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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.

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SERGEY LAVROV: “For the benefit of our nations”

Exclusive interview with the minister of foreign affairs of Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov on Russian-Armenian relations and situation in the region in general.

INTERVIEW : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : ARMENPRESS



Mr. Lavrov, a rapprochement between Russia and Turkey has recently begun. Should Armenia watch this rapprochement with caution, given the complicated relations between Armenia and Turkey and the special relations Turkey has maintained with Azerbaijan?

This normalization between Russia and Turkey should not be regarded as a process that may harm other states. Russia has no hidden agenda. We build no political and no economic alliances directed against third countries or adversely affecting any interests. In general, we are open for constructive and mutually respectful cooperation with all who express same readiness. We are convinced that getting the Russian-Turkish ties out of months-long crisis will enhance trust and mutual understanding in the region. We expect the gradual restoration of bilateral cooperation with Ankara to benefit peace, security and stability in Transcaucasia.

The border between Armenia and Turkey which now de facto delimitates Turkey and the Eurasian Economic Union remains sealed. Can Russia play a positive role in settling this issue?

We would most certainly welcome the opening of the Armenian-Turkish segment of the EAEU's external border for free movement of people, goods and services. This will obviously benefit the entire region.

Sergey Lavrov in the Armenian Genocide Complex during his visit in 2016



citizens. When Yerevan and Ankara sit at the negotiating table, Russia will be ready to provide them with most vigorous assistance.

Could you describe geopolitical relations between Armenia and Russia as satisfactory, and what areas do you think have potential?

We consider our current relations with Armenia to be at a high level. We have a long record of friendship and mutual support and are bonded by cultural and spiritual affinity. Russia and Armenia are reliable allies in international affairs and security. Together, we are forging the forward-looking Eurasian Economic Union. We have a shared perspective on today's most pressing challenges.

Our ties are based on the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of August 29, 1997, and the Declaration on Allied Cooperation Oriented to the 21st Century of September 26, 2000. The legal framework for our cooperation includes dozens of documents embracing every area and aspect.

One can hardly overestimate the role of a close trust-based dialogue at the highest level in our joint work. In 2016, President Vladimir Putin and President Serzh Sargsyan met on two occasions in Moscow (on March 10 and on August 10) and once in St. Petersburg, on June 20, on the margins of the trilateral summit on the Nagorny Karabakh settlement. Vladimir Putin visited Yerevan on October 14, 2016, to participate in the events in the framework of the CSTO Collective Security

WE CONSIDER OUR CURRENT RELATIONS WITH ARMENIA TO BE AT A HIGH LEVEL. WE HAVE A LONG RECORD OF FRIENDSHIP AND MUTUAL SUPPORT AND ARE BONDED BY CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL AFFINITY

Let me note that Russia played an important role in restoring the relations between Armenia and Turkey during the active phase of this process in 2007-2009. The collective efforts, first and foremost those of Yerevan and Ankara, led to the signing in Zurich on October 10, 2009 of the Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations and the Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations between the two countries in the presence of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, France and Slovenia, the U.S. Secretary of State and the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Sadly, the normalization process subsequently stalled and by now has come to a complete halt. It is of principle importance, though, that the sides have demonstrated the ability to reach agreement and take serious and responsible decisions. I am convinced that Armenia and Turkey are able to resolve the current problems. That said, quite a lot depends on themselves. After all, the quality of the politicians is measured not only by the depth of their realistic analysis of the objective difficulties, but also by their ability to be optimistic in order to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of their

Council. Our bilateral trade and economic relations gained an additional impetus following the official visit of the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, on April 7, 2016, to Yerevan.

What about economic partnership between the two countries?

Russia is Armenia's leading economic partner, whose share in the Republic's foreign trade amounts to 24.3 per cent. The bilateral trade between the two countries reached USD 1.24 billion in 2015 and USD 745.3 million in the period from January to August 2016. A considerable increase in Armenian exports of agricultural products to the Russian market has been registered lately. Accumulated Russian investments in the Armenian economy amount to USD 4.3 billion, making up 40 per cent of its overall foreign investments. The total number of enterprises with Russian participation is about 1,300. They operate in a wide range of sectors, such as energy, transportation, banking, telecommunications, mining and smelting. Intergovernmental commissions on economic and military and technical cooperation pursue their work. Cooperation between legislative authorities steadily progresses, including in the framework of the Interparliamentary Commission. There is an increase in inter-regional exchanges involving about 70 constituent entities of the Russian Federation. On October 14, 2016, Yerevan hosted a successful Fifth Russian-Armenian Interregional Forum.

I would like to highlight the humanitarian and spiritual ties that have bound our peoples for ages. Names of many Armenian academicians and artists have been listed among those who constitute an important part of Russia's



TOGETHER WITH ARMENIAN FRIENDS WE SHALL CONTINUE WORKING ON FURTHER **UNLOCKING THEIR TRULY LIMITLESS POTENTIAL** FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR NATIONS

cultural heritage. Armenia has traditionally offered a warm welcome to Russian performance groups. Contacts in the educational sphere are growing stronger. Eight branches of Russian higher educational institutions operate in your country, providing education for the total of over two thousand students. In September 2015, the Lomonosov Moscow State University opened its branch in Yerevan. I cannot but mention the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University, which nowadays ranks among the most prestigious higher educational institutions in the Republic. Fruitful collaboration between the foreign ministries of the two countries remains an integral part of multifaceted Russian-Armenian cooperation. I highly appreciate our meaningful dialogue with my Armenian counterpart Edward Nalbandian. I warmly recall my official visit to Yerevan on April 21-22, 2016, during which we held an amicable and detailed discussion of the major items on the bilateral, regional and global agenda.

We are grateful to Armenia for cosponsoring the Russian draft resolution "Combating Glorification of Nazism and Other Practices That Contribute to Fuelling Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance" approved by the UN General Assembly on December 17, 2015. We appreciate the support Armenia provided to us when the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly was voting on the Ukrainian-sponsored draft resolution "Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol" on November 15, 2016.

So, can we say Russian-Armenian retaliations have also a bright future?

Indeed, the relations between Russia and Armenia are comprehensive in nature. Together with Armenian friends we shall continue working on further unlocking their truly limitless potential for the benefit of our nations. ♦



ARARAT

When “From the very deep of the heart” is not the figure of speech

Very often, we don't pay proper attention to the things that are close by. We will never plan a visit by our own to a museum in our home country and enjoy it when we have enough time, enough options and enough possibilities. Why we should always hurry to visit a museum? The recent example. Crossing over the Victory Bridge in Yerevan in the hard day's evening and I caught myself that I had never visited the Yerevan Brandy Company's museum, one of the most visited tourist attractions in Armenia. After all, it is better late than never, right? The hour that I spent there was an hour of Revelations that what it was.

TEXT : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN

The history of the ARARAT is quite well known among Armenians because it is also an important part of Armenian history and Armenian identity. But here is where the very illusion of knowledge keeps us away from the real expanding of our curiosity. Let's say that you always knew that wooden barrels are very important for brandy making, but did you know that these barrels are all handmade by skillful masters, and then are commissioned for eighty years, and after that are used as part of the fire for the preparation of new barrels? You can see all of this at the ARARAT Museum's interactive booth, where even the 3D reincarnation of a cooper is in line with the work safety standards. These barrels are waiting for the purest part of the spirit to be filled in. In fact only the middle part of the second distillation which is poetically called “heart” goes for ageing. Thus, when ARARAT says from “Heart to Heart”, it is not a figure of speech. Another thing: you might have heard that while in the barrels, the spirit of the brandy evaporates, losing about 3 per cent from each barrel. It's called the “angels' share”. And as Yerevan Brandy Company's museum is located in the Ageing Cellar, during the tour we felt like... angels! At least we understood why the Angels are always smiling on the paintings. Here is also the very place where you can meet with the around 30 different presidential barrels. As we have been told

there is a tradition during high rank visits of the Head of States a Special Barrel is offered to them.

The second part of the tour is dedicated to the ARARAT's history, starting from the founding by the Tairyants brothers, and then on to the acquisition of the company by Russian businessman Shustov who was known for his skillful promotion campaign that brought Armenian brandy to the Russian Tsar's court and gained a reputation at numerous expos and fairs. The latest medal is the Gold one received a year ago in the prestigious San Francisco Wine and Spirits Competition. Probably the finest stand in the hall – the bottles of Armenian brandy, which show the evolution of ARARAT bottles. I am not going to stop on each of them, nor on all of them in this story – just not to spoil. They definitely deserve to be seen closely. Fortunately, by the end of the tour, as thousands of tourists do each year, we had the opportunity to taste some of the great ARARAT brandies: Akhtamar, Nairi and Dvin. By the way did you know, that to warm the brandy up easier one should hold the glass in the left hand as it is closer to the heart? Leaving the Museum I had just one thought – the true Museum is the one that provokes you to come again. I will come again. Not only for another tour, but maybe also to attend a mysterious event “ARARAT Speakers Night” the banner of which I saw right before the building of Yerevan Brandy Company. ♦

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ARMENIA: HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Around the world, the role and power of the private sector is increasing in both global, as well as local markets. Businesses are increasingly being seen as important players in social and economic development on every level. Armenia is no exception.

TEXT : NAZARETH SEFERIAN, SOFIA MANUKIAN / CSR ARMENIA NGO

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be defined as a business function that allows the company to harmonize its activities with the community and environment in which it operates with the aim of mutual benefit and sustainability. In Armenian business circles, usage of the term arguably began around 2005-2006, when VivaCell (now VivaCell-MTS) launched mobile services in the country and began a broad philanthropy and community investment program, providing the phrase “corporate social responsibility” with extensive media coverage. But to what extent have businesses in Armenia embraced CSR and embedded it in their everyday activities over the past 10 years?

In 2009, the profile on Armenia in *The World Guide to CSR*, a publication compiled by CSR International, stated that CSR was still “poorly understood” in the country, with little “visible activity.” It found that most of the projects being conducted in the name of CSR were simply corporate philanthropy initiatives, and that public relations was the motivation driving them. It is worth nothing that, even now, the phrase mainly used in the country for this topic remains “corporate social responsibility” while many other business communities have evolved to talking about “sustainability.” The 2008-2012 program of the Government of Armenia even explicitly stated “promoting corporate social responsibility” as one of its objectives. Nevertheless, there were no state initiatives to spur the business sector into action in this area.



Pain Photo

However, the years that followed did show some improvement, specifically led by the telecommunications sector. VivaCell-MTS continued to be the most visible player, with Orange Armenia and Beeline both implementing innovative projects and developing useful partnerships. Orange Armenia conducted a CSR Stakeholder Dialogue, the first of its kind in the country, and introduced eco-labeling and bottom-of-the-pyramid solutions that made the internet more accessible to Armenian villagers. Beeline developed partnerships to encourage the use of internet technology in the classroom. All companies worked to promote the concept of child protection and internet safety, although they worked in silos, possibly missing out on any synergies that could have come from collaboration towards what

was essentially a common interest. In 2013, VivaCell-MTS announced that it was using the ISO 26000 guideline for social responsibility, a big milestone for the adoption of sustainable business practices in Armenia. The information technology (IT) sector has also had some success stories in the area of CSR. Synopsys has developed a curriculum with the Armenian State Engineering University that fills a gap in the technology education sector in the country, while simultaneously solving a labor pool problem for the company. The IT sector has been demonstrating promising growth in the country for a number of years now, and it seems only natural that expectations of these companies will grow when it comes to being better corporate citizens as well. >



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In the banking and finance sector, HSBC has had a modest but stable community program for several years, focusing on the education of underprivileged children. ACBA Credit Agricole has a sound set of internal policies to reduce energy and paper use. Now, other players, such as Ameria Bank and Converse Bank, are becoming more active in this area, shifting their focus from philanthropic initiatives to a more strategic engagement in sustainable business.

Nonetheless, the period from 2010 to 2016 still remains a mixed bag when it comes to responsible business in Armenia. The mining sector was often at the center of attention with some mining companies engaging in environmental destruction or neglect, leaving environmental activists frustrated at their efforts to maintain environmental justice for themselves and the communities, while the mines were hailed as big employers for the village inhabitants. In 2014, the Government and the World Bank hosted a conference on Responsible Mining, the first of its kind in a country that has hundreds of potential and active mines. While the international donor community hailed the event as a big step forward, activists denounced it as a diversion tactic and used the event to stage a protest. Shortly afterwards, the American University of Armenia established the Center for Responsible Mining, potentially taking on the role of a neutral participant with valuable expertise. Among other activities, the Center is taking samples of soil and drinking water from mining communities to assess the impact of the companies and has already voiced concerns regarding the level of arsenic in the soil in some areas. In the retail sector, some supermarkets caused surprise in July 2016 when they introduced a 10-dram payment per plastic bag provided to shoppers. Such payments are standard practice in many Western countries and have led to a decline in plastic bag usage when properly combined with public awareness initiatives and the provision of viable alternatives. However, this move back-



SPOTNIK / JASMIN PESKOVITS

fired in Armenia and many shoppers were outraged at what they saw as an attempt for big supermarkets to “make customers cover their costs.” There was no visible communication by any of the supermarkets that reducing the use of plastic bags would benefit Armenia’s environment, and the motives of this change in policy still remain unclear. It is a common mis-perception that CSR is only relevant to large businesses. But in fact, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) around the world have a number of exciting CSR programs, and they form an important part of the picture. Armenia has a few promising companies in this area, such as the Green Bean, a chain of coffee shops that has had sustainability at the heart of its design, waste management practices, human resource policies, and so on. Another success story in this area is Nairian Cosmetics, featuring all-natural components in its products and a first-of-its-kind recycling program in the country for its cream jars. While companies have been making headway in CSR individually in Armenia, the history of cross-sector collaboration on sustainability issues in the country does not (yet) make for good reading. The United Nations launched its Global Compact initiative in the country around 2008-2009, and featured more than 35 members at one point. A local Steering Committee was created, essentially handing over control of the group from the UN to the representatives of the private sector. But the effort failed. A new effort was needed to establish a community of like-minded businesses,

working together towards CSR. Aimed at boosting companies’ engagement in adopting and implementing CSR policies, an NGO called CSR Armenia was launched in 2016. One of its first activities has been co-founding the Responsible Business Network (RBN) with the American Chamber of Commerce in Armenia (AmCham). AmCham is a powerful business organization in the country and a platform bringing over 100 companies together. AmCham has already focused the attention of its membership on the environmental challenges facing Armenia through its business magazine in 2013, with yet another issue on CSR and Corporate Governance planned for 2017. With the Responsible Business Network, AmCham and CSR Armenia NGO seek to promote corporate citizenship and find common ground through shared commitments in the areas of stakeholder engagement, environmental stewardship, responsible procurement, education, and more. The Network is intended to grow and include any company in the country that displays an interest in CSR, while having prior experience in this area is not required to join the RBN. The concept of responsible business has seen very slow progress so far, but there is hope that the private sector will understand its role in Armenia’s progress. Inevitably, there will be considerable positive impact on the businesses themselves resulting from the use of more sustainable practices, and this “win-win” situation will benefit the whole country and herald a new period in Armenia’s economic maturity. ♦



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TAPPING INTO THE RUSSIAN MARKET

The hot topic in the business sphere in Armenia now – is the opportunities of the +180m market opened up by the signing of EEU agreement. Russia, a 4-trillion\$ economy, that only for the last couple of years has stagnant growth rates, has the potential to reshape Armenia’s businesses and the economy as a whole.

TEXT : SONA GRIGORYAN

While some local companies have turned Russia into their single largest source of profits and growth, others, especially smaller scale companies in other sectors, have had daunting challenges to capture higher revenues from the market. Russia had a ~ -0.6 growth last year and is expected to grow by 1.5% in 2017. The commodity prices still remain the major force shaping the economy. And since no sign of increasing oil prices are noticed in the horizon, the economy is still expected to have hard times. The sanctions on major European imports are yet another force shaping the economic trends. Russia’s retail shelves were hardly filled due to the sanctions. Thus, the major supermarkets have

been going the extra mile to find potential suppliers for basic food products. This has had a major impact on the strict policies that supermarket chains used to execute. The strict barriers to entry are now milder and more opportunities of entering the major supermarket chains are available. Russian rouble is weak (with a slight trend of getting stronger recently), making local products less competitive cost wise. This issue is still part of the scale game, as the large-scale business can survive on low margins, whereas for local businesses most of the time, the profits will be too low. Thus, Moscow is achievable only for businesses with significant opportunities and abilities to scale up. Time has come for Armenian companies to utilize the advantage of being close to the huge market of Russia. However, Armenian companies can only do that through well thought and accurately carved strategic moves. Our thinking is that only by recognizing the key strategic challenges of the Russian market, the Armenian companies can go forward. Below we identify the strategic challenges.

SCALE IS EVERYTHING

This is no secret. It is self-evident that getting into retail chains in Russia, or other distribution/sales points for that matter, requires large scale operations. Scale gives the advantage of efficiency, ability to negotiate with the retail chains, ability to distribute the minimum quantities required by the chains (which in Armenian standards are huge and sometimes impossible). Only a few Armenian companies can achieve the scale sufficient enough to be a supplier of Russian retail chains. A very successful example is well known company Spayka. It emerged from being a distribution company, to one of the largest agro-product exporters to Russia from Armenia. The emergence was due to the accurate recognition of opportunities and leveraging the scale of the company. Now Spayka collects agro products from numerous

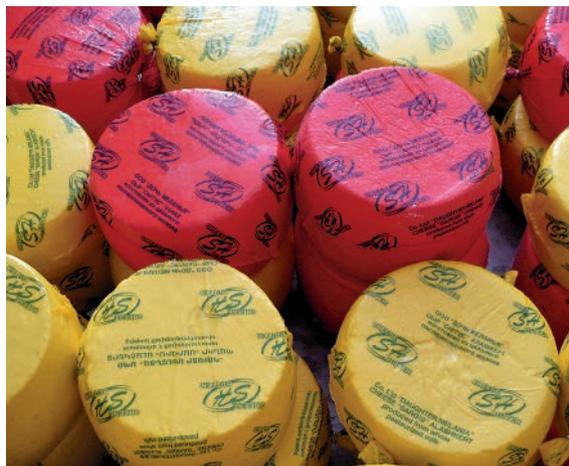


local small scale producers, calibrates the quality and distributes the Russian market – utilizing its scale, negotiating power and the distribution network. This is a classic success case and in case being smart, the government could use the same logic, for helping small scale producers to unite in a large scale supplier branded under the same umbrella and negotiating on the same terms. However, this is a complex task that the government of Armenia has so far been unable to realize.

The Wines of Armenia – is another success case, that Ameria Russ and its affiliates – a Russia based group of companies (predominantly owned by Armenians) is utilizing. The mainly small scale Armenian wine producers are united under one brand to market their entry to Russia successfully. Earlier, EV Consulting suggested this approach under its Industrial Policy, developed in 2010, for the government to form an association and help brand the wine makers. However, the private player did it, proving the idea was feasible.

EFFICIENCY IS EVERYTHING

Since scale is something that only a few Armenian companies can achieve, the alternative to bit the Russian market – is through robust efficiency. By achieving high efficiency levels Armenian companies can achieve the price advantage in comparison to other



▼
Sona Grigoryan,
Junior partner at
EV Consulting



products available in Russian markets. For now, most local companies are not price competitive. An additional issue is the weak rouble, which makes things even more difficult.

Local companies have high unutilized potential to increase their operational and management efficiency levels, which will translate into lower costs and thus lower price levels. Our observation in the Russian companies (EV Consulting's Moscow office has been operating in Russian market and actively working with Russian companies since 2014) shows that management wise Armenian and Russian comparable companies have about the "same" level of management efficiency. It is time to have a quality leap forward in our management capacities. Armenia has the potential to become the management powerhouse in the region, which will make the local, even small scale companies efficient in comparison to others in the region.

Thus, local companies need to focus on utilizing management and operational efficiencies to achieve competitively priced production, which is yet another strategy to enter the Russian market. What the government can do to foster the management quality increase in the country – is to improve the higher education in management, bringing the businesses and educational centres closer together, and investing in other areas of management education.

STRATEGY IS EVERYTHING.

Choosing the right strategy and entering the high value niche segments is the ultimate path that Armenian companies should try to achieve. Of course not all segments and sectors of the economy have this opportunity. However, studying the market and carefully choosing the right segments to target will give a better understanding and perhaps the opportunity. Since low scale disadvantage is something that not all companies can bit, then producing low volume high value products/services can be the answer. One popular example is in the cheese production. The Russian market is hungry for cheese. But the cheese market is very multi layered. And the local mass producers of average Lori or other relatively cheap cheese products – have serious difficulties in entering the market. Whereas, blue cheese or other types that have high margins and are the absolute favourites in Russian market – have considerable opportunities.

Again, having said this – several factors are important to consider. Even in high value products, efficiency can serve as a vital advantage. Since price, even if not of first importance in this case, still plays a role in negotiating with distribution companies. Also, another factor is that even if the company produces an extraordinary quality product, selling is ever more important. Thus, distribution

companies in Russian market earn very high margins in some cases. Unfortunately, there have been failure cases in Armenian reality very recently, when the local producers, having a high value quality product, have not been able to negotiate the desired price, due to not accepting the necessity to share the margin with distribution companies. As a result, the company did not enter the Russian market, and is in liquidation process now.

More abundant opportunities of high value products are available in technology segment. Armenian IT sector can be quite competitive in the Russian market. One of the key contributors to this is that the problem of high transportation costs and periodic land accessibility issues are not a bottleneck for this sector, meanwhile being strong headaches for other sectors. One successful example is National Instruments, the branch of the international engineering company that successfully utilizes its sales abilities in Russian markets both for itself and for its affiliate companies.

Armenian companies have all the potential to be competitive in the Russian market. However, this can come true only in case of accurate business strategy. Often in Russia, the fundamental barrier to success is less about identifying the opportunity and more about choosing and executing the right strategy. ♦



DAYS OF FRANCOPHONIE IN ARMENIA

As part of the francophonie season in Armenia, which will take place from 2 March to 30 April 2017 and will present hundreds of cultural and educational events throughout the country, the French Embassy in Armenia organizes The 15 days of Digital Francophonie on March 15-30.

Program includes round tables on digital publishing and e-reputation, an economic meeting on francophone start-ups, and a language contest. The highlights of the program are a unique concert with participation of smartphones as musical instruments and a festival of francophone cinema.

This year Armenia will also be a part of the Grand Tour, which will take place throughout 2017 in five continents. It consists of hundred steps, including 20 in France. These must-see meetings, among others, include variety of topics from visual arts to gastronomy in the forms of performing arts, dance, cinema, photography, music and literature, and highlighting cultural heritage, creation and innovation. This major event is organized by the International Organization of Francophonie and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development.

20-26 MARS 2017 AU CINÉMA MOSCOU SEMAINE DU CINÉMA FRANCOPHONE

20.03	
	
Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu? 19:00 Grande Salle	
21.03	
	Je fais le mort 18:30 Petite Salle
	Eden 20:30 Petite Salle
22.03	
	Juste la fin du monde 20:00 Salle Bleue
	Timbuktu 20:30 Petite Salle
23.03	
	Demain 20:00 Salle Bleue
24.03	
	Le Nouveau 18:30 Petite Salle
	Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu? 20:30 Petite Salle
25.03	
	Timbuktu 18:30 Petite Salle
	Je fais le mort 20:30 Petite Salle
26.03	
	Yves Saint Laurent 20:00 Salle Bleue

ENTRÉE LIBRE

Films avec sous-titres russes





SCHEDULE

MARCH 15-30

Date	Time	Event/Deadline	Field	Place	Conditions
Wednesday 15 march	From 9 to 18:30	Conference: "E-Reputation, management and protection issues for businesses and individuals"	Discussion of ideas	AGBU	For subscribers
Friday 17 march	From 14 to 16	Round Table: Broadcasting of French and Armenian literature at the age of the digital book	Culture	AGBU	For subscribers
Saturday 18 march	From 14 to 16	French language competition for 15-25 years olds: "Tell me 10 words on canvas" (general culture, expression and language tests).	Education	Alliance Française	For subscribers
From 20 to 26 march	(Informations and schedules on the website and facebook of the French Embassy)	Francophone Film Festival (Films in French with Russian subtitles: "Qu'est ce qu'on a fait au bon dieu?", "Timbuktu", "Je fais le mort", "Juste la fin du monde", "Le nouveau", "Eden", "Demain", "Yves Saint Laurent")	Culture	Cinéma Moscow	Free entry
Tuesday 21 march	More info on ambafrance-am.org	Taste of France / Good France	Gastronomy	Partner restaurants	More info on ambafrance-am.org
Thursday 23 march	From 14 to 16	Economic meeting: Francophone start-ups and digital innovation	Economic meeting	AGBU	For subscribers
Friday 24 march	18:30	Concert with smartphones organized by GRAME, Association MUSCARI and TUMO in Yerevan	Culture	TUMO	18:30
Thursday 30 march	14:30	Francophone theater Festival in Yerevan, Hamazgayin Theater	Culture	Theater Hamazgayin	14:30

FROM LYON TO YEREVAN:

Music programming and artistic mobility

With cooperation between the French National Center for Music Creation, Grame, and Armenian Tumo Center for the Creative Technologies, new technologies meet art. Here is how it is going to happen.

