

REGIONAL POST

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE / 2017

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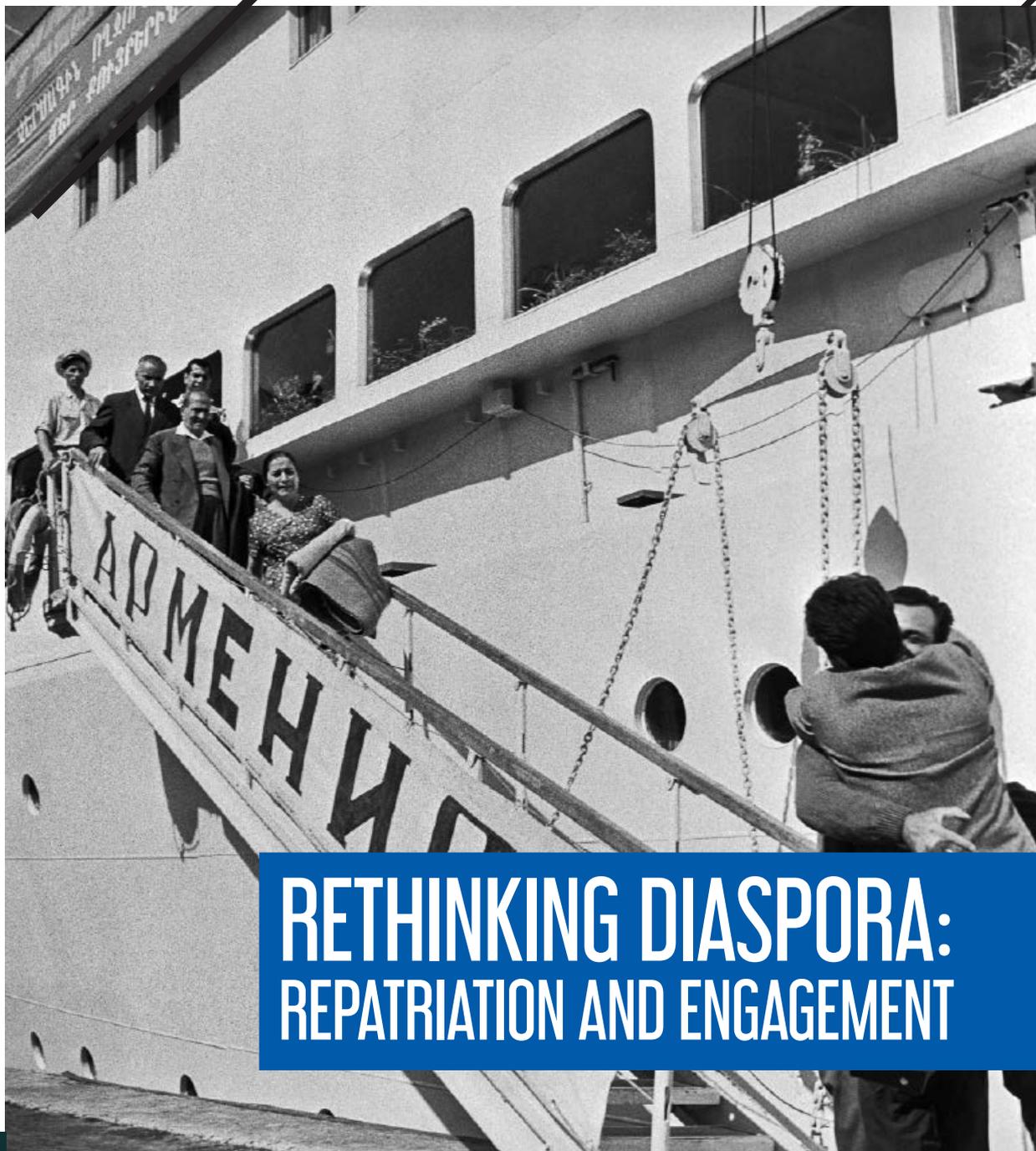
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RETHINKING DIASPORA:
REPATRIATION AND ENGAGEMENT



MUSCARI

Caring for Land, People & Culture

Gyumri Ceramics

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

The prestigious “Gallery de la Tour” in Lyon held in 2016 a two-month exhibition-sale of unique pieces of ceramics made by the craftsmen of Gyumri using the know-how of Armenian potters from Kütahya, a major center of ceramic production in the Ottoman Empire during XVI-XIX centuries.

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

This event was organized as part of the global project aimed at the promotion of the economic and artistic prowess of Gyumri, initiated by Antonio Montalto, Honorary Consul of Italy in Gyumri, and the Pamokdjian family.

The Muscari association plans to establish several Houses of Armenia (les Maisons d’Arménie), centers for the distribution and promotion of Armenian crafts across France and other European countries.

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

The exhibition will also take place in a prestigious gallery in Paris and in the city of Aix-en-Provence between 2017 and 2018 followed by a tour in various European cities throughout 2018.

These events are supported by Muscari association, Family Care and Friends of Gyumri foundations.



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WITH AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMME

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Cover Photo: UN PHOTO ARCHIVE

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Printed in "TIGRAN METS" PUBLISHING HOUSE C.JSC,
Armenia, 0023, Yerevan Arshakunqats Ave., 2 Building
Readership: 2000

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Dear reader,

We are happy to present you our first summer special double issue dedicated to “Repatriation and rethinking the role of Diaspora”.

As a repatriate myself it is hard for me to underestimate the importance of repatriation and the efficient relationship between Armenia and Diaspora for the bright future of the Armenian nation and state.

We often forget that we are a nation of 10+ million spread around the world and we do not take advantage of all the potential on offer from all these outstanding individuals.

The relationship between Armenia and the Diaspora is far from being ideal: many Armenians and unfortunately many Armenian state officials see Diaspora as a mere source of money – they are happy to accept their financial contribution but when the time comes to involve them in serious processes of decision making on topics that may impact the future of all Armenians, they are often seen as outsiders who are unable to grasp the realities of Armenia.

On the other hand Diaspora’s efforts are mainly concentrated to the topic of the international recognition of the Genocide and more recently the war in Karabakh. They often do not really see Armenia as their homeland, believing their homeland to be somewhere in Van, Cilicia or Kars and actually using that as an excuse for not being

bothered about the Republic of Armenia itself, seeing it as nothing more than a touristic destination for a rare summer vacation.

They are often not really aware about political and economic realities in Armenia, nor they wish to be so; they do not consider Armenia as a viable option for repatriation, for investment or any other activity which requires dedication and effort.

Obviously not everyone will be expected to repatriate or start a business in Armenia, but there are many ways to contribute to what I am sure is our common dream – a strong prosperous modern truly independent Armenia.

It is obvious to me that both Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora have a lot to gain from a more efficient and more intelligent relationship and we at Regional Post would like to contribute as well to the process of reassessing this crucial relationship. We tried to tackle repatriation from historical, cultural and economic angles, to present you the repatriates who impacted considerably the cultural, scientific or business life in Armenia, to analyze the current relationship with Diaspora and to present the vision of the future as seen by various interesting individuals.

Enjoy this special issue and possibly give us your feedback and your vision via our website or Facebook page.

Executive Director
ARSHAK TOVMASYAN

EUROPEAN NEWSPAPER CONGRESS 2017

This May Vienna hosted 9th annual European Newspaper Congress, supported by Japan Tobacco International. Regional Post was among over 500 media experts who discussed the most important media related topics.



ENC united over 500 professionals from all over the world





◀
“Die Zeit” editor
in chief Giovanni
Di Lorenzo



The Congress's main focus areas cover media content, design and strategy. This year's event's program had 24 topics to discuss, including Media digital transformation, Constructive journalism, Newsroom of the future, The power of data and others. They were presented by such speakers like Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern, “Die Zeit” editor in chief Giovanni Di Lorenzo and others. A special attention was paid on Central Europe and post-Soviet space: media projects from Serbia and Romania were presented, and panel discussion on media landscape in CIS+ (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia) were organized. One of the most popular spots during the Congress was The Future of Brands, an interactive exhibition

that explores and predicts the future of companies in the not-too-distant future. Guests were briefed and explained the exhibition concept and key messages. During the Congress winners of European Newspaper Awards (Newspaper Design & Concept) organized by newspaper designer Norbert Küpper were announced. They were chosen among 191 newspapers from 27 countries. “Hufvudstadsbladet” from Finland was named as the Local newspaper of the year, “Het Parool” from The Netherlands was the best in the Regional newspaper category, “Politiken” from Denmark – Nationwide newspaper of the year and German “Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung” became Weekly newspaper of the year.

ARARAT Speakers Night: “The Museum Today”

As a partner of the most important cultural events both in Armenia and worldwide, this March the ARARAT Museum became the initiator and the platform for the unique “arttainment” project held in the format of Public Talk: ARARAT Speakers Night. For us it was yet another reason to visit the museum, one of the most significant places in Armenia.

That warm spring evening, the museum’s garden and meeting hall was full of artists, actors, museum professionals and journalists. Although ARARAT Speakers Night’s very first edition was yet to be launched, it was clear to all of us that it was going to be something special. As stated in a press release that we read whilst tasting one of the marvelous cocktails based on Ararat brandy, “ARARAT Speakers Night is a special series of meetings and dis-



cussions, where professionals from different fields including experts, artists, opinion leaders, journalists and representatives of contemporary art present their thoughts on urgent issues.” “It’s great to know that the Yerevan Brandy Company is not just enjoying its status as Armenia’s national treasure, but it is also creating a platform to discuss the future of some of the most important global topics”, noted Peto Poghosyan, a talented painter,

who was going to produce some sketches of that evening. A few minutes’ later, guests were invited into the hall. The decorations with the “The Museum today” writing revealed the topic of the first discussion. As I was checking in to the ARARAT Museum (by the way, a member of ICOM: The International Council of Museums) on my smartphone, the moderator of the evening Ara Tadevosyan (the director of “Mediamax” media company) presented the speakers of the first episode of ARARAT Speakers Night: Zelfira Tregulova, director of the Russian State Tretyakov Gallery; and Danilo Eccher, curator, a contemporary art critic and one of the primary faces of Italian art. During the meeting, the speakers presented strategies to build new types of relationships with regular and potential visitors. They also shared their rich experience of combining traditional and modern approaches, such as using cross-media technologies. The latter has reached a record number of diverse visitors of different ages and social backgrounds. Mr. Eccher noted that times have changed and so has the audience. It





^ Guests of ARARAT Speakers Night



^ Peto Poghosyan sketching the event

^ Danilo Eccher and Zelfira Tregulova

reminded me of the very common scene I observe in almost every museum in different parts of the world – youngsters sitting near the art masterpieces but staring into their phones. It's not enough just to have treasures inside anymore. "Visitors demand new options that we didn't have in museums 10 to 20 years ago. They need more technologies and more ways to become integrated into the museum," Mr. Eccher said, "That's why nowadays you can take photos in many museums, which was impossible a few years ago. The selfie is one of the ways they can interact with museums, it became some kind of source of information in that way". Additionally, Mr. Eccher said that it is important to fully understand what the demands of the visitors are and to encourage them to come closer to the museum. One of the brightest examples he recalled took place in one of the museums in Rome: "During that exhibition we let people write on the walls, and 120 thousand visitors left notes on the wall. While there surely were explicit words, the majority of the writings were visitors' impressions about the pieces of art they saw in the museum." Speaking of writing on the museum walls: there's a similar writing corner in the ARARAT Museum with greetings from visitors from all over the world. While discussing the new approaches that museums must employ, Zelfira Tregulova stated that it's not only about new technologies, but to also provide visitors with a tool to express themselves: "They want to take part in the process and if you give them that op-



portunity, the museum succeeds. The museum must show not only pieces of art hanging on the walls, but must immerse visitors in everything that the museum is. We need to present interesting, fresh and bright ideas." Tregulova adds: "The museum must expand outside of the museum's walls. That's what we do in Tretyakovka: we went out onto the streets, onto the internet and social networks, and finally, we went down into the metro with a great project with the Moscow Metropolitan. For six months we were exhibiting the history of Russian art since the very beginning of the XX century to the current day in all of the carriages of the subway trains."

Summarizing the discussion, Mr. Eccher noted that it's also very important not to get too absorbed in technology and to not forget that the museum's main function is to show the art's real value and importance: "Technologies are just a tool and the tool should never replace the art itself." The discussion then continued at the meeting hall in a less formal manner. A few hours passed by very quickly, resulting from spending the whole day in an interesting museum and not noticing the time passing by. At the end of the day, it became clear that we are never going to skip any of the next editions of ARARAT Speakers Night.

THE ARMAS ESTATE WINE & JAZZ FESTIVAL 2017

Summer in Armenia started with wine and jazz. The historical meeting of the two national treasures took place in ArmAs Estate: in the village of Nor Yedesia, thirty minutes from Yerevan, among vine yards of the company that already became one of the leaders of Armenian winemaking.



<
Goght Band



➤ Armen "Chico"
Tutunjan



▼ Jazz Veterans
Martin Vartazaryan,
Yervand Yerznkyan,
Jack Shirinyan



▼ Vahagn Hayrapetyan



From June 2-4, ArmAs Estate hosted the first annual Wine & Jazz Festival where guests were treated to a Feast for the senses – Fine Wine, Fabulous Jazz, Flavorful Foods, a Fantastic View, and Feelings Galore. The 3 day festival included 4 events, with 7 performances and over 30 of the finest jazzmen including – in order of appearance – Goght Band, Artyom Manukyan Group, Chico's New Trio, Ann Kostanyan, Vahagn Hayrapetyan's Trio, Armen Hyusununts with Time Report, and Jazz Veterans Martin Vartazaryan, Yervand Yerznkyan, Jack Shirinyan, Armen Tutunjan, and special guests Levon "Malkhas" Malkhasyan and Artur Ispiryan. Sadly, just days later, Armen "Chico" Tutunjan passed while playing tennis after a long day of recording his weekly TV Show "Jazz Time." Indeed, even in his passing, he recited jazz, with romance, a lyrical poetry and an indescribable symmetry in the notes and keys of life. He performed with his new trio of talented young jazzmen whom he had schooled, and on the next day Chico had the farewell performance of his life with those whom he had played with in his very first performance over forty years ago. Chico's legacy and his contribution to Jazz was invaluable, through his books, his teachings, his recordings and lyrical writings, as well as his countless recitals, the last of which we were fortunate to enjoy at ArmAs Estate.

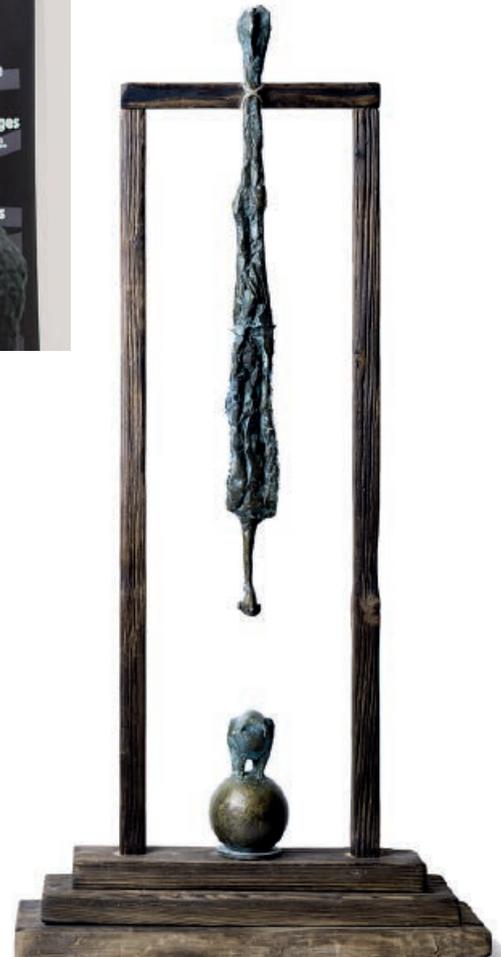
The ArmAs Wine & Jazz Festival was indeed yet another reminder of all the cultural elements of our past and present that we have to share with the world. Over 600 guests, including expats, repats, tourists and locals, enjoyed the contemporary and legendary musicians that continue to shape jazz culture, Armenian and international alike. Likewise, the Renaissance of Armenian Wine continues to treat us with fine wines with doses of history shaping the future.



ARMENIAN ART IN LYON

Muscari, a cultural philanthropic foundation which contributes to the valorization and diffusion of Armenian and French cultures, this spring organized exhibitions of two Armenian artists in the Rose Tower in Lyon: young sculptor Ashot Gevorgyan presented his works, while a documentary filmmaker Gareguin Zakoyan presented for the first time his collages. Both exhibitions were a great success, impressing the French public with the quality of the presented works.

PHOTO : MUSCARI FOUNDATION





ASHOT GEVORGYAN

Born in Yerevan in 1987, Ashot Gevorgyan lives and works in Armenia. He is sculptor and assistant professor in the chair of Sculpture at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Yerevan. To this day he has presented 23 personal and collective exhibitions in Armenia and abroad.





^ French public was impressed with the quality of the presented works

< Founder of Muscari Manoug Pamokdjian

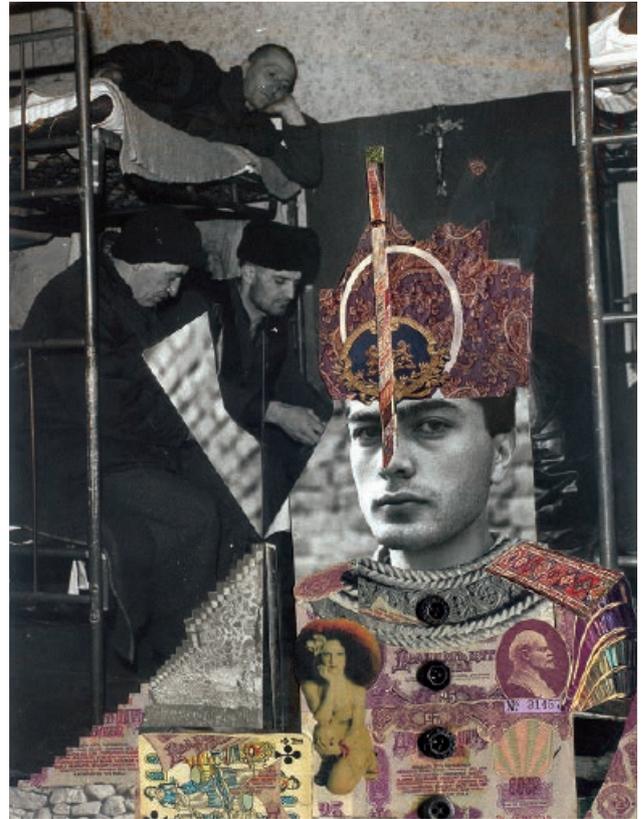


GAREGUIN ZAKOYAN

Born in Yerevan in 1947, Gareguin Zakoyan lives and works in Armenia. He is director of documentary, scriptwriter, producer, recognized cinema critic, historian and theorist of cinema. Artistic director of many cinematography festivals and exhibitions. He is also editor and author of monographs. He is founder of National Cinematheque of Armenia.

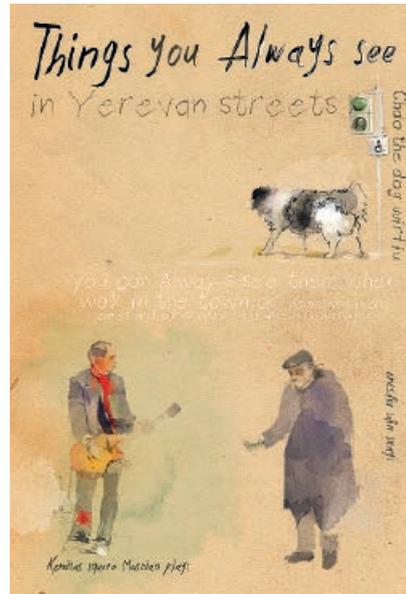
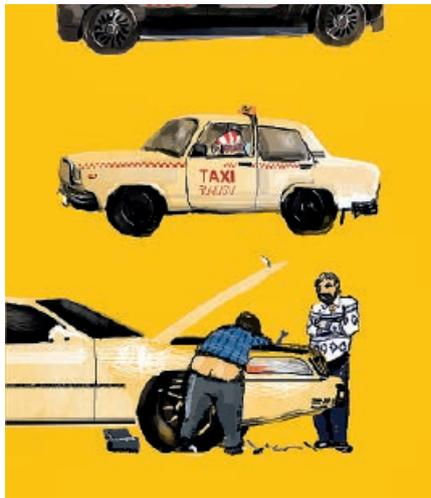


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Garegin Zakoyan
in Lyon



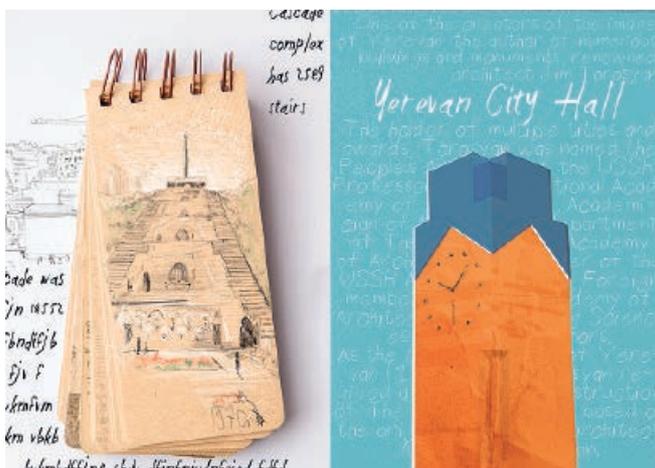
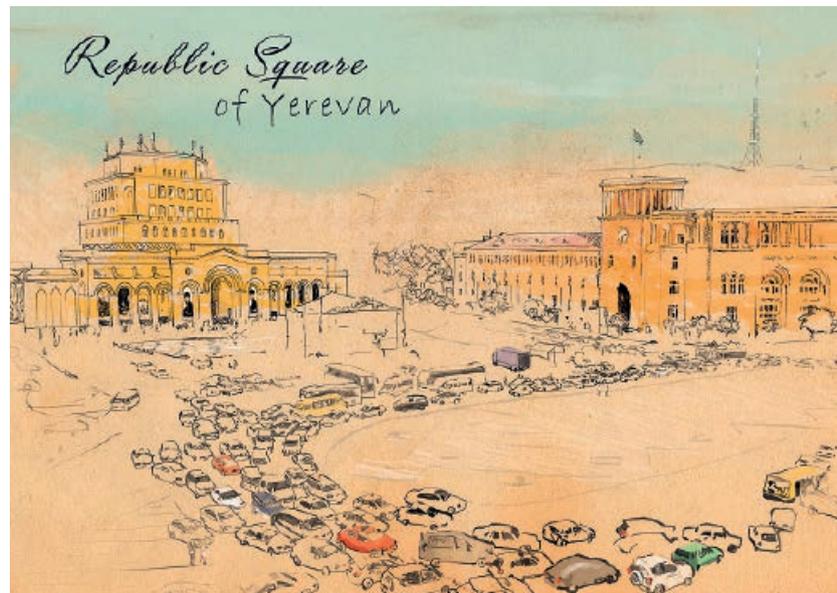
Muscari was founded in 2016. Based in Lyon, it contributes to the valorization and diffusion of Armenian and French cultures, in addition it carries out different exchange programs between Armenia and France. It works for education in both countries and promotes a better knowledge of people, culture and language. As a partner of the French university in Yerevan, Muscari has always carried out actions promoting the Francophonie in Armenia. Its president and founder, Manuel Pamokdjian, has been organizing numerous cultural, educational, social and economic projects between France and Armenia for 25 years (exhibitions, concerts, translation of books, etc.)





