

**ON THE DOCTRINAL AND POLITICAL RELATIONS  
BETWEEN ARMENIA AND THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE  
IN V CENTURY**

TER-GRIGORYAN A.

armen.tergrigoryan@yahoo.com

The Armenian-Byzantine relationship began with the creation of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium). Rome and Persia, the two great conquering superpowers, had a fierce struggle to seize Armenia, which had a military, political, and economic significance for them. In Armenia there was a constant struggle between the “racist” or “paranoid” groups favoring the domination of either Rome or Persia<sup>1</sup>.

In 387, after the division of Armenia, its western part was part of the Roman Empire. In 395 it fell under the control of the Eastern Prefecture of Byzantium. Movses Khorenatsi writes: “But at that time came Sahak the Great and he established himself with the support of Ardashir. Ardashir, the Great King of Persia, died, and Vram, who was also called Krman, became king in the tenth month. And he kept the same alliance with Armenia and with our king, Vramshapuh and with Sahak the Great. And there was peace in Vram and Arkad”<sup>2</sup>.

The attitude toward Christians in Persia during the time of Yazdegerd I (399–420) was mild, which was undoubtedly convenient for Armenia. However, the policy adopted by Yazdegerd I in the Armenian Kingdom and Byzantium changed over the last few years of his reign. Yazdegerd sought to reinforce and strengthen the Persian religious, cultural, everyday and state influence in Armenia.

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<sup>1</sup> **Իսկանյան Վ.**, Հայ-բյուզանդական հարաբերությունները IV–VII դդ., Ե., 1991, էջ 44:

<sup>2</sup> **Մովսէս Խորենացի**, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, քննական բնագիրը և ներածութիւնը Մ. Աբեղեանի և Ս. Յարութիւնեանի, Ե., 1991, էջ 324:

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In 408, after the death of the Byzantine Emperor Arcadius, Theodosius II (408–450) ascended to the throne under the influence of his sister Pulcheria. The Emperor and his sister were more involved in religious activity than political ones<sup>3</sup>.

On Mesrop Mashtots' initiative, Sahak Partev and King Vramshapuh, Armenians had an alphabet created at the beginning of the 5th century. Ghazar Parpetsi writes: "Because the ceremony of the church and readings were written in Syriac, the people in the churches of Armenia were not able to understand. And to help the people of a country as large as this, there was a great undertaking to save the people from the uselessness of the Syriac language"<sup>4</sup>.

After 408, Vramshapuh remained only the king of the Eastern part of Armenia. For this reason, Antiochus, the commander of the Byzantine armies, warmly welcomed Mashtots, but he did not allow the establishment of Armenian schools in the Byzantine part of Armenia without the consent of Emperor Theodosius. Only after visiting Constantinople and personally meeting the Emperor and Patriarch Atticus (405–425), Mashtots received official permission to teach Armenian in the Byzantine Armenian schools (between 420–422)<sup>5</sup>. Koryun writes that when Mashtots and his disciples went through the provinces of Karin and Derjan, the local people welcomed them with great enthusiasm, and the Emperor Theodosius II ordered Mesrop Mashtots to be promoted and granted him the title «սկումիտ» (in Greek *vak, wakeful, watching*), and his disciple and grandson of Sahak Partev, Vartan, «ստրատելա» (commander)<sup>6</sup>.

By the order of Emperor Theodosius, Karin, located on the Persian-Byzantine border, was rebuilt and renamed Theodosiopolis. It became an important military base and regional capital. Emperor Theodosius supported the Christians of Persia and Eastern Armenia, as well as Catholicos Sahak Partev and Mesrop Mashtots. All this strengthened the national identity of Armenians, inspired and encouraged their struggle against Zoroastrianism and Persian influence, and strengthened the

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<sup>3</sup> Успенский Ф. История Византийской империи, т. I, СПб., 1913, с. 189–190.