TEXT : JAMES GIROUDON, YANN ORLAREY, CATINCA DUMITRASCU / PHOTO : GRAME

GRAME, NATIONAL CENTER FOR MUSIC CREATION (LYON)

Grame is one of six centers of a network of national centers for musical creation, a label created by the French Ministry of Culture in 1997. Organized around an artistic creation hub and a research hub, Grame's main mission focuses on the design and the realization of musical and multimedia projects, in the context of technological innovation and transversality of the arts. All the activities of creation and research are underpinned by several axes: the establishment of collaborative processes and sharing, both in artistic and scientific content, as well as in institutional and cultural partnerships; the permanence of an arts-science

synergy, that combines the two hubs for creation and for research of Grame; support for digital writing, including the constitution of creative audio-digital platforms for artists and amateur audiences; the research for a societal dimension of creation through awareness-raising actions and events addressing large audiences, across all generations; the heart of the activity concerns the musical field and in a more extended way, all territories of the sound. However, music does not escape the deep mutations that agitate all of the artistic expressions. It occupies even a privileged position, being in direct contact with the incessant



extensions and outsourcing of humans (connected objects, augmented instruments, virtual memories), as evidenced by the creations for mobile phones. In this sense, Grame strives to be a place of artistic perspective in convergence and with technological innovation. The current season of concerts and exhibitions, proposed by Grame, is in phase with the new virtual, artistic and educational environment that are developing around sound creation on the web and in the universe of smartphones (Smartmômes, educational work for smartphones, first workshops FaustAudio Playground ...). They rely among others on different declinations of the FAUST language.



FAUST, A PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE AT THE SERVICE OF MUSIC

The story begins in 2010. At the time, Grame's scientific department had been working for several years on the FAUST project (Functional Audio Stream), which aims to provide a high-level notation for concisely describing electronic musical instruments, as well as digital tools for implementing them. Instruments written in the FAUST language can work with all kinds of material and not just powerful conventional computers. It is natural that Grame began to take an interest in the possibilities of smartphones. The development for smartphones is quite complex and significantly differs from that of conventional computers.

But the devices now have a power of significant calculation and are specially equipped with sensors! Starting from 2010, two axes of work will develop in parallel. On the one hand, the use of smartphones synthesizes sound, and on the other hand the use of the sensors embedded on the smartphone gesturally controls the synthesis made on a conventional computer. These promising developments around smartphones, resulted in a large participative concert that took place in the framework of the 2014 edition of the Biennale Musiques en Scène organized by Grame. A musical command was given to the composer and improviser Xavier Garcia, who worked closely

with Grame's scientific department to develop a series of applications for iOS and Android, named Smartfaust. The artistic approach is innovative in more than one way, especially since the instruments / applications for smartphones are co-written simultaneously with the pieces they will be used to interpret. Another notable feature of these instruments is the lack of a graphical interface. The musician doesn't need to look at the phone to play it because everything is done between the hand and the ear. The concert took place in two stages: the performance of three pieces for the "chorus" of smartphones and soloists, then a fourth piece involving the audience. The concert was a great success and had a magnificent impact.



AMPLIFIED IMAGINATION IN CLASSES

The pedagogical interest of this approach was clear for all those involved. The Smartfaust instrument applications opened the way for an essential pedagogical practice, where the important notions are the instrumental gesture, musical play, collective practice, adequacy between a fully adopted technology by young people and its opening to artistic productions. This was all made accessible without going through the process of a discouraging technical apprenticeship.

In other words, from the start, studying for a musical production is not entirely limited to the mastery of a software or a high-level technological know-how, it is linked immediately to the essentialities: mastery of gesture and body attitude, concentration, listening to one's own production and that of others. In other words, all the components of a musical practice are presented from the beginning. In 2015, Grame organized Smartfaust workshops in several cities of France (Bourg-en-Bresse, St.Etienne, Lyon)

in partnership with Momeludies (structure which regularly invites composers to write musical pieces for children).

FAUST AUDIO PLAYGROUND, A NEW WAY OF APPROACHING MUSICAL PROGRAMMING

Wishing to go even further in its pedagogical approach and to involve young people at all stages of the artistic creation process (from the conception of violin to musical performance), the platform Faust Audio Playground (<http://faust.grame.fr/faustplayground>) was launched by Grame at the beginning of 2015. Designed for children, it allows for a simplified programming of musical instruments due to a series of high-level components that are assembled graphically. Once the instrument is tested and validated on the platform, it can be "exported" as a native application for Android and installed on the Smartphone by simply flashing a QR code. The initiation of computer programming through music is a very promising approach and it is in this sense that a collaboration is being established between Grame and Tumo (Center for Creative Technologies) in Yerevan, one of the most interesting places in the field of digital pedagogy.



WHEN GRAME MET TUMO

During the winter of 2015, Grame discovered Tumo, thanks to the association Muscari and its president Manoug Pamokdjian who worked tirelessly for the valorization of Armenian culture and greater Franco-Armenian exchanges. The facilitator of meetings, Muscari organized the first trip to Yerevan during which Grame was immersed in the universe and teaching philosophy of Tumo and met Marie-Lou Papazian, the director of TUMO in order to identify possible synergies between the two structures. In September 2016, the first workshop for teachers and pupils of Tumo took place in Yerevan, with the objective of working together with Armenian teaching teams, to create a transdisciplinary teaching methodology using music and FAUST language and the web platform Faust Audio Playground. This very first stage demonstrated that a fruitful collaboration was possible between Grame and TUMO, making it possible to enhance the know-how of the two structures, which could then lead to the creation of an innovative pedagogical approach combining musical creation and programming.

TUMO IN LYON

The experience of the first training course at Tumo revealed the necessity for thorough FAUST language training to be provided to Armenian teaching staff and the need to develop a pedagogical method for their students, crossing the skills of all partners. Grame and the association Muscari are pleased to welcome an Armenian delegation between the 6th and 10th of March in Lyon, composed of three teachers and three students from Tumo. This second seminar will aim not only to deepen FAUST language proficiency of the teachers, but also and especially the creation of the transdisciplinary “programming-music” pedagogical method for the creation of a musical programming curriculum within TUMO. The purpose of this approach is to build a relevant



pedagogical program based on the learning of the FAUST language and to explore new ways to raise awareness of music via computer science and to introduce computer science via electronic music. The methodology that was designed as a result of the training will be tested and implemented both among TUMO students and Rhone-Alpine schools.

This second working session between the Grame and Tumo teams was possible thanks to the support of the Muscari association as well as that of the French Embassy in Yerevan which awarded two scholarships to two members of the Armenian delegation. The training that will take place in Lyon during March will not only have the objective of acquiring technological skills but will also award an important place to the discovery of the French cultural and scientific world. The training week will be enriched by travels within the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, which will enable the Tumo team to meet the CIEREC research lecturers (Interdisciplinary Center for Studies and Research on Contemporary Expression) from the University of Saint-Étienne, a class from the Lycée Marie Curie in

Échirolles (38) who learn to use the Faust Playground platform, as well as actors of the Francophonie, in connection with Armenia.

MARCH 2017 EVENTS

After the rich exchanges and working sessions around musical programming, it's now time for a real performance! Upon the initiative of the City of Lyon and the French Embassy in Yerevan, a concert will be organized at TUMO on March 24th as part of the “Francophonie week in Armenia” and will mark the strong partnership between Grame and Tumo. On the program, pieces for marimba (J.S. Bach, Bertrand Dubedout) will join pieces for percussion and the chorus of smartphones (Xavier Garcia) which will project the emotion of the music in an unforgettable way to the public! Guided by the director Jean Geoffroy, for the last piece (titled Beelzebub), the listeners equipped with their smartphones will become the “actors” of the musical piece, and will put themselves in the shoes of the orchestral musicians to experience a new perspective of the sound whilst participating in creating new sound material. ♦

CIS ARMENIA: Children at the center of the educational process

Last September, the CIS Armenia school opened its doors in the center of Yerevan. It is notable not only for its comprehensive curriculum based on the British model (developed by the University of Cambridge and recognized by universities all over the world) but also for its modern approach to education. Here, everything is done to ensure students are happy whilst studying and are supported to discover their real talents. We talked about the changes in education all over the world with the director of CIS Armenia Mr. Runar Salimullin.

TEXT : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : CIS ARMENIA

Mr. Runar, it is understood that education is changing all over the world. What exactly is being changed and why is it so important?

Many things have rapidly changed during the past few years of our lives, in all areas and in the educational system in particular. The industrial age is turning to information and globalization, with significant changes in the economy. Many researches around the world say that the model of education should be reflective of these changes. Kids study today and they will be using their knowledge in five, eight or ten years. The problem is, we have no idea what the world is going to be like then. So, a good school should be focused on preparing the student for the future. To do that, we have to predict what will be the most valuable and useful skills to have in the future.



Are there any examples of these kinds of changes in the world?

Just imagine that twenty to thirty years ago, we had books as a primary source of information. Now we can't imagine our lives without modern gadgets and the internet. With new technologies, new paradigms arise. In my opinion, an interesting example is Finland, a country that is regarded as having one of the most innovative educational systems in the world. Recently they decided to radically change the whole system, focusing more on creativity and their overall approach to education. Now, they have no homework, no conventional classes and subjects. The education is cross-curricular and project-based. They learn languages, history or anything based on

this topic. Even the children are free to decide by themselves what they want to learn.

By the time graduation comes around, many children don't know what they are best at. This is a problem for schools.

Exactly. I believe that one of the most important roles of a modern school is to "unpack the talent of a student". Every child has a talent deep inside and modern schools help them to recognize their talents and learn how to use them. It's not about the marks and learning things by heart or anything like that. Children should become creative and independent learners with critical thinking and self-evaluative skills.

WHAT MAKES CIS ARMENIA SPECIAL?



In child friendly environment it is much easier to motivate children to study



^
CIS Armenia opened its doors last September



I think first of all, our values. Curriculum, afterschool programs, meals – everything. We believe that we can create a modern school which will provide and meet the demand for excellent education.

Secondly, we are a non-governmental, independent and transparent organization. Our founders are private businessmen and school has nothing to do with government, corporations and politics. We have our own sponsors and partners – they are our parents and children.

We also invest in our staff. We have a diverse community here: English native speakers from the UK, Canada and other countries working together with Armenian colleagues as part of a team. We try to find and train people who share the same vision of modern education.

Overall, here at CIS Armenia, we are creating an excellent educational environment. Perfect conditions for the growth of future leaders.

CIS has a unique interior for an Armenian school. Does the environment play an important role in the children's education?

The educational environment is really important. We designed our interior with practicality in mind. Bright and beautiful colors create a great mood. In a child friendly environment, it is much easier to motivate children to study. It's just another tool to foster self-development rather than pushing hard. That's what we have to do to ensure a generation of motivated young professionals.

You opened your doors last September. Can you share your initial results?



◀ Director of
CIS Armenia
Mr. Runar Salimullin



We are now at the beginning of the path, but it seems we are going in the right direction. At the moment, we have 3 classes here and feedback from them and their parents is quite positive. One thing that really makes me feel glad is that all of the kids are happy and motivated to come here. There was even an amusing story one of the parents told me. This family had a visa appointment at the embassy. In the morning the father told his child this and the child said: "Oh no! I can't! I have English class at my school!"

What about the curriculum? How was it developed?

We pay close attention to the school curriculum. It should be academically strong, well-recognized, flexible, and of course, fit our values and expectations. It should allow students and parents to be flexible and comfortable. It should meet the interests of national identity. In school, we have an integrated curriculum. A strong international curriculum

whilst simultaneously delivering the national curriculum. We are licensed to deliver both curriculums. Regarding an international curriculum, we selected the Cambridge curriculum, based on the UK national curriculum and delivered by the Cambridge International Examination all around the world. IGCSE and A-Level qualifications offered by this curriculum are globally recognized. On the other hand, we also follow the Armenian national curriculum, so students have the opportunity to study abroad or at an Armenian university.

You started from kindergarten and primary school grades this year. I think many people will be interested in middle school and high school. Will you have senior classes?

Yes of course we will. However, we also want to develop steadily. There are two main reasons why it is important to follow an international education system from kindergarten. Firstly, it is much easier for younger children to adapt to the

international system. The other thing is motivation. Children are natural learners, they want to play, learn and explore the world. It's really important for the child to have a good mentor near them and to not lose motivation and love for knowledge. A fact about language learning: many scientific researches say that from the ages of three to six, children can learn any language and they will never forget it. Even if they don't have any practice, it will be very easy for them to remember it years later.

What do you think is the most important skill for the younger generation to learn today?

It is hard to identify just one skill. Many researchers say that in the future we need open minded people with creative and critical thinking, who respect human values. They need to be able to collaborate with others and use their knowledge in practice. We set these as markers in our path to becoming a modern school for the future generation.



PARENT'S FEEDBACK

TATEVIK KHURSHUDYAN PARENT OF YEAR 5 STUDENT

CIS Armenia is the school where my child is given the opportunity to discover herself. I feel safe as a parent, knowing that she gets a proper education. The teachers care and are very supportive. My daughter had almost no knowledge of the Armenian language, she now reads and writes, which is amazing! I am happy there is such a school in Yerevan because families who come from abroad need it the most.

SUZANNA KHACHATRYAN ADVISOR TO THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE NA OF THE RA PARENT OF YEAR 5 STUDENT

The best gift any parent can give his or her child is a good foundation for their future education, delivered within a safe environment. CIS Armenia is a good example of such an environment. The staff here are extremely supportive and they encourage our children to be self-starters and to use their initiative. Due to all of the aforementioned features, my son has become more confident and very self-reliant. Hence, I highly recommend this school to any parent who wants the best education for his or her child.

ALIN VARDANIAN PARENT OF YEAR 3 STUDENT

We have chosen this school for a variety of reasons. First, it is an international school but still maintains its ties to the Armenian language, culture and traditions. Children are able to receive international education whilst also learning their native language – a very valuable combination for me. Secondly, we chose this school as it offers the Armenian national curriculum in addition to its international curriculum. This sets the school apart from other international schools in Armenia, making it very attractive to me. I love the way that all subjects are taught effectively and engagingly in both Armenian and English.

HAYK ADAMYAN DIRECTOR OF CISCO ARMENIA PARENT OF YEAR 1 STUDENT

I wanted my child to study with the International Curriculum and also in an international environment. I wanted him to receive the most modern education available in Armenia. So, this School, in my strong opinion, includes all of the mentioned criteria.

There were some worries, of course, but if you don't try then you will never know. So, we tried and I think it turned out to be very successful for us. My child lives in this school! I mean, he spends the main part of his day there and he is very happy to come back the following day. This is not very common amongst children, they usually do not like going to school. But we are happy not to have this problem with our child. He just loves his school!

TATEV GEVORGYAN PARENT OF YEAR 1

I have only positive things to say when speaking of CIS Armenia. Fully conforming to international standards, the school is run by creative, talented, educated and proficient educational staff. Additionally, the administrative staff is always kind, attentive and receptive to new ideas. Our children are provided with wonderfully nutritious cuisine on secure and safe premises. All of this is very significant to me as a parent but, the best reward is the smile on my child's face when returning home from school. I wish success for CIS Armenia and hope more families will join us to experience this amazing school!

ICARE: Developing Skilled Workforce for Armenia

Whilst establishing the Agribusiness Teaching Center at the Armenian National Agrarian University back in 2000, the founders were confident that the project result will be a groundbreaking and a leading national and regional-level educational institution in agribusiness. All partners – US Department of Agriculture, Texas A&M University, and the Armenian National Agrarian University – were aware of the existing needs and challenges within the Armenian agribusiness sector. Armenia needed well-trained specialists and leaders with important managerial decision-making skills, capable of building a knowledge-based economy.

TEXT : ASHOT GARUNTS



To ensure that this innovative academic program of the Agribusiness Teaching Center (ATC) is sustainable, the ATC was incorporated into the International Center for Agribusiness Research and Education (ICARE) foundation, established by Texas A&M University in 2005. ICARE has also been running the Agribusiness Research Center (ARC) since 2005 and the EVN Wine Academy since 2014.

Today, the **Agribusiness Teaching Center** – the flagship of ICARE – provides modern agribusiness education in Armenia. It prepares graduates who are capable to accomplish high-level entrepreneurial business in the food and agriculture sector in Armenia and globally. Graduates at both undergraduate and graduate levels are equipped with broad economic, marketing and managerial skills, up-to-date communication abilities, and

excellent knowledge of English. All of this makes these young professionals highly competitive in the growing regional agribusiness and related sectors. The program curricula are Western-structured, based on the undergraduate (Agricultural Economics) and graduate (Master of Agribusiness) curricula of Texas A&M University. Courses are taught in English by American and Armenian instructors who have degrees from leading U.S. and European universities. ATC has a strong research component, with around 20% of students engaged in ICARE research projects. They have important roles in data collection and data processing, analysis and reporting, as well as a number of in-depth studies that are conducted by the Agribusiness Research Center. The current students at ATC are from Armenia and Georgia. As of June 2016, the number of undergraduate program



◀ Masters students preparing for their graduation ceremony

▼ Dr. Rafael Bakhtavoryan conducting Econometrics online class from Texas A&M University for Masters students



graduates from ATC was 419, including 53 graduates from the Republic of Georgia. Additionally, ATC is one of only few 'natural choices' in Armenia for exchange students from European countries to receive international education. As of 2016, 18 students from European universities studied in ATC undergraduate and graduate programs for a semester or two through Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ programs. ATC provides its students with the qualifications and skills necessary for successful employment in the agribusiness sector, international organizations, finance and banking system, government, NGOs, academia, and non-agricultural fields. Over 90 percent of graduates get their first professional jobs within the first few months after graduating. On average, these graduates then go on to earn twice more than graduates from other Armenian universities.

Research, along with agribusiness academic programs, is a priority at ICARE. The results of research projects and services provided by **Agribusiness Research Center** have been of practical significance for a number of beneficiaries: farmer groups and co-operatives, agribusinesses, and rural development initiatives. ARC is a leading research and rural development center in Armenia and the region with research topics covering agricultural finance and financial literacy, value chain analysis, organic agriculture, efficient water management, food waste and loss management, sustainable agriculture, and many others. ARC promotes Armenian agribusinesses at national and international conferences, symposiums, and meetings. The geography of activities covers Armenia, Georgia and Central Asia, with project partners globally. This center collaborates with USAID,

FAO, World Bank, IFC, Swiss National Science Foundation, World Vision, GIZ, Business & Finance Consulting, EURICSE, EUROQUALITY, IAMO, and many others. So far, ARC has implemented projects together with over 40 partners from 17 countries.

EVN Wine Academy was established jointly by ICARE and Semina Consulting to bridge the growing gap between modern industry trends and the outdated knowledge taught by higher and vocational professional schools in Armenia. This gap was very much in the focus of the Armenian Wine Sector Baseline Study, conducted by ICARE team. The study reinforced the need to establish a state-of-the-art wine education and training center. Today, EVN offers short masterclasses for wine enthusiasts, and a professional 18-month certificate program in Enology and

➤ Students of Food Safety Systems Management program conducting microbiological analysis with Prof. Joseph Marcy

Wine Business. This professional program is developed and taught jointly by the faculty of ICARE and Geisenheim University. The first graduating class of EVN Wine Academy has already become a significant contributing factor in helping the Armenian wine industry become internationally competitive. The short-term masterclasses aim to educate wine consumers in Armenia. Experts coin the current phase of development within the Armenian wine industry as “back to the origins.” The country, with a history of over 6,000 years of commercial winemaking, had lost this reputation over the past 70 years. Importantly, through wine education, research and extension, the EVN Wine Academy is successfully “re-reminding” Armenians about their historic reputation as a wine-consuming society. With the current rapid development of the Armenian wine industry and the emergence of modern wineries producing internationally competitive wines, EVN promotes the admission of students from businesses in Armenia and abroad. The expertise of the EVN faculty and the unique student wine lab and tasting facility help the industry by organizing student-staff-alumni wine promotion events, involving exchange students, as well as strengthening internship programs with partner wineries. Moreover, EVN has become an exceptional site for foreign winemakers, sommeliers, students, and current and potential partners, including those from the Armenian Diaspora.

Food Safety Systems Management intensive professional certificate program is one of the most recent initiatives of ICARE. The program is offered jointly with US-AID-funded InnovATE/Armenia proj-



◀ EVN students conducting wine analysis with Dr. Daniela Fracassetti

ect and taught by prominent experts from Penn State University and Virginia Tech University. This pioneer course includes 6 modules (Principles of Food Science, Sanitation, Food Microbiology, Better Process Control and Acidified Foods, HACCP, and Food Defense) and equips students with hands-on experience and critical skills to make the future of the food supply chain in Armenia safer and secure. Local experts who were assisting the U.S. faculty will take over the teaching responsibility for the next academic years.

The **Greenhouse Crop Production and Management** is another market-driven educational program that ICARE is currently developing in order to meet the current needs of the growing greenhouse industry in Armenia. This program is being developed

jointly with the International Finance Corporation and the “Greenhouse Association” NGO. Industry experts are supporting the ICARE team in adapting modern international textbooks and other educational resources to the Armenian context. These experts also contribute years of experience to help ensure the best possible solutions for the industry. Like in all ICARE educational programs, this curriculum will combine intensive classroom learning with hands-on practical experience in greenhouses.

USAID Mission Director to Armenia Deborah Grieser recently said, “We are happy to have watched ICARE evolve and grow over the past 12 years into an essential institution that promotes the best international standards for agribusiness education.” ♦



YEREVAN



YEREVAN



GYUMRI



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ARMENIAN MATHEMATICS

“Armath” engineering club and laboratories designed for school children of grades 5-12 was launched in 2014. In 5 to 6 years they are likely to become mandatory for all school children that will teach programming, robotics and 3D-modeling.

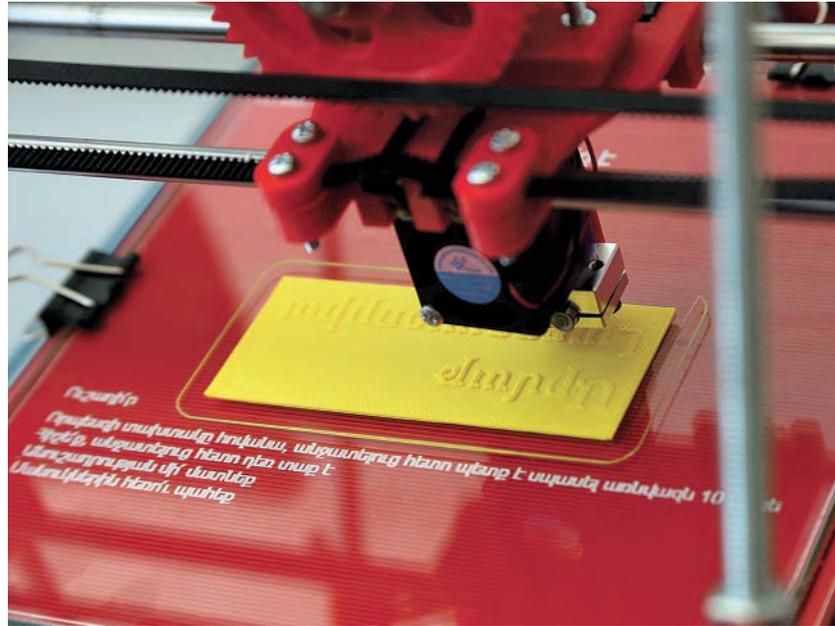
TEXT : ANI SMBATI

THE HEARTLAND OF SOVIET INNOVATION

The prototype of this initiative, “The Armenian Robotics Development and Support Program” (Armrobotics) was implemented by the Union of Information Technologies Enterprises (UITE) in 2008. According to UITE Executive Director Karen Vardanyan, since the early 1950s, Armenia has been a leader thanks to its engineering mind of the Soviet Era. “It was then planned to open 45-47 robotics industrial automation manufacturing centres by 2000. After the collapse of USSR it was important to restore the image of Armenia as an engineering country and to preserve this tradition.



