarian macro-community,³⁰ fostering a sense of closeness or similarity ("they are like us").³¹ Seventeen years later, in 2008, a research team from the Open Society Institute - Sofia conducted a survey on social distances and stereotypes among Bulgarians and various ethnic groups in Bulgaria (Armenians, Bulgarians, Jews, Pomaks, Roma, and Turks). Instead of utilizing the Katz and Braly checklist, they opted for the method of associative open questions, considering the shifting social context since the socialist era's downfall. The findings indicate a shift in stereotypes about Armenians compared to those identified in the 1990s. While Armenians were previously perceived as open-minded, active, and courteous, later perceptions characterized them as cheerful, amiable individuals but also as sly, envious, indolent, frugal, and predominantly as traders - astute, hardworking jewelers or traders who are affluent yet miserly. Notably, due to the prominence of certain noteworthy individuals of Armenian descent in Bulgaria, isolated instances such as "culinary prowess," "musical talent," and "artistic abilities" emerged. Unlike the overarching national stereotypes concerning Armenians, medical professionals, educators, and social workers tended to view Armenians as a closely-knit community, indicating a perception of Armenians as a distinct, "other" community, rather than part of the "our" collective.³²

154

Similar findings emerged from a 2022 research study involving an Armenian individual and 30 individuals of Bulgarian-Armenian heritage. The research revealed that Armenians who lived in the first half of the 20th century were consistently esteemed for their precision, meticulousness, and adherence to correctness.³³ They were perceived as honest, courteous, diligent, and esteemed individuals, while women were also regarded as proficient homemakers. Additional empirical data gathered indicated that Armenians and Bulgarian-Armenians commonly encountered stereotypes among Bulgarians. These stereotypes encompass not only the negatively perceived stereotype of thriftiness³⁴ but also favorable perceptions, such

³⁰ Prandzheva, "Religion as a Factor," 239-40.

³¹ It is noteworthy that in a book from the beginning of 1970s are mentioned no Armenian topoi (as church, school, etc.) except for the Armenian neighbourhood [Nikola Alvdzhiev, *Plovdiv Chronicle* (Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1971)] which suggests that even then "Armenians were fully integrated and therefore insufficiently distinguishable inhabitants of the city." Lina Gergova, *Ethnic Stereotypes in the Everyday Culture* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2012), 52.

³² "Myths and prejudice about ethnic minorities in Bulgaria," Alexey Pamporov, last modified July 22, 2009, <https://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/publication/mitove-i-predrazsdci-za-etnicheskite-malcinstva-v-blgariya>; Deyan Kolev, et al., *Beyond anti-Roma Stereotypes: the World is not Just White and Black* (Plovdiv: Astarta, 2013). Armenians are labeled also as stingy, prudent, witty, amusing and well-educated people (Gergova, *Ethnic Stereotypes*, 122).

³³ AIF I No 611, a. u. 29 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Armenian origin).

³⁴ AIF I No 611, a. u. 16 (woman, age group: 18-30 years, Armenian origin), AIF I No 611, a. u. 28 (man, age group: 18-30 years, Armenian origin).

as being good friends, kind-hearted individuals always willing to lend a hand, possessing a sense of humor, intelligence, loyalty, honesty, and respectability.³⁵ These perceptions were also echoed by the interviewed Bulgarians. However, individuals who do not engage in interactions with Armenians tended to harbor more negative stereotypes. For instance: "Honestly, for me they are the same as Jews: calculating persons who prefer not to do physically hard work. Or if possible, to take money without working."³⁶ Positive is the opinion of Bulgarians having a closer contact with Armenians: "Armenians in Bulgaria are accepted neutrally. Not as in the past – as Jews and stingy people. Bulgarians perceive them not as Armenians but as Bulgarians. You can tell them apart only by their appearance."³⁷; "They are the best and the most loyal friends. I have no negative stereotypes and prejudices towards the Armenian people but a great respect. I like their hospitality and cuisine."³⁸; "They are very friendly, well-disposed to us (Bulgarians), but at the same time they are people who assess carefully the benefits and losses of a friendship."³⁹