<sup>4</sup> Ղազարայ Փարպեցոյ Պատմութիւն հայոց, Թուղթ առ Վահան Մամիկոնեան, քննական բնագիրը Գ. Տեր-Մկրտչյանի և Ստ. Մալխասյանցի, աշխարհաբար թարգմանությունը և ծանոթագրությունները Բ. Ուրուբաբյանի, Ե., 1982, էջ 30:

<sup>5</sup> Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. II, Հայաստանը վաղ ֆեոդալիզմի ժամանակաշրջանում (այսուհետև՝ ՀԺՊ, հ. II), Ե., 1984, էջ 427:

<sup>6</sup> Կորյուն, Վարք Մաշտոցի, աշխատ. Մ. Աբեղյանի, Ե., 1941, էջ 64:

Armenians' sympathy for the Empire, fostering connections with it<sup>7</sup>. Yazdegerd I understood that Armenia and Byzantium were allies and may be allied to each other, so he began a policy of assimilation of Armenians to finally rule Armenia.

In 422, a peace treaty was signed between Persia and Byzantium, according to which Christians gained religious freedom in Persia, while the followers of Zoroastrianism had the same rights in Byzantium.

In 422, the newly elected King of Persia, Bahram V, appointed Artashes (Ardashir), the son of Vramshapuh, as the king of Armenia. In 428, with the consent of the Armenian nakharars, he deprived the Armenian king of the crown and appointed a Persian ruler in Eastern Armenia<sup>8</sup>.

After the abolition of the Armenian Kingdom of Arshakuni, the statehood was preserved, the spiritual-ideological support of which was the Armenian Apostolic Church. In the absence of a common statehood, the church was regarded by both the Armenians and the foreigners as a public institution uniting the people. It also contributed to the development of feudal loyalty, with the purposeful efforts of the country's spiritual life and legal relations<sup>9</sup>.

When examining the ecclesiastical events of the fifth century, first of all, it is important to pay attention to the issues of Jesus' nature and the resulting outbreaks of Ephesus and Chalcedon. The Third Cosmic Council took place in 431 BC. in Ephesus. This meeting was directed against Nestorius, who in 428 became the Constantinople Patriarch by order of Theodosius II<sup>10</sup>. According to Nestorius, St. Mary did not give birth to God, but to a man. Cyrus of Alexandria, who opposed the doctrine of Nestorius, claimed that divine nature in Jesus can not be separated from human nature, and Jesus is both a God and a man. In 431, the meeting in Ephesus condemned Nestorius and his doctrine. Thus, Cyrus of Alexandria defeated Nestorius and became the leader of the Eastern Church and began to impose his will on the emperor. Khorenatsi mentions that Sahak Partev and Mesrop Mashtots

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<sup>7</sup> **Իսկանյան Վ.**, նշվ. աշխ., էջ 63–64:

<sup>8</sup> **Rawlinson G.**, The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World, Parthia, New Persia, Vol 3, New York, 1875, p. 399.

<sup>9</sup> **Վարդանյան Վ.**, Հայոց եկեղեցին՝ նախարարական պետականության հենարան (428–630-ական թթ.), ԼՀԳ, 2015, № 1, էջ 212:

<sup>10</sup> Օտար աղբյուրները Հայաստանի և հայերի մասին, հ. 8, Ասորական աղբյուրներ, Ա (այսուհետև՝ Ասորական աղբյուրներ), թարգմանություն բնագրից, առաջաբան և ծանոթագրություններ Հ.Գ. Մելքոնյանի, Ե., 1976, էջ 240:

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did not participate in that meeting, but Cyrus of Alexandria, Prokghos Constantinople and Akak Melitinetsi bishops sent a letter to them, warning them of the Nestorians. Armenian translators delivered this letter to Sahak and Mesrop in Ashtishat, the six rules of the Ephesians meeting and the exact copies of the Scriptures. They got engaged in the new translation of the Holy Bible.

It is clear from this note that the Emperor and the Byzantine Church were trying to involve Armenia in their religious and political life.

