

Professional Organizations of Bulgarian Engineers During the Interwar Period

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Abstract: By 1914, the first stage of the organizational development of Bulgarian technical specialists was completed and the national engineering and architectural association was established. After World War I, socio-economic conditions changed and the technical community faced serious challenges. In search of solutions to these problems, attempts were made to reorganize the existing Association, and other professional associations were created. This article shows the evolution in the attitudes and activities of this professional group during a very dynamic historical period from 1919 to 1939.

Key Words: Bulgaria, Economy, Technical Professions, Associations, Interwar Period

Ключови думи: България, икономика, технически професии, асоциации, междувоенен период



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INTRODUCTION

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Europe underwent a process of professionalization in engineering. Its main elements were practice, education, and the creation of associations. The associations are the most important agent for the establishment of any profession, including engineering. As a rule, they unite the elite of a given profession and fulfill certain functions, the most important of which are:

to provide possibilities for the exchange of knowledge and experience; to define who is a professional and who may (or may not) exercise the given profession and to define the rules of professional conduct.

The history of professional engineering associations in Europe up to the First World War shows that they became a key partner and corrective to the state in regulating technical professions and in forming and implementing government policy in the economic field. This was valid both for Western European countries and for those in the Balkan region.¹

¹ On this topic, see Antoniou 2004; Buchanan 1989; Grelon 2007; Kostov 2018.

After World War I, with the end of this 'classical period' in the development of engineering associations, serious changes occurred in their activities. This article attempts to show the transformations in the professional organization of engineers and architects in Bulgaria, taking into account the new economic, social, and political conditions in the country between the two world wars. Based on official documents and materials from the specialized periodical press, an attempt is made to provide a more accurate assessment of a phenomenon that has not been sufficiently studied.

THE PREHISTORY

The professionalization of the engineering profession in *Bulgaria* began in the mid-1880s. when, the first local association, the Bulgarian Technical Association, was founded in Ruse. In the early 1890s, the number of Bulgarians who had graduated from technical universities abroad was growing. Inspired by the Western example, they embraced the idea of creating a national association of engineers and architects. As a result, they created in 1893, the *Bulgarian Engineering-Architectural Association (BEAA)* (*Balgarsko inzhenerno-arhitektno druzhestvo*) which had the main objectives 'to develop closer relations and solidarity between its members, to assist in their technical ventures and to generally defend the rights of technicians in Bulgaria'. According to the statutes, 'every Bulgarian subject with a higher technical education' was eligible for membership. The data show that at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, as the number of engineers in Bulgaria grew, so did the membership of the Association. Starting with only 35 members at the beginning, it already had 284 members in 1914.

Along with the purely technical problems, the Association raised issues related to the defense of the engineer's profession in Bulgaria. One of the most important activities of BEAA was for the introduction of a clear state regulation on engineering practice. The establishment and consolidation of BEAA made it an important

factor in the development of the technical community in the country and a respected partner of the state. However, the period after 1918 interrupted the Association's generally progressive development due to the serious consequences of Bulgaria's unsuccessful participation in the war.

In the period before World War I, there was a tendency for certain categories within BEAA to try to separate themselves from the rest. They felt somewhat neglected by the dominance within BEAA of the most numerous group, that of civil engineers. That is why some of them created their own structures. In 1910, architects formed their own group within the BEAA, and by 1914 their example had been followed by electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, and mining engineers.

At the same time, there were attempts to establish local organizations outside the capital in opposition to the excessive centralization of the organization. So, in December 1908, a group of engineers and architects founded the Varna Technical Society within the framework of BEAA, which in 1914 was recognized as its branch – the first one in the province.

NEW CHALLENGES AFTER WORLD WAR I

Immediately after 1918, Bulgaria, defeated in the war, fell into a serious economic crisis, accompanied by social and political problems. Over the next two to three years, engineers and architects in the country faced major challenges in practicing their profession.

