

REGIONAL POST

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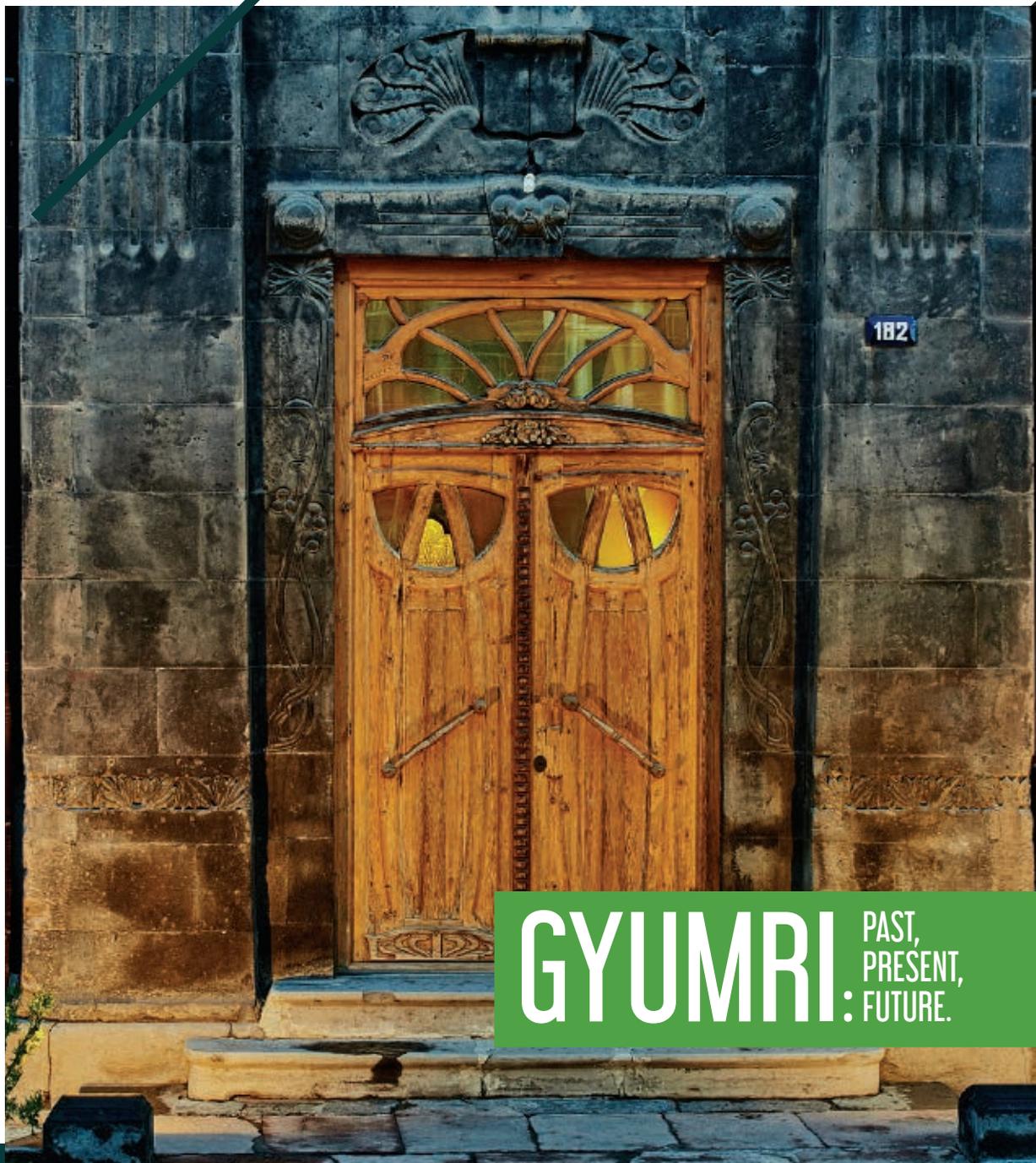
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GYUMRI PAST,
PRESENT,
FUTURE.



The Friends of Gyumri Foundation was founded in 2014 as a cultural foundation registered with the State Register of Legal Entities of the Republic of Armenia.

The goal of the foundation is not only to restore the historical city center of Gyumri but also via inclusion and training of local families, create additional jobs, raise the quality of life and help reversing current trends of migration.

Our foundation sees the revival of the historical city center as an opportunity to seriously contribute to the economic development of the whole region.

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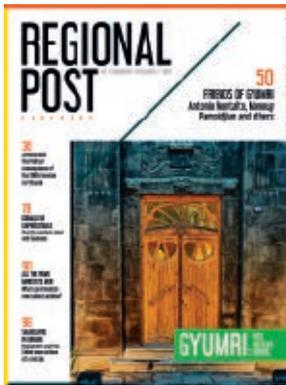
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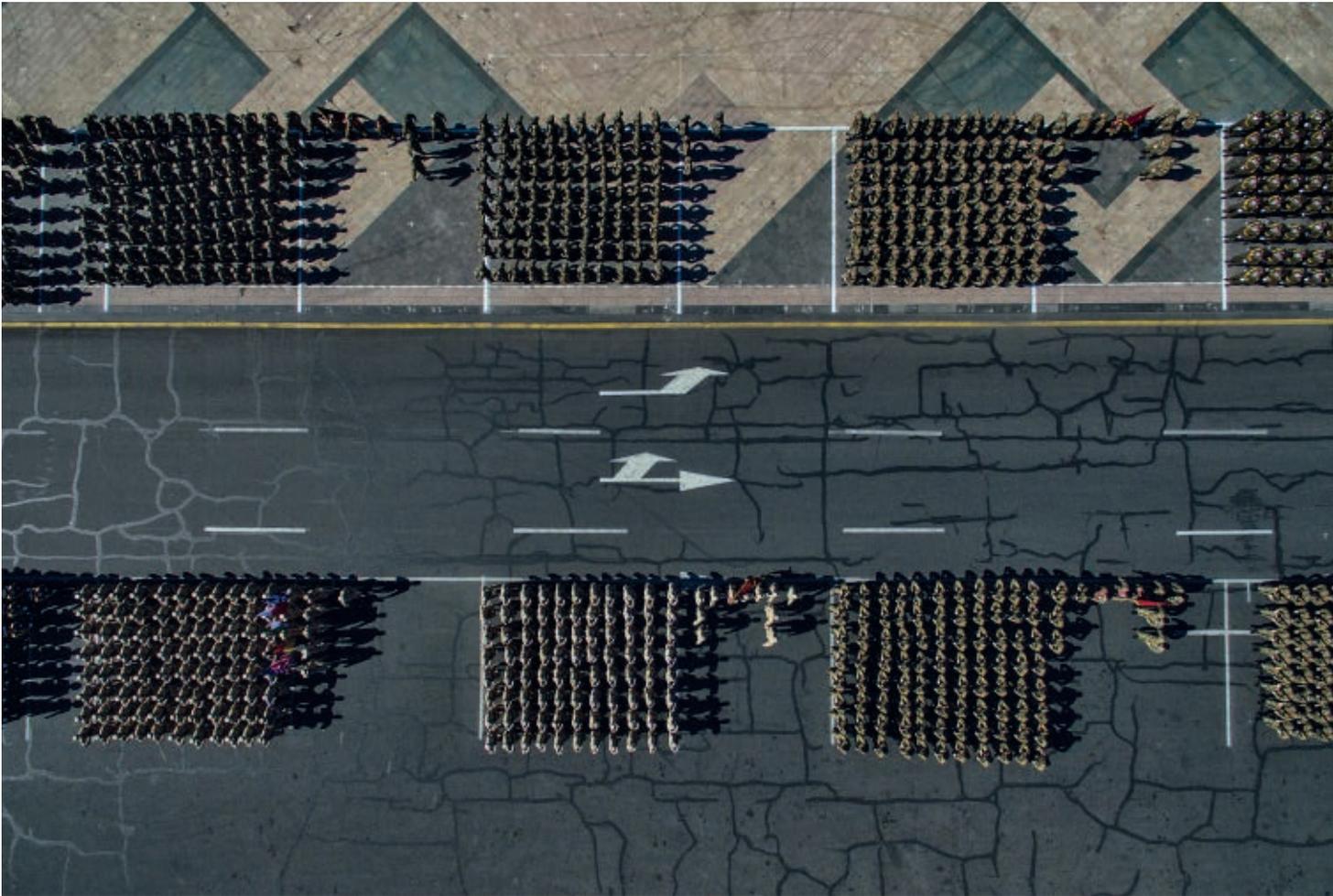


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ARMENIAN INDEPENDENCE:

Military Parade 2016



Armenia celebrated 25th anniversary of its independence with a military parade that roared Yerevan's central Republic on September 21. The parade featured intelligence units specifically designed for battlefield reconnaissance tasks, special units equipped with modern machine guns, long-range sniper, as well as other high-precision weapons, a peacekeeping brigade convoy, military police units, as well as soldiers of the 102nd Russian military base. The military display showcased unmanned aerial vehicles, multifunctional electronic warfare systems designed to disorganize the enemy troops and weapons control systems, ZF-80 armored transport vehicles and mechanized infantry and armored units. The most important part of the parade was showing off Iskander-E missile systems with a range of 300 km, Smerch heavy multiple rocket launchers, Tochka tactical ballistic missiles, as well as Buk medium-range surface-to-air missile systems, whose presence in the Armenian armed forces was confirmed during the pre-parade rehearsals.

PHOTO : PAN PHOTO

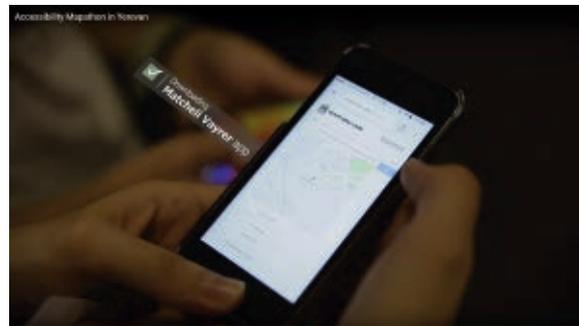






UN ARMENIA CELEBRATES UN STAFF DAY BY DOING GOOD

25 October is celebrated worldwide as the United Nations Staff Day in an effort to acknowledge the courage, commitment and sacrifice of the men and women who have answered the noble call to become international civil servants.



In Armenia, the United Nations celebrated UN Staff Day by organizing an initiative to raise public awareness of the accessibility of public places for people with disabilities by mapping accessible places in downtown Yerevan using a special mobile app – Matcheli Vayrer – which was developed with the support of UNDP’s Kolba Innovation Lab. The initiative supports Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and particularly Target 11.7 on safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces. The theme of the initiative was also chosen to coincide with the Armenian Prime

Minister’s decision to mark 2016 as the year of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Minister of Labor and Social Issues, Artem Asatryan, opened the event together with Bradley Busetto, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia at the UN House by congratulating the UN staff on their special day and thanking them for their service supporting Armenia’s development. He also joined the staff in walking through the city center and mapping accessible places for people with disabilities. The event was widely covered in the media, who accompanied the ‘mappers’ throughout the walk. ♦

ARARAT 25

This fall we had few occasions to be truly happy. On one hand Republic of Armenia celebrated the 25th anniversary of Independence. On the other hand, Yerevan Brandy Company's Cognac Ararat Nairi has won the Grand Prix and gold medal at the XX Moscow International Professional Contest of Wines and Spirits. But what made us even happier as avid lovers of legendary Armenian cognac, is how Yerevan Brandy Company celebrated the 25th anniversary of Armenia's Independence – in his unique, delicious way. On this occasion the Company has released a limited edition brandy – ARARAT 25.

TEXT : ARSHAK TOVMASYAN



This remarkable blend was presented to the public on the eve of the anniversary celebration. Though in limited edition, many media representatives also had chance to taste the flavor of ARARAT 25. Yerevan Brandy Company produces unique and unordinary brandy, and so are the ways they present their products to the media. It's not just an average press-release one could imagine, not just a piece of paper with some text and a photograph. ARARAT 25's press release was as original as the blend itself: a hard copy box, more like an expensive present. And it truly was a present, with a special bottle containing this new blend's flavor. And, trust us, it was remarkable.

This great present made us look back to the Yerevan Brandy Company's history. Once again we could see how tightly it was always related to the Armenian history. Moreover, ARARAT is considered to be one of the country's symbols. This noble drink has absorbed all the best that the Armenian land can give: its bright sun and an abundance of colors, love and dedication, and a respect for tradition and national pride. Since it's founding, ARARAT has been and remains an important part in the lives of the people and their country. No surprise, it should be leave its footprint on the celebration of Armenian modern

history's most important event – Independence. ARARAT 25 is an exceptional brandy, created from ARARAT signature blends and old spirits, which were aged in oak barrels for a half-century. This exclusive alliance clearly reveals the nature of this noble brandy. The unique blend has a beautiful color and a rich multifaceted taste, which includes shades of dark chocolate, toasted bread and sweet raisin. The amazing bouquet is filled with the aroma of vanilla, with a hint of caramel flavor. The drink reveals notes of black coffee, oak and pepper and ends with a long sweet aftertaste. This 25-year-old brandy is presented in an elegant bottle and a gift box decorated with the Coat of Arms of Armenia.

Dramatic twists in the history of Armenia, periods of triumph and stoic patience, climbing dynasties and the fortifying of new capitals affected the country's heritage. As the unhurried process of aging the precious spirits contributes a thinner and richer taste, each new era tempered, rallied and strengthened the Armenian people. The unique taste of ARARAT 25 brandy is created from rare spirits kept in the treasury of the Yerevan Brandy Company. It also shows the strong devotion of Armenian brandy makers to their native land and the people of Armenia. ♦

DIGITEC EXPO 2016

This year 124 companies and projects of the local and international market and about 60 000 visitors participated in the 12-th annual DigiTec technological exhibition.

PHOTO : UIITE



The official opening ceremony of DigiTec started with the speeches of newly appointed Minister of Transport, Communication and Information Technologies Vahan Martirosyan, Karen Vardanyan's, who is the Executive Director of the Union of Information Technology Enterprises which organizes the exhibition, and Hayk Yesayan – the General Director of Ucom – the platinum sponsor of DigiTec. President Serzh Sargsyan, the Deputy Minister of Defense Davit Pakhchanyan and representatives of diplomatic structures, local and international organizations and missions, other guests also attended the official opening ceremony of the Expo. Within the framework of the mobilization program of the IT sector im-

▼
General Director of Ucom Hayk Yesayan and president Serzh Sargsyan on the opening of DigiTec





Virtual reality products shown in Arloopa booth



Robotics is one of the fastest growing segments of IT in Armenia

plemented by the UITE, in a closed discussion format the specialist from the military sector and those who are responsible for the sector introduced to the president the processes of the investment of the innovative technologies used in the Military Industry, reported the results of the cooperation between the military industrial complex and information technologies companies formed by the appropriate degree of the President of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the forthcoming projects aimed at the full use of the potential of the sector of the information technologies for the future

and successful development of the Military Industry of Armenia. This year India was represented with a consolidated pavilion as a partner country. Official representative companies of American, Russian, Swedish, Chinese companies also participated at DigiTec. Particularly: Keysight Technologies, VMware, PicsArt, National Instruments, Ucom, Joomag, VOLO, Instigate, Festo, Rusbase, Monitis, Huawei, IUNetworks, ArmSoft, Arloopa, gg companies, Enterprise Incubator Foundation, Stay alive art club, Armath, Tumo educational centers, American University of Armenia and others took part at DigiTec 2016. ♦

ARMENIA INVESTMENT FORUM 2016

The Armenia Investment Forum 2016 took place in New York City on October 10-11th, 2016 under the high patronage and with the participation of H.E. Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia. The event was organized by the Development Foundation of Armenia (DFA), Armenia's national authority for investment, export and tourism promotion. DFA facilitates investment plans into Armenia, helps domestic firms export goods, and promotes the country's many tourist attractions.



^
President Serzh
Sargsyan's speech
on the forum

The Forum served as a unique platform for a dialogue between executives and investors from around the globe. It was attended by more than 200 decision makers and high-level officials, including more than 100 investors. Key policy leaders and business decision makers from Armenia, the United States, the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union, and international organizations discussed the opportunity Armenia presents as a gateway to major markets (EEU, Middle East and Iran) and outlined their vision about the economic development of the country. This two-day event gave firsthand information about Armenia's unique position as a gateway to major markets to investors looking for business ex-

pansion and cost reduction. Tariff-free access to the markets of the Eurasian Economic Union (market of 182 million consumers), the CIS (market of 250 million consumers), was noted as a key advantage by the Chairman of the Board of the EEU commission, Mr Tigran Sargsyan. As Mr. Sargsyan said: "Armenia is no more market of 3 M consumers. It is a market of 250 million consumers!" Referring to the question "Why Armenia?" Vice Prime Minister of Armenia and Minister of Economic Integration and Reforms Vache Gabrielyan underlined a number of reasons for investing and doing business in Armenia. "Macroeconomic and financial stability, entry to large markets without tariffs, opportunity for a fa-



Many investment projects in different sectors were presented during the Forum, eliciting great interest from the investor community



cilitated product circulation system, a constantly developing business environment, diversified investment sectors, and a young, established and inexpensive labor force are the best foundations for doing business in Armenia” stated the Vice PM. He also emphasized the benefits and opportunities, offered through Armenia’s membership to the Eurasian Economic Union, the GSP+ and GSP trade regime with the EU and US respectively, as well as Armenia’s close relationship with Georgia and Iran. Deputy Director General of the European Commission (DG NEAR) Katarina Mathernova, speaking of the currently negotiated Armenia EU agreement, stated, “This trade agreement will bring with it a lot of benefits, because

it is going to go some ways towards regulatory convergence. The agreement is going to focus on important sectors and it means access to the largest single market in the world.” Armenia enjoys GSP + membership with EU countries for around 6,400 products, and GSP membership with the USA, Canada, Japan, Norway, and Switzerland. The long lasting good relationship with Iran and opportunity to serve this market from Armenia are of interest to investors looking for low risk arrangements for serving the Iranian market. Last year, Armenia and the U.S. signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), a historic first step towards normalizing and expanding U.S.-Armenian economic relations.

During the plenary sessions, Deputy Ministers discussed improvements in Armenia’s business environment and presented business opportunities in each sector, executives from foreign firms established in Armenia shared their experience and success in the country. Many investment projects in different sectors were presented during the Forum, eliciting great interest from the investor community. All key presentations can be downloaded from DFA’s website at www.dfa.am. “Thanks to its geographic location, stable macroenvironment and skilled labor force, Armenia offers a great opportunity for investors to access major regional markets.” said Garen Mikirditsian, CEO of DFA. “The DFA assists investors to ease their entry into Armenia.” ♦

THE NEW OPPORTUNITIES OF INVESTING IN ARMENIA

The time for easy growth in the country is long foregone. The new reality of the economy is here, and it requires the business and economic elite to move to its next level of thinking, to make some hard choices and adapt. In this article we point to the main investment themes that have the potential of high returns for possible investors, and can eventually help turnaround the economy today.

TEXT : SONA GRIGORYAN

Armenia's economic growth has been sluggish for some time already. GDP growth in 2016 will be as low as 3%. Forecasts for 2017 are not much higher – just around the level of 3.2%, mostly in light of Russia's recession and reduced remittances from Russia. The increasing physical threat on the country's border and the volatile internal situation have been the priority for the country strategic agenda. These are also the main factors that have severely deteriorated the investment climate in the country. Adapting to this new reality requires a competitive economy that can attract and digest healthy investments and utilize its main competitive advantages, while being resilient to the lack of natural resources and logistical advantages. Some of the growth points of the investment climate in the country are pointed out below:

INVESTMENT THEME 1: FAST GROWTH OF IT, AGRO AND OTHER SELECTED SEGMENTS OF THE ECONOMY

Amid the overall economic grayness in the country, a handful of sectors have been growing impressively. Thus, riding the growing wave of these segments will payoff to the investors. Unlike, the first period of economic freedom of the country, when construction was the main locomotive for the growth, now this has shifted. IT, Agro, Mining, Leisure and several other sectors are the main "growth providers" in the country. Each of these sectors has a unique set of underlying growth factors that allowed to drive growth against the overarching trend of decline. The most interesting of these trends can be observed in the IT sector. The growth driver for IT has been the availability of high quality and relatively low cost human resources, as well as

the entrepreneurial wave of start-up movement, fueled by the availability of venture and angel funding in the sector. Average annual growth in the IT industry amounted to about 20% for the past several years. The productivity of the sector, which equals the total output per one employee, is about 5 times higher than the average of the economy. There is no doubt that the global economy is in the era of innovative technological movement. Thus Armenian economy and its IT/engineering sectors face the challenge of keeping up with the global pace. Venture, angel and other forms of investment are increasingly available for the sector companies, although still with ample potential of growth. Granatus Ventures is the first venture fund in the country that has been actively involved in securing investments for promising start-ups in the country.