After the abolition of the Arshakuni Kingdom in 428, the Byzantine influence in Persia was in favor of Persia during the reign of Yazdegerd II (439–457). The Catholicosate of the Armenian Apostolic Church, being independent from the Metropolitan of Caesarea, appointed bishops in eastern Armenia. However, during the reign of Yazdegerd II, the administrative and tax pressures of the Persians intensified in marzpanian Armenia, especially religious persecution. The Persian court demanded Armenians to accept Zoroastrianism. The revolt became inevitable. With the Byzantine relief, the Mamikonyans, especially Vardan Sparapet, had great hopes. The opportunity to make a request to Byzantium was coming soon. By the decree of the Ctesiphon court, Chora marzpan Sebukht's army entered Aghvank to protect the 300 Persian magi sent there, and put the country to the sword. According to the alliance between the Armenians, Georgians and the Aghvans, Aghvank appeals to Armenia. Yeghishe writes: "At that time there was one man of the great nakharars, Atom from the house of Gnuni, they sent him with haste to the western country, to show this advice from the evil king of the East, and at the same time to tell them of the bravery of the men who disobeyed the frightful order and greatly destroyed the magi who had arrived, and to request military assistance from them, and if they accepted, to enter into their service"<sup>11</sup>. The Armenians requested Byzantine support in case of victory to re-unite the Eastern and Western parts of Armenia under the domination of the Empire.

Theodosius II died on July 28, 450. He was succeeded by Marcian (450–457), who did not help the Armenians not only for the interests of Byzantium, but also for not complicating the internal affairs of his country. In 451, during the rebellion, Byzantium refused to help Armenians, which from the military point of view led to the Armenians' defeat. For Byzantium, Armenia's independence from Persia was

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<sup>11</sup> **Եղիշե**, Վասն Վարդանայ և Հայոց պատերազմին, թարգմանությունը և ծանոթագրությունները Ե. Տեր-Մինասյանի, Ե., 1989, էջ 142:

not favourable, since it could have become an example for Western Armenia that was under its rule.

451 was marked by two major historical turning points for Armenians, in which all their national self-determination would be summarised. On the one hand, it was Avarayr that made Armenia an excellent Christian, disconnecting it from the East and the Paganism, and on the other hand, Chalcedon, which brought the Christian country that entered into a European family, into an isolation that was a perfect helplessness from the political point of view and a perfect self-review from the national-cultural point of view. Soon, a new Christian debate broke out. The rejection of nestorian doctrine resulted in the formulation of an approach that the divine nature prevailed in Christ, and the human nature was dissolved in the divine nature. By doing so, Christ was given a single nature. This doctrine has received the name of a monophysic. The new inventor was Eutychus, who was one of Constantinople monks. The meeting took place in 451 after the death of the Emperor Thodosius II, when Emperor Marcian sat on the throne. On the basis of one letter from Pope Leo, Emperor Marcian commanded to convene a church meeting for appoining the Chalcedon, as the capital of Botanius, built on the Asian coast of Constantinople<sup>12</sup>. The Fourth Cosmic Council was attended by Patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and nearly all the representatives from Eastern Churches (except for the leader of the Egyptian Christians), about 600 bishops. After the battle of Avarayr, Armenian clergymen were detained and sent to Persia, where some of them were brutally murdered. Under the circumstances, the Armenian Church could not send a representative to Chalcedon. He opposed the unity of the dual doctrine, which went as follows: "Christ's one-person nature is closely intertwined with the nature of other persons, or one person's nature is personalized and calls for the existence of another nature." The Council of Chalcedon welcomed the formula of faith suggested by Pope Leo. The Chalcedon Council divides and creates controversy in the Christian world, and for over 200 years, Byzantium should choose whether to accept or not accept the decisions of the Chalcedon Assembly<sup>13</sup>. The monotheists were declared as heretics who had to be punished. The decisions taken at the Chalcedon Assembly raised a

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<sup>12</sup> **Լեո**, Հայոց պատմություն, հ. Բ, Ե., 1967, էջ 99:

<sup>13</sup> **Оганесян Г.** Размышления на тему Халкидона: армянское достояние на святой земле, Иерусалим, 2009, с. 18.