YEREVAN SKETCHBOOK

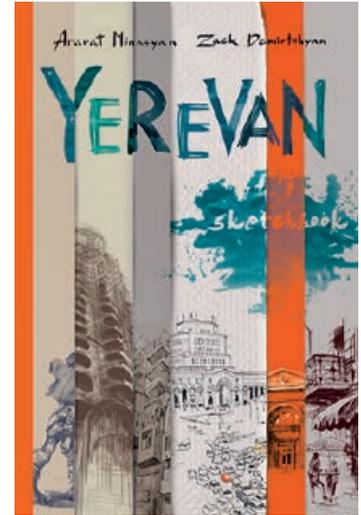
This June one of the most important cultural venues of Yerevan, Cafesjian Center for the Arts, hosted a presentation a one-of-its-kind publishing: “Yerevan Sketchbook”, a collection of sketches done by young artists Ararat Minasyan and Zack Demirtshyan.



“Yerevan Sketchbook”, published in Zangak Publishing House, introduces the Armenian capital with not only its rich history and sites worth seeing, but also with its hues and scents, its noise and music, its famous and not so famous residents and simply with its daily and vibrant life. Artists Ararat Minasyan and Zack Demirtshyan, alternating between whimsical momentary impressions and profound ideological expressions, depict scenes of the rich past and the lively present of this locale, situated in the crossroads of the East and the West. The city is presented either in vibrant colors or in black and white, but is always lovely for the residents, and full of interesting and unexpected discoveries for its guests. With light outlines and sometimes with heavy brushstrokes, these sketches will make the images of the old and new Yerevan more familiar to Armenians. As for visitors, this book will make their trip to Yerevan a trip to remember. Worth to mention, that the book is available both in Armenian and in English.

> Artists Zack Demirtshyan and Ararat Minasyan

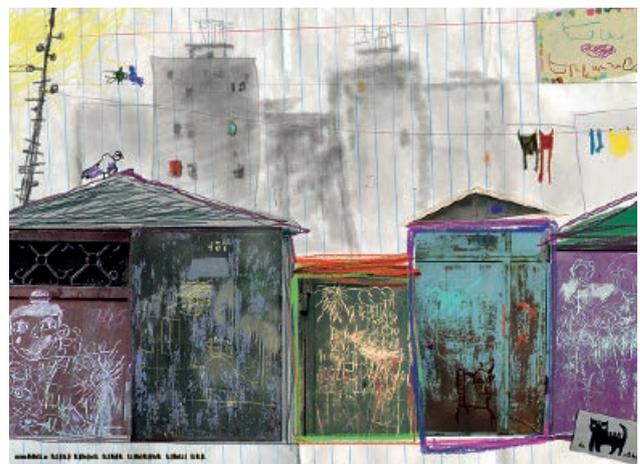
Zangak Publishing House / Lusi Sargsyan



YEREVAN SKETCHBOOK
Publisher: Zangak Publishing House
Artists: Ararat Minasyan, Zack Demirtshyan
Text: Krist Manaryan
Pages: 162
Cover: hard
Language: Armenian / English
Published: 2017



Zangak Publishing House / Lusi Sargsyan



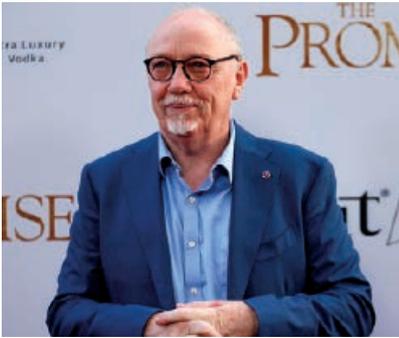
KEEP THE PROMISE

The movie critic Vahagn Tevosyan's review of "The Promise", a historical epic starring Christian Bale, Oscar Isaac and Charlotte Le Bon. The movie, directed by Oscar-winner Terry George (director of "Hotel Rwanda"), was released on the eve of the 102nd anniversary of the Armenian Genocide to a lot of hype and mixed reviews.

TEXT : VAHAGN TEVOSYAN

It's a bit of a challenge for every Armenian to be objective on anything (in this case a movie), which has some relation to the Armenian Genocide. And it's also hard to expect an objective perspective from Turkish society. For Armenians and many other countries, the events of the early 20th century were undoubtedly characterized as Genocide, but for Turkey and a few Islamic countries – there is no association with Genocide. And we should accept it by default before watching "The Promise". Anyone who understands films more or less, would admit that "The Promise" is a usual movie. It's not a masterpiece, but also not rubbish. It's less about Genocide, than the "Titanic" is about the sinking of the RMS Titanic, and more about a love triangle, than the "Titanic" was. And we could've discussed the artistic merit of the movie, its cultural significance, etc, if there wasn't so much noise surrounding the movie, even when the movie was in the early stages of filming. Even when no one had seen the movie, Armenians began to promote it on the Armenian Genocide





^
Director of "The Promise"
Terry George



^
Oscar Isaac,
Charlotte Le Bone
and Christian Bale
on the premiere of
"The Promise"

platforms, the Turks, on the other hand, began an unprecedented campaign on the IMDB website, purposefully giving the film the lowest rating. As a result, "The Promise", unfortunately, gradually turned into a thing rather than a movie, making it hard to judge objectively. Although the main topic of the movie is not Genocide (also, in my humble opinion the Holocaust is not the primary focus of the films "Schindler's List" and "La vita è bella"), but the plot of the movie is constructed in a way that any event depicted and any dialogue in the film is somehow dealing with the topic of Genocide. This is a good example of screenplay solution. The thing is, you can't find scenes of bloody massacres in the movie, but nonetheless you have the main topic before your eyes during every second of the movie, even in the very short dialogue between two doctors, when one of them, using their internal terminology, refers to Arme-

nians as a "cancer" of the Ottoman Empire. However, there are also "good Turks" depicted in the movie. A senior official, for example, gives information to an American journalist, which then provides a clearer picture about the massacres, or a young student, who risks his life trying to save his Armenian friend. Such kind of references in Taviani's "The Lark Farm" are quite normal, but in the present day, where vehement denialism of the Armenian Genocide is still a reality, and the fact that the movie is financed by Armenians (more precisely, by billionaire Kirk Kerkorian, who passed away before the movie was completed), this is quite remarkable and unprecedented. Generally, the film is some kind of a "thank you" and tribute to those who helped Armenians during the Genocide: US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, the American journalist, performing faithfully his duty, and the

French navy, which helped Armenians during the Musaler self-defense. I purposefully avoid talking about the plot in details, but I strongly advise anyone to watch the movie. You might be bored at some points, or you may feel the absence of suspense, but the movie will have a profound impact with its humanitarian nature and its emotional atmosphere of pain and loss. Any ambitious blockbuster would look at the cast list with envy – Oscar winner Christian Bale, Golden Globe winner Oscar Isaac, Oscar nominees James Cromwell and the charming Shohreh Aghdashloo, TV-show stars Angela Sarafyan, Charlotte Le Bon, Tom Hollander and even Jean Reno who plays a French Admiral. This energy, created by a stellar cast, along with devoted work from the famous screenwriter Robin Swicord and Oscar-winning director Terry George, firmly puts "The Promise" on the "must watch" movie list. ♦

THE ONE CAUCASUS FESTIVAL

Since 2014, Georgia's Marneuli region has hosted the annual One Caucasus festival, in the village of Tserakvi. One Caucasus (then not under such name) started to develop as a concept in 2011 and in July and November of 2013 two research trips were conducted to find a suitable venue for the festival in Georgia. The festival line-up includes musicians and bands from the South Caucasus, Europe and further afield. Although music is a large part of the festival, One Caucasus is more than just a music festival. It hosts the 'One Caucasus Town' which is co-created by architects, international volunteers and local volunteers which offers a wide range of interdisciplinary activities to festival-goers. The festival is unique in that it brings people together from all three countries of the South Caucasus. Furthermore, beyond the region, it seeks to encourage active participants from all over the world. Rather than an exercise in peacebuilding, the festival offers a safe space for a meeting between people from all over the Caucasus without the pressure of expectations or outcomes. However, in terms of publicity, the festival is not as well known in Armenia than in neighbouring Georgia and Azerbaijan.

TEXT : CHARLIE ROSE / PHOTO : ONNIK JAMES KRİKORIAN



OVER THE BORDER

On the journey from Yerevan to Georgia I was accompanied by an Armenian friend of mine. Part of our route ran alongside the sometimes hostile Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Our driver said that every time he travels close to the border he worries about the threat of gunfire coming from the Azerbaijani side of the border. He told us that his friend's car was shot at from the Azerbaijani border, just two weeks before. The danger of being on the receiving end of gunfire is a daily reality facing those who live and travel close to the border.

When we crossed into Georgia we boarded the free transportation provided to the festival. Bearing in mind that me and my friend had no knowledge of the situation across the border in Marneuli, we were in for a pleasant surprise. We were the first two passengers on the minibus and our first stop was an Azeri village. Me and my friend were worried as we seemed to stop at this village for more than 20 minutes. A group of Azeris gathered around the minibus and asked me where I was from. The Azeris did not ask my friend where he was from but they somehow knew he was Armenian. My friend was noticeably apprehensive and so was I.

We got back into the minibus with our new passengers and proceeded onwards. A few minutes later we made a brief stop at a shop and our new passengers left the minibus. They returned to the minibus with some bags and before we knew it we were handed beer, chips and a generous portion of fresh bread. We felt less apprehensive after this kind and hospitable act. We were unsure what was going on and wanted to know when we would arrive at the festival, as it was getting late. The passengers spoke little English so my friend started to speak Russian with them. My friend would intermittently translate what they were talking about as I had no Russian language skills to speak of. My friend assured me that the conversation was friendly and he was no longer worried. We stopped at another village and let some more passengers on, but this time our new passengers were not Azeri. Our fellow Azeri passengers, much to our surprise, started to speak Armenian with the new passengers, and of course the village we had just arrived

MY FRIEND WAS RELIEVED AS HE COULD THEN CONVERSE IN ARMENIAN. IT WAS AT THIS MOMENT THAT WE REALISED ARMENIANS AND AZERIS CO-EXIST PEACEFULLY OVER THE BORDER IN GEORGIA



Yerevan-based band Lelocity at One Caucasus 2016



Lelo Balian, lead singer of Lelocity



in was Armenian. My friend was relieved as he could then converse in Armenian, rather than continuing to struggle with Russian. It was at this moment that we realised Armenians and Azeris co-exist peacefully over the border in Georgia. We both knew that Armenians and Azeris would be present at the festival but we hadn't given much thought as to what that would actually be like, bearing in mind the things you hear about Azeris in Armenia and the perception of Armenians in Azerbaijan, but also the fact that both countries are locked into a conflict with each other over Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite this, the experience at One Caucasus was extremely positive, meeting Azeris (both living in Georgia and from Azerbaijan) who were eager to make friends with Armenians and enjoy the festival together.

MY EXPERIENCE AT LAST YEAR'S ONE CAUCASUS

The Yerevan-based band I was playing with at the time (1243k) had the pleasure of playing a set at last year's festival. We played a 20-minute set which was going smoothly until we suffered a momentary loss of power halfway through our set. It was then my job to continue playing percussion to



keep the crowd entertained as my instruments didn't require electricity to be heard. After a minute, power was restored and we finished our set to an enthusiastic applause from the audience. Before we performed our set, the festival's music director Pako Sarr approached us and told us that he'd like to take one of our songs ('Jehovah's Robot') and rearrange it under his direction, adapting the song for a performance on the main stage.

We gladly accepted his invitation and were also told that we'd be playing the new arrangement with additional musicians from the Baku-based band, the Snails. Before our performance, we rehearsed the new arrangement with the Snails, taking around an hour for all of us to get the new arrangement nailed down. The new arrangement differed from our usual performance. At the time, 1243k comprised of three musicians: a keyboardist/vocalist, an acoustic guitarist/vocalist and myself on percussion. Our live performances had more of an acoustic flair rather than the sound you get from a conventional setup of electric guitar, bass guitar and drum kit. However, the new arrangement amplified, projected and accentuated the drama of the song with the addition of the



aforementioned instruments. Performing the song was an incredible experience and the reaction we got from the audience was electric! This was not only significant exposure for our band but it also marked the largest audience any one of us had performed in front of. Before arriving at the festival, we never expected to play on the main stage, never envisioned playing one of our songs with other musicians and we also never expected to play with a band from Azerbaijan!

A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH WITEK HEBANOWSKI, PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF ONE CAUCASUS

It seems that the Marneuli region of Georgia is best suited as a location for a festival that aims to appeal to all nationalities and ethnic groups of the Caucasus. This is not only important to attract festival-goers but also to attract those who come as active participants to the festival. But in your opinion, what is so special about the Marneuli region?

IT SEEMS HARD NOT TO THINK ABOUT THE ONE CAUCASUS PROJECT AS SOME KIND OF PEACEBUILDING PROJECT OR PERHAPS A PROJECT WITH A POLITICAL AGENDA. IS ONE CAUCASUS EITHER ONE OF THESE?



▲ Campfires burn late into the night

◀ Baku-based band Snail's at One Caucasus 2016

“In a way the Marneuli region is a laboratory for development and coexistence. It takes a lot of work, but I consider it much more effective than all of the similar projects we have undertaken in Tbilisi, Baku, Yerevan or even in other regions. For the festival itself, I believe we need to bring more open-minded people from all of the countries of the South Caucasus and also from the North Caucasus, to give them the chance – not only to enjoy together but also to work together and with international colleagues also.”

It seems hard not to think about the One Caucasus project as some kind of peacebuilding project or perhaps a project with a political agenda. Is One Caucasus either one of these?

“I believe that anything you do as part of a public project is political. So of course One Caucasus is no exception. My educational background is in mediation, negotiation and conflict management and I have worked on a lot of projects in other regions (not only in the Caucasus) where we have worked with communities that have been affected by ethnic or religious conflicts (including working with the Rohingya in Myanmar). So I am happy to say that our agenda at One Caucasus is clear: One Caucasus is about creating a space for a meeting, work-



ing together with young people from the Caucasus and it is not a peacebuilding program or some sort of reconciliation effort.”
“I don't believe that peacebuilding or reconciliation are processes that can be effectively started by any project, it should be started by the people. So the paradox is that Armenians and Azeris are so similar to each other, it is often just the case of providing the right space, the right conditions for working together – and you really can see that One Caucasus works better in building bridges than many of these ‘peacebuilding’ initiatives. Of course I am very happy to see such moments happen at One Caucasus. So in a way One Caucasus is an experiment, but not emphasising ‘peace’ as the key word: it's more of an experiment to see if we can build something modern and inspiring together – that our differences are the strengths – not the reasons to start another fight.”
The One Caucasus festival will take place again this August and will have participants from over 15 countries including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, Kenya and Nigeria. If you would like to attend this year's festival, please check www.onecaucasus.org for the finer details and follow their page on Facebook for regular updates. ◆

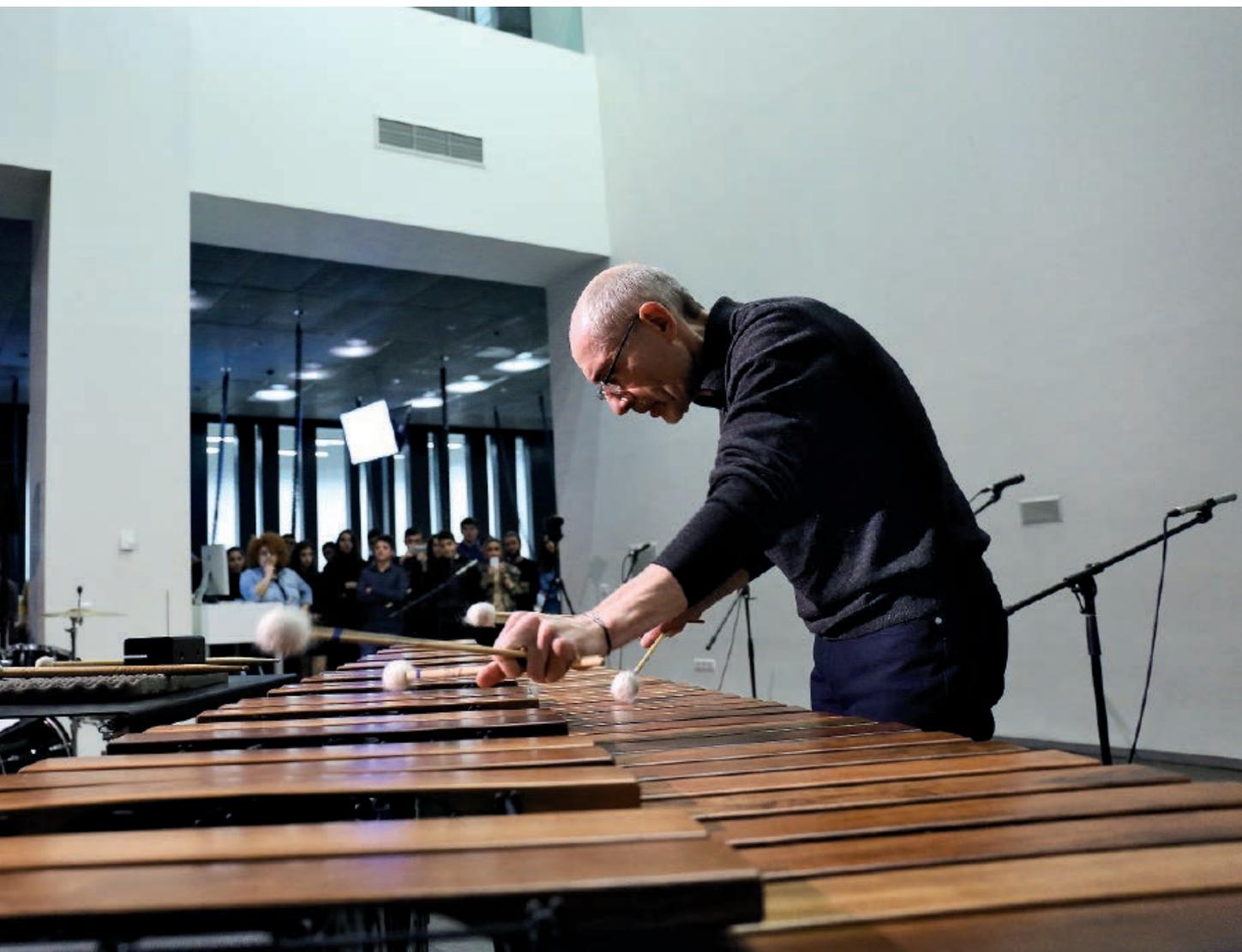
SMART MUSIC

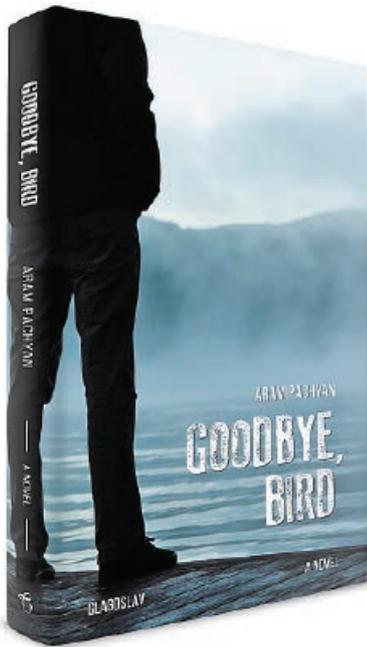
This spring French musician at Tumo center for the creative technologies Jean Geoffroy led a high-tech concert that combined the marimba and smartphones. Equipped with the SmartFaust music app, the students created some unique sounds to jive and sway to. The following day, Jean led a master class on the importance of interpretation in music. Event was organized by Grame, Lyon and the Muscari Association.