UIE

< PicsArt's booth on DigiTec Expo 2016

> Sona Grigoryan, Junior partner at EV Consulting



Menu Group (menu.am, menu.ge, menu.by and yet to grow) is one of the successfully growing investments of the fund – a restaurant food delivery service IT platform, that is rapidly expanding to regional countries. Last year it closed \$720,000 investment round to fuel its growth strategy. ggTaxi – an IT platform allowing to disrupt the taxi industry emulating and tailoring the business model of uber for Armenia and with ambitious plans to grow. SoloLearn – a mobile educational platform that provides users with unique teaching methodology and game-style learning experience in different areas such as

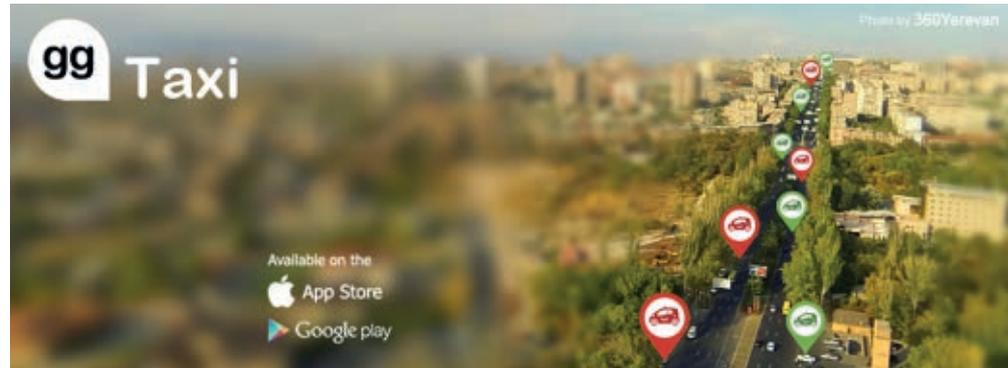
programming, business and photography. It has recently raised \$1.2M seed round to socialize mobile code learning. NewsDeeply, an online journalism and technology platform, is another Armenian start-up, which is specialized in single-issue news websites and it attracted \$2,500,000 from four sources – Omidyar Network, Granatus Ventures, HIVE and Fresco Capital. The most recent and a very significant success news was out only several days ago, while this article was in process – CodeFights announced raising \$10 million Series A round led by e.ventures. CodeFights, Granatus Ventures portfolio company that brings together coding challenges and skills-based recruiting. PicsArt, renowned for being one of the best Armenian start-up applications so far, succeeded in 2015 to attract a total of \$45M at three stages from different venture companies – Sequoia Capital, Insight Venture Partners, DCM Ventures and Siguler Guff & Company. PicsArt has become among the world's most famous popular photo-editing and sharing applications. According to Forbes, the mobile application is now valued at \$250M. Apart from the start-up movement in the country, the IT sector success is very much due to the country hosting some of the largest multinationals in the global IT industry. In particular IT giants such as Microsoft, Oracle, Cisco, Ericsson, Huawei, D-Link, VMware, Mentor Graphics, National Instruments, Synergy International Systems and Synopsys have subsidiaries, R&D offices and laboratories in Armenia. >

∨ Spayka is "responsible" for about 70% of fresh agricultural exports from Armenia



Armen Martirosyan

➤ ggTaxi is one of the leading IT startups in Armenia



INVESTMENT THEME 2: DELEVERAGING AND DISTRESS FINANCING DUE TO RAPID EXPANSION OF CREDIT

Bankruptcy of local companies in different sectors has become very frequent and common. It is the sad but inevitable consequence of slow economic realities. The purchasing power of the population has plummeted, bringing whole sectors “down to their knees”.

The rapid expansion of bank loans and lack of deep equity markets resulted in suboptimal capital structures and emergence of many distressed assets.

The higher-than optimal leveraged companies now face the challenge of restructuring debt, which opens opportunities for investing in distressed assets. Most of these assets are either stuck at the mercy of commercial banks, or still breathing with their original owners, eager for new capital injection.

The non-performing loans, which include bad debt, restructured loans and written-off assets, rose to almost 9 percent towards the end of the year, according to Central Bank data. Which is quite high for Armenia and still does not reflect the whole reality of non-performing loans.

It is time to recognize that crises and defaults are an essential part of investing in developing countries and Armenia is no different. Companies default, get restructured; learn their lessons, and rebuild.

Distressed opportunities in Armenia are more suited for private equity, as there is a sever need for equity instruments for improving the capital

structure and also, more importantly, there is a need to make the management changes.

The bankruptcy wave is a result of not-only the higher than acceptable leverage of local companies, but also the failure of management to recognize the need for change and adapt to the new realities of the economy. The imperative to mobilize and flex to new markets, new channels of growth and the new needs of the economy is higher than ever. Thus the new investment can have effect only in case of recognizing the need for efficient management.

INVESTMENT THEME 3: EXPANSION OF LOCAL COMPANIES TO EEU MARKET

Armenia’s becoming part of the 180m+ Eurasian Economic Union market opens new expansion opportunities for the local producers. This is of course yet a project in process, with numerous practical issues to be resolved, however, it has the great potential to provide some relieve to local companies “hungry” for market, scale and efficiency.

There is a growing interest from international players to buy production assets in Armenia to capitalize on this opportunity.

Armenia’s exports to member states of the EEU have increased by 70% over the past seven months, according to the official representatives of the EEU. This indicates numerous opportunities mainly in agro, greenhouse and food processing sectors of the country. Spayka, a locally established logistics and greenhouse company, has been paving the success path on this

theme. Today Spayka has its own fleet of more than 200 Volvo trucks, with more than 10.000 m2 of A Class refrigerated warehouses in Yerevan, Ararat and Tavush regions, factory of juices and preserves with Italian production lines, factory of packaging materials for agricultural products. Spayka manages also 30 ha radish greenhouses in Ararat region. The company is “responsible” for about 70% of fresh agricultural exports from Armenia. And it has plans to invest in a 100ha greenhouse complex equipped with modern technology, the main export market being Russia. Although, manufacturing sector has lagged behind agro and IT by its growth levels, there will be substantial opportunities to invest in value-creating businesses that can tap into the large EEU market. Armenia’s manufacturing sector needs to grow in productivity and management efficiency, which can largely benefit from the foreign direct investment in the country.

Investments are the much needed fuel for the economy right now, and the timely recognition of significant trends might lead to harnessing the available growth potential. Realizing the potential of Armenia’s economy will require national and local leaders to adopt new approaches to management, both in corporate and in government levels. For investors, Armenia represents a sizable market but will require a granular strategy and a locally focused operating model. This is the new imperative of the economy and the success could give a historic boost to Armenia’s economy. ♦



MUSCARI
Caring for Land, People & Culture

Gyumri Ceramics

Inspired by the know-how of the Armenian potters of Kütahya

The prestigious “Gallery de la Tour” in Lyon located at the “Maison de la Tour Rose” (XVI century) recently held a two-month exhibition-sale of unique pieces of ceramics made by the craftsmen of Gyumri using the know-how of Armenian craftsmen from Kutahya, a major center of ceramic production in the Ottoman Empire during XVI-XIX centuries.

The exhibition was initiated by Muscari, an association for the promotion of Armenian and French cultural heritages and its president Manoug Pamokdjian.

This event was organized as part of the global project aimed at the promotion of the economic and artistic prowess of Gyumri, initiated by Antonio Montalto, Honorary Consul of Italy, and the Pamokdjian family. Antonio Montalto and his “Family Care” association are behind the considerable effort for the restoration of ancient buildings at the heart of the historical center of Gyumri, such as Villa Kars, which has been converted to a magnificent and charming hotel.

The Muscari Association plans to establish several Armenian Houses (les Maisons d’Armenie), centers for the distribution and promotion of Armenian crafts across France and Italy.

In addition to the unique nature of the presented items, the goal of the exhibition, which will tour various European cities throughout 2017, is to use art as a way of reviving Gyumri, a city devastated by a powerful earthquake in 1988 as well as continued economic crisis.

In addition to the Muscari association, these events are also supported by “Family Care” and the “Friends of Gyumri” associations.



SILK ROAD

The American-Armenian businessman Levon Der-Bedrossian had been dreaming about establishing himself in Armenia for many years. In 2014 he made his dream come true and founded the Silk Road hotel in the Agedzor district of Yerevan. Simultaneously he established the The Folk Arts Foundation. Its main goal is to revive the art of Armenian national crafts, especially carpet weaving.

TEXT : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN / PHOTO : SILK ROAD



Mr. Der-Bedrossian, what were your impressions, when you first visited Armenia?

I arrived in Armenia in the summer of 1982. It was an amazing experience for someone from the Diaspora to meet so many people speaking Armenian and to appear in a very special place. I cannot describe my impressions, when I was leaving. They were probably the most pleasant impressions. I vis-

ited Armenia after the earthquake for a second time. I arrived as a volunteer as part of a program implemented by a Diasporan organization in the summer of 1989. We settled in Gogaran village, located near Spitak. We tried to provide psychological help to the residents, as our financial support was limited, although we helped one of the families to restore a ruined barn. In the evenings we were just talking to peo-

ple, enjoying our time. Communication with the people was very important to us. I hope they felt the same way. It was a hard time; the aftermath of the earthquake, the Soviet union on the verge of collapse and the devastating Karabakh conflict. I had spent my summers in that village for two years. I had become very connected to Armenia during that period. So I set a goal to deepen my relationship with Armenia.

And when did you decide to establish yourself and settle in Armenia permanently?

In the 1990s I had already thought about opening a small hotel in Yeghegnadzor, but it was almost impossible at the time. However, I had been spending all of my vacations here since 1993. But as I had not yet managed to establish myself in Armenia, I did not risk starting a business. Finally, one day I made the decision to buy a house here, where I could spend at least half of the year. I studied the housing market and stopped by at a house in Aygedzor. I saw quite a large space, a semi-ruined old house and the owner had emigrated to Russia. The house was near the center, on the verge of the canyon, so the air was fresh and I decided to buy it. When we started to repair it, I thought that it would be great if we built a few rooms inside to accommodate my friends or children. The architects persuaded me to construct another building in the area. The construction was quite complicated and expensive, so it took us almost 10 years to complete the whole process.

Did you ever change your mind during that period?

On the contrary, I became wiser, looked through my ideas and forged them into



a concrete plan. I established the foundation and focused on national crafts. I studied ethnology and anthropology and I had always been interested in Armenian national crafts. I have a large collection of carpets. I have been engaged in the restaurant business for so many years but I did not forget about my collection. So I decided to use this space as a center for national crafts, in addition to being a hotel.

We gathered a class of 10 children and began to teach them carpentry, absolutely free of charge. It was so successful that now we have three classes, and then the children's elder relatives showed interest in the craft. Maybe some of the children will launch other activities in the future. Anyway, the culture is being spread and this is the most important thing. Some of them will become professionals, and the adults are seriously fond of embroidery and carpet weaving. We sell their works in the hotel and they earn money in return. It's a serious economic project for them.

So, in brief, what is 'Silk Road' for you?

With its 13 rooms, the hotel became the base of the foundation. It gave independence both to the foundation and to me, as currently we are self-dependent. On the other hand it is a unique live museum, which exhibits Armenian culture to foreign tourists. By the way, most of the furniture has been brought from my house in San Francisco, that is why it is like a home for me.

Could you please tell us about other cultural events taking place in the "Silk Road"?

The 'Ayrudzi' ensemble has been operational in Ashtarak for already 30 years. It organizes races and shadow theatre performances. 'Ayrudzi' is a very unique ensemble. Recently we have organized their performances at Silk Road, the group performs shadow theatre twice a month on Thursday nights. Our aim was to create a platform for them, which would allow them



^
Celebration of Silk Road's two-year anniversary

to discover young talents. We achieved our goal as they managed to find new members. For us, the further development is much more important than just organizing a couple of interesting events, which will be forgotten all too quickly. Additionally we organized documentary movie screenings together with the ensemble. Two years ago Dsirani Dsar Ethno Film Festival was organized by filmmaker Garekin Zakoyan, with the support of the Silk Road Hotel and the Folk Arts Hub Foundation. This year we have worked with Dsirani Dsar again. In cooperation with the 'Ayrudzi' ensemble we started to shoot an interesting documentary movie. They have a tradition of organizing a tour in about



^ Carpet weaving in the Silk Road's terrace



◀ One of the 13 guest rooms in Silk Road

a dozen villages across Aragats. During the tour they perform shadow theatre and organize concerts. So, the documentary is about the tour. I was present at their performance in Aragats village last year. I had a chance to talk to the head of the village. I naively thought that children study crafts at schools in Armenian villages. Soon, it turned out that children did not study carpentry or carpet weaving, and the school building was in poor condition to

facilitate this. This was a significant day for me as I then came to the realization that we should expand our activities in the region. We developed a new charitable "Adopt a Loom" project which included trainings, taking place at that school. We provided the school with the necessary equipment, tools and a specialist. Our next step was to arrange support for the villages of Sasunik and Karakert. We have to continue our activity and to provide support in almost 100 villages. By the way, each village has its own signature and if you pay attention to the carpets weaved by the children, you will see that each of them is different and unique. Even adults joined the children in the villages. Our foundation buys the best samples of their work, which means that it is not just a hobby for them, this is their work and a real investment in their future. The art of carpet weaving is developing and both the villagers and our team are content with the results. I am also glad to see that the revival of traditions have started to come from the younger generation and that encourages the adults. Armenian Rug Society supports the project as well. By the way, I am a member of the Armenian Rug Society. They organize different sympo-

siums, exhibitions and workshops. And this is high time for Armenia and the Diaspora to unite. It seems that a carpet can become a symbol, kind of a bridge between the two worlds.

What can you say to sum up the first two years of Silk Road?

I am very glad as the results are better than I had ever expected. This place began a life of its own and became very important for those who are interested in Armenian culture. We are going to continue our activity and pay attention to the development of other crafts as well. We are currently organizing a project to introduce Armenian culture to foreign students. Next year we are planning to revive another great Armenian tradition at the hotel. The tradition of baking in a Tonir oven. We will organize special evenings, people will gather around it, talk, sing and bake bread.

The future plans are big...

The future plans are big, but realistic. I prefer to plan such things which can be easily realized and go on taking small steps. ♦



DILIJAN ARTS OBSERVATORY

Dilijan Arts Observatory project launched on August 22, 2016. For some three weeks over 30 artists representing different spheres worked to create modern art. The outcome of the Dilijan Arts Observatory will first be exposed in the National Gallery of Contemporary Art in Berlin, in November 2017 and in Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, in summer 2018. On September 10 and 11 former Impuls factory based in Dilijan hosted the exposition of Dilijan Arts Observatory.

It is a part of the Dilijan Art Initiative project and is supported by RVVZ and IDeA foundations. International curator and anthropologist Clementine Deliss curated the Dilijan Arts Observatory. She told RP about her ambitious project in Dilijan.

TEXT : MARIAM LORETSYAN / PHOTO : DAVID GALSTYAN



Edgar Barsagyan



< "Impuls" building front view

> "Activist who cannot speak English is no activist" by Vahram Aghasyan

>
"Scent of Nature and Materials both inside and outside of Impuls Factory" by Andrea Poessnicker in collaboration with Erik van Buuren



<
Artwork by Silvina Der Meguerditchian



<
Clémentine Deliss giving a speech on the opening ceremony of Dilijan Arts Observatory

IN LOVE WITH DILIJAN

Today we live in a world of expertise and everyone likes to feel that they are specialists in their field. We also know that today the world is turbulent with an unstoppable movement of people, of skills, of ways of seeing the world. Living and meeting people in an unknown place is no longer limited to a moment of travel, it can be a question of survival, of emergency, a situation of life or death. All confrontations whether peaceful or aggressive, require readjustment. Against this backdrop of our daily politics and the growing fears that we feel wherever we live, there is hope of a safe corner of creativity and education that will help foster a dialogue across cultures, faiths and ages. It does not exist without our investment and this is a collective investment.

I am honored to be invited by IDEA foundation, RVVZ and Dilijan Development Foundation to engage with Dilijan. I loved the place the moment I arrived there for the first time in September last year and I have already come back six or seven times, and I'll be back again. But even more than the foundation, I am honored to have received an immediate sense of trust beyond the barriers of languages and contexts by the citizens of Dilijan. You realize now, I do not speak Armenian or Russian. >



THE IMPORTANCE OF DILIJAN COMMUNITY ARCHIVE

The Director of the Dilijan centralized library system and the other 15 women working in the municipal library, opened the door to the prospect of setting up a Dilijan Arts Observatory. In an active and intense generosity, they lent me archival photographs and it led to the proposal for a Dilijan Community Archive, which was displayed on the top floor of the administrative building of “Impuls” factory.

You ask me: what are the results? Number one is the conviction that Dilijan needs a community archive, a new form of cultural centre for everybody and our exhibition is a modest proposal. The key concept of education in Dilijan can be realized and it can regenerate employment on a local, regional, national and international scale of excellence.

Installation
by Haig Aivazian



Archival photos, forming the
“Dilijan Community Archive”
“Impuls”, Dilijan, 60's



IF WE HAD A MANTRA

If we had a mantra, which is not really my style, it would consist of the following points: Before we plan, let's listen to the stories of the place, before we build, let's live in what is here, before we think we know, let's exchange our insecurities, let's meet artists, historians, scientists, architects, people with daily jobs, people of every society, young and old. But if we start a conversation, we have to work with a translation. In this case we will miss things, imagine it, but we may also gain a lot. This is why the works that are exposed in Dilijan Arts Observatory project are unfinished, they are rushed works that have come from field work experience with the participants of Dilijan Arts Observatory. This is a result of a field work that only lasted for three weeks. It is meant to be the beginning of the conversation with you.



Wall charts by
Clementine Deliss

P.A.M Perks and
Mini collaboration
with David
Galstyan and
Andrew de Freitas

A MODEL FOR AN ARMENIAN CONTEXT

The year was 2009 when I came to Armenia for the first time. I was invited to take part in a very important summer school that had been curated by Nazareth Karoyan. It was at that moment I met a lot of strong thinkers, brilliant artists and I always wanted to come back to Armenia.

In the art world today there are many biennales, every part of the world has its biennale, which is like a big art fair. There are also many people today who build new museums. What we wanted to do here was to begin to understand and identify what is the most appropriate kind of art-educational institution and to use Dilijan as a model for the Armenian context. So when I was invited by IDEA foundation to come to Dilijan, to look at the city, I saw centers of cultural activities of composers, writers, cinematographers and architects. But I also saw this factory 'Impuls', which we renamed to 'Impuls Konden-

sator'. I thought to myself that Dilijan is not only about elite culture, it is also about employment and production. I also knew that Dilijan has always been international. Many people used to come to Dilijan because of its beauty and nature, and because they could revive dialogues between different people from different parts of the world. For me the most important result of the Dilijan Arts Observatory is the model, the beginnings of a new kind of cultural center in Armenia based on a community archive. This archive is a foundation for the youth and I am honored that so many people of the older generation were ready to share their experience and memories with people, who came out to Dilijan for the first time. So we want to achieve national and local, but also international recognition of the value of Dilijan through artists, scientists and historians who will come back to this wonderful town. >



◀ "Impuls" factory 2016



^ Dilijan Community archive presentation

◀ Postoyan family carpet collection exhibition during public events at "Impuls" factory

➤ Dilijan Arts Observatory's opening

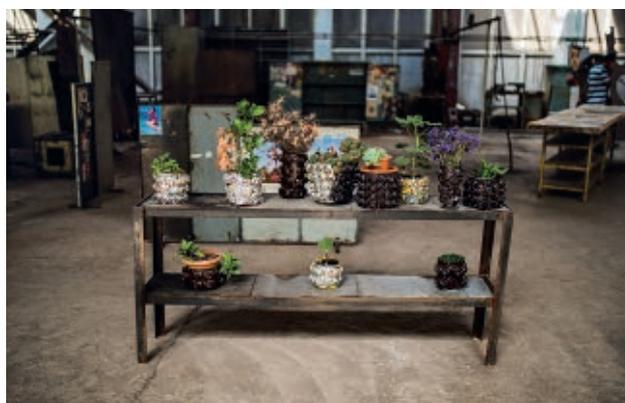


◀ Dilijan Arts Observatory participants meeting

▲ Clementine Deliss with CEO of Aurora Prize Arman Jilavian

HOSPITALITY - THE CULTURAL UNIQUENESS OF DILIJAN

I have worked in many parts of the world, in many countries including West African countries, India, Japan and Australia. Very often, when you come as an outsider you will feel hostility, you feel that people are suspicious of you. Here in Dilijan I do not know the language but I have never had a problem with feeling the sympathy of Dilijan and Armenian people. This is extraordinary. If I had felt resistance from the moment I arrived here in Dilijan, then it would not have worked. So I am very grateful for the openness of the Dilijan residents, their trust and their generosity, otherwise this would have not worked. We were met with a dialogue and this is the most important thing for me. Dilijan has always had the ability to greet people from the outside, it has been a place for filmmakers, architects and composers. Already today I am meeting so many people who have decided to move to Dilijan from Yerevan. Every place in the world has its unique culture, but every culture changes. Even traditions change, so there is no static notion of culture. Hospitality is the cultural uniqueness of Dilijan because this town manages to bring people together.

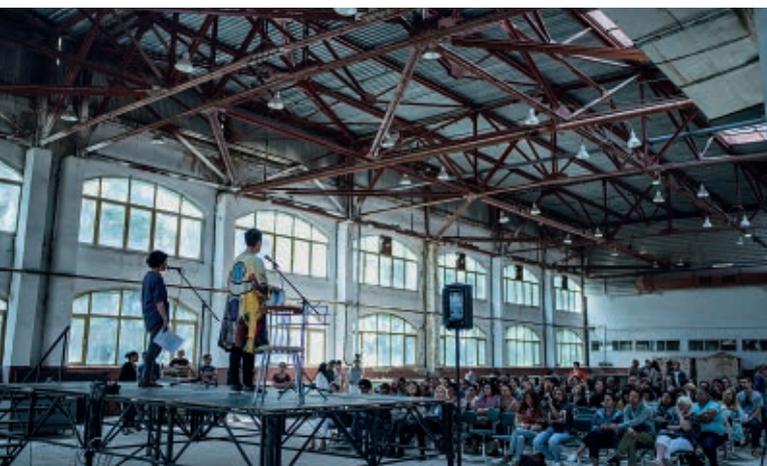


▲ Installation by Marcello Spada

THE ONGOING DIALOGUE

Armenia has always been famous for its intelligence, educational faculty, astrophysics and composers. I am very impressed with the artists I have met there and I want to work more and more with them.

I was very stubborn because I did not want to say “we are going to do this” and “this is how we are going to do that”. I had to keep coming back and fine tune my own expectations in dialogue with the ladies from the library, with the people I met here and I had to keep understanding which way I was to go. Very often in corporate life today we keep asking for the results, but the observatory is field work and it is about an ongoing dialogue. We have been here for only three weeks and that is why we have showed works in progress. So I hope we will have a chance to continue with this. ◆



THE CATASTROPHE:

New film about the 1988 disaster

This September, the Armenian film industry and general cultural life has been experiencing real chaos. There were tough discussions over which movie deserved the right to represent Armenia and to be nominated for Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Thirty-two years old film director Sarik Andreasyan's 'The Earthquake' was selected with three other movies (but was later disqualified by the Academy for too many Russian professionals involved in the production). This is one of few films that touches on the topic of the 1988 devastating Armenian earthquake, so the spotlight on it was intense from the very beginning. Film critic Diana Martirosyan has already watched 'The Earthquake' and tells us why the movie does not deserve so much attention.

TEXT : DIANA MARTIROSYAN





WHO IS MR. ANDREASYAN?