Executive Director of UITE Karen Vardanyan



This is why we started Armrobotics, and in 2014 the preliminary engineering education introduction program in the communities and public education system of the country was implemented,” explains UITE Executive Director. Karen Vardanyan affirms that through this project, UITE aims to promote technological education in all schools of Armenian communities, encouraging an early interest in modern state of the art technology, to assist the development of an engineering mindset from the early ages and to prepare competent students. “The engineering laboratories investment program in Armenia’s educational system will give Armenia a major competitive edge on the international market,” he says, “the project enables practical support for the integration of qualified IT-specialists into the Armenian and world markets, the exchange of the experience between them and the attraction of large-scale investments into the IT-industry.”

2019 GOALS

During the project implementation, for the acquisition of the equipment and software for “Armath” (from words “Armenian” and “mathematics”) engineering laboratories, the priority is given to the local producers of high-quality 3D printers, mini-computers, robotics kits





◀ Hayk Yesayan, General Director of Ucom telecommunication company: "Armath" labs were created in cooperation with Ucom

and other devices produced. "So far 200 "Armath" engineering club-laboratories have been opened throughout Armenia. By 2019, we're planning to open labs in all 1200 Armenian schools so that every interested student will have the chance to attend the lab and learn the ABCs of engineering and robotics. We must accomplish the goal of becoming the world's only country with engineering laboratories in all schools by 2019 which is an unprecedented phenomenon in international practice. Engineering education must be at the highest level in our country's general education system," says Karen Vardanyan.

2019 is a notable date as the World Congress of Information Technology (WCIT) will be held in Armenia under the initiative of the UITE and with the support of the Armenian Government. "We should consider the fact that about 2,000 world leaders in IT are participating. And besides other strategic questions the keynoters will discuss, Armenia should present its own products that make it different from many other countries. We should encourage the world's interest in Armenia's experience," says Karen Vardanyan, noting that after the largest companies get acquainted with Armenia and want to cooperate, it will result in rapid economic growth.

"ARMATH" IN THE ARMY

Regarding the military meaning of the "Armath" project, the UITE Executive Director says that the most significant result of the program in 10 years will be the fact that Armenia will have no problem building its own military economy. "Along with the contests at Armrobotics, such as line follower robots, line follower and object sorting robots, Minesweeper robots and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle contests, the "Armath" engineering labs give the opportunity to become a highly demanded specialist in the army and thus being useful from the very first day of serving. That's why we consider it a national project, equally important for the education, economy, army and society in general," he says.

CAMPS AND SCHOOLS

Besides "Armath" engineering labs and Armrobotics contests, UITE organizes Technological Summer Camps in collaboration with World Vision Armenia and Ucom. The Technology Camps are attended by children of socially vulnerable regional communities from World Vision Armenia as well as students of "Armath" engineering labs from the other regions. The children manage to acquire some basic knowledge of robotics, create robots themselves and program them with the help of the "Fox" computer program. "The

young engineers of the Technology Camp take active part in cognitive trips throughout Armenia, as well as swimming, football and volleyball competitions," says Karen Vardanyan, "thus they get the chance of training both their minds and bodies." Since 2015, UITE has implemented the "One Company – One School" project – an educational initiative that in a short period of time has managed to create a platform for dialogue between the 26 IT companies and 70 public schools. "One Company – One School" project provides an opportunity for children from the capital and the regions to raise awareness of the IT field and learn about new perspectives and for IT companies to raise the potential of employees. The project aims to bring each school under the patronage of an IT company, which by providing regular meetings with pupils, lectures on diverse topics, sharing their success stories and IT global trends, organizing orientation visits to their offices and other activities will help to broaden children's horizons, welcome them into the world of IT and assist in their professional orientation. After 1200 "Armath" engineering labs are operational, the second phase of the project will start: the creation of incubators to provide a workspace environment for the alumni. ♦





UN_{AND} ARMENIA

25 YEARS IN THE UNITED FAMILY

BRADLEY BUSETTO:

“Real change is going to be driven by the people of Armenia”

Regional Post talked to the UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia, Mr. Bradley Busetto, about the most important initiatives of the organization in Armenia, as well as the challenges it faces, and opportunities for a bright future.

INTERVIEW : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN / PHOTO : ARNOS MARTIROSYAN



WE TRY TO ACT AS A CATALYST TO MOVE THE COUNTRY IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION TO CREATE SUSTAINABLE JOBS, IMPROVE GOVERNANCE AND BUILD RESILIENCE

Mr. Busetto, before Armenia you worked in Indonesia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Iraq. Are there any similarities between working in Armenia and these countries?

— In the countries you mentioned, my job mostly involved saving lives after wars and natural disasters – it focused on the humanitarian mandate of the UN. So in this way, what we are doing in Armenia is very different. Armenia came out of its crisis many years ago and the UN's current focus is how to accelerate Armenia's development. We try to act as a catalyst to move the country in the right direction to create sustainable jobs, improve governance and build resilience.

You were appointed as the UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia nearly four years ago. How has your vision for Armenia's development changed between then and now?

— I think I've learnt a lot during this period. Not only about how complex Armenia is, but also about how exciting the opportunities are for Armenia moving forward. I think the key to success is Armenia's connectivity to the region. So, we often think how international partners of Armenia, like the UN, can help accelerate this connectivity? Maybe through modernizing the borders, supporting the election of female leaders in the countryside and many other ways.

The other key point is promoting citizen engagement. Everyone knows about the demographic issues the country faces. I think that people leave not only because of economic reasons, but also because they feel they have limited influence on society or on politics. It's apathy. We've already made some changes in this field, and the level of citizen engagement has really grown. One of the ways we achieve this is through our social innovation platform, called Kolba Lab. Kolba uses crowdsourcing to reach out to citizens for their ideas and action in solving some of Armenia's biggest social challenges. Another important thing that has changed since I arrived here is the start-up culture. It's not only a phenomenon exclusive to Yerevan, but to Armenians in general. Organizations like TUMO, ImpactHub and OneArmenia promote social ventures that not only make money, but also do social good. This sector is very important for us. So much so, that in late March we are hosting the very first UN Global Summit on impact investment for development here in Yerevan. The idea is to bring together the world's foremost leading social enterprise investors with leading development practitioners, so that investors and entrepreneurs can talk to each other. It will help to come up with new investment models for accomplishing development work.

Hopefully it will also attract new investments for this sector in Armenia. There's a huge opportunity to position Armenia as a leader in this field. The fourth key area is partnering. Armenia is not a huge country, but it has huge opportunities. The question is how to push civil society to work together in a coherent manner and how to bring international partners together? There are a lot of partners who help Armenia, but it is extremely important to make sure that this help is coordinated. What we must never forget is that real change in Armenia is only going to be driven by the people of Armenia.

As you actively travel all around Armenia, you can probably see what has changed in Armenia during these years yourself. Are you satisfied with the situation in the other regions?

— Maybe the pace of change is slower in the regions than it is in Yerevan. I also think the acceleration of the social innovation space and start-up culture can be even quicker. Of course, there are serious challenges but opportunities are there too. Such as tourism, which is still a largely untapped sector in Armenia. Although there have been big flagship projects like Tatev, for example. What we're trying to focus on is looking at things from the other way around – focusing more on the village level, on community-driven eco-tourism, or tourism

I'D LIKE TO SEE OUR OFFICE TRANSFORM INTO AN INNOVATION HUB THAT HELPS DRIVE THE IT INDUSTRY AND SOCIAL INNOVATION SCENE. THAT'S WHERE I SEE THINGS GOING

that can promote food, local living and local cultural heritage which can then compete on the international market. We are now starting a big tourism initiative based on helping communities create their own projects in agro or eco-tourism, or in using their own specific cultural monuments. We are actively working on creating jobs outside of Yerevan. Most recently, we've been working in the region of Tavush, targeting the 45 communities near the border. There we run a rural development programs; one funded by the Russian Federation, and aiming to create sustainable business opportunities for farmers, by giving them access to agricultural know-how and quality equipment. In another region of Armenia – Shirak – we operate an EU-funded programme that helps organize cooperatives and produce high-value crops. Country wide, we are supporting the agro-cultural sphere, we're creating a new textile industry, establishing a lot of greenhouses, eco-tourism centers and more.

You just mentioned an initiative the UN is now implementing in the tourism sector. In your view, what are some of the other significant UN initiatives implemented in Armenia over the past four years?

— There are 14 UN agencies in Armenia that are representing different aspects of development, so it's not going to be easy, but I'll talk about some of the most noticeable ones. One of them is modernizing border crossing points with Georgia, bringing completely brand new and state of the art infrastructure. Borders are not only about national security, but also about trade and development. The first impression plays an important role. If an investor drives across the border, sees old and unpleasant infrastructure, then he or she probably won't think about investing any more. But now it's amazing and the modernization makes it feel efficient and more secure. Another important area in recent years is our support to the Syrian Armenian community, of whom 20,000 refugees have made their way into Armenia over the past few years. UNHCR offered them immediate support, such

as accommodation, food and blankets. Now we need to focus more on the next stage: training, finding jobs and integration. Human rights issues are very much in focus for us, especially regarding gender equality. Even though it's not that sensitive in Armenia, it's obvious that there are not many women in business positions or in government. We work with local NGOs to help young female leaders in rural communities, those who want to be engaged in politics and governance. We help to build their skills, run their campaigns and so on. Another area which is perhaps less visible, but also very important, is the problem of sex selective abortions. A few years ago it was a real crisis and the birth ratio of boys and girls was somewhere around 120 to 100, which was one of the worst in the world. I think we really played a key role in working with the government, church and the military to make it clear that first and foremost it's a national security issue: it's about life and death. Now the ratio is about 112 to 100, which is almost normal.





Another significant project (undertaken by UNICEF) was related to children in residential care, whose families couldn't support them, so they were staying in very old, soviet-style residential accommodation. It is best if children are raised by their biological families but in some cases an alternative family can be found – through kinship, a foster family or an adoptive family. For now, 75 per cent of these kids are with families again.

One of the important UN initiatives in Armenia is support for the upcoming parliamentary elections. How exactly is the office involved?

— It's the first time we're supporting the elections in this country on such a wide scale. To make them more inclusive and transparent, we are helping to provide voter authentication technology. It's a particular type of equipment that makes sure that when you go to vote, you are the person you claim to be and no one else can do so on your behalf. The great thing about this initiative is that we're doing it upon the request of the government, oppo-

sition and civil society, with the participation of all three parties and international organizations and states such as the EU, US, UK, and Germany.

The UN is also very active in HIV/AIDS related issues.

— Yes and Armenia has great results here. I believe it's one of the first countries in the world to totally eliminate the transition of HIV from mother to child, which is a huge milestone. It's basically a huge step towards the eradication of HIV. Once again, it's not what the UN is doing, but what Armenia is doing itself, while the UN is here to help, encourage and support.

What about energy efficiency?

— We are currently in the process of implementing large projects here. We just received a twenty-million-dollar investment through the Green Climate Fund, which will help to create a major energy efficiency initiative, both in residential and public buildings. The project itself is based on another project

that we completed a few years ago in Avan district, where we covered one multi apartment building with insulation (which by the way, was designed in Armenia), ultimately generating up to 60 per cent in energy savings. That small pilot brought us to the twenty-million-dollar project, which may potentially trigger much larger investments from the European Investment Bank. So, I believe this project will make Armenia a leader in the energy efficiency field.

How do you see the future of the UN in Armenia?

— I hope that we will be less focused on governance and human rights issues, as Armenia will hopefully have solved most of these issues. From there I'd like to see our office transform into an innovation hub that helps drive the IT industry and social innovation scene. That's where I see things going. Already, the UN in Armenia is seen as a global leader in the field of social innovation. We can already demonstrate to the rest of the world how it should be developed. Seriously, Armenia should be proud of that! ♦

EDWARD NALBANDIAN:

“Within the UN Armenia is involved
in a wide array of activities”

Exclusive interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Mr. Edward Nalbandian about Armenia’s 25 years of membership in the United Nations.

INTERVIEW : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN / PHOTO : UN ARMENIA ARCHIVE



25 years ago on March 2 the Armenian flag was hoisted in front of the United Nations headquarters. What did it mean for the newly independent state? How would you evaluate these years in terms of Armenia's engagement in the UN and what are the key milestones of Armenia-UN cooperation?

Quarter of a century ago Armenia was embraced by the family of sovereign states, became a full-fledged member of the international community. The dream of many generations came to reality and Armenia reemerged on the political map of the World. Armenia attaches great significance to this day, and it is highly symbolic that exactly this day has been chosen to celebrate the professional day of Armenian diplomats.

Armenia reasserted its right to be equal among sovereign and united nations under extremely difficult circumstances of the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the consequences of devastating earthquake and economic blockade. Armenia's engagement within the United Nations began during these challenging times but that has never diminished our resolve and commitment to the building of a state and society that fully adheres to the purposes and principles of the Global Organization. It would not be an exaggeration to stress that within the UN and its agencies Armenia is involved in a wide array of activities in almost all aspects of the work of the Organization. Of course we have our priorities that first and foremost relate to the maintenance of peace and security. In this regard the international efforts in support of the processes, developing good neighborly relations, countering terrorism, radicalization, combating hate speech and xenophobia, promoting tolerance and coexistence fall within the focus of our activities.

Armenia supports the resolution of the conflicts exclusively by peaceful means within the agreed negotiation formats. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution the internationally mandated mediators of the Minsk

Group of the OSCE elaborated basic principles of the conflict settlement embedding among them the equal rights and self-determination of peoples, which is enshrined in the Charter as one of the purposes of the United Nations. The importance of this principle for the conflict resolution efforts was recently again emphasized by the United Nations Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order. He rightly stated that too many conflicts have started due to the denial of the legitimate aspiration of peoples to achieve their human rights, including the right to self-determination and thus the realization of this right is

IT WOULD NOT BE AN EXAGGERATION TO STRESS THAT WITHIN THE UN AND ITS AGENCIES ARMENIA IS INVOLVED IN WIDE ARRAY OF ACTIVITIES IN ALMOST ALL ASPECTS OF THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION

essential to maintaining peace. It is our conviction that the efforts of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs need to be supported by all international actors and the UN is important in this regard.

Coming back to the priorities of Armenia within the UN system I would like to stress our dedication to the prevention agenda of the UN, including prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, which has been and continues to remain one of the central pillars of our engagement. The promotion and protection of democratic values, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law is another dimension of activities that we vehemently follow within the UN framework.

In 2015 Armenia-UN Development Assistance Framework Document was signed outlining the main directions of cooperation based on the following four

pillars: equitable, sustainable economic development, good governance, social services and inclusion, environmental sustainability and resilience building. Armenia closely cooperates with the different UN agencies. We have been traditionally very active within the Human Rights Council and UNESCO frameworks. As a country with a nuclear power plant we strictly adhere to the IAEA principles, which have been reaffirmed by Agency's numerous on-site inspections and assessment missions. It is not possible to enumerate, leave alone to go into the details of the whole scope of multifaceted activities of Armenia within the UN framework. I would also like to emphasize that it is not just the enumeration of activities but rather the hard work, dedicated efforts and unreserved commitment that defines the full depth and scope of Armenia's involvement.

Next year the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide will be marked. During the last years Armenia has initiated and sponsored several resolutions on the prevention of genocides and crimes against humanity. What is the significance of those resolutions?

Genocide is a crime under international law, both in times of war and peace. Resolutions adopted within the framework of the Human Rights Council have a major influence on the development of international law, especially if those resolutions are adopted on the consensual basis.

Armenia has traditionally presented resolutions related to the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The first resolution was initiated by Armenia on the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1998 at the Human Rights Commission. Since 2008 resolutions have been submitted within the framework of Human Rights Council. The resolutions are living documents aimed at reflecting all developments in the field of international and human

rights laws during past years. They also underline contemporary challenges in the field of genocide prevention. These resolutions are aimed at reaffirming the necessity of protecting national, racial, ethnic and religious groups, reassuring significance of adhering to human rights and importance of eradication of racism and xenophobia. Furthermore, they stress the role of criminal justice and accountability in the protection and promotion of human rights. The UN General Assembly 1st Session Resolution states, “Many instances of such crimes of genocide have occurred when racial, religious, political and other groups have been destroyed, entirely or in part.” Initiation of the resolutions on genocide prevention by Armenia has a symbolic value, as there is a common perception of the fact that they are submitted by a nation who itself passed through the horrors of genocide, suffered and survived and resolutely contributes to the international efforts of prevention. We believe that Armenia has a moral authority to speak out against recurrence of genocides and crimes against humanity. Armenia is determined to do what it can on the international level, including through the UN framework to ensure to the extent possible that others will not suffer the same as we did, that crimes against humanity will never happen again. The Resolution presented by Armenia to the UN Human Rights Council in 2015 bears a special meaning for us, since it was put forward on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. It was co-sponsored by 72 countries and was adopted unanimously. The Resolution condemns the Act of Genocide as the most heinous crime against humanity and points out to the relationship between impunity and denial. In accordance to its recommendations another resolution initiated by Armenia was adopted this time at the UN General Assembly, designating December 9th, the day of the adoption of the Genocide Convention, as the international day of commemoration of the victims of the crime of genocide. Annu-

al observance of December 9th sends a powerful message to ignite political, legal and moral responsibility for defying and ultimately halting the repetitive nature of this crime, calling to consistently elaborate a strong national and international system of prevention. The wide international support extended to the resolutions initiated by Armenia at the UN indicates that the subject is more than pertinent and timely and there is an understanding that only by joint efforts “never again” will be not merely a promise but reality. It is highly regrettable that the world today continues not to be immune from the threat of new crimes against humanity and the efforts of prevention remain high on the agenda of the international community. The crimes against humanity perpetrated by DAESH are the last egregious examples, but the style and tactic adhered by these terrorists can also be seen in other regions of the world as well. The large scale aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan last year against Nagorno-Karabakh was accompanied by gross violations of the international humanitarian law. The DAESH style images of tortured and beheaded civilians and servicemen of Nagorno-Karabakh were disseminated through media by the perpetrators themselves. The issues raised in the Resolutions initiated by Armenia were widely echoed at the Global Forums against the Crime of Genocide organized and hosted by Armenia during the past two years. They gathered together political, public, religious, academic, civil society and media representatives from over 50 countries. We intend to sustain these platforms for dialogue on different aspects of crimes against humanity and for continued efforts to prevent genocides. No doubt that due to this and other consistent efforts and determination Armenia is considered now as one of the staunchest contributors to the international efforts of prevention of crimes against humanity.

Mr. Minister, the refugee crisis and migration flows from the Middle East are among the most apt challenges faced by the international community nowadays. The Secretary General invited a special high-level conference on this issue last September. We know that Armenia is not just receiving substantial numbers of refugees from mainly Syria and Iraq, but has been active in the international efforts of addressing the issue. Can you please elaborate on Armenia's contribution to this end?

There are a lot of emotions around the refugee crisis nowadays, especially in Europe. In one of my speeches I recalled the words of Fridtjof Nansen, great humanist and champion of the rights of refugees who said that “the refugees who were regarded as an intolerable burden would comprise a rich asset”. I strongly believe in this. Indeed, what the world is facing today with regard to the large movement of people due to the situation in the Middle East is probably one of the biggest humanitarian crises since the World War II. This is not a conventional situation and thus it could not be addressed through usual instruments but rather requires special attention and exceptional efforts. With this regard Armenia has been actively involved in international efforts of finding remedies to the refugee crisis and the ways to help the affected communities. The High Level Conference organized by the Secretary General that you mentioned was an important event in this regard. The adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants by the UN General Assembly that followed outlined the main dimensions of the international efforts in this regard. I delivered a speech during the High Level Conference and chaired its first session. I would like also to mention that on the next day President Obama hosted another Summit on the same issue and Armenia was the only country from the region that was invited to participate. Needless to say that this invitation owns a lot to Armenia's contribution to the international efforts aimed at addressing the current refugee crisis.

➤
Edward Nalbandian and
Secretary-General of UN
(2007-2016) Ban Ki-moon

Armenia is deeply concerned by the situation in our immediate neighborhood – the Middle East. On numerous occasions Armenia has condemned the crimes committed by DAESH and other terrorist groups, which threaten the lives of the people of the region and beyond. The war in Syria has had a devastating impact on its civilian population, including national and religious minorities who face existential threats due to identity based crimes perpetrated by terrorists and foreign fighters. The violence in the Middle East has not spared Syrian Armenians, many of whom lost their lives in terrorist attacks. The Armenian settlements, churches, schools and cultural institutions were destroyed. There is a sad symbolism that our fellow Armenians have been again obliged to flee from the very countries that sheltered them one hundred years ago after the Genocide. From Syria alone around 22 thousand Armenians found refuge in Armenia, making our country the third largest recipient of Syrian refugees in Europe on per capita basis. Armenia is committed to making its utmost in addressing the issues of Syrian refugees, however no single State can manage such large movements on its own. We believe that more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility, could make a real difference for the benefit of refugees. I would like also to add here that this is not the first time in our recent past that Armenia has been facing the challenges relating to hosting substantial number of refugees. In the late 80s and beginning of 90s Armenians were either massacred or expelled from their homes in Azerbaijan and found refuge in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, we have first-hand knowledge about what it means to be a refugee, to host refugees and to work towards solution of their problems.



THE RESOLUTION PRESENTED BY ARMENIA TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL IN 2015 BEARS A SPECIAL MEANING FOR US, SINCE IT WAS PUT FORWARD ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

In this context I would like to stress the significance of addressing the root causes of large-scale movements of people through the prevention of conflicts and crisis situations, peaceful settlement of disputes and achievement of long-term political solutions. Likewise, I would like to highlight the importance of providing equal, prompt and unhindered access to international humanitarian assistance for refugees and displaced persons in all affected parts of the world, without distinction to their current political status. The situation in the Middle East, the quest of refugees from there has always been on my agenda during my working meetings and participation in international events. In March 2015 Armenia, together with Russia, Holy See and Lebanon initiated a ministerial level discussion on the Christian minorities of the Middle East in Geneva. We participated in the Conferences on the Middle East communities in Paris, New York and elsewhere. Just recently I dis-

cussed the issue with Stefan De Mistura, the UN and Arab League special envoy to Syria. I would also like to add that we have never ceased our diplomatic activity in the region. Even during the most dangerous phase of the crisis I headed a delegation to Damascus to have first-hand discussions on the situation. Our Consulate General in Aleppo is the only diplomatic representation in the city, in the heart of the war. We have our fellow Armenians living in Syria. We want them and all other Syrians who gave them refuge hundred years ago, to feel not just by words but also by tangible deeds that we stand by them. Armenia is also among those countries that continuously provides humanitarian aid to the war-torn country. This February alone Armenia dispatched two planes with humanitarian aid to Syria.

Mr. Minister, Armenia's contribution to the world peace and security does not solely limit to these important efforts. Armenia's participation to the peacekeeping operations is another sphere where the country is actively involved especially in recent years. What does this engagement tell about?

One of the main purposes of the UN is the maintenance of peace and security. As the threat of violence and hostilities continue to spread in different parts of the world it is crucial to make our joint efforts in this regard more efficient and effective. It is with this understanding that Armenia has proudly participated in a number of UN and



◀ Administrator of UNDP Helen Clark and Edward Nalbandian

UN-mandated Peace Operations, thus actively contributing in the most direct way to the building of international peace and security. The UN Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations recently stated in this regard that “Armenia’s support is important not only for its contribution but also for the Armenian history and the challenges overcome during it”. Indeed, history teaches us that security is a common endeavor. The attitude of Armenia towards peace-keeping missions can be tested by the geography of our engagement in past and present missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon (UNIFIL) and Mali (MINUSMA).

In September 28, 2015 the President of the Republic of Armenia Mr. Serzh Sargsyan participated at the UN Leaders’ Summit on Peacekeeping in New York. He stated that despite the present tensions on Armenia’s borders, our engagement in the area of international peacekeeping has gradually expanded in geographical terms, as well as quantity and quality wise. We are committed to continue our support towards the maintenance of international peace and security, simultaneously contributing to the improvement of the UN peacekeeping system to adjust to the evolving international situation and the existing challenges.

ARMENIA WILL CONTINUE TO SPARE NO EFFORTS TO ENSURE COMMON SUPPORT FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE PEOPLES IN ACCORDANCE TO THE PURPOSES OF THE UN CHARTER

The UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set out an ambitious plan of action aimed at a better and more sustainable future in the years ahead for the benefit of millions of people. Could you please elaborate how the Government of Armenia is going to implement and incorporate this framework in its policies?