PHOTOS : TUMO



Jean Geoffroy making music with marimba and SmartFaust app





ARAM PACHYAN'S "GOODBYE, BIRD" IN ENGLISH

This spring an unusual and very important event happened in Armenian contemporary literature circles: the English edition of writer Aram Pachyan's novel "Goodbye, Bird" was released. While Pachyan is preparing the second Armenian edition of the "Bird" and finishing his new novel, literary critic Arqmenik Nikoghosyan explains why this English edition is so important.

TEXT: ARQMENIK NIKOGHOSYAN

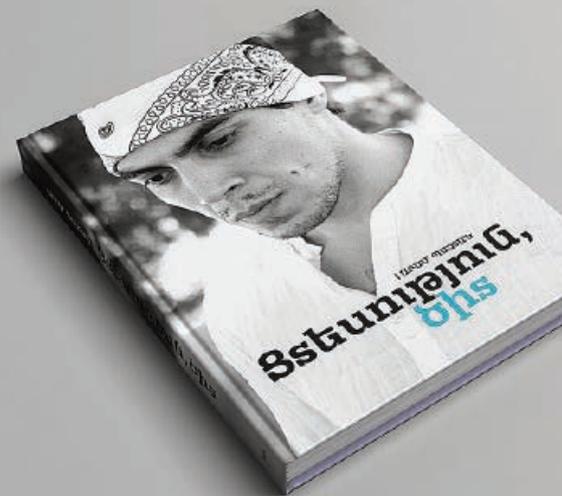
Readers are usually preoccupied over whether there's any high-class contemporary Armenian literature and world-class Armenian authors. On the one hand this preoccupation is trivial, at least since those who ask are not aware of the topic, but on the other hand the question is kind of relevant, as it is rare that a contemporary Armenian writer's book is translated, published in another country and is also successful.

Thus, nowadays leading Armenian publishers and literary agents, besides their core publishing activity, attach a great importance to the issue of contemporary Armenian writers' books being translated and represented abroad. The work completed in recent years has already provided certain results. Among the most successful projects that should be commemorated is the English edition of Gurgen Khanjian's "Yenok's Eye" novel in the United States, the Turkish edition of Hovhannes Tekgyozyan's "Fleeting City", and the Ukrainian edition of Aram Pachyan's "Robinzon" storybook.

Naturally, these editions should not be an end in itself. Work must be done for their further promotion, as each Armenian author's success abroad causes a chain reaction, in other words, be-

comes the locomotive, enabling the works of other writers to follow. Many literary experiences are evidence of this. Let us recall the example of Milorad Pavić and Orhan Pamuk. Their consequent fame all over the world brought interest to Serbian and Turkish literature and to the authors in general. And now Aram Pachyan's novel "Goodbye, Bird" is available in English. This book, published by Antares publishing house, included in the "XXI. Modern Armenian Prose" series of contemporary Armenian literature, has become one of the favourite books among Armenian readers, has set record high sales in Armenia and has consequently brought the author fame. The English version of "Goodbye, Bird" is destined to have the success that the "Robinson" storybook has had in Ukraine. For Armenian contemporary literature, it's very important to bring high-class literary works to readers abroad, so that the success continues. Aram Pachyan's "Goodbye, Bird" is a very valuable book, and one of the best works of Armenian literature in the last 10 years. Therefore, I am confident in the success of the novel abroad, and I hope that it will carry the difficult but honorable function of the locomotive.

Aram Pachyan (born in 1983, in Vanadzor, Armenia) was first published in 2007 in the literary newspaper "Grakan Tert". Later, his short stories were published in various local literary periodicals including "Grakan Tert", "Gretert", "Eghitsi Luys", and "Narcis" literary magazines. In 2009, his works were included in the collection of modern Armenian prose "Anthology 18-33". His first collection of short stories, "Robinzon and 13 Short Stories", was published in 2011 (translated into Ukrainian in 2015), and his second collection of short stories and essays, "Ocean", was published in 2014. His first novel "Goodbye, Bird", was published in 2012. In 2010 he was awarded the Youth Prize of the President of Armenia for a series of stories published in the press.





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KATERINA TSETSURA:

“Learn by doing and learn by thinking”

Regional Post's interview with one of the leading experts in Public Relations, Dr. Katerina Tsetsura, who was one of the key-speakers of the 4th Annual PR Summit Armenia

INTERVIEW : AREG DAVTYAN

Katerina Tsetsura, Ph.D. is Gaylord Family Professor of Public Relations and Strategic Communication and the Director of Graduate Studies at the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma in the USA. She is the author of two books, over seventy peer-reviewed publications and more than one hundred conference proceedings and papers. Currently, Dr. Tsetsura is the Vice-Chair of the Public Relations Division of the International Communication Association (ICA), and a member of the Global Commission on Public Relations Education. From 19th to 21st May 2017 Dr. Tsetsura was sharing her valuable insights in Yerevan within the frames of the 4th Annual PR Summit Armenia. Initiated and organised by Deem Communications, the 4th Annual PR Summit Armenia is the premier platform for PR and communications professionals to explore best practices and trends of Public Relations worldwide, network with top PR practitioners from leading local and international agencies, bring input and add value to the ever changing communications landscape. The theme for the upcoming professional event is Trends and Convergence of Communication in Armenia and worldwide. The three-day event featured an array of hands-on sessions, workshops and discussions, as well as B2B case presentations enabling individuals, non-for-profits and businesses to be successful and grow by connecting with their audiences and staying relevant.





This year the 4th Annual PR Summit Armenia brings together seasoned experts from the US, Europe, Russia, and Lebanon and over one hundred keen professionals from Armenia. Regional Post had the opportunity to interview Dr. Tsetsura ahead of this major event.

Today's technological age has changed business life in almost every aspect. How does this affect the field of public relations?

— Absolutely! Progress brings many changes to all aspects of our life, and the field of public relations is no exception. Today, our world is shrinking thanks to the compression of time and space: someone in one very remote corner of the world has access to the latest news or announcements made in another part of the world almost instantaneously, on the fingertips, at one stroke on a mobile device or keyboard. That means public relations practitioners have to always be alert to what is happening around the world. That is why issue monitoring and social listening are so important in today's public relations practice. But listening and understanding how conversations affect stakeholders' perceptions and expectations about the organizations is only the beginning – companies must also be ready to respond to challenges in the shortest amount of time and, most importantly, be proactive in anticipating which issues require attention.

SOMEONE IN ONE VERY REMOTE CORNER OF THE WORLD HAS ACCESS TO THE LATEST NEWS OR ANNOUNCEMENTS MADE IN ANOTHER PART OF THE WORLD ALMOST INSTANTANEOUSLY

Some basic rules of public relations, however, never change: trust and transparency are as important as ever. Honesty, desire and ability to listen, to change as expectations and values of society and the public at large change, have always been, are and always will be central to any successful public relations practices. In the end, organizations exist only as long as the people allow them to exist and prosper. And this long-term effects of public relations efforts should be in focus of all CEOs and leaders.

What about media: what are the biggest challenges that journalists face all over the world today?

— Our research shows that one of the major challenges that the media face worldwide is a decline of trust among publics and media consumers. A lack of transparency in the process how news gets into the media and past experiences of paying or providing favors for news coverage to support certain goals

have drastically changed the landscape of the news media. Increasingly, people in many countries are suspicious of the newsfeeds as they learn that some companies try to compromise the integrity of journalism by buying news coverage or providing services and products in exchange for news coverage. This is also true for political parties in some countries. I have been leading research on media transparency for over a decade. We found that non-transparent bribery practices for paying or influencing news coverage created the environment in which today's media are scrutinized. When in the past, news stories have appeared as a result of payment or advertising influence (because advertising departments put pressure on editorial news staff in terms of which news to cover), today we see more and more direct influence in form of native advertising and content marketing. As long as these new forms of information sharing are not clearly identified and separated from the journalistic, news content, we will continue experiencing issues of distrust.

Today in many countries around the world (even in countries with traditionally strong journalism industry, such as the US) people are very sceptical of news stories. But many companies have a false sense of comfort when they claim that their readers know and can separate what is news and what is paid information. Some argue that today's media consumers are less concerned about who paid for news

rather than how useful the news is to their lives and well-being. But research showed that regular readers and viewers are not able to effectively distinguish between paid and nonpaid media content – or at least, do not pay attention to the fact that some articles can be marked with the lines, such as “Advertising” or “Paid Message.” Once they discover, however, that the message has been paid, their trust in that media channel declines. As long as journalists continue to contribute to this confusion and blurred lines between what is paid and what is not, the expectation that the media can provide true and reliable information will continue to decline. We as a society no longer trust the information and will look for alternative channels to receive news. That is why it is imperative for modern media organizations and journalists to resist pressures of publishing content in the news media when it is not clearly marked as such: these media companies are creating more troubles for themselves by ruining the trust their consumers place in them and in their media channels today.

In your research papers you often explore the role of women in public relations. How does it differ from what men do? Is there no equality yet in PR?

— Women in public relations have come a long way in achieving their successes in the field. However, we are still far from equality. Of course, depending on the country, you will see different levels of women’s involvement in public relations. Almost in every country around the world, the number of women is higher than the number of men who work in public relations with exception, perhaps, of political campaigning and communication. However, even in the countries where women are a majority of public relations workforce, men still occupy many leadership and managerial positions. In some countries, the field is positioned as a woman’s job – which also creates additional stigma for the profession. My research shows that it is important for us as PR professionals to emphasize that both

men and women contribute to the field and thus both should be present in all aspects of public relations practice.

As an educator, what is the first thing you tell your students? On what should they focus when studying PR?

— One of the first things I tell my students is to learn by doing and learn by thinking. My goal as an educator is to help students to discover the beauty and value of knowledge in everyday professional practices. I demonstrate

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the importance of cutting-edge research and theory development in strategic communication and public relations by engaging students in meaningful practical exercises and activities and create real-life opportunities for students to work hard and to see the results of their work.

As part of my learning by doing approach, students are exposed to the latest theories, practices, and trends in public relations and work with actual small, medium, and large-size organizations in the US, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to solve communication challenges. My students complete and present research and strategic communication plans and projects to the top management of global and local organizations. Learning by thinking encompasses a comprehensive understanding of the rapidly changing global environment and must challenge students to become intellectual leaders within their

professional and societal communities. A university graduate should not only master his or her area of study, but also must be an intellectual who is willing and ready to share knowledge with others. In my classes, I ask questions that encourage students to think deeply about topics and to explore alternative viewpoints that challenge their current views and that may confront students’ own professional and personal values. I dare students to think unconventionally and responsibly about their chosen profession and about the place and role of public relations in contemporary global society. When I bring my global research and my professional experience and expertise to the classroom, I spark students’ interest in the world beyond Oklahoma.

You also specialize in media transparency. Do you think the world of media has achieved significant results in that field?

— We already discussed some of our research in media transparency. Our research and its dissemination showed real results in the last few years. For example, research on media transparency in Poland, which we conducted together with the Polish practitioners’ association, allowed PR professionals in the country to revise and adopt a new code of ethics and create a more robust approach to identifying the qualified PR players in the market, especially for foreign companies. My media transparency research also got a great traction in Finland, one of the most transparent countries in the world, where today’s media are struggling with issues of native advertising and trust. My Finnish colleague and I just completed a research project to help media companies in Finland to develop a transparency framework for disclosing content marketing and native advertising. Currently, we are working on another research project in Finland, called Opening the Black Box of Content Marketing, to discover the nature of consumers’ expectations toward content marketing and media messages. ♦



FURNITURE AND DOOR PRODUCTION

ENGINEERING FORUM-EXPO IN VANADZOR

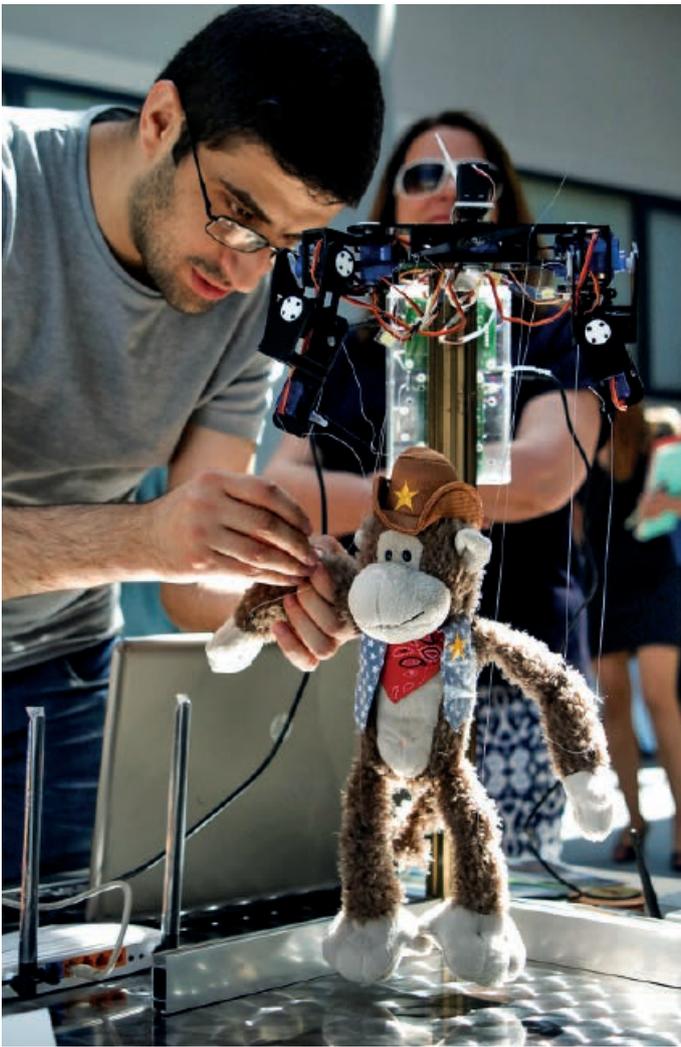
In late June Vanadzor Technology Center hosted first Engineering Forum-Expo in Armenia organized by Enterprise Incubator Foundation, RA Government, Regional Administration of Lori Marz, Union of Employers of ICT, Unicomp and International Science and Technology Center.

PHOTO : VTC ARCHIVE



Vanadzor Technology Center opened its doors in 2016





◀ Engineering Forum-Expo hosted more than 150 participants

▲ Director at the Enterprise Incubator Foundation Bagrat Yengibaryan



The aim of the event was to discuss global engineering developments, challenges in education and business, as well as to encourage exchange of ideas, experience and expertise among companies and key actors of the sector with an emphasis on Engineering Industry (recent development and success stories), Challenges of education and research in engineering sector and Advanced Industrial Applications (Autonomous Vehicles, 5G, Semiconductor Test Solutions, RF and Microwave Applications (RF and microwave), Industrial Internet of Things (IIOT)). Designed to support regional development and to promote Engineering and high-tech SMEs in Armenia, the

Engineering Forum-Expo hosted more than 150 participants representing the Government, universities and research institutions, donor organizations, start-up community, engineering companies and industry professionals from Armenia and abroad. More than 20 local and international companies will exhibit their "Made in Armenia" high-tech products, solutions and services. Director at the Enterprise Incubator Foundation (EIF) Bagrat Yengibaryan explained why event took place in Vanadzor Technology Center: "It has a unique engineering focus. I think this event will open a new page in Armenia's high-tech sphere," he said, expressing hope the forum will become traditional.



FAIR: The France Armenia International Network

In 2013, upon the initiative of Hilda Tchoboian, the Regional Councilor and current Vice-President of France Armenia International Network, some French-Armenian friends came up with the idea of founding a purely economic association which would bring together the leaders of the Rhône-Alpes region's economic life, the second region of France in terms of economic dynamism. This new unique project attracted the attention of business leaders, and consequently, quickly associated themselves with the network.

Two years after the birth of the idea, in May 2015 the France Armenia International Network association was officially established. A few months later the inauguration took place in Lyon with the presence of the President of the Regional Council of Rhône-Alpes, the regional, political and economic structures and the Ambassador of Armenia. The choice of the name "France Armenia International Network" was closely linked to the social reasons and strategic objectives of the association. The Armenian Diaspora has a strong economic potential. It is strongly involved not only in the life of the Rhône-Alpes region (which has become the



Auvergne Rhône-Alpes), but also in other areas of France, Western and Eastern Europe, North and South America, and the Far East and South East Asia.

The globalization process of Armenian organizations has been ongoing for a century. The Church, political parties and charitable organizations have long created networks throughout the Diaspora. Today, it is the turn of the entrepreneurs to organize and expand their network to include all their French, European, American, Russian, Iranian, Lebanese, Argentinian partners and other countries of the Diaspora. This is to contribute to the expansion of international exchanges and more particularly to Armenia and neighboring countries. Besides this, because of its geopolitics, Armenia has always been at the crossroads of international empires and issues. It is located on the border between Europe and Asia, and on the border between the Christian and Islamic worlds. Although its borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey are closed, it has privileged relations with Iran, which is a strategic partner for Armenia. Now Armenia is seen as a safe path connecting Europe to Iran and elsewhere.

The France Armenia International network now includes a growing number of companies and entrepreneurs in the Rhône-Alpes region occupying numerous sectors of activity: industry, finance, construction, services and consulting, digital, high-tech, communication, restoration, crafts, agriculture, and more.

Its development is based on three essential axes:

1. The development of the regional network of Franco-Armenian entrepreneurs and all their partners, and the economic development of the region.
2. The expansion of this network to encompass the entire Diaspora.
Deepen economic relations with Armenia to aid its development, but especially as a bridge for a network in the greater region which includes Iran and the CIS countries.
3. Build bridges between these companies and companies in Armenia as a door to the markets of neighboring countries. To achieve the strategic objectives, the France Armenia International Network organizes its local network of companies by creating synergies between them. At the same time, it





establishes partnerships in different countries of the Diaspora. Regular meetings are organized in the form of workshops involving experts in various fields such as management, finance, taxation and implantation. Armenia is taking its place in the region and the future development of FAIR is closely linked to its establishment in Armenia to serve as a base for companies wishing to penetrate the promising regional markets, and the first place is Iran, which has become more accessible with the promise of the lifting of Western sanctions. Moreover, in these times of uncertainty increased by recent political changes, Armenia will be able to make itself indispensable for any company wanting to trade with Iran. The network is developing with considerable speed. It enjoys great popularity due to the quality of the economic exchanges and networking between the member companies. Since its creation in 2015, the France Armenia International Network is chaired by Aramazd Abedi, President of Damaris. It's a company specializing in dematerialization of documents, which has a unit operating in Armenia for 15 years, and feels quite comfortable there. ♦

REGIONAL POST

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SWISS ASSISTANCE DURING HARD TIMES

Armenia is located in one of the most seismically active regions of the world. One of Armenia's most devastating tragedies occurred on December 7, 1988. An earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale completely destroyed the town of Spitak, over 25,000 people were killed, and the consequences of the catastrophe are still being felt. Swiss experts were among the first who came to assist the survivors. This is how the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) began its operations in Armenia. For nearly three decades the SDC has been working on various disaster risk reduction projects, aiming at improving local and central preparedness systems.

TEXT : ARMEN MOURADIAN / PHOTO : EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND, SWISS COOPERATION OFFICE SOUTH CAUCASUS





FROM FIREFIGHTERS TO RESCUERS

The threat of another earthquake has since been hanging in the air. Swiss Humanitarian Aid therefore has been working with Armenia's authorities to help strengthen their decentralized search and rescue operations. Since 2004, Armenian firefighters have been trained and equipped to respond to disasters.

According to statistics, 90% of all rescues are undertaken by people who are living or performing duties directly near the disaster area.

"There are 62 fire stations around the country, so we came to the conclusion that there is no better option but to train their staff also in basic rescue as well as to equip them with relevant tools and materials to perform the rescue operations efficiently. In 2004-2010 we have managed to train and to equip 2400 firefighters in Armenia," – says Swiss Cooperation Office National Program Officer Sergey Hovhannisyán.

THERE ARE 62 FIRE STATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY, SO WE CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS NO BETTER OPTION BUT **TO TRAIN THEIR STAFF ALSO IN BASIC RESCUE**

Now they are the first to respond in the event of a disaster, available 24/7.

MEDICAL MOBILIZATION

Firefighter-rescuers can save people, but they are not qualified to provide professional medical support. To fill the gap and to make another step towards a complete rescue structure a new project aimed at improving medical onsite response capacities in Armenia was launched. During 2009-2014, 27 Medical Units were established and 540 healthcare professionals were trained and equipped to provide professional onsite emergency medical assistance to disaster victims in collaboration with rescue teams.

As a final step this project has established a high quality system for continuous training in disaster medicine for healthcare professionals in the country.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

To manage disasters effectively SDC provided expertise to establish a National Crisis Management Center and a 911 Call Centre with regional branch centers to strengthen Armenia's preparedness system. The project triggered improvement of governmental policies and procedures in disaster response, as well as strengthened the inter-agency cooperation related to disaster preparedness. >



MARVELOUS FIVE

Finally, based on positive results achieved and thanks to a productive cooperation with the government, SDC has supported further improvements of the rescue system in line with international standards by creating, training and equipping five Regional Rapid Response Teams (RRRTs) in Yerevan, Lori, Tavush, Shirak and Syunik regions. Between 2013 and 2016, the project trained 235 team members in

their respective functions, ranging from search, rescue, medical assistance, communication and logistics to management, and provided them with special rescue equipment. The RRRTs are integrated into the existing response plans and deployment procedures and are able to adequately respond to disasters on national and regional levels coordinated by the central and regional governmental offices, respectively.