Sarik Andreasyan is a director, who has managed to earn the reputation of a 'Russian Ed Wood'. Realizing the fact that kitsch and distaste are more scandalous than monotony, Andreasyan almost takes up the rhythm of TV production and works as hard as a 'kom-somol', giving great importance to social media. Currently, he is thirty-two years old and has already shot ten feature length and two short films during his stormy mainstream career. Some of them are remakes, the others just distasteful, based on a grotesque lifestyle, related to sex and vaudeville features. Just watching the trailer of Andreasyan's 'What do men do?' is enough to get the message and to understand the Russian press, which stated on one occasion that romantic comedies, full of Hollywood clichés, can be considered to be on the level of Chekhov and Dostoyevsky, compared to Andreasyan-like directors. By the way, this was said made about Andreasyan's 'Happy New Year to Mothers', which is a relatively less trashy 'phenomenon'.

Andreasyan's phenomenon is probably related to the idea of guilty pleasure. However, the Russian audience is ashamed of accepting the fact that they need to watch such kind of films of local production while eating popcorn once or twice a year. Otherwise, there exists no other explanation for such success of the director and his ongoing activity. >

ANDREASYAN IS THIRTY-TWO YEARS OLD AND **HAS**
ALREADY SHOT TEN FEATURE LENGTH AND TWO SHORT
FILMS DURING HIS STORMY MAINSTREAM CAREER

WHY GYUMRI?

After the failed thriller starring Adrien Brody, 'American Heist', along with his brother and partner Ghevond and a major Russian producer Ruben Dishdizhyan, Andreasyan began to shoot 'The Earthquake', a film about Gyumri and the 1988 disaster. Surprisingly the National Cinema Center of Armenia cooperated with the director of odious comedies, who does not even know Gyumri. As a result, we got the 'Earthquake', a featureless, inexpressive and ordinary movie, as average as its name. No directing idea, no writing and no artistic component.

The plot is not about the tragedy, its effects and consequences. It is about the heroes of an unintelligible movie, which almost always turns out to be an overdose of pathos. And the characters of the movie are incomplete from the dramaturgic point of view. The earthquake just serves as a background for the movie, which is full of simple and uninteresting dialogues, trivial and sketch-like scenes. There is no sense of completeness and Armenian mood (not counting vulgarly shown crosses and duduk in the soundtrack). The authors of the 'The Earthquake' have probably watched Oliver Stone's 'World Trade Center' and exclaimed: "This is exactly what we need! A movie about an Armenian tragedy with scenes of grey ruins and heroes!".

**IT IS A FEATURELESS, INEXPRESSIVE AND ORDINARY MOVIE,
AS AVERAGE AS ITS NAME. NO DIRECTING IDEA, NO WRITING
AND NO ARTISTIC COMPONENT**



THIS IS JUST A COMMERCIAL PROJECT FOR ANDREASYAN AND ARMENIANS ALONG WITH THE HISTORY OF THEIR COUNTRY ARE JUST A WAY OF MAKING MONEY FOR HIM

THIS IS NOT HOLLYWOOD

In fact, this is not Sarik Andreasyan's worst movie. This movie is patriotic, national, painful, tender and hits a sensitive nerve, and there is definitely no need to touch on this topic very often.

But let's face it, this is just a commercial project for Andreasyan and Armenians along with the history of their country are just a way of making money for him. Generally, Andreasyan does not care about the fact that a Russian family, surrounded by people of Gyumri (with some of them looters), takes the central role in the movie. Lilit (Tatev Hovakimyan) and Robert (Viktor Stepanyan) also have leading roles in the movie, but their characters are incomplete and boring.

Although an Armenian, Andreasyan is not an Armenian director, he is a businessman living in Moscow, who, for instance, when in Hollywood, takes advantage and realizes all of the possible local clichés. In the case of 'The Earthquake' he must understand that Gyumretsis will never forgive him for this kind of an approach (and we have already heard the first angry comments from Gyumri citizens who have seen the film). This is not Hollywood, where on average 600 feature length films are released annually. This is Armenia, with no strictly formed cinematic style and lack of a sizeable film industry. And even only from the cinematic point of view this is not a film but a catastrophe, which has nothing in common with the word 'earthquake'. ♦



GYUMRI: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

All you have to know about Armenia's second largest city's history — from the first settlements founded 2800 years ago to the disastrous earthquake of 1988.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN / PHOTO : ARMENPRESS



Throughout centuries of its history the city has at times changed its name, however the name Gyumri (alternatively: Kumayri) are believed to be the oldest and that name is still preserved.

The first settlements in the territory of the present-day Gyumri were founded under the kingdom of Urartu, in 8th century BC. Kumayri was also mentioned in medieval chronicles. Ghevond (Leontius) the Historian mentions the town as a centre of Armenian rebellion led by Artavazd Mamikonian against the Arab Caliphate, between 733 and 755 AD. In the beginning of the 19th century Gyumri was the centre of the tiny Shoragyal Sultanate. The Russian troops took control over the town in 1804 and by the 1813 Gulistan Peace Treaty Iran officially renounced the city.

The town's life was revived after 1829 when following the Russo-Turkish War, around 3,000 families from territories in the Ottoman Empire, in particular from the towns of Kars, Erzurum and Bayazet settled in and around Gyumri. The Russian poet Alexander Pushkin visited Gyumri during his journey to Erzurum in 1829.

The city changed its name into Alexandrapol in 1837 when Russian Tsar Nicholas I visited Armenia. The name was cho-

sen in honor of Tsar Nicholas I's wife, Alexandra Fyodorovna. A major Russian fortress was built on the site in 1837. Alexandrapol was finally formed as a town in 1840 to become the centre of the newly established Alexandropol Uyezd (district) to be soon incorporated into the Erevan Governorate, experiencing rapid growth during its first decade. After the establishment of the railway station in 1899 Alexandrapol became the largest city in Eastern Armenia. The town had railway connections with Erevan, Tiflis and Kars. In 1902, the first bank in the city was opened. Until the sovietization of Armenia in 1920, Alexandrapol had 31 manufacturing centres including beer, soap, textile, etc. After the October Revolution of 1917 and the Russian withdrawal from the South Caucasus, the Ottoman forces launched a new offensive capturing the city of Alexandrapol on 11 May 1918, during the Caucasus Campaign in World War I. However, the Ottomans withdrew from the city on 24 December 1918, as a result of the Armistice of Mudros. On 10 May 1920, the local Bolshevik Armenians aided by the Muslim population, attempted a coup d'état in Alexandrapol against the government of Armenia. The uprising was suppressed by the Armenian government on May 14 and its



▼
 Vartanants
 Square and
 Gyumri City Hall



▲
 Church of the
 Holy Saviour



leaders were executed. However, during the Turkish-Armenian War, Turkey attacked Alexandropol and occupied the city on 7 November 1920.

Armenia was forced to sign the Treaty of Alexandropol to stop the Turkish advance towards Yerevan, to put an end to the Turkish-Armenian War. However, the Turkish forces withdrew from Alexandropol after the Treaty of Kars in October 1921.

Being under the Soviet rule, the name of the city was changed in 1924 to Leninakan after the Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin. The city suffered an earthquake in 1926, when many of its significant buildings were destroyed including the Greek church of Saint George. Leninakan became a major industrial centre in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and its second-largest city, after the capital Yerevan. The city suffered major damage during the 1988 Spitak earthquake, which devastated many parts of the country causing thousands of victims and disabled.

At the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the city was renamed Kumayri between 1990 and 1992, when it was finally given the name Gyumri. The Russian 102nd Military Base is located in the city. >



▼ Mikhail Gorbachev in Leninakan after the earthquake

► Views of Soviet Leninakan



HISTORICAL CENTER

The current square was once a large market area (“shuka”), as shown in the 19th century photograph. The old market was made of stone and served as both a market and central meeting point. Giumretsis would gather to shop, meet friends and neighbors and exchange the latest news and gossip, while farmers and craftsmen would display their wares in the covered stalls.

The market’s place as a meeting point also served public gatherings, and it was demolished to create a square commemorating the so-called May uprising of 1920, which Soviet histories wrote, began the Sovietization of Armenia. It was renamed Freedom Square in the 1990s.

From the old area the only 19th century buildings surviving are Yot Verk Cathedral and Amenaprkich (All Savior) Cathedral opposite. Others include the 1926 Hoktember Cinema, the “Black Box” and the 21st century Mayoralty.

Surb Mair Astvatsatsin Yot Verk (7 wounds) Church, 19th century, the city’s place of worship. Yot Verk is the unofficial name of the church used by the citizens parishioners named for the seven wounds of Christ. Note the two tower domes outside the building. These fell during the 1988 earthquake, and far from being examples of the destruction wreaked

on Gyumri during the earthquake, they actually performed as they should have. In addition to the ringing of bells, the towers also served a specific purpose in the event of earthquakes, absorbing some of the shock. They also served as a counter-balance to the shaking in the church. The domes were meant to literally “pop off” their base, taking the shock waves with them, preventing severe damage.

Yot Verk was saved. Opposite the square, Amenaprkich Cathedral shows a different story: in the 1960s the drum was reinforced from inside and rather than performing their intended job to cushion the earth shocks, they added to the shockwaves, collapsing the building.

Opposite on square there is Sb. Amenaprkich Cathedral. Constructed between 1850-1870, the cathedral is based on the 10th century cathedral of Ani authored by Trdat Architect, which was destroyed in the Middle Ages. Gyumri has always compared itself to Ani, and Surb Amenaprkich cathedral is an example.

During the Soviet period the cathedral was converted into a concert hall. Most of the building was destroyed during the 1988 earthquake. Reconstruction is ongoing, carefully rebuilding the building to its former glory. ◆



YEREVAN



YEREVAN



GYUMRI



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AFTERSHOCK:

The Political Consequences of the 1988 Armenian Earthquake

The earthquake of December 7th, 1988 claimed thousands of lives and destroyed thousands of homes. It also had far-reaching political consequences. The relief effort that followed became a symbol of the end of the Cold War, as Western countries rushed to help their former enemy, the Soviet Union. Yet, the wide scale of damage from the earthquake and the disorganized nature of the relief effort also showed the world the degree to which the Soviet system had been plagued by corruption and inefficiency. Finally, the earthquake was followed by a crackdown on the national-democratic movement in Armenia, further eroding the trust in the Soviet system.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN / PHOTO : RUBEN MANGASARYAN

GORBACHEV IN NEW YORK: A TRIUMPH TURNED SOUR

December 7th, 1988 was supposed to become a day of triumph for the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. On that day Gorbachev gave a speech at the United Nations, which was supposed to go down in history as the speech that would end the Cold War. He talked about new principles of international relations, announced that the USSR would reduce the armed forces by half a million and would withdraw 50,000 troops from Eastern Europe. On the streets of New York Gorbachev was greeted by people waving Soviet flags and chanting 'Gor-by', the nickname that Gorbachev had received in the West. After the speech he was scheduled to have a meeting with the outgoing president Ronald Reagan and the president-elect George H.W. Bush. On his way to the meeting he received a call from Soviet prime minister Nikolay Ryzhkov; a terrible earthquake had struck Armenia, destroying several cities and probably claiming the lives of thousands of people.

There are various estimates of the number of casualties, from 25,000 to 50,000. Journalist Yuri Rost in his book 'Armenian Tragedy' put the number of victims at 24,817, 1500

villages and 35,000 buildings were destroyed or damaged. The reaction of the Soviet leadership and the media reflected the changes that had taken place in the USSR during Gorbachev's rule. Two years before that, in April 1986, when the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power took place, the authorities tried to cover up the disaster in order "to avoid panic". This only led to more damage as thousands of people were exposed to radiation. Chernobyl had been a major blow to the image of the Soviet Union and the Soviet leadership was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past. The news of the terrible tragedy in Armenia spread immediately across the world, sparking an effort to help the victims. Initially, when the scale of the destruction was not clear, Gorbachev was planning to continue his visit to the US, which was to be followed by a meeting in London with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. As news of the utter devastation and massive loss of life began to surface, Gorbachev decided to cut his visit short and return to the USSR. However, he had enough time to meet with Reagan and Bush and Reagan offered American aid to Armenia. The international effort to help Armenia, particularly the aid offered by the West, became a powerful symbol of the end of the Cold War. This was the first time since World War II that the USSR received aid from the USA and other Western countries. In a development, unimaginable even a couple of years earlier, George H.W. Bush encouraged his son Jeb Bush (the same Jeb Bush, who recently competed unsuccessfully with Donald Trump for the Republican nomination) to visit Armenia, accompanying humanitarian aid. Jeb Bush took his son to Armenia, where they visited children injured in the earthquake in hospitals and offered them Christmas gifts. Images of Jeb and his son with tears in their eyes, overwhelmed by the grief they had witnessed in Armenia, spread all over the world. Of course, it was not only the West that had offered help. Other Soviet republics and countries of the Socialist block were at the forefront of the effort. The only Soviet republic, where the reaction to the earthquake was far from unanimous was Azerbaijan. By that time the two republics were already locked in a conflict over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. To this day the response to the Armenian earthquake in Azerbaijan remains a subject of controversy. There were reports that aid was collected in Azerbaijan for Armenia but apparently there were people in Azerbaijan who celebrated the news of the earthquake. The Russian general Aleksandr Lebed' who at the time served in the South Caucasus, wrote in his memoirs that some people in Baku even used fireworks to celebrate "Armenians' punishment by God".

THE TREMENDOUS RELIEF EFFORT THAT BROUGHT TOGETHER THE EAST AND THE WEST WAS AN IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENT, A SIGN THAT THE COLD WAR HAD FINALLY INDEED ENDED

NATURAL DISASTER OR A MAN-MADE TRAGEDY?

From the point of view of the Soviet authorities, the tremendous relief effort that brought together the East and the West was an important achievement, a sign that the Cold War had indeed ended and a new era in the relations with the West was to come. There was however, a downside to the wide coverage of the earthquake and the relief effort; it exposed to the world the corruption and mismanagement that existed within the Soviet system. Of course, by the late 1980s it was no secret that the Soviet economy was in dire straits and the Soviet system of government was not as efficient as it had tried to present itself. However, the images of the destruction and misery that were broadcast all over the world became irrefutable evidence that the Soviet Union lagged far behind the West. Victor Sebestyen, author of the book '1989: The Revolution', argues that the scale of destruction of the earthquake, as well as the poor organization of the relief effort seemed to confirm the characterization once given

by Helmut Schmidt (The chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany) who called the USSR an "Upper Volta with nukes", i. e. A third world country that has nuclear weapons. While the earthquake was indeed strong, the scale of destruction and casualties that was witnessed in Armenia could have been avoided. Even though it was widely known that Armenia is part of a seismically active zone, many of the buildings constructed in Armenia were not prepared for an earthquake of that magnitude. In addition to this, the quality

of construction of many of the buildings was extremely poor because of the corruption and mismanagement that had plagued the Soviet system during the years of the so-called 'Stagnation'. Thus, questionable urban planning on the one hand, and corruption and simple mismanagement on the other, led to a situation where whole cities were left vulnerable to a catastrophe that could have been avoided. In order to illustrate the degree to which the scale of casualties was a result of the human factor, one could compare the Armenian earthquake to the 'Loma Prieta' earthquake in the San-Francisco Bay area, which took place less than a year later in October 1989. While the earthquake was of roughly the same magnitude (6.8-6.9), it left 63 people dead and 3757 people injured. It is true that there were other factors at play, which aided in helping to reduce the number of victims (thousands of people were at an open air stadium watching a baseball game, reducing the traffic that would otherwise have been on the collapsed freeways) but in any case, the difference in the scale of damage is remarkable. >







Furthermore, the Armenian earthquake relief effort was also poorly managed. It turned out that there was a lack of both equipment and specialists who were needed to deal with the immediate consequences of the earthquake. As the situation in the earthquake area was chaotic and the weather conditions were severe, the aircraft transporting aid faced a deadly risk. A Soviet military plane carrying 77 people and a Yugoslavian plane with 7 crew members crashed, killing everyone on

board. In his book 'Armenia in Crisis' author Pierre Verluise quotes a French doctor who claimed that dozens of people died of kidney failure as there were not enough dialysis machines. Meanwhile, as reported by 'Time' magazine (December 26, 1988), an American designed flying medical center with 20 dialysis machines could not start operating until four days after the disaster because the crew encountered bureaucratic barriers and had to wait for visas to enter the Soviet Union.

There were also logistical problems related to the distribution of humanitarian aid. There were even rumors that some of the humanitarian aid was stolen and sold on the black market. The construction crews that came to rebuild Armenian cities after the earthquake often faced difficulties and

THE LEVEL OF DISTRUST IN THE SOVIET SYSTEM WAS SO HIGH, THAT SOME PEOPLE IN ARMENIA EVEN ACCUSED THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT FOR BEING DELIBERATELY BEHIND THE EARTHQUAKE

some of them left without completing their jobs. In his book '1989' Victor Sebestyen describes how the prime minister Ryzhkov, who was actively involved in the reconstruction efforts, reprimanded Soviet officials for the lack of assistance they gave to foreign volunteers. "Some of the foreign groups are leaving now with heavy hearts" Ryzhkov said, "not because of what they have seen, but because of the treatment they received here". To be fair to the Soviets, many of these

problems remained even after Armenia became independent, and the reconstruction effort dragged on for years and even decades.

At the time, the level of distrust in the Soviet system was so high, that some people in Armenia even went further and accused the Soviet government of being deliberately behind the earthquake. A theory emerged that the earthquake had been deliberately caused by Moscow through an underground detonation of nuclear weapons and was a reaction to the Karabakh movement, a protest movement that demanded the unification of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. According to this explanation, the Kremlin wanted to punish Armenia for protesting and to distract Armenians' attention from the issue of



Karabakh. To this day, no solid evidence to support this theory has ever materialized. Vazgen Manukyan, one of the leaders of the movement at the time, was asked about this conspiracy theory by Russian magazine 'Slon' and said that he had thought about it a lot but he did not think it was true: "all the secrets of the Soviet Union had been revealed... when [former] KGB guys living in US started writing their memoirs they would have mentioned that... at least someone would have". Most probably, if the Soviet system was indeed to blame for the thousands of deaths, it was not through direct action, but through the incompetence and corruption that had plagued the Soviet government system by this time.

EARTHQUAKE AND THE KARABAKH MOVEMENT

Cutting short his trip to the West, Mikhail Gorbachev came to Armenia to oversee the relief effort. Here, however, he had to not only deal with the consequences of the earthquake but also with the complicated political situation. The Karabakh movement had become a major challenge to the Soviet leadership. At first, the movement had only one demand: the unification ('miatsum') of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the list of demands of the movement became wider, as the movement started to raise issues of democratic reform and demanded an end to one-party rule. Soviet leadership did not know how to deal with the movement; the protests were largely peaceful, the protesters respected all Soviet laws, and phrased their demands using Gorbachev's rhetoric of "glasnost" and "perestroika". However, the movement presented a mortal danger for the Soviet system: by December 1988 the Communist authorities of Armenia had virtually lost control of the country. For the majority of Armenians, the highest authority was not Armenia's Communist leadership but instead the 'Karabakh committee', the body that was formed to coordinate the popular movement.

The level of mistrust toward Communist leadership on the one hand, and the influence of the 'Karabakh Committee' on the other was so high that when international aid started pouring in, many Armenians argued that it would have been better for the 'Karabakh Committee', rather than the Communist authorities to manage it. One of the committee's members, Rafael Ghazaryan later told British journalist Thomas de Waal: "Immediately after the earthquake, imperceptibly to ourselves, we discovered that we were in charge of the people and even in charge of the rescue work, aid to the victims and so on... It was unexpected. The levers of power went from the government to us".

When Gorbachev arrived in Armenia he was overwhelmed by the images of destruction, but he was also enraged by the fact that some Armenians attempted to raise the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh in conversation with him. As he often did in other cities, Gorbachev went out to talk to people in the street, most likely expecting gratitude for the relief effort. Instead, some Armenians, for whom this was an exceptional chance to voice their concerns with the Soviet leader personally, tried to raise the issue of Karabakh. This was something Gorbachev did not expect and was consequently infuriated.

Several days later the members of the 'Karabakh Committee' were arrested. Among them was the future president of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan, future prime minister Vazgen Manukyan, renowned physicist Rafael Ghazaryan and others. It is still not clear whether the crackdown on the Karabakh movement was planned by the Kremlin or it was a reaction to the events. Gorbachev's unpleasant experience may have been the last straw which triggered the crackdown.

Manukyan, in his aforementioned interview, said he believed that apart from political calculations the fact that Gorbachev felt insulted, played a role in the decision to arrest the opposition leaders: "later when I was prime minister I had a chance to talk with Gorbachev one on one... he told me 'I came [to Armenia] with my wife, I thought after the earthquake everything else would be forgotten, people would be preoccupied only with that, but wherever we went people were raising the issue of Karabakh and were insulting me and my wife'".

WHEN MIKHAIL GORBACHEV ARRIVED IN ARMENIA HE WAS ENRAGED BY THE FACT THAT SOME ARMENIANS ATTEMPTED TO RAISE THE ISSUE OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH IN CONVERSATION WITH HIM

Whatever the causes for the crackdown on the "Karabakh" committee, it did help the authorities to regain control for some time. In the long run this move proved to be counter-productive. Political prisoners, the members of "Karabakh" Committee received a hero's status in Armenia and became a cherished cause for human rights campaigners in the USSR and abroad, among them were such prominent voices as the physicist and dissident Andrey Sakharov. The arrest of the leaders of Armenia's democratic movement contradicted everything Gorbachev and his entourage said about democratic reform in the country. Inside Armenia, the protest movement was not crushed and it became revitalized as new activists took the place of arrested leaders. As a result, several months later the members of the Karabakh Committee were released. By this time it had become clear that trust in the Soviet system in Armenia had disappeared entirely. The demand for independence, which only a year before would have been perceived as dangerous radicalism had become the main rallying cry of the popular movement. ♦

1988: THE INTERNATIONAL AID

The 1988 Armenian earthquake was exceptional both for the scale of disaster and the international community's reaction. A number of countries from around the world, including most of the republics of the Soviet Union and many individuals sent humanitarian aid to Armenia. Despite the Cold War and the Soviet Union, the West also supported Soviet Armenia. Here are some stories about the international aid and support to the victims of the earthquake.