Issues related to employment and remuneration for their work were key topics of discussion at BEAA in the early post-war years. Along with measures to protect professional interests after the war, a number of issues concerning state policy in the technical and economic spheres were also discussed. Among them were issues related to the electrification of the country, housing construction and others.

After 1919, a number of issues related to the organizational status of BEAA were discussed at its forums. A number of changes were proposed to improve its functioning for the benefit of its members. Ultimately, after lengthy discussions,

in December 1921, the new BEAA statute was finally adopted, which included a number of changes compared to the old one.² It provided for the creation of branches of the organization in so-called technical centers or settlements (or the area around them) where there were at least ten people with higher technical education. In 1923, there were already created 13 branches in the capital and in most of the district cities.

The period until the end of the 1920s was characterised by economic stabilisation. After the post-war crisis, the country began to gradually rebuild its industry and public construction which provided opportunities for even more technical specialists to find employment.

Under these conditions, the process of reorganizing of BEAA continued throughout the second half of the 1920s. By the end of the decade, branches had been established in a total of 21 cities across the country, including the capital Sofia. Its influence and membership also grew. Thus, while in 1923 BEAA had a total of 734 members, by the end of the 1920s their number had grown to nearly 1,000. It should be noted here that the association was now accepting members from new professions such as forestry engineers.

Information about the organizational status of BEAA in Sofia and other 'technical centers' as of 1929 is shown in Table 1. It shows the cities (and regions) where there were branches of the association. Data for the period until the end of the 1920s, as well as for the following decade, show the uneven distribution of engineers and architects in the country who were members of BEAA. For example, according to the data for 1929, the vast majority of them were located in the capital and were part of the largest branch. Of the total 987 members at that time, 469 (or 47.52 %) were registered in the provinces, and 518 (52.48 %) in Sofia.

Table 1: Number of BEAA members by region in 1929.

Technical Center / Region	Number
Sofia	518
Plovdiv	60
Ruse	47
Varna	44
Burgas	40
Pernik	35
Tarnovo	28
Pleven	24
Vidin	22
Stara Zagora	20
Gabrovo	18
Kazanlak	18
Vratsa	17
Haskovo	17
Shumen	17
Kyustendil	12
Sliven	11
Dupnitsa	10
Karlovo	10
Pazardzhik	10
Lom	9
Total	987

Source: *Yubileen Sbornik 1929* : I-XVI.

² *Izvestiya na BIAD* 1921: 9-10, 11-12.

Along with the branches, which were the main organizational units, BEAA members were also divided into ten groups by specialties – civil, electrical, mechanical, chemical, mining, cultural (agricultural), forestry and military engineers, architects and surveyors. In its efforts to attract more members and respond to demand, the association created three sections. By 1929, these sections brought together the following specialists within the BEAA: a) engineers and architects at the Ministry of Railways, Post and Telegraphs, b) engineers – industrial entrepreneurs, and c) aviation engineers.

In the second half of the 1920s, BEAA intensified its activities. Discussions expanded on issues related to the country's economic development and the role of technical specialists. Critical comments and recommendations were made to the state regarding the adoption of laws and other normative acts. Many of them were accepted by the government.

During this fruitful period, a number of organizational changes were made with the aim of improving the functioning of the organization. These changes are also reflected in its statute. Thus, in 1926, it was adopted that there would now be two types of congresses: organizational (regular and extraordinary) and scientific.³ In 1927, the first scientific congress of BEAA was held, and in 1928, the second. These forums discussed theoretical and specific issues related to the activities of engineers and architects in Bulgaria, often considering them in a pan-European context.

Along with the positive trends in the development of BEAA in the late 1920s and early 1930s, problems arose that presented it with new challenges. At that time, some important changes took place in the community of engineers and architects in Bulgaria. They partially affected BEAA and demonstrated the need to seek fairer solutions at the organizational level. The changes were dictated by the dissatisfaction among certain categories of specialists with

their position within the association and in society and the economy as a whole. For example, the majority of architects left BEAA and on February 8, 1927, they established the Association of Bulgarian Architects (ABA). In 1930, the Union of Freelance Engineers and Architects (UFEA) was founded. The initiators of its creation were dissatisfied with the neglect of the interests of this professional group by the BEAA).