ARMENIA IN INSARAG

Long standing cooperation created a solid basis for one of the teams – Yerevan RRRT to pass successfully INSARAG external classification in 2015 and for all RRRTs to pass domestic classification for the benefit of not only Armenian people but all people in the world, as the Yerevan RRRT can now be deployed internationally to help in case of an earthquake. “Assistance of the Swiss side can’t

INSARAG

The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) was established in 1991. This establishment followed the initiatives of the specialized international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams who operated together in the Mexican earthquake of 1985 and Armenian earthquake of 1988. So as not to duplicate existing structures, the group was created within the framework of existing humanitarian coordination within the United Nations (UN). To this end the group’s secretariat falls within the Field Coordination Support Section (FCSS) of the Emergency Services Branch (ESB) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva.

The INSARAG’s primary purpose is to facilitate coordination between the various international USAR teams who make themselves available for deployment to countries experiencing devastating events of structural collapse due primarily to earthquakes. The group achieves such coordination through facilitating opportunities for communication between these groups ahead of such events. These meetings of teams have resulted in many practical agreements between them that have streamlined working together during actual disasters. Much of the details on how these teams have agreed to work together can be found in the INSARAG Guidelines, a living document outlining the principles agreed within the group.

SDC

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), established in 1961, is the Swiss center of excellence in development cooperation. SDC is responsible for implementing the Swiss Federal Council's foreign policy on humanitarian aid, development, and cooperation with Eastern Europe. It supports countries in their efforts to overcome poverty- and development-related problems. For example, the SDC enables disadvantaged groups among the population to gain better access to education and healthcare, and it helps resolve environmental problems. The SDC places special emphasis on fragile states and countries affected by conflict. The new Swiss Cooperation Strategy for the South Caucasus 2017–2020 aims at enhancing regional dialogue and cooperation; supporting the three South Caucasus countries in coping better with external economic, political and natural disaster shocks; It will as well foster inclusive economic development and democratic institutions; Moreover, Switzerland will assist the three countries in peace promotion activities to find political solutions for conflicts, by this, contribute to increased human security. 67 million Swiss Francs will be invested to the region.

To learn more about the Swiss projects in Armenia visit www.eda.admin.ch/armenia

THE SKILLS AND EQUIPMENT THAT WE RECEIVED ARE A **HUGE CONTRIBUTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND SAFER FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY AND WHOLE REGION**



be underestimated. The skills and equipment that we received are a huge contribution for the development and safer future of the country and region, – says Commander of Yerevan RRRT Gevorg Galstyan. – We hold seminars and exercises on a regular basis. Also we are preparing for 2020 INSARAG qualification with Switzerland as a mentor country.” Since 2004, the Swiss assistance to Armenia for the preparedness and response amounts to almost six million Swiss francs.

After SDC Humanitarian Aid's exit from the country the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia as the main partner will continue to manage the results achieved together in the field of disaster risk reduction independently.

Check out the film about the Armenia-Swiss cooperation „Saving Lives in Armenia“ on Youtube. ♦

SDC IN ARMENIAN REGIONS

This June Armenia's Syunik region hosted a sheep shearing festival, a unique attraction for tourists and a great opportunity for farmers from the nearby villages to sell their products. But that's only a small part of the big program of Inclusive Sustainable Economic Development, which the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) undertakes in Armenia.

TEXT : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : SDC ARCHIVE

▼
Goris animal market



The program started few years ago, and is operational in the Syunik and Vayots Dzor regions of Armenia. The program consists of two main projects: Livestock Development in Southern Armenia and Rural Development in the Region of Meghri. SDC's mission is to explore the areas, identify the weak spots and work to improve them, so that local farmers have all the opportunities to develop their businesses, by reducing the costs and increasing their production, and being able to sell that. Zara Allahverdyan, Head of the International Cooperation of the Swiss Cooperation Office, says that in the case of the Livestock development in Southern Armenia (which includes over 100 villages of the region), the project's overall goal is to increase economic opportunities for male and female farmers involved in animal husbandry in the aforementioned regions. In 2008, SDC started with the veterinary practices:

“The aim of the project was mainly informing and raising awareness about the importance of veterinary practice. Farmers had to realize that they have to pay for that service and get more high quality product and healthier animals”. The other result of the initiative was reduction of animal mortality. At the same time, in the framework of the project, a specialist was chosen and his workplace was repaired. The other problem was organizing artificial insemination. Previously there were stations in the cities only, now the specialists and the equipment are in all of the villages, so as a result farmers have reduced their costs by nearly 50 percent.

Some of the problems in the regions were related not only to the economy, but also to ecology. “Because of the poor condition of the infrastructure in pastures (roads, water supply, etc), farmers had to use only nearby territories, while the heavy use was putting the soil in danger”, says Zara. At the same time, the pastures further away were also endangered because of a lack of usage. Repairing the infrastructure brought a more balanced usage for both of the pastures. At the same time, trainings were held about the importance of balanced use of pastures.

One of the most important parts of the project is cooperating with the authorities and collecting data about the animals, diseases, etc. During the years all of the information was written down on paper, so it took ages to get the certificates and other documents. So, when e-governance was introduced in the villages, SDC included the electronic animal register, to save time and effort for the farmers and local government when needed.

A large part of the village community consists of lonely women: widows, or wives of men who emigrated abroad for work. As stock raising is a hard work, many of them are excluded from the process. With the help of the project, the community's women were involved in producing feed and poultry. Besides, after participating in trainings



^ Animal farm in Goris



< Production of cheese

organized by the project, women developed their skills in cattle-breeding, barns improvement, etc. Talking about the second project, Rural Development in the Region of Meghri, Zara says that its goal is to create economic opportunities for increased and sustainable income of small-scale horticulture producers through higher profitability of production and enhanced access to markets. Again, to reach the goal, the project improved different aspects of the production. For example, cooling facilities were introduced, so that farmers could save part of their harvest to sell later for a higher price, during the New Year season for example. The collection center was founded, which allows small farmers, who have difficulties in bringing their fruits to the markets in Yerevan, to sell their harvest right at their door. In the frame of the program few new fruit types were introduced, previously not grown in the region. The importance is that due to climatic differences, apricots, grapes and cherries ripen almost a month earlier

than in other places in Armenia, creating a new income source for the community, while before the only season of income was autumn.

Women of the community are involved in producing preserved food and tea, like pomegranate jam, or pomegranate flower tea, successfully sold at the duty-free added in Yerevan's airport. Producing dried fruits was quite challenging. A few years ago when farmers tried to export it, they were unsuccessful because Western standards do not allow dried fruits to be produced in an open air environment. Farmers got familiar with the new innovative ways of fruit drying meeting all the hygiene standards.

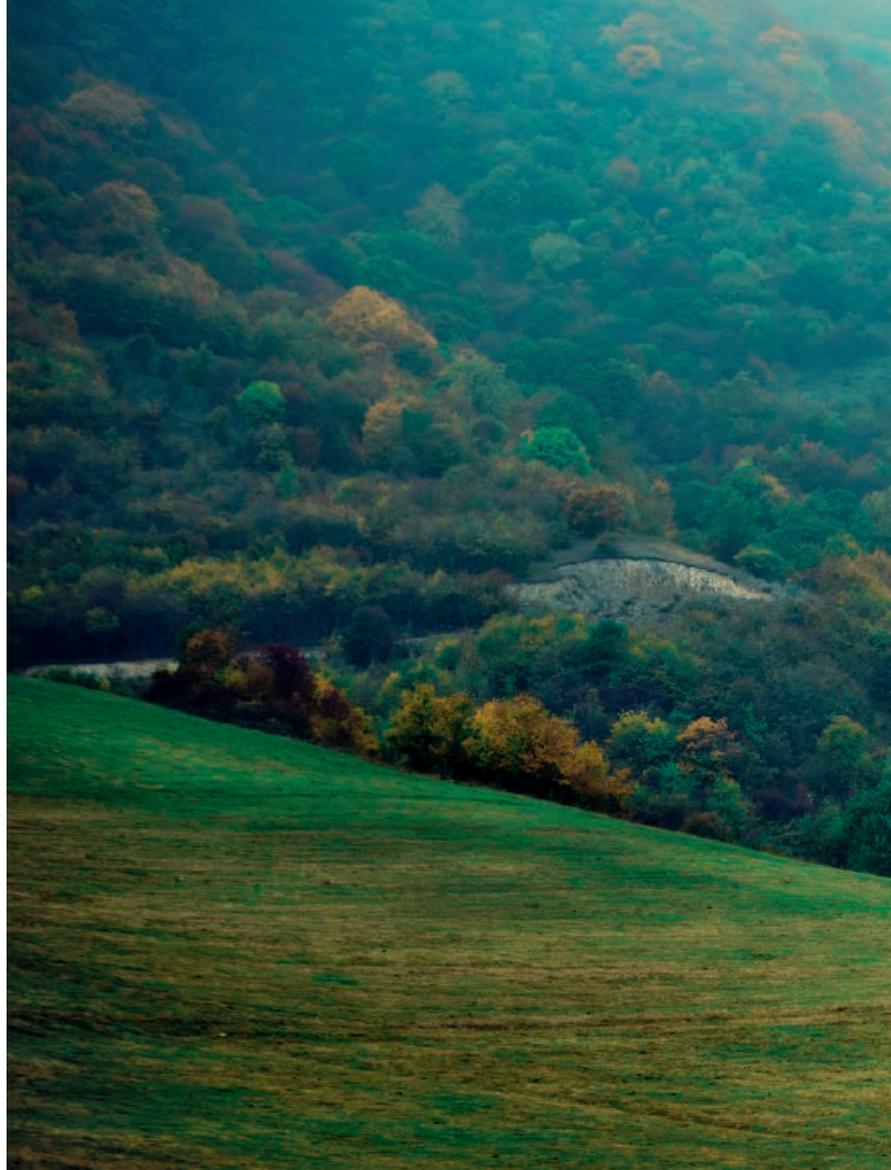
The most significant result of the program, as Zara says, is that farmers have learnt a lot about agriculture that made their work more productive, whilst also increasing their income. “If in the beginning some of them were suspicious, now they see that they can achieve a lot by using new methods and new approaches. Their interest and involvement is what this was all about”. ♦

FOREST QUESTION

Every year Armenian environmental activists warn us about new and devastating cases regarding the felling of trees in the forests, particularly in the North of the country, in and around Dilijan National Park. Sometimes the Government will respond, initiate an investigation, and in most of the cases it either turns out that the felling is legal, or some of the lower level forestry officials are fined, fired or imprisoned. So, what is the current situation of our forests, what did it look like in the past, what do we want it to be like in the future, and how do we achieve this?

TEXT : VARDAN MELIKYAN

Two thousand years ago about 40% of the Republic of Armenia's current territory was covered in forest. At the beginning of the 20th century the figure was 20%, while today only about 11% of the country is covered in forest. Wood has always been a highly-valued resource, so deforestation has always accompanied human habitat, including Armenians and different invaders and occupiers of the country. The 20% of forest cover had rapidly deteriorated to around 7% due to the difficult 1920s, industrialization of the 1930s and WWII. Later, a large-scale reforestation program was initiated, where millions of seedlings were planted annually, from the 1960s till the independence of the Republic of Armenia, and forest cover has reached around 11%. Another phase of massive deforestation





Haik Karaghiyan

< Teghut forest

began in the 1990s, when Armenia was facing an energy crisis and people needed wood for heating and cooking. According to “Hayantar”, the state forestry agency of Armenia, starting from 2003-2004 the issue is gradually being resolved thanks to the increasing availability of gas in the country, stating that the demand for wood has decreased around five-fold. During 2004-2016, the harvesting of wood, as per official statistics, has decreased from around 74,000 cubic meters to around 25,000 per year. On the other hand, according to independent estimations, Armenian households burn around one million cubic meters of wood annually. Surprisingly, even as a result of such pressure on forests, its area is not shrinking significantly, as confirmed by data recently collected by GIZ using

THE PROBLEM IS THAT **THE FOREST QUALITY IS WORSENING** – THE DENSITY OF CANOPY DECREASES, WHILE THE SPECIES COMPOSITION CHANGES TO A LESS FAVORABLE ONE

satellite images. The problem is that the forest quality is worsening – the density of canopy decreases, while the species composition changes to a less favorable one. While 70% of our forests are beech, after felling these are replaced by lower value hornbeam and shrubs, like blackberry, that prevent the natural regeneration of forests. Add to this climate change, resulting in the increase of the mean air temperature and the decrease of precipitation, and eventually we may indeed lose our forests, if things continue how they are.

The National Forest Program of Armenia, approved in 2005, states that the optimal forest cover for Armenia is 20.1%, taking into consideration various climatic, watershed management, soil protection, urban development and other factors. This means that the forest cover has to roughly double and over 250,000 hectares will need to be planted. According to Hayantar data, during 2004-2015 planting and sowing was implemented on 3,666 hectares. Additionally, around 1,000 hectares have been planted by the Armenia Tree

Project, an NGO established by Diasporan Armenians based in Massachusetts. A good effort, but not sufficient, since at such a pace, it will take hundreds of years to accomplish the target of 20.1%, so more effort is needed. The planting of forests costs money, around USD 3,000 per hectare, to be precise. So, in total it will cost around USD 750 million to reach 20.1% forest cover, a huge amount for Armenia, especially taking into consideration the current state of the economy. But first, there is no need to invest all of the money immediately, as reforestation is a long process and it can take up to 50 years, and furthermore, the planting of forests is an investment with long-term economic benefits. Forests are not just trees and shrubs, they are complex ecosystems with thousands of flora and fauna species that cooperate and compete with each other, providing unique services and resources for humans, like protection from landslides and mudflows, purification and regulation of water, production of biofuel and food, tourism, etc. Forests are also extremely important to mitigate the effects of climate change, as they can sequester and store huge volumes of carbon dioxide. Furthermore, agricultural fields located next to forests can yield up to 20% more crops, providing extra income for farmers. Another important area to focus on is the proper regulation of wood harvesting, in order to prevent further degradation of existing forests. Many Armenian households still rely on wood as their main source of energy, as it is cheaper than natural gas. Ten cubic meters of wood, necessary for the heating and cooking purposes of an average household, can cost around AMD 150,000 per year, while the cost of natural gas can be four or five times higher. Armenia does not have its own fossil fuel resources, and of course it is wrong to expect that we can influence the price of fossil fuels. So, the solution can be found in increasing the efficiency of the use of wood and other sources of biofuel, like straw, food



waste, dung, etc. Improved insulation of houses is another step that can help cut energy needs and respective costs. One obvious step towards increasing efficiency is to make sure the wood is properly dried before burning. If one visits rural areas of Armenia during the winter, it is easy to notice the white steam pouring out of chimneys, which is a result of burning wet wood. Instead of heating houses, the wood first dries, losing a lot of energy, that could otherwise be used to meet heating needs. The stoves used in most of the households are also inefficient and need to be upgraded for better results. The next and more advanced step is using wood together with other biomass for production of fuel pellets and briquettes. The experience of Basen

FORESTS ARE NOT JUST TREES AND SHRUBS, **THEY ARE COMPLEX ECOSYSTEMS** WITH THOUSANDS OF FLORA AND FAUNA SPECIES THAT COOPERATE AND COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER

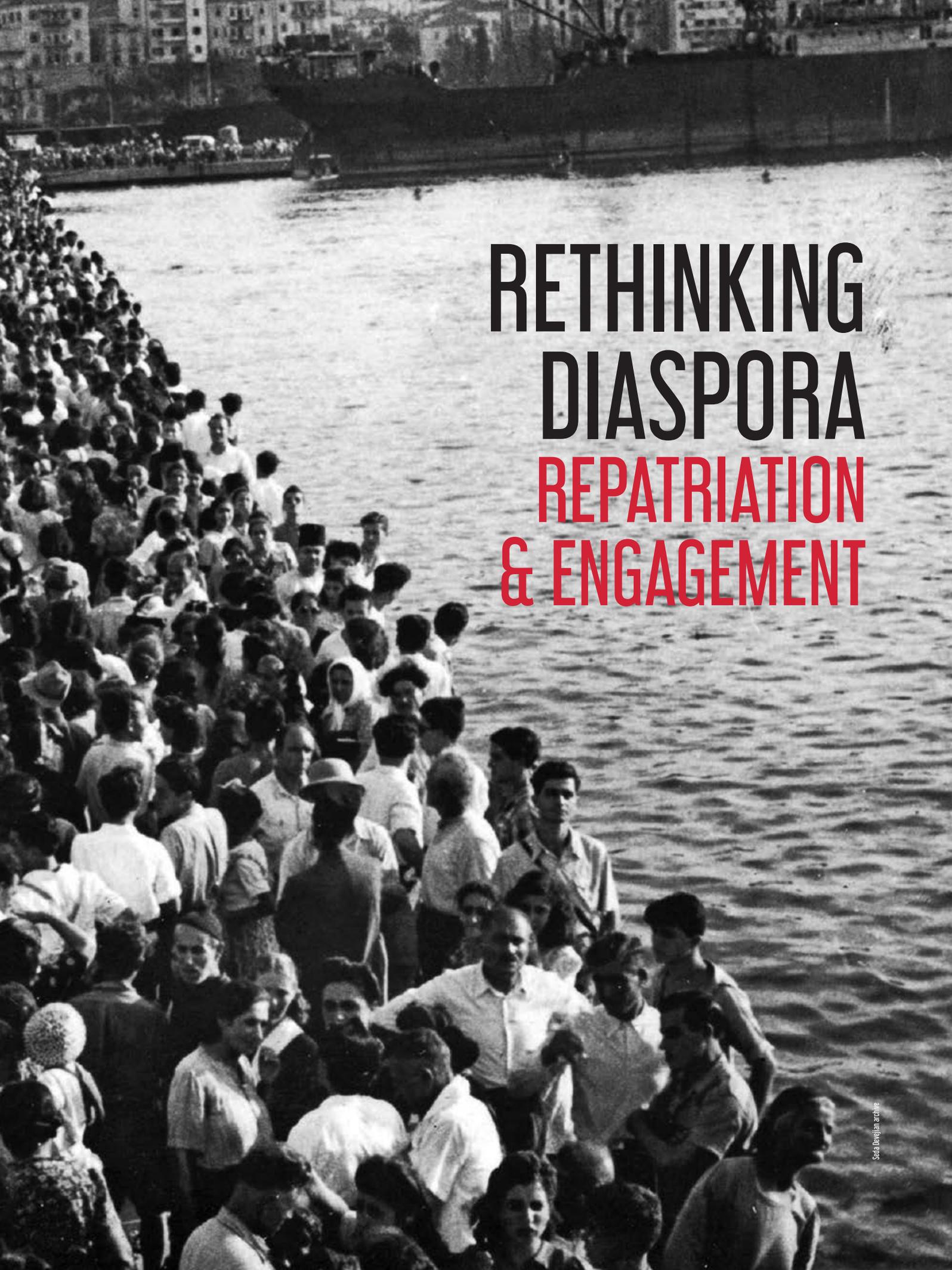
village in the Shirak region, where the local production of fuel pellets has recently started, shows that these can be competitive both in terms of costs and provided comfort. Another issue related to the use of wood resources is that in many cases, trees that are felled for burning can be used to produce higher value products, thus providing additional income and consequently better access to natural gas with all the benefits related to its use. Local communities have to be pro-

vided with a higher degree of freedom in regards to the ways of using harvested wood to enable the development of crafts and other high value-added activities within legal parameters. The implementation of the above-mentioned changes could lead to a decrease of pressure that is currently placed on forests, while also providing additional income that could be channeled into reforestation and afforestation programs. Another source of funding for these activities is the unemployment and social payments. This can be provided in exchange for participation in forest related work, thus also decreasing the risk of social capital devaluation and preventing a lapse in work ethic. At the same time, as forest activities are not permanent, participation in these should not be considered a form of employment, but rather some form of volunteer activity, so that participants are not removed from social programs. If serious steps are taken towards implementing large-scale reforestation initiatives, there will be other available sources of funding too, including the Diaspora (mentioned earlier), which already invests in reforestation and can most likely invest more. International development organizations and governments of developed countries can also participate in funding through different schemes related to the cancellation of national debts in exchange for implementing projects that mitigate the effects of climate change. Finally, besides all of the economic benefits and funding sources, there are some examples of countries, that have a reputation for amazing forest landscapes, which previously did not have such landscapes a few decades ago. Sweden, New Zealand and South Korea are among these. Armenia can be the next country. ♦



Haik Baraghijan





RETHINKING DIASPORA REPATRIATION & ENGAGEMENT

AVETIK CHALABYAN:

“Being global citizens, yet staying strongly rooted into our native soil”

Regional Post talked to a senior partner in McKinsey & Company consulting firm, Co-founder and Trustee of Repat Armenia Foundation and Arar Foundation Avetik Chalabyan about challenges that Diaspora and Armenia face in 21st century and his vision of nation's future.

INTERVIEW : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : REPAT ARMENIA FOUNDATION

Avetik, after leaving to US in 1999 you made a successful career, becoming a senior partner in one of the leading consulting companies of the world. But still, you never lost your connection with Armenia, being involved in a various big and important projects. Why is it so important for you? One can imagine, a senior partner in McKinsey must be quite busy.

— There is a simple answer to it, and a complex answer too. The simple answer is that I'm an Armenian citizen, Armenia is my country, and I feel obligation to contribute to making it a better place. The complex answer is that our country is still endangered; it may lose the critical mass of its devoted and productive citizens, necessary to uphold its sovereignty, and fold back to its colonial past. Personally, for me, that would be the biggest tragedy, as we will miss the greatest chance to stand from our knees, and become a modern, competitive and thriving nation. I hope this prediction will never materialize, but each of us should think and work hard to build a better future for our country, even if takes some sacrifices on our personal and professional lives.

Many of your Armenia-related initiatives, like Repat Armenia Foundation, are aimed to show, that repatriation for Armenians abroad is a clever solution (and we can already see bright





results of such programs). But at the same time, personal examples of people like Ruben Vardanyan, David Yang and yourself, show that to gain a real high level success one should find a path in Russia, Europe or USA. What would you say about that?