TEXT : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : ARMENPRESS



THE WORLD'S AID

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was in New York on December 8th 1988, participating in the regular session of the UN General Assembly. When the participants of the session heard the news of the earthquake, Gorbachev received offers of aid from numerous Western countries. This was the greatest cooperation between the USSR and the West since the Second World War. A few days later, the US sent a number of aircrafts with doctors, teams of rescue workers and the necessary equipment on board to the disaster area. Furthermore, a significant number of private donations were collected. For instance, \$800k was sent to Armenia



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Jeb Bush and his
son in Gyumri

from Chicago. American businessman Armand Hammer arrived in Armenia, bringing almost a ton of medical equipment provided by the Red Cross. Hammer also donated \$1million, half of which he funded himself and the other half was from international organizations. Even Jeb Bush (son of then US President Bush) and his son arrived in Armenia together with the members of one of the American organizations. They spent a few days in the disaster area, visited hospitals and distributed gifts. Rescue workers from France arrived in Armenia almost immediately after the earthquake on December the 9th. That same day, Japan offered \$9 million dollars, Italy offered to construct

JEB BUSH AND HIS SON ARRIVED IN ARMENIA TOGETHER WITH THE MEMBERS OF ONE OF THE AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS. **THEY SPENT A FEW DAYS IN THE DISASTER AREA, VISITED HOSPITALS AND DISTRIBUTED GIFTS**



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Two planes, Soviet and Yugoslavian, crushed during rescue operations in Gyumri



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Nikolay Ryzhkov meeting citizens of Gyumri after the earthquake



a temporary block to house the victims and Western Germany announced that it could send state of the art technology to assist with the reconstruction process. Generally speaking, the number of volunteer rescue personnel from Austria, Canada, Switzerland, the United States and Yugoslavia numbered two thousand, who worked in Leninakan after the earthquake. Famous avant-garde musician Pierre Schaeffer was among the French volunteers, who also arrived in Armenia. As of July 1989, Armenia received about \$500 million in donations from 113 countries. Most of the donations were spent on initial relief work, medical care and also on the reconstruction process.

THE FATAL ACCIDENTS WITH RESCUE WORKERS

During the rescue operations two tragic accidents occurred. There was a fatal collision between Soviet Ilyushin Il-76 and an aircraft near the airport of Leninakan in foggy conditions, killing 79 people. At the time, approximately 180 daily flights were made in the area, it was also difficult to manage the flights because of a lack of staff members. The aircraft crew were destined to join the other rescue workers and to help search for survivors. A disagreement between the pilot and an airport worker caused the crash of Yugoslavian Antonov An-12 aircraft, which was carrying supplies to the disaster area, killing all seven members of the crew. Afterwards, a monument was erected in memory of the crew members.

NIKOLAY RYZHKOV EXTENDED HIS STAY FOR TWO MONTHS, ALMOST ABANDONING HIS POSITION AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, SOLELY CONCENTRATING ON MANAGING THE DESTRUCTION CAUSED BY THE EARTHQUAKE

NIKOLAI RYZHKOV

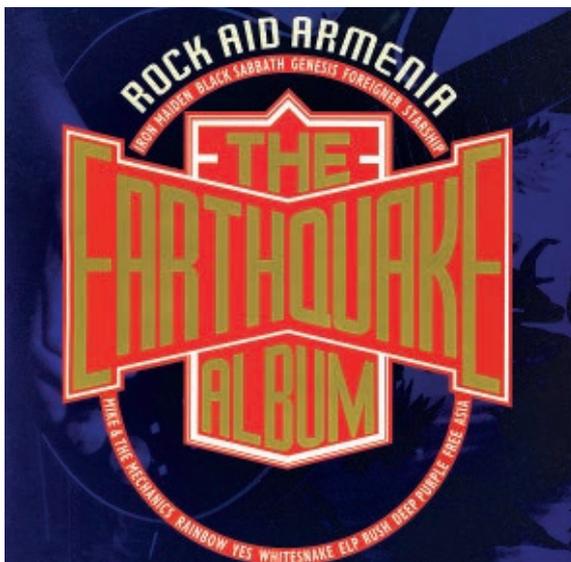
The majority of the Soviet republics supported Armenia, except Azerbaijan; the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had already begun between the two republics. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union Nikolai Ryzhkov played a rather significant role in aid assistance. A Politburo commission was established for the local ASSR (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics of the Soviet Union) Government with Ryzhkov elected as its chairman. The commission provided guidance for the assessment of the damage caused by the earthquake, for the coordination of the rescue operation and aid assistance. He only initially intended to stay in the disaster area for two or three days, to give instructions and depart soon after. But Ryzhkov extended his stay for two months, almost abandoning his position as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, solely concentrating on managing the destruction caused by the earthquake. During this period he promised to rebuild the city of Spitak within two years, but he subsequently failed. A monument in recognition of his



▼ Charles Aznavour's Pour Toi Arménie was released as a single



▲ One of Rock Aid Armenia's initiatives



◀ The Earthquake album cover

➤
Ian Gillan in
Gyumri in 2014

significant personal contribution to the reconstruction after the 1988 Spitak earthquake was erected both in Gyumri and Spitak. In 2008, the Armenian Government awarded Ryzhkov the highest state decoration, the National Hero of Armenia.

AZNAVOUR FOR ARMENIA

One of the most famous charitable organizations was founded by Charles Aznavour to help those affected by the earthquake. Sometime after the earthquake, the chansonnier visited the disaster area. After his visit, he gathered a group of French artists in France to record the 'Pour toi Arménie' (For you Armenia) song, written in collaboration with Armenian-French composer Georges Garvarentz. The charity single was released in 1989 and sold more than 1 million copies. The funds that had been raised were intended to help Armenians who were affected by the 1988 Spitak earthquake. Patricia Kaas, Salvatore Adamo, Vanessa Paradis, Mireille Mathieu and many other artists, who were popular at the time, also took part in the project.

Aznavour has consistently helped the country through his charity and funds raised from various concerts. In recognition of his active involvement, in 2002 a statue was erected to honor Aznavour in Gyumri, which is the only one dedicated to the chansonnier in Armenia. In the aftermath of the catastrophic 2010 Haiti earthquake, a remake of the song titled "Pour Toi Haiti" was released in support of the victims of the earthquake.

ROCK AID ARMENIA

Some of the most famous rock musicians were involved in a project to support those affected by the 1988 Armenian earthquake. The project was initiated by young activist and international charity campaigner Jon Dee, who managed to bring the many musicians together. Jon Dee suggested recording a new version of Marvin Gaye's 'What's Going On' to raise funds. 'A Cool Wind Is Blowing' was on the B-side, featuring Armenian duduk music performed by Djivan Gasparyan. However, the project increased in popularity after the re-recording of Deep Purple's famous hit song, 'Smoke on the Water', with the participation of Bryan Adams, Ritchie Blackmore, Bruce Dickinson, Geoff



AZNAVOUR GATHERED A GROUP OF FRENCH ARTISTS IN FRANCE TO RECORD THE 'POUR TOI ARMÉNIE' (FOR YOU ARMENIA) SONG, WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION WITH ARMENIAN-FRENCH COMPOSER GEORGES GARVARENTZ

Downes, Keith Emerson, Ian Gillan, David Gilmour, Tony Iommi, Alex Lifeson, Brian May, Paul Rodgers, Chris Squire and Roger Taylor. The single made it to the UK Top 40 Singles Chart and proved to be highly successful in raising awareness about the Spitak earthquake in the UK. But that was not enough for Dee. Sometime later the documentary 'Smoke on the Water' was filmed, featuring the recording sessions of the song. Afterwards, 'The Earthquake' album was recorded. Along with 'Smoke On the Water', it included a number of tracks which were suggested by famous bands and artists for free. The album included tracks from Genesis, Deep Purple, Yes, Black Sabbath etc. Twenty years later in 2009, Mediamax Company initiated the 'Armenia Grateful 2 Rock' project, supported by the President's Administration and the Government of Armenia. Within the framework of the project, in July 2009 Armenian President Serzh Sargsian signed decrees for awarding the most active participants of Rock Aid Armenia, with 'Orders of Honor' for "significant and continuous assistance to Armenia and the Armenian people". Within the framework of 'Armenia Grateful 2 Rock' and on Mediamax Agency's invitation, the most active participants Ian Gillan, Tony Iommi and Jon Dee visited Armenia. ♦

FRIENDS OF GYUMRI

French-Armenian entrepreneur and philanthropist Manoug Pamokdjian and Italian doctor, the founder of Family Care Foundation Antonio Montalto met in 2009. Since then they have launched several large-scale and ambitious projects together, aimed at shedding new light and giving hope to the second largest city of Armenia, Gyumri. We talked to Mr. Pamokdjian and Mr. Montalto about the projects that have already been implemented and about the upcoming plans.

TEXT : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN / PHOTO : FRIENDS OF GYUMRI FOUNDATION

An entrepreneur of French-Armenian origin Manoug Pamokdjian, has been active in Armenia since 1990. During these years he has managed to implement a number of projects in different fields and in various parts of Armenia. He says that while working in Armenia one should remember that it is, of course, more challenging here compared to Europe. A lot of time is necessary to establish a full democratic system in Armenia. "I realize all of these difficulties. I just do everything possible for my country, for the youth's future", Pamokdjian states. In 2009, Pamokdjian's efforts turned into a new and exciting continuation, due to a very significant and unexpected encounter. "I heard about an Italian doctor, who visited Armenia after the earthquake and stayed here. He managed to build schools, hospitals and also this wonderful hotel 'Villa Delenda' in Yerevan". Manoug was

holding all of the important meetings and was discussing the projects with partners in 'Villa Delenda'. One fine day, the owner of the hotel Antonio Montalto approached him. Antonio told Manoug that he had heard about his projects and would like to discuss a possible cooperation. "Life always takes us to unknown places. Such a thing happened to me, when I arrived in Armenia in 1989", the Italian doctor remembers. Currently Montalto is the Honorary Consul of Italy in Gyumri. He states that although he got acquainted with the country during a tragic time, it stimulated the further strengthening of relations between Armenia and Italy. Montalto had initiated a number of humanitarian projects with his companions in the first years after the earthquake, for instance in the field of motherhood and childcare. But even at that time, it was clear to him that the idea was not





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Villa Kars hotel in
Gyumri

only about building hospitals. It was necessary to organize training for the specialists and to invite professionals from abroad. The most important thing was the goal to alter the soviet mentality concerning life issues, people etc. "I stayed here after completing the first project and many people were surprised by that", Montalto says, "Gyumri attracted me. There were two main reasons: Shirak and Lori, the most devastated regions of Armenia, needed me. And in 2001, I was appointed Honorary Consul of Italy in Gyumri. It is such a great responsibility for me and my presence in Gyumri has become more important".

The Italian doctor wanted to talk to Pamokdjian about Gyumri. "It is a unique place, and it seems to me it has a symbolic significance for Armenia", he says, "Gyumri is a frontier city and that is the reason for the unique cultural infiltration. The city has got huge potential for prosperous development. But people have to do their best for the further development of this huge potential".

"We had been talking and discussing things for about three hours", Pamokdjian recalls. "Soon we approved the first project. We intended to restore one of the buildings in Gyumri, which had a historical significance,

THE CITY HAS GOT HUGE POTENTIAL FOR PROSPEROUS DEVELOPMENT.
BUT **PEOPLE HAVE TO DO THEIR BEST** FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT
OF THIS HUGE POTENTIAL



MANOUG PAMOKDJIAN
 Board member and
 co-founder of Friends of
 Gyumri

Manoug Pamokdjian was born in Lyon in 1946. He is an engineer-meteorologist, entrepreneur and scientific adviser. He has been present in Armenia since 1990, where he began as part of an effort to promote a major technology transfer. Creator and director of a startup incubator within the Université Lumière Lyon (Lyon II Enterprise), he was also the co-founder of a nursery for innovative companies from 1982 to 1989 – MIFI (House of Innovation, Training and Industry). Founder of the company Finesco Eurofinancement in France and co-founder of Fineco Innovazione Italy. Co-founder of Pamexial Expertise. With his wife Aghavni, he initiated several economic missions between France and Armenia in 1996-1998. His various companies and family are actively involved in cultural and humanitarian patronage. He is a member of the International Association 'Terre et Culture' which renovated the hospital of Shushi, Karabakh, between 2008-2010. Since 2009, he has been a partner of the Istanbul based NGOs 'Anadolu Kultur' and the 'Hrant Dink Foundation'. Several cultural projects are co-organized by himself between France, Armenia and Turkey. Since 2009, Pamokdjian and his family combined their efforts with Antonio Montalto and created the Friends of Gyumri foundation.



^ 'Villa Delenda' hotel
 in the center of
 Yerevan



v Gyumri Kyutahya
 ceramics exhibition
 in Lyon, 2016





ANTONIO MONTALTO

President and co-founder of Friends of Gyumri

Antonio Montalto was born in Palermo in 1953. He first came to Armenia in 1988, where he led medical aid projects after the earthquake until 1991 and again from 1993 to 2004. The projects involved mainly motherhood and childcare and they have been implemented in Armenia and then Karabakh. In 2004, the NGO was transformed into a Foundation. As the president of the Family Care Foundation, Antonio implemented projects in tourism, with the focus on promotion and recognition of Armenia in Europe. He is also actively involved in the restoration of buildings of historic and cultural significance both in Yerevan and in Gyumri, as well as in activities focusing on the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in Armenia and Turkey. He has been the Honorary Consul of Italy in Gyumri since 2001.

THE MOST IMPORTANT FACT IS THAT THE BUILDINGS ARE NOT JUST RESTORED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THESE PROJECTS. AS A RESULT, THEY BEGIN TO FUNCTION

to establish the European Cultural Center there. Currently this building is called 'Villa Alexandropol' and it serves as the Consulate of Italy". Montalto had already implemented similar projects in Yerevan: the aforementioned 'Villa Delenda' and 'Villa Aygedzor'. And this fact played a significant role for Manoug to cooperate with him. "I have been implementing a number of projects in Armenia and I do not deal with the government within their framework. I don't think I would have been involved or had ever been in contact

with them if it wasn't for Antonio who took full responsibility. I am happy for our cooperation".

The most important fact is that the buildings are not just restored within the framework of these projects. As a result, they begin to function. This is the right way to make a change in Gyumri. The situation in Gyumri is poorer in comparison to other cities. Twenty-eight years after the earthquake, the consequences are still unsolved. The number of unemployed people is high and emigration increases. So the companions have



Antonio Montalto and Manoug Pamokdjian

to struggle for the further development of the city.

Antonio Montalto recalls that he started to work in the field of medicine both in Gyumri and Shirak. But later he switched fields and dealt with social business. "Currently it is high time for the creation of employment. We have to give people long-term opportunities to do what they love. Employment creation in Gyumri is equal to giving hope to people, to let them build a better future for their families in their native city instead of emigrating". 'Villa Kars' was one of the first projects to be implemented. It is a hotel and a cultural center with a conference hall. On the one hand, it had already become an actively functioning spot in the city, on the other hand, being a hotel it brings short-term income to support the

implementation of future projects. Experienced Italian architects helped to restore the building. By the way, it is called Kars as it is the biggest city situated next to the border of Gyumri, and its architectural style and spirit has always been similar to that of Gyumri of 19th century. Currently Pamokdjian and Montalto are intending to restore buildings gradually, to create a restoring momentum preserving the glorious history of this city. In a few years they plan to present a project to UNESCO to be declared a World Heritage Site. One of the abandoned factories in Gyumri has become the next project. They intend to make it a new center for ceramics. An English tourist discovered and visited a ceramics center while in Spitak and consequently ended up

supporting the project. He was so impressed with the place that he provided all the necessary equipment. Soon, the center was ready to open its doors to Gyumri. Currently, wonderful ceramics are made there, resembling the famous Kutahya style and techniques. It should be noted here that the ceramics center has been operational for many years, but it was moved to Gyumri at that time. It first opened in Spitak on the initiative of Antonio Montalto. At that time, the main goal was to establish and open a warm and welcoming place, where the children of Spitak would be able to spend at least a few hours to learn art. The center was relocated to Gyumri and it has around two dozen employees. "They produce high quality work. Eventually, Armenians got the skill of



◀ Gyumri Kyutahya ceramics exhibition in Aslamazyan Sisters gallery in Gyumri, 2016





◀ Official opening of the first stone for the building to be restored by 'Friends of Gyumri'

handmade art in their veins”, Montalto assures. “There is no need to create something new, we just need to bring back and revive this tradition. We study the traditions of Armenian ceramics of Kutahya and Iznik”. The Honorary Consul of Italy in Gyumri thinks that true patriotism means being useful to the world, while using the skills which are considered to be the best for Armenians.

To make this a reality Pamokdjian and Montalto have already established contact with the Balyan family based in Jerusalem. The family has continued these traditions for decades. The next step is to commercialise the ceramics in France and in Europe. The first exhibition in Lyon was quite successful. The artworks produced in the workshop were exposed in Lyon for two months. The exhibition had over 400 visitors and €25,000 was collected from the sale.

THE CERAMICS CENTER HAS BEEN OPERATIONAL FOR MANY YEARS, BUT IT WAS MOVED TO GYUMRI AT THAT TIME. IT FIRST OPENED IN SPITAK ON THE INITIATIVE OF ANTONIO MONTALTO

Paris, Geneva, Milan, Verona and many other cities are waiting for their turn to host the exhibition. There is high demand and the raised funds will be sent back to Gyumri. About 16 employees currently work in the workshop and it means that at least sixteen families are given the opportunity to stay put in Gyumri. The ‘Friends of Gyumri’ foundation was founded to coordinate the great number of projects. At that time the co-founders managed to cooperate with the Gyumri Municipality and another building of historical significance was given to the foundation for further restoration. A small ‘City

History Museum’ and the ‘George Gurdjieff’ center will be situated in the building after restoration. Currently the International Gyurdjieff Center is situated in Malta, it is time for this legendary person to also be remembered in his home town too. Pamokdjian states that the implementation of all the aforementioned projects is quite a significant factor that has had great success and has produced a noticeable result concerning the creation of employment. “This is a very good example for Armenians in the Diaspora to follow and to unite, support and promote our activity, which is the future of Gyumri”. ♦

ANTON MERKUROV:

**“It’s a cool city,
let’s work and develop it”**

Regional Post talked to the Moscow based IT specialist Anton Merkurov, who is the great-grandson of prominent Soviet sculptor-monumentalist Sergey Merkurov. For several years Anton has been engaged in the promotion of The Merkurov House Museum located in Gyumri. Anton is sure that Gyumri can fully compete with Yerevan as the country’s touristic center.

TEXT : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN / PHOTO : ARSHAK MANUKIAN

Anton, tell us about your personal relationship with Gyumri. When did you visit Gyumri for the first time and what was the reason?

I went to Gyumri in the summer of 2012. I combined my personal and professional issues. I met with museum workers and told them about the possibilities of using the Internet during their everyday work. This was the professional issue. The personal issue was that one of the seminars was held in the house where my great-grandfather Sergey Merkurov was born, which eventually became the museum. Since then, I have been trying to visit Gyumri more frequently.

What did you expect to see there? What was your impression of the city?

I did not have any expectations and my impressions were mostly emotional. My expectations are not so important. The most important thing is my desire to act and develop.

Considering your engagement in the activities of Merkurov’s House Museum, in fact, you come to Gyumri both as a ‘son of the nation’ and on business. In this regard, what are the most important issues in both Gyumri and Armenia that need to change and improve?





Anton Merkurov in newly repaired house-museum of Sergey Merkurov

I do not want to recount and repeat the obvious issues about the city and the region again. There are a number of economic, infrastructural and social issues. In some cases we see the solution. For instance, I have some personal concerns about the museum. This is mainly a local issue. There are a number of such stories, everyone minds their own business. There are some global issues within the country and many individuals and organizations do important things that contribute to the further improvement. But there is a city in between the country and our house and some issues are being solved. A few years ago, when nothing happened in Russia, I was thinking about bringing an affordable airline to Gyumri. Something went wrong, but currently we expect 'Pobeda' to fly to Shirak Airport. This will expose the country to another point of view.

What is the exact potential of Gyumri? Can it actually compete with Yerevan in terms of tourism and economy? And where should we start?

A year ago, together with bloggers from Moscow we visited the United World College, where the founders of Dilijan Development Foundation presented the country's development



Museum's collection

plan. The development plan was first implemented in Yerevan and continued to Tatev and Dilijan. On the map where Gyumri was placed it was written "Planned for the Development". It just struck me because according to its parameters, Gyumri possesses a great potential. Tourism is the most immediate point for further development. There are many places in Gyumri to stay and see. Gyumri can and must compete with Yerevan. There is an airport where a number of different types of aircrafts can land. It

has two wonderful routes to Yerevan and Vanadzor. The cultural potential of the city is huge. I like the idea that "Gyumri is the cultural capital of Armenia". Maybe it does not fully meet the 'Leninakanian' type, but there are a few schools, many sculptors and craftsmen in Gyumri. Taking into consideration that Gyumri is a city with a difficult history, I think that only art and creativity can break the stereotype. Industry does not have so many positive connotations. >

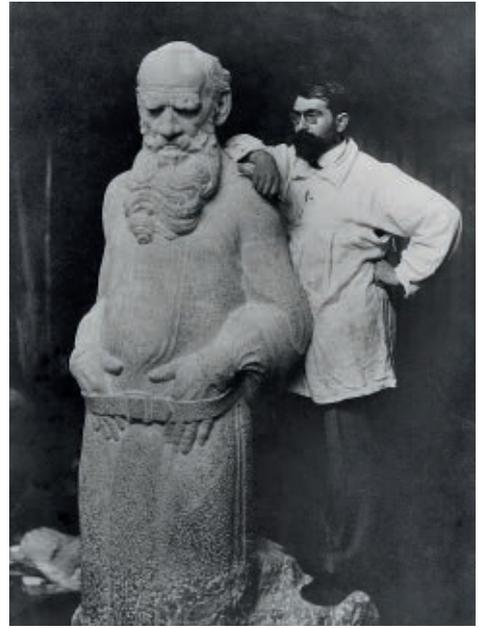
TOURISM IS THE MOST IMMEDIATE POINT FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT. THERE ARE MANY PLACES IN GYUMRI TO STAY AND SEE. **GYUMRI CAN AND MUST COMPETE WITH YEREVAN**

So, answering your question regarding starting, I realize that everyone considers the issues according to his or her professional perspective. I deal with media and communications, these are my tools. There are a number of groups on social media, uniting people, telling citizens and foreigners about the life of the city. The process has already begun without my presence or participation. For me, the most important things are the start and the progression, the discussions and the involvement of more people. Sooner or later it will find the right course. I have already noticed the progress and maybe the

process is slower than I would like it to be, but that is fine.

Your plan is quite ambitious and it needs the cooperation of the authorities (urban redevelopment, redevelopment of infrastructure etc). Have you already had contact with them? Do you have so-called 'inside' support?