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wave of dissatisfaction in the Byzantine Empire. Egypt, Syria, Assyria and Armenia were separated from the homeland, adopting monotheism. As a result of the Council of Chalcedon, these countries were alienated from the Byzantine church, which undoubtedly touched upon the fate of the Empire<sup>14</sup>. The Armenian Church first and foremost treated conscientious disputes as unnecessary arguments, finding that the doctrine of the original church is reasonable and incomplete, so it is not necessary to include some innovations in it<sup>15</sup>. The Armenian spiritual leaders have sharply criticized this artificial connection of natures, pointing out that the denial of humanity in Christ means human imperfection or inferiority into Christ, and thus we consider it as imperfect and unrealistic to our salvation<sup>16</sup>.

At a time when the Christian world was engaged in Christian affairs in Chalcedon, a whole nation left behind the fate of loyalty by its religious brothers backed the Christian religion from the persuasive Persia. In 450–451, the Armenian nation preserved not only its faith but also the integrity of the church, with the slogan that “Christianity is not a cloth for us that can be changed, but our skin which cannot be removed”<sup>17</sup>.

After the Chalcedon Council, religious controversies began in the whole empire. The Byzantine Emperors subsequently sponsored and supported one Chalcedonians, monotheists. The sponsoring emperors of the latter were Zeno (474–491) and Anastasius (491–518). During the rule of Emperor Zeno, the struggle of political and ecclesiastical parties and dominant divisions was aggravated in Byzantine. By using the situation, the Armenian nakharars of the Byzantine division rebelled. Zeno, despite the autonomy of ministers after the quelling of the rebellion, did not destroy the “sovereignty”, but, taking into account their unreliable and dangerous nature, deprived the ministers of their posts, and ministerial houses from becoming a life satrap and from the hereditary right<sup>18</sup>. According to Procopius of Caesarea, “The Roman army has never assisted either the Armenian crown or the satraps. In warfare, they were independent. Some time later, in the days of Zeno, when Elios and Leontius rebelled against the Emperor, some of the satraps

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<sup>14</sup> Успенский Ф., указ. соч., с. 280–281.

<sup>15</sup> Մելիքյան Կ., Հայոց եկեղեցու դիրքն ընդհանրական քրիստոնեական եկեղեցու համակարգում IV–VI դարի I կեսին, Ե., 2016, էջ 146:

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.armenianreligion.am/am/Encyclopedia\\_kaghkedonakanutyun](http://www.armenianreligion.am/am/Encyclopedia_kaghkedonakanutyun):

<sup>17</sup> Оганесян Г., указ. соч., с. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Խսկանյան Վ., նշվ. աշխ., էջ 119–120, 122:

decided to join them. And when the emperor Zeno suppressed this rebellion, he left a minor power of satrap in the country called Balabitenne, just as it used to be ruled by, and left all the others deprived of power and made no inheritance”<sup>19</sup>.

Emperor Zeno's role in the religious field was the most important step taken by the publication of the “Henotikon”. The Empire was divided between the monotheists and chalcedonians. Zenon was trying to find a compromise solution for them. In consultation with Constantinople Patriarch Acacius, Zeno issued an imperial decree on July 28, 482, known as the “Henotikon” or “Act of the Union.” The main idea of the “Henotikon” was to ignore the Council of the Chalcedon and re-evaluate the laws adopted by the previous three Cosmic Councils (Nikki, Constantinople, and Ephesus). After the bloody quarrels and disputes that followed the Chalcedonic Council, many representatives from both sides adopted the “Henotikon”, but Rome did not admit<sup>20</sup>. The Henotikon was cursing both Nestorius and Eutychius and all those who preached another doctrine. The monotheists gladly accepted the “Henotikon”, commenting on the possibility that they would enable them to annul the Council of Chalcedon and Pope Leo the Great's doctrine. The main goal of the Henotikon was to reconcile Egyptian and Syrian allies and to provide church peace in the empire<sup>21</sup>. Asoghik writes that Emperor Zeno “wrote a letter to all the lands of the Greeks and Romans, called the Henotikon, in which he anathematized the Council of Chalcedon and the belief Christ had two natures”<sup>22</sup>. Kirakos Gandzakeci writes: “This Zeno anathematized the Council of Chalcedon and also diaphysitism”<sup>23</sup>.

