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PRINCIPLES OF BULGARIAN MEDIEVAL DIPLOMACY

Diplomacy occupied an important place in the history of medieval Bulgaria. It would not be an exaggeration to say that both the periods of upsurge and the periods of decline of the Bulgarian State depended closely on diplomacy, on the ability and skill to take the correct decision and position in the changing international conditions. In all cases Bulgarian rulers followed a policy of combining peaceful with military means to be applied according to concrete aims. There were many cases when it was not arms but the skillful and timely diplomatic battle that brought about much better and lasting results. The relative independence of diplomacy as a means for peaceful settlement of the foreign political relations of medieval Bulgaria justifies a definition of that diplomacy as a specific system of separate elements, interrelated and interdependent, which form one whole. The study of this system requires the correct distinction of its elements, their interrelations, the dynamics of their development and change, and the general regularities which they follow. One of the main elements in the system of diplomacy are the near and distant objectives of state foreign policy whose realization required diplomatic activities. The nature of these objectives was determined by the concrete historical conditions. But there were also permanent, strategic aims irrespective of whether it concerned the Christian or pagan times, the First or the Second Bulgarian State. Thus it is well known that a major strategic aim of the policies of Bulgarian rulers which can be called global, was the aim of defending the territorial integrity of the state.

Its implementation was possible by means of both military and peaceful action. It fell upon diplomacy to ensure loyal allies or find other ways to neutralize the enemy. At the same time Bulgarian rulers strove to preserve the new territorial acquisitions through diplomacy. It is hardly necessary to dwell on the great significance of preserving territorial integrity for the state's political and economic prosperity. The authority and power of the ruler depended to a great extent on how well he defended his people against foreign encroachment. Therefore practically every Bulgarian ruler did his best, irrespective of specific conditions, to preserve the territorial integrity of the state using, with varying success, also diplomatic means.

Another important aim whose realization required the conducting of diplomatic activity was the desire of many Bulgarian rulers to attain prestigious international recognition of their power, and gain privileges for the Bulgarian church. Diplomatic activities also included the aim of forcing Bulgaria's partners to observe all agreements signed which were advantageous for Bulgaria and did not upset the existing balance of power. Another impor-

tant aim of the diplomacy of most Bulgarian rulers was to seek ways and means to obtain political influence on their neighbours, which was achieved through convenient marriages, through interference in other countries' home affairs or winning them over as allies in return for some concessions. In time of decline Bulgarian diplomacy had the task of deciding on a compromise as a basis for the preservation of territorial integrity or reducing to a minimum of inevitable losses. Naturally, their success depended largely on the diplomatic skill of the Bulgarians and the correct use of different diplomatic means. Such means as international agreements — peace treaties, trade agreements, military alliances and royal marriages — were an important element of the system of Bulgarian medieval diplomacy. Their practical realization involved talks, representations, written correspondence, meetings between rulers, etc., i. e. means precluding the use of arms. The system of diplomacy included the relevant state institutions engaged in the task of conducting diplomatic activities. These institutions had to prepare future diplomats and envoys.

The systems of diplomacy of that time also involved the theoretical principles and arguments underlying diplomatic work. Taken as a whole the methods, forms, principles and arguments are what is called the art of diplomacy.¹ The better the mastery of this art, the more significant the results achieved in foreign policy. The above elements of the system of diplomacy are historically conditioned and cannot be identified and distinguished in the same degree for all periods in the development of human society. Only a concrete historical approach to the study of diplomacy can provide an answer to the question: when did diplomacy arise and become a specific system. It is obvious that the character of diplomacy when it first appeared in tribal society was quite different from that of antiquity when it acquired a new significance and then once again changed substantially in the Middle Ages.² The system of diplomacy developed through these epochs in close connection with the peculiarities of the socio-economic system and the related superstructural phenomena: philosophy, law, morality; on the other hand, a continuity can be seen of already established principles, methods and forms. What has been said so far mostly concerns the so-called 'old' diplomacy whose main features can be found in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. This is an ad hoc diplomacy conducted without permanent diplomatic representations, without a clearly defined international law, in the conditions of state organizations widely different in the degree of their political and cultural development.³ These peculiarities of the 'old' diplomacy do not warrant an underestimation of its place and importance. The popular idea that the Middle Ages were ruled by fist-law and that the natural state of relations between states was war, is not quite correct or complete. Violence or club-law cannot be the only characteristics of the relations between the medieval states. There is no doubt, however, that medieval diplomacy had certain features which set it apart from present day ideas of diplomacy. These features fully apply to Bulgarian medieval diplomacy and derive from the specific socio-economic and political conditions in which medieval society developed. One of these features is closely

¹ Левин, Д. Б. Дипломатия, ее сущность, методы и формы. М., 1962, с. 173. Nicolson, N. The Evolution of Diplomatic Methods. London, 1954.

² The History and Nature of International Relations. New York, 1922, 31-85; Numelin, R. The Beginning of Diplomacy. New York, 1950.

³ Cf. История на дипломатията, Т. I, С., 1963, с. 99; Ganshof, Fr. Histoire des relations internationales, I, Le Moyen âge. Paris, 1953, 42; Queller, D. The Office Ambassador in the Middle Ages. Princeton, New Jersey, 1967, 3-60.

linked with the very appearance and consolidation of medieval states in Europe. The transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages involved radical changes in the political map of Europe connected with the fall of the Roman Empire. New tribes, new nations and new states appeared on the historical scene. At the same time in South-East Europe — where the Bulgarian State was founded — there was still Byzantium and it tried hard to preserve and apply to the new conditions the ancient traditions established in the fields of political life, law, diplomacy, culture, etc. In other words, there was an uneven social and political development which reflected on the formation and nature of medieval diplomacy. On the one hand, there arose inter-state relations while, on the other, we can speak about relations between states and individual tribal alliances, principalities, city-republics and others. This created the specific character of medieval diplomacy since the tribes and nations nationalities which had just appeared on the historical scene brought with them new specific elements in the application of the already established general rules and principles in international relations. The newly established feudal relations determined yet another feature of medieval diplomacy particularly noticeable in the period of developed feudalism. As a result of growing feudal separatism, there arose a peculiar 'internal diplomacy' within one state effected by individual independent or semi-dependent feudal lords. Because of their desire to ensure a stable political support and protection, in many cases they undertook diplomatic moves which ran counter to the main objectives and foreign political orientation of the state as a whole.