— This seeming contradiction is mostly superficial. I left to study in the US when I was already 27, after studying and working in Armenia for 10 years after the high school, and when I was 31, I returned to start my first project back home. Since then, I have accomplished many projects in Armenia, even more are currently underway, so in reality I have spent quite a bit of my professional time in Armenia. At the same time, I have become a global citizen, having served companies and governments not only in Russia, but also other parts of CIS, the US, Brazil, India, South-East Asia, etc. I sincerely believe that this is our destiny – to be truly global citizens, yet staying strongly rooted into our native soil. Israel has shown a great example of this – while Israelis are fiercely patriotic, and face a constant danger living in their homeland, they have also build an impressive network of global connections and presence in many countries, this allowed them to prosper, and in turn, leverage that prosperity to defend the

BELIEVE WE HAVE TO BUILD A STRONG INSTITUTIONAL HUB WITHIN ARMENIA, AND LEVERAGE IT FOR A GLOBAL SUCCESS OF EACH ARMENIAN, AND LEVERAGE THAT SUCCESS TO STRENGTHEN THE HOMELAND

sacred homeland. I believe we can and have to do the same – build a strong institutional hub within Armenia, and leverage it for a global success of each Armenian, and consequently leverage that success to strengthen the homeland. In this case, our people would both repatriate and expatriate, yet staying connected to the same system, leveraging it for their successes wherever they are, yet contributing to it constantly too. Simply think about a different type of a nation, which has no set borders, has lateral systems of self-governance, a core institutional hub within the historic homeland, many spokes across the globe, and flows of people, ideas, goods, and capital in both directions – with the current technology and connectivity, we can build this, and eliminate the dilemma which you have mentioned.

Millions of Armenians in Diaspora do not consider repatriation to Armenia as an option. What do you think must be done to make the Republic of Armenia a more attractive option for them?

— The Armenia of the future, which I have just described, is still a distant dream – so the simple answer is that we need to materialize it, so our people in Diaspora would consider enlisting as its devoted citizens. We need to start from simple things though – clean up the country, and this is a herculean task. 25 years of relative independence brought lots of good things, but they took also a heavy toll on us – 1.2 million of our fellow citizens have left the country, many of them well qualified, entrepreneurial and driven, and those who stayed in the country, have still not been able to build a nation, which is universally attractive for all Armenians. There is an objective element in it – our starting conditions 25 years ago were horrible, with war, earthquake and economic collapse creating an unenviable mess to deal with, yet the truth is that a big part of our issues are also self-inflicted, first and foremost because of the low leadership qualities of our governing elites. Therefore, the place to start is exactly in those



leadership qualities, and here where we need selective repatriation, to bring more leadership talent and passion to the country, in order to augment that limited pool, which we possess here. Although this may seem to be a circular reference – we need to improve the country to attract repatriates, yet we need to bring those same repatriates to improve the country, the truth is that there is a strata of our people abroad, who is not waiting for Armenia to become the next Switzerland, but are returning already now. Those people are usually true risk-takers, are entrepreneurial and driven, they are idealistic and in a search of self-meaning, and they feel truly responsible. They throw their bets with Armenia and come, despite the difficulties – each year we see several hundred families repatriating from more developed countries, and our aspiration is to have several thousands of them, so they can meaningfully influence the country's otherwise sluggish course. In order for this to happen, those who are already in Ar-

WE SHOULD DIFFERENTIATE OURSELVES IN EDUCATION AND SCIENCE, AND THIS WOULD REQUIRE CONSCIOUS AND CONTINUOUS INVESTMENT INTO IMPROVING ITS QUALITY

menia should succeed; this will create a positive word of mouth and will help to reverse the image that Armenia is only for crazies and losers, and will attract more newcomers. This is exactly where we focus at Repat Armenia – to help newcomers succeed, both individually, as well as though reducing the systemic obstacles we still have here in abundance.

You have also taken part in several initiatives aimed at reforming Armenia's educational system, including Aqb School. Do you think Armenia has a competitive potential in education on a global scale?

— First, we need to set more modest yet realistic aspiration of achieving educational excellence at a regional

level. Some of our regional neighbors, such as Russia, Iran, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, are substantially ahead of us in terms of educational achievements, some of them, such as Turkey and Georgia, are relatively at par with us, so our starting condition is quite modest. Yet it is obvious for many of us, that we should differentiate ourselves in education and science, and this would require conscious and continuous investment into improving its quality. Unfortunately, the current ruling elite of Armenia, being mostly of mediocre or even poor education, has essentially neglected this for many years. Only in the last 5 years, we see some renewed interest to education, yet mostly private foundations and individuals, rather than the state, have

driven this. In the coming decade, we need to catch up at least with our regional peers – this will require both more resources, but also a fundamental reform of the educational sector, so the schools and universities are no longer viewed primarily as vehicles of preserving political power, but would become the key source of the country's competitive advantage. We also need a huge influx of high-quality talent into the educational sector, both from inside the country, as well as from the same repatriates, so it can rise to a new level of excellence, and can train the next generation to become globally competitive. It is encouraging to see now the diaspora and repatriate driven educational initiatives, such as Tumo, Ayb or Teach for Armenia, finally taking roots and involving many more locals – this proves that we do have a competitive potential in education, and presents a good platform to build our future excellence.

For many in Diaspora it's a huge challenge to stay loyal to their Armenian roots and at the same time fully integrate in the other society. What would you advise them?

— This has been mostly true in past, but things are changing, and in a favorable direction. First, the largest countries where ethnic Armenians live – Russia, the United States, Canada, France, are becoming more culturally diverse and tolerant. Second, people are able to accelerate their learning and integration, thus becoming parts of several communities simultaneously. There are some very good examples of this I observe in Moscow, with my fellow Armenian friends both being very active in Armenia, as well as being well-connected, respected and visible members of Moscow's increasingly cosmopolitan social and business strata. In my mind, the secret to integration is in continuous learning – as long as one puts conscious effort to learn the societal context of the host country, connect to its people, create economic and social value, and show true

dedication to the interests of the host society, then the integration becomes a reality. In past, we had to sacrifice our Armenian identities for this integration – now, this is less and less of an issue, and many people in our host countries, in fact appreciate us maintaining our native identities and unique flavors, while becoming valued friends, colleagues and partners. Thus, my advice would be very simple – integrate while staying Armenian, there is no inherent contradiction, it just takes more effort.

As a professional who worked and lived both abroad and in Armenia and has connections with many parts of the Armenian world, how do you think we should rethink Armenia-Diaspora relations? Should we continue the same path or find other aims in the XXI century?

— I partially addressed this above, but in continuation of that logic, I would like to mention, that the Armenia-Diaspora model, which we have inherited from the dark days of the Armenian Genocide, as well as from the Cold War, will be fundamentally transformed in the 21st century, and this is already an ongoing trend. A very substantial part of the people with ethnic Armenian roots will likely choose to forgo their historic identities, and will become largely assimilated into their host societies. This is unfavorable, but also largely unavoidable, people will eventually make their personal choices. Yet if we are successful in rebuilding both Armenia and the Diaspora, then we will bring a new meaning to Armenian existence – the meaning woven of precious legacy and values, but also of bold vision, daring aspirations, and humanistic spirit uniting our people. With such a universal meaning, another substantial part of our compatriots currently living abroad, would form a New Diaspora – a diaspora by choice, rather than by force of circumstance, which we have now. This people would continue to stay Armenian wherever they are, and the notion of being Armenian will no longer be linked to the past ethnic connection (who are your parents), but to future

common aspirations as members of the new Armenian nation (who are going to be your children). We are still in a process of comprehending this new reality, and most of the existing parts of the Armenian world are not yet fully into it. Yet the search of this new, common and global Armenian identity has started, and if we are successful, we will build a convincing new narrative for our compatriots to join forces, and strive for a common future as a unified nation.

Do you have a vision for Armenia's future? Can it be bright and prosperous in, let's say, 2040? In addition, more importantly, what should we start doing right now to achieve it?

— I see Armenia's future as a thriving hub of the new Armenian nation – alone, without the larger forces of the global Armenian nation the current Republic hardly can survive the test of sovereignty. Yet, the broader Armenian nation cannot survive the test of assimilation, without having the institutional hub in the current Republic. This creates an important prerequisite for various parts of the Armenian world to cooperate. This is not going to be easy, as the interests of elites within the Republic and abroad still can diverge in many aspects, and the foreign powers, who wield large influence both over the Republic of Armenia as well as over the overseas Armenian communities, may often interfere into this too. Yet, if we do not learn to work with each other to a mutual benefit, we will fail the historic opportunity of restoring ourselves as a healthy and sustainable nation, and will eventually get pushed to the sidelines of the history. In that sense, the first thing we need to start from, is establishing fair rules of engagement, for every Armenian both inside and outside the country, so each of us can contribute to the homeland, and see the benefits of that contribution. This alone will unleash a huge creative energy, and will allow us to take many more successive steps towards materializing the vision, which we discussed above. ♦

VARDAN MARASHLYAN:

“Repatriation is the best solution”

The Repat Armenia Foundation, a non-governmental and non-profit organization, was established in August 2012 to take the concept of repatriation to the next level, complete with a full time, dedicated professional staff based in Yerevan and a network of active supporters worldwide. Regional Post talked to Vartan Marashlyan, the co-founder/Executive Director of Repat Armenia Foundation about the importance of repatriation, the Diaspora’s attitude on the subject, as well as current developments and challenges faced by the foundation within its mission in creating a better Armenia.

INTERVIEW : ANI SMBATI / PHOTO : BIAYNA MAHARI



Mr. Marashlyan, you were born in Yerevan yet you lived in Moscow for over 25 years. In 2010, you made the decision to move to Armenia with your family. It has been seven years, do you consider yourself a repatriate?

— It's interesting that all interviewers start with this question. I am a proud repatriate, but for me it is predominantly focused on the appreciation of the return home, rather than the feeling of belonging to a special caste in Armenia. I am fully integrated into local society, living with the nation's challenges and achievements simultaneously 24/7, 365 days a year.

In parallel I enjoy a full life with friends and family, as well as a job that makes me happy. In my mind, Yerevan and Armenia are already considered the only home for me. I feel myself a visitor, no matter which country or city I end up in around the world, including Moscow, where I grew up and still have both friends and family. It brings me joy to feel that I will not split that emotion with a country outside of Armenia, a sentiment shared by all my family. At the moment, my household consists of three repatriates and one local, the latter being my youngest child.

I N MY MIND, YEREVAN AND ARMENIA ARE ALREADY CONSIDERED **THE ONLY HOME FOR ME**. I FEEL MYSELF A VISITOR, NO MATTER WHICH COUNTRY OR CITY I END UP IN AROUND THE WORLD, INCLUDING MOSCOW

The decision to move back to Armenia in 2010 was a complex one, though I had a previous experience of living here for a 2.5 year period from 1998 to 2001. As long as I can remember, I've always wanted to live in Armenia with every step taking me closer to that goal. Even though I was mentally ready, the decision still required quite a bit of work on my part. There were multiple facets to consider from family to professional development. My wife and I made a list of pros and cons that would affect our decision and had actively debating the possibility for a couple of weeks; it ended with her ripping up the page and me buying a one way ticket to Armenia. Should this decision have been made in the present day – there would be much less hesitation, due to available resources and possibility of connecting with like-minded individuals.

How was the idea of Repat Armenia born?

— My repatriation example is only one of many. Along with eleven other individuals either in the process or already having established themselves in Armenia, the concept of making repatriation a possibility on a larger level was born. Between conception and establishment of the Foundation there was over a year of brainstorming and preparatory work. Whereas the initial idea was to create a platform for obtaining the most essential of information and current repatriate experiences from a single space, it soon evolved to the founding partners creating the foundation for a movement that would span through the upcoming 20 years and counting. What we put together needed to be dynamic, ever developing and shaping itself to the needs of those who would arrive in Armenia. It required a team, a permanently evolving network and individualized assistance on a daily basis, supporting in the process of repatriation. Repat Armenia as we know it now was officially launched in August 2012, with a clear vision and mission – to focus on high impact repatriation to Armenia, in particular that which would bring new and trailblazing ideas, while facilitating multi-faceted engagement in a broader sense with the country. Our vision involves the mobilization of those with the ability to truly make an impact on multiple fronts, inspiring others to also test their full potential.

What are the major functions of Repat Armenia?

— I'm happy to go into more details this time around. The work done by Repat Armenia is ever evolving, but our core key functions are repatriation promotion, integration support, and instigating a pro-repatriation environment. Within the first concept falls the introduction of Armenia as a country versus simply a cause to work for, complete with its opportunities, challenges and individual



impacts. We offer personal stories of experiences from all aspects of moving and living in Armenia, as well as engaging with Diaspora communities through “Imagine Armenia” forums. This is best achieved through the establishment of strong ties with organizations which share similar values to ours. Of course, efforts are often met with doubt, disbelief and an overall lack of relevant knowledge, something that was especially seen initially during our “Imagine Armenia” events in Moscow, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Beirut and Tehran, among others, when we began our work nearly five years back. Today, the interest of the younger generations, the higher event attendance, the increased volume in inquiries, and other such indicators prove inspiring for us as well as those who may have never considered making their move to Armenia. The audience we have is keen to learn about local developments, to have their move demystified and to find new ways of personal engagement with their homeland. Repatriation is becoming a new fad among the youth. Let's not make it complicated, moving to Armenia is not as hard as it seems.

Providing integration support is integral to Repat Armenia, offering individualized consultations, networking opportunities, answers to those nagging questions, and a social support that comes in very handy when you face certain culture shocks, answers to those nagging questions, and a social support that comes in very handy when you face certain culture shocks. Soft landing is our specialty, while ensuring as many resources as possible are provided for all newcomers. This includes an online network group of nearly 5000 individuals, connecting people through cultural backgrounds, employment spheres, and other areas of specialization. Our main sphere of work lies in meeting with each repatriate separately, assessing needs, providing employment support in

terms of resume writing, interview coaching, career advising, linking to professionals, trainings, freelance and available resources. Our team has established ties with most top employers and recruitment agencies in Armenia, ensuring the high quality of positions posted to our website, where in the past year over 700 were posted, all with a minimum of 200k+ monthly salary requirement. We also provide support to repat entrepreneurs, assisting in finding the right lawyers, accountants, and personnel, while also promoting their work through our Siramark.am B2C platform and local media, connect-

THE NEW GOVERNMENT HEADED BY KAREN KARAPETYAN HAS RECENTLY APPEALED TO THE ARMENIANS OF THE DIASPORA URGING THEM TO CONSIDER PROFESSIONAL REPATRIATION AND ENGAGEMENT

ing with successful businessmen in the same sphere and bringing them moral support. All services provided are free of charge and with heartfelt encouragement. Furthermore, for those who wish to test the waters, pre-repatriation opportunities and pilot trip programs are presented.

It appears that repatriation is not a prioritized issue in Armenia. Does the government support your efforts in any way?

— Here is where I will mention our third and final key function: to instigate the inclusion repatriation part of Armenia's development agenda. For us, this is the most challenging part of the job, yet that which motivates us the most. From the government level, down to the ordinary citizen, repatriation is still not a concept they can relate to, often seeing it as part

of a forced move due to failures or war, becoming an added weight for society. There have been many positive changes of late, however, and the skilled repatriate who adds to the country's social wealth or makes a major impact is looked upon with admiration and a genuine wish to support.

Repat Armenia strives to influence government policies to develop a pro-repatriation environment in Armenia. We are constantly suggesting the ways to make repatriation a part of the political agenda in Armenia and the Diaspora. The new government headed by Karen Karapetyan has recently appealed to the Armenians of the Diaspora urging them to consider professional repatriation and engagement, seeing as to how this move helps bring in some much-needed fresh ideas, approaches, and global connections, based on a proven impact of successful endeavors in a number of important sectors. Considered a rather large milestone, this was the first such address on such a high level, coming in parallel with an increased number of repatriates recruited for public service.

There are regular discussions currently between related public institutions and Repat Armenia concerning changes to existing procedures affecting the repatriation process. The simplification of the procedure in moving personal belongings has already been added to the new government to-do list, one of the many ideas proposed. Concrete recommendations are being developed by Repat Armenia concerning a wider range of issues related to State-Diaspora policies. But this is a conversation for when we have more time.

What are the most common concerns in the Diaspora about repatriating to Armenia?

— The diaspora often forms their impression based on local and international media in their opinions of what life in Armenia is like, alongside



personal stories from those living here. Furthermore, the hunger, destitution and multiple shocks experienced by those who fled in the '90s, together with negative experiences and sometimes heavy losses seen by diasporans and those who have tried to repatriate, amplified by what is known about the original repatriation waves during the 1940s, all add fuel to the fire and create a picture that may be far from what the average repatriate will experience in Armenia today.

Unfair competition, corruption, business monopolies, ongoing migration, limited career opportunities and low salaries, as well as an underdeveloped political system with a lack of checks and balances are all major concerns expressed by diasporans as per our interactions during global events; this includes the Q&A sessions, later social media conversations, as well as in-person discussions on the matter.

Integration into local society might also pose a problem for those born

and raised in regions vastly differing in mentality and culture. These concerns are all valid, of course, but not to the extent that it has taken root in diasporan minds. While certain sectors do require evolution, the past decade has seen repatriates taking a pioneering role and bringing revolutionarily innovative developments to the field. This progress has been duly noted in the 2014 survey commissioned by Repat Armenia, engaging 300 of its members in order to understand top reasons for repatriation and concerns along the way. From the information gleaned through this task, it became clear that the integration environment has vastly improved, as well the comforts and commodities that make a place worth living in.

Repat Armenia's observations have found that over 70% of those deemed repatriates have been here or plan to stay for the long term, well integrated and with strong feelings of ownership; most thus take an active role in social and economic development programs, fighting for their rights and

demanding change on a positive trajectory. Over 95% would stand their ground and keep to their repatriation decision, even in the event of war.

What are the main reasons why Diaspora Armenians are looking to repatriate?

— To answer your question, I consider my conversations with the many diaspora Armenians spanning the past several years. While it might seem emotionally influenced, those who repatriate are looking for a home where they feel a sense of belonging and personal happiness. Providing a safe space for their children to grow while keeping their Armenian identity is first and foremost in every young family's mind. Personal development is also highly valued, along with a chance to explore one's culture more easily in the most authentic manner possible. For those with a mind for innovative business, Armenia generally offers a blue ocean and many uncharted waters, particularly when intended for export.

In certain sectors there are major opportunities for those with specific skill sets, particularly in IT, project management, and marketing. Armenia is especially attractive for freelancers of all nationalities, lately landing itself on top digital nomad lists. Furthermore, the last decade has brought in a number of social initiatives, developed by mixing repatriate with local and bringing in diasporan support. Co-working spaces are especially rife with social initiative ideas and the brains behind them.

At the end of the day, low service costs, easy access to essentials, a friendly populace, and the ability to strike a great balance between your personal and professional lives are especially attractive for many. With the millennials more open to change and steady movement glob-

ally, Armenia offers many benefits that attract a good number of both those of Armenian descent and those who fall in love with the country. The smaller size of the country allows for you to grow as a person, instead of getting lost among many others like you as seen in larger cities. Those who have moved have cited everything from the existence of clear seasons to the sheer number of cultural events as reasons to immigrate, while the short proximity reduces stress caused by heavy traffic, instead encouraging a healthier lifestyle through walking. While it might be a touch more challenging to achieve certain successes in Armenia, it is by far more rewarding when you reach those peaks, particularly when there is a positive impact on society as a whole.

During the past decade, a number of diaspora organizations and influential tycoons have cut their funding, citing an overall lack of trust. When you were in the process of launching Repat Armenia five years ago, was this a concern you faced?

— During the initial stages of development, even with all 12 founders putting in all their efforts, there were moments of real fear that we might not be able to gather the required support. The founders, including myself, have all been actively engaged for many years in innovative projects across Armenia and the Diaspora, something which greatly assisted in building trustworthy partnerships. It was a completely different and entirely specific concept we brought to the table, a major risk to take. It was an ambitious project to tackle, and the trust of those around us in



our diverse backgrounds and ability to make this work has increased the support base to over 30 donors to date and an increasing number of partner organizations. Crowdfunding for specific projects have also been successful due to trust gained from the public in general.

Repat Armenia is committed to building an ecosystem supporting high-impact repatriation, providing change-makers and professionals with the opportunity to find success in their homeland. We have shown an openness and flexibility in working with similarly-minded groups and organizations, building up trust and a strong base for support. This has also been essential in the implementation and/or design of such initiatives as Syrian-Armenian Relief, Support Our Defenders, Yerevan Half Marathon, Citizen Observer, as well as the Siramark and Marar projects, working hand in hand with partner organizations.

Our work has been recognized and appreciated by international organizations, who have in turn partnered with us on their own diaspora involvement, refugee integration, and migration-related projects.

Let's talk numbers. How many Armenians from the diaspora have moved to Armenia in the last 5 years due to the efforts of Repat Armenia? How many have visited Armenia in the context of different programs and initiatives to get engaged in Armenia?

— This is a great question and one that we are often faced with. Unfortunately, concrete statistics are unavailable due to the fact that each individual arrives in a different manner, without an official repatriate status. Many do not even visit or write to us about their repatriation. We can only track those who have a direct connection with us. On the country level, however, as we understand through indirect indicators, there are over a thousand voluntary repatriates moving to Armenia every year. During the past five years, we also had an influx of over 18,000 Syrian Arme-

nians, as well as a few thousand from Ukraine and Iraq. The Repat Armenia office in general sees over five hundred visitors per year, in all stages of repatriation, while over a thousand inquiries are received through email or social media. Hundreds have been assisted in their soft landing and search for employment, as well as in setting up businesses. Our main numbers are from the United States, Russia, Lebanon, Iran and Canada. We understand that compared to high numbers of outward migration, these are a drop in the bucket, but nonetheless each individual's suc-

REPAT ARMENIA IS COMMITTED TO BUILDING AN ECOSYSTEM SUPPORTING HIGH-IMPACT REPATRIATION, PROVIDING CHANGE-MAKERS AND PROFESSIONALS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND SUCCESS IN THEIR HOMELAND

cess brings joy to our personnel, particularly when one has an impact on Armenia's development.