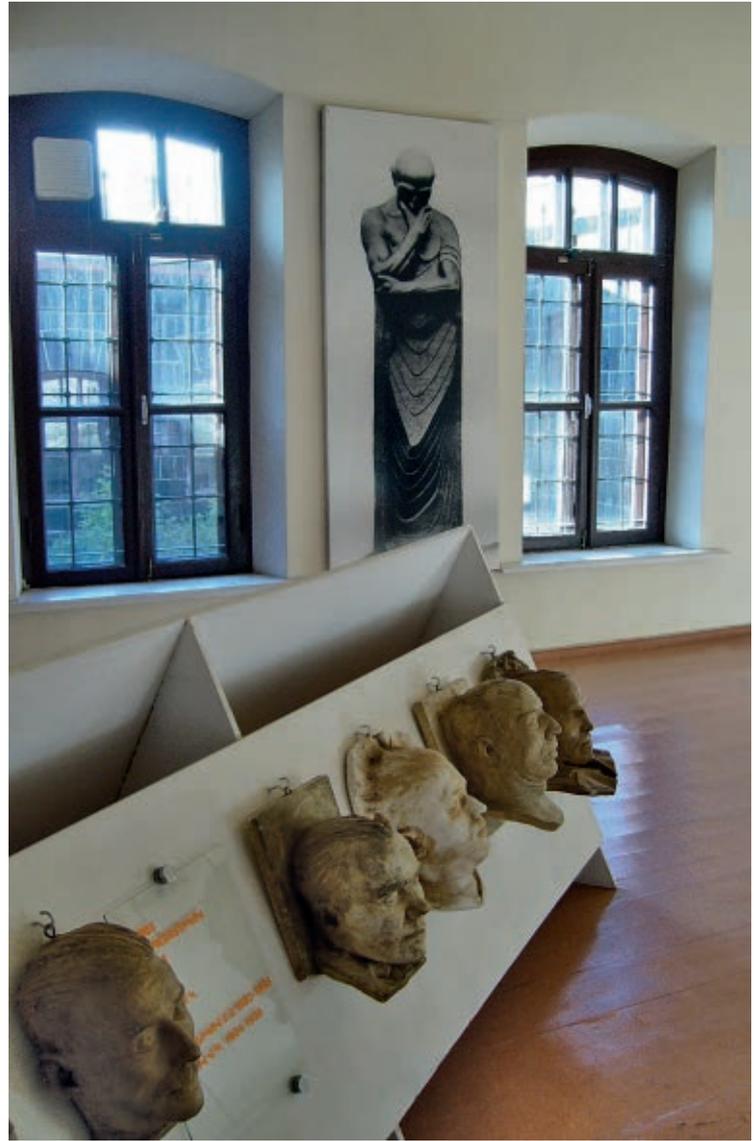
My mission is to involve different people and spread the word. Look, here is Gyumri, a cool city, let's work and develop it. It is interesting for the experts of the field and for the Diaspora to be involved in an ambitious project despite their occupation. Each professional can become useful. Con-



Merkurov's deathmasks are museum's main attraction. Among others there are masks of such prominent people like Maxim Gorky, Georgy Orjonokidze, Khrimyan Hayrik, Vladimir Mayakovski, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Lenin



◀
Sergey Merkurov
in his studio



▲
Museum's exposition
before renovation

MY MISSION IS TO INVOLVE DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND SPREAD THE WORD. LOOK, **HERE IS GYUMRI, A COOL CITY, LET'S WORK AND DEVELOP IT TOGETHER**

scientific expertise is very important for urban administration. Residents need clear solutions that will make their lives easier. Business needs transparent investment projects. I can assure you that everyone supports us. When we encounter disputes, we will discuss, persuade and find compromises. I see no problems; each of us wants Gyumri to become a steadily developing city.

Are there any similar examples of city revival in the world?

There are examples of cities that have been built up from a zero base. Of course, it is easier to build from a zero base than to restore the existing city. In our case there is a city, we have to understand its visualization and implement our plans. And we can do it! ♦

> Sarhat Petrosyan



COMUS: protect, develop and promote

The COMUS (Community-Led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns) project is a joint Council of Europe and European Union initiative that is part of the second Eastern Partnership Culture Program. It aims to stimulate social and economic development by strengthening cultural heritage in nine historic towns in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. We spoke to the Project Officer and architect Sarhat Petrosyan about the project in Gyumri.

TEXT : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : COMUS



How and why did COMUS start and what are its goals?

COMUS is the logical continuation of the Kiev Initiative program, which was implemented between 2009-2011. It was carried out by the Council of Europe, aiming to start the processes of revitalizing the historical cities of the Eastern Partnership countries, including Armenia. In the Kiev Initiative they worked mainly on a national level trying to understand the needs and identify resources. COMUS started in 2015 and is more focused, working directly with towns and their communities. There are two pilot towns with valuable heritage in Armenia, in Gyumri and Goris. The main goal is to develop participative urban policies, concentrating on the preservation of cultural heritage in these towns.

So, what exactly does the COMUS team do?

First of all, we cooperate with communities to create a broader understanding and with various stakeholders. We are trying to bring in as many participants to the process as possible, those who are interested and those who represent the community as a whole – civic society organizations, activists, local business owners and community officials. The goal is to make all of the decisions from the bottom up and to not apply readymade solutions. We had lots of meetings with these people, raised questions regarding problems with historical heritage preservation and told them about the possible solutions. We developed together the vision of Gyumri's development, based on which some sub-projects were implemented. As a result, we will have a mutually developed and agreed fundamental document – A Reference Plan. We also tried to build capacity to follow-up these ideas. For that reason, we organized workshop and study visits for chief architects and other



decision makers who are in charge of the preservation of the historical monuments by training them and try to foster a new approach to their work. We also expect to support and elaborate on concrete projects that, at a later date, the same communities can address to donor organizations and implement different projects in the future, when the program has finished. These projects will also create a better atmosphere for future urban development.

But one believes, they need some help from the professionals.

Of course. During this period, several international and local experts were involved to assist with the implementation of the COMUS local project unit to prepare all the documents and projects. So, it's also a changing the mentality and approach to urban heritage. One of the main things we try to spread the idea of thinking broad and integrated, not just restoring one building, but the whole block and its infrastructure. They need to have the potential to be flexible.

COMUS also finances some smaller initiatives...

Yes, such as urban walks called 'Faro Walks', a format well known all over the Europe that is aimed at promoting the Council of Europe Convention

on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (first opened for signature in Faro in 2005). We supported it once it became a periodic community activity. What's interesting is that participants of these walks are mainly citizens of Gyumri. It's great as the main idea of this tour is to show people their own city from a different perspective. On the other hand, such projects may in the future become very useful tools for the development of the tourist industry. At the same time, we made a lot of effort to raise awareness of the importance of historical heritage's preservation – print booklets, shoot some short films, etc. And once again, it's all done with the participation of the residents of Gyumri.

What are the expected results, when COMUS is set to finish in 2017?

The community will have a number of projects developed by citizens, with participation of the municipality and help of international experts and will be ready to be implemented. So, the next step, when COMUS is over, is to find financial support for these projects. But these are very 'domestic' outcomes... the long term result will be a strong heritage oriented enthusiasm and passion to protect, develop and promote their own assets – Gyumri's rich heritage. ♦





GYUMRI PROJECT HOPE

Gyumri Project Hope (GPH) is a non-profit urban planning foundation established in 2015, focused on the improvement of Gyumri in various sectors to eliminate the depopulation crisis of the city, by restoring social and economic stability for the region. In October 2016 GPH presented its concept paper “Strategic Redevelopment of Gyumri”. This concept is a joint initiative of GPH main donors: AGBU, ARS, IDeA Foundation and the Kololian Foundation. Below are some excerpts from the report about renovation of Gyumri’s some significant sights.



ALL SAVIORS SQUARE AND FREEDOM SQUARE

Built during the early Soviet years, the two sizable squares in front of City Hall are vastly underutilized without adequate seating, green space, and pedestrian connections to surrounding areas. GPH’s vision for the squares is built off of two previous proposals from prominent Gyumri-based architects and community feedback received. The vision includes, increasing connectivity, and creating an inviting and user friendly meeting place for visitors and residents alike attracting a variety of businesses to the area.

CENTRAL MARKET (“SHUKA”)

The main farmers market of Gyumri, located near City Hall, is one of the largest and most active outdoor markets of Armenia. However, infrastructure at the market is rundown, vendor kiosks are haphazardly constructed, artists and craftspeople lack a designated area to sell, and there is a lack of an overall plan for the market. GPH proposes that the market becomes a place where a variety of vendors come together to sell their products. The vendors would be grouped based on their products, which would allow for better organization, better user experience and pedestrian flow. Additionally, the market can expand to support new retail such as eating establishments that activate the market into a lively public space at all hours of the day. In many towns and cities, the market is the heartbeat. Gyumri is no exception and therefore GPH envisions enormous potential for the Gyumri Shuka. >

KUMAYRI HISTORIC DISTRICT

A five block area within the Kumayri Historic District in Gyumri was chosen to demonstrate how preserving historic buildings while adding new uses into the buildings can be a precursor and model for preservation efforts throughout Gyumri. As part of creating a model for preservation, GPH developed a set of so called “Preservation and conservation guidelines” to demonstrate how the use and enforcement of such guidelines could preserve valuable buildings that can attract businesses to the area. In addition to above mentioned, GPH team visited Kakheti region of Georgia to better understand Georgia’s recent track-record in implementing a regional development plan. As a neighboring country Georgia offers valuable insight on implementing large scale initiatives for tourism and historic preservation aimed at boosting economic development. Georgia case study proved that strong com-

▼
 Concept art of
 Central Market's
 renovation



◀
 Jivani Street today

mitment of Government and valuable support of International Funding Organizations leads to social economic prosperity. The USD 65 mm. loan approved under Regional Development Project of World Bank (RDP, RDPII and RDPIII) provided infrastructure and large scale institutional development. The analysis showed that in most of Georgian cities urban regeneration has resulted in economic growth and increase in tax revenues from 10 mm. Lari to 25 mm. Lari in 2 years. The lessons learned during Kakheti trip helped to guide and prioritize GPH’s analysis of tourism, historic preservation, and infrastructure development for Shirak Marz and Gyumri.

▼
 Shiraz Street
 renovation concept





GYUMRI PROJECT HOPE

GPH was born from the Depopulation research conducted by the Kololian Foundation. Through this research it was found that Gyumri has experienced the highest level of depopulation out of any city in the Republic of Armenia. The first phase of GPH is to create the Feasibility Study. By conducting a feasibility study GPH will develop a true understanding of what is needed and what is feasible and this can only be achieved through systematic approach in creating a high-quality Feasibility Plan based on international standards, incorporating input from citizens and officials who live and work in Gyumri and the Shirak region. Once the Feasibility Study is complete, projects will be launched in co-operation with private industry and international organizations, where people from Gyumri will play leading roles. GPH mission is to build upon Gyumri's potential by creating long-term sustainable economic development initiatives through a collaborative, comprehensive, and regional approach.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION HANDBOOK

“Gyumri Project Hope” Foundation has taken the initiative to propose and develop a handbook of how to preserve historical buildings and how these buildings can be used today. The document is created based on best international practices and similar projects and initiatives. The main goal of the guidebook is to use Gyumri as a pilot city and a model for heritage preservation in Armenia and neighboring countries. ♦



TUMO GYUMRI

Opened in 2015, TUMO Center for Creative Technologies' Gyumri branch became one of the symbols of the city's technological renaissance.

PHOTO : TUMO



The TUMO Center for Creative Technologies is a free of charge, after school learning environment that merges the latest in the tech and art fields to give teens everything they need to survive in the increasingly digital world. Students from the ages of 12 to 18 come to the center to learn from the four main focus areas consisting of filmmaking, animation, game development and web design. They also gain knowledge in a variety of complementary skills ranging from music and photography to 3d modeling and robotics. The TUMO center in Gyumri was opened in 2015 through the partnership between the Simonian Education Foundation and the Armenian General Benevolent Union. There are 1500 students in attendance. The center is currently located in the Gyumri Technology Center, but will soon be relocated to the

historic first theater where it will maintain the location's heritage as the city's epicenter of culture and progressiveness. In the past year alone, the students have created great results during their workshops and learning labs. LA-based graphic designer Shoghak Kazandjian led a branding lab; a new TUMO News team was established when PR consultant Jackie Abramian came to the center; robotics guru Joseph Fargas showed his teens how to program their own robots using LabVIEW software; musicians Arik Grigoryan and Areni Agbabyan taught their teens about traditional Armenian music; and photographer Katarina Roters led a lab on architecture photography. The student results of Katarina's lab were featured as part of the Republic of Armenia's booth at the 2016 Venice Architectural Biennale. ♦



◀ Gyumri's Tumo has 1500 students in attendance

⤴ TUMO Gyumri will soon be relocated to the historic first theater of the city

◀ TUMO Gyumri opened its doors in 2015



SUNNY DEVELOPMENT

Shirak region. What is it associated with? Good food and humor? Or maybe an earthquake, poverty and harsh climate? How about rucola, green basil, sage and other food items, mostly seen in the upscale restaurants and supermarkets of Yerevan. Or even tomato, cucumber and pepper. The latter seems especially significant to Shirak – the locals call Yerevan residents ‘bibar krtsogh’ or ‘pepper gnawers’, and the legend says that this is because no peppers grow in Shirak and locals are simply envious! But just a few months ago the situation has changed dramatically: new and experimental greenhouses built in Shirak seem to have caused an agricultural revolution in the region.

TEXT / PHOTO : VARDAN MELIKYAN



The climate in the Shirak region is indeed harsh and it is one of the coldest regions of the country, with frequent hail and other extreme weather. So, in terms of agriculture this part of Armenia is mostly associated with the harvesting of grains and cattle breeding. This in turn makes agriculture a risky business, since the level of diversification is low and weather calamities or diseases can potentially lead to loss of crops, cattle and income. But it turns out that the seemingly negative factors of the region can also become advantages. The high altitude is one of the reasons for the harsh climate, but it also results in some positive points. Higher elevation means a thinner atmosphere and thus more solar energy reaches the surface. In combination with an abundance of water and quality soil, this provides a good environment for the development of the greenhouse business. The problem with convenient greenhouses used in Armenia and other countries in the region is that these require natural gas for heating, if used during the colder season, then this is more expensive, raising doubts

➤
Torosgyugh's new
greenhouse under
construction



over the economic feasibility of the business. However, new technologies mean that there are no heating costs involved, even when the temperature is far below zero. Passive solar greenhouse technology was first developed in China, specifically for high-mountain zones, over two thousand years ago. Since then it has been successfully utilized in different parts of the world, including Japan, Korea, Russia and starting from 2013, Armenia as well. An Armenian NGO called 'Researchers for Bio-Heating Solutions' first piloted the technology in Kut village of Gegharkunik Marz in 2013. The village residents are almost exclusively refugees from different parts of Azerbaijan, including cities, and poverty is one of the main issues of this village, although historical chronicles say it once used to be the summer residence of Syunik Princes. Another distinct characteristic of the village is its high elevation (2,060 meters) and the surrounding harsh climate. The main source of income in Kut is cattle breeding and some potato and cabbage harvesting, so construction of the first passive solar greenhouse has been something unprecedented for locals. Since then a small group of farmers have been successfully cultivating different high value crops year round and selling these to the best restaurants and hotels in Yerevan.

The promising results of the work undertaken in Kut has become the trigger for the UNDP Armenia Country Office to implement another pilot project, with some improvements made by its experts, this time in Horbategh village of Vayots Dzor region. The village has been selected for the same reasons as Kut, including its association with the

Orbelian Princes of Syunik – according to locals, Horbategh comes from the Orbelian word 'tegh', meaning 'place' in English. The village and its fantastic nature, including Red Book wildlife species, like bezoar goats, is located next to some of the well-preserved historical monuments of Armenia, such as the famous Smbataberd. However, this has not resulted in income generation yet, so there has been a need for the assistance with this. Plus, the assessment undertaken by UNDP has shown that Horbategh is one of the most vulnerable villages of Vayots Dzor, in terms of climate change, and there has been a need for the introduction of respective adaption mechanisms to mitigate the risks. The greenhouse construction was completed in December 2015. Starting from January 2016, when the temperature outside has been as low as -250 C, the locals have harvested the first crop without spending a penny on heating. So, what is the secret behind this? Not much – mostly proper design and positioning. The greenhouse consists of three heavily insulated walls, built using locally made straw bales, as well as a double-layer of special polyethylene film covering the fourth side of the structure, facing south. Thanks to this, during the day the maximum amount of the sun's energy can penetrate the greenhouse and raise the air temperature inside to more than 400 C, even when it is extremely cold outside. Of course, during the night the temperature drops significantly, but the thermal energy accumulated during the day, as well as the proper thermal insulation, ensure that it does not drop below 0. This does mean that one can grow tomatoes during the winter (as

most Armenian farmers want to in the beginning), but instead there are better options, with higher added value and better tolerance of low temperatures, such as the above-mentioned rucola. The success stories in Kut and Horbategh have become an incentive for the Government of Romania to provide funds to UNDP for construction of another passive solar greenhouse in the Shirak region in 2016. Torosgyugh village has been selected for the project, mostly thanks to its active residents, who have already established a cooperative to implement similar projects. A convenient greenhouse with photovoltaic panels and a solar heating system has been constructed by the cooperative and a passive solar greenhouse is being built next to it. This will provide a comparison of the results, although assessments made by respective specialists already show that the passive solar greenhouse is more effective. A 260 m² greenhouse will become an alternative source of income for a village with around 250 residents, and can potentially lead to the development of other businesses, such as the production of agricultural products, the opening of a restaurant, etc. The local cooperative members have ambitious plans, including exporting their produce to neighboring Javakhk region of Georgia, and cooperating with the farmers there. Additionally, the greenhouse will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the year-round access to locally grown healthy and fresh food. Construction commenced on October 2016 and is scheduled to finish by the end of the year. Most likely, Torosgyugh residents will be serving food grown in the greenhouse on their New Year tables. ♦

10

MUST-DO THINGS IN GYUMRI

First of all, Gyumri is famous all over the country for its people – highly talented, incredibly witty, friendly and hospitable. There are so many things to do and see in Gyumri, that it's quite hard to sum it all up in one article. Here is our list of 10 things one should do in the city first of all.

TEXT : ARMEN MOURADIAN

SOVIET VIDEO GAME ARCADE ZONE

There is another place in Gyumri, where time seems to be frozen. While kids and grownups around the world play in highly modernized gaming clubs with huge monitors, using online-platforms and futuristic gadgets, here you can still find vivid examples of the Soviet Union gaming industry – including world-famous Tetris. There's no place for good old Mario here, but instead you can play some games that kids were playing back in the early 80's – shooting games, basketball, racing games – it's up to you. Oh, and the pixels are so huge, that sometimes it's quite hard to distinguish what are you driving – Formula 1 car or a few boxes attached to each other. Again, the atmosphere and interior have almost been left untouched since 1981 – the year when the place first opened.



TASTING 'QYALA' DISH

Qyala is Gyumri's traditional meal made from lamb or beef head. The dish is so popular in Gyumri, that any visitor can taste it at almost any restaurant. The dish is served with onion, lemon, salt and greens. Traditionally the dish is eaten with hands – without a knife and fork. Yes, it may sound a little weird, but well prepared Qyala with the right garnish and a shot of vodka (why not) will alter your perception of the taste. In Gyumri there are a lot of places where you can taste Qyala, especially if you are invited to a family dinner or some kind of celebration. But the most famous Qyala-place is at 'Araik' place, where Araik's son is now in charge of preparing the tastiest Qyala – using a secret family recipe. The locals call it 'Araik's Oven'.



Armen Mouradian



Pan Photo

75 YEARS OLD BARBERSHOP

Men's barbershop, on one of the oldest streets in Gyumri has retained its original appearance since the time it was founded. Here, you never know when retro barbershop ends and museum begins – every single interior detail hasn't been changed for ages – including some of the hair-dressing supplies. Eighty-five year old Khanayev Aristakesyan is one of the oldest barbers in Armenia, and he still works at the oldest active barbershop in the country. Among his clients were many famous Gyumri residents, including legendary movie actor Frunzik Mkrtchyan. Here you can feel the past of the city and get an awesome haircut by old-school professionals.



Marjanne Sarantis

BLACK FORTRESS

Sev Berd or Black Fortress was built between 1834-1847, (8 km away from the Turkish border) soon after the Russo-Turkish War. It is considered a national cultural heritage monument of Armenia and is situated on the hill, just 10 minutes from Gyumri's downtown. The 360-degree round-Fortress is made from black stone, which provides the structure with a unique appearance. The interesting part is that the fortress has never experienced a siege, but strategically it was of huge importance for the main victories of the Russians against the Turks.



SERGEY MERKUROV'S HOUSE MUSEUM

Sergey Merkurov was a prominent Armenian sculptor and the creator of many monumental sculptures and more than 300 'death masks'. His first death mask was made for the Catholicos of all Armenians Mkrtych Khrimyan, who died in 1907. Merkurov was regarded as one of the most influential sculptors in the whole of the USSR. The museum opened in 1984, but after earthquake of 1988 it was inhabited by people who were left homeless. In 2003, the museum was renovated and reopened. Today one can not only find a large collection of masks, but also Merkurov's letters, publications in press, photos, etc. The death mask museum – is there any other chance to visit this kind of place in another city?

CHERKEZ 'FISH' GORGE

Cherkez gorge is one of the most picturesque places around Gyumri. The gorge was famous among locals and visitors since the 19th century for its unique nature, surrounded by shady trees and green hills. But the place is a must-visit not only for the nature, but also for the best fish you can taste around Gyumri. The locals used to call it Fish gorge instead of the official name. All credits go to 'Cherkez Dzor' restaurant with its own fish farm. It's quite a difficult challenge to find someone, who wasn't delighted with trout and sturgeon – barbecued, braised and boiled. Here you can choose a particular fish, which will be caught and cooked especially for you. It's one of the famous places for celebrations and rest for Gyumretsis. If you love fish, then don't miss this chance!



Arshak Manukyan

THE ASLAMAZYAN SISTERS' ART GALLERY

There's a black tuff building on Abovyan street with a door leading into a garden with porches on two sides, featuring lovely wooden lattice work constructed between 1880-1900. Here you can find The Aslamazyan sisters' art gallery. Yeranuhi and Mariam Aslamazyans were painters and sisters, who had a big influence on the Armenian fine arts of the second half of XX century. The museum also highlights pottery by Yeranuhi Aslamazyan. Some works of Mariam Arshakovna are stored in the State Tretyakov Gallery, including 'Armenian Still Life' (1955) and 'Red Cactus Flower' (1957). The collection consists of around 620 works, including paintings, graphics, and ceramics. You can find Yeranuhi's works on the first floor and Mariam's works on the second floor. The sisters created together, but if you look closely, you'll see a completely different personality.