Last year our government, in partnership with the UN and after an inclusive and multi-stakeholder public discussions and inputs, launched Armenia’s final national progress report on Millennium Development Goals. Based on it, the roadmap for nationalizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been drafted and as a next step Armenia will soon have a National Action Plan on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. A multi-stakeholder Coordination Taskforce on SDGs is in the process of formation, which will further

strengthen transparency and inclusiveness, thus enhancing effectiveness of sustainable development.

Armenia has been actively involved in the process of elaboration of the transformative Agenda 2030, which contains a stand-alone goal among other SDGs to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Armenia welcomes the integration of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries into the Agenda 2030 as an important step to promote sustainable and inclusive development. To ensure the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and mainstream it into our policies, the Government of Armenia has recently adopted a national strategy for its implementation. Agenda 2030 reconfirms once again that unilateral economic measures as an instrument of political pressure are detrimental to sustainable development. The land blockade of Armenia by Turkey is a gross violation of international commitments. It continues to severely hamper regional transit communication routes, economic cooperation and integration.

What would be your prediction in terms of Armenia’s engagement with the UN for the next 25 years?

Armenia is consistent in its approaches and policies. No doubt, we will continue to pursue our goals. Seventy years ago the Charter proclaimed the UN as a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of common aspirations. Paraphrasing it, Armenia will continue to spare no efforts to ensure common support for the attainment of the aspirations of the peoples in accordance to the purposes of the UN Charter. ♦

A CULTURAL ADVENTURE



PRESENTED BY
**THE PERMANENT
MISSION OF
ARMENIA TO
THE UNITED NATIONS**



CELEBRATION
OF THE
25TH
ANNIVERSARY OF
ARMENIA'S MEMBERSHIP
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STAGE DIRECTION / ERIC HILL // VISUAL EFFECTS / KAREN MIRZOYAN

**MARCH 16
2017 AT 8PM**

**ALICE TULLY HALL
AT LINCOLN CENTER
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS**

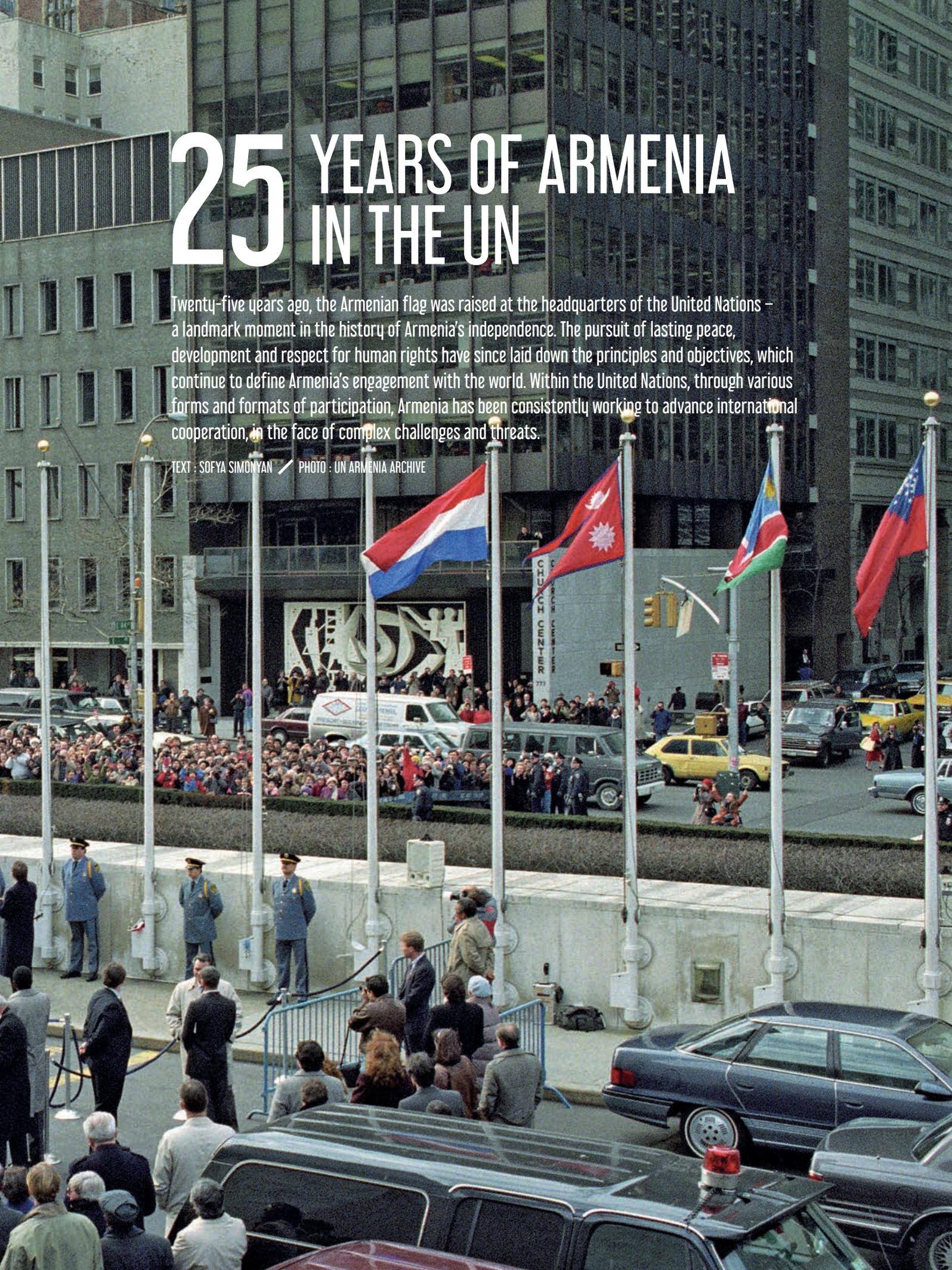
JIVAN GASPARYAN JR. / DUDUK
ARMEN HYUSNUNTS / SAXOPHONE
ARTYOM MANUKYAN / CELLO
VAHAGN HAYRAPETYAN / PIANO
VARDAN OVSEPIAN / PIANO
JOSHUA DAVIS / BASS
KAREN KOCHARYAN / DRUMS
"HOVER" STATE CHAMBER CHOIR
CHOIR-MASTER SONA HOVHANISSYAN



25 YEARS OF ARMENIA IN THE UN

Twenty-five years ago, the Armenian flag was raised at the headquarters of the United Nations – a landmark moment in the history of Armenia’s independence. The pursuit of lasting peace, development and respect for human rights have since laid down the principles and objectives, which continue to define Armenia’s engagement with the world. Within the United Nations, through various forms and formats of participation, Armenia has been consistently working to advance international cooperation, in the face of complex challenges and threats.

TEXT : SOFYA SIMONYAN / PHOTO : UN ARMENIA ARCHIVE



In the spirit of collective responsibility, Armenia has been increasingly expanding its involvement in a number of UN and UN-mandated Peace Operations, thus actively contributing, in the most direct way, to the strengthening of international peace and security. In recent years, Armenia has been enhancing its deployment capacities, including through involvement in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon mission (UNIFIL). As a security contributor, Armenia has shown consistent support and commitment to the works of the blue helmets to help bring lasting peace for millions living in areas ravaged by war and conflict.

As a supporter of the concept of regional engagement, Armenia has been consistently promoting the efficiency and the role of regional mechanisms, including for the maintenance of international peace and security. Regional and sub-regional organizations often have a better understanding of local circumstances, tailored approaches and more effective tools, while contributing to the overarching principles of effective division of labor, coherence, coordination and non-duplication of the efforts. For Armenia, the unwavering and continued support of the UN system and the Secretary-General to the internationally agreed format of negotiations for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs has been critical in deflecting attempts of mediation shopping and selective interpretations of international law, while helping sustain focus on a lasting solution.

Against the background of a deteriorating international context exacerbated by the rise of violent extremism, protracted emergencies and conflicts, there exists considerable evidence of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The global wave of displacement has brought about a large number of risks and instabilities, which require a collective response on an international level, including through better coordination on matters of border management, migration and fight against trafficking – important areas of international cooperation effectively embraced and supported by Armenia. In the last few years, over 20,000 displaced persons have sought protection in Armenia, making it the third largest recipient of Syrian refugees per capita in Europe. To promote international cooperation on

the global displacement and migration agenda, Armenia has been actively engaged in major intergovernmental processes, promoting the recognition of the need for a more equitable burden-sharing, among the internationally agreed collective commitments, as outlined, most recently, in the New York Declaration adopted at the UN Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants in 2016.

Within the UN, Armenia has been consistently supporting the promotion of human rights, including, most notably, through the concept and the practice of prevention. This implies a focus on early action to prevent situations, which, if not addressed, result in conflicts and atrocity crimes. To this end, since 1998, Armenia has been leading the international efforts to underpin the significance of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as well as to construct solid foundations for prevention. In 2015, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 69/323 tabled by Armenia, which proclaimed the 9th of December as an International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. This landmark resolution followed up on resolution 28/34 unanimously adopted by the UN Human Rights Council, upon Armenia's initiative. High-level events in observance of the 9th of December have since been held regularly at the United Nations and beyond, to pay tribute to those who fell victims of past inaction. The establishment and regular observance of the International Day adds to the

continued efforts of Armenia to promote consolidated international action against the crime of genocide. Armenia is an active advocate for collective rights, including the right of the peoples to self-determination – a fundamental principle of the Charter of the United Nations, also enshrined in the landmark UN documents that constitute the normative and institutional frameworks for the promotion of human rights – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The progressive realization of the inalienable right of peoples to decide upon their own political destinies, as a basic principle of international

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Armenian delegation at the UN
General Assembly session, 1994



SINCE 1998, ARMENIA HAS BEEN LEADING THE INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO UNDERPIN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1948 CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE



➤ SG Boutros Boutros Ghali and MFA Vahan Papazyan in Matenadaran, 1994



⤴ Ancient cross-stone as Armenia's gift to the UN, 1995



⤵ The then Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees Sergio Vieira de Mello in Armenia

⤴ Armenia's first Representative to UN Alexandr Arzumanyan signing MOU, 1992





^ MFA of Armenia Vartan Oskanian Addresses UN General Assembly, 2007



> SG meets new Permanent Representative of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, 2014



> Millennium Summit Group photo of heads of 189 member states, 2000



< Flag Raising of 9 New Members of the UN, including Armenia, 1992

^ Armenian president Serzh Sargyan and the Secretary-General of the UN Ban Ki-moon, 2014

law, has been a natural process, as demonstrated by the very history of the UN. Founded initially by 51 member states, the UN currently embraces 193 nations, working together on a wide variety of issues of a common global agenda. The right of peoples to self-determination is also indispensable to the realization of the right to development. As a landlocked developing country, whose access to the sea through a neighboring transit country continues to be essentially denied due to an ongoing land blockade, Armenia has been consistently supporting all processes aimed at addressing the detrimental barriers to the realization of the right to development and international cooperation.

Attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) followed by the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been an important priority defining international development cooperation. Armenia has been actively engaged in the process of the formulation of the post-2015 agenda, which culminated in the drafting and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development endorsed by the world leaders in 2015. Armenia consistently contributed to this global effort by providing inputs, including, most notably, on more than 300 proposed indicators on the SDGs and their targets, for the purposes of an initial assessment in terms of their feasibility, suitability and relevance. As one of the 27 members of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators under the UN Statistical Commission, Armenia has been directly engaged in the development of a global indicator framework for monitoring the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Armenia has also been active in joining

its voice, through group arrangements within the UN, for the purposes of communicating interests and positions, to amplify the focus on the common challenges facing specific groups of countries, including landlocked developing countries, as well as middle-income countries.

The track record of Armenia's membership in the UN re-confirms its strong commitment to international efforts for peace, security, development and dignity, with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – the core values that lie at the heart of the Organization. Whether through the works of the General Assembly and other bodies of the UN, or various other platforms of engage-

ment, Armenia has been consistent in building partnerships for cooperation and dialogue. To enhance the UN presence and promote greater engagement and exchange, Armenia, through its representations, continues to invest considerable efforts to organize regular panels, thematic discussions and side events held on the margins of high-level sessions at the UN, as an important platform for dialogue and cooperation to be sustained and further promoted.



Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Arzumanyan with SG Kofi Annan, 1997



ARMENIA HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTING ALL PROCESSES AIMED AT ADDRESSING THE DETRIMENTAL BARRIERS TO THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Represented by a relatively small mission, the delegates of Armenia have continuously been elected to represent the Member States, across various UN bodies and organs, including, most notably, Armenia's chairmanship of the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) of the UN General Assembly, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the presidency of Armenia in the Executive Boards of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). At present, Armenia continues to be at the service of the membership, having assumed the Vice-Presidency of the 71st session of the General Assembly. Building on its past record and following the commitment to increase its involvement in the global agenda for peace and security, development and human rights, Armenia has put forward its candidacy for membership in the Economic and Social Council (for the years 2019-2021), the Human Rights Council (for the years 2020-2022), as well as the Security Council (for the years 2032-2033). Over the years, a growing partnership with the UN has played an important

role in reinforcing Armenia's potential. Today, the UN and its development system continues to play a transformative role in a wide range of areas – from poverty reduction to environment, innovations and social entrepreneurship, disaster risk reduction, the empowerment of women and good governance, towards stronger institutions and citizens increasingly aware of their rights. Armenia's position on the UN Human Development Index and its progress on the Millennium Development Goals give confidence to continue on the path of strengthening and deepening regional and global partnership and involvement to advance the objectives of a sustainable, peaceful and prosperous future. ♦

THE 2030 AGENDA IN ARMENIA

On the 25th of September 2015, during a historic United Nations summit in New York, more than 150 world leaders signed a document, which defined to a great extent the direction humanity intends to move towards. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proposed an ambitious plan to transform the world. Shortly after, the agreement came into force. As one of the signatories of the resolution, Armenia will need to adapt the 2030 Agenda, according to its national development strategy and develop a clear plan of implementation.

TEXT : KARINA GHAZARYAN

THE GLOBAL PLAN RELOADED

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is comprised of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The impressive scale of the initiative does not, however, affect its measurability: all of the ambitious goals and their 169-step breakdown describe scrupulously the particular processes that need to be implemented, the challenges that need to be met and the outcomes that need to be achieved. For Armenia and the rest of the countries, both developed and developing, this is of essential importance: combining economic progress, social justice and environmental awareness. This agenda may become a blueprint for a prosperous future and it emphasizes the role of the member states and their cooperation as a necessary condition for success.

The SDGs have the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as their basis. The previous UN agenda focused on fighting poverty, reducing the expansion of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. The new Global Goals are designed to go further, encouraging all nations and all countries to unite and defeat poverty hand-in-hand by creating a prosperous climate for economic growth. While the MDGs were aimed towards developing countries, the

scope of the SDGs is wider. “These are not goals about poor countries; there is still a long way to go to really achieve sustainable development whether you are a rich country or a poor country”, Jeffrey Sachs, the Director of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network launched by the UN Secretary General, stated advocating for the SDGs.

ON SOLID GROUND

Essentially, the Global Goals are aiming towards three major accomplishments in 15 years: ending extreme poverty, defeating inequality and injustice and preventing climate change. The agreement is not legally binding. Still, by adopting it, the signatory states took on a responsibility to implement the goals. The data provided by countries serves for regional and global monitoring of the achievement of the SDGs.

A solid data foundation is expected from each and every country in order to evaluate the progress of implementation. Armenia has already had a positive experience in this field: the National Statistical Service proved itself a professional expert in monitoring the achievements and gaps under the MDGs. Furthermore, in 2012 Armenia presented its version of the Sustainable Development



Index (SDI), which further shaped the global discourse on sustainable development. At the same time, the UN and its agencies provide methodological and technical support to the countries by developing institutional capacities for the implementation and monitoring of national strategies.

ARMENIAN OUTLINE

Armenia made a significant contribution to the design of the Global Goals. The country presented its experience on sustainable development strategy during the Rio+20, a summit which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The member states of the UN then launched a process to develop a set of new global goals. Armenia was among the first 50 states chosen by the UN to participate in its creation. In 2013 and 2014, hundreds of Armenians, including young people and those from vulnerable communities, engaged in open discussions of the future SDGs, assisting in their formation. Moreover, Armenia was among the five countries globally to pilot SDG indicators focusing on disaster risk reduction. Given its experience in this area, Armenia was an ideal place for evaluating the weak and strong points during this stage of the agenda. The SDGs were created to appeal universally but it was clear that par-



particular topics and targets would be of higher priority for a given country with its specific circumstances and needs. By signing the agreement, countries did not pledge to work in a particular way and follow strict prescription. Instead, each member state will need to adapt the document according to its priorities and national goals, creating a unique version of the agenda which would reflect and address very concrete challenges. Armenia will

base its plan to interpret the SDGs and targets into action on the country's national development strategy and the sector-specific policies. The responsibility for implementing the SDGs rests on the government. The National Council for Sustainable Development (established in 2002 and chaired by the Prime Minister) will play a key role in driving the nationalization and the implementation of the SDGs in Armenia.

Armenia demonstrated significant progress in achieving the MDGs, especially in the fields of reducing child mortality, ensuring basic education for everybody and providing access to safe drinking water. The 2030 Agenda should not be seen as a set of technocratic targets and indicators, but rather as a good opportunity to envision what Armenia could be like by the year 2030. ♦

THE UN INNOVATION AGENDA IN ARMENIA

From designing public services with citizens to holding pop-up innovation labs in government ministries and building funding models based on the private sector, UNDP in Armenia is revolutionizing the way that development organizations contribute to public good.

TEXT : ANI SMBATI / PHOTO : UNDP ARMENIA



✓ Armenian Second Public Sector Innovation Award

➤ Winners of Social Innovation Camp on Healthcare



KOLBA LAB PERIODICALLY ORGANIZES COMPETITIONS AROUND DIVERSE TOPICS, IDENTIFIED WITH UNDP'S SPECIALISTS. ANYONE CAN PARTICIPATE, REGARDLESS OF AGE OR SPECIALIZATION

Five years after the creation of a ground-breaking innovation lab, Armenia has sourced perspectives from citizens in municipalities across the country and made important inroads against climate change, human rights abuses, corruption, and many other areas. “One of the main features of Kolba Lab is the fact that we do not have ownership for the ideas we incubate,” says Hasmik Soghomonian, Digital Communications Expert at Kolba Lab. “We support activists, entrepreneurs and change-makers within the Government of Armenia who have a good understanding of social problems and feel passionate about solving them. Our incubation programme picks the potentially best successful ideas, and provides access to our design workshops, support from mentors, specialists and organizes fundraising to help the ventures reach scale and sustainability,” she says. One of the winning initiatives at a recent Social Innovation Camp is the “Armenian Meteo” project. Using open data, the start-up has created a network of sensors to be placed

in different parts of the country that deliver real-time information about air, soil and water. Thanks to the system, it will soon be possible to make more robust predictions about climate change and promote better adaptation. In another project centred around healthcare services, one group of women who had been working with children with learning disabilities suggested development of an app that helps parents of kids with autism teach them how to perform daily tasks and supports them in social integration. According to Kolba Lab Lead, Marina Mkhitarian, these are the kind of ideas that Kolba helps bring to life. “We simply tap into Armenia’s creativity and entrepreneurial side, harness it, and use it to deal with some of the development issues that the country is facing”. Kolba Lab periodically organizes competitions around diverse topics, identified with UNDP’s specialists. Anyone can participate, regardless of age or specialization. After a citizen defines an idea, it passes through an incubation period, where it is processed and

different experimental methods and innovative tools are applied. The resulting idea takes the form of a prototype – a cheap, flexible, first attempt at implementing the idea – which then goes through a user-testing stage. Kolba Lab evaluates the feasibility of the prototype, before assisting in finding funding for projects. One of the significant principles is that the author of the idea should be someone who is directly affected by the issue at stake. Seeing this success, in 2016 the Armenian Government started working with Kolba Lab in an attempt to create an internal cadre of creative and dynamic civil servants and power the government’s reform agenda. At the beginning of 2017, Kolba Lab held Armenia’s second Public Sector Innovation Week. Through a series of platforms and events dedicated to exploring public administration and governance innovation changemakers from across the spectrum of society were invited to take part. In June 2016, Kolba Lab with the Armenian Government and Ministry of Justice announced first-ever call for innovative ideas in the public sector

among civil servants. Ideas were crowdsourced from within the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Justice to solve small issues with innovative approaches. The Ministry of Justice of Armenia hosted a Pop-up Innovation Lab where employees of the Ministry could test their ideas and discuss them with experts. The successful ideas were announced during the Public Innovation Award in early 2017 and Kolba Lab is already preparing to run incubation cycles for those ideas. What's next for Kolba Lab? "We want to link the sectors together even more. If we have citizens and government both working to solve different social challenges, why not have them do it together? This is the logic behind our next challenge, focused on education,



◀
Accessibility Mapathon
for Matcheli Vayrer
mobile app



▶
Winners of Open Data
Hackathon

that will take place around June this year. We also want to make use of the Armenian expertise in Data Innovation and Behavioural Insights, and to really take advantage of these new resources and opportunities. It's an exciting time for us," says Marina.

In March 2017, UNDP plans to host "Impact Investment for Development" Summit (IID) in Yerevan. IID will focus on the opportunities and mechanisms of impact investing and the role that development agencies, including the UN, can play in promoting it. According to Artak Melkonyan, Senior Advisor at UNDP Armenia and the Summit's lead organizer, this event will give entrepreneurs a great opportunity to present their projects to both impact investors and development organizations targeting sustainable development goals as part of their major mission.

"UNDP works on addressing impact investment developments through various platforms. The one developed in Armenia – Impact Investment Vehicle – is unique as it aims to support social enterprise at all stages of its development. The concept is based on inputs from Venture Capital and Social Entrepreneurship scholars at INSEAD and Stanford University, combines incubation and acceleration, an Impact Venture Fund, as well as



◀
Kolba Cafe event

IMPACT INVESTMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT WILL FOCUS ON THE OPPORTUNITIES AND MECHANISMS OF IMPACT INVESTING AND THE ROLE THAT DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES CAN PLAY IN PROMOTING IT

provides advisory support to ventures, aiming to attract both private and public money for funding," he says. There are many events on social entrepreneurship but the IID Summit is the first one specifically focusing on how to bridge the two worlds: that of impact investment and that of international development organizations. Four types of participants are invited to take part in the Summit: international organizations, bilateral development agencies, impact ventures and government representatives interested in social entrepreneurship. Artak Melkonyan says that since the independence of Armenia, the eco-

nomy has consisted of three components: government, businesses and NGOs. Businesses pay taxes to the government and/or support NGOs and these two would then take care of social issues. "Now it's the turn of the fourth component, social entrepreneurship, to contribute to the development of the country, finding new ways of addressing development challenges and scaling up impact solutions," he says. "Once the Impact Investment Vehicle pilot concept is proven successful in Armenia, UNDP may implement the template globally", says the Senior Advisor. ◆

UN IN ARMENIA:

Twenty-Five Years of Effort and Achievements

Twenty-five years ago, on January 29th 1992, the Republic of Armenia, which had recently become an independent nation, was admitted to the United Nations by the UN General Assembly. Several months later, in September 1992, an agreement was signed between the Government of Armenia and the UN, on the establishment of a UN office in Armenia. In December 1992, the first temporary UN office opened at the Yerevan hotel “Hrazdan”, which at the time was the center of most diplomatic missions to the newly independent republic. Since then, the UN has been working in Armenia, implementing a wide variety of projects around the country.

In fact, the UN had started working in Armenia prior to independence: after the 1988 earthquake the UN was one of the organizations that were involved in the relief and reconstruction effort. After 1992, when the UN opened its representation office in independent Armenia, the main focus was on humanitarian activities. The first years of Armenia’s independence were turbulent, all post-Soviet countries were going through the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union. However, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and the 1988 earthquake exacerbated Armenia’s situation. By the mid-1990s the situation somewhat stabilized, the war was over and the economic breakdown was overcome. United Nations activities reflected this change and from 1996 the focus of the UN shifted to development programs. Since then, the UN has contributed to various fields of Armenia’s development.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN / PHOTO : UN IN ARMENIA ARCHIVE



Armenpress

MODERN BORDER CROSSING POINTS

It is enough to cross the border from Georgia into Armenia to see one of the outcomes of the UN’s work in Armenia. The biggest border crossing between the two countries, in Bagratashen, was recently modernized and opened in November 2016. It was UNDP and the Government of Armenia, in cooperation with the European Union and the European Investment Bank that implemented the program on modernizing border crossing points (BCPs) at Bagratashen, Bavra and Gogavan.