From their very first appearances, both organizations expressed the opinion that Bulgarian engineers and architects should find a more suitable form of national unifying organization for all technical specialists, which would strengthen their position in the economy and society. So for example, in 1928, the ABA proposed that this should take the form of a federation of various organizations.⁴

The beginning of the 1930s witnessed a deterioration in the situation of technical specialists in Bulgaria due to the impact of the global economic crisis on the country. The new situation inevitably necessitated changes in the activities of BEAA, as well as in the other two organizations mentioned above. In 1931, changes were made to the BEAA Statute and the organization was now defined as 'scientific and professional'.⁵

Despite the problems in the national economy and the technical community, the number of BEAA members grew in the first half of the 1930s and, in 1932, it had a total of 1,075 members. It continued to grow until the middle of the decade, when the economic situation in Bulgaria became more favorable for technical activities.

Among the branches of BEAA, the biggest one was again in Sofia. By the mid – 1930s, they made up over 50% of its membership. In 1936, their number was 865. The distribution by specialties, shown in Table 2, is also interesting, especially since it is largely representative of the entire organization.

³ *Ustavite* 2007: 54.

⁴ *Spsanie na BIAD* 1928: 4, 83-84.

⁵ *Ustavite* 2007: 63.

Table 2: Members of the Sofia branch of BEAA in 1936, by specialty.

specialty	number	%
civil engineers	316	36,53
electrical engineers	187	21,62
mechanical engineers	156	18,03
surveyors	74	8,55
chemical engineers	64	7,40
Other	68	7,86
<i>From them</i>		
<i>mining engineers</i>	19	
<i>cultural engineers</i>	8	
<i>architects</i>	7	
<i>forestry engineers</i>	6	
<i>military engineers</i>	6	
Total	865	100,00

Source: *Spisanie na BIAD* 1937: 4, 57.

Serious changes in Bulgaria occurred in the mid-1930s. In particular, the role of the state in the economy was strengthened. Under the new conditions, Bulgarian engineers and architects sought to rethink the role of their organizations. The leading principle was to unite them into a single association that would have the power to protect their interests.

For example, in 1935, at the 16th Congress of BEAA, the issue of creating a unified organization of engineering and technical personnel was put up for discussion. This issue was also discussed during the following years. At the same time, discussions were also taking place in other professional organizations.⁶

Questions remained about the nature of the future union. Other ideas were also being discussed. For example, at the 18th BEAA Congress, held on February 21-24, 1937, a

resolution was adopted to establish the Chamber of Engineers and Architects in the country. The creation of such an institution would strengthen state control over the activities of technical specialists in the country. Finally, a decision was reached that was supported by the government, namely the simultaneous creation of the Chamber of Engineers and Architects and a new association of engineers and architects. In preparation for this transformation, on September 12, 1937, the leadership of the three organizations, BEAA, ABA and UFEA, announced their merger into the Union of Bulgarian Engineers and Architects.

At the end, a Ordinance-law was adopted after studying the experience of professional organizations in neighboring countries such as Greece and Yugoslavia, as well as in Austria and Hungary.⁷

⁶ *Spisanie na BIAD* 1935: 4-5, 120-124. *Idem* 1936: 5, 45-47.

⁷ In Greece and Yugoslavia, similar chambers were established in 1923 and 1925, respectively.

On October 7, 1937, the Ordinance-Law was enacted establishing the Chamber of Engineers and Architects (CEA) as the sole professional organization of engineers and architects in Bulgaria and the Union of Bulgarian Engineers and Architects (UBEA) as an academic organization.⁸

A careful reading of this document reveals the nature of this structure, which in practice places the activities of engineers and architects in Bulgaria under complete control by the CEA. Thus, Article 1 stipulates that all engineers and architects practicing freelance technical work in the country must be members of the newly established Chamber, while Article 2 explicitly emphasizes that 'engineers and architects who are not members of the chamber cannot practice their profession freely.'