Another important feature characterizing the development of medieval diplomacy, is associated with the great role of the church. The ideas of Christianity, its moral and religious norms, established in daily life, were applied widely and obligatorily in the diplomatic practices of the Christian state. An important role in the working out of standard rules in maintaining diplomatic contacts between states was also played by the church councils whose decisions were binding on the Christian world. Religion exercised a great influence on the external, purely formal, aspects of diplomatic work, as well as on the shaping of certain ideological arguments used in international relations. Naturally, Christianity began to affect Bulgaria's state diplomacy after the conversion. Before that time we can talk, in most general terms, about a pagan stage in the development of Bulgarian medieval diplomacy. During that period Bulgarian diplomacy was under the direct influence of the experience and traditions of proto-Bulgarians and Slavs.⁴ As is known, with the very foundation of the state, the two ethnic groups were actively involved in political interrelations on the European continent and in lively diplomatic activity. One of their most permanent foreign political partners was Byzantium which used every possible means, military, as well as diplomatic, to preserve its territories and draw the barbarians into its political orbit. Long years of contacts with Byzantium helped proto-Bulgarians and Slavs, yet in their pre-state stage, to adopt and apply some methods of Byzantine diplomacy. Such 'borrowing' especially increased after the conversion. Byzantine influence as a factor in medieval Bulgarian diplomacy was not accidental. It was not due only to geographical proximity or a common religion. It is a fact that the Roman Empire adopted the methods and traditions of ancient diplomatic art and developed them in the conditions of the feudal system. Therefore, Byzantium was believed to have the most highly developed system of diplomacy in the Middle Ages which enabled it to triumph in

⁴ Cf. Angelov, P. La diplomatie médiévale bulgare. BHR, 1982, 4.

difficult and tense foreign political situations.⁵ It was therefore natural for the Bulgarian state to use some of the means of Byzantine diplomacy in order to try and to prevail over its main foreign political partner. It was mostly a question of constructive adoption rather than blind imitation of traditional Byzantine diplomatic methods which, sometimes, contradicted fast changing political situations.

Another feature of medieval diplomacy which fully applies to Bulgarian diplomacy, was the great role and importance of the ruler for diplomatic activity as a whole. It is well known that the ruler was the supreme leader on all issues of home and foreign policy. The ruler was legislator, judge and commander-in-chief. His many rights were closely linked with the dominating medieval autocratic and religious idea that the ruler was God's deputy on earth.⁶ In practice that meant that a large portion of diplomatic activity in the Middle Ages was directly linked with the name and qualities of the ruler. His place in diplomacy may account for a common practice in the relations between medieval states. It is the practice where a country sent its envoys to their neighbours to inform them of the coming into power of a new ruler, in a lawful way or as a result of a coup. In some cases the envoys confirmed that existing agreements would be honoured, while in other cases that they were declared null and void. This clearly demonstrates the great role of an individual ruler in establishing and maintaining a certain type of relations between states.

A condition that also influenced the nature of medieval diplomacy is that it developed in the absence of well established and generally recognized international law and in the conditions of uncertain and often unreliable means of communication. This explains the role of accident as a factor in achieving one or another result in diplomatic activity. The Middle Ages did not see the foundation of international institutions with the task of supervising the observance of agreements signed and of taking sanctions against violators. Despite its enormous power the church was not in a position to play such a role, certainly not in the Eastern Orthodox world where it was inferior to secular authority.

The study of medieval diplomacy also requires a good knowledge of the thinking and mentality of the people of that time. An insufficient and superficial knowledge of the middle ages may lead to an incorrect interpretation and understanding of the diplomacy of one or another state. Care must be taken when concepts from the present day diplomatic vocabulary are used to elucidate elements of medieval diplomacy. It is well known that the value system of the individual in the Middle Ages had its peculiarities which do not correspond, and sometimes even contradict, modern ideas of the world, society, human interrelations and relations between states. Medieval man, restricted by convention, attributed a different meaning to such concepts as duty, truth, justice, benefit, reason, etc. from the meaning we give them today.⁷ This was due, above all, to the dominating religious outlook and the powerful traditions, customs, etc. handed down from generation to generation. That is why without knowledge of this particular outlook it would be difficult, and sometimes impossible, to grasp the essence of one or another event in the

⁵ O b o l e n s k y, D. The Principles and Methods of Byzantine Diplomacy. — In: XII^e Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines, Ochride, 1961, II, c. 57; B r e h i e r, L. Le monde byzantine, Les institutions de l'empire byzantine, Paris, 1949, 281—324.

⁶ Cf. А н г е л о в, Д. Към въпроса за царската власт в средновековна България. — Сб. в памет на проф. Ал. Бурмов, С., 1973, 158—162.

⁷ Г у р е в н и ч, А. Я. Категории средневековой культуры. М., 1972, 5—26.

history of medieval diplomacy. It would be equally impossible to clarify adequately the theoretical principles and arguments underlying the diplomacy of a medieval state.

Bearing in mind all these peculiarities in the development of medieval diplomacy, this paper sets itself the task of revealing the specific methods and principles underlying the development of medieval Bulgarian diplomacy. Although the foreign policy of medieval Bulgaria was determined by different factors in different periods and its surrounding did not remain the same, there are several main directions which may cover the basic principles of Bulgarian diplomacy.

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As was already pointed out, one of the chief concerns of diplomacy was to find reliable allies. In many cases this was the only possible and reliable way of resolving the existing contradictions and conflicts to the advantage of the Bulgarian state. Another well tried traditional method in diplomacy was to seek an ally amidst the enemy's enemies. The practical application of this principle requires a good knowledge of developments in international relations, conditions and intentions of neighbouring states, current changes on the political map of Europe. These changes acquired particular intensity in the early medieval period when new 'barbarian' states were born one after another, considerable migrations of tribes and peoples occurred, old civilizations disappeared. The analysis of the relevant source material suggests that Bulgarian diplomacy followed several paths in recruiting allies.