As head of the foundation, what is your biggest dream to realize through Repat Armenia?

— Ambitions are aplenty at Repat Armenia. And when you dream, you should dream big. I expect to see 100,000 Armenians actively engaging with Armenia annually within a 10 year period, excluding tourists. I would like to see a minimum of 10,000 repatriates arriving at Zvartnots airport each year. I imagine organized charter flights touching down on a regular basis bringing new immigrants, much like that which exists currently in Israel. This will be a challenge and in order to reach this goal, there should be active efforts made in three particular directions:

First is changing the narrative of the diaspora. This can be achieved by stressing the importance of Armenia as a country as opposed to a cause, the core of one's identity, with active engagement in pursuit of one's own goals working hand in hand with viable national state-building. Each young adult should be given the opportunity to come to Armenia through at least one initiative during their lifetime.

Second is bringing the concept of professional repatriation and engagement into the government's agenda with a commitment to utilize multiple resources at their disposal while developing the necessary infrastructure and establishing wide-scale reforms throughout the country. It is at this point understood that repatriation is a vital contributor to socio-economic development and national security.

Third, is the development of the proper means to foster the sheer amount of visitors. With a united platform between like-minded organizations and their combined efforts, we should be able to encourage and substantially increase capacities, optimize capabilities, and help in the development of public-private programs among other such initiatives.

Do people need good reasons to repatriate?

— Repatriation is a personal choice; each of us had our own good reasons for moving to Armenia. But one thing that I can tell with certainty is that if you have found your reason to make the move, we are here to provide you with the right connections, necessary information, and would love to share our personal experiences. As for those who are still searching for their reason, we hope they will get engaged more with Armenia and take part in its development. Pick your own reason to experience this step. It will enrich your life regardless of how long you end up staying. Do it because you can. ♦

BECAUSE YOU CAN

One of the major principle that Repat Armenia Foundation concentrates on, is the promotion of the concept of repatriation and providing an objective review of the real opportunities and perspectives of repatriation. The Foundation informs, initiates and actively champions the return of high-impact (professional, entrepreneurial) individuals and families to Armenia to secure the future development of the Armenian nation.

TEXT : ANI SMBATI

PHOTO : REPAT ARMENIA FOUNDATION



According to the Executive Director of the Foundation, Vardan Marashlyan, Repat Armenia brings together hundreds of like-minded people with diverse backgrounds and life experiences, and provides potential repatriates and newcomers with a soft landing and networking support, by providing information and necessary resources to those who wish to engage with Armenia. “Since physically moving to Armenia is a responsible decision to make, we offer Armenians of the Diaspora a way of remotely contributing to the development of the country or the opportunity to visit on a short-term basis and to get involved with different programs and initiatives so that they have the time and the opportunity to understand the challenges they are going to face, as well as the benefits they will receive when they repatriate,” he says.

Repat Armenia suggests various options from which the diasporan Armenians can choose from and start the journey to their homeland, depending on their age, specialization, preferences and interests. One can choose to start from a general visit, exploring Yerevan (Impact Hub, TUMO, Cafesjian Center for the Arts, National Museum of History, Parajanov Museum, AYB School) and outside of Yerevan,

whether being an adventure lover or a traveler who appreciates comfort. Most of the young Armenians choose volunteering as the best way to explore their homeland, living here and getting to know the people. Repat Armenia collaborates with a number of related organizations, suggesting short-term (Armenian Volunteer Corps, AYF Internship in Armenia, Armenian Assembly of America, AGBU Yerevan Summer Internship, Habitat for Humanity, Land and Culture Organization Fuller Center of Housing) and long-term (Birthright Armenia, European Voluntary Service (EVS), Children of Armenia Fund (COAF), Mission Armenia) volunteering opportunities. Studying is another long-term opportunity for the youngsters to stay in Armenia, receiving education and the opportunity to learn more about their homeland. Repat Armenia provides information on the leading universities in Armenia, as well as international schools, high schools, colleges and lyceums. Many diasporan Armenians, who have the will and the potential to take part in the development of Armenia but have no strong intentions to make the move or have the time to visit the country every now and then, have the chance to get engaged in Armenia through investing in large and influential



initiatives and organizations, such as Doing Business in Armenia, National Competitiveness Report, Development Foundation of Armenia, IT Sector in Armenia, Ministry of Economic Development and Investment, Alliance Free Economic Zone and Meridian Free Economic Zone. “There’s a number of important organizations we collaborate with and encourage Armenians from the Diaspora to support. For example, in cooperation with the Arar Foundation and the Sahman NGO, and in coordination with the RA Ministry of Defense, the Repat Armenia Foundation started a fundraising effort in the wake of the Four Day War started by Azerbaijan on April 2, 2016. The collected funds are used to provide first aid to the soldiers and civilians wounded during the recent military actions, and will be used in the near future to provide financial assistance to the families of Armenian soldiers killed or wounded during further hostilities,” says Vardan Marashlyan. In 2017, Repat Armenia worked with the Citizen Observer Initiative, aiming to engage and encourage more repatriates and diasporan Armenians to become observers during April’s parliamentary elections. “We hope that in the future many diasporans will prioritize their engagement in developing an effective, fair and transparent political environment,” says the Executive Director of the Foundation, “if we want a strong and fair democracy, if we wish to see Armenians consolidate their civil society, we need citizens participating in, trusting, and validating the democratic processes.”



WE PROMOTE ALL THE IMPORTANT SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES THAT WE ARE AWARE OF, WHICH CAN BECOME A HELPFUL WAY OF GETTING ENGAGED IN ARMENIA

It’s been three years since the Repat-Armenia Foundation started to organize the annual Yerevan Half Marathon, held every October. According to Vardan Marashlyan, it’s one of the most colorful and festive events in the country. The race offers runners an exciting route passing by the most picturesque places in the heart of the city. The Yerevan Half Marathon has become an international event. October is believed to be the best month in Yerevan due to its attractive weather and appealing scenery. So this is another chance for diasporan Armenians to visit the city. Around 2000 people come to participate in the run every year, and more than 500 of them come from the Diaspora. Repat Armenia Foundation offers personal stories of experiences from all aspects of moving and living in Arme-

nia, as well as engaging with diaspora communities through regular forums to discuss opportunities to engage with Armenia, including repatriation. During these forums (titled “Imagine Armenia”), accomplished experts share their experiences, opportunities in Armenia, the reasons and the best ways to engage with Armenia. The goal of the event is to introduce Repat Armenia to Armenian communities around the world, with panelists from different businesses/organizations that share their experience of doing business in Armenia. Volunteer and professional opportunities are also introduced to the youth, as a way to work and gain experience while they contribute to Armenia’s development.

“We promote all the important social, educational and cultural initiatives that we are aware of,” says Vardan Marashlyan, “which can become a helpful way of getting engaged in Armenia. Among these initiatives I would also like to mention Teach for Armenia, OneArmenia, Street Workout Armenia and others, which have a great impact both on Armenia and the Diaspora. We make all the efforts so that every diasporan Armenian can find his or her own best way of engaging in Armenia. But the ultimate mission is, of course, to make their final repatriation happen.” ♦



WITHIN BIRTHRIGHT

Birthright Armenia builds a bridge between Diasporan Armenians and their ancestral homeland by providing volunteering opportunities to young Diasporans from around the globe. We spoke to Sevan Kabakian, the organization's country director, about volunteerism as a tool to help Diasporan youth to establish a strong cultural and intellectual connection with Armenia.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN / PHOTO : BIRTHRIGHT ARMENIA



Mr. Kabakian, Birthright Armenia is one of the largest volunteering organizations in the country. How was it founded?

— Birthright was founded in 2003 by Edele Hovnanian whose vision was to have an organization which is able to put to service the Diasporan potential for the development of Armenia. In Birthright's case this is done through the youth, it's done through introducing Armenian reality to the young people from the Diaspora as much as possible. We want them not to have a ten-day tourism trip to Armenia but to establish a more substantial, longer-term connection with the country. We have developed a very affordable model, where there are no application fees, moreover, we cover the travel costs and pay for the host family. Over one hundred people between the ages of 20-32 come every year to volunteer with Birthright. And in the summer about half of them work outside of Yerevan.

Is it more difficult in the regions?

— Yerevan has many job sites; outside of the city one has less opportunities. Still, working in the regions has been rated by over 95% of volunteers as being an experience that they would not have exchanged with Yerevan. I believe it's because outside of the city they get more authenticity, more of the indigenous reality.

How many of them stay in the country, repatriating to Armenia?

— I would say that historically about 15% of volunteers have stayed back for longer-term employment. About 7% of our total number of volunteers are currently living in Armenia. However, Birthright's mission is not for everyone to move to Armenia. Repatriation may be a very natural outcome, and we support that very much. But the goal is not that if you come you must repatriate. We focus on the phase between physical and mental repatriation, encouraging people to start



OVER ONE HUNDRED PEOPLE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 20-32 COME EVERY YEAR TO VOLUNTEER WITH BIRTHRIGHT. AND IN THE SUMMER ABOUT HALF OF THEM WORK OUTSIDE OF YEREVAN

to think of this place as a possibility for them, as a place that they can be engaged with for real and not just emotionally. That is specifically why our model is based on volunteerism. Volunteering 30 hours a week puts someone in the cycle of a local resident. If you are a tourist, everyone else in the country is working, and you are on a bus going somewhere, you do not get a chance to get acquainted with local life. Unlike that, when you volunteer you go to work as a local, you go home to a host family and spend an evening as a local, and thus your opportunities for connection with the reality here are maximized. Through volunteering you meet coworkers, make friends with them, get attached to the people and the place. These kinds of connections are very important, as the whole point is not to come and be a tourist for six months, isolated in a hotel or in a tour bus; the point is to come and to understand more substantially what is going on here.

Being from another country, they must have a very dull idea of the culture, they often may not know the language. Does volunteering provide them with the necessary skills to find a job in Armenia?

— About a third of the participants come with no or very basic language skills, the rest are at more intermediate or advanced levels. However, I cannot say that the language barrier is something that is insuperable. You see, when you are a volunteer you have an opportunity to see Armenia as a real country with real possibilities – something that you cannot do from Beirut, or Paris, or Los Angeles, sitting there and just reading stories or hearing other people's narratives. This program is a gateway for seeing a true country and that, I think, is the most important part of wanting to stay and work here. It's of course also important to have the skill set which is marketable. Because the economy is growing, there are more and more companies which are looking for employees who come from different countries and have skills which cannot be found here in Armenia. Also, work skills in the outside environment are attractive to many local organizations. At Birthright, we have methods of assisting, providing people with contacts, helping them to find something according to what they want to do. Over time, a volunteer establishes his own network and is able



to fully enter the job market. Sometimes you volunteer at job site A, but job site B knows that there is this person, a marketing specialist, or graphic designer, or somebody else that will be just the right candidate for them. At other times, the hosting organization decides to keep the volunteer in their team for permanent employment.

But is it difficult for your participants to find a job in Armenia?

— It is difficult to find a job in any country. Armenia has a small economy, but I know a lot of people in bigger countries, in more developed countries for whom finding a job, or finding the right job is not easy at all. A lot of people are underemployed: they are working but it's not in their major and it's not in their sector. So I think challenges exist in a lot of places. In Armenia certainly it is also a challenge, a significant challenge, but it is important to follow the historical trend: if someone looked for a job in Armenia 20 years ago, it would be nearly impossible. It became easier 15 years ago, 10 years ago, 5 years ago... Compared to the past, we have a lot more opportunities available today, and I think this trend will only continue.

How do you attract people to take part in Birthright program?

— We of course use traditional mechanisms and social media. There are also a lot of former participants who go back

NOT KNOWING THE LANGUAGE FLUENTLY, BEING AWAY FROM HOME AND COMPLETELY UNFAMILIAR WITH THE SUPPORT STRUCTURE, ALL OF THESE MIGHT CAUSE THE MAJORITY OF STRESS

and encourage others to come, give personal recommendations which is always very effective. Yet, I think the fact that this is not a one-week or ten-day program and it demands a longer-term commitment, for nine weeks, maybe even a year, automatically self-selects the participants: a lot of people who do not have that tenacity, or that courage, or that boldness to dive into the adventure, they don't apply. So people who come here have a similar spirit and a whole range of different motivations. Some of them come for professional internships to put on their resumes; some come to connect with the language and the culture; some come because they are at a transition point in their lives: they don't want to stay in the same routine, working from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., always busy, always tired... So it's very personal, it's very individual.

What are the hardships that volunteers encounter when they arrive in the country?

— Not knowing the language fluently, being away from home and completely unfamiliar with the support structure, all of these might cause the majority of stress. But the good thing about Birthright is that we have a significant

support system. When someone arrives, we do not tell him "Ok, here's your job site, bye-bye." Instead, we do everything to relieve the unease, to make the new environment more welcoming and less scary. Fortunately, from 1,400 volunteers who have arrived over the years less than 10, I would say, did not make it, changed their plane ticket and flew back home. On the other hand, we have incredible stories of connection with the country. For example, a couple of years ago we had a paramedic firefighter from Los Angeles, her name is Jamie Kolar. Because she was in active duty at the Fire Department and had a very limited vacation time, her goal was to come for about four weeks, do some professional engagement and then go back and continue her life. We placed her at the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and she found out that people there were very interested in what she knew, very eager to learn from her. So she decided to stay for another few weeks and do something outside of Yerevan. Then we placed her at an ambulance core in a hospital in Gyumri, and people there were happy to have her. She was training the first responders and she knew zero Armenian! Jamie got



so much involved in the process that she got special permission from her supervisor to stay longer, telling her team back in LA that she is not just having a nice time on a beach but is actually integrating professionally here. And they were very supportive, they even started to donate equipment. She ended up staying for months and started her own organization called "Aid to Armenia." On the centennial of the Armenian Genocide she headed a project called "100 Villages." With the help of other volunteers, she traveled all over the country giving professional first response trainings to teachers and hospital crews. She kept her job in LA, working extra weekends and holidays in order to be able to spend more time in Armenia. Jamie is actually here now.

Mr. Kabakian, you are a repatriate yourself. How did you decide to move back?

— I was born in Lebanon, I lived there for about 15 years. But I lived most of my life in the US. For me repatriation was not a single-step event where you wake up one day and say: "Let's move to Armenia." It's pretty much a life-long dream. Even before Armenia was independent, when there was no sign of independence, in the Armenian community people talked constantly about that one beautiful day when we all would move back. Unfortunately, when the country became independent, the big move, the big wave of repatriation did not happen, mainly because of very practical reasons – jobs, for example. It's understandable. But, I think, as time passes, we come out of that very

difficult situation – again, not every part of Armenia, but at least the country as a whole has given more opportunities for people to look at it as a place where they can come and invest themselves. Every country develops like that. You can't wait for Armenia to become fully developed and prosperous in every sector and then take action.

Why, in your opinion, is repatriation important for our society?

— To some extent having most of your children being outside of the country is a deficit in the sense that they are not here directly contributing to this society. But on the other hand, it can be looked at as study abroad and an investment in experience. A lot of countries spend huge amounts of money to send their citizens to study at the best universities, get work experience and then come back and reinvest. Armenia naturally has the biggest study abroad program in the world for which it has spent no money. Putting aside that huge potential and focusing on local residents only is not really efficient. Of course, many Armenians are not connected to their culture, but there is a very significant part which still at the very least has an interest in personal engagement. It might be a two week visit as a tourist or something a bit more substantial or very substantial, just like long-term volunteering which we at Birthright chose believing that it is one of the best gateways to repatriation. ♦



REPATRIATION:

A short guideline

What new challenges were waiting those young people, who decided to make one of the important steps in their lives – to come to Armenia and build their future here. We asked a few young repatriates to provide with a short guideline for those, who are preparing to move to Armenia for the first time.

TEXT : ARMEN MOURADIAN / ILLUSTRATION : MUKUCH CHANCHANYAN



ADRINEH GRIGORYAN

DOCUMENTARY DIRECTOR

MOVED TO ARMENIA FROM USA IN 2008

I can give 15 advices I didn't know when I was moving to Armenia:

- 1) Forget about everything and be ready to survive in a whole new system;
- 2) You can either like or dislike the system, but you have to understand that you can't control it – you only can become a particle of the stream;
- 3) Be tolerant with those who say that you don't speak Armenian very well;
- 4) Take a chance to walk everywhere;
- 5) Use every single chance to visit live concerts;
- 6) Buy vegetables and fruits in near markets, not supermarkets;
- 7) Feed cats and dogs in your yard;
- 8) Try buffalo matsun, it's magic;
- 9) Use only taxis with a counter and don't complain, when taxi drivers try to cheat you on money – it's everywhere;
- 10) Yerevan is one of the safest cities. You can go home alone at any time. Though, I'm trying to avoid going home alone at late nights, when streets are empty;
- 11) Get Fuxwell knife, it can save your life;
- 12) Go to movie screenings at a place called the Club every Tuesday at 20:00;
- 13) If you need medical examination, you can ask your friend for an advice or ask at any repatriate groups in Facebook;
- 14) Always keep change equal to 600 AMD;
- 15) Visit Dalan art-cafe at Abovyan, 12.

Enough for free advices. The rest you should learn at the spot and by yourself. And remember – the real fun is discovering by yourself.

KARINE VANN

JOURNALIST, EDITOR

MOVED TO ARMENIA FROM USA IN 2014

If you decide to move to Armenia, you should understand, that it's your decision, not others'. There could be a lot of people, who would put their hand on your shoulder and say, that "Your Homeland needs you." If my decisions were based on their advice, I would have left the country the first

day, when I met the guys who were thinking that I'm crazy to leave United States and move to Armenia. You also don't have to listen to those, who are sure that you can't find job in Armenia. You don't have to listen to both positive and negative people. It's your decision, and you have to be responsible for that and never blame anyone.

MARIA AGHISYAN

CULTUROLOGIST

MOVED TO ARMENIA FROM UKRAINE IN 2014

If you're looking for some action and crazy fun, Yerevan can hardly suit you. But on the other hand Armenia is a great place for those, who are sick of clubs and looking for a place, where they can rethink their lives, take a deep breath and find new ways to continue. No, life isn't stopped here, it's just different. Many things here are based on old traditions, but you should never consider Armenia as an archeological museum or some beautiful nature reserve. Things become more interesting when we talk about art and culture. It's not very right to stay in Yerevan, you should go to mountains, and if you're lucky, to stay there for a while. Even roads that go through mountains are awesome. You should remember, that people sometimes are too concerned with your personal life, be that your successes or failures. People here are closer to each other, sometimes feels that there are no boundaries between them. Introverts, just take this part into consideration.

VREZH HARUTYUNYAN

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

MOVED TO ARMENIA FROM USA IN 2012

The biggest disappointment you can experience here, is that people are afraid to be unique, and also they don't believe in themselves and their better future. One should consider,

that very many people here are not so serious about their jobs. I know hod-dog makers from Aleppo, who put their soul into their job, but I've rarely seen such kind of approach even in good restaurants. They only want to earn some money. I would strongly advice to anybody willing to visit Armenia to study their rights and be prepared even for confrontations. First, you have to do some research, figure out how you're going to maintain yourself, and whether your skills are needed there. You should be prepared to become either small or big part of one small world, where everything looks bigger. Also you should never consider yourself as a hero. You should understand, that this country lives its life without you not so bad, though I have to admit, that also not so good. Remember, here you have to do what you can do best, and everything will be ok.

KAZAR AKOPYAN

FOUNDER OF STREET WORKOUT ARMENIA

MOVED TO ARMENIA FROM RUSSIA IN 2014

You should never listen to local taxi-drivers and relatives, who will make you believe, that everything is bad here. Such kind of rumors are not good source of information. And be prepared for a famous phrase "it's not a good place to live in." Also be prepared for a situation, where you are considered some crazy man, who came to Armenia only because he had no other place to go. Actually, there are a lot of good things here. Only the fact, that you live in your Homeland, surrounded by "hom-mies", can give you an additional source of energy. I really feel it. One should assume, that there is much need in him in Armenia. It's a big illusion. In reality, there is a huge competition between specialists in every sphere. Be prepared for it and know your strength and weaknesses. ♦

THE CASE FOR REPATRIATION:

Why both Armenia and the Diaspora Need Repatriation to Survive



In the past there had been several waves of repatriation, which have strengthened Armenia and made the realization of the Armenian nation-state project possible. In the rapidly changing, globalized world of today, repatriation may become indispensable not only for the survival and development of Armenia as a country, but also for the survival and development of Armenian identity and culture globally.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN



▼
Minister of Diaspora Affairs Hranush Hakobyan

►
Carahunge cafe-library in Stepanavan, founded by Khorozyan foundation from diaspora



Pan Photo



Carahunge Cafe archive

WHILE ACHIEVEMENTS ARE UNDENIABLE, THERE ARE ALSO SERIOUS CHALLENGES BOTH FOR ARMENIA AS A COUNTRY, AND DIASPORA AS A SYSTEM OF COMMUNITIES

REASONS TO BE PROUD, REASONS TO BE CONCERNED

Every year in April Armenians all over the world are paying their respects to the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. For many Armenians it is also an occasion to reflect on the road that Armenians have come in the course of the last century, as well as to think about the future of Armenia and Armenians. Compared to hundred years ago, when the very existence of Armenians as a people was under severe threat, Armenians have come a long way. Today Armenia is an established independent country, with all the attributes and institutions of independent statehood, from armed forces to a central bank. It not only survived the chaos and confusion of the first post-Soviet years, but withstood the challenge of war and blockade. The descendants of the refugees from the Genocide have formed communities all over the world, which have, in most cases, combined integration into host societies with preservation of Armenian identity. As a sign of confidence and pride that is associated with Armenian identity today, in a sharp contrast to the fear and humiliation of hundred

years ago, many Armenians, who are addressing the memory of genocide on social networks, are using the hashtag “Turkey failed”.