The Bagratashen and Gogavan borders opened on November 4 2016, and the remaining border in Bavra will become operational later this year. Simplified procedures and reduced waiting times, modern infrastructure and equipment, and improved security – these are some of the advantages that the new border crossing point in Bagratashen is providing to citizens travelling from Armenia to Georgia. Of course, on the day of the opening there was no shortage of VIPs, including the President of Armenia (Serzh Sargsyan) and the Prime Minister of Georgia (Giorgi Kvirikashvili).

As UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia, Bradley Busetto said: “The opening of the new Bagratashen and Gogavan border crossing points sends a clear signal of Armenia’s openness to the world, its desire to engage with the global trading community, and its commitment to addressing international security challenges that threaten us all. The new facilities are one of the prerequisites for border agencies to do their work, to facilitate trade, and to enhance security. But facilities are only one part of the story. The BCPs should help to raise standards that effect the daily lives of all Armenian people: through improved facilities and professional border staff, Armenia can ensure that the foodstuffs we eat are safe, that the goods we buy are manufactured to a certain standard and free from dangerous faults, and that imported falsified goods and medicines are detected”.

The new BCPs are going to make life easier for travelers and businesses alike. It is expected that they will bring about a significant decrease in transit time. Individual travelers will be the most fortunate: for them the waiting time will decrease by 80 per cent, to three minutes on average. But the decrease in transit time for passenger cars is also impressive: by 75 per cent to five minutes, and by 70 per cent to 25 minutes, for trucks.

Naturally, the potential gains from the new BCPs are not limited to businesses alone. The new border crossings are a boost to the local communities, as they increase their livelihoods, opportunities and access to services. Thus, according to estimates, in the neighboring communities of Gogavan BCP, 1,200 households could connect to the new gas network and 56,000 people could benefit from high-speed Internet. Of course, simply building new facilities is only a part of what the program is about: the EU and UNDP have worked together to ensure modern and streamlined procedures and trained 700 border officials to improve search techniques, profiling, dealing with refugees, and fight against drug trafficking. The modernization of the border crossing points program is only one of the many ways UNDP has been contributing to Armenia's development. Since 1993, when Armenia became one of 170 countries where UNDP operates, UNDP has supported the Government in meeting development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

COMBATTING SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS

Several years ago, Armenia found itself making headlines all over the world, but for the wrong reason. Statistics showed that Armenia was one of the countries with top prenatal selection rates in the world. Many parents opted for abortion, when they learned the gender of their future child: abortions took place in cases when the future child was expected to be a girl. In 2011, one of the UN agencies, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, were the to raise the alarm: Armenia's sex-at-birth ratio of 114 boys for every 100 girls stood as the third highest in the world, after neighboring Azerbaijan at 116, and China at 118. The norm, as the UNFPA explained in its study, stands at 102-106 males for every 100 females. In a recent interview, given to AFP news agency and quoted by Newsweek, Garik Hayrapetyan, UNFPA Armenia's Assistant Representative explained the dangers of this situation: "In 10 to 20 years, we will face a shortage

of women and – combined with a dramatic decline in fertility rates – that will lead to a serious demographic crisis... By 2060, some 100,000 potential mothers will not have been born in Armenia. We will become a society of single men." Here is what UNFPA wrote in their 2012 study, which attracted worldwide attention to the issue: "In Armenian society, preference toward a son is traditional: daughters are also desirable in families, but only after there are already sons. It is noteworthy that, given the fact that males are biogenetically weaker than females, there has been an observable pattern of a certain predominance of boys in births, i.e. slightly more

IT IS ENOUGH TO CROSS THE BORDER FROM GEORGIA INTO ARMENIA TO SEE ONE OF THE OUTCOMES OF WORK OF THE UN IN ARMENIA



boys are born than girls, in order to maintain a demographic balance (102-106 boys are born per 100 girls, i.e. the ratio is 1.02-1.06). However, owing to a higher mortality rate of males, the gender composition of the population becomes almost balanced in the generational cohorts from the time of reaching majority through mature years, while women predominate numerically in the cohorts of 65 years of age and above. According to the official statistical data on civic status registration in the Republic of Armenia, from 1993 on, the sex ratio at birth has been significantly higher (110-120 boys per 100 girls) than the average that is seen as a biological norm." UNFPA helped to identify the main causes for sex-selective abortion, raise awareness about its detrimental effects, work out strategies to reduce the number of sex-selective abortions, and create a large alliance to tackle it. Its wide scale advocacy campaign against prenatal sex selection in Armenia led to

the adoption of a national program to combat prenatal sex selection, as well as amendments in legislation, thus, banning prenatal sex selection. Since the time of intervention, the sex-at-birth ratio has dropped from 114 boys/100 girls to 112 boys/100 girls in just five years. For a practice that has been deeply rooted in society, this is a great success. However, it is too soon to dismiss the issue, as the saying goes, “bad habits die hard”, and a lot needs to be done to keep this positive trend on course. Nonetheless, with the help of the UN, Armenia has demonstrated to the world that prenatal sex selection is an issue that can be dealt with in such a short period.

HELPING REFUGEES FROM SYRIA (AND ELSEWHERE)

Azniv Kouyumjian left Aleppo and came to Armenia in 2012 when she was 27 years old. A successful travel agent back in Syria, she struggled to find work in Armenia due to the harsh economic climate, as well as the cultural barriers (even though the majority of Syrian refugees in Armenia are ethnic Armenians, there are various differences between them and the local Armenians, such as the spoken dialect, traditions, etc.). But she and her friend, another refugee from Syria, Sevan Tekkelian, came up with an innovative business idea: they would bake cupcakes and sell them online. Azniv and Sevan joined a UN-funded income-generation project for Syrians. Their proposal was accepted, so they received a small loan and equipment for baking, as well as some basic training on running a business and started their own bakery, “Sweatheart Cupcakes”. To cut expenses, instead of opening a shop, they were advertising and selling via Facebook. “Sweatheart Cupcakes” did not turn into a major international corporation, but Azniv and Sevan were able to make a living and support their families. In March 2014, they even received the Prime Minister’s Award in recognition of their successful start-up business model.

When it comes to accepting refugees, Armenia has been punching well above its weight, and the UN has helped Armenia to welcome refugees. The numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers, and persons in a refugee-like situation is around 20,000. For a country with a small territory and population (itself involved in a protracted conflict), helping out 20,000 people requires significant effort, and the UN, particularly its refugee agency, UNHCR, has been there to help Armenia share the burden. The majority of the “people of concern” (as UNHCR refers to refugees, asylum-seekers and persons in a refugee-like situation), are from the Syrian Arab Republic. There are also refugees from other conflicts of the present and of the past – the conflict in the East of Ukraine, the war in Iraq, refugees from Azerbaijan, who were forced to leave their homes decades ago, as well as refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons from various other countries. Of course, today the situation in Armenia is calmer than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Armenia experienced a mass influx of refugees from Azerbaijan, during the Karabakh conflict. It was then, in December 1992, that the UN refugee

agency started working in Armenia, offering humanitarian assistance. Today the number of refugees is lower, but the help they receive from the UN is still vital.

There are various ways, in which the UN is helping refugees and helping Armenia to accommodate people in need. One of them is helping to set the legal framework. Armenia is a State party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, as well as to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions. The UN has helped Armenia advance in the field of legislative reforms, such as the establishment of asylum procedures, and humanitarian response network. Currently, the UN cooperates with the Armenian government to develop the Armenian asylum system. The UN has promoted legislative reform process, including work on a new Law on Refugees and Asylum, as well as amendments to citizenship legislation and bringing into operation statelessness determination procedures. In addition to promoting legislative change, the UN has also focused on capacity building and training programs for Armenian government bodies dealing with refugees. Thus, the UN has been offering training and technical assistance to the staff of the State Migration Service, helping to build its capacity in dealing with refugee issues. Another institution, which often has to deal with the refugee issues, is the court system and UNHCR has engaged with the judicial system. It has implemented systematic training of judges and lawyers on how to deal with cases involving refugees and asylum-seekers. In certain cases, UNHCR has also provided legal counseling services and strategic litigation.



**WHEN IT COMES TO ACCEPTING REFUGEES
ARMENIA HAS BEEN PUNCHING WELL ABOVE
ITS WEIGHT, AND THE UN HAS HELPED A LOT**

Although working with various government institutions is important, in many cases the UN steps in to assist refugees directly. Often refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation, especially those who have come from war zones, are in severe need of psychological support. This is where the UN comes forward with offering psychological and social support, including to those people, who have been subjected to sexual and gender-based violence. Even those refugees, who have not been subjected to direct violence, are often arriving to the host countries with few resources to sustain themselves: people lose their homes, their property, their savings and their social capital. So, in some cases the UN has provided rental subsidies for the vulnerable persons. In other cases, they were provided with one-time relocation grants and other targeted assistance.

As they say, instead of giving someone a fish, it is better to teach them how to fish. Apart from financial help to pay rent and to assist with relocation, UNHCR and its partners have implemented income generation projects, by providing income generation grants and microcredits. It is important to educate people, to teach them skills required for integration and successfully working in a new environment. Thus, the UN and its partners have been providing language classes, training courses “how to do business in Armenia”, coaching programs and market access for displaced entrepreneurs. One of the key issues in helping refugees is educating the host society. The UN has been organizing various events and activities, providing public information and raising awareness on the plight of a displaced population. One of the most interesting and innovative projects, implemented by UNHCR, was the “adopt-a-family” initiative, in which “host families” established relations with displaced families. Each “host” family helped their “adopted” family with practical advice, guidance and assistance, helping them to deal with various situations that arise for a family of refugees in a new environment. The families of “locals” and “newcomers” visited each other, the “locals” took the “newcomers” sightseeing, they went out together, participated in various social activities. This was a project that helped the displaced families find the things that are often the hardest to find in a new home – friendship and warmth.

Hovig Ashjian, who used to be a jeweler in Aleppo, before he and his family fled to Armenia in 2012, recalled during an interview to UNHCR: “I lost everything I had – my house, my work, my car... Everything I cherished disappeared in an instant. We were scared. We thought there was nowhere else we could go but to Armenia, the land of our ancestors... We were afraid to look back... We scarcely escaped the shelling... My daughter cherishes the hope that her Bible and DVDs have survived and they are kept somewhere safe in the corner of her room. She cannot accept that our house is completely ruined and that there is nothing left.” With the help of UNHCR and its partner organizations, Hovig and his family were able to start a new life in Armenia. Thanks to a rental subsidy scheme, they were able to afford a small apartment in



Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Through participation in vocational training and income generation projects, Hovig used his skills to build a new jewelry business in Armenia. In spite of all the hardships that he recalled, Hovig's conclusion of his story was optimistic: “Today, I am proud I can make my small but stable income... and raise my daughter in Armenia.” Losing one's home amid war is a wound that can probably never be healed completely. But at least, we can help people who have been forced to leave their old lives behind, to build a new life. And this is what the UN has been helping to do in Armenia for a quarter of a century.

PROVIDING HOT MEALS FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

The Sustainable School Meals Program is an example of a successful joint effort, where the UN cooperated with the Armenian Government and other stakeholders to help Armenian children receive nutritious daily meals and improve their education, health and nutritional status. It was in 2010 that the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) initiated a large-scale School Meals Program in Armenia. Classified as a lower-middle-income country, Armenia had been severely affected by the global economic crisis, with the national GDP declining by 15 per cent in 2010. Poverty, food insecurity and social vulnerability increased drastically from 2008 to 2010. The School Meals program, which is funded by the Russian Federation, has been providing nutritious meals to pre-school and primary school children throughout all ten provinces in Armenia. By 2016, the total number of children benefiting from everyday meals under the national school meals program was 81,500 children, out of which 60,000 were directly assisted by WFP with food values amounting to USD 3 million annually. In addition to this, the project provides take-home

food parcels worth around USD 500,000 annually to 8,500 community members (mostly women of vulnerable households) involved in the preparation of food in schools. The WFP has been focusing on various aspects of the program, including education, nutrition, social protection and local agricultural development. It has also sought to increase the national ownership of the program through cooperating and providing technical support to the Government of Armenia. As a result of WFP's advocacy activities, the government managed to secure a national budget line to fund the program in three provinces since 2014. WFP's partnership led to a decision to secure additional funds for the Government to take over all schools in the province of Tavush in September 2017. Moreover, the Government recently established a State School Meals Foundation, which will institutionalize the administration of the program by the Government. This decision marks an essential milestone in the transition process to national ownership of the program. The School Meals Program in Armenia has been a major success, so it is not a coincidence that Armenia was selected in 2016 to host the 18th edition of the Global Child Nutrition Forum, which is the largest world-wide forum on school meals strengthening South-South cooperation.

Apart from its obvious development values related to contribution to food security and improvement of educational results, the School Meals Program has multiple effects, which might not be entirely apparent to the wider public, but are equally important. For example, it draws a hungry child to school, improving class attendance and reducing social inequalities. Since it is an incentive to both boys and girls, it also helps to overcome the challenge of gender discrimination by promoting the same opportunities to both sexes. Simultaneously, it helps local communities and smallholder farmers by creating a predictable regular demand of local production, and improve food systems. Research shows that when adequate education programs are combined with school meals, children on average move up between 7-12 percentiles in student rankings.

Apart from the aforementioned impacts of the program, the school meals are a major contribution to the feeding of the vulnerable children. As the Executive Director of WFP, Ertharin Cousin, highlighted at the Global Child Nutrition Forum: "School meals are often the only meals a hungry child receives... By providing the poorest children with a catalyst to attend school, we open up a range of other possibilities for them".

However, school meals are more than humanitarian assistance: the school meals program is a long-term investment in the well-being of Armenia. The analysis of the national school meals program showed that each one dollar invested in the school meals of Armenia today has an economic return of USD 7.1 million over the lifetime of a single beneficiary. Here are some numbers that will help to realize the scale of the effort:



- The overall budget of the program from 2010 to the end of 2017 is USD 25 million;
- USD 3.9 million is allocated by the Government to fund program in three provinces from 2016-2018;
- USD 0,7 million is secured by the Government for funding program in Tavush from September 2017
- 88% of children receive hot meals, comprised of nutritionally diverse and healthy food;
- 262 schools were provided with kitchen equipment worth USD 404,000 in 2016;
- WFP will provide kitchen equipment and school rehabilitation materials worth USD 850,000 between 2017 and 2018.

LEARNING TOGETHER: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

More countries around the world are working towards establishing an inclusive education system. Armenia inherited an exclusive education system from the Soviet Union, in which children with disabilities were often educated in segregated environments, such as specialist schools. In June 2005, the Government of Armenia started to move towards establishing an inclusive education system. The Law on Education of Persons with Special Education Needs was passed and inclusive education was included in the draft Education Development National Program for 2008-2015. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been assisting Armenia in transitioning towards an inclusive education system and as of 2017, there are 200 inclusive schools in Armenia.

The process of reforming the education system began in 2001, when the UN started working with the Armenian government. The UN worked with the Government to develop strategies and legislative frameworks for advancing inclusive education. Furthermore, the assessment tools for children with special needs were brought to meet the classification principles established by the World Health Organization. With assistance from UNICEF, training was organized for the principals and teachers of the inclusive schools, as well as for the parents of the pupils. UNICEF was also instrumental in raising awareness. In 2010, the Armenian Government ratified the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the



THE UN WORKED WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

convention itself was drafted in 2006). The ratification of the convention became the basis for changing Armenia's legal framework in accordance with the convention.

One of the main driving forces behind the reforms is to replace the concept of "integration" with the concept of "inclusion". While integration means that people with disabilities are present and part of society and are provided with specifically designed services and resources, inclusion goes beyond this. Inclusion means creating an environment, where people with disabilities have equal opportunities and can participate in community life, just like everybody else. The practice of inclusive education reflects this philosophy. At school, ideally every child with special needs receives an individual education plan, created by a specialist and designed to

suit a child's abilities and needs. During classes, teachers are aided by an assistant in order to provide additional support. The school receives extra funding from the state budget, which is put towards providing the necessary conditions for children with disabilities. The extra funding also goes towards the cost of acquiring special training materials, ensuring a physically accessible environment and other needs. If delivered correctly, inclusive education brings benefits to all of the children involved. It helps to raise self-confidence, improve interpersonal communication skills and social skills, in regards to making friends. Inclusive education helps to form a worldview based on a positive approach to life and others, free of negative clichés and stereotypes. Moreover, this also aids in fostering mutual respect.

Armenia's inclusive schools already have graduates that they can be proud of. Tigran Hakobyan began studying at a special school, but later moved to a general education school. Tigran then successfully graduated from the Mkhitar Sebastatsi school. Tigran is a sportsman and a successful swimmer. He represented Armenia three times at the Special Olympics. First in China during 2007, Greece in 2011 and most recently, the USA in 2015. Although winning is not the primary objective of the Olympics, a large emphasis is placed on participation. However, Tigran certainly went above and beyond, becoming champion of the freestyle swimming competition twice. He has also had acting experience and was a cast member of a television production, broadcasted on one of Armenia's most popular channels, "Shant".

While there have been some success stories pertaining to inclusive education, there is still more to be done in Armenia, especially in regards to changing society's attitudes and challenging stereotypes. A 2012 study conducted by UNICEF found that one in five children with disabilities were not attending school, while in Armenia's regions, one in four children with disabilities were not attending school. According to the study, respondents cited children's inability to study at mainstream schools as a reason behind their exclusion. This study helped to reveal the existing perceptions around disability and inclusion as well as the extent of stigma and inequity that children face. In 2013, UNICEF conducted a nationally representative survey to understand attitudes towards children with disabilities. The study highlighted that there was a significant difference in attitudes between children with physical disabilities and children with intellectual disabilities. Ninety-five per cent of respondents supported the inclusion of children with physical disabilities, but 30 per cent of respondents were against the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. However, a follow up UNICEF survey conducted in 2015 found that attitudes towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities changed, as only 19 per cent of respondents said they were against their integration in the society. The results showed that 96 per cent supported inclusive education for children with physical disabilities, with 19 per cent against including children with intellectual disabilities. Slowly but surely Armenia is becoming more inclusive and this is a field the UN continues to support. >



HELPING TO MAKE OUR FOOD SAFE

Since 2009 the UN has been helping to raise the food production safety standards, particularly when it comes to meat. One of UN agencies, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been focusing on providing safe meat and meat products for the country's population. With the assistance of the Greek Government, five slaughterhouses with up-to-date equipment have been built in the country. This project was launched in 2009 with a budget of USD 1.6 million aiming to raise the food production safety standards. Five new pilot slaughter houses have also been set up and became operational through partnerships with the private sector. At present, Armenia does not have a detailed regulation on abattoir registration or licensing. At FAO's recommendation, the Ministry of Agriculture is considering a national abattoir licensing system that promotes a gradual but progressive improvement in meat safety. The project also aimed to increase institutional ability to ensure the safe development of the meat sector including improved meat inspection techniques and procedures, and disease reporting in line with international requirements. Over the past 25 years, the UN has played an active role in supporting Armenia's national development contributing to increasing agricultural productivity, improving the country's food security and also rural livelihoods. In this respect, a particular milestone is Armenia's accession to UN's agency that leads the efforts to defeat hunger globally, the Food and Agriculture Organization, which Armenia joined in November 1993. When it comes to agriculture development, the UN has contributed

THE UN HAS PLAYED AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SUPPORTING ARMENIA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTING TO INCREASING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY



in various ways: it has provided technical assistance through policy support and specific capacity development including various direction such as fighting transboundary animal diseases, natural resources management, land administration and forestry and fisheries interventions at both the grassroots and national level. Current cooperation includes sustainable use of natural resources, disaster risk reduction and management; animal health, plant protection and food safety; food and nutrition security and poverty reduction.

In food safety sector, another intervention has focused on enabling the country to control the quality of pesticide products on the market in line with international standards and to carry out pesticide residue surveillance monitoring programmes in order to improve the quality of agricultural products. The project contributed to the sustainable development of the agricultural sector through less hazardous agricultural inputs leading to improved agricultural practices, safer food and a cleaner environment as well as to the reduction of risks associated with the use of pesticides. The project established a National Pesticide Quality Control laboratory equipped to analyze pesticide products in accordance with international specifications and standards. It also supported the Pesticide Residue Monitoring Laboratory to strengthen the national institutional capacities to undertake pesticide residue surveillance monitoring programmes for food and feed. The UN also introduced internationally recognized laboratory management systems for both laboratories leading to accreditation to international standards (specifically the ISO/IEC 17025); increased awareness on pesticide-related problems and improve Good Agricultural Practices. Closely related to the issue of food safety is the task of improving the quality of veterinary services on the country. One of the gravest dangers that the veterinary services need to deal with is the disease called "brucellosis". Brucellosis in small ruminants and cattle has been on the increase in Armenia since the late 1990s. The disease is dangerous not only for cattle, sheep, goats and other animals, but also poses a threat to humans. It can spread through non-pasteurized dairy products and direct contact with infected animals. Aimed at providing technical assistance and capacity building of the veterinary services at national level, the Government launched, with assistance from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) a major project worth more than USD 700,000. 40534 heifer calves and 154,568 sheep and goats have been vaccinated in the framework of the pilot project in 109 communities of the Syunig region of Armenia. The result of coverage survey among the vaccinated small ruminants indicates that the vaccination campaign was thoroughly implemented and vaccinated animals have sufficient level of immune response. Implemented by FAO, the project has identified a more efficient system of controlling brucellosis in animals, which will lead to limitation of the infection risk in humans, in addition to serving as a useful model for a future sustainable National Brucellosis Control Programme.



OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

REDUCING MATERNAL MORTALITY

The UN, through UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, has contributed to reducing maternal mortality in Armenia by establishing “Traveling Gynecologist” and “Rapid Response System” in the country for hard-to-reach and poor areas, and introducing evidence-based guidelines on maternal care. These contributed to the decrease of maternal mortality ratio from 43.2 per 100,000 live births (1999-2001) to 19.6 (2013-2015). In addition, UNFPA has organized training of more of than 1000 obstetrician-gynecologists and midwives.

HUMANITARIAN FOOD ASSISTANCE

The UN has been providing humanitarian food assistance to those in need since the early 1990s. United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) established its presence in Armenia in 1993 with an emergency operation in the aftermath of the devastating 1988 earthquake, the economic downturn following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the full-scale armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (1988 to 1994). WFP supported General Food Distribution to 300,000 refugees and internally displaced people in 1994. Starting from 1999, WFP switched focus to prolonged relief and recovery operations. From 1993 to 2010, WFP assisted Armenia through six Emergency Operations (EMOP) and five Protracted Relief Recovery Operations (PRRO) that included food assistance to refugees and internally displaced people, elderly programs, as well as Food and Cash-for-Work to build resilience and invest in community development, Food-for-Training, and Winter Food Preservation projects. During this period, WFP implemented food assistance programs providing 140,000 metric tons of food commodities worth USD 110 million and covering an average of 180,000 beneficiaries annually. In 1995, WFP launched the Soup Kitchens initiative for widowed pensioners to help the vulnerable groups, in partnership with a national NGO – Mission Armenia. This project helped over a thousand beneficiaries annually.

REDUCING ABORTIONS THROUGH ADVANCING MODERN FAMILY PLANNING

UN, through UNFPA, has also helped to decrease the abortion rates by supporting healthy family counseling and providing access to modern methods of contraception. The estab-

lishment of 75 family planning units by UNFPA in the country helped to increase of the modern contraceptive prevalence rate from 22 per cent (2000) to 28 per cent (2015-2016). Accordingly, the number of abortions declined from 81 abortions per 1000 women aged 15-44 (2000) to 21 (2015-2016).

HELPING TACKLE DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

Since its independence, Armenia has been facing serious demographic challenges including low fertility, high migration, rapid ageing. The UN, through UNFPA, has been helping to tackle these challenges through numerous studies, support to development of legislation, strategies and policy instruments on the issues of demography. Those include, but are not limited to the Strategy of the Demographic Policy of the Republic of Armenia and its Action Plan (2009-2035); the Armenia population censuses and, as a result, creation of household address database; the Strategy on Combating the Consequences of Ageing and Social Protection of Elderly People, and many others.

EDUCATING POPULATION ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Through cooperation between UNFPA and faith-based organizations, more than 19000 boys and men, girls and women, 3400 newly-weds and 4700 soldiers of army have been reached and sensitized on issues of gender stereotypes, gender norms, gender-based violence and family values.