The first of these involved looking for an ally whose interests largely coincided with those of the Bulgarian state and thus presupposed a natural alliance. This approach often gave good results when potential allies were faced with the same threat to their independence. In this case it usually took a relatively short time and relatively small diplomatic efforts to persuade the other side that their salvation depended on unity of action. Such alliances were concluded without prior discussion of conditions concerning the division of newly acquired lands and spoils or any advantages involving mutual concessions. The main thing was to agree on joint military actions specifying the number of troops, their movements, command, sphere of action, etc. In other words, these agreements were essentially military pacts aimed at repulsing the common enemy.

The above can be illustrated with some typical examples. The very foundation of the Bulgarian state is essentially the result of an alliance based on the common interest of Slavs and proto-Bulgarians. Faced with the obvious threat posed by Byzantium which never reconciled itself to territorial losses, only an alliance of the two ethnic groups could hope to ensure the protection of the conquered lands. There is an opinion in science, mainly based on a narrow philological interpretation of source material, that there existed unequal political relations between proto-Bulgarians and Slavs.⁸ However, to adopt such a view would mean that the two ethnic groups were not clearly aware of their own interests and even less of the one natural way to uphold them. Such an accusation of diplomatic 'immaturity' is obviously untenable since it is well known that in the very first years of its foundation, Bulgaria's diplomacy proved successful and facts show unambiguously that proto-Bulgarians and Slavs acted as allies.

⁸ Different views are discussed in Ангелов, П. Образоването на българската държава в съвременната българска медиевистика. — In: Военно-исторически сборник, 1981, 3, 71—78.

Another typical example which illustrates well the aforementioned method of recruiting allies takes us back to the time of the brothers Assen and Peter. Historical evidence clearly shows that they made considerable efforts to enlist the support of some of the main enemies of the Byzantine empire. At that particular point in time a natural ally for the rebellious Bulgarians was the Serbian state of Stephan Neman. The common interests of Bulgarians and Serbs were based on their desire to win their independence. Their unity of action was expressed in their support for the crusaders of the 3rd Crusade who were in conflict with Byzantium when they moved across the Balkan Peninsula. The western chronicler Ansbergt writes in detail about this alliance which set the beginning of traditionally good relations between Bulgarians and Serbs which remained, with minor exceptions, throughout the 13th century.⁹ These relations were based on a common anti-Byzantine orientation.

During the 14th century Bulgarian diplomacy was again faced with the need to find allies in the struggle for political independence. This became particularly obvious when the Peninsula had to face the Ottoman threat. The idea of forging an alliance against the Turks was not alien to the Bulgarian rulers but it took a long time to materialize. For a long time the desire to seek independent diplomatic and other ways to settle relations with the conquerer outweighed the feeble attempts at joint resistance. This can explain the failure of John Cantacuzene to conclude an anti-Ottoman alliance in 1351 as well as the inaction of Bulgaria and Byzantium after 1355 when the two rulers' families became related by marriage. Documents preserved from that time show that one of the main objectives of the signed treaty was to be "detrimental to the unbelievers" (i. e. the Ottomans), but no practical steps in this direction were undertaken.¹⁰ In the last decade of the 14th century Bulgarian diplomacy looked for allies in the struggle against the Ottomans on many occasions but conditions were no longer favourable. The forming of an alliance was difficult because of the feudal disunity of the country and its vassal status. In general, the events of the second half of the 14th century demonstrate that it is not always sufficient for two or more states to become aware of a common threat to their independence in order to form an alliance. Diplomacy has a crucial role to play in this respect, it has to consider many factors, overcome deep-seated prejudices so as to take the correct decision. It was not always, however, that a common threat to independence was the basis on which Bulgarian diplomacy looked for allies. In many cases alliances were formed on the basis of common interests in gaining new lands, trading privileges or other advantages. In such cases also the treaties provided for detailed conditions concerning the obligations of each country, the amount to

⁹ Different opinions exist concerning the chronology of this alliance. Златарски, В. История на българската държава през средните векове. III. С., 1972, с. 2, бел. З а с е р т с 1188 as the beginning; Петров, П. Към въпроса за виргинската грамота и съдържащите се в нея сведения. — ГСУ, ИФФ, 1957, 51, 2, 235—237 argues for 1186. However, the exposition of the Western chronicler and certain cross references suggest that the alliance was concluded not earlier than the summer of 1189, i. e. when the crusaders first set foot on the Peninsula. This is also the conclusion indirectly reached by Фережанчић, Б. Када се Евдокија удада за Стевана Неманића. — В: Зборник Филозовског факултета, Београд, VIII, 1, 1964, с. 222.

¹⁰ Miklosich, Müller. Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi, sacra et profana, v. I. I. Vindobonae, 1860, 432—433. According to Haleski, O. Un empereur de Byzance à Rome, Warszawa, 1930, 51, the marriage was arranged because of the threat posed by Serbia and the desire of Byzantium to keep its influence over Bulgaria. However, such an explanation would be rather onesided. Cf. also Ангелов, П. България и балканските военни съюзи срещу турските нашествия. — Военно-ист. сборник, 1982, 4, 127—130.

be received by each country in case of success, or the conditions under which the alliance will come into force. Mutual compromise and concessions were essential in this type of alliances. However, the initiator of the alliance, being the more interested party, was usually prepared to make bigger concessions. In such cases diplomatic skill consisted in the correct choice of an ally or in the thorough assessment of an offer for joint action. Such action commonly involved pressure on the common enemy on two or more fronts, which was essential for the final victory. The medieval history of Bulgaria contains a number of such alliances. Only a few of these will be cited here, alliances about which we have more detailed evidence.