Among the formulated objectives of the Chamber of Engineers and Architects, the following obligations to the state stand out: to serve as an advisory body to state institutions on technical and economic issues; to provide opinions to the Ministry of Public Works, Roads and Public Utilities on draft laws and regulations concerning the application of technology and those regulating the free technical practice of engineers and architects; to provide technical information to state institutions and individuals and (*please note*) to monitor the exercise of free technical practice by engineers and architects. Of course, its members had not been forgotten. The new organization had to take care of 'professional, material, and moral interests' of its members for example, by creating a mutual aid fund and other social services.

All organizational activities of the Chamber were carried out under the control of the state, represented by the Minister of Public Works. Strict disciplinary penalties were also provided for, ranging from reprimands and fines of varying amounts to deprivation of the right to practice for a period of 1 month to 2 years 'throughout the territory of the Kingdom'.

The final provisions stipulated that the Chamber of Engineers and Architects 'shall remain the only professional organization of engineers and architects in Bulgaria.'

The second part of the aforementioned Ordinance-Law of October 1937 concerned the establishment and functioning of the Union of Bulgarian Engineers and Architects.

Right at the beginning, it stated that 'all engineers and architects with the right to practice their profession' could become members of the new organization. It was defined as an academic organization with the following objectives: 'a) to contribute in every way to the advancement of technical work in the country; b) to preserve and promote the morale and good name of engineers and architects and to ensure that they are good and loyal citizens of the fatherland; c) to give, upon request, a reasoned opinion on all technical matters and to prepare draft laws, regulations, etc., governing technical matters.' However, Article 75 expressly stipulated that the UBEA was prohibited from dealing with any matters of a professional nature.

Within the three-month period following the promulgation of the aforementioned Ordinance-Law, a temporary governing council, elected by the existing governing bodies of the organizations, was convened and a founding congress was held to adopt the union's statute. The main document of the organization is based on the provisions of the Ordinance-Law from October 1937, which emphasized that the union was an 'academic organization' and its goals were mainly focused on contributing to the economy and technical development of the country. Unlike the last (and first) charter of the BEAA, there was no mention of 'protecting the professional and material interests' of the association's members, which can be seen as a retreat from the principles laid down in the early 'romantic' period of the previous organization. As we have seen, this goal had been taken on as a task by the semi-state Chamber of Engineers and Architects.

The new UBEA had a central management and was divided into societies by specialty in Sofia and the countryside. In turn, given the large number of members in the capital city, the societies there were united in a separate Sofia branch.

In this organizational situation, Bulgarian engineers and architects were active immediately

⁸ *Darzhaven vestnik* 1937: 221 and 226.

before and during World War II. After 1944, under the conditions of the emerging totalitarian communist regime, both organizations, the EAC and the UBEA, underwent transformations and

were eventually dissolved and, in 1949, most of their members joined the newly founded Scientific and Technological Union under strong state control.

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Професионалните организации на българските инженери и архитекти през междувоенния период

Александър Костов

Към 1914 г. завършва първият етап от формирането на модерната инженерна професия в България, като е поставено началото на организационното развитие на технически специалисти и е създадено национално инженерно-архитектно дружество. След Първата световна война социално-икономическите условия се променят и техническата общност в страната се сблъсква със сериозни предизвикателства. В търсене на решение на проблемите са направени опити за реорганизация на съществуващото дружество и са създадени други професионални асоциации. Настоящата статия показва еволюцията в нагласите и дейностите на тази професионална група през един много динамичен исторически период от 1919 до 1939 г. Въз основа на официални документи и материали от специализирания периодичен печат е направен опит да се даде по-точна оценка на едно явление, което не е достатъчно проучено. Проследени са опитите за намиране на подходящи начини и форми за професионална организация и за защита правата и интересите на българските инженери и архитекти през разглеждания период. Със създаването на Инженерно-архитектурната камара и на Съюза на българските инженери и архитекти през 1937 г. обаче се засилва държавният контрол върху тяхната дейност и автономността на техните организации.