482–484 was known for a new wave of rebellions uprising in the Marzpanian Armenia. The rebellious atmosphere of the country began in the 60s and 70s of the

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<sup>19</sup> Օտար աղբյուրները Հայաստանի և հայերի մասին, հ. 5, Բյուզանդական աղբյուրներ Ա, Պրոկոպիոս Կեսարացի, թարգմանությունը բնագրից, առաջաբանը և ծանոթագրությունները Հ. Բարթիկյանի, Ե., 1967, էջ 191:

<sup>20</sup> **Richards J.**, The Popes and the Papacy in the early Middle Ages, 476–752, New York, 1979, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> **Bury J.**, History of the later Roman Empire: from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian, Vol. 1, New York, 1923, p. 403–404.

<sup>22</sup> **Ստեփանոս Տարանազի Ասողիկ**, Պատմություն տիեզերական, Մատենագիրք Հայոց, ԺԵ հ., Ժ դար, Ե., 2011, էջ 731:

<sup>23</sup> **Կիրակոս Գանձակեցի**, Պատմություն Հայոց, աշխատ. Կ. Մելիք-Օհանջանյանի, Ե., 1961, էջ 36:

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fifth century, when the Catholicos Gyut Arahezaci (461–478) was on the Catholicosate, who was a disciple of Sahak-Mashtotsian school. The other remaining faithful nakharars of Christianity were so disdainful of the Persians and denied by the Armenians that held secret counseling in the Catholicosate again on what could be done to get out of that situation. The Armenians were still counting on Byzantine as a conqueror. They did not show their attitude towards the Chalcedon Council, although they remained monotheists. Besides, the vast majority of Eastern Christianity was also homogenous, and the Byzantine rule after Marcian and Pulcheria not only shied away from using violent means to protect or disseminate the Orthodox Church, but also worked to establish peace and reconciliation in Christianity. In addition, the monotheism was joined by the Byzantine orthodoxy against a new enemy that began to spread in Syria. It was the nestorian sect. Gyut Catholicos began negotiations with Byzantine Emperor Leo I (457–474), followed by Marcian. The Emperor made promises, but with various reasons he procrastinated their fulfillment. Hearing about it, in the year 471, Persian king Peroz (457–484) summoned Gyut to Ctesiphon and deprived him of his post. Hovhannes Mandakuni was elected Catholicos at the time of Gyut. The anti-Persian movement had to go to a larger public speech headed by Sahak Bagratuni and Vahan Mamikonyan<sup>24</sup>. The 482–484 rebellion of Marzpanian Armenia against Sasanian Persia is one of the most prominent medieval Armenian liberation movements, which ended with a victory. At that time the Byzantine Empire's internal and external state was tense. Peoples' disturbances had reached the unprecedented scale in Egypt, Syria and Palestine.

However, Byzantium's refusal to help Armenians was conditioned by the existing relations with Persia, which were not tense at all. Though Byzantium did not provide assistance again, the rebellion ended with a victory. In 484, by the Treaty of Nvarsak, in the person of King Vagharsh (Balash) (484–488) Persia promised to fulfill the demands of the Armenians. Armenia maintained its internal independence, Christianity and the possibilities of economic and cultural development. However, the Treaty of Nvarsak did not last long. Persian King Vagharsh was blinded by dissatisfied magicians, while Kavadh rose to the throne (488–531).

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<sup>24</sup> ՀԺՊ, հ. II, էջ 197:



The Emperor Anastasius (491–518), followed by Zeno in Byzantium, continued his religious policy, further aggravating the split and hostility of the eastern oppressed countries. The church split was more prominent in the separation of the eastern provinces of the Empire, which began at this time. At the same time the Sassanians (the Sassanids) officially recognized nestorianism as the only official religion of the Christians in Iran.