An alliance against the Latin empire was signed in 1234 between the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Asen II and the Nicean emperor John Vatatsi. The most important provisions of this treaty are contained in a historical document by Georgi Acropolitus.¹¹ The two rulers agreed on the restoration of the Tărnovo Patriarchate and this was an indisputable success for Bulgaria's diplomacy. It was one of the main terms of the treaty and on it depended the implementation of the whole treaty. Other provisions concerned the future joint military actions against the Latins and the fate of the conquered cities. The text suggests that the two partners had prior agreement on the division of conquered land. The Bulgarian tsar was to receive the land in Southern Thrace and an area around Andrianopolis and John Vatatsi was to expand his territories to the West of the Maritsa river. All these rights and obligations of the two sides were confirmed by a sworn agreement and sealed by a royal engagement. The underage daughter of the Bulgarian tsar was engaged to the Nicean heir, Theodor Laskaris.¹²

A similar treaty, with even more specific clauses, was signed by Michail II Asen and Dubrovnik against Serbia. This is one of the few treaties of the medieval Bulgarian state whose text has been preserved. It contains predominantly clauses of both offensive and defensive nature and describes the enemy clearly: "The faithless king Urosh and his brother and all his kin and all those who live on his land." There was a specific provision to the effect that the allies must not conclude a separate peace with Serbia. There are clauses providing for the division of the conquered Serbian lands. A further text is added specifying the commercial relations between the two parties.¹³

Another similar alliance was offered by the Bulgarian tsar Michail III Shishman in 1330 to the Byzantine Emperor Andronic III. The Bulgarian tsar sent his envoy to the emperor and proposed a military alliance in the forthcoming was against Serbia. The emperor, who was related to the Bulgarian tsar, did not hesitate long. He accepted the offer. According to John Cantacuzene, the chief aim of the alliance was to attain an easier victory over the Serbian king.¹⁴ Nicephorus Grigoras, another contemporary of these events, adds that the aim of the alliance was to force the Serbian king to cede as much land as possible.¹⁵ Clearly, in case of success this land (newly acquired by the

¹¹ Georgii Acropolitae. *Historia*. ИБИ. XV, ГИВИ VIII, p. 163.

¹² *Ibidem*, 163. A detailed discussion of the terms of the treaty and the division of the land can be found in Златарски, В. *Op. cit.*, III, p. 389; Гюзелев, В. *Българската държава и Никея в борба срещу Латинската империя*. — *Известия на нац. исторически музей*, 2, 1978, 2—37.

¹³ Петров, П., Гюзелев, В. *Христоматия по история на България*, II, 1978, 211—212; Cf. Златарски, В. *Op. cit.*, p. 443.

¹⁴ Ioannis Cantacuzeni. *Historiarum*, ed. J. Schopen. *Vonnae*, 1828—32, I, p. 428.

¹⁵ Nicephori Gregoras. *Byzantina historia*, ed. J. Schopen, 1828—30, I, p. 454.

Serbs, mostly in the northern and the middle parts of Macedonia) was to be divided between the allies. As is known, the treaty could not be realized since the Bulgarian tsar was defeated by the Serbs and was killed in the battle field near Velbuzhd.¹⁶

These examples show that irrespective of the time when the alliances were concluded, irrespective of the concrete circumstances, or the number of clauses in the treaties, their main feature was the respect for the mutual interests and the clear awareness of mutual advantages. These agreements specified conditions on whose implementation depended the realization of the alliance as well as clauses whose completion depended on the final success of the military actions.

This conclusion applies also to the agreements concluded by the Bulgarian state with different tribes and nations to recruit them as mercenaries, which was one more way used by Bulgarian diplomacy to find allies. The need for mercenaries was particularly great when the state's own forces were not sufficient or were fully engaged at another front. It cannot be claimed that the role of mercenaries was invariably decisive for the realization of the foreign political goals of the Bulgarian state. But it must be recognized that they sometimes played a considerable role. The word 'mercenary' itself suggests that the main means of recruiting this kind of allies was money and spoils. It may seem, at first glance, that no great diplomatic effort was required for the purpose. Concrete facts show, however, that it cost diplomats considerable effort, sometimes, to prevent the enemy from securing the same tribe or nation as an ally. There were many cases when mercenaries were prepared to side with those who promised and paid more. Usually the loyalty of mercenaries was not based on some deep conviction in the correctness of a political line, but on material interest. Therefore, alliances with mercenaries were never very lasting or stable.

It should also be mentioned that mercenaries usually came from pagan tribes or peoples of other religions, for whom the established rules of diplomacy in the Christian world were not necessarily binding. Thus, without particular qualms of a moral or religious nature, they could violate any agreement reached and join the enemy. Because of all this, the Bulgarian diplomats took particular care in recruiting mercenaries and in maintaining relations with them. The need for mercenaries especially increased during the flourishing of feudalism in Bulgaria when the extreme feudal division made it difficult to ensure that everybody did their compulsory military service.

The history of medieval Bulgaria is rich of examples showing the role of diplomacy in the recruitment of mercenary troops. It is a known fact, for instance, that during the long years of struggle between Bulgaria and Byzantium, in Tsar Simeon's time, an important role was played on some occasions by the Pechenegs. When the first war against Byzantium broke out in 894, the Bulgarian ruler skilfully used his alliance with the Pechenegs to deal a crushing blow on the Hungarians whose action was inspired by the Empire.¹⁷ Especially indicative of the skill with which the Bulgarians maintained their alliance with the Pechenegs and used them as mercenary troops on given occasions, is a letter by the Byzantine Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus. He writes that Bulgarian envoys often went to the Pechenegs to offer them an alliance

¹⁶ История на България, III, С., 1982, 331—332.

¹⁷ Божилков, Ив. България и печенегите. — Исторически преглед, 1973, 2, р. 40 ff.

and that 'was a constant concern of the Bulgarians and so they try to arrange marriages for their children and thus ensure an alliance with the Pechenegs'¹⁸.