ELIMINATION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV INFECTION

One of the most worrying aspects of AIDS is the issue of mother-to-child transmission. The UN supported to solve this issue in Armenia. On 7 June 2016, at the UN General Assembly on HIV/AIDS special session, WHO Global Validation Committee validated Armenia’s elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV infection as public health problem in Armenia, and Armenia’s Minister of Health officially received a validation certificate.

HELPING TO MANAGE MIGRATION

The UN has assisted reforms of migration management, including introduction of the system of electronic passports and identification cards with biometric parameters. International Organization of Migration (IOM) has provided technical assistance to the Armenian Government in elaboration of policy and legislation to regulate the field of labour migration. IOM developed toolkit for dealing with challenges and for processing of readmission cases in Armenia. It also facilitated negotiations for bilateral labour agreements between Armenia and destination countries (including in Europe) with the aim of enabling an environment for circular migration of Armenian workers.

SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD Armenia), the United Nations Industrial Development

Organization (UNIDO) and UNDP work together to provide technical assistance to the project titled “Producer Group and Value Chain Development”. UNIDO and UNDP work towards establishing and strengthening producer groups, effectively engaging them in the value chain. The project is operational in six regions of Armenia – Shirak, Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Lori and Vayots Dzor. The beneficiaries of the project are agricultural producers, members of producer groups, their employees and their families, as well as consumers themselves. Special priority is given to women, the youth and vulnerable groups. The project works with 53 cooperatives of primary production and processing across five value chains – high value field crops, non-conventional vegetables, fruits and berries, high value cheeses and dried fruits and herbs. The project also helped establish six demonstration farms on conservation agriculture and trained farmers on business-oriented cooperation in 122 communities.

SUPPORTING BUCKWHEAT PRODUCTION IN ARMENIA

As part of the EU-supported ENPARD project, the UN is helping start production of buckwheat in Armenia by establishing a cooperative of farmers in Gegharkunik region, known as the “Buckwheat of Tsovaguyugh”. The cooperative has brought together over 100 farmers who made up their mind for innovative production of buckwheat instead of wheat, traditionally grown by farmers. The enterprise has also attracted the support of the leader of Tsovaguyugh community. As the farmers’ group comprises 10 per cent of the population of Tsovaguyugh, benefits are equally distributed among men, women and youth, and the impact of the project is significant at the community level. Since December 2016, the processed buckwheat can be found on the Armenian market with “Tsovatik” brand, enriching the Armenian menu with a nutritious ingredient.

PROTECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO GROW UP IN A FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

The UN has consistently worked to support the Armenian Government in protecting a child's right to grow up in a family environment in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights

of the Child. During the past decade, Armenia has managed to reduce the number of children in residential care by 75 per cent and establish foster care services for children without parental care as an alternative family-based service. Today, child care reforms are underway, supported by UNICEF, aiming to provide a family environment for every child in the country.

PROTECTING CHILDREN'S HEALTH

The UN has taken great steps to ensure the protection of children's health in Armenia. With the help of UNICEF, the mortality rate for children under five years old was halved. The rate of immunization reached 90 per cent in Armenia, which is crucial in protecting children from preventable diseases. Thanks to such measures, dangerous diseases such as measles have been eliminated entirely. With the help of UNICEF, iodine deficiency has been eliminated through universal salt iodization

HELPING MIGRANTS RETURNING TO ARMENIA

Since 1994 IOM have assisted more than 10,000 migrants who returned to Armenia, mainly from the European countries. Since 1997, the IOM helps individuals (including returnees, refugees and displaced persons) to become self-sufficient through micro-credit schemes, including micro-enterprise training as well as credit and employment opportunities. As of now, about 3,000 persons have already completed training in micro-business management and business planning. So far, over 10,000 loans, amounting to more than USD 9 million have been extended, impacting the lives of over 7000 direct beneficiaries, including loan recipients as well as persons employed and over 5,000 businesses were supported. IOM also established Migration Resource Centre which provides free consultations to potential migrants and inform returnees about existing reintegration programmes.

APRICOT AND GRAPE COLLECTION ORCHARDS

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has supported Armenia in establishing apricot and grape collection orchards on six ha of land pertaining to more than 80 varieties of apricots and 285 varieties of grapes (which include 16 wild and wildened forms and their clones, 10-imported varieties as well as selected or not yet described varieties) to conduct demonstration orchards in regions throughout the country. Besides collecting and conserving the genetic resources, the project fosters the sustainable basis of the fruit production in the country. The collection orchards will be open to all scientists and researchers as well as producers. The application of the new agricultural technology, which includes a drip irrigation system and hail prevention net, also increase farmers' incomes and create a sustainable basis for the implementation of future selection activities. The project contributes to the sustainable development of agriculture in the country through establishing the basis for improvement and modernization of the grape and apricot production sector with possible future significant output to food security, employment opportunities and income generation.



COMBATting TRAFFICKING

Since 2007, UN's migration agency, IOM provided medical, psychological, legal support and shelters to more than 125 victims of trafficking. The IOM has lobbied for inclusion of an article criminalizing human trafficking into the Criminal Code, for ratification of the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, and has contributed to the development of the National Plans of Action to Combat Human Trafficking. Thanks to IOM support, a counter trafficking course has been included into middle and high school, as well as university curricula. All teachers of the social science subject in Armenia were trained to teach counter trafficking course. The IOM has provided capacity building to more than 10,000 people (including government officials, police officers, border guards, teachers, students, pupils, journalists, doctors, migrants, refugees, victims of trafficking, etc.).

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION ON MIGRATION ISSUES

The UN also facilitates research and education on migration issues. IOM conducted the first large-scale and representative nationwide household survey on migration among 7,890 households in Armenia. It also contributed to development and introduction of Master Program in Migration Studies in line with the Bologna requirements: migration Competence Center was established at Yerevan State University.

IOM put efforts to strengthen the role of the diaspora in Armenia's development through the effective utilization of its intellectual potential, knowledge and skills to promote the country's development and its transformation into a knowledge and innovation based economy. Adherence to this idea, thanks to IOM efforts more than 30 highly qualified professionals, including 8 full professors from leading European universities are invited to Armenia and contributed to the development of Armenian institutions.

IMPROVING ENERGY EFFICIENCY

In September 2014, in Avan community of Yerevan, the first energy efficient apartment building in Armenia was presented to the public: it is set to consume 60 per cent less energy than a conventional building. The Avan apartment block building was an outcome of the pilot project, carried out by UNDP, which aimed to show the potential for development of energy efficient measures in Armenia. UNDP also assisted in making buildings energy efficient elsewhere: in southern Armenian town of Goris, in "Cascade Hills" apartment complex in Yerevan, and in Avedissian School in Malatya-Sebastia administrative district of Yerevan. It also assisted in replacing old street lamps with new, more than 65 per cent energy efficient LED lamps, on the highway from Matenadaran to Zvartnots airport. Currently, the UN, with funding from the Green Climate Fund, is set to embark upon a major energy efficiency initiative in residential and public buildings.



DEALING WITH THE THREAT OF EARTHQUAKES

In September 2015 Armenia joined INSARAG, the International Search and Rescue Group, a network of disaster-prone and disaster-responding countries and organizations dedicated to urban search and rescue (USAR) and operational field coordination. This network aims to establish standards and classification for international USAR teams as well as methodology for international response coordination in the aftermath of earthquakes and collapsed structure disasters. The INSARAG Secretariat is located at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). Thus, with the help of the UN office in Armenia, our country became the first CIS country, whose USAR teams received the level of certification necessary to join the group.

STRENGTHENING FORESTRY SECTOR

The UN has supported the Armenian Government through establishment of a centrally located professional forest nursery. It has also raised awareness regarding the importance of forests and forest management in order to increase both reforestation and afforestation (conversion of previously non-forested land to forested land). With FAO's support, a Pilot nursery of Hrazdan Forest Enterprise for seedling production (bare-root and container seedlings) was rehabilitated and equipped with basic tools, machinery, gas pipe-line for heating the greenhouse and soil substrate. Eight pilot seed collection stands comprising in total 116.5 ha were identified, documented and mapped. FAO analyzed the institutional set-up of the nurseries, using Hrazdan Forest Enterprise as an example, and provided recommendations on how to strengthen the forestry sector in Armenia.

ENHANCING BORDERS PROTECTION AND AIRPORT SECURITY

The UN has supported the Government's border management reforms and organized the expansion of the Border Management Information System to all border crossing points of the Armenia. As per request of the Armenian Government, IOM has assisted in improving security standards at Zvartnots International Airport by conducting an assessment of security standards. IOM also facilitated the connection of central units at Police Headquarters and Yerevan Zvartnots Airport to Interpol's telecommunications database system. ♦

AMBASSADOR OF THE ARMENIAN FORCES

Son of military officer, Igor Sargsyan had always dreamed of becoming a soldier. First he entered the Military Institute after Vazgen Sargsyan and then went to Italy – to continue his studies at the Italian Military Academy. After graduation, Igor was sent to Lebanon as part of the UN peacekeeping mission.

INTERVIEW : ARMEN MOURADIAN
PHOTO : IGOR SARGSYAN'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE

What was your purpose in Lebanon?

I served in Lebanon as part of the Armenian troop under the direction of the Italian military brigade. As I used to say, we are not only peacekeepers but also ambassadors of Armenia, who represent the Armenian forces in the international area. As we all know, the situation in the Middle East has been quite intense for the past few decades, and the main purpose of our troop in Lebanon was to protect the UN base located in the country.

Are there any specific qualities an Armenian soldier should have in order to be chosen for international service?

We are soldiers and we only fulfill our duty. There's an order which we have to follow. However, I'm sure that possessing particular personal qualities influence decision making. For example, you have to speak foreign languages, especially those who are being sent to such regions as commanders. Speaking specifically about me, I graduated from the Military Academy in Italy, and as I speak both Italian and English, and





ARMENIAN PEACEKEEPERS

Armenian peacekeepers have participated in international missions since 2004, numbering more than 3000 soldiers in total. Usually Armenian troops consist of soldiers from the Ministry of Defense peacekeeping brigade and supporting forces with engineering and military medical assistance.

Armenia's first peacekeeping experience was in Kosovo. In 2004 one platoon became part of NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) Greek battalion.

Armenian peacekeepers left Kosovo in 2011 with the Greek battalion.

Since 2012, Armenian peacekeepers returned to KFOR: one platoon (35 units) stationed at USAREUR – United States Army Europe military base.

The platoon's mission includes providing security at the base, patrolling and also serves as a rapid reaction unit during a state of emergency.

Armenian peacekeepers were located in Afghanistan as part of NATO ISAF and Resolute Support missions, numbering 40 peacekeepers in 2010 and 81 peacekeepers in 2011. Now there are 56 Armenian peacekeepers at the Camp Casaba base in Kabul and 65 in Mazar e Sharif.

Between 2005 and 2008, 368 Armenian peacekeepers completed 8 tours as part of the Operation Iraqi Freedom mission, providing transportation responsibilities, demining and medical support.

Armenia joined the UNIFIL Lebanon mission in 2011. Since 2014, there has been one Armenian peacekeeping platoon (32 units) and one military observer Arthur Avagyan. The platoon's mission is to provide security at the military base located in the city of Shama.

Armenian peacekeeping troop under the direction of the Italian military brigade in Lebanon



as long as we were under the direction of the Italian brigade, I was appointed as the contingent cooperation officer. In a few words, I was responsible for the coordination of different issues between Armenian and Italian troops.

What is the difference between an Armenian soldier and representing an international military structure?

When you serve your country, you are defending the interests of your nation and its security. Here, you are who you are. However, being part of a UN mission is not only about representing yourself as a soldier but the whole country. So the feeling of responsibility is twice as high. For example, we not only wear the UN flag on our uniform but also the Armenian flag on the other shoulder. And whatever you do, you will be considered not only as an international peacekeeper, but also as a representative of the Republic of Armenia.

What new things did you learn from your service?

First of all, I learned that Armenians are highly respected in Lebanon by the locals. It's because of the Armenian community, which is quite large in the country. Armenians are part of social life, and they are being treated very well.

Also, we had good relations with other soldiers. Many of them had been in touch with other Armenian peacekeepers in Afghanistan or Kosovo, and they already knew how responsible and friendly we can be.

What did the UN mission give you personally?

New knowledge and the understanding of a new culture. It's very different when you watch life in Middle Eastern countries on TV and then physically go there by yourself. You understand their culture, their way of thinking, you make new friends and connections, and you learn new things from other nations, which you can then apply to your life and your country. Locals, as I said before, were very friendly to us, not only because we were Armenians, but also because we were soldiers. Every country, which went through a significant war, values soldiers who protect them. They know the price of peace. Also, right after we arrived in Lebanon, the UN held special courses on how to behave in Muslim countries and Lebanon in particular. For example: What cultural, political or social differences locals have, how we should act in this or that situation. That's why we served with no incidents and returned to our homes safe and sound. ♦

COOPERATION WITH THE UN IN ARMENIA

During 25 years of Armenia's membership to the United Nations, the organization has collaborated with a number of Armenian ministries, agencies, international and non-governmental organizations, to contribute to Armenia's development and progress. Below, UN partners tell us about their cooperation and accomplishments.

TEXT : ANI SMBATI





DAVID HARUTYUNYAN

MINISTER – CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT STAFF OF ARMENIA

Since independence, the Republic of Armenia has established close relations with the UN and implemented various programs. The UN office has become an indispensable partner of the Armenia Government. This is evidenced by the fact that the projects implemented by the UN agencies are related to almost the entire range of cornerstone sectors for sustainable development of the country: democratic governance, the fight against corruption, economic development, education, human rights, etc.

Indicative programs in the economic field are the ones supporting SME development, competitiveness of export-oriented industries and young entrepreneurs.

From the recent years' experience, I would particularly like to highlight the social sector programs, efforts to implant the integrated system of social services, as well as the "Sustainable School Feeding", "toward social inclusion of vulnerable children" programs, which the UN has implemented in collaboration with our partners.

Besides this, a special attention is given to the projects in the field of environmental protection: sustainable waste management, sustainable land and forest management, enhancing the financial sustainability of Armenia's protected area system and so on.

The cooperative achievements are as diverse as the projects implemented with the different UN institutions. In this respect, the results can be divided into groups.

In a number of areas, such as the employment policy, social security and other issues, the legal framework was improved and new methodologies were developed. The economic programs mainly led to the spreading of business-oriented knowledge, increasing the value of producing groups' products and availability of resources for these groups. As a result of other projects, separate infrastructures of the country were modernized, such as the case of Bavra, Bagratashen and Gogavan Border Crossing Points.

I strongly believe that each project striving towards development will eventually bring changes in the culture and society as a whole, through the introduction of the most advanced

IT'S IMPORTANT TO MENTION THAT THE BEST EXPERIENCE ACQUIRED AS A RESULT OF COOPERATING WITH THE UN ALWAYS FINDS ITS WAY BACK TO THE GLOBAL LEVEL

institutional knowledge and responsibility. This is clear in sensitive areas such as environmental protection, climate and ecological progress, women's involvement in decision-making at the local level etc.

It's important to mention that the best experience acquired as a result of cooperating with the UN always finds its way back to the global level. For example, last year the UN recognized Armenia as one of the first countries in the world where the successful implementation of efforts towards prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV lead to the transmission being eliminated, and today Armenia can share its experience with other countries.

I have to state that cooperation with the UN office in Armenia has always been in line with global trends and the rising essential imperatives of our country. The proof of this is in at least two key processes, carried out by the Armenian Government staff and the UN office.

The first process is connected with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that has been developed by the UN and to replace the Millennium Development Goals which ended in 2015. The Government staff are coordinating the long-term process of the nationalization of the SDGs, which will be implemented by 2030, along with Armenia's strategic plans.

The other important process is directly connected with the UN priority to support the development of democratic institutions and principles. Armenia's new electoral code provides some serious reforms, which will be in place for the first time during the parliamentary elections on 2 April, 2017. The UN acts as a coordinator and helps to acquire new hardware and software to support the electoral process in Armenia. The successful organization of the process will lead to a direct increase of confidence in the electoral system by the public and our international partners.

Currently, we are in discussion with the UN to further support reforms in a number of areas, such as public management innovations, people with disabilities, refugees and the establishment of a Food Bank in Armenia.



ARAM TANANYAN

HEAD OF SECRETARIAT OF NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL OF ARMENIA

The modernization process of Armenia's border crossing points (BCPs) started back in 2010, based on the RA President's Directive on the adoption of Armenia's Border Security and State Border Integrated Border Management Strategy, which was followed by the adoption of the 2011-2015 Action Plan for implementation of the strategy. The main goal of the Action Plan was to modernize the three BCPs – Bagratashen, Bavra and Gogavan on the Armenian-Georgian border. In 2012, in partnership with the European Union, UNDP supported the “enhancement of the border management capabilities at Bavra – Ninotsminda border crossing point between Armenia and Georgia” project. It linked closely to the “modernization of Bagratashen, Bavra and Gogavan border crossing points of the Republic of Armenia” project with a specific focus of support given to the installation of networks at BCP sites. On the other hand, in the framework of the Integrated Border Management System development in the South Caucasus, again in partnership with the EU, UNDP implemented the “Provision of Equipment and Infrastructure for the Bagratashen-Sadakhlo BCP between Armenia and Georgia and enhancement of their capacities” project.

In 2016, the Bagratashen BCP was opened within the framework of EU-funded and UNDP implemented “Modernisation of Bagratashen, Bavra and Gogavan Border Crossing Points of Armenia” (MBBG) project. Along with this project, a three-year EU program regarding regulation of migration and modernization of borders was launched in Armenia in 2016. This program is a continuation of the programs that are already being implemented and we will start reconstructing the Meghri border checkpoint as part of the program.

Along with these projects, there is the “Support to Migration and Border Management in Armenia” (MIBMA) project implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in partnership with UNDP. The project is very important as it follows the national strategies and priorities as well as EU-Armenia partnership agreements. The overall objective of the action is to enhance approximation of the migration and border management in Armenia to the European standards of governance, in order to increase security, facilitate trade, and support the possible visa liberalization dialogue between the European Union and Armenia.



ARPINE HOVHANNISYAN

MINISTER OF JUSTICE OF ARMENIA

The Armenian Ministry of Justice is carrying out active and effective cooperation with the UN Office in Armenia, in particular, with The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). In the framework of this cooperation, in 2015 the Ministry of Justice of Armenia and UNICEF launched the “Improving Access to Justice for Children in Armenia” program. The program involves practicing international law expertise focusing on children's rights and access to justice; the development of an action plan to set up an integrated information system for juvenile justice; and capacity building of the staff that deals with children that have problems with the law and are witnesses and victims. In 2016, the Ministry of Justice continued and expanded its cooperation with UNICEF within the framework of “effective coordination, cooperation and public awareness to improve access to justice for children's matters” joint program. It is aimed at bringing legislative and procedural issues regulating children's participation in criminal, civil and administrative proceedings in line with international and European standards, creating an action plan to improve access to justice, raising public awareness, encouraging the participation of children in related activities.

I should note that the Civil Status Acts Registration Agency of the Ministry of Justice actively cooperates with UNICEF as well, and in particular, protecting children's rights within the framework of “Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction” (1980) and “Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption” (1993) Hague conventions.

Currently, the draft law “On Amending the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia” is in circulation. It is based on the reports and statements by UNICEF, Save the Children and other organizations, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The draft law includes not only directly mentioned recommendations, but also provisions of the conventions ratified by the Republic of Armenia.



DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ARMENIA

The European Union and the UN work together to support government and civil society in Armenia. This cooperation takes form in different actions and progress requires the pooling of resources from a number of donors. In Armenia, UNDP is involved in a number of EU funded projects as an implementing partner or coordinator. Among these projects is the global project of rehabilitation and upgrading all of the border crossing points between Armenia and Georgia, “Modernization of Bagratashen, Bavra and Gogavan Border Crossing Points”, supported by loans from EIB and EBRD, as well as the EU grant and “Provision of equipment and infrastructure for the Border-Crossing Point Bagratashen-Sadakhlo between Armenia and Georgia and enhancement of their capacities” project. “Support to migration and border management in Armenia” under the lead of the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) project was fully financed by the EU. Here, UNDP is sub-contracted to perform a feasibility study of the Armenia-Iran Border Crossing Point. Another important initiative is the implementation of the Clima East Pilot Project. In Armenia, the pilot project focuses on the restoration of the management of traditional pastures and is so far achieving good results. The initiative demonstrates the feasibility of the ecosystem, through the pilot actions throughout the neighborhood region.

UNDP manages the EU-funded GEF Small Grants Program, aiming to improve NGO’s capacity to participate in an informed and skilled manner in environmental policy formulation and natural resource management, collaborate in decision-making on key issues, and represent the interests of citizens and communities in the environment and sustainable development arenas. The program is achieving excellent results in Armenia. UNDP implements with UNIDO, the “ENPARD Armenia Technical Assistance: Producer Group and Value Chain Development” project, designed to support the agricultural institutions, encourage the development of farmers’ associations and improve access to more affordable food in the European Neighborhood countries. It covers Shirak, Lori, Gegharkunik, Aragatsohn, Kotayk, Vayots Dzor regions of Armenia. A particular emphasis of support is placed on promoting the significant potential role that women can play as cooperative members and leaders. As part of the EU budget support for Human Rights, UNDP will be the implementer of three sub-contracts to UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA respectively, with targeted complementary support focused on the implementation of the conditions attached to the disbursement of the annual tranches. UNDP will have the lead on support on issues related to the National Human Rights Action Plan, Fight Against Torture and other ill Treatment, the national gender machinery etc.

The EU supported the involvement of women in municipal council and work jointly to this aim through EU-UNDP “Promoting Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities in Armenia: Women in Local Democracy” (WILD) project. The general objective of the project was to support the advancement of gender equality, building parity democracy, and improving social cohesion in the Republic of Armenia through enhanced knowledge and mechanisms for progressive realisation of human rights and fostering democratic governance at the local level. “Inno4Dev” is a joint initiative of the EU and UNDP’s Innovations Lab and will be undertaken in Armenia between 2015-2018. Within this project, innovative new development technologies and methodologies are fully utilized in order to position the citizen at the heart of development and government decision-making. This EU-UNDP partnership will create more opportunities and mechanisms for citizen engagement and introduce tools and systems for more effective and open governance. Finally, the EU funds to the UN Elections Basket Fund: Support to the Electoral Process in Armenia (SEPA) to jointly strengthen the institutional capacity of electoral authorities and promote inclusivity in the electoral process for the National Assembly elections 2017, including raising public awareness on critical changes in proceedings at the polling station with the introduction of electronic voter identification technology.



EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN ARMENIA

The UN mission in Armenia is an excellent partner. We coordinate many activities with them. Currently we are working together to support the Government of Armenia as it seeks to ensure the safety and protection of vulnerable children by developing family-based care and community-based services. Together with the UN, we are working with the Armenian Ministry of Health to prevent and control tuberculosis. And with the UN and other international donors we provided funding for new equipment and procedures designed to support free and fair parliamentary elections in Armenia. In the past we have worked with the UN on a number of health and nutrition programs, environmental protection efforts, and public works development in Armenia.

WITH THE UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL DONORS WE PROVIDED FUNDING FOR NEW EQUIPMENT AND PROCEDURES DESIGNED TO SUPPORT **FREE AND FAIR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA**



ARMEN HARUTYUNYAN DEPUTY MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE OF ARMENIA

There are two important projects we've recently been implementing together with UNDP and UNIDO. The first one is the "Integrated Support to Rural Development: Building Resilient Communities" project, financed by the Government of the Russian Federation and implemented by UNDP in Armenia. The second major project, launched in 2015 lasting two years, is the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD). The project aims to improve agricultural institutions, encourage the development of farmers' associations and improve access to more affordable food. The activities focus on women, youth and other vulnerable groups. ENPARD is improving the lives of nearly 800 farmers directly, and indirectly 3,200 people, through the creation of agricultural cooperatives. The cooperatives have been provided with the latest equipment and technology and their staff are trained to produce high quality products. Fifty-five cooperatives have been formed and registered under the Law on Agricultural Cooperatives.

The farmer groups are producing buckwheat, European type high value cheeses, non-traditional vegetables such as broccoli, and dried fruits and herbs. Another important project I'd like to mention is the Climate East Pilot Project "sustainable management of pastures and forests in Armenia to demonstrate climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits and dividends for local communities". The project aims to demonstrate a sustainable natural resource management model in degraded mountainous pastures and forests of Armenia to increase an ecosystem's capacity for carbon sequestration under climate change conditions, at the same time retaining biodiversity and economic values. The project is funded by the European Union and co-funded by UNDP. The main target area of the project is Vardenis sub-region of Gegharkunik Marz, Armenia. I'm glad to mention that we have a long history of joint collaboration with the UN in Armenia and have implemented development projects in all of the regions of Armenia so far.