And yet, among Armenians, both in Armenia itself and in Diaspora communities, one can often sense a certain nervousness about the future of the Armenian people. While achievements are undeniable, there are also serious challenges both for Armenia as a country, and Diaspora as a system of communities. The challenges are very different: Armenians of Armenia are facing a deteriorating life standard caused by stagnant economy, corruption and lack of rule of law. The situation is further complicated by the security threat related to the unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan and problematic relations with Turkey. As a result, more and more Armenians become alienated from the Armenian nation-state and see the solution to their problems in leaving the country. Armenians in Diaspora communities in the West, and to a lesser extent in Russia, are in a significantly better situation when it comes to security and quality of life. However, they are

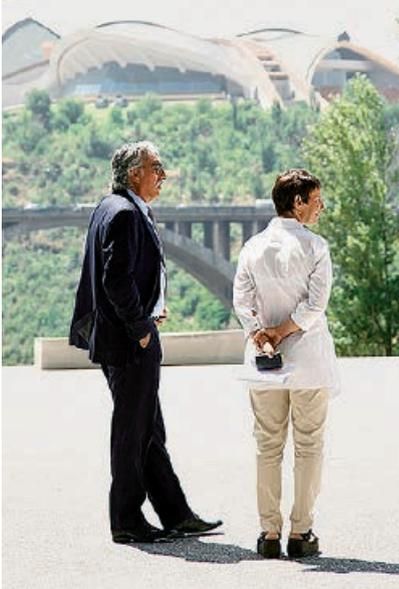
facing the challenge of maintaining their identity and heritage, being exposed to the assimilating influence of the host society. Finally, some of the Armenian communities of the Middle East are struggling to maintain their cultural heritage amid deteriorating security environment and growing religious radicalism.

Obviously, there is no single answer to all these different challenges. However, I believe that one of the answers to these challenges will be a massive repatriation of Armenians to their historical homeland. In the rapidly changing, globalized world of today, repatriation is indispensable both for the survival and development of Armenia as a country, and for the survival and development of Armenian identity and culture.

WHY DO WE NEED REPATRIATION?

There is hardly even need to explain why a large-scale repatriation would be indispensable for Armenia as a country and as a state. It is no secret that today Armenia is losing population. The quarter of a century of independence saw hundreds of thousands of Armenians leave their homeland.

Sam Simonian and Marie Lou Papazian at the newly opened TUMO center



Suren Mamelgum



Arnos Martiresyan



Deem Communications archive

^ Ayb school was also launched with the help of repatriates

< Serj Tankian and repatriate entrepreneur Raffi Niziblian in Yerevan

Falling numbers of population are affecting all spheres of life: emigration means empty villages, depressive regional towns, closing schools and, most worryingly from the point of security, not enough young men to serve in the army. The effects of population loss on the economy, such as the reduction of the workforce and of the size of the market, are detrimental. The positive consequence of the migration flows, the influx of remittances that helps fuel the Armenian economy today, is hardly sustainable in the long run: temporary migrants tend to settle down, inviting their families to join them and thus over time the transfers will be dwindling. The brain drain has an abysmal effect on not only on economy and security, but also on education, science and culture. A mass repatriation could overturn this dynamic. People are the most important strategic resource in our age, and repatriation would be a boost to Armenia's economy and security. The repatriates would not only bring with them investments, but what is argu-

ably more important, skills, knowledge, and inter-cultural expertise. While it is obvious how Armenia will benefit from repatriation, it may be somewhat less clear how it would benefit the Diaspora communities. One could argue that Armenian identity has survived and even thrived in the Diaspora communities for hundreds of years, even at times when nothing remotely resembling an Armenian nation-state existed in the homeland. Therefore, one could say, it just might be true that Armenian identity and culture do not necessarily need to be associated with a nation-state in order to survive and develop? However, such an argument does not take into account the changes that the age of post-modernity and globalization has brought. The old model of Diaspora communities, as relatively closed ethno-religious communities, can no longer work. It worked until recently in the relatively archaic Middle Eastern Countries, but today the communities there are threatened by instability and religious radicalism. And this model is

unsustainable in the Western countries, (including Russia, which in terms of its societal model can be considered a post-modern Western society, albeit with some local specifics). Maintaining a closed ethno-religious community defined by religion and language is virtually impossible in a modern post-industrial society, with its modern technology, diversity of lifestyles, and high level of social mobility. To an extent the problem of maintaining identity in modern industrial and post-industrial societies was solved by Armenian Diaspora communities through focusing on the historical memory, particularly memory of the Genocide and the demand for its recognition, as the centerpiece of Armenian identity. It allowed people of Armenian origin, who had lost connection to Armenian Church, language or traditions, to identify and participate in the community life through this focus on historical memory. However, it is questionable to what extent this model can work in the long run. It is hard to predict what could be the effect on the

➤
“Jano” restaurant moved
from Aleppo to Yerevan
with its repatriate owners

Diaspora Armenian identity of a development like the Genocide recognition by Turkey, or of potential geopolitical changes that will affect “the Armenian Cause”, e.g. possible emergence of an autonomous Kurdish state in Kurdish-populated areas for Turkey. True, such developments seem utopian today, but in a rapidly changing world of today it is difficult to exclude anything. Even if none of this happens, over time the issue of Genocide recognition is bound to lose its emotional appeal, as the time passes and generations are changing. Obviously, memory of the genocide is not likely to disappear in any predictable perspective, but, with the passing of time, the genocide-based Armenian identity will become largely symbolic. Armenians in the Western countries, thus, will repeat the fate of many other ethnic communities, who have largely assimilated, while maintaining only some symbolic aspects of their identity. Therefore, in order to maintain their identity and culture, Diaspora communities may need to go through a significant identity transformation, and the most obvious direction of such a transformation would be focusing on the connection with Armenia as a country. There are signs that Diaspora identity is indeed becoming Armenia-centered, at least to a higher extent that was the case before. The last several years provided several examples of this, and participation of numerous Diaspora Armenians in the monitoring of the recent elections was the most recent sign of this trend. However, if this interest in the affairs of Armenia is not accompanied by a repatriation of significant numbers of Diaspora Armenians, this interest in Armenia’s affairs is likely to remain just another aspect of a largely symbolic identity.



PEOPLE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT STRATEGIC RESOURCE IN OUR AGE, AND REPATRIATION WOULD FOR SURE BE A BOOST TO ARMENIA'S ECONOMY AND SECURITY

LESSONS OF THE PREVIOUS WAVES OF REPATRIATION

Obviously, there may be significant differences in the forms that repatriation may take with regard to communities in different countries. While it may be relatively easy to organize repatriation of Armenians from Middle East or Post-Soviet countries, it would be hard to imagine hundreds of thousands of Armenians from West Europe and North America, leaving their countries and relocating to Armenia for good. But one could imagine a higher extent of mobility between Armenia and Diaspora communities, turning the flow of migration, which today is mostly one-sided (away from Armenia) into a two-way street. In any case, repatriation does not mean that Diaspora communities will disappear: in the globalized world, the mobility between the homeland and the Diaspora can be quite high, meaning that the lines between “Diasporans” and “Hayastantsi” will become more blurred. In the past there had been several waves of repatriation, which strengthened Armenia and made the realization

of the Armenian nation-state project possible. Arguably, the very existence of Armenia as a nation-state would have been impossible without several waves of repatriation. Even if we look only at the last hundred years of Armenia’s history it is impossible to deny the importance of repatriation. During the first decades of the Soviet rule thousands of Armenians came to Armenia from various parts of the former Russian Empire. Of course, the largest groups of repatriates came from the big urban centers of the Caucasus at the time, Tbilisi and Baku, as well as from various other parts of the Caucasus and the Soviet Union. In fact, this wave started earlier, during the short-lived independence of 1918-1920, and together with the flow of refugees from Western Armenia, it shaped Armenia for the years to come. Another wave of repatriation was the Great Repatriation in 1946-1949, which mostly consisted of Armenian Genocide survivors and their ancestors, without which it is difficult to imagine the “national renaissance” of the 1960s. ➤

↘ ↗
Noubarashen suburb of Yerevan was found in 1920's by Egyptian Armenian philanthropist Boghos Noubar Pasha for immigrants from the Western Armenia



With the Karabakh movement and the achievement of independence repatriation again became a part of Armenia's life and has remained such till today. In some cases it was a result of forced migration, as was the case with Azerbaijani Armenians in 1988-1990, Iraqi Armenians after 2003, and Syrian Armenians since 2011. However, in addition to these waves, there was a more or less stable flow of repatriates from various parts of Diaspora since the early 1990s. This flow sometimes became more intensive and sometimes it grew weaker, but it never ceased completely. The repatriates have been bringing with them their education, their investments, and their different cultural backgrounds, enriching Armenia's life. What does the experience of previous repatriation waves teach us? It has not always been successful. Particularly painful are the memories of 1946-1949 and 1988-1990. In both cases, the repatriation ultimately turned into reverse migration. Some of those, who came in 1940s, left as soon as USSR allowed emigration, and many of those who arrived in 1988-1990 soon left Armenia settling in Russia and in the West. In both cases there were objective reasons that accounted for the difficulties and traumas. In 1946-48 the repatriates came to Soviet Armenia, seeing it as their homeland, but found themselves in a totalitarian Stalinist dictator-

UNLESS THE PROBLEM OF INTOLERANCE TO DIFFERENCE WITHIN ARMENIA AND ARMENIA DIASPORA IS DEALT WITH, ANY MASSIVE REPATRIATION CAN HARDLY RESULT TO A LONG-TERM SUCCESS

ship. In the early 1990s the repatriates were mostly refugees, unwilling victims of a conflict, who found themselves in a country devastated by earthquake and war. But objective factors, such as totalitarianism and war were only part of the picture: to a certain extent, the obstacles that the repatriates faced were also a result of subjective factors, such as the inability of Armenian state institutions to solve the logistic problems arising from the influx of large numbers of repatriates. However, there was also a deeper underlying issue that acted as an obstacle to repatriates' integration: the host majority was often not ready to accommodate the newcomers, particularly the cultural and sometimes linguistic differences (whether different dialects or lack of knowledge of Armenian). On the other hand, faced with the difficulties of the repatriation, the newcomers

sometimes chose to stick to their old community identities, rather than fully integrating to the new environment. Unless the problem of intolerance to difference within Armenia and Armenia Diaspora is dealt with, any massive repatriation can hardly be expected to result in a long-term success, even if all the logistical issues are dealt with adequately. The experience of previous waves of repatriation teaches us that, in order to be successful, repatriation needs a society that is open to and tolerant of difference. Moreover, a massive repatriation inevitably will lead to a serious redefining of Armenian identity, both in ethnocultural ("hay") and civic-territorial ("hayastantsi") forms. Repatriation and the process of redefining Armenian identity will go hand in hand, one will reinforce the other. This may seem somewhat of a utopia today. But so does a massive repatriation. ♦



Elf Garden

welcomes both Armenian and Russian speaking children from 1.5 to 6 years old in respectively four age groups.

It opens at 08.30 and closes when the last child leaves and offers full-day as well as half-day attendance. The educational programs are based on the methodology of the world-known pedagogists. The age peculiarities, learning requirements and child development phase expectations are all taken into account.



We offer the following classes

- Speech development
- Elementary literacy
- Russian (for Armenian speakers)
- Armenian (for Russian speakers)
- English
- Ecology
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- Painting Skills
- Safe Behavior
- Dancing and Singing
- Theatrical skills



Considering the importance of games and playing in the early ages - the learning process is organized in playing method. There are two play-areas in the kindergarten: indoor and outdoor.



For an utmost effect there is a special painting classroom and a specialist teaching:

- Pencil painting
- Finger painting
- Sand painting
- Clay sculpture coloring
- Eco-sandbox
- Stucco
- Construction skills



The four times nutrition is formed by a special pediatrician and a physiologist according to all the health rules.

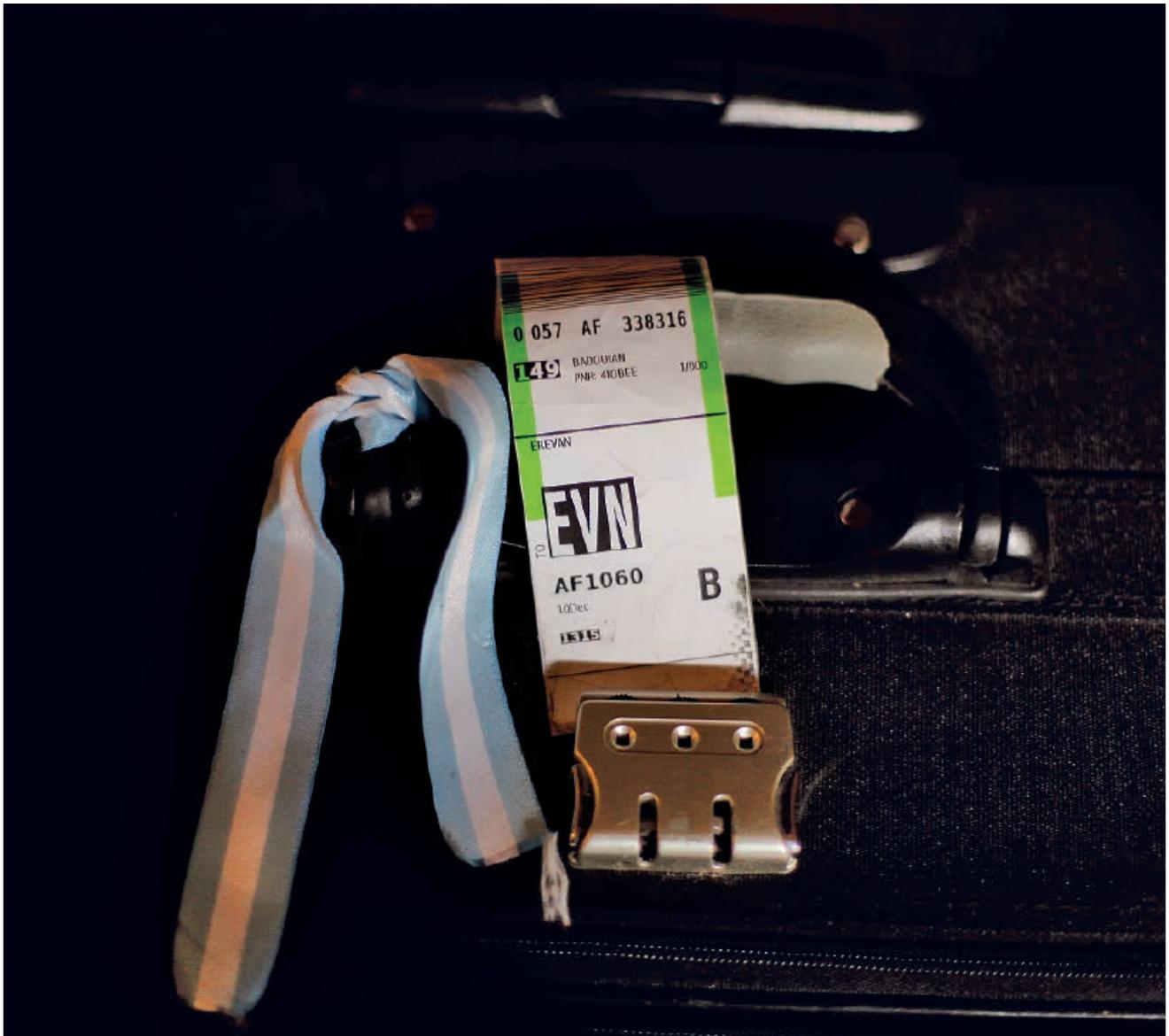
Taking into consideration the harmonic development and healthy lifestyle rules the children are always under the pediatrician's strict control.

Address: Centre, Yerevan
1 Yeznik Koghbatsi street, bld. 121
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BACK HOME

Using diaspora's potential is one of the key tools for Armenia to become a strong state with a successful society. That's integration of repatriates is so important. To illustrate this truth Regional Post presents 11 repatriates who recently moved to Armenia and changed its cultural and business surface.

TEXT / PHOTO : REPATARMENIA.ORG



Baqra Mahari / Yerevan City Magazine



ARAM PAKCHANIAN

“We chose to educate a new generation”

MOVED FROM MOSCOW, RUSSIA, IN 2014

Born in Yerevan Armenia, Aram Pakhchanian originally left in 1985 to study physics at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology. He always dreamed of becoming a physicist, but as graduation approached his interests had shifted to computers due to the rapid growth in the field of information technology. It was also in Moscow where he met his future wife through mutual friend in college. “Despite being in Moscow I was inclined to come back to Armenia,” Aram recalls and thus following graduation he came back to Armenia in 1991 during the decline of the USSR. Despite the harsh environment of a post-Soviet Armenia the couple was married and soon had their first child. In 1992 they moved to Moscow, where Aram’s friend David Yang was running a small software company which would later become a global IT giant, ABBYY.

“Even though I had a job in Moscow I always felt Armenia as an important part of my life, but back then the idea of returning was like a nice dream. I was considering ways to establish a business in Armenia and gradually move over. However I had invested a lot of time and energy into ABBYY and the company was doing so well that there was little reason for me to look for other opportunities even if it was somehow related to my motherland. Then circumstances changed”, Aram remembers. One day, when he was sitting in his flat in Moscow not even thinking about introducing any sharp changes in his life, Aram received an email which his wife sent out informing her friends and acquaintances that she was planning to be involved in a project in Armenia and so she would be spending more time in Yerevan. “I replied asking her to find something for me in Armenia as well, as I would greatly miss her if we were going to be apart for so long.”

As it’s known to happen Aram’s words materialized and within ten minutes he received a call from Yerevan offering him a job in Armenia. From emails to phone calls to reality Aram is now the Director of Ayb School and still represents ABBYY as the vice president.

“The whole idea of a new school was born much earlier during a meeting of friends who decided to invest in Armenian education. “There were eight of us. We all felt indebted to our motherland and we thought it was high time to take action. Initially our intention was to make a few repairs to our former high school (Physical-Mathematical School after A. Shahinyan) and gradually we discovered that there was much more to be done. We believe education is something which serves society as a whole. Therefore we chose to educate a new generation, invest in the future for the sake of the future”.

**RAFFI NIZIBLIAN****“This is not America,
not Europe”****MOVED FROM MONTREAL, CANADA IN 2003**

As the Founding-Director of Deem Communications, Raffi has built a large network in the Armenian market. By accomplishing several major marketing jobs, he has gained a wide range of experience in PR, Event Management and Advertising. It was quite a challenge for him to repatriate, but he took the risk. He remembers: “When I moved to Armenia, the country was in a different place. The only inkling of an IT sector was the soviet remnant of Armentel. I chose to live here to have my input in the building of the country. I am happy to say that I had the opportunity to be the first to head the commercial department of the now leading mobile operator, VivaCell-MTS. In that position, I was able to somehow revolutionize the customer service and communications of the telecom industry in Armenia. I hired 180 sales, customer relations, communications and marketing staff. Trained them and prepared a new platform of service provision in Armenia. My Canadian experience and background came in very handy.”

Raffi is sure, that to succeed in Armenia you have to understand its cultural nuances and you're your baggage from the country you moved in. “Doing business anywhere is a risk. Once you have that out of the way, you can now start thinking about how business is done here versus there”, he says. “Every country has its own cultural nuances. When I arrived here, I had certain expectations of how things should be and what I can do to make it so. However, I studied the challenges and tried to implement the most I could from my Canadian baggage and used many of the local benefits of how to best use your network, how to negotiate and so on. Bottom line, this is not Canada, it is not America, not Europe and not China. This is a post-soviet republic closely tied to Russia with many traditional values and customs. The opportunities are awaiting those who will know how to make best use of them”.



ARMINEH PANOSSIAN-GHAZARIAN
**“Mainly because we love
our motherland”**

MOVED FROM BEIRUT, LEBANON, IN 2015

Born in Syrian Aleppo, Armineh moved to Lebanon with her family when she was 7. There, in Beirut, she studied English language and literature. A certified and experienced TEFL instructor, an author of English course books, activity books, and story books, she began thinking about repatriation few years ago. It took Armineh and her husband two years to come to that decision. “Mainly because we love our motherland and I wanted to start my own educational center here rather than in Lebanon”, she says and adds: “Another reason is our son to whom we wanted to provide safe childhood and the best environment”.

And so it happened: Armineh and her son moved to Yerevan in August of 2015, a year later her husband joined them. In 2017 Armineh established here her own educational center, “A+I Imbibe Skills”, where they provide interactive English language courses, Character development training, managerial courses, CV writing and interview skills, TEFL Certificate, and Study abroad programs.”

Talking about challenges in the historical motherland, Armineh says: “The biggest challenge is being able to adapt to the conditions here: harsh winter, inconvenient public transportation, and old residential buildings”. But it is still a special place for her and her family: “Armenia is special for me because it inspires me with its beautiful nature, I can put into practice my educational beliefs, and most importantly I’m putting my long years of experience in education in service of my people. I am also thankful to my new friends in Armenia who gave me the opportunity to enter the Armenian media. I am especially appreciative to Repat Armenia organization members for their constant support and assistance. Let Walt Disney’s powerful quote inspire not only repatriate Armenians but also everyone “All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them”.