Another tribe often used by the Bulgarians as mercenary troops were the Koumanians. They played a considerable part in the uprising of Assen and Peter which ended with the restoration of the Bulgarian state.¹⁹ Historical records of Western and Byzantine origin unambiguously show that Kaloyan, the successor of the two brothers, also used mercenary troops in his wars against the Latin Empire. We can quote one such record of the 13th century, the so-called 'The Praise of the Wonders of the Great Peacemaker Dimitrius' by the Byzantine John Stavrakis. He writes among other things that 'Kaloyan's army consists of Bulgarians but also nomads, Khazars, Byzantines, Albanians with the Russians — a multitude of all peoples.'²⁰ The role of Koumanians in Bulgarian history does not only consist in that they were used as mercenaries. There is proof that Koumanians penetrated the high aristocracy of the Bulgarian state, made attempts to interfere in the political life of the country, etc. Koumanians were involved in the conspiracy against Kaloyan and this is a clear demonstration of the risk of a continual use of mercenaries. During the 14th century some of the Bulgarian rulers also resorted to the help of mercenary troops. That was necessary because of the weakening military and political power of the state caused by the growing process of feudal separatism. Thus it is known that in his war against Serbia in 1330, Mihail Shishman formed an alliance with the Byzantine emperor and used mercenary troops. Nicephorus Grigoras writes that there were 3000 mercenaries in that army.²¹ In the introduction to Dushan's status book and in some Serbian genealogies and chronicles it is mentioned that the mercenaries were Tartars, Usal and Bessarabians (i. e. Wallachians).²² In conclusion it should be underlined once again that Bulgarian diplomacy used different ways and means to secure allies. The choice of one or another of them depended, above all, on the concrete conditions and the financial and political capacity of the State at that time. A fundamental principle of Bulgarian diplomacy was to secure an ally for the realization of the foreign political aims of the State. The timely and correct application of this principle determined, to a great extent, the political stability and international prestige of the state. Closely linked with this foremost principle were other principles followed by Bulgarian diplomacy.

In many cases diplomatic efforts were guided by the principle of preserving the relative balance of forces in the Balkan Peninsula. The notion of 'balance' of forces itself became widely used after the appearance of modern diplomacy during the European Renaissance but the need and usefulness of such balance was well understood in the Middle Ages as well. It was particularly important to follow this principle at times when the country needed peace or when its interests were threatened by a hostile coalition. A balance of forces could be maintained in a variety of ways but in each case diplomacy had a considerable role to play. One of these ways was when diplomacy was

¹⁸ Nicolai Constantinopolitani. Epistolae. — ИБИ, VIII, ГИБИ IV, с. 210.

¹⁹ З л а т а р с к и, В. Op. cit., III, 1—91. All scholars dealing with this uprising acknowledge the role played by the Koumanians. Some of them, however, tend to exaggerate that role. Cf. M a l i n g o u d i s, P h. Die Nachrichten des Niketas Choniates über die Entstehung des Zweiten Bulgarischen Staates., Byzantina, 10, 53 sq.

²⁰ „Похвално слово за чудесата на великия миротворец Димитър“ от Йоан Ставракий. — ИБИ. XXII, ГИБИ X, 1980, с. 129.

²¹ G r e g o r a s. Op. cit., I, с. 455.

²² Н о в а к о в и њ, С т. Законикцара Стефана Душана. Београд, 1898, с. 3.

called upon to interfere and foil the progress of some talks or planned alliances which were against the interests of the Bulgarian state. To follow such a way successfully required a good knowledge of the course of political events, the aims and intentions of the sides involved.

An example of this can be found in Bulgarian diplomatic activities in the end of the 13th century when Serbia and Byzantium began peace talks. They concerned the fate of a substantial part of the Bulgarian lands in Northern Macedonia which, at that time, were occupied by Serbia. The Serbian king wanted to marry the grand daughter of the Byzantine Emperor in return for the above mentioned lands as dowry. The Byzantine diplomat Theodore Metochitus, a participant in these talks, writes that when the talks began Bulgarian envoys arrived at the Court bringing counter-proposals. Their main task was to prevent the conclusion of a pact and alliance. The Bulgarian envoys tried to persuade the king that Byzantium was not a reliable ally since it was weak and lacked military and financial power.²³ Moreover, they conveyed the proposal of the Bulgarian tsaritsa, Tsar Smilets' widow, offering to marry King Milutin and thus hand over the power of Bulgaria. We are not going to dwell here on the question of whether it was possible to set up such a dual Bulgarian—Serbian monarchy. We shall mention only that in all probability the proposal was only a diplomatic manoeuvre aiming to foil the planned Serbian—Byzantine agreement. The latter posed a threat for Bulgaria not only because two of the main forces on the Peninsula were forging a lasting alliance but also because it concerned lands with Bulgarian population but failed to take into account the interests of Bulgaria. In this case Bulgarian diplomatic efforts were not crowned with success but soon the new tsar, Svetoslav Terter, found other means to bring the state out of the deep crisis.

Bulgarian diplomacy acted in a similar way during the reign of Ivan Alexander. This was particularly clear after 1342 when Bulgaria and Serbia took an active part in the internecine war over the Byzantine throne. That same year one of the pretenders, John Cantacuzene, approached the Serbian King Stephan Doushan asking him for help. One of the main questions the two of them discussed was the fate of the Serbian acquisitions in Macedonia at that time and the conditions under which Stephan Doushan would agree to help John Cantacuzene. The pretender had to recognize all Serbian gains and agree that Stephan Doushan would take over the lands of the semi-independent ruler Hrelyo. These negotiations became known to the Bulgarian tsar who took steps to prevent the planned alliance. He was aware that the interests of the Bulgarian state were once again threatened, therefore Ivan Alexander sent envoys to the Serbian king asking him to throw Cantacuzene in prison or kill him. This happened several times and we learn about it from Cantacuzene himself.²⁴ Apparently the main argument of the envoys was that once Cantacuzene was removed, Doushan could easily realize his ambitious plans to conquer the Empire. Stephan Doushan, however, was not persuaded. He was aware that it would be much more difficult to agree with Ivan Alexander on how to divide the conquered lands than with the pretender to the throne who was then in a weak position. Irrespective of this, Bulgarian diplomatic efforts were well justified in this case and they proved the will of Ivan Alexander

²³ Cf. Н и к о в, П. Татаро-български отношения през средните векове с оглед към царуването на Смилец. — ГСУ—ИФФ, XV—XVI, 1919—1920, 36—39.