Marjanne Sarantis



'STYLE' GALLERY

'Style' gallery was established in 1991 based on the 'Style company's' personal collection of Armenian fine arts. Since then, the gallery has curated personal exhibitions in 28 countries throughout the world. In 2000, however, the gallery changed its basic collection. Today's collection consists of 3 sections – Armenian graphics, Soviet collections of the 1950's and a collection of 1950's Soviet glass. Here you can also find the largest collection of 18 and 19th century European engraving arts. Style Gallery also periodically exhibits the works of different painters and sculptors.

ALEXANDRAPOL BEER FACTORY

Written evidence of ancient beer production in Armenia can be found in Xenophon's work Anabasis (5th century BC). But if we speak about modern times, the Alexandropol Brewery in Gyumri is considered the oldest beer factory in Armenia. It was built in 1898 by Hamazasp Tsaghikyants but in 1988 it was devastated by the earthquake. Only in 2008 it was fully reconstructed. Today Alexandropol Factory (which produces famous 'Gyumri' and 'Alexandropol' beers), opens its doors to visitors – offering guided tours of the factory cellar and beer tasting. Also, you can take a workshop and master-class on beer brewing and one shouldn't miss that chance.



Armes Martirosyan

FRUNZIK MKRTCHYAN HOUSE MUSEUM

One of the famous Armenian movie-stars of the Soviet period, also known as one of the main actors in the legendary Soviet movie 'Mimino', Gyumri born Frunzik (Mher) Mkrtychyan's house museum was opened in 2004. The museum covers the life and activities of the great actor, by leaving the great art values to the future generation. The purpose of the museum is to provide its visitors with a closer look at the life and works of the great Armenian actor. The collection and research on gathering materials associated with Mher Mkrtychyan is consistently enriching the museums fund.



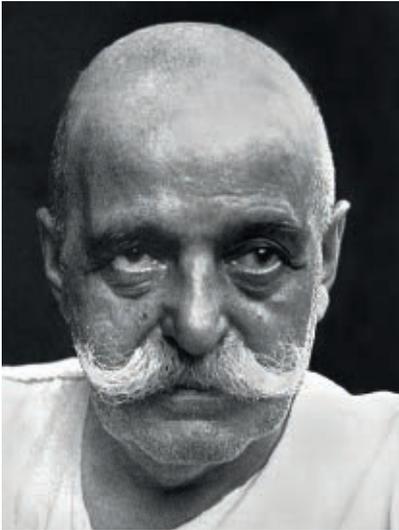
visitgyumri.com

THE DANCING PROVOCATEUR

When the freight train entered the tunnel, the driver did not notice a short person of eastern appearance standing near the railroad. Nothing special happened. There were neither magical fireworks, nor solar eclipses, but the train did not come out of an empty tunnel. The person of eastern appearance cunningly smiled and left. This is one of numerous mystic stories from George Ivanovich Gurdjieff's life. He was a mystic and philosopher. He was skilled in everything; a talented hustler and an energetic merchant. He began to work as a cleaner of decks on ships. Three decades later he became the owner of a castle in France and established the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. The most prominent personalities of the era attended this place for true knowledge.

TEXT : NUNE MELKOUMIAN, FIRST PUBLISHED IN YEREVAN MAGAZINE





◀ Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man

The historian Avetik Melik-Sargsyan had been sitting at a library table for a couple of hours. He was searching through aged and yellowed documents, metrics, certificates of birth, ownership certificates of property, death certificates ... And suddenly he found what he was looking for. Avetik jumped up, holding the cherished document. He wanted to return home to Gyumri as soon as possible. Finally, he was able to find the house where George Gurdjieff was born almost a century ago. During the evening of that same day, he was already strolling through the streets of Gyumri, which were recently destroyed by the earthquake. He was holding a household schedule. There was the number of the block on the first page '35', where Gurdjieff used to live. The names of his parents (Ivan and Yeva), brother, sister and the future magician were written on the second page. So here he was, on Tikhy street. Gurdjieff referred to this block by the Greek word 'slobodka' in his memories.

Gurdjieff was born in Alexandropol (now Gyumri) during a bitterly cold winter. He entered the world without tears and with eyes wide open. It seemed like he had begun to explore and take on the

world with all its mysteries, irregularities and unwritten rules that only the initiated ones knew, from the very first moment of his life. The exact date of his birth still remains a mystery, some people believe he was born in 1866, others think in 1872 or in 1877. Some years later, when George Ivanovich went to the USA with his students, an officer at the visa application center found a mistake in his passport – the distant future was mentioned as the date of his birth. “Everything is right”, George Ivanovich was not perplexed at all. Generally, Gurdjieff lived his life as if dates and other such things were insignificant. Some years later, either due to a miracle or to his own strong will, he recovered from a mysterious car crash, and stated, “I am Gurdjieff, I will not die”. By that, he designed a special path for himself, which lives on to this day.

Gurdjieff lived and studied in Kars for a few years, he was sent there by his first teacher, the priest of Alexan-

dropol Church, Dean Borsh. Once, when young George returned home to spend Easter with his family, he experienced an incident, the first one in a series of incomprehensible and inexplicable pattern of incidents, which he was to face in the future. Some years later he recalled that moment in his book ‘Meetings with Remarkable Men’.

“While I was working hard to implement the order, suddenly I heard a scream. I jumped up and was sure that something bad happened to one of the children playing around. I saw a boy surrounded by children, weeping loudly and making strange movements. The children were laughing at him. I came up and asked them what had happened. They told me that the weeping boy was Yezidi and they drew a circle around him. It was impossible to get out of that circle until it was wiped off. The child struggled to get out of the circle, but it did not work. I came up and erased part of the circle, allowing the boy to get out of it”. ➤

IT SEEMED LIKE HE HAD BEGUN TO EXPLORE AND TAKE ON THE WORLD WITH ALL ITS MYSTERIES, IRREGULARITIES AND UNWRITTEN RULES THAT ONLY THE INITIATED ONES KNEW, FROM THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS LIFE



◀ Gurdjieff in France

➤ Mysterious Gurdjieff moves



▼ George Gurdjieff's funeral



George was not content with the banal explanations from his intelligent friends. He seemed to intuitively foresee that the answer was somewhere far away. Even further than logic was. But no matter what, Gurdjieff knew that he had to find the answer and kept on searching.

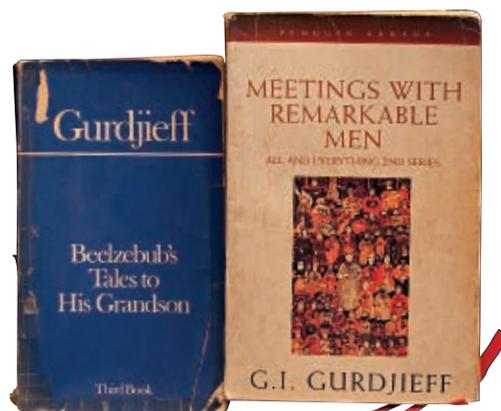
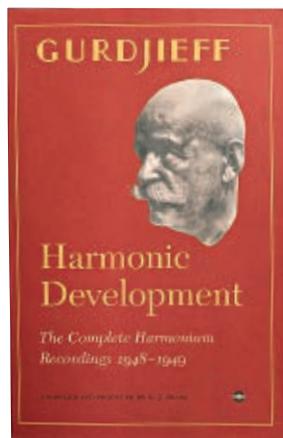
He began to seek the secret knowledge, believing that it had been preserved in the most ancient brotherhoods and esoteric societies of the world. He moved to Ani with his friend Sarkis Poghosyan and spent much of his time observing the ancient temples. George longed to find their traces in Ani, which was called the 'city of one thousand and one churches'. And he did. For the first time Gurdjieff read about the secret brotherhood of Sarmoung in an ancient letter. "The brotherhood does exist", the author of the letter was sure.

But where were they? Gurdjieff was searching and bought the most expensive and rarest books and manuscripts. The future philosopher was ready to do anything to get his hands on them. He even started selling sparrows, telling customers that they were rare American canaries. Every day Gurdjieff caught a few birds, painted and trimmed their feathers. George's trickery and fantasy had no limits. Both Gurdjieff and his friend Poghosyan could speak Armenian fluently, but it was hard for them to understand many of the books they were interested in. It turned out that "it was written in ancient Armenian, which has little in common with the modern Armenian language". Apparently it was Grabar (ancient Armenian language). "Most of all, we were impressed by the fact that the word 'Sarmoung', that we found in the book 'MerkKhavat' (Pure Faith), is the name of a famous esoteric school". As a result, he found the

clue. An ancient map of the world was preserved in one of the Armenian priests' house and the location of the brotherhood was indicated in it. Gurdjieff secretly made a copy of the map and then finally knew the path that would take him to the secret knowledge.

Gurdjieff lived in Tiflis for some time. He had already made significant progress in studying Eastern philosophy and esotericism. Tiflis was another transit point for him, kind of a spring board for his great journeys. George Ivanovich used to work at the railway station, he was well received in many famous houses. Later, he recalled doing amazing business tricks made in Tiflis that brought him unprecedented profits.

In 1919, Gurdjieff established his first Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Tiflis, and soon the most prominent and intelligent personalities from the entire region began to attend the institute in pursuit of mysterious and eternal knowledge. Here, Gurdjieff became very popular. Famous people from Europe and the USA who were seeking the truth came to him. The teacher was sure that people were just like cars with a shallow soul. They were doing everything automatically, without realizing and recalling themselves. Gurdjieff thus developed a 'Fourth Way', encouraging a person to recall his actions, to develop his soul and to become immortal. To achieve the previously mentioned points, the guests of the castle were carrying water, feeding pigs and cultivating the land all day long. A few hours were dedicated to dance classes. The students were imitating the movements of celestial objects listening to music, composed by Gurdjieff. The teacher thought they



FAMOUS PEOPLE FROM EUROPE AND THE USA WHO WERE SEEKING THE TRUTH CAME TO HIM. THE TEACHER WAS SURE THAT PEOPLE WERE JUST LIKE CARS WITH A SHALLOW SOUL

were able to influence themselves and everything surrounding them by that. An unprecedented performance took place at the Theater of Champs Elysées in Paris in December, 1923. The performance consisted of special exercises, tricks and 'magical experiments'. There was an impressive act during the performance, when any person in the audience managed to mentally transfer the title of any opera to the man sitting at the piano on the stage, who started to play the piece. Of course, dances were of special importance during the performance. The unreal, almost automatic synchronicity of the performers was astonishing. They were moving like dervishes. At the climax of the performance, the students turned their faces to the audience and rushed to the footlights and then jumped over the orchestra pit, falling into the first rows of the stalls. The audience jumped off their seats. All of this took place immediately after the teacher nodded. Afterwards, the dancers had no bone fractures, injuries or scratches to speak of.

Mixed reviews and responses were published in newspapers after each

performance. Gurdjieff was titled a magician, a great master, a slave owner, a hypnotist, a witch and a dancing provocateur. He enjoyed every achievement. He was in love with his life, enjoying every second of it. He was madly in love with the material life, but spent everything seeking the immortality of the soul. On December 29th 1949, the magician suffered a fatal car accident in France. This was the second car accident he suffered. For the first time, he predicted his impending misfortune. The power of attorney was handed to his secretary and she took a train. The mechanic was asked to recheck the car. Gurdjieff was considered dead after the car crash and was taken to the morgue. But when the students came to take their teacher's body away, the astonished doctor stated that Gurdjieff was alive. When the second accident happened, his students refused to believe that their teacher was dead. Some scientists think that the car crash was not an accident; Gurdjieff was disliked by many people. But everyone knew that the magician was a real road hog. This time the great master was not ready to face his own death. ♦



JAMES JEN

DONALD THE UNPREDICTABLE:

what does Trump presidency mean for the South Caucasus?

This November the United States elected 45th president of the country. Surprisingly for many the campaign was won by a Republican billionaire Donald Trump. While the world is trying to understand what will be the consequences of that choice, here is what Trump's presidency means for South Caucasus.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN

NOT IN THE HEADLINES: SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

If there is one word that could describe Donald Trump, it is "unpredictable". This is especially true of his foreign policy. While in case of Clinton, a former Secretary of State, her foreign policy outlook was more or less clear, Trump's foreign policy remains a mystery. And when it comes to figuring out what the US policy would bring to the South Caucasus it is even more difficult. Obviously, the South Caucasus was very far from the priorities that defined the presidential campaign in the US. The campaign mostly focused on internal issues, and the foreign policy issues, the ones that were discussed were larger issues like China, Russia, Syria, Iran, the Pacific, etc. Yet, ironically, this was the first US presidential campaign in which both candidates had firsthand knowledge of the South Caucasus. Hillary Clinton has been to all the three countries, in her capacity as the Secretary of State. Donald Trump has had business interests in Georgia and Azerbaijan. He visited Georgia in 2012, where a local company, "Silk Road Group" started

building a Trump tower in Batumi. Moreover, during this visit he met with the then president Mikheil Saakashvili, who, as he claimed, has known Trump since mid-1990s, and has been his fan since then. Trump's ex-wife, Ivana has also visited Georgia. Saakashvili and Trump gave a joint press conference and Saakashvili presented Trump with a state award, "Order of Brilliance". After the elections Saakashvili published a video shot during the visit, in which Trump praises Saakashvili and Georgia. However, given Saakashvili's current involvement in Ukrainian politics, this probably has to do more with the Ukrainian politics than with the politics of Georgia. Also, Trump has a business connection to Azerbaijan, which became a subject of discussion during his campaign: Trump's critics raised the issue of Trump's cooperation with Azerbaijani businessman Anar Mam-

madov, who also happens to be the son of an Azerbaijani government minister. According to a July 2015 report by "Mother Jones" magazine, Mammadov is the owner of the tower and hotel in Baku that bears the name "Trump", for which he has paid a fee of 2.5 million USD to the future US president. Though there is no indication that Trump has ever visited Azerbaijan, his daughter Ivanka has visited Baku to oversee the construction of the Trump tower there. In addition to that there were rumors that Trump's campaign has been receiving donations from an ethnic Azerbaijani oligarch from Russia, Araz Agalarov. Not only Agalarov knows Trump personally, but also Trump has made a cameo appearance in a video for a song sung by Agalarov's son, Emin. In an interview to Russian newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, Agalarov himself denied the connection, though he admitted that

THERE WERE RUMORS THAT TRUMP'S CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN RECEIVING DONATIONS FROM AN ETHNIC AZERBAIJANI OLIGARCH FROM RUSSIA, ARAZ AGALAROV

he had been rooting for him, adding that the fact that Trump harassed women meant that he was a real man: “it would have been much worse if he tried to harass men”. However, in spite of these connections, so far there has been no indication that Azerbaijani government may have any special influence on Trump’s administration. To be fair, Clinton also had an Azerbaijani connection. According to Eurasia.net, for the last 7 years the Azerbaijani embassy has used the services of a lobbying firm the Podesta Group, established by Clinton’s campaign manager John Podesta. However, the link should not be exaggerated, John Podesta left the firm long time ago (it is now managed by his brother), and there is no evidence of significant Azerbaijani influence on Clinton’s team.

THE DONALD: A VIEW FROM THE CAUCASUS

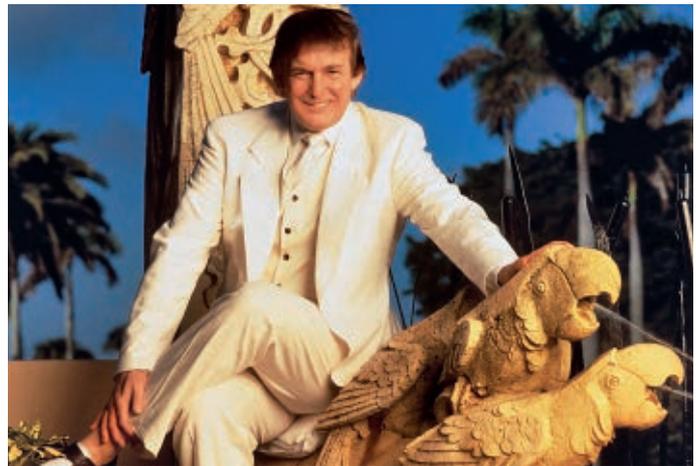
So, how was Trump seen from the capitals of the South Caucasus? Many Armenians see the presidential elections in US president through the prism of the campaign for the recognition of the Armenian genocide. In 2008 both leading Democratic candidates, Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama unequivocally promised to recognize the Genocide. After Obama became president he defied his promise, though he did go further than most his predecessors: in his address to the Armenian community instead of using the word “genocide” he used the words “Mets Yeghern”. “Mets Yeghern” is the Armenian term used to describe the events of 1915, however, unlike the word “genocide”, it does not carry legal consequences. In 2012 the leading candidates on both sides avoided the issue altogether. The same thing happened this year, therefore most Armenian organizations in the US refrained from supporting any of the candidates, so most probably this year the votes of Armenian community were divided. As for Azerbaijan, here Trump’s candidacy was viewed with mixed feelings. On the one hand, Trump’s remarks about Muslims did not create sympathy for him in this Muslim majority



◀ Trump Tower in Baku, Azerbaijan

nation. On the other, from the point of view of the government Trump is probably a more comfortable interlocutor than the Democrats in general, and Hillary Clinton in particular. Democrats are known as proponents of a value-based foreign policy, keen on “spreading democracy”, while Trump is expected to be more pragmatic and to be less concerned about the promotion of democratic values. To what extent this expectation would be true, remains to be seen. Business connections of Trump to Azerbaijan also inspired some sympathy for Trump in Azerbaijan.

For Georgia, the biggest issue is obviously the new president’s position on relations with Russia. Therefore, Hillary Clinton, who would have largely continued the previous US policy, would probably have been more preferable. Trump administration, even if it does not make any revolutionary changes in the foreign policy, would at the very least be less enthusiastic about Georgia’s membership in NATO. One of leading Trump supporters, conservative Republican Newt Gingrich once famously said in an interview that if he had been the president he would



◀
Brandi Brant and Donald Trump on Playboy's 1990 March cover

MANY ARMENIANS SEE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN US THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE **RECOGNITION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE**

think twice about starting a nuclear war with Russia, were Russia to attack Estonia, a NATO member, which, according to Gingrich, "is located in the suburbs of St. Petersburg" and "is 40 percent Russian". Such statements by Trump and his allies have caused serious anxiety in those post-Soviet countries that have strained relations with Russia, and Georgia is not an exception. On the other hand, the Georgian Dream government had been conducting a more pragmatic policy vis-a-vis Russia than its predecessor, so in this respect Tbilisi is probably better prepared to deal with the consequences of a possible U-turn in US policies than, for example, Ukraine.

TRUMP AND THE REGIONAL POWERS: RUSSIA, IRAN, TURKEY

In general when it comes to Trump's approach to relations with Russia, it is hard to make predictions (as with

most other policy areas). Alleged Russian support for Trump has become one of the main topics of the election campaign. Though president Vladimir Putin's rhetoric has been reserved, inside Russia media and politicians did not conceal their support for Trump. State Duma reacted with applause to the news of his election. The eccentric Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who, according to some Russia-watchers, often says publicly what is said in the Kremlin in private, even threw a small party with champagne for MPs and journalists. Obviously, the main cause for this support for Trump was the presumed foreign policy approach of Hillary Clinton, who has a reputation of a proponent of policies of assisting democratization, which in Moscow are usually seen as the cause for Colored Revolutions and other uprisings across the world. Besides, Trump's assault on liberalism and political cor-

THE WEALTHIEST PRESIDENT IN HISTORY

Donald Trump was born and raised in the Queens borough of New York City and received a bachelor's degree in economics from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1968. In 1971, he took control of his family's real estate and construction firm, Elizabeth Trump & Son, which was later renamed The Trump Organization. During his career, Trump has built, renovated or managed numerous office towers, hotels, casinos, and golf courses. He also lent the use of his name to brand various other products. He owned the Miss USA and Miss Universe pageants from 1996 to 2015, and has made cameo appearances in films and television series. From 2004 to 2015, Trump hosted and co-produced The Apprentice, a reality television series on NBC. As of 2016, Forbes listed him as the 324th wealthiest person in the world (113th in the United States) with a net worth of \$4.5 billion, which would make him the wealthiest president in U.S. history.



rectness is in harmony with the conservative discourse prevailing today in Russia. However, it is still hard to say to what extent this support translated into meddling in the elections, e.g. financial support or hacking of the Democratic establishment's e-mails, remains unclear, as well as to what extent has this support played a role in determining the election outcome. On the side of Trump things are not so obvious. Trump has praised Putin as a strong leader and said that it would be easy for him to find common ground with Putin. He also talked about readiness to cooperate with Russia in Syria against the Islamic State. In an episode widely used by his adversaries Trump even called for "Russian hackers" to hack Clinton's e-mails to show that he has been involved in shady business. Obviously, Trump has shown little interest in supporting democracy abroad, especially in the former Soviet states. Hence, there are some hopes in Moscow that the new administration would be ready to make a deal that would actually recognize the former Soviet space as a zone of priority interests for Russia. On the other hand, one could also imagine how US-Russian relations could deteriorate further under Trump. Apart from all the compliments about Putin, Trump also said that he would give the order to shoot down Russian planes if they flew too close to American military. Since foreign policy is not a very big priority for Trump it means that his foreign policy team will play

TRUMP HAS PRAISED RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN AS A STRONG LEADER AND SAID THAT IT WOULD BE EASY FOR HIM TO FIND COMMON GROUND WITH HIM



> "The Simpsons" predicted Trump's presidency in 2000



a significant role in formulating foreign policy. And this is not exactly good news for Moscow, since Trump's foreign policy crew will probably be recruited from conservative Republicans, including members of the Bush and Reagan administrations, many of whom have a hawkish stance toward Russia. The same goes for the Republican majorities in the Senate and the Congress, which, will have a significant influence on foreign policy. Impulsive, authoritarian traits that Trump has exhibited during his campaign may mean that his attitude to Russia may easily change under circumstances. Besides, Trump will have

to overcome the image of a Russian puppet, which had been conferred on him by the Democrats and the liberal media: he will have to prove that he can be tough in dealing with foreign leaders, including Putin. In any case, US foreign policy is formulated as a result of a complicated process that involves many institutions, so even if Trump wanted to radically change the approach to relations with Moscow this would hardly be possible. Relations between Russia and the USA are only one of the variables that could influence the situation in the South Caucasus: relations between USA and other regional players are

also important. Of these, the USA-Iran relations are obviously the most explosive and potentially dangerous for the region. In the Bush years, when some circles in the US were considering a military operation to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, this was viewed as a nightmare scenario by both Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is highly unlikely that Trump will resort to a military operation against Iran, but he has talked about scrapping or re-negotiating the nuclear treaty with Iran. Probably, this would not be a priority for Trump, but the Republican hawks, as well as Israeli and the Saudi lobbies, will keep reminding Trump about this promise. It is hard to imagine that Trump would actually scrap the treaty, but he may embark on unfriendly steps with Iran that could jeopardize the treaty. This is especially dangerous for the process of normalization of relations between Iran and the West, as in Iran itself the deal is already disliked by many conservatives, and reformist president Rouhani is facing a difficult election in 2017. Whatever happens, it is obvious that the détente with Iran, which was seen by Obama as one of his major achievements, will not have the same significance for Trump. And if the relations between the West and Iran return to a confrontational pattern it would be bad news for the whole region.