Stereotypical images persist in contemporary communication phrases associated with Armenians. For instance: "Armenian with a shovel – that is not possible" or "Stingy as a Jew, garrulous as an Armenian."⁴⁰ These phrases reflect the stereotype of talkativeness attributed to Armenians and their perceived relationship with money. Additionally, other expressions link this talkativeness and the Armenian attitude toward money through reference to the Armenian flag: "The Armenian flag is a square meter of fabric and has two-meter mouth. (...) We as Armenians never forget about the handle of the flag which is four-meter-long because we don't like our tongue to slither on the ground. In other words, yes we have long tongues but things we say are valuable."⁴¹ The enduring and widely recognized expression related to Armenians is linked to the portrayal of the Armenian priest within the idiomatic phrase: "Complain to the Armenian priest." This idiom's archetype and historical origins trace back to the Ottoman Empire, specifically to the town-fortress of Diyarbakir. Many Bulgarian prisoners exiled to this region sought help from Armenian archbishops and clergymen, who altruistically and effectively aided them. They provided medical treatment, intervened with Ottoman authorities on their behalf, and, in certain instances, secured their release from imprisonment. Although this phrase originated in the past, its contemporary interpretation has evolved into a stereotype with diverse connotations, often associated with ironic and humorous usage. The implication is that even seeking help from the Armenian priest might not resolve an issue—a portrayal of a seemingly hopeless situation. During the Night of Museums in 2011, the Armenian community in Plovdiv creatively engaged with this idiom. They opened the town's Armenian church for

³⁵ AIF I No 611, a. u. 30 (man, age group: 51-65 years, Armenian origin).

³⁶ AIF I No 611, a. u. 32 (man, age group: 31-50 years, Bulgarian origin).

³⁷ AIF I No 611, a. u. 34 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Bulgarian origin).

³⁸ AIF I No 611, a. u. 31 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Bulgarian origin).

³⁹ AIF I No 611, a. u. 33 (man, age group: 31-50 years, Bulgarian origin).

⁴⁰ Gergova, *Ethnic Stereotypes*, 122.

⁴¹ Man, age group: over 65 years, Prandzheva, "Religion as a Factor," 242-43.

public viewing and placed a box in the yard labeled “Grievances addressed to the Armenian priest.” Surprisingly, they received approximately 50 letters, none of which contained complaints. Instead, the letters overflowed with well-wishes and commendations for the location, the night’s events, and expressions of appreciation towards the Armenians.

Through this self-ironic action, they not only introduced the public to Armenian culture but also fostered a positive perception of it among others.⁴²

National stereotypes, identities, and relationship to Europe

National stereotypes and identity are shaped by factors such as origin, historical recollections, ties to the homeland, spoken language, and the familiarity and sense of ownership that individuals perceive as their own, native elements.⁴³ In Bulgaria one can often hear an Armenian saying: “Armenia is my homeland because I have Armenian roots. Bulgaria is also my homeland because I was born and live here,⁴⁴ or Bulgaria is my homeland because I was born here and I like everything there.⁴⁵ I am Armenian by heart and blood, but I am Bulgarian by thinking. (...) I say first that I am Armenian because they have to know it. After that if someone asks me where I am from, I will say that I come from the town of Shumen.”⁴⁶ Consequently, when refugees from the late 19th and early 20th centuries consider the belongings they brought during resettlement as their own and regard everything encountered in Bulgaria as foreign, the subsequent generations’ understanding of what is native is significantly influenced. This understanding is shaped by their acquired Bulgarian citizenship,⁴⁷ their familial history within Bulgarian territory, their social connections, the establishment of new families, and the acknowledgment that despite Armenians not residing in their “own” ethnic territory, their sense of ethnic belonging remains intact.⁴⁸ This is upheld through the preservation of traditions and the continuation of cultural and educational activities in Armenian community centers, clubs, and schools, particularly in towns with a more substantial Armenian community presence.

During the survey, respondents were questioned about what instills a sense of being Bulgarian and whether they perceive themselves as European. Their responses shed light on a modern inclination in self-identification, particularly among younger generations. The primary factor in their identification lies in their connection to Bulgaria through their possession of Bulgarian citizenship. This affiliation often serves as a determining factor in their sense of alignment with Europe and the European Union. Essentially, their identification—or lack thereof—as Europeans stems from their feeling (or lack of feeling) Bulgarian: “I feel European because Bulgaria

⁴² Prandzheva, “*Religion as a Factor*,” 241.

⁴³ See Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, trans. Nikolay Aretov (Sofia: Kralitsa Mab, 2000), 23; Gergova, *Ethnic Stereotypes*, 274.

⁴⁴ AIF I No 611, a. u. 19 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Bulgarian-Armenian origin).

⁴⁵ AIF I No 611, a. u. 29 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Armenian origin).