²⁴ С а н т а ц у з е н о с, II, 338. A detailed analysis of this diplomatic action can be found in А н г е л о в, П. Българо-сръбските политически отношения при царуването на Иван Александър (1331—1371) и Стефан Душан (1331—1355). — ГСУ, Исторически факултет, 72, 1978, С., 1982, 104—105.

not to allow an alliance between Serbia and Byzantium which would tie his hands for more decisive actions in Macedonia.

Another way to maintain a relative balance of forces was for Bulgaria to form alliances or sign peace treaties aiming to neutralize hostile coalitions. In such cases Bulgaria either found a reliable ally or established peaceful relations with one of the enemies. As is known, in 815 Omourtag concluded a thirty-year peace treaty with Byzantium. The Bulgarian khan took this decision not because he was a less capable military commander than his father Khan Kroum. The need for peace with Bulgaria's major enemy was dictated by the concrete foreign political conditions. Only a year earlier when Khan Kroum was still alive, Byzantium and the Empire of the Franks were forming an alliance against Bulgaria.²⁵ This was one of the main reasons why Omourtag sought a peaceful settlement of the conflict. A proof of the foresight of Bulgarian diplomacy in this case is the fact that the peace with Byzantium allowed Khan Omourtag later to settle his disagreements with the Franks by force without fearing a surprise attack in the rear.

The same desire to maintain the balance of forces later led Knyaz Boris to establish close alliance with the German Empire against the coalition formed by Byzantium and Great Moravia. In order to restore the balance of forces, in 1213 Tsar Boril made peace with his greatest enemy, the Latin Emperor Henry after the latter made peace with the Nicean Emperor Theodore Lascaris.²⁶ This diplomatic move ensured Tsar Boril recognition for his crown by the Pope since until that time he had been considered usurper of power in Bulgaria. The conclusion of peace was followed by a royal marriage: Boril's daughter married the Latin emperor. However, in return Bulgaria ceded important lands and towns in Thrace. It should be pointed out that following the principle of balance of forces did not lead to a lasting settlement of the contradictions between Bulgaria and its neighbours. It was necessary to apply the principle at times when the country could not act successfully at several fronts. It was diplomacy that helped to assess the situation and decide when such a balance would be useful for the state and what the concrete ways to achieve it might be. As we have seen, sometimes the existing conditions required compromise and concessions which did not correspond to the aims of the country's foreign policy. In general, the balance of forces in medieval times was a temporary state of relations between states which was difficult to achieve and quite easy to upset. Another principle which guided Bulgarian diplomacy in certain cases was interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring states. The interference meant to derive specific advantages, mostly territorial gains, and sometimes, to undermine the political stability of the enemy. Also, to reduce considerably the risk of surprise enemy actions against the Bulgarian state. Interference in the affairs of neighbouring states was resorted to in different cases. Often this happened when overthrown lawful rulers approached Bulgarian tsars asking for assistance to regain their crown. Treaties were signed in such cases which brought new acquisitions to Bulgaria and, sometimes, restored to Bulgarian possession formerly lost territories and towns.

²⁵ История на България, II, С., 1981, с. 142.

²⁶ Ibid, III, p. 149. On the connections between the reconciliation between Boril and Henry and the relations between the Latin empire and Nicea cf. Prinzling, G. Die Bedeutung Bulgariens und Serbiens in den Jahren 1204—1219 in Zusammenhang mit der Entstehung und Entwicklung der byzantinischen Teilstaaten nach der Einnahme Konstantinopels infolge des 4. Kreuzzuges. München, 1972, 108. There is no proper justification for the opinion that relations between Tsar Boril and Emperor Henry had improved as a result of the growing Bogomil movement in the country, put forward in Longon, J. L'Empire latine de Constantinople et la Principauté de Moree. Paris, 1949, p. 149.

Naturally the decision to give assistance required an assessment of the concrete conditions and existing potentials. It is likely that promises for assistance were given more readily when the partner in need was a relative of the Bulgarian ruler or a loyal ally. However, quite often interference was undertaken solely from material motives.

As an illustration of the above we can use the reign of Khan Tervel. As is known, in 705 the overthrown Byzantine Emperor Justinian II turned to him for help. A military pact was signed between the emperor and the khan and its successful implementation brought Bulgaria considerable gains. For the first time Bulgaria conquered a sizeable territory in South-East Thrace (the region of Zagore), Khan Tervel was given the lofty title of Caesar as well as a lot of money and other valuables.²⁷ In this case it was immaterial for the Bulgarian khan whether one or another ruler had greater rights to the Byzantine throne. What mattered was what he would gain provided Justinian II was restored to the throne.

In 1203 the overthrown Serbian king Stephan Pervovenchani turned to Tsar Kaloyan for help. He had been driven away by his brother Vulkan who had the active support of the Pope and of Hungary. A letter by Pope Innocent III suggests that Stephan Pervovenchani succeeded in regaining power with the help of the Bulgarians who undertook crucial military actions against the Hungarian king and his protégé in Serbia. In this case the decision to help King Stephan Pervovenchani was prompted by Tsar Kaloyan's desire to put an end to the Hungarian expansion to the North-West of Bulgaria as well as win the Serbians as his allies. The further course of events shows that Kaloyan was successful. In return for the assistance he gave the Serbian ruler, Bulgaria acquired an important territory, the city of Niš and the area surrounding it.²⁸

An example which demonstrates that a concrete assessment of circumstances was required before taking a decision whether to render assistance to a foreign ruler in need, again comes from the reign of Tsar Kaloyan. After the first siege of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204, emperor Alexius III abandoned his capital and turned to the Bulgarian tsar for help. Historical records suggest a possible personal meeting of the two rulers. However, in this case Kaloyan did not give his support to the emperor in need since he could see clearly that the empire was fast nearing its downfall.²⁹ In many cases Bulgarian diplomacy decided on interference in the internal affairs of a foreign country when internecine struggles broke out in that country. Then usually the Bulgarian ruler actively supported one of the warring sides guided

²⁷ История на България, II, 110—111.