The third important regional power with influence in the South Caucasus is Turkey. Predicting how relations between Erdogan and Trump will develop is not an easy task. There are similarities in style between Trump and Erdogan: both are anti-establishment populists with a right-wing message and authoritarian tendencies. At the same time as both are known for little tolerance for their opponents, it is hard to predict to what a possible disagreement between them might develop. And there are many issues to disagree about, from Erdogan's insistence on extraditing his opponent Fethullah Gulen, currently a US resident, to the American support for Kurds in Syria. ➤



▲ Trump's famous cameo in "Home Alone 2"

We asked two American citizens living and working in Armenia tell us why are they pro or contra to Donald Trump's presidency



PRO

Maggie Ryan (Senior at AUA)

I'm a millennial, and I voted for Trump. It took me a while to get to make that decision. It felt like the entire population was judging Trump on his characteristics. Was he too funny? Is he a racist? Why does he talk in a funny way? He said horrible things 10 years ago, that's why he's a sexist. While his statements have their truth to it, I do not want to judge my future president on a few personal characteristics or scandals. I wanted to judge them based on a few factors that actually mattered, not just for America, but for the whole world. I am excited to see Trump and Putin find common ground. Two power countries working together might be a good thing. The other thing is Gun Control he talked about a lot. Like Trump, I believe that anybody has the right to bear arms. And at the end of the day, Trump represents change. Maybe he'll be the worst president, maybe he'll be the best. But, he is not what has been done for the past decade. He was a radical choice, but a change nonetheless.



CONTRA

David Bequette (entrepreneur)

This was going to be the first election that I would just watch from afar. But then Trump walked in carrying with him the bravado of a billionaire, the rage of someone who was severely disenfranchised and the speech pattern of a small child that everyone hates to love. I felt an urge to run and hide from the mere thought of the possibility that the greatest country on the Earth could take this seriously. And then it started, the uncontrolled wrath of Trump's misogyny, bigotry and hatred for anything that would improve his likability among an increasingly disenfranchised (so they claim to be) group. Trump was their savior. He could speak on their level. Trump is everything I never want to be. He is everything I grew up to fight against. Trump was and is the bully that many of us have grown to despise, and more importantly grown to not become. And yet we should still have faith that over 2 million more voters do not believe in this type of hate.

> Melania, Donald, and Barron Trump, 2010

**TRUMP'S OIL POLICIES:
 WHAT THAT COULD MEAN FOR THE REGION**

Another Trump policy that might affect the South Caucasus is his promise to lift the restrictions on production of oil and gas in the USA. This would probably lead to a further downward in the oil prices globally: in fact the oil price suffered a drop immediately after the news of Trump's victory was spread. Obviously, this is not good news for Azerbaijan, which has already suffered serious economic setbacks due to the falling oil prices. Immediately after the Trump election Business journal "Euromoney" named Azerbaijan as one of the countries with the highest level of risk of suffering from Trump policies, together with other commodity producers like Congo and Nigeria. In theory, Armenia and Georgia, as countries that do not export hydrocarbons should not suffer that much (though Georgia benefits from transit of hydrocarbons). However, they both have links with Russian economy, and Russian economy can be affected significantly by falling oil prices. Of course, this is more of a concern for Armenia, which is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union and has close links with Russia, and has been receiving millions of dollars in remittances from guest workers in Russia.

The economic consequences of the falling oil prices may in turn have political consequences, which can be even more dangerous. Azerbaijan has already experienced a wave of social protests in winter 2015-2016. The April war in Nagorno-Karabakh has led to a patriotic mobilization and consolidation around the government in Azerbaijan. In September 2016 the Azerbaijani government felt confident enough to pass changes to the constitution, which expanded the powers



Regine Mahaux for getty images

EVEN AS A CANDIDATE, DONALD TRUMP HAS ALREADY CREATED A LOT OF HEADACHE IN US AND AROUND THE WORLD, AND PROBABLY MORE IS TO FOLLOW

of the president. However, further socio-economic problems may lead to domestic instability. Though mainstream opposition and civil society are weak in Azerbaijan, this can hardly be a consolation for the government: on the contrary, it means that the socio-economic difficulties are more likely to be exploited by various radical groups. As for Armenia, it has experienced both economic difficulties and internal political instability recently, and is facing elections in spring 2017. What is probably the most dangerous is that internal instability either in Armenia and Azerbaijan may lead to resumption of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh. Many analysts think that the outbreak of fighting in April was in part caused by the desire of Azerbaijani leadership to distract the population from the internal situation. Fighting "little victorious wars" has been one of the most popular ways of governments to deal with internal problems, and this danger cannot be ruled out.

Trump critics both in US and abroad fear that his presidency will be a catastrophe, Trump supporters hope that it will be the beginning of a glorious new era. Most probably, it will be neither. US policy, including foreign policy, is not determined by one man, even if that man is the president and is as eccentric as Trump. Besides, Trump himself has already started to retreat on some of his campaign promises, so there are chances that he would be a more or less regular conservative Republican president, with a pragmatic and somewhat isolationist foreign policy. However, it is undeniable that the Trump presidency the world will become much more unpredictable. Even as a candidate, Trump has already created a lot of headache in US and around the world, and probably more is to follow. And while the citizens of the South Caucasus countries have had no voice in electing Trump, they may find themselves having to cope with the consequences of Trump policies. ♦



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IN THE MIDDLE OF WAR

Iran's reaction to the Four-Day War and the factor of its ethnic Azeris

It is traditionally said that Armenia and neighbouring Iran maintain good relations and that Tehran is sticking to a policy of neutrality in the Karabakh conflict, regardless of its huge Azeri ethnic minority and the official rhetoric of Islamic consolidation. Tehran, since the start of the conflict in the early 1990's has repeatedly made offers of mediation, which however, are of little effect, due to the sceptical attitude of other regional and global players, including Russia and of course the USA who are unanimous in keeping Iran's influence as limited as possible in the Caucasus

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN



Avast region in Iran bordering Armenia and Azerbaijan is inhabited predominantly by the Turkic-speaking Azeri population with a large section of them who consider themselves kin to the Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan.

Azeri or Pan-Azeri nationalism has always been a problem for Iran's government, which they have tried to resolve through different methods under different regimes. The current government is constantly underlining the importance of the Shi'i-Islamic and all-Iranian solidarity over narrow ethnic allegiances, while the ongoing struggle between Armenia and Azerbaijan to its north is a potential threat which could mobilize ethnic Azeris and serve as a catalyst, empowering their ethnic consciousness.

April's unprecedented escalation in and around Nagorno-Karabakh (soon coined as Four Day War), inflamed Iran's ethnic Azeri displays of solidarity with Azerbaijan against Armenia.

On the grassroots level the solidarity with Azerbaijan among ethnic Azeris was generally more apparent, than on official or semi-official level. One instance of such solidarity display occurred at a match played in Iran's East Azerbaijan provincial capital of Tabriz on the 6th April. Fans of the local TraktorSazi, the most popular team among ethnic Azeris, chanted slogans such as "Karabakh is ours and will be ours" before and after the match. The fans also carried banners with various slogans in support of Azerbaijan, which were written not only in Azeri, but also in Persian and English. Azeri solidarity displays were also occasionally seen on higher level too.

Weeks after the conflict flare-up, the East Azarbayjan TV (Sahand TV) showed on 23rd May Ayatollah Mojtahed-Shabestari (the representative of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamaeni in the province) talking in Azeri at a meeting with a group of members of religious and cultural NGOs from the Azerbaijani Republic. Shabestari said that "Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of Azerbaijan and belongs to Islam".

The TV channel later said that the chairman of the Azerbaijani State Committee for Religious Organizations, MubarizQurbanli, "appreciated Iran for supporting Azerbaijan over the Karabakh conflict", adding that people of Azerbaijan would never forget the aid provided by Iran and Iranian officials in this regard. He also mentioned that Wahhabism and the spreading false interpretations of Islam harms all Muslim countries. >

>
Armenian president
Serj Sargsyan
and Iran's Hassan
Rouhani



APRIL'S UNPRECEDENTED ESCALATION IN AND AROUND NAGORNO-KARABAKH INFLAMED IRAN'S ETHNIC AZERI DISPLAYS OF SOLIDARITY WITH AZERBAIJAN AGAINST ARMENIA

It would be wrong however to state that the clerical leadership in all Azeri-populated communities in the north was anti-Armenian.

For example, The Supreme Leader's representative in the province of West Azarbayjan and Friday imam of Orumiyyeh, Hojjatol-Eslam-val-Moslemine Seyyed Mehdi Qoreyshi, was much more reserved in his assessment of the situation days after the Four Day war.

Referring to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and deadly clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, Qoreyshi said during Friday prayers on 8th April that the conflict has been raging for 20 years and the international organisations have done nothing to bring an end to it. He thanked the Iranian government for their response to the issue and efforts towards establishing peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, claiming that "any kind of conflicts and riots are against the region", the channel reported.

An incident, which could potentially intensify anti-Armenian sentiment among Iran's ethnic Azeris, occurred at the very start of the sudden eruption of hostilities on the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh. Major Iranian media outlets, including the official Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran (VIRI) and Tasnim agency reported that several mortar shells fired by either party in the conflict during the night of 2nd April landed in a locality across Iranian border, also causing damage to infrastructure. Due

>
Tabriz, capital of
East Azerbaijan
Province of Iran

∨
Iran defense
minister Hossein
Dehghan



∧
Ayatollah Mojtahed-
Shabestari

to the incident it was claimed that the damage caused temporary power outages in three villages of Iran's East Azerbaijan province. The Iranian media quoted the deputy governor-general of East Azerbaijan Province for political and security affairs Sa'id Shabestari-Khiabani, confirming the report. The same official was quoted by Tasnim agency on 3 April as saying: "At present, full security is established on borders of the East Azerbaijan province and armed forces and border guards are ready to give a determined response to any kind of encroachment against our territory". He added that necessary measures had been taken by the provincial Security Council, after three shells fell in Khodaafarin village at 14:30 GMT on the 2nd April, consequently damaging an electricity post.

"Following this incident, the provincial Borders Guards [Service] requested a meeting on the border with the two parties [Azerbaijani and Karabakh administrations]. At this meeting, the two parties involved in the conflict were seriously counselled and given an official warning by the Border Guards [Service] of the Islamic Republic [of Iran]. They promised that such an incident would not reoccur," Shabestari said.

Sahbestari was also seen as pointing to Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian forces as the most culpable party, whilst Yerevan was quick

to intervene by summoning the Iranian ambassador for clarification and to consequently deny such a statement.

Armenian Deputy Defence Minister Davit Tonoyan had briefed the Iranian military attaché in Yerevan (Hossein Sheikhi) on the shelling of an Iranian village during clashes between Azerbaijani and Nagorno Karabakh forces, Armenpress news agency reported on 4th April.

Regarding Shabestari-Khiabani's allegations, the Armenian deputy defence minister responded, saying: "The Armenian side, after confirming the geographical coordinates of the village in question, states that the settlement is located behind Nagorno Karabakh forces and, therefore, it is unlikely that the ethnic Armenian forces shelled it. Tonoyan also reportedly claimed that "the incident resembled a provocation and was not in the interest of the Armenian side."

Tonoyan and Sheikhi also made arrangements to regularly exchange information "in order to exclude any misinformation," Armenpress reported, adding that Nagorno Karabakh forces promised to conduct their own investigation into the incident.

Other Iranian officials also spoke on the incident in a rather stern and even, one might say, threatening manner. The Iranian Law Enforcement Force (police) Border Guards Commander Qasem Rezaei said in a statement that he had seriously warned Azerbaijan and Armenia of hitting Iranian border villages by shrapnel, Mehr News Agency reported on 5 April. State radio VIRI quoted the spokesman of Iran's Foreign Ministry, Hossein Jaber Ansari, as expressing "serious concern" over the clashes and calling on both sides to exercise "self-restraint". Iranian officials also made attempts at quelling the flare-up of hostilities, which from the very first day showed their serious negative potential for Tehran as well.

THE FOUR DAY WAR WAS A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO TEHRAN'S UNEASY POLICY OF BALANCING BETWEEN THE AZERI ETHNIC SENTIMENT AND ITS OWN STATE INTEREST

Iranian Defence Minister Brig-Gen Hoseyn Dehqan called for the immediate cessation of the “military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan”, urging “both sides to exercise restraint, and resolve the dispute through dialogue”, as reported by conservative Khorasan newspaper on the 4th April.

Dehqan was reportedly said to have held separate conversations via telephone with his counterparts, the Azerbaijani and Armenian defence ministers Zakir Hasanov and Seyran Ohanyan. IRINN Iranian rolling news channel said on the 5th April that the Azerbaijani economic minister and Iranian communications minister had a telephone conversation and the Iranian side stressed that “Armenia and Azerbaijan should put an end to the conflict”. The Iranian minister voiced Iran’s preparedness to help both countries resolve the issue, the news channel added.

Later, months after the flare-up of the conflict, Iranian President Hasan Rouhani at a joint press conference with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (on the side-lines of the Trilateral Iran-Russia-Azerbaijan Summit on 7-8 August) held in Baku, reiterated earlier offers to mediate in the conflict.

IRANIAN MEDIA'S CONCERNS OVER THE CLASHES

The Iranian media shared concern over the resumption of hostilities in Karabakh and expressed a rather cautious attitude towards possible Turkish involvement in the conflict.

Hard-line daily Vatan-e Emruz said on 5th April that Turkey “is fomenting the flames of war” in Karabakh and that only Iran and Russia can work together to establish peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The newspaper wrote that Baku had proposed an “unrealistic” condition for ceasefire such as the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azeri territories where, the author said, Armenians have been living for approximately 100 years. “Baku’s condition means the continuation of war”, the author said.

Meanwhile, Hard-line Keyhan said that Iran, Russia and Turkey, together with Azerbaijan and Armenia, will be able to reach a solution to the Karabakh conflict.

➤ Spokesman of Iran's Foreign Ministry, Hossein Jaber Ansari



Some media outlets largely reported from the Armenian side, probably to counter-balance the impression that Karabakh Armenians stood behind the shelling incident in the East Azerbaijan province. For instance, Iran’s English-language Press TV news channel on the 3rd April reported the Armenian and Karabakh officials’ remarks on the intensifying clashes without mentioning Azerbaijan’s position.

The channel aired Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan’s remarks about Armenia’s position on the clashes at a meeting of the National Security Council.

The channel later showed an interview with David Babayan, the spokesman for the Karabakh president, accusing Azerbaijan of violating international law.

At the same time, with the above said, it should be noted that due to the political and social idiosyncrasies of Iran, we cannot gauge just how deep the sympathy among ethnic Azeris with Azerbaijan against Armenia could manifest. We can claim that this could be a warning sign for Tehran in its current policies against nationalist and even separatist or secessionist tendencies in Azeri-populated regions. However, the contrast between the reaction of Iranian media, officials and the population and clerics in Azeri-populated regions could signal another split amongst Iranian society along ethnic lines.

The Four Day War was a serious challenge to Tehran’s uneasy policy of balancing between the Azeri ethnic sentiment and its own state interest. Iranian diplomacy (through its active neutrality and media) offered a rather balanced and occasionally even somewhat pro-Armenian image of the conflict, thus preventing growth of the potentially dangerous anti-Armenian and pro-Azerbaijani sentiment among a portion of its population, which could threaten destabilization inside the country. ♦

ALL THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEN:

What can Armenia's New Cabinet Achieve?

Everything you need to know about Armenia's new Prime Minister, surprisingly appointed this September, the new cabinet, its challenges and perspectives.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN / PHOTO : PAN PHOTO





◀ Karen Karapetyan
and Vigen Sargsyan

▶ Previous prime minister
Hovik Abrahamyan

AN EFFICIENT MANAGER

In early October many Armenians were discussing a recently surfaced YouTube video that shows newly appointed prime minister Karen Karapetyan playing the drums in a cover of “Superstition”, Stevie Wonder’s famous funk hit. Social network users remembered that at least two of the previous Armenian prime ministers Hrant Bagratyan and Tigran Sargsyan were known for their musical hobbies; they played the guitar. A new Internet meme appeared, the image of a fictional band ‘the Varchapets’ (the prime ministers): a photo shopped image of the Beatles, featuring the faces of Karapetyan, Bagratyan and Sargsyan, as well as Karapetyan’s predecessor Hovik Abrahamyan (even though the latter is not known to possess any musical talent). Whatever the musical skills of Karapetyan’s predecessors, neither of them were able to bring about a major economic breakthrough to Armenia. Will Karapetyan be more successful? That is the question that interests most Armenians.

To many, the credentials of the new prime minister are a source of optimism. Unlike his predecessors, Karen Karapetyan came to government from a top management business background. And not just any business, but from one of Russia’s leading companies, Gazprom. Karapetyan spent the last five years working as senior management of various structures affiliated with GazProm; as First Vice-President of Gazprombank, as Deputy Director General for Strategy and Development at Gazprom Mezhrregiongaz company, and Deputy Director General for International Projects of Gazprom Energo-holding. Prior to this, Karapetyan worked as the Mayor of Yerevan for less than a year (December 2010 – November 2011). The previous mayor of Yerevan, controversial Gagik Beglaryan, had to resign as a result of a scandal that made headlines all over the world: Beglaryan had physically assaulted a presidential administration official who, in his opinion, had insulted his wife at a Placido Domingo concert. Karapetyan, who had previously worked as the head of ArmRosGazProm,

a joint company formed by the Armenian government and Russian Gazprom, had a better public image than his predecessor, and many inhabitants of Yerevan were quite optimistic about his plans to modernize the city. When Karapetyan soon left his post to commence working for the Russian company Gazprom, the reasons behind his departure were never openly discussed, but part of the public were convinced that Karapetyan’s plans to modernize the capital had clashed with vested interests of the local ‘oligarchs’.

WHY A NEW CABINET? WHY NOW?

It is no coincidence that someone with the image of an ‘efficient manager’ has been selected to head the cabinet precisely at this time. Even though Armenia is still a presidential republic, the cabinet reshuffle is quite a significant step, especially given the current political context. Most likely, the resignation of the previous cabinet is the government’s strategic response to the events of this July, when a group of armed men calling themselves ‘the Daredevils of Sasoun’ seized a police station and street protests ensued in support. The public reaction to the actions of ‘the Daredevils’ demonstrated that the level of dissatisfaction with government policies had reached a dangerous level. While some public figures condemned the actions of the armed group, many others directly or indirectly supported them, pinning the major part of blame for the situation in the country on the government. It became clear that, given such public dissatisfaction, the emergence of new, equally or even more radical protests were only a matter of time. Hence, there was a need to diffuse the negative attitudes and to show that the government was capable of implementing changes. The fact that a small armed group was able to seize a police station and had managed to occupy it for over two weeks, also signified a crisis within the Armenian governmental institutions. Finally, ‘the four-day war’ in April showed the need



◀ Edward Nalbandyan was reappointed as minister of foreign affairs

for mobilization and effective management of Armenia's resources in order to help Nagorno-Karabakh to withstand another possible confrontation with Azerbaijani forces. Given this context, the creation of a new cabinet can be quite strategic. On the one hand, it can help mitigate public discontent. On the other hand, it could restore the consensus between different interest groups and factions within the government camp and eliminate the danger of a rift within the elites. Finally, a new prime minister with his own team may have a chance to pursue necessary economic reforms, tackle issues of corruption and inefficient management in the government structures whilst attracting investment. In this situation, the choice of Karen Karapetyan as the new prime minister seems almost perfect. Karapetyan's predecessor, Hovik Abrahamyan has been one of the most influential figures in the ruling Republican Party for years. He has also been the target for accusations of corruption by opposition politicians and the media. In contrast to Abrahamyan, Karapetyan has the image of an 'outsider'. Not only has he not been part of the government for the last five years, he became a member of party only in late November. However, he is still perceived as someone who is not a member of the Republican "old guard". Thus, the choice of the new prime minister was meant to send a clear signal to the public; the new cabinet will be technocratic, rather than a political one that will offer a fresh start. Other changes in the cabinet also reflected this logic, as several unpopular ministers were replaced. Among the dismissed were ministers who have an image of being part of the 'oligarchs' – Gagik Khachaturyan, minister of finance, and Gagik Beglaryan, minister of communications (and the former Yerevan mayor who had to resign after the Placido

Domingo incident). Another controversial figure to be dismissed soon after the introduction of the new cabinet was the regional governor of Syunik region, Suren Khachatryan. Khachatryan had been accused of corruption and criminal activities in the past, but has managed to survive numerous scandals and even criminal investigations. His dismissal was perceived by many in Armenia as a sign that the new cabinet is serious about cleaning up the government structures. Overall, there were eight new ministers appointed: minister of health Levon Altunyan, minister of agriculture Ignati Arakelyan, minister of economy Suren Karayan, minister of energy and natural resources Ashot Manukyan, minister of culture Armen Amiryan, minister of transport and communication Vahan Martirosyan, minister of finance Vardan Aramyan, and minister of defense Vigen Sargsyan. Most of these appointees are technocrats with no immediately obvious political connections, who have not been in the public spotlight before. An exception to this rule is the minister of defense Vigen Sargsyan (no relation to the president) who, as the head of the presidential administration, has been one of the most influential people in Armenia's government. However, Sargsyan, who has a reputation of a Western-educated intellectual and a skilled manager, is to a certain extent immune from the negative stereotypes associated with the so-called 'oligarchs' and 'old-school' Republicans.