⁴⁶ Miceva and Papazian-Tanielian, *The Armenians*, 534-35.

⁴⁷ See Vladimirova, *Safeguarding*, 39.

⁴⁸ Miceva, *Armenians*, 3-5, 108-24.

is a part of the EU"⁴⁹; "I don't feel European because in Bulgaria the cultural and mentality are not on European level."⁵⁰ Others identify as Europeans not on ethnical or national principles: "I think I am European because I have an European standard of living. For me it is important that I feel European and not to have European features."⁵¹ A few of them see themselves as Europeans not ethnically or nationally but because they think highly of the European values."⁵²

Some Armenians express their belonging to Europe through their Armenian origin, as in their opinion Armenia is situated between Europe and Asia, and the Armenian identity has European and Asian elements⁵³: "I feel European because my nationality is the cradle of European civilization."⁵⁴ Influence on the identification as European (from the Armenian perspective) could also have the fact that Armenia is connected with Europe culturally and since 2001 it becomes a member of the European Council and since 2004 it is included by the European Commission in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

It is not surprising that some of the studied Armenians share that they do not feel European, when, for example, they were born in Armenia, and for them Armenia is not connected with Europe,⁵⁵ or when they point Bulgaria's 'state of Europeans:' "I would like to believe that Bulgaria is European because it is on the territory of Europe but I think I do not feel as a part of the European family"⁵⁶; "I do not consider myself a European because in Bulgaria the culture and the mentality are not a such (European) level."⁵⁷

Some concluding remarks

Viewed through the framework of Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory,⁵⁸ following the Liberation and particularly escalating after the 1930s with the emergence of stereotypes, Armenians were perceived as belonging to another group - the out-group, designated as "them," distinct from the cultural norms and values of the host Bulgarian society, identified as the in-group or "we." Throughout the socialist era, despite Armenians being recognized as Bulgarian citizens, they remained perceived as the "others" who continued to uphold their Armenian in-group activities within family settings or through engagement with Armenian religious, cultural, or educational institutions. It wasn't until after the fall of socialism that Bulgarian scientists began studying these "others," leading to increased visibility within Bulgarian

⁴⁹ AIF I No 611, a. u. 16 (woman, age group: 18-30 years, Armenian origin).

⁵⁰ AIF I No 611, a. u. 24 (woman, age group: over 65 years, Armenian origin).

⁵¹ AIF I No 611, a. u. 15 (man, age group: 18-30 years, Bulgarian-Armenian origin).

⁵² AIF I No 611, a. u. 26 (man, age group: over 65 years, Armenian origin).

⁵³ Tigran Matosyan, "Europe: A Model for Imitation or the Threat for the Identity? The Armenia Case," in *Dynamics of National Identity and the Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration*, ed. Mirella Decheva (Sofia: Paradigma, 2008), 190.

⁵⁴ AIF I No 611, a. u. 8 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Armenian origin).

⁵⁵ AIF I No 611, a. u. 28 (man, age group: 18-30 years, Armenian origin).

⁵⁶ AIF I No 611, a. u. 22 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Armenian origin).

⁵⁷ AIF I No 611, a. u. 24 (woman, age group: over 65 years, Armenian origin).

⁵⁸ Tajfel and Turner, *An Integrative Theory*.

society.⁵⁹ This visibility grew as Armenians actively participated in various multicultural and multiethnic events organized by the host society across different Bulgarian towns.

Regarding the stereotypic thinking could be summarized that those stereotypes of Armenians constructed in past centuries have not changed considerably in present days. In those cases, when Bulgarians have no close contact to Armenian people, the stereotypes of them are negative and they are seen as lazy, stingy, and sly persons. Prevailing however are the positive images of the hardworking, educated, and good Armenians. Of course, there is also the opinion that contemporary stereotypes do not influence the perception of Bulgarian Armenians and –Armenian-Bulgarians of different generations⁶⁰ or that all people should not be treated as equal and the valuation depends on the particular person – on his skills, achievements, and success or failure.⁶¹

According to the Bulgarian-Armenian respondents' answers they and their Armenian relatives experience positive stereotyping. Bulgarians perceive them as friendly people, whom they don't ignore or avoid, and who are most often interested in the Armenian culture.⁶² However, as they say, in the Bulgarian society still exist negative stereotypes of Armenians and in some cases – scarce or no knowledge about their origin, as for example there are Bulgarians who have never heard of the existence of the Armenian state.⁶³ This corresponds to the observation of a man, a descendant of an old Armenian kin that came from Turkey in the first half of the 20th century that despite the huge presence today and in the past: 'in most cases except for the intellectuals and the armeniologists – Bulgarians have scarce knowledge about them: everything begins and ends with a mutual sympathy.'⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Armenian Bulgarians and those born in Armenian-Bulgarian families feel at home in Bulgaria, some of them identify as Bulgarians and in many cases – as Europeans as well.