²⁸ Innocentii III Papae et Calojohannis regis, Epistolae. — ИБИ XII, ЛИБИ III, p. 352. Историја српског народа. I. Београд, 1981, p. 270, 16 questions, without justification, the support given by the Bulgarian ruler to Stephan Pervovenchani. Cf. Златарски, В. Op. cit., III, p. 150.

²⁹ According to Prinzing, G., op. cit., p. 5, the records are not quite clear as to whether negotiations actually did take place between Kaloyan and Alexius III after the emperor fled to the town of Develt at the Bulgarian — Byzantine border. At the same time, the author quotes less well known records like the chronicle of Balduinus Constantinopolitanus, Tafel, G., G. Thomas. Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig mit besonderer Beziehung auf Byzanz und die Levante. Wien, I, 1856, p. 297, as well as a letter by Dimiter Homatian. (Cf. Златарски, В. III, p. 171), and they provide evidence that negotiations did take place. The chronicle explicitly says that Alexius III fled to 'the tsar of the Wallachians' Yoan. The author seems unaware of a very interesting Georgian record where it is shown unambiguously that Alexius met with Kaloyan in Plovdiv. However, the Bulgarian tsar is incorrectly called son-in-law to the Byzantine emperor. Cf. Грузинские источники по истории Византии-Тбилиси, 1974, С. Г. Каухчишвили, 146—148.

by concrete external political tasks. Often this support was decisive for the victory of one of the sides. There were also cases when in the course of the internecine war Bulgarian diplomacy changed orientation depending mainly on changes in the situation and providing evidence of diplomacy flexibility.

The above can be illustrated with typical examples from the history of Bulgaria during the 14th century when internecine struggles for the thrones of neighbouring Serbia and Byzantium were a frequent phenomena.

Thus for instance it is known that Mihail Shishman participated actively in the internecine struggles for the Serbian throne following the death of King Milutin. The Bulgarian ruler supported the main enemies of Stephan Dechan-ski, his brother Constantin and later his cousin Vladislav. The aim of this interference was chiefly to maintain the internal instability of Serbia and check its further expansion into Macedonia. Furthermore, Mihail Shishman helped the two pretenders because each of them had a lawful right to the throne. Constantin was to succeed King Milutin in accordance with the latter's last will, while Vladislav claimed a right to the Serbian throne based on an earlier agreement between his father Dragutin and King Milutin which was later violated. Later Mihail Shishman was involved in the internecine struggles over the Byzantine throne. At times he supported young Andronicus, in other cases he tended to give support to his grandfather Emperor Andronicus II.³⁰

The most eloquent example of the advantages for diplomacy as a result of interference in the home affairs of neighbouring countries takes us back to the time of Ivan Alexander and his involvement in the internecine struggles in Byzantium in 1342-1347. Having failed to remove Cantacuzene, in 1344 he offered his support to his enemies, the underaged Jhon V, his mother Anna of Savoy and Alexius Apokaukos. Agreement was reached according to which Bulgaria received 9 cities in the Rhodopes, among them the city of Plovdiv. This can be called the last major success of Bulgarian diplomacy before the onset of Ottoman conquest.³¹ It has already been mentioned that an important task of the foreign policy of the Bulgarian state during certain periods of its development was the desire to achieve authoritative international recognition and independence for the Bulgarian church. It is known that Bulgarian rulers made exceptional diplomatic efforts to climb as high as possible in the hierarchy of medieval rulers and at the same time win a privileged position for the Bulgarian church. This led to the elaboration of a specific method of Bulgarian diplomacy which consisted in using, to the maximum, of the contradictions between the major political or religious forces on which such recognition depended. This is a reference mainly to the two Christian centres in the Middle Ages: Rome and Constantinople. It is well known that the Pope had a great influence over West European states and his attitude towards Bulgaria largely determined the attitude of those states to Bulgaria. On the other hand, political relations between Byzantine emperors and Bulgarian rulers determined, to a great extent, relations between the two Orthodox churches. Bulgarian diplomacy was well aware that the existing rivalry between Rome and Constantinople for religious and political domination over the rest of the Christian world, could be used safely and successfully in order to derive maximal advantages. This principle is associated with the bril-

³⁰ Д н и њ, М. Однос између краља Милутин и Драгутин. — ЗРВИ, 3, 1955, р. 49; Б у р м о в, А. Л. Историја на Бугарија по времето на Шишмановци. — In: Избрани произведения, I, 1968, р. 242.

³¹ Сј. А н г е л о в, Д. Бугаро-византијските одношења при царувањето на Иван Александър, Втори период (1341—1347). — Военно-исторически сборник, 1974, I, 35—36.

liant diplomatic activity of Knyaz Boris. Researchers are unanimous in their opinion that Knyaz Boris compensated for failures on the battle field with skilful diplomacy.³² The Bulgarian church question which arose immediately after the adoption of Christianity (866-870) clearly reveals the essence of Boris' diplomacy. The struggle for domination over the Slav world set Rome against Constantinople, each trying to win the newly converted Bulgarians over to its side. It is well known that when two forces fight for domination and influence each one of them may be prepared, at a given moment, to make a compromise running counter to its own interests. This is the fact which Boris took into account in his actions. It is our opinion that the sudden orientation towards Rome in 866 was not so much caused by an indecision in the Bulgarian ruler concerning the affiliation of the newly created church as by his intention to make Byzantium more flexible. This was a diplomatic manoeuvre which was ultimately crowned with full success. Bulgaria had an autonomous church, which determined, to a large extent, its further independent development.