ARMAN TATOYAN

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OF ARMENIA

The UN is one of our most important partners. The cooperation between the Human Rights Defender's Office (HRDO) and the UN is focused on jointly promoting respect for human rights. This cooperation includes, but not limited to, conducting projects that is promoted by means of special incentives. There are a number of projects co-implemented with the UN. I would like to particularly emphasize the "Implementation of Sexual and Reproductive Rights" public research conducted in 2015 with UNFPA Armenia, carried out within the "Strengthening Sexual and Reproductive Health Services" project. Within the framework of the research, a number of visits have been carried out to the medical and educational institutions in Yerevan, as well as in some regions (Gegharkunik, Syunik and Shirak). There are two projects currently being implemented. The first project is being implemented

together with UNICEF Armenia. In October 2016, I signed an agreement with UNICEF on the mutually implemented project titled "cooperation on achieving better promotion, monitoring and protection of children's rights". Within the project, a child friendly complaint system will be developed and will be accessible to all children indiscriminately. It is assumed that after the development of the complaint mechanism for children, HRDO will be more actively engaged in receiving and responding to complaints. The second project is being co-implemented with UNHCR in Armenia. At the end of 2016 "enhancing the capacity of HRDO to monitor the situation of refugee and asylum-seekers in Armenia" project agreement has been signed. It entails cooperation in the field of monitoring the situation of human rights protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in Armenia.



SUSANNA TADEVOSYAN

FOUNDER OF "BRIDGE OF HOPE" NGO

"Bridge of Hope" NGO has been collaborating with UNICEF since 1998 to develop inclusive education in Armenia. As a result of the partnership, around 10,000 teachers from 334 schools have been trained to implement inclusive education in their schools. More than 4,000 children with disabilities were included in mainstream schools. Three special schools in Syunig region were transformed to regional pedagogical-psychological support centers for inclusive schools. Seventy-nine children with disabilities from special boarding schools were returned to their families and were then included in mainstream schools. The legal framework of mainstream education has been improved to

THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER'S OFFICE AND THE UN IS FOCUSED ON JOINTLY PROMOTING RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

support sustainable development of inclusive education through the whole mainstream education system of Armenia. This includes the law regarding mainstream education, the financial procedure supporting inclusive education and transformation of special schools to regional pedagogical-psychological support centers. Guidelines for teachers and specialists on Individualized Education Programs (IEP) development, implementation and evaluation, teachers in-service training packages and other essential materials were developed. Currently, Bridge of Hope hand in hand with UNICEF, promotes the expansion of inclusive education from one province to another. UNICEF partnership with Bridge of

Hope resulted in the development and the strengthening of local partners to advocate for the rights of children with disabilities and special educational needs to inclusive quality education and full inclusion in community life. Therefore, demonstrating the bottom up and human rights based approach to the rights of children with disabilities in Armenia. Currently, Bridge of Hope is collaborating with the UN in the framework of the project "Toward social inclusion of vulnerable children: Expanding alternative care, family support, and inclusive education services". The project was launched in September 2014 and should be completed by August 2019.



VACHE TERTERYAN

FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER OF TERRITORIAL
ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ARMENIA

In order to make the country's territorial administration more efficient, it is necessary to engage in each community and village, especially in bordering regions. Bordering communities are always in the focus of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development and in this sense I would mention one of the main projects we started in 2015, the "Integrated Support to Rural Development: Building Resilient Communities" project. Over five years, 45 bordering communities of Tavush region, with an overall population of 62,000, will have the opportunity to develop their own community plans, prioritizing activities – such as infrastructure and income generating activities – for financing within the framework of the project. Financed by the Government of the Russian Federation and implemented by UNDP

in Armenia, the overall goal of the project is to ensure balanced development of Armenia's regions through an integrated socio-economic approach. The project aims at raising the quality of life and income level of the local population in 45 bordering communities of Tavush region.

In 2016, we launched the "Integrated Rural Tourism Development" project, financed by the Government of the Russian Federation and was implemented by UNDP in Armenia. Thanks to this project, over the next three years 60 communities in Armenia will benefit from UNDP's intervention to support rural tourism in the country, which will ultimately reduce the level of rural poverty and promote community based tourism and rural development. Another important project was initiated,

which focused on the level of women's representation and meaningful participation in governance and decision-making, which continues to be low in Armenia and we have to take steps to try to change this situation. The "Women in Local Democracy" project is comprised of three main dimensions: women's empowerment, strengthening the capacity of local government and promotion of gender equality. To date, with the support of UNDP and the European Union, 128 female candidates have stood for positions in local government, of which 84 were elected by their communities. Overall, 623 women ran for elections in 2012, of which 406 were elected. This is still a tiny proportion of the 5,384 elected representatives in local government but it's a start and we're focusing on quality.



ZARA BUDAGHYAN

HEAD OF TUMO COMMUNICATIONS

TUMO has been hosting different events organized by a number of UN agencies, such as UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF as well as Kolba Lab. In June 2015, TUMO organized "Children's Rights through Children's Eyes" photography workshop in collaboration with UNICEF and PAN Photo agency. Participants, including TUMO students and others, learned about the fundamentals and key techniques of photography. They worked on their personal photo series, presenting a self-contained story at the end of the workshop. At the end of the workshop, leaders and Pan photographers Hrant Khachatryan, Varo Rafaelyan and Areg Balayan discussed the five-day long workshop results and chose the best photos. The purpose of the workshop was to provide another tool for the kids to share their ideas, dreams and problems. Afterwards, the results of the workshop were showcased at a special exhibition.



IVAN VOLYNKIN

RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO ARMENIA

Russia consistently builds upon its efforts to provide support to its foreign partners to achieve the goal of sustainable development. Priority recipients of the Russian international development assistance are CIS countries and its partners in Eurasian integration. UNDP is a reliable partner of the Russian Federation which has an excellent reputation and huge experience accumulated through years of working globally.

In 2010, the Russian Federation and the UN World Food Program launched the “School Food” joint program. It provides meals to primary school children and distributes take-home entitlements to kitchen helpers involved in the daily preparation of school meals. Although the program has been partially handed over to the Government of Armenia, WFP continues to manage it in seven provinces (10 at the beginning) and provides basic kitchen equipment and other capacity-building resources. “School Food” program is supposed to be implemented and totally handed over to the Armenian Government by 2024.

Since 2014, the Government of the Russian Federation has been financing the “Integrated Support to Rural Development: Building Resilient Communities” project, implemented by UNDP in Armenia, in close partnership with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations. Communities of Tavush region have the opportunity to develop their own community plans, prioritizing activities – such as infrastructure and income generating activities – for financing within the framework of the project.

In 2014, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) launched the two-year pilot phase of the “improving competitiveness of export-oriented industries in Armenia through modernization and market access” program, aiming to boost the country’s textile, garment, leather and shoe sectors. It will enhance local manufacturers’ productivity and competitiveness, and promote business networking and institutional partnerships between shoe and garment producers and designers. It will also foster em-

ployment, particularly for women. The three-year second phase of the project, launched this year, will develop the industrial linkages of the Armenian shoe and garment producers within regional value chains. Russia is sponsoring the first and second stages of the program.

Another important direction we chose to fund is the health care system. UNAIDS National Program Officer also coordinates the implementation of the Regional Cooperation Program in Armenia, funded by the government of the Russian Federation. The Program aims to strengthen the HIV response and stem the spread of other infectious diseases in four countries of the CIS: Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Program will strengthen health systems to ensure better epidemiological surveillance of HIV and other infectious diseases in the four countries, as well as scale up prevention measures for key populations at higher risk of HIV. Over the first year, the program has demonstrated outstanding results in strengthening the national epidemiological surveillance systems, improving services for women and children. As one of the important results, this program eliminated mother-to-child transmission of both HIV and syphilis.

Our latest activity is aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality in Armenia. In 2016, the Russian Federation and UNICEF joined hands to accomplish a project strengthening neonatal care services in Armenia. The project will be implemented from 2017-2019 in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Armenia with the objective to reduce infant and neonatal mortality and morbidity in the country. With the support of the Russian Federation and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF will work to strengthen neonatal intensive and pediatric care services at the regional level by equipping healthcare providers with skills and knowledge regarding the delivery of quality neonatal care services in accordance with international standards, as well as providing essential supplies. Meanwhile, actions on reducing maternal mortality in Armenia are currently being discussed.

UNDP IS A RELIABLE PARTNER OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION WHICH HAS AN EXCELLENT REPUTATION AND HUGE EXPERIENCE ACCUMULATED THROUGH YEARS OF WORKING GLOBALLY



SEVAK HOVHANNISYAN

PARTNER AT EV CONSULTING

In 2015, EV Consulting prepared “The Millennium Development Goals: National Progress Report 2015” at the request and under the guidance of the UN office in Armenia. The report summarizes Armenia’s performance in relation to the MDGs, the targets under the MDGs and their respective indicators. The performance assessment of the country towards meeting its commitment and achieving the MDGs is made in relation to concrete national indicators committed by Armenia under each target.

The report also discusses approaches and principles for the prioritization of the Sustainable Development Goals in Armenia, successor to the Millennium Development Goals. With the purpose of furthering the MDGs and ensuring the continuity and sustainability of global efforts towards development, countries adopted a set of goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda in 2015.

In 2016, we also helped the UN team conduct the Rapid Integrated Policy Assessment in Armenia to assess the country’s readiness for SDG implementation. The objective of the assignment was to review the level of integration of the SDGs into national planning processes, specifically in the Prospective Development Strategy Paper of the Republic of Armenia for 2014-2025 and other relevant sectoral policies, and provide recommendation on actions to be taken forward for effective implementation at a local context.



TALAR KAZANJIAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AGBU ARMENIA

AGBU has been collaborating with UN in the framework of different projects and programs. We have been hosting joint events and organising workshops and seminars for various social groups.

In the nearest future we are planning to widen our collaboration and focus on global problems related to the development of Armenia. Together with UNICEF in Armenia, Mission East and the European Union Delegation in Armenia we have launched a special initiative – Together4Armenia – designed to facilitate the transfer of skills from the diaspora to local Armenian communities. The initiative was developed within the framework of the “Social Response to Labour Migration in Armenia” project funded by the European Union and implemented by UNICEF in Armenia. This is a very important topic for us, as we consider that Diaspora engagement is a critical element in Armenia’s ongoing socio-economic development. For five years we have been making joint efforts towards integration of Syrian-Armenians in Armenia. Currently, AGBU is assisting the Diaspora Ministry’s Syrian-Armenians Relief Coordination Center NGO and is forging a partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), aiming to make sure that humanitarian aids and assistance is provided to Syrian-Armenians and their integration in Armenia is facilitated. ♦

THREE VOTES TO WATCH THIS SPRING:

Parliamentary Election in Armenia, Constitutional Referendum in Turkey, Presidential Election in Iran

In spring 2017 voters in Armenia, Iran and Turkey will enter the voting booths. Armenians will be voting in a parliamentary election, Iranians will be choosing a president and voters in Turkey will have to make up their mind on a constitutional reform. Why are these votes important? And what results should we expect?

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN



Armenpress



Pan Photo

ARMENIA

ELECTIONS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, APRIL 2017

The upcoming parliamentary election in Armenia, in early April, is not a regular one. It will be the first parliamentary election after the constitution of the country has been changed, replacing a presidential system of government with a parliamentary one. Therefore, not only will the outcome of this election decide who comes to power in Armenia, but it would also set the trends of Armenia's development for years ahead. When the new constitution was adopted in a referendum in December 2015 its proponents in the Armenian government argued that by eliminating the strong executive presidency, the reform would make Armenia more democratic. The reform's critics from the opposition argued that the rationale behind the constitutional reform was to preserve the current political elite's grip on power. In particular, the opposition pointed to the fact that the second presidential term of Armenia's president Serzh Sargsyan is coming to an end in April 2018, while the constitutional reform could allow him to take on a new role in the government after that. Sargsyan and his allies have so far sent mixed messages regarding Sargsyan's possible political role after the end of his presidential mandate: in some cases they denied such intentions, but in other cases did not exclude anything. Another focal point of the criticism was the rule, which provided for a run-off vote, in case none of the parties were able to secure a majority in the elections. This provision has no precedents in other countries' constitutions (such a rule was introduced in Italy in 2015, but as a law, not as a constitutional provision, and still has to be tested in action). Opposition argued that this rule would favor the ruling party, while the defenders of the constitutional reform countered that it would prevent the emergence of weak coalition governments, a common drawback of parliamentary systems around the world.

➤ One of “The Way Out” coalition leaders, Nikol Pashinyan

Naturally, neither the government, nor the opposition can claim to know how the reform will play out in reality. One thing is obvious: the change in the system of the government is quite significant. In the past, strong executive presidency dominated Armenian politics, so the presidential elections were a winner-takes-all affair, often leading to protests and violence. As a result, there was little room for negotiation and deals, a vital part of the democratic political process. Besides, the opposition parties failed to convert their votes into a comparable share of influence on the affairs of the state. The new parliamentary system can give the opposition parties more say in deciding how the country is run, and can serve as an incentive for more deal-making that can advance democratic political culture in Armenia. Of course, things could also go wrong: in the absence of a strong presidential mandate based on direct popular vote, Armenian politics may become dominated by a few influential oligarchic groups, who could gain the control over parliament and monopolize political decision-making. Ultimately, it depends on the voters, whether the new system brings more or less democracy to Armenia. At the moment, there are some worrying signs of apathy and disillusion among many voters: many Armenians, who have come to distrust both the government and the opposition, do not expect that meaningful change can take place through elections. However, there are also positive signs: months before the elections a wide movement of election observers has started, involving mostly politically and socially active young people. This movement is not confined to Armenia proper: many Diaspora Armenians have announced their readiness to be part of this movement. Among those planning to take part in the elections as observers are figures who enjoy a cult status among young Armenians, such as Serj Tankian and Canadian actress Arsinee Khanjian. Of course, observation is an important element of elections, but, ultimately, an election is about the political parties. At this stage it is hard to make predictions. However, it is obvious that the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), which has won all parliamentary elections in Armenia held in this century, has the highest chances of winning this time as well. Recently, the RPA has been strengthened by the accession of a new prime-minister, Karen Karapetyan, who is perceived by many in Armenia as someone capable of bringing change to stagnant Armenian economy. However, there are also signs of internal splits within the RPA, which could influence its electoral results. Thus, former prime-minister Hovik Abrahamyan has left the party, along with some of his allies. As Abrahamyan had often been accused of corruption and shady connections in the past, his departure may help RPA to present a new face to the voters. On the other hand, Abrahamyan's ability to mobilize the party's resources in various regions has been a key element of the RPA's successes in the past, so his departure may create a headache for RPA. The RPA faces a challenge by several parties and coalitions, which represent groups that until recently have been a part of the ruling elite. These parties can hardly be described as opposition in the conventional sense, however, it is common



THE NEW PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM CAN GIVE THE OPPOSITION PARTIES MORE SAY IN DECIDING HOW THE COUNTRY IS RUN

for post-Soviet countries that groups, splitting from the ruling elite can challenge their former allies, and in some cases quite successfully. One coalition is formed around wealthy businessman Gagik Tsarukyan and his party “Prosperous Armenia”, and another one has brought together former minister of defense Seyran Ohanyan and former minister of foreign affairs Vartan Oskanian. Will these forces be able to present a serious challenge to RPA, or are they going to become what in the post-Soviet space is called “systemic” opposition, remains to be seen. Finally, there is the “non-systemic” opposition, which competes for the votes of those want to see radical change in the country. Here there are two main players at the moment: the Armenian National Congress, led by former president Ter-Petrosyan and “the Way Out” coalition led by three young politicians, Nikol Pashinyan, Edmon Marukyan and Aram Sargsyan. At the moment these forces can hardly be considered the frontrunners of the election: the local self-government elections in fall 2016 showed a low level of support for them. While there are many Armenians, who are highly critical of the government, many of them do not trust the opposition either, or consider it too weak to be able to change anything. However, in the past, Armenian opposition has often seen the numbers of its supporters surge in the run-up to elections. Besides, usually the opposition parties show good results in the capital Yerevan, which did not take part in the 2016 local government election. So, it would be wrong to write these forces off. The election in April may become the most important parliamentary election in the history of Armenia since independence. Not only this election will determine which political forces will dominate the political life of Armenia in the coming five years, but it will also determine how smooth the transition from a presidential to a parliamentary republic will be. In other words, the coming election will be the first test for the new constitution, and it will show whether Armenia has gained or lost as a result of the constitutional transition. ➤

TURKEY

REFERENDUM ON A NEW CONSTITUTION, APRIL 2017

On April 16 voters in Turkey will be asked to express their opinion about the proposal for anew constitution. The project of constitutional reform which will be on the ballot, will turn Turkey into a presidential republic. This vote can potentially have immense consequences for Turkey, and, given Turkey's role in regional and global affairs can resonate far beyond Turkish borders.

The fact that the referendum will be held is already a significant victory for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), and more specifically for its leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan. For years Erdogan and his allies have been pushing for a constitutional reform that would enhance the powers of the president. The plan of constitutional reform faced resistance from all sides of the political spectrum: the opposition People's Republican Party (CHP), pro-Kurdish "People's Democratic Party" (HDP), the ultra-nationalists, the military, the moderate Islamist movement of Fethullah Gulen, the liberal intellectuals, and even from some groups within Erdogan's own party. However, in some cases this resistance was broken, and in others Erdogan managed to carve deals that won support of those who had previously opposed him.



It was one of such deals, between Erdogan and the ultra-nationalist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) that allowed the referendum to take place. On January 21 parliament deputies from MHP provided the votes necessary to secure the backing of the National Assembly, without which the referendum would not be possible. The bill was opposed by MPs from CHP, as well as those deputies from pro-Kurdish HDP, who had not been arrested. Neither these votes, nor the brawl between the pro-government and opposition MPs during the parliament session, stopped the bill from passing: it gained 339 votes, surpassing the 60% threshold (330 votes) required to submit the draft to a referendum.

If passed, the constitutional reform will turn Turkey into a presidential republic, with wide executive powers for president. The new system might be called "super-presidential". The reform will abolish the office of prime-minister (though it will establish an office of vice-president), and the ministers will be appointed by the president directly. Critics of the new project have argued that this will take Turkey down the road to authoritarianism by weakening the system of checks and balances. The defenders of the project, however, argue, that the new constitution will actually enhance the system of checks and balances by providing a clear division between the executive and legislative power. They defend the constitution as a solution to the problem of weak coalition governments, which had plagued Turkish politics in the past, before AKP's rise. The critics, however, point to provisions that reduce the power of the parliament and give the president control over the judicial system. Thus, the parliament is deprived of the right to submit questions to the cabinet, asking to clarify various policies, a tool that allows the parliament to exercise control over the cabinet today. The new constitution also complicates signifi-





CRITICS OF THE NEW PROJECT HAVE ARGUED THAT THIS WILL TAKE TURKEY DOWN THE ROAD TO AUTHORITARIANISM

so far not harmed Erdogan's electoral prospects. In fact, when AKP failed to secure a solid majority in June 2015, gaining 40.87 % of the votes, Erdogan called for a snap election in November 2015, and though major terrorist attacks took place during the campaign, AKP significantly improved its result, gaining 49.5% of the votes, which allowed it to form a majority in the new parliament.

But will things continue to work this way? After all, now the voters are asked to say "yes" or "no" to a proposal, which even many AKP supporters have reservations about. So far Erdogan has been successful in eliminating dissent in AKP and getting rid of potential rivals within his party (such as former president Abdullah Gul or former prime-minister Ahmet Davutoglu). But will he be able to mobilize enough AKP supporters in support of the constitutional reform. Opinion polls show that Turkish voters are now almost evenly divided between supporters and opponents of the reform. Even a small defection from the ranks of AKP supporters could lead to a defeat of the constitutional reform.

Since the latest election Turkey has gone through various shocks. Turkey's involvement in the Syrian war and the influx of refugees from that country, turbulent relations with Russia, the escalating conflict in Kurdish regions, and finally, the failed coup d'état and the subsequent political repressions against Erdogan's opponents, have shook the country. All these troubles left their mark on Turkish economy. Various crises, and, most of all, the rising terrorist threat have hit tourism, one of Turkey's major sources of income. Instability has hindered investments, and international rating agencies have lowered the country's credit ratings. Turkish currency, Lira, became the second-worst performing emerging market currency in 2016 (after the Argentine peso), losing about 17 % of its value.

In the past, Erdogan's and AKP's appeal had to a high extent been based on the success of their economic policies, which opened up Turkish economy and lifted millions of its inhabitants out of poverty. With the economy in trouble, Erdogan is doing what many leaders before him have done in such situations: he calls on the people to rally around his leadership, against internal and external enemies, of which there is no shortage: from Kurds to ISIL, from Assad to Gulen. But will the voters heed to AKP's argument that, in order to counter numerous threats, Turkey needs a super-presidential system under a strong leader like Erdogan? Or will the referendum bring victory to those who consider Erdogan himself the source of many of Turkey's problems? We shall know the answer to this question in April. >

cantly the procedure of impeachment and gives the president an opportunity to influence "the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors", a body that oversees the judiciary. Any discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the constitution ultimately comes down to Erdogan's role. In one capacity or another, Erdogan has been Turkey's leader since 2002, when his moderate Islamist party AKP won the elections for the first time. Erdogan's critics have pointed out that the constitutional reform will allow Erdogan to run for president for two more consecutive terms, five years each, thus making him Turkey's leader until 2029. Even though Turkey is still in theory a parliamentary republic, and the executive branch of the government is headed by the prime-minister, Erdogan already has effective control over the country. Many observers believe that the departure of the former prime-minister Ahmet Davutoglu, once a leading AKP ideologue, has been a result of his relatively independent stance vis-a-vis Erdogan, particularly his objections to the direction of the constitutional reform. Binali Yildirim, who has replaced Davutoglu, it seems, wholeheartedly supports Erdogan and has no reservations about the new constitution project. In the past years, Erdogan has won virtually every major vote, in which he has participated. He also emerged victorious after an attempted military coup d'état this summer. Will the spring referendum be another victory for Erdogan? So far, what has helped Erdogan to defeat his numerous opponents, was their inability to form a coalition and to agree on a unified agenda. In fact, many of Erdogan's opponents are more hostile to each other than to Erdogan. It would have been extremely difficult to imagine the military, the Gulenists, the Kurds and the ultra-nationalists coming together. Even the tension and instability, which have rocked Turkey in the recent years, have

IRAN

MAY 2017

On May 19 2017 Iranians will be voting in a presidential election. Though in Iranian political system the president is only the second most important official, as he is subordinate to the Supreme Leader, presidential elections are still an important event, which can determine the path that the country takes. While the Supreme Leader Khamenei has retained the highest post in Iranian hierarchy since 1989, throughout that period Iran has changed four presidents, and the arrival of each new president has brought significant changes to the politics of the country. So, to a large extent it depends on the result of this election whether the gradual normalization between Iran and the West, undertaken by its incumbent president Hassan Rouhani will continue, or whether the country will be stirred in a different direction by the religious conservatives.

The upcoming election will most probably turn into a referendum on Rouhani's policies. In the complicated political landscape of the Islamic Republic, which is sometimes divided into "reformists", "moderates", "conservatives" and "ultra-conservatives", Rouhani can be described as moderate, supported by the reformist camp. Elected four years ago, Rouhani represented a break with the policies of his predecessor, radical conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad's combination of conservatism and populism today seems to be one of the predecessors of the rising wave of populism in the West. While Ahmadinejad, just like the right-wing populists in the West, was quite popular with some groups of population, he was detested by many middle class urban voters. These contradictions led to massive protests in 2009, when Ahmadinejad's election victory was disputed by his reformist rivals. The protests, known as "the Green movement" were put down, but the ruling elite of the Islamic Republic took an important lesson. In 2013 election the Khamenei, himself a staunch conservative, made it clear that he would not object if a moderate like Rouhani won. The reformers and moderates, however, had also learned lessons from their previous failures. Rather than challenging the conservative establishment directly, Rouhani made his priority the advancement of the negotiations with the West over a nuclear deal. By the time Rouhani became president, the controversy over Iran's nuclear program had led to massive sanctions against the country, which had taken a toll on Iran's economy. While Iran claimed that its nuclear program had purely peaceful aims, US, EU countries, and even Russia, a much more friendly power for Tehran, suspected that Iran was on the way to get nuclear weapons and insisted that Iran halted its nuclear program. Economic sanctions imposed on Iran in connection to its nuclear program, took a heavy toll on Iranian economy, which, by the time Rouhani came to power, was close to collapse. Moreover, some countries, particularly US and Israel, threatened to do everything in their power to



Pan Photo

prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons: even military operation was not considered off the table. Ahmadinejad's rhetoric, which included calls for annihilation of Israel, could have provided a pretext for such actions.