⁵⁹ See Miceva, *Armenians*, and others.

⁶⁰ AIF I No 611, a. u. 10 (woman, age group: 18-30 years, Armenian origin).

⁶¹ AIF I No 611, a. u. 29 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Armenian origin).

⁶² AIF I No 611, a. u. 15 (man, age group: 18-30 years, Bulgarian-Armenian origin), AIF I No 611, a. u. 30 (man, age group: 51-65 years, Armenian origin).

⁶³ AIF I No 611, a. u. 18 (woman, age group: 31-50 years, Armenian origin).

⁶⁴ Ovanes Salbashyan, *Sad Eyes. The Odyssey of an Armenian Family* (Dobrich, 2015), 29.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Alvadzhiev, Nikola. *Plovdivska hronika* [Plovdiv Chronicle]. Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1971.
2. Arnaudov, Vasko. "Pavlikyanstvoto – armenskata eres, i negovoto vliyanie v balgarskite zemi" [Paulicianism – the Armenian Heresy, and Its Influence on Bulgarian Territories]. In *Balgari i armentsi zaedno prez vekovete* [Bulgarians and Armenians Together Over the Centuries], edited by Garo Hayrabedian, 211-22. Sofia: Tangra, 2001.
3. Artyunyan-Topakbashyan, Ahavni. "Armenskata kolonia v grad Rouse v kraja na XIX v. – nachaloto na XX v. Istoriko-demografski harakteristiki" [Armenian Colony in the Town of Rouse in the end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries – historical-demographic characteristics]. In *Izvestia na Regionalen istoricheski musey* [Proceedings of the Rouse Regional Museum of History]. Vol. 14, 373-84. Rouse: Rouse Museum of History, 2011.
4. Bankova, Petya. "Armentsite – istoria i religia" [Armenians – History and Religion]. *Balgarska etnologia* [Bulgarian Ethnology] 2 (1995): 79-91.
5. Bankova, Petya. "Balgari i armentsi v kontaktana zona na Iztoka i Zapada" [Bulgarians and Armenians in the Contact Area of the East and the West]. In *Problemat Iztok-Zapad. Prevaplashtenia v novo i nay-novo vreme* [East – West Problem. Reincarnations in Modern and Contemporary Time], edited by Tamara Stoilova, Violina Atanasova, and Rummyana Chukova, 36-44. Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2005.
6. Beer, Bettina. "Ethnos, Ethnie, Kultur." In *Ethnologie. Einführung und Überblick*, edited by Bettina Beer and Hans Fischer. 5th Edition, 53-72. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2003.
7. Denova, Svetlina. *Semeyni praznitsi pri smesen brak (po materialii ot grad Plovdiv)* [Family Holidays in an Intermarriage (Materials from the Town of Plovdiv)]. Plovdiv: Imeon, 2005.
8. Gergova, Lina. *Etnicheski stereotipi vav vsekidnevната kultura* [Ethnic Stereotypes in the Everyday Culture]. Sofia: Paradigma, 2012.
9. Kolev, Deyan, Teodora Krumova, Alexey Pamporov, Daniel Radulescu, Sebastian van der Zwaan and Tayfun Balcik. *Otvad antiromskite stereotipi: svetat ne e samo cherno i byalo* [Beyond anti-Roma Stereotypes: the World is not Just White and Black]. Plovdiv: Astarta, 2013.
10. Konstantinova, Yura and Ivaylo Nachev. *Spogled kam Amerika. Izsevaneto na balgarskite armentsi ot sotsialisticheska Bulgaria* [With a Glance toward America: The Deportation of Bulgarian Armenians from Socialist Bulgaria]. Sofia: Fakel, 2019.
11. Matanova, Tanya. "Armenian Community in Bulgaria in the Time of Covid-19: Coping with the Challenge." In *Between the Worlds: Narratives and Notions of Pandemics*, edited by Yelis Erolova, Vanya Ivanova, Behrin Shopova, and Yulia Popcheva (Sofia:)(in print).