CHALLENGES

While these personal changes have created a largely positive atmosphere around the new cabinet, serious challenges lie ahead. There are high expectations surrounding Karapetyan's cabinet and it will require a lot of effort to fulfill these. Although

Armenia, which has no significant hydrocarbon resources, has suffered less from the recent recession than some other countries in the region, it still has serious economic problems. Armenians suffer from a high level of poverty and unemployment, the growing state debt and the significant predominance of imports over exports are a particular cause for concern. Economic troubles have led to mass migration, as hundreds of thousands of Armenians have become seasonal workers, mostly in Russia, even despite the economic recession there. However, the recession in Russia and other post-Soviet countries also means that Armenia's gains from joining the Eurasian Economic Union are limited. Perceptions of widespread corruption and the lack of the rule of law have hindered foreign investments. Karapetyan's cabinet will have to deal with all of these issues and it does not have much time to demonstrate that it is on the right track. In April 2017, parliamentary elections will take place and given the process of transition to a parliamentary republic, these elections will be crucial in determining Armenia's future. Karapetyan's cabinet will be expected to demonstrate enough achievements in order to secure the support of the electorate.

In addition to internal politics and socio-economic issues, a question that interests many observing Armenian politics is whether the changes in the government could influence Armenia's foreign policy. There has been quite a lot of speculation in this regard, especially as Karapetyan, having spent several years working in Gazprom, is sometimes perceived as a pro-Russian figure. On the other hand, Sargsyan (the new minister of defense), is often considered a pro-Western politician, mostly due to the fact that he has studied in the USA, at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. This view, however, ignores the fact that Sargsyan has also graduated from a university in St. Petersburg, and what is more important, he was responsible for communication with the Kremlin when he was the chief of the presidential administration. Similarly, while Karapetyan's background could certainly enable him to work efficiently with Moscow, his image as a 'technocrat' and an 'outsider' can be helpful in terms of fostering relations with the West, especially in the economic sphere.

In any case, the influence of personalities on Armenia's foreign policy should not be overestimated. In Armenia, at least before the constitutional changes are enacted, foreign and security policies are the prerogative of the president, rather than of the cabinet. The fact that Eduard Nalbandyan, who has held the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs since 2008, was reappointed to his post shows that the country's leadership are not looking for major changes in this respect. Due to geopolitical realities, any Armenian government will strive to preserve a certain balance in relations between Russia on the one hand and the West on the other. Armenia has been conducting this policy for a while and it should not be expected to abandon it, no matter which particular personalities are in government. >

NEW GOVERNMENT PROFILES



IGNATI ARAQELYAN
RA Minister of Agriculture

In office since
20 September 2016

Born in 1972

1998-2016, Yerevan Brandy Company Pernod Ricard Group, expert accountant, chief accountant, finance director, Deputy Executive Director, Executive Director As of September 20, 2016, Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Armenia



ARMEN AMIRYAN
RA Minister of Culture

In office since
27 September 2016

Born in 1967

1984-1985, Armenian SSR State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, assistant director
1988-1995, Armenian SSR State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, Moderator
1997-2015, Armenia National Radio State Enterprise; National Radio of Armenia State Closed Joint-Stock Company, Executive Director
2010-2013, Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan, Department of Culture, Head of TV and Radio Journalism Chair
2015-2016, Armenian Public TV and Radio Company, Board member
As of September 27, 2016, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Armenia



VIGEN SARGSYAN
RA Minister
of Defense

In office since
3 October 2016

Born in 1975

1995-1998, Assistant, Adviser to President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia

2001-2011, Lecturer at the American University of Armenia
2003-2009, Assistant to the President of the Republic of Armenia

2009-2011, Deputy Chief of Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia

2011-2016, Chief of Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia

As of October 3, 2016, Defense Minister of the Republic of Armenia



SUREN KARAYAN
Minister of Economic Development
and Investments

In office since
27 September 2016

Born in 1973

1997-1998, Ministry of Finance and Economy, leading specialist at Tax Policy Department (on contractual basis)

1998-1999, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Acting Head of Tax Policy Department Unit, Head of Tax Policy Department Unit

1999-2000, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Acting Head of Tax Policy Department, Head of Tax Policy Department

2000-2001, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Deputy Head of General Department of State Revenue Policy, Head of Tax Policy Department

2001-2002, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Head of General Department of State Revenue Policy

2002-2006, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Head of the State Revenue Policy Department

2006-2008, Ministry of Finance and Economy Deputy Minister
2008-2015, Ministry of Finance, Deputy Minister

2015-2016, First Deputy Minister of International Economic Integration and Reforms

As of October 6, 2016, Minister of Economic Development and Investments



ASHOT MANUKYAN
Minister of Energy Infrastructures
and Natural Resources

In office since
20 September 2016

Born in 1968

1994-1995, Respublika Armenia daily, special correspondent

1995-1997, International Committee of the Basel Banking Supervision, executive secretary of the regional group of Central Asia and South Caucasus

1995-1997, Central Bank of Armenia, Staff / Board Secretary

1997-1998, Information-Analytical Center for Economic Reforms (joint program of the World Bank and the Government of the Republic of Armenia), Project Manager, Center Director

1997-1998, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Chief of Staff / Head of General Department

1998-1999, Office of the Prime Minister, Chief of Prime Minister's Staff

1999-2001, National Television of Armenia, Deputy Executive Director

2001-2003, Public TV and Radio of Armenia, Deputy Chairman of Board

2003-2004, Mitsubishi corporation, consultant

2004-2015, Hrazdan Power Company / HRAZTPP OJSC, Deputy Director General

2015-2016, Energo Invest Holding JSC, CEO

As of October 6, 2016, Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources of the Republic of Armenia



VARDAN ARAMYAN
Acting Minister
of Finance

In office since
20 September 2016

Born in 1975

1999-2002, Specialist at the Monetary Division of the Monetary Policy Department of the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia; Specialist at the Division for Relations with the State Budget

2002-2003, Senior Specialist at the Real Sector Analysis and Modeling Division of the Department of Monetary Policy of the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia;

Macroeconomist at the Central Bank's Real Sector Analysis and Modeling Division of the Department of Monetary Policy

2003-2008, Head of Foreign Economic Relations and Foreign Exchange Policy Division of the Monetary Policy Department of the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia;

Head of Foreign Economic Relations Division of the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia

2008-2013, Deputy Minister of Finance of the Republic of Armenia

2013-2016, First Deputy Chief of Presidential Staff

As of September 20, 2016, Minister of Finance of the Republic of Armenia



LEVON ALTUNYAN
RA Minister
of Healthcare

In office since
 27 September 2016

Born in 1958

1986-1987, Hrazdan central regional hospital; Ambulance doctor – intern
 1987-1989, Hrazdan central regional hospital; Anesthesiologist
 1989-1995, Research Institute of Traumatology and Orthopedics; Anesthesiologist
 1996-2016, EFES insurance company (since 2004, Ingo Armenia insurance company); Founder and Executive Director
 2002-2006, Insurance Market Association ULE; Founding President
 2012-2016, Fund for Rural Economic Development in Armenia; Member of Board of Trustees
 2014-2016, Armenian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (Employers); Member of Board
 As from September 27, 2016
 Minister of Healthcare of the Republic of Armenia



ARTSVIK MINASYAN
RA Minister
of Nature Protection

In office since
 27 September 2016

Born in 1972

1996-1999 Ministry of Finance and Economy, the specialist head of department
 1998, the Yerevan State University Department of Economics, lecturer
 1999-2000. – Deputy Head of the Securities Market Inspectorate
 2000-2005, member of the Securities Commission
 2004-2005 lecturer at Yerevan State Institute of Economy, and from 2005-2006 in Armenia Accountants 'and Auditors' Association
 2005-2007 Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs
 2007-2016. – NA (proportional system, ARF)
 2016, Minister of Economy of the Republic of Armenia
 As of September 27, 2016,
 Minister of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia



HRACHYA ROSTOMYAN
RA Minister of Sport
and Youth Affairs

In office since
 27 September 2016

Born in 1981

1997-1999, Ani – 90 Ltd, commodity expert
 2003, Children's dental clinic No. 5, doctor-intern
 2006-2008, Lecturer at the Yerevan State Medical University
 2006-2009, YSMU, Physical Training Chair, Lab Assistant
 2008-2009, Yerevan municipal council, alderman
 March 12, 2006, President of Armenia Basketball Federation
 2010-2012, National Olympic Committee, Secretary-General
 2012-2013, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
 2013-2016, National Olympic Committee, Secretary-General
 As of September 27, 2016,
 Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs of the Republic of Armenia



VAHAN MARTIROSYAN
Minister of Transport, Communication
and Information Technologies

In office since
 20 September 2016

Born in 1962

1984-2000, Yerevan Electrical Equipment Plant, engineer-constructor, constructor bureau chief, deputy chief engineer
 2000-2006, Cornet-AM CJSC Director General
 2006, ArmenTel CJSC Commercial Director
 2006-2010, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Cornet-AM CJSC
 2008-2012, GNC- Alpha CJSC, Chairman of the Board of Directors
 2012-2016, GNC- Alpha CJSC, Chairman of the Board of Directors
 As of October 6, 2016,
 Minister of Transport, Communication and Information Technologies

CONSUL GENERAL OF ARMENIA IN ALEPPO:

“We have no other option but to be optimists”

In October, a convoy of humanitarian aid from Armenia reached Aleppo, which has been in the spotlight of intense military operations. Regional Post talked to Consul General of the Republic of Armenia in Aleppo, Tigran Gevorgyan about the importance and the difficulties of this occasion.

TEXT : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN

Mr. Gevorgyan, tell us about the process of sending aid, taking into consideration the complicated situation in Aleppo. Did you manage to organize everything as scheduled?

Much has been said in regards to sending humanitarian aid to Syria after the President announced his decision. I have delivered a number of speeches and have given interviews on this issue, but now, for the first time I will talk about the difficulties we experienced whilst sending humanitarian aid to Aleppo. First of all, let me state that everything was implemented at a high-level.

We were well aware of the risks we took, while sending the humanitarian aid, especially the risk to our personal safety. Let me remind you that the Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia is the only diplomatic representation currently operating in Aleppo. The others are no longer functioning in Aleppo because of security reasons. So, I will not be exaggerating, if I say that we renewed the message of the Motherland to Syrian Armenians by sending aid. The message reads that we support our compatriots; we are not indifferent to what is going on in Syria, especially in Aleppo. Our main concern about delivering the aid was transferring it to Aleppo



from the Russian airbase Hmeymim in Latakia. The road from Latakia to Aleppo passes through destroyed towns, villages, and settlements. In many places, the road is only a few kilometers away from armed terrorist groups, there are also many cases of road bombings, kidnapping and snipers targeting civilian cars. So, it was necessary to outline a detailed project plan. The successful transfer of humanitarian aid was made possible due to the support of Russian soldiers, who provided military

trucks and accompanied the convoy to Aleppo. The humanitarian aid was transferred to the civilian trucks carrying Armenian tricolor flags from the military trucks near the entrance of the city. After that, the convoy moved to Villas, the Armenian populated districts of Aleppo. The crowd of civilians, as well as the leaders of Armenian religious and community organizations gathered in front of St Mary Armenian Apostolic Church and applauded when the humanitarian aid sent from the

▼
Consul General of the
Republic of Armenia in
Aleppo Tigran Gevorgyan



Republic of Armenia reached the final destination. Of course, that was such an exciting moment.

What was the reaction of Armenians living in Aleppo?

The reaction was overwhelmingly positive. The Armenians in Aleppo were certain about the fact that this was not just material aid. This is evidence of the considerable attention Armenia gives to Armenians in Aleppo and also Syrians. This gave a new meaning and made a positive impact on the city, to the Armenians living in gloomy Aleppo experiencing the military situation, who started to believe in a better future.

In general, what expectations do they have from Armenia?

Armenia has always done its best to support compatriots who want to return to their homeland. The Republic of Armenia covers the expenses related to transfer and accommodation, as well as providing financial assistance, some benefits within the framework of receiving education, health insurance, or starting a business, etc. That is why many of our compatriots see Armenia as a location for their permanent residence, even after the ceasefire.



►
Convoy of humanitarian aid from Armenia arriving in Aleppo



Do you plan to send humanitarian aid to Aleppo again?

First of all, I would like to emphasize that this is not the first time that Armenia has sent humanitarian aid to Syrians affected by war. In 2012, our country delivered humanitarian aid by aircraft to Syria three times. Sending humanitarian aid to Armenians in Aleppo is a priority for the Republic of Armenia. Currently we are discussing implementing a number of projects, supporting Armenians in Aleppo. And we will definitely inform everyone about that after the implementation.

Mr. Gevorgyan, how do you define the status of Armenians in Aleppo? Do you see a chance for a ceasefire in the near future?

For the past seven years I have been on a diplomatic mission in Syria. First of all, I was on a mission in Damascus and for the recent three years I have been the Consul General of the Republic of Armenia in Aleppo. I cannot recall even a day, where I have noticed a glimpse of despair among the local Armenians. No hardship could have taken away the belief in a peaceful future for the Armenians. Our compatriots have never stopped smiling, even in the most difficult conditions. Of course, one day the conflict will end. Nothing lasts forever and we hope a peaceful solution is not far away. We really hope, because we have no other option, but to be optimists and to continue our activity to bring about a peaceful solution. ◆

SAAKASHVILI'S RESIGNATION AND THE FAILED EXPECTATIONS OF A MIRACLE

Hanna Shelest, editor-in-chief of Ukraine Analytica tells why Mikheil Saakashvili's political career in Ukraine didn't go the way everyone expected.

TEXT : HANNA SHELEST, FIRST PUBLISHED IN WWW.NEWEASTERNEUROPE.EU

The decision of President Poroshenko to appoint the former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili as the governor of Odesa region in 2015 came as a surprise. He needed a pro-Ukrainian, pro-President outsider who could break a chain of corruptive connections in the region, but also a bright personality, a man of courage, who would not be afraid to initiate a radical change. It was an "all-in" decision – either a miracle would happen in Odesa or the situation would stay the same. Moreover, for Odesans it was a move to boost their local pride – a president becoming a governor of their region. The question of his foreign origin was the last thing Odesa cared about as, in its history, there have been many foreigners in charge.

However, Odesa hoped for the Saakashvili of 2004 – a bright inspirer and enthusiastic personality capable of changing the environment and attracting investments. The one who inspired everyone when he promised to build in Ukraine a second Batumi – a famous reconstruction and revitalising project of the seaside resort in Georgia. But Odesa received the Saakashvili of 2010 – an uncompromised person who did not tolerate criticism, who was addicted to media attention, still full of

ideas, but more interested in high politics than in everyday work.

From the very beginning two views dominated. First, that for Saakashvili it was a temporary appointment, which he needed in order to show Georgians that they made a mistake by getting rid of him. In a way, it could have been seen as a stepping stone for a triumphal return to Georgia, or at least for a higher position in Kyiv, which would precede his return. The second impression was that Saakashvili did not understand the role of the governor. His early statements and actions indicated the will to introduce changes in the city of Odesa (which was not directly under his jurisdiction), or on the national level. The Odesa Package of Reforms, presented in September 2015, in about 80 per cent addressed national reforms rather than regional development. Moreover, Saakashvili organised anti-corruption forums all over the country and spent more time on national TV and talking to international journalists than in the region.

The initial euphoria of the local activists who were eager to join Saakashvili's team, soon faded, as they became frustrated with the governor's obsession with the media, unsystematic work and unfulfilled promises. For many of

them it appeared easier to continue to work without the governor's support rather than waiting for hours for a short meeting. In fact, Saakashvili turned out to be a man of deconstruction rather than creation. He was quick in destroying the mechanisms and structures of regional governance, but was unable to provide an alternative, create a sustainable, stable and productive administration. While this is not to underestimate and undermine the role of the individuals who joined the governor's or regional administration and dedicated their energy to reform, the role of Saakashvili was more of an inspirer rather than a team leader.

In the classical theory of elites, we have traditional (inherited), charismatic, and legal rulers. While the charismatic ones are good for revolutions and rapid radical transformations, for the stable daily work of state management, legal rulers are needed. Saakashvili is a classic charismatic leader, who unfortunately is in a constant revolutionary mood. With such a manner of leadership, the leader can be a good inspirer, but needs a team who would take on the daily managerial roles to guarantee implementation and sustainability of ideas. The situation was aptly described by the Ukrainian journalist, Maxim Eristavi, who wrote: "Saakashvili's resignation says more about his failure to work within long-term non-populist framework, rather than about Ukraine's reforms".

Ukrainian journalists compiled a list of nine to 30 big promises of governor Saakashvili. Among them was the creation of administrative services centre (similar to the Georgian houses of justice), reconstruction of Odesa-Reni international road (crucial for the southern districts' existence) and moving his office to a tent on a construction site until the central government issues the necessary financing to complete the investment. He also promised the construction of a new airport terminal, open competition for the posts of the head of Odesa region and Odesa Customs, initiating electronic customs procedures,



support for the Odesa “Storm” battalion in Mariupol, attracting investments and fighting corruption, cutting down the number of civil servants in the Odesa Region State Administration, new police attire, etc. However, just a few promises from the list were fulfilled, including the beginning of the Odesa-Reni road reconstruction, partial administration cuts and the opening of the Administrative Services Center, which had been closed down just a few days before the governor’s resignation.

The lack of financing, the opposition of the local old-fashioned elites, high level of corruption and the inability to control the judicial sphere have been among the objective obstacles for the introduction of reforms in Odesa and Ukraine. At the same time, Saakashvili had underestimated the limits to his power in comparison with his Georgian days. He also did not live up to the standards he set himself; soon after declaring the fight against corruption as his top priority, the governor negotiated a compromise on the continuation of the airport construction – one of the biggest corruption scandals in Odesa, where the prosecutor’s office held a serious investigation and the local authorities worked with investors of dubious reputation. The unexpected move of

the governor in December 2015 was explained with the urgent necessity to have a new airport in the city to boost tourism and investments. The promises to open a new airport by summer 2016 have never been fulfilled and are currently postponed by another year. The first rumours about the possible dismissal of Saakashvili by the president appeared in March 2016. According to sources, the two had had a tough conversation which ended with mutual promises about reforms and development projects in the Odesa region. In October 2016, experts and journalists actively discussed the possibility of Saakashvili’s return to Georgia if his party were to win the election – an option, which appeared more possible if one listened to the political statements made during the election campaign in Georgia. Saakashvili and his team were actively involved in the political campaign in the country, as a result of which the Ukrainian embassy in Tbilisi was often called on the carpet by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. In November 2016, there were no more rumours when the announcements came as a snowball – the head of the Odesa region’s police Giorgi Lortkipanidze stepped down and a few hours later, Saakashvili himself announced his

resignation. Within a few days, a number of other members of Saakashvili’s team resigned and a few heads of local districts announced that they were only going to continue working until the appointment of the new governor. Many activists and journalists began to present Saakashvili’s resignation as the biggest tragedy, a betrayal to the EuroMaidan principles and a victory of the corrupt elite, blaming the president and the central government. At the same time, Anatoliy Boyko, the head of the committee of voters in the Odesa region wrote: “we should stop deluding ourselves about Saakashvili, because his misfortune is not an automatic failure for all of us, or depreciation of all the work done by volunteers and himself. First of all, it is a lesson. Idolisation, unwillingness to look sober at him and the things around, to make reasonable estimates – is a guarantee that we will trigger the backlash of populism and will not reach anything”. The main question is what is next to come? Will Saakashvili be able to capitalise on his political influence and enter Ukrainian politics with a strong political party? Or maybe his personal ambitions and desire to fight against everybody will prevent any constructive changes? In July 2016, Saakashvili’s fellows announced the creation of the new political party – Hvylya. However, for the moment it is only an initiative and Saakashvili’s leadership is not guaranteed. Especially given the fact that right after his resignation the governor announced the creation of the Platform of New Forces political movement. While initially there were rumours that Saakashvili would join forces with the young reformers, such as Mustafa Nayem, Sergey Leschenko and Vasyly Gatsko, they turned out to be false when in July 2016 the new DemAlliance party was founded without the former governor. The reason for his absence in the new movement might have been his prolonged bargaining with president Poroshenko’s administration. Thus, only time will tell what is next for both Ukraine and Mikheil Saakashvili. ♦

1988 EARTHQUAKE RELATED COLLECTABLES

After the disastrous earthquake that shook Armenia in 1988, several charity projects were implemented to help Armenian people. Among others several collectables — post stamps, table medals, limited edition coins — were produced in Soviet Union and abroad.



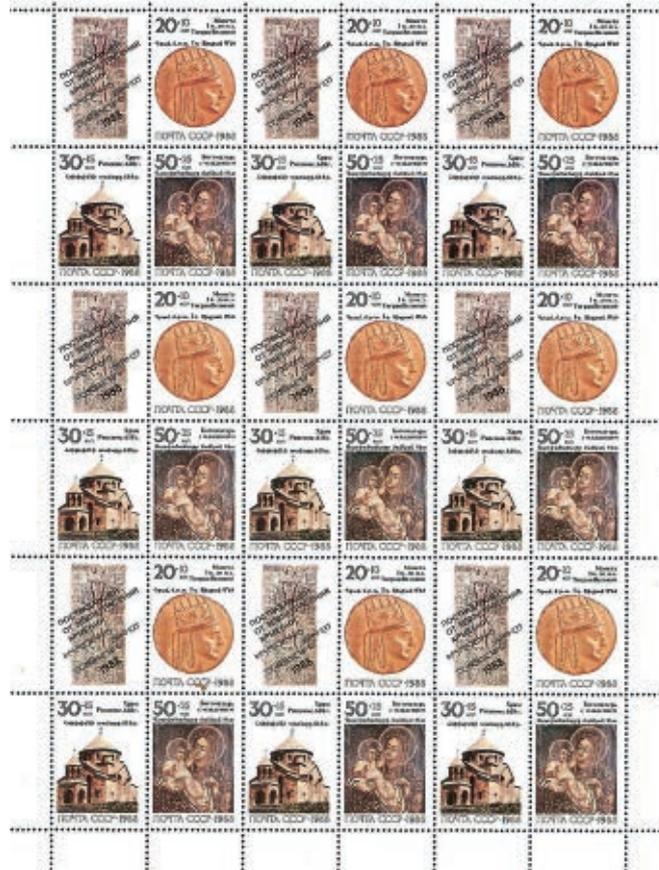
➤ Sheet of Soviet post stamps dedicated to the victims of the earthquake, 1988

◀ A postcard and two stamps, released in 1990 on the Memorial day of the earthquake victims

➤ 1988 earthquake commemorative medal

◀ 1988 earthquake commemorative medal

➤ Soviet 3 rouble limited edition collectable coin, 1989



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