Kavadh again continued the Sassanian (the the Sassanid ) anti-Christian policy. He ordered to build a large number of temples of fire worship in Armenia and persecute Armenian Christians, but the Armenians took advantage of Persia's internal and external hardships, raised a rebellion. Considering the fact that Kavadh had risen to the throne thanks to gunas, he owed them a large amount of gold. In 491 Kavadh demanded from the Byzantine Anastasius Emperor to pay the annual monetary sum foreseen by 363 Covenant for the protection of the Caucasian passageways against nomadic tribes. However, the Emperor rejected the latter.

“When the Armenians heard that Kavadh had not received a peaceful answer from the Romans, they got encouraged and jointly destroyed the inscriptions that the Persians had built in their country and killed the magicians around them. Kavadh sent a marzpan over them, but the Armenians crushed him and his troops, and then sent ambassadors to Caesar and told him they wanted to be subordinate to him. But he did not want to accept them lest the Persians should not think that he provoked Armenians to fight against the Persians”<sup>25</sup>.

We have seen that in the 5th century Armenia faced the threat of losing religious freedom. The Sasanid kings were eager to attract Armenia under their influence and alienate it from the Byzantine Empire. When Armenia was the subject of Persia's persecutions, meanwhile, the Byzantine Empire was busy with doctrinal disputes and was ignoring those pressures. Despite the fact that Armenia had received no aid from its western religious neighbour the Byzantine Empire, it was able to protect its religion and get out of difficult situations with glory.

Byzantium always proved by its policy that it operated exclusively for its state interests, ignoring its promises and religious affiliation with the Armenians.

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<sup>25</sup> Ասորական աղբյուրներ, էջ 162:

**Վ Դ. ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԵՎ ԲՅՈՒԶԱՆԴԱԿԱՆ ԿԱՅՍՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ  
ՄԻՋԵՎ ԴԱՎԱՆԱԲԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ  
ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՇՈՒՐՋ**

ՏԵՐ-ԳՐԻԳՈՐՅԱՆ Ա.

**Ամփոփում**

V դարում Հայաստանը կանգնած էր իր կրոնական ազատության կորստի շեմին: Սասանյան արքաները փորձում էին իրենց գերիշխանությունը տարածել երկրում և այդ կերպ հեռու պահել հայերին Բյուզանդական կայսրությունից: Այն ժամանակ, երբ Հայոց աշխարհը ենթարկվում էր պարսից արշավանքներին, Բյուզանդիան զբաղված էր ներքին դավանաբանական խնդիրներով և դրանց ուշադրություն չէր դարձնում: Չնայած հայերը ոչ մի օգնություն չստացան իրենց արևմտյան հարևանից՝ Բյուզանդիայից, այնուամենայնիվ, կարողացան պահպանել սեփական դավանանքը և արժանապատվությամբ դուրս գալ դժվարագույն իրավիճակներից:

**О ДОКТРИНАЛЬНЫХ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ  
МЕЖДУ АРМЕНИЕЙ И ВИЗАНТИЙСКОЙ ИМПЕРИЕЙ В V В.**

ТЕР-ГРИГОРЯН А.

**Резюме**

В V веке Армения оказалась перед угрозой потери религиозной свободы. Сасанидские цари преследовали цель установить свое господство в Армении и тем самым отдалить ее от Византийской империи, однако в период персидских нашествий на Армению Византия была вовлечена в доктринальные споры, в силу чего игнорировала сложившуюся в Армении ситуацию и не обращала на это внимание. Хотя и Армения не получила помощи от своего западного соседа – Византии, но тем не менее ей удалось защитить свою религию. Проводимая Византийской империей политика свидетельствовала о том, что она руководствовалась лишь своими государственными интересами, оставляя в стороне интересы армян, с которыми их объединяла религиозная принадлежность.