12. Matanova, Tanya and Vladimir Penchev. "Pomagame... koy s kakvoto mozhe'. Etnopredpriemachestvoto i etnospomoshtestvovatelstvoto sred armenskata obshtnost v Bulgaria" ['We Help Each Other... To the Best of Our Abilities.' Ethnoentrepreneurship and Ethnic Sponsorship among the Armenian Community in Bulgaria]. In *Migratsii, obsthnosti i kulturnoistorichesko nasledstvo* [Migrations, Communities and Cultural-Historical Heritage], edited by Penka Peykovska, Yordanka Gesheva, Mila Maeva, Nadya Filipova, and Stefan Dimitrov, 501-33. Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2021.
13. Matanova, Tanya and Vladimir Penchev. "Armenskoto etnichno predpriemachestvo u nas" [Armenian Ethnic Entrepreneurship in Our Country]. In *Migratsiya i obshtestveno razvitie* [Migration and Public Development], edited by Penka Peykovska, Yordanka Gesheva, and Mila Maeva, 229-55. Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2022.
14. Matosyan, Tigran. "Evropa: modelzaimitatsia ilizaplahazaidentichnostta? (Sluchayat s Arenia)" [Europe: A Model for Imitation or the Threat for the Identity? (The Armenia Case)]. In *Dinamiki na natsionalnata identichnost i transnatsionalnite identichnosti v protsesa na evropeyska integratsia* [Dynamics of National Identity and the Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration], edited by Mirella Decheva, 189-208. Sofia: Paradigma, 2008.
15. Miceva, Evgeniya. *Armentsite v Bulgaria – kultura i identichnost* [Armenians in Bulgaria – Culture and Identity]. Sofia: IMIR, 2001.
16. Miceva, Evgeniya and Siranush Papazian-Tanielian. *Armentsite razkazvat za sebe si* [The Armenians Tell about Themselves]. Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2007.
17. Ovnanyan, Suren. *Armensko-bŭlgarski istoricheski vrŭzki i armenskite kolonii v Bŭlgariya prez vtorata polovina na 19 vek.* [Armenian-Bulgarian Historic Ties and Armenian Colonies in Bulgaria during the Second Half of 19th Century]. Sofia: Science and Art, 1972.
18. Pamporov, Alexey. "Mitove i predrasŭdŭtsi za etnicheskite maltsinstva v Bŭlgariya" [Myths and prejudice about ethnic minorities in Bulgaria]. Last modified July 22, 2009. Accessed on November 7, 2023. <https://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/publication/mitove-i-predrazsdci-za-etnicheskite-malcinstva-v-blgariya>.
19. Prandzheva, Zornitsa. *Religiyata kato faktor v kulturnite vzaimodeystvia v gradska sreda (po materialy ot grad Plovdiv)* [Religion as a Factor for Cultural Interactions in an Urban Setting (Materials from the Town of Plovdiv)]. PhD diss., Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski," 2018.
20. Salbashyan, Ovanes. *Tazhni ochi. Odiseyata na edno armensko semeystvo* [Sad Eyes. The Odyssey of an Armenian Family]. Dobrich, 2015.
21. Smith, Anthony. *Natsionalna identichnost* [National Identity]. Translated by Nikolay Aretov. Sofia: Kralitsa Mab, 2000.
22. Stanoev, Stanoy. "Potrebniyat tshuzd" [The Necessary Foreigner]. In *Prostranstva na drugostta* [Spaces of Otherness], edited by Evgeniya Miceva, 225-49. Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov, 2005.

23. Tajfel, Henri and John C. Turner. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, edited by William. G. Austin, and Stephen Worchel, 33-47. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979.
24. Tomova, Ilona. "Ethnicheski stereotipi i predrazsadatsi" [Ethnic Stereotypes and Prejudices]. In *Seminar "Aspekti na etnokulturnata situatsia v Bulgaria," 8-10 Noemvri 1991* [Seminar "Aspects of the Ethnocultural Situation in Bulgaria," November 8-10, 1991], edited by Valeriy Rusanov and Lilyana Lakesadrieva, 77-96. Sofia, 1992.
25. Vladimirova, Nadya. *Opazvane i sahranyavane na kulturnoto nasledstvo na armentsite v Bulgaria: aktualno sastoyanie i problemi* [Safeguarding and Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of Armenians in Bulgaria: Current State and Problems]. Rousse: Avangard Print, 2018.