Rouhani and his cabinet, particularly his minister of foreign affairs, skilled negotiator Javad Zarif, succeeded in working out an agreement with the so called "Five plus One" (UN Security Council members and Germany) and the EU. The nuclear deal, concluded in 2015, ended Iran's international isolation and paved the way for economic recovery. So, Rouhani and his supporters have a strong argument to present to the voters in May election. However, Rouhani could still face serious problems, which could cost him an election.

First of all, there is Donald Trump. Trump's election has the potential of becoming a genuine disaster for Iranian moderates. Both during the campaign and after election, Trump and his allies criticized Obama for being too soft on Iran, promising to get tough. Iran was included into Trump's travel ban on several Middle Eastern countries, signed on January 30, 2017. After it tested a ballistic missile in early February 2016, Trump's national security adviser, Michael Flynn said that Iran "was put on notice", though it is still unclear what exactly this means. It is still quite unlikely that Trump's administration would simply pull out of the nuclear deal. However, given Trump's tendency to take unpredictable policy decisions, such a development cannot be ruled out. The continuing civil war in Syria, where Iran actively supports Bashar Assad's government, has also contributed to the tensions. Besides, Trump's administration's tough talk on Iran has already encouraged the "hawks" in Iran, who blame Rouhani for alleged weakness in dealing with "the Great Satan". Even if Trump's "toughness" on Iran does not go beyond rhetoric, it could still hurt Rouhani's fortunes in the elections.

Trump is not the only possible obstacle for the reformers' camp in the upcoming election. While the lifting of sanctions has certainly helped the Iranian economy, it has not yet produced a major economic boom, as some have hoped. First, not all sanctions have been lifted, some still remain in force.

◀
Iran's current president
Hassan Rouhani

▶
Clashes after the 2009
Iranian presidential election

The hopes of a major international investment boom still have to materialize, as Iran still remains a risky place for investment for many international investors. While the lifting of sanctions allowed Iran to increase export of oil, the falling oil prices have reduced the potential benefits. Besides, Iran needs time and new technologies to increase the output of oil. So, while the nuclear deal is certainly a major foreign policy success for Rouhani's government, it cannot point to a similar success when it comes to the economy.

Another problem for Rouhani is that many in the reformist camp are disappointed with his policies, complaining that Rouhani has failed to bring serious change into Iran's internal life. Thus, censorship, though it is less pronounced than under Ahmadinejad, still exists and cultural policies of the state still reflect a high degree of influence of the conservatives. Besides, as a result of conservative resistance, Rouhani has so far failed to secure one of his campaign promises, the release of the leaders of the 2009 Green Movement, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi, who have been under house arrest since 2011. However, in any case, faced with a conservative or ultra-conservative alternative, the voters, who normally support reformist and moderate candidates, will most likely mobilize to give Rouhani their vote.

A lot depends on the position of the religious establishment and the Supreme Leader. In 2013 Khamenei chose not to oppose Rouhani, which, in the context of Iranian politics, amounts to

THE UPCOMING ELECTION WILL MOST PROBABLY TURN INTO A REFERENDUM ON PRESIDENT HASSAN ROUHANI'S POLICIES



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Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif



tacit support. But what would be Khamenei's position this time? It may be still too early to tell. It was a serious blow for Rouhani that his powerful ally, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, one of Iran's most influential politicians, passed away in early January. Rafsanjani, a former president, headed the Expediency Council, one of the top non-elected bodies of the Islamic Republic. His pragmatic approach helped to advance the reformist cause. Rafsanjani used to be a hardline revolutionary in the early years of the Islamic Republic, but later drifted toward the moderate camp, and often helped to settle contradictions between reformists and conservatives, thus helping to achieve incremental change in Iran. His absence may embolden ultra-conservatives and make it harder for the reformists to find common ground with the clerical establishment, including the Supreme Leader. The official registration of the candidates will take place only in mid-April, and the whole campaign will take less than a month. So, last-minute surprises are highly probable. However, at this point the conservatives and ultra-conservatives have yet to come up with a candidate who could effectively challenge Rouhani. In the previous election, one of the factors that helped Rouhani win, was the failure of various conservative factions to unite around a strong candidate. Charismatic Ahmadinejad still has many supporters, especially among the pious lower class voters, but he is a figure that is too divisive for the Iranian society, so his return to power is unlikely any time soon. In any case, a Rouhani's defeat would seriously endanger the breakthrough in relations with the West. Even if the hardliners decide to stick to the deal, their victory would most probably become an additional argument for the "hawks" in Trump's administration and their allies in the Middle East. All this could lead to unravelling of the nuclear deal, and, in a nightmare scenario, even military conflict between Iran and the West. Of course, even a Rouhani win is no guarantee that the conflict between Iran and the West would not escalate. However, a second term for Rouhani would not only empower Iranian reformers, but would probably be met with a sigh of relief in many capitals in the region and around the world. ♦

CAUGHT AMID A CLASH OF THE TITANS: Is Karabakh the Next Stage in the Iran-Israel Proxy War?

The amount of Israeli-made weaponry used in the recent Four-Day War in April 2016 and the subsequent visits by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Azerbaijan and Iranian President to Armenia give an impression that Yerevan and Baku are taking sides in the Israeli-Iranian rivalry. This is an ominous news for the region, against the backdrop of the Trump Administration's Iranian policy, which seems to be reversing the brief *détente* achieved during Obama's presidency.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN



Israel-Iranian rivalry dates back to the Iranian revolution and has since evolved into a sort of proxy war in the Middle East, close to the borders of Israel, in which both sides have made use of paramilitary groups or regimes with questionable legitimacy. Complex relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan caught up in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh just across the Iranian border could not avoid the attention of Israel, also in view of the fact that Azerbaijan has made its own overtures to Tel-Aviv. For Israel, Azerbaijan is a source of energy but it also serves as a gateway into the Turkic and Islamic world and can also be instrumental in disrupting Iran's strategy in Central Asia. Meanwhile, Armenia's interest in Israel does not generally extend beyond moral, political and humanitarian interest. On the other hand, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have their historical, cultural and other ties with Iran. Azerbaijan's ties with Iran is more complicated since most part of Azerbaijan's be-

lievers are Shi'a Muslim, an ideology championed by the neighboring Islamic Republic of Iran. Both countries have their leverages of influence into each other's home affairs along religious (in case of Iran) and ethnic (in case of Azerbaijan) solidarities.

AN ENEMY'S FRIEND OR PARTNER? AZERBAIJAN AND ISRAEL VERSUS IRAN

After the 1979 revolution, Iran started to seek a greater influence and has since vigorously competed for the position of leader of the Islamic world. Meanwhile Israel, whose very existence is verbally threatened at the highest level in Iran, seeks all possible means to neutralize and respond to those challenges and Iran's neighborhood in the South Caucasus has proved to provide an opportunity for such an endeavor. Israel's ties with Muslim and predominantly Shi'a Azerbaijan, apart from pragmatic reasons, also carry a considerable amount of ideological charge essentially disrupting Tehran's zealously promoted solidarity against

what it calls the "Zionist regime". Given the large presence of the Azerbaijani Turkic-speaking minority in Iran, Israel's cooperation with Baku is a highly sensitive issue and is viewed as a thorn in its side by Tehran. There is a cable on Wikileaks in which the Azerbaijani president reportedly said in 2009 that "bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Israel is like an iceberg. Nine-tenths are below the surface". It was probably this statement that Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan alluded to when he called Armenia's relations with Iran "open and clear" during a reception of President Hassan Rouhani in Yerevan in December 2016. Azerbaijan has since been long viewed as an Israeli-friendly country in Iran, as Baku reportedly hosted Israeli intelligence units engaged in surveillance operations within Iran. It is also said that Azerbaijan hosts Israeli intelligence engaged in interception and other operations against Iran. It was said that a 2009 Iranian planned attack on Jewish sites in Azerbaijan was successfully



averted thanks to the Israeli intelligence efforts. At the heyday of the West vs Iran rivalry under President Ahmadinezhad, relations between the two neighbors were rather sour, while Baku was capable of capitalizing on this, even at the cost of some diplomatic scandals, such as the case of the downing of an Israeli drone over Iran, which immediately pointed to Baku as the drone's launching base.

The situation changed however, to some extent with Hasan Rouhani's assuming of presidency, followed by the historic nuclear deal of 2015, which brought about a détente between Iran and the West but not with Israel.

Iranian officials even hint that Baku has stopped hosting Israeli drones engaged in surveillance operations over Iran. In his recent interview with the Russian RT TV channel in December 2016, Iranian Defense Minister Hosein Dehqan claimed that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev admitted to hosting Israel's surveillance drones and promised to put an end to the practice. This does not necessarily mean a complete end to such practices, it would rather mean that Baku will be more cautious in providing its facilities to Israeli surveillance. Azerbaijan-Iran tensions occasionally intensify and incidental low-key verbal shots are made from both sides.

FOR ISRAEL, AZERBAIJAN IS A SOURCE OF ENERGY BUT AZERBAIJAN ALSO SERVES AS A GATEWAY INTO THE TURKIC AND ISLAMIC WORLD AND CAN ALSO BE INSTRUMENTAL IN DISRUPTING IRAN'S STRATEGY IN CENTRAL ASIA

^ Israel's Minister of Defense Avigdor Lieberman

▼ Hassan Rouhani and Serzh Sargsyan in Yerevan

"BUSINESS AS USUAL": ISRAELI WEAPONRY IN ACTION DURING THE FOUR DAY WAR

Israel remains a major weapons dealer for Azerbaijan. The SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) Arms Transfers Database, which seems to be conservative in its estimates, clearly indicates that after Russia, Israel is the second most important weapons supplier for Azerbaijan in 2014 and 2015. It is unlikely that the trend will be reversed. According to the Jerusalem Post, Azerbaijan is Israel's second largest market for weapons in Asia after India. During the recent visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev boasted of having bought five billion dollars' worth of weapons from Israel. Earlier in October 2014, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon visited Azerbaijan, meeting with his Azerbaijani counterpart and also with President Aliyev. The Four Day War in early April 2016 along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh was an escalation



Pan Photo

> The Israeli-made drone that took off from Azerbaijan and was downed by Iran in 2014

of unprecedented scale in which both sides used new deadly weapons and delivered strikes which were expected to have a profound psychological impact.

Azerbaijan, who bought large quantities of Israeli state-of-the-art weaponry, including Harop suicide drones capable of carrying 20 kg of explosives and equipped with live feed cameras, tested them with deadly effect, in one case blowing up a bus full of volunteers heading towards the front line. Two Armenian village mayors were among the dead, which Azerbaijan could mark as a small victory for the home audience. This was an opportunity for the drone manufacturer Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to boast of its deadly efficiency, which they could not miss, also successfully circumventing possible ethical concerns.

Days following the incident, The Washington Post provided the world a view into the war in Nagorno-Karabakh when it published a photo of an Israeli manufactured suicidal drone exploding into a bus.

The Jerusalem Post recalls that a few days following the incident, during a visit to IAI facilities Israeli military journalists asked a spokeswoman if the company was behind the Washington Post revelation. She refused to answer but openly smiled when one reporter commented that such a photo is good for business and promotes sales of products that can then be labeled “battle proven”, the paper wrote.

The Jerusalem post also said that IAI was reportedly the likely winner of a bid to provide Azerbaijan with a spy satellite worth \$150 million, excluding the ground station and launching cost.

SILENT DIPLOMACY: THE ARMENIAN REACTION TO THE ISRAELI-AZERBAIJANI PARTNERSHIP

Referring to an Israeli “high ranking official”, Haaretz news reported that Armenia protested in early April to Tel Aviv over the sale of arms to Azerbaijan, whilst Armenian deputy foreign minister Shavarsh Kocharyan on 15 April denied the report claiming that the Armenian envoy in Egypt handed over a text of official protest. The Armenian diplomat did not deny that he met his Israeli counterparts, without elaborating

IT SEEMS THAT BOTH IRAN AND ARMENIA HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THE ISRAELI-MADE DRONES, WHICH ARE OCCASIONALLY CAPABLE OF PERFORMING THEIR COMBAT TASKS WITHOUT BEING SHOT DOWN

or denying the reports by the paper, while the Israeli Foreign Ministry did not comment on it, Haaretz wrote. Azerbaijani reports on plans to buy elements of the Israeli anti-missile system Iron Dome were initially played down by the Armenian defense minister. However, recently Armenian lobby organizations in the USA are seriously engaged in persuading the Trump Administration to try and pressure Israel to back down from its decision to sell weapons to Baku. Meanwhile, Armenian experts did not express too serious a concern over the possibility of the purchase, as according to them, the system was designed for small-scale warfare, with sporadic missile launches, typical of the conditions in Israel. It might fail to yield any serious results in the case of massive barrages or ballistic missiles, like Iskander, which Armenia proudly demonstrated during the Independence Day military parade held in Yerevan on 21 September 2016.



AN ARMENIAN-IRANIAN “UMBRELLA” AGAINST DRONES

It seems that both Iran and Armenia have problems with the Israeli-made drones, which are occasionally capable of performing their combat tasks without being shot down. In the immediate aftermath of the four-day war, some pundits in Armenia suggested that Armenian and Iranian specialists could jointly investigate the fragments of the shot down drones and exchange information.

On the eve of his visit to Iran, Armenian Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan said that Armenia might seek state-of-the-art technologies for its defense beyond the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Most Armenian experts agreed that this was an apparent hint at Iran. Some important details of his comprehensive visit are not known to the public. However, most Armenian experts tend to believe that the topic of anti-missile umbrella was certainly on the agenda.



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Ilham Aliyev and
Benjamin Netanyahu

UNFRIENDLY VISITS: NEW FRICTIONS FOLLOWING NETANYAHU'S AND ROUHANI'S VISITS?

Tensions between Baku and Tehran somewhat increased following the Israeli prime minister's visit to Azerbaijan, which was an unprecedented step also characterized as such by Israeli officials and most part of the media. It was no coincidence that Iranian President Hasan Rouhani's long expected visit was held days following Netanyahu's visit, which was picked up by most observers.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Bahram Qasemi said that Baku should have not hosted the meeting, in the meantime adding that "Azerbaijan is an independent state and it is its internal matter".

Baku also replied with the same token when Qasemi's Azerbaijani counterpart, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hikmat Hacıyev commenting on Rouhani's visit in Yerevan said that "Iran is an independent state, and this visit is a decision of the Iranian government" pointing out that Armenia is an enemy of Azerbaijan.

Iran also seems to hold certain reservations but at the same time tolerates Azerbaijan's purchase of Israeli military equipment and technologies as long as they are not directly against Iran's

interest. Illustrating this point is Iranian Defense Minister Hosein Dehqan's remark in the above mentioned interview with the RT stating that their "Azerbaijani friends" were told that "granting Israel access to the region will do them no good" and that "Iran will not tolerate that". On the other hand, the Iranian official said that Tehran would not object to Azerbaijan's moves, made with an aim of "achieving their goals and safeguard their national interests".

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED NEXT?

There is little room for the expectation that Iran and Azerbaijan will be good friends in the near future. The new Administration in the USA which is set to dismantle a significant part of the progressive policy towards Iran built under Obama as well as the likelihood that conservatives could turn the tables at the upcoming election in Iran are solid indicators of the unlikelihood of such a scenario.

It is beyond a doubt that Israel's rivalry with Iran will continue and under such circumstances Baku will probably use this to its advantage as part of its strategy against Armenia. In the meantime, this is a rather unsafe brinkmanship for Azerbaijan, particularly for Ilham Aliyev

who could risk his own power given the complex social conditions and possible dissatisfaction which Iran might facilitate. Under those conditions, Armenia will opt to continue to seek even closer cooperation with Iran in defense and security, especially in some specific matters like defense against Israeli-made drones. The role of this cooperation should not be overestimated given the restrictions on Armenia's foreign policy choice, including dependence on Russia as well as the large presence of ethnic Azerbaijanis among the high-ranking officers in the Iranian army and security bodies, which could make such cooperation complicated. Armenia has to reach out to Israel too, not only in terms of buying drones or technology, but also to attempt to influence Israeli politicians that their country should pursue a more responsible stance on the Karabakh conflict. It is true that this task is hard to achieve under the current Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who advocates for the expansion of ties with Azerbaijan and according to the Azerbaijani media, criticized Armenia over the escalation in April 2016. However, consistent activities in this direction could yield their results if not tomorrow, then a few years later. ♦

UNITED RIVERS OF THE CAUCASUS

Throughout history, the Caucasus has continually acted as an arena of conflicting political interests and wars. Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, and Russians conquered this part of the world during different periods. It is not much better today – conflicts involving Artsakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia still remain unresolved and the level of animosity between people is only increasing. It seems like nothing can unite Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians and other ethnic groups of the region, with their different languages, religions, customs, etc.

TEXT : VARDAN MELIKYAN



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Confluence of the Aravi
and Kura rivers in Georgia

REGARDLESS OF THE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE NATIONS OF THE REGION,
RIVERS KEEP FLOWING AND SOONER OR LATER THERE WILL BE A NEED
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOME KIND OF COOPERATION



There is something that is common though – the nature, particularly the rivers flowing between all countries, such as Armenia’s Aghstev that becomes Agstafacay in Azerbaijan, or Georgia’s Mtkvari that becomes Azerbaijan’s Kur. Moreover, Kura-Arax River Basin unites not only the three nations of the Caucasus, but also Iran and Turkey. Regardless of the tensions between the nations of the region, rivers keep flowing and sooner or later there will be a need for the development of some kind of cooperation for better management of watersheds. Therefore creating increased benefits for all countries, if these countries really want to develop and prosper. Historically, like any other important resource, water has mostly exacerbated and fueled conflicts rather than cooperation. Given the implications of climate change, it is highly likely that the same can happen in the Caucasus, if no imminent action is taken today. According to Third National Communication of the Republic of Armenia on Climate Change, by 2100 the average river flow of Armenia will decrease by around 40%, from 5,797.0 million m³ (1961-1990) to 3,602.2 million m³.



Obviously, this is a serious security risk, as the water use efficiency is currently very low in all countries regionally. In Armenia alone, the annual water intake reaches up to 3 billion m³ (including groundwater intake, which accounts for about 40% of total water intake), most of which is used in agriculture, where the utilization of water-saving technologies is still at a very basic level. Speaking of conflicts involving water, the ownership and water use issues surrounding the river Nile is certainly more known than the Armenia and Azerbaijan conflict. From as early as 1891, several agreements were signed between the countries of the river Nile basin regarding water usage which has seen Egypt disproportionately benefit at the expense of the other countries. Egypt claims to have a historical right over the river, while largely neglecting the interests and needs of the rest of the countries, including Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. According to the 1929 agreement, Egypt can monitor the river flow in the rest of River Nile basin countries, pursue projects related to the river, without coordinating with



upstream countries, whilst having the right to veto such projects implemented by the other countries.

To address these issues, the Nile Basin Initiative was launched in 1999 by nine countries sharing the river Nile (the above-mentioned countries, excluding South Sudan), aiming to “achieve sustainable socioeconomic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources”. Supported by key international development organizations such as the World Bank, the Initiative

▲
Kura river
in Georgia

includes important operations. Such as training on integrated water resource management, confidence-building, water use efficiency in agriculture, watershed management including reforestation and erosion control, etc. While there are still tensions between the basin countries, with upstream countries frequently claiming to be “tired of first getting permission from

Egypt before using river Nile water for any development project like irrigation”, with Egypt and Sudan refusing to sign a new agreement that will change their current stake of the Nile River waters. Still, this is better than threats of war made by Egypt. Other examples of cooperation relevant to river basin management include the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan (the relationship between them is otherwise not much better than between Armenia and Azerbaijan, for instance). Thanks to the treaty ratification back in 1960, the two countries have not had any water related conflicts and all issues have been resolved via respective procedures provided in the document. Within the framework of the Treaty, the Permanent Indus Commission was established in order to exchange data and to cooperate on issues pertaining to it. Despite the three wars between the two countries since 1960, the Commission has successfully implemented its objectives via regular consultations, inspections, and visits. This ensures that political tensions do not become a major headache for small farms and rural redevelopment that are heavily dependent on the availability of increasingly scarce water resources. The situation in the Caucasus region is of course somehow different from both examples, and if there is a possibility for cooperation on river basin management between the countries of the region, then a new model needs to be developed. Most of the water resources of Armenia and Georgia are generated locally, while Azerbaijan is more dependent on the river flow coming from both Armenia and Georgia. And since it is hard to imagine any historical rights of Azerbaijan on, say, Kura River waters, the cooperation has to be based on something more than simple distribution of water shares, although that will also become increasingly important given climate change forecasts. In fact, Turkey is planning construction of a dam on the Kura River, which will result in a water shortage in Georgia and Azerbaijan and potentially Armenia.



But let's focus on the quality of the water and the risks of disaster, which are more pressing concerns at the moment. While high in mountains, where most of the rivers of the region begin, one can safely drink the water from a river without detrimental health consequences. However, in the downstream areas of generally all rivers, the use of water is risky even for irrigation purposes. Absence of wastewater treatment systems in most of the communities, active development of mining and deforestation, lead to contamination of waters, while overgrazing and hydropower generation result in degradation of riparian zones. As a consequence, more money is spent on water treatment, health issues, infrastructure rehabilitation etc. Moreover, given the ecotourism potential of the Caucasus with its rich biodiversity and scenic landscapes, there is also lost potential income that can otherwise help solve certain social and economic issues. Untreated domestic wastewater, mining activities and deforestation are common problems for all countries in the Caucasus and these are also the main reasons responsible for the problems in most of the watersheds. While each

of the countries can potentially solve these issues alone, it is important to ensure proper management of the whole watershed because inefficient management in the upstream area can cause problems in the downstream area and vice versa. Thus, it will be more effective to conduct joint transboundary management of watersheds, including joint monitoring of water quality and quantity, the collection zones and deltas of rivers, riparian areas, etc. Implementation of reforestation projects and rehabilitation of riparian zones are the other important elements, that can be implemented jointly, at later stages. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Aghstev River is probably the best candidate for such a project. Unlike most of the other transboundary rivers flowing from Armenia, Aghstev is less effected by mining activities and the number of hydropower plants in this watershed are also relatively small. Another important advantage is that its collection zone is located mainly in Dilijan National Park. So, its management contains smaller potential for conflicts with other users, while benefits can be more tangible, both in terms of income generation and protection of biodiversity.



◀ Nile river's drainage basin covers eleven countries in Africa

▲ Dilijan National Park



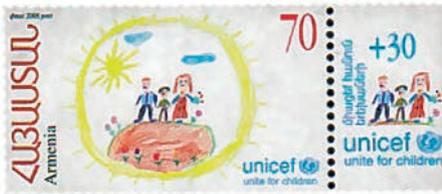
Management of Aghstev watershed can be partially based on the example of the Hudson River, where the water quality is so high that there is no need to filter the drinking water in New York City. As a result of the adoption of Watershed Rules and Regulations, which covers everything that concerns water supply, including sewer collection, storm water discharging, etc., saved about USD 6-10 billion on construction of a filtration plant, as well as USD 110 million on operation and maintenance, annually. At the same time, costs related to watershed management are less than USD 100 million and this does not include other benefits.

Evidently, the chances of cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan are very slim, especially after last April's conflict but the building of trust has to start somewhere and sometime. Environmental management is one of the best places to start. It took India and Pakistan over 10 years to reach an agreement on the Indus waters. If Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia begin today, chances are that the next generation will be able to discuss issues related to creating a better future for everyone in the region and not war. ♦

UNTREATED DOMESTIC WASTEWATER, MINING ACTIVITIES AND
DEFORESTATION ARE **COMMON PROBLEMS FOR ALL COUNTRIES IN**
THE CAUCASUS REGION

UN THEMED POSTAL STAMPS

During over 70 years of United Nations' existence hundreds of collectible postal stamps were produced, related to different events and agencies. After Armenia joined the Organization in 1992, several stamps were presented here too.



A stamp dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Armenia's membership in UN, 2012



UNICEF unite for children. Armenian stamp, 2008



Women for Peace, 2002



Armenian stamp from The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)



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