The same path was followed by Tsar Simeon towards the end of his rule. He had a cherished dream — to be the equal of the Byzantine emperor and enter Constantinople as a victor — and for its realisation he also relied on the existing rivalry between the Western and Eastern church. As is known, although Simeon called himself tsar, the Byzantines did not recognise his title and this is quite clear from the letters of the then Emperor Romanus Lacapinus.³³ Therefore Simeon began negotiations with the Holy See and asked to be crowned by Rome. In this he was probably guided not only by the desire to gain recognition for his power but also a possibility to find new political allies in Western Europe. It cannot be said with certainty, because of lack of sufficient records, whether Simeon was granted the desired crown. Judging by letters of Tsar Kaloyan to Pope Innocent III, it may be accepted that if not Simeon, who died suddenly, then surely his son Peter was crowned.³⁴ The principle on which Knyaz Boris and Tsar Simeon based their relations with Byzantium and the Roman church found its brilliant continuation in Tsar Kaloyan's diplomacy. In his letters to Pope Innocent III he underlined, repeatedly, that his desire to submit to the Roman church was prompted, in a high degree, by the example of his predecessors Peter and Samuil who also received their crowns by the Holy See.³⁵ In the complex international situation at the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th centuries, Tsar Kaloyan displayed fine diplomatic skill, correctly estimated the state and potentialities of the major political forces in Europe. He had hardly any doubt that at that moment only Rome could give him an authoritative recognition of his power. The Holy See was at the peak of its might, a new crusade was gathering momentum in Western Europe. The Bulgarian ruler had made his choice yet he continued to rely on the existence of sharp contradictions between Byzantium and Rome in order to make the Pope more flexible. In one of his letters to the Pontiff, Tsar Kaloyan purposefully suggested that the Byzantines had been sending him tempting offers of a crown and a patriarch.³⁶ However, so

³² Гюзелев, В. Княз Борис I. С., 1969, p. 241.

³³ Romani Lacapini. Epistolae. — ИБИ VIII, ГИБИ IV, pp. 299, 307, 308.

³⁴ Cf. Duicev, I v. Patriarcato Bulgaro del secolo X, Medioevo bizantino—slavo, III, p. 259. According to Jugie, M. Le schisme byzantin. Paris, 1941, p. 171, it was in the interest of the Bulgarians to maintain good relations with the Pope in view of their war with Byzantium.

³⁵ Inocentii III Papae. Op. cit., p. 310.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 319, Kaloyan wrote to the Pope: '... when the Greeks learned about this they sent to me (an envoy with an offer).' 'Come to us and we shall crown you tsar and we shall give you a patriarch because a kingdom without a patriarch cannot be.'

as not to make it sound like open blackmail, the Bulgarian ruler went on to say that he definitely preferred a link with the Roman church. All this was exceptionally skilful diplomacy which played a considerable role for the decision of Innocent III to crown Kaloyan and acknowledge him as a sovereign ruler. It is a fact that the Church Union concluded in 1204 which placed the Bulgarian church under dependence from Rome was above all a political act. It did not result in essential changes in the religious life of the country, nor did it exert a decisive influence on the foreign policy of the Bulgarian rulers. Yet in a number of cases the Pope became a kind of mediator who could affect considerably Bulgaria's relations with her neighbours. Bulgarian diplomacy made good use of this and with the help of Innocent III settled, for the time being, its tense relations with Hungary which did not recognize Kaloyan as a lawful ruler.³⁷

The examples cited above show that Bulgarian diplomacy mastered and deftly applied an important principle which often led to success. This principle could best be expressed through the maxim that 'when two parties are quarrelling, a third party wins.' Of course, this 'third party,' i.e. the Bulgarian state was not just any diplomatic partner, it was not some minor factor in international life. It was the authority of the Bulgarian ruler, as well as the important strategic location occupied by Bulgaria at the border between Asia and Europe that made Byzantium and Rome enter into a bitter argument as to who should win her over. From everything said so far, the following most general conclusion may be drawn: Bulgarian medieval diplomacy was guided by a number of principles which determined, to a large extent, its image. These principles were never explicitly formulated in a piece of writing, in some treatise. Their typology is based on the concrete analysis of one or another moment in the history of Bulgarian medieval diplomacy. Such typological analysis is possible insofar as the relations of Bulgaria with the other states display many things in common, things which repeat themselves, irrespective of whether reference is made to the early Middle Ages or to developed feudalism. Therefore in this concrete case the application of the chronological principle was not obligatory when illustrating the principles underlying Bulgarian diplomacy. The typology was also based on the already mentioned fact that the foreign policy of the Bulgarian state had permanent strategic aims. This naturally presupposes the application of general, unchanging and well tried principles in diplomatic activity.

While we point out these general directions in the diplomacy of medieval Bulgaria, we certainly do not deny that sometimes history presents us with examples and facts which cannot be fitted into a ready scheme. This determines, to a great extent, the relative nature of the typological analysis applied to diplomacy. However, this analysis makes it possible to look at the foreign policy of the state from a different angle, to define more precisely the causes for its success or failure, to clarify more fully the character of the different state institutions, to penetrate more deeply and many-sidedly in the ideology of the ruling class and to see more clearly the bridges which span the separate historical epochs, thus confirming the law of continuity in the historical process. Another important conclusion that can be drawn is that no sharp differentiation is possible between the separate principles of Bulgarian diplomacy. These principles were mutually connected and interdependent, which, inevitably, led to their simultaneous implementation. Thus for instance, the seek-

³⁷ T a u t u, L. Le conflit entre Johannitza Asen et Emeric roi de Hongrie (1202—1204). *Studi e Testi*, 233, Vatican, 1964, 367—393.

ing of an ally among the enemies of the main enemy was often connected with an intention to restore the political balance or exert pressure in order to obtain important political and church recognition. In the same way, interference in the internal affairs of another state was sometimes determined by the desire to maintain a balance or find an ally prepared to make substantial concessions.

Of course the fact that Bulgaria's diplomacy was guided by the above mentioned principles as well tried principles of international relations did not promise automatically success in negotiations. Obviously the ultimate success of one or another action depended to a great extent, on the correct combination of these principles at the appropriate time as well as the correct assessment of the powers and possibilities of the state. Diplomats had to make sure that the aims set before diplomacy were mutually compatible and the means chosen for their implementation, the most effective. In other words, even when the aims were correctly formulated and the principles were good and the diplomatic means well tried, that still did not equal good diplomacy. Many things depended on subjective factors, mainly in the person of the ruler and his closest advisors. It was equally important to know well the diplomatic partners, their aims and principles of foreign policy. These were all factors which also influenced, to a large extent, the sinuous path of Bulgarian medieval diplomacy, marked by victories, as well as defeats.