**AREN APIKYAN****“I was ready to face the difficulties and obstacles”****MOVED FROM MOSCOW, RUSSIA IN 2009**

After living in Russia for 16 years, Aren Apikyan decided to return to his Motherland. He has lived with his family in Armenia for five years already. Aren explains that he thought about moving to Armenia for quite a long time, but now he knows that it was the right decision.

“I was born in Yerevan and I was 15 when my family moved to Russia in 1992. My father was offered a job in the Embassy of Armenia.” In Russia, Aren received his higher education, graduating from Moscow Academy of Economics and Rights majoring in jurisprudence, and Moscow State Institute of Foreign Affairs majoring in management. Aren met his future wife Marianna in Moscow. Their two sons, Alexander and Artyom, were born there.

“I always thought that one day I would return to Armenia. Maybe it was my destiny that, due to the financial crisis of 2008, hard times began in my sphere of work. At the time, an interesting job was offered to me in one of the banks in Armenia. And I realized that this was a good reason to return to the Motherland. It was a hard and serious decision. My parents were against it and my wife had doubts at first too, but we decided to give it a try. And now we’re here.”

Aren says that he didn’t have any integration problems. While living in Russia he periodically visited the Motherland. “I tried to visit Armenia at least once a year. I had some idea of what was going on in the country and how people lived here. I never put on ‘pink glasses’ and I didn’t think (assume) that everything would be so good after we moved to Armenia. I had no illusion. That’s why nothing surprised me. I was ready to face the difficulties and obstacles.”

Aren has decided to live in Armenia, but he doesn’t preclude that one day he may leave his Motherland again for some time. As for the future of his kids, they will decide for themselves where they want to live. “I don’t want my children to receive a higher education in Armenia. May the minister of education in Armenia forgive me, but higher education institutions in Armenia are at the lowest level.”

Aren Apikyan has set several tasks for himself: “Speaking of the main goal of my life, I would like to put my children on their own feet and give them a good education. As for me, I would like to work on projects that will contribute to the development of our country. We have many projects like this. Enough to last my whole life.”



RUBEN MALAYAN

**“Never stop working
and aim as high as possible”**

MOVED FROM TEL-AVIV, ISRAEL IN 2004

Ruben left Armenia with his family in 1990's. At that time he already knew he was going into arts: in Yerevan Malayan studied in State Art College after P. Terlemezian and Academy Of Fine Arts. In Tel-Aviv he began his career as a graphic designer in which he got specialized in different disciplines – visual identity, typography, illustration and calligraphy. Over the years he has collaborated on a number of high profile international commercials, branding development for various TV stations, concept art and shot design for commercials and feature films. In 2010 Malayan decided to return to Armenia and share his skills and experience with local professionals and students. Triada Studio, TUMO center for the creative technologies, Maeutica creative agency: these are some leading companies, Malayan has cooperated with after returning to Armenia.

Here he devoted his time and passion to rebirth of Armenian calligraphy. Today Malayan is considered to be the best professional in his field. “Just 5 years ago there was practically nothing done with this art, so I am proud to say the work I did pays off as more and more people become interested in Armenian calligraphy”, Malayan says, “It all began when I received a letter from New York based publishers asking if I was interested to contribute to the planned “World Encyclopedia of Calligraphy”. I have done some calligraphy before, as you know I have been working in graphic design for over 20 years and letters were always important part of visual communication, but I never really spent considerable time drawing letters by hand. So it was sort of a challenge which I happily accepted. I was living in Israel then and the first thing I did was to try to amass as much material as possible. Unfortunately there was nothing about it online, but I knew there is information but it's as always scattered upon many libraries. So I went to Jerusalem, then Yerevan, asked friends in academia and started my research.” Now Ruben is working on the book “The Art of Armenian Calligraphy” which focuses on the evolution of the calligraphic tradition and placing it on a stage upon which it can be studied as an independent art form. It's designed to serve as a source of reference and inspiration to anyone interested in this subject and to illuminate its future by offering inspiring examples of contemporary calligraphic work.

When talking about his personal professional motto, Ruben says: “Never stop working and aim as high as possible.”



TAMAR NAJARIAN

“I have come home to stay”

MOVED FROM TORONTO, CANADA IN 2013

Tamar was born in Canada. She got a background in psychology and teaching, a penchant for creative writing, and a love of business and marketing. In 2013 she arrived in Yerevan.

“It amuses me to walk down Northern Avenue and see funky Jamaican wearing hippies being pelted with apple slices because of their god-awful songs as much as discovering that famous churches still bear signs of being temples of centuries past. It hurts my heart to see old buildings abandoned while rather monstrous new ones built at exorbitant prices. It makes me smile to see the marshutka culture and laugh when I see the children playing so carelessly on the streets. I love being confused for a Syrian Armenian, with the ability to camouflage where needed. Bickering with taxi drivers is a favorite past-time and I so enjoy berating bus drivers for smoking and subjecting the local population to such an abomination”.

Tamar, who now works as Integration Manager at Repat Armenia Foundation, realizes it can't be easy to live in Armenia: “I won't say there are no problems. I won't say there are jobs galore. And then I think of Canada. I spent forever looking for a low-paying job to tide me over, under bosses who hated my kind. One hated females, the other only liked Chinese culture (though he was Scottish) and no one else was worth his time or praise. I spent hours on foot, serving the public, with minimal appreciation, just to manage to pay for my food and gas in my car. Here, I created my own work. I had no knowledge of writing health articles, but I do have a psychology degree, which meant I know health-based research. I have little experience teaching ESL and yet I teach English to students who enjoy my lessons. I work 3 jobs in a country where finding a single job seems a chore. And oh do I have much to say on that, later on. For those who work, there is always something to do. The laziness in this country is absurd!

So yes, to all those who said I wouldn't last the summer, I have proved you wrong. Now to knock down the negative notions that I would not last the winter! There may be over 250 people leaving a day, but I am most definitely not one of them. I have come home to stay”.



ARA AND ANAHIT MARKOSIAN

**“One should never have
to sacrifice health for beauty”**

MOVED FROM LOS ANGELES, USA

Anait and Ara Markosians' Nairian Cosmetics is a bright example of a successful business done after repatriation. The idea for Nairian came to Anahit and Ara a physicist and mathematician respectively, during a family road trip through the mountains of Armenia few years ago. Riding along in a clunky Lada, the couple was struck by the potential of Armenia's incredible, and heretofore untapped flora. As they zipped by fields of blossoming white yarrow and golden helichrysum, the Markosians tossed about ideas of essential oil distillation and sustainable farming in Armenia – first jokingly, then with a greater degree of seriousness.

Once the Markosians were back in their California home, they continued to ponder the possibilities. After much consideration, Ara and Anahit decided to take a leap of faith and give up their comfortable Silicon Valley jobs for a lifetime venture. They moved across the globe, assembled a team of researchers and horticulturists, and set to work creating Nairian: the very first all-natural cosmetics company based in Armenia.

Ara had also always appreciated the benefits of all-natural goods, but was more intrigued by the impact which a project like Nairian could make for Armenia's rural communities, as well as research in certain branches of natural science that were new to Armenia. For years Ara had brought his startups to Yerevan, supporting the country's emerging tech industry. Nairian, therefore, would be his next innovative way of giving back to the home that he left during the early nineties.

In the beginning the going was... rough; the first Nairian lab was just two small rooms in a semi-abandoned Soviet era factory, and it took years to find the perfect land for Nairian's farm. Even during those early days, however, both Ara and Anahit felt that this new endeavor was to be a riveting adventure and poignant homecoming, all in one. Today, complete with a factory, farm and two showrooms in the heart of Yerevan, this seedling endeavor has flourished beyond all expectations.

Nairian was founded on the firm belief that one should never have to sacrifice health for beauty. This conviction is at the core of everything we do, and it drives us every day as we work to bring you premium natural cosmetics, made with your beauty in mind and health at heart.



KAZAR AKOPYAN

“I’m happy here”

MOVED FROM MOSCOW, RUSSIA IN 2014

Kazar was born in Yerevan. In 1994 his family left the country – first, for several years they lived in Ukraine, but afterwards moved to Moscow, where they settled down. There, Kazar continued my studies at school, went to college and received a master’s degree diploma in Economics and Management.

He was involved in sports and dancing since childhood. In Ukraine, Kazar took boxing classes, then became a national champion among juniors and simultaneously took Latin American dance classes. “I continued my trainings in Moscow. Once attended a conference after I graduated from college. My love for sports and dancing eventually brought me into fitness industry. I liked this path a lot, and I understood that I could realize my potential in this area.” After that, he says he worked as a Russian and international conventions presenter for “Fitness Academy”, was appointed as a manager of a dance studio a year and a half later, and the manager of an elite fitness club “Golden Keys” within the next year. Meanwhile he also developed interest in the history of Armenia, the history of his family and the Armenian diaspora. The desire to make his own contribution was born. At first he came up with idea to create a project called «Armenian People» for uniting people from all over the Armenian diaspora around the world. Then few other events took place and finally a visit to Armenia in 2013 for both personal and business reasons. At that time Kazar was already familiar with the youth movement called «Street Workout» and met the movement’s leader, Artur Harutyunyan, in Yerevan. This meeting served as an impetus to the creation of a public organization called Street Workout Armenia. “I suggested Arthur and Armine Abrahamyan, who was responsible for the development of the Gyurmi Sports City project, develop the community as a social organization and so we started working together.” While they had initially begun working remotely, preparations for the «Mix Battle Fest» festival brought to light quite a range of organizational issues that forced Kazar to fly to Armenia. “After visiting Repat Armenia Foundation’s ‘Imagine Armenia’ forum in Moscow, my conception about modern Armenia was changed in certain ways. I very much liked their attitude towards the Motherland and their future vision of Armenia. I realized I could be helpful.”

In promoting the idea of organizing Street Workout Armenia, the group has been supported by Gore Nakhapetyan and accepted into the “Yerevan 2.0” incubation project, acting on the basis of Yerevan Productions, which aims to support projects that can change the Armenian society for better, something he is thankful for.

Naturally, he had some doubts and anxiety about repatriation back to Armenia. “I went through a lot of thought process whether moving was the right decision to make, I was aware there would be many problems to overcome. The thought about returning matured not only in my mind but also in my mother’s and sister’s minds. I must say that thanks to my mother, I have changed my views and attitude towards the issue of repatriation.” Kazar never regretted to repatriate: “Living and working in Armenia is my pleasure; I’m happy here”



LARISA RYAN

“It’s not a sacrifice”

MOVED FROM MOSCOW, RUSSIA IN 2013

Larisa was born in Yerevan to an Armenian mother and an Irish-American father. When she was three months old, her family moved to California. But only a few years later her father’s work took the family to Russia – first to the Far East and then to Moscow. That is where Larisa spent the next ten years of her life.

“We lived in Moscow, but every summer we would return to Yerevan. My grandfather, the writer Leonid Hurunts, had passed away by then. But my grandmother was still teaching at the State Linguistic University named after Bryusov. For me she represented all that was good about Yerevan. She was beautiful, sophisticated, generous, and fiercely intelligent”, Larisa remembers. When Larisa graduated from high school she applied to universities in the United States. She decided to attend St. Norbert College, a liberal arts college in De Pere, Wisconsin and majored in International Business, French, and Graphic Design. Larisa was set on a career in advertising. And yet her life was guiding me toward a different path.

“My best friend from college, who graduated a year before I did, told me about a program called Teach for America. Its goal was to recruit young and passionate college graduates and to place them for two years into the most disadvantaged schools in the country. That is how I ended up in Phoenix, Arizona. I became a special education teacher for children with moderate to severe disabilities. It was my goal, as it was Teach for America’s mission, to give hope to these children. After my two-year commitment with Teach for America, I moved to Moscow to pursue a marketing position. I worked at a large agricultural company, and I was grateful to have the job. It was exactly the kind of job I had spent all of college working for. But I could not help but feel unfulfilled. I knew I had to do something. I knew, finally, that it was time to go home”.

In January of 2013 Larisa moved to Armenia. As her grandmother was passed away, her relationship to homeland became more complicated than it had ever been. “I was still enchanted with the country’s beauty and mystery, but somehow I also knew that Armenia was in pain. We tried to mask the pain, of course. We have become very good at cosmetic surgery. But beneath the surface, there is so much poverty, disappointment, and hopelessness”.

Larisa have long believed that change – true, meaningful change – begins in schools. That is why, together with her co-founder, she decided to create Teach For Armenia. “The idea is clear: to give all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, an opportunity to attain an excellent education. The strategy is simple: to recruit the best and the brightest from Armenia and its diaspora, and to commit these young transformational teachers to two years in the service of children in underprivileged schools. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, we hope to bring this vision to life”.

Talking about repatriation, Larisa says she doesn’t view it as a sacrifice. “My return to Armenia was an opportunity for me to pursue my dreams in the country I’ve always loved. I am lucky to be home”.

**NAREK ASLIKYAN****“One the most right things
I’ve done in my life”****MOVED FROM ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA IN 2016**

Narek was born in 1991. In 2006 he graduated from secondary school and enrolled at Moscow State University after M.V. Lomonosov, Faculty of Economics, Department of Management (Human Resources speciality). “Simultaneously to the studying I actively took part in the Armenian Student Association’s activity, organized a lot of events and wrote a lot of articles brochures about Artsakh’s issues”, remembers Narek. Since then almost all my hobbies are connected with Armenia and Armenian political activity. Since 2008 I’ve been actively learning Armenian revolutionary movement’s history. Besides this he was always interested in art-house films, management theory and Armenian music, especially Arthur Meschyan.

And then one day Narek decided to move to Armenia. “The main reason I moved was a lack of reasons to stay in Russia, while Armenia is special for people, nature, business environment and opportunities. And I had a lot of ideas for realization here”, he says. One year later he was remembering: “This impulsive decision was one the most right things I’ve done in my life”. As it often happens, lots of friends of Narek thought this was a silly move. “Now, when they realize this was not a matter of surviving but developing, the begin to change their minds”, says Narek. Talking about developing, he adds: “For the educated professional living in Yerevan is much easier, than in a megapolis. There are lots of opportunities and not much contest.”

Narek, who co-founded in Yerevan an Armenian Code Academy, is also aware of the problems: “The biggest challenge for me is to find time for implementing everything I want to do. For other repatriates will be challenging to adapt to the mentality – people in Armenia are very process-oriented and quite “slow”. It’s the biggest competitive advantage or repatriates – do things faster and with better quality. But it’s very hard to find the right employee if you’re going to build some business here. But not only because the people are slack, but also there is a huge gap between the labor market and both local and global business needs”.

And finally Narek says that the most of all he wants to see in Armenia all of his friends who now work abroad: “Here we need people who can see the opportunities”.



LUCINEH KASSARJIAN
“This land is my land
MOVED FROM SAN-FRANCISCO, USA IN 2008

Being born in Armenia to a family of Repats to parents from France and Uruguay, Lucineh moved to the States when she was 20, and lived in San Francisco almost half of her life. Throughout almost all of the duration of her life outside of Armenia Lucineh and her family have always kept very close ties with Armenia – be it with friends, the country or with projects. “When the children were born, we made every effort to bring them home every year, so that they would grow up having the closeness of the air and people and the familiarity of the culture”, Lucineh remembers. Raffi, her husband, their 2 children, Haig and Satineh, and she, moved to Armenia in 2008: “The repatriation has done a full circle in my family”, she says. Now Lucineh works for Armenia Tree Project, a non-profit program based in Woburn and Yerevan, which conducts vital reforestation projects all throughout Armenia (more than 5,2 million trees planted already), offers sustainable development and poverty reduction efforts (ATP provides fruit trees all throughout the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh, etc.), and deliver much needed environmental education to 5,000+ kids annually – both in 2 Environmental Education Centers (in Margahovit and Karin villages) and throughout many schools in Armenia. Armenia Tree Project greened almost 1/3 of the whole Republic – in schools, hospitals, military centers, parks and elsewhere.

When asked what makes her stay and work in Armenia, Lucineh explains: “This land is my land. I walk on this soil with a Yerevantsi attitude. If we put the sentimentalism aside, this is a wonderful country with so much potential! We need to remember, that this is a modern, living, breathing country – with its issues, achievements, obstacles and victories – and make this a better place for us and our children. Every night we go to sleep happy and frustrated, angry and fulfilled, because this is a land of contrast. Every morning we wake up with a newly developed vigor – ready to tackle what the day has prepared for us”.

She is sure that there really is no huge sacrifice in moving to Armenia: “We are no more or less patriotic than anyone living in or outside of Armenia. It’s the impact that you have with your actions”. Lucineh realizes that there’s a lot to do in Armenia to make it a better place. “This is a tabula rasa for an ambitious individual who wants to have her/his imprint in a nationbuilding effort. When your time is right, you will be here, but don’t think repatriation is a toughest decision – it has to be a process, from inside out. It’s a personal saga”. ♦

THE RENAISSANCE OF ARMENIAN WINE

ArmAs, Honoring Tradition with Progress

Victoria Aslanian CEO at Golden Grape ArmAs, tells the amazing story of foundation and rise of ArmAs wines, one of the creators and leaders of the renaissance of Armenian Wine.

TEXT : VICTORIA ASLANIAN / PHOTO : GOLDEN GRAPE ARMAS ARCHIVE



The 180 hectare ArmAs Estate is a stunning display of agricultural achievement, and represents the assimilation of tradition with development and progress, set against the backdrop of the inspiring Mount Ararat. Located in the Aragatsotn Province, just 40km North West of the city center, the estate is completely surrounded by a 17km brick wall, humbly named the Great Wall of ArmAs. Within these walls rest 110 hectares of established native varietal vineyards, 40 hectares of orchards, a world class winery and distillery, a boutique hotel and a grand tasting room, with a lake, farm, greenhouse, and dormitory currently under construction.

As I regularly approach our gates, this stunning panorama, with its enchanting spirit, never ceases to mesmerize me, despite the decade of investment, love and labor, alongside some blood, sweat, and tears we have devoted to this terrain and to our homeland. A homeland with an army of angels who have the unyielding capacity to awaken the soul. As we receive thousands of guests from all over the world, I share their excitement and relive the path that has brought us to this fruitful stage. Indeed, it is quite difficult to imagine, sometimes even for me, that only 10 years ago, this locale was comprised of no more than rocks and snakes.

Huge rocks, varied sized snakes. When I share some of our 'before' pictures that tell the story of recycling 100 hectares of rocks and removing 15,000 trucks of waste, establishing infrastructure, electricity, irrigation, drinking water, and roads in the middle of nowhere, I'm often asked, "What kind of a crazy person looks at that kind of desolate and disconnected rock-strewn countryside and decides to create an oasis?" "Well," I reply, "I call him dad."

ROMANTIC BEGINNINGS

In May of 2007, on my father's birthday, I told him he was expecting his first grandchild, my son Armen.



A month later, he told us he's moving back to Armenia to spend some time with grandma and plant some vines. We thought that dad decided upon a hobby and wanted to reconnect with his roots, literally and metaphorically. After all, his own grandfather Armen Aslanian Sr., the honorary namesake of ArmAs, was the renown village winemaker and my father grew up amidst vines and wines. While we still resided in Los Angeles, I recall my grandmother often calling us from Armenia and asking us a bit baffled, "Baby girl, where does your father go all day? For 20 years all we saw him in was business suits and ties, and now he's out all day in cowboy hats



and anti-snake boots and returns home covered in head to toe dust." We had no idea the grandiose scale of his undertaking and that he had initiated the first phase of our project, Man vs Nature, cultivating a sea of rocks into paradise. When we visited the estate for the first time the following summer, we were mesmerized by the battle and conquest. Shock and Awe does not begin to describe our impressions. My father had worked alongside 400 farmers, under his devoted daily direction, and cultivated a rested soil that represents what is perhaps Armenia's greatest natural resource – the idyllic terroir of the vine. Indeed, his venture also involved the intertwined aspects of family, heritage, culture and progress, with personal values and responsibilities he maintains as a father, a successful businessman, and an Armenian. His vision would consequently partake in upholding Armenia's ancient viticultural and enological legacy in the epicenter of the Historic World of Wine and the Birthplace of the Vine.

HOME COMING

The ArmAs Estate was simply inspiring and my father's passion contagious. As we stood atop the highest point in the estate, 1350m above sea-level, gazing at the perfectly planted soldier-like rows of vines, with Mounts Ararat, Araler and Aragats gazing back at us, I realized, there was no other place I would like to call home than right here. We moved to Armenia a few months later and joined my father and his vision wholeheartedly as we embarked on the next phase of our project, Wo/Man vs Man, building the winery and the team. I proudly took the reigns in this endeavor, involving hundreds of

MY FATHER HAD WORKED ALONGSIDE 400 FARMERS AND CULTIVATED A RESTED SOIL THAT REPRESENTS WHAT IS **ARMENIA'S GREATEST NATURAL RESOURCE** – THE IDYLIC TERROIR OF THE VINE

▼ Actor Jackie Nercissian, 'Apgar' from the renown film 'Mayrig'



people from various villages, cities and countries. Over the period of four years, from concept to construction, completion, utilization, and ongoing upgrades, 35 Italian engineers, architects, and construction crews lived in Armenia, with numerous teams of varied areas of expertise regularly visiting and working alongside, as well as training, local specialists and exceptional Armenian students for continuing maintenance and management. While I had completed a course with UC Davis in viticulture and enology, the 'on the job training' was essential, and our company culture of ongoing edification and education remains as one of the main keys to our success as we strive towards excellence in all that we do. Indeed, the ArmAs Cellar & Distillery is among the best in the world, housing the latest state of the art enological equipment, as well as traditional French and Kharabagh oak barrels for aging of our reserve wines and brandy. The continued realization of the ArmAs Estate is illustrative of progress through guidance and cooperation, and represents the assimilation of tradition with development. The ensuing ArmAs Wines convey these improvements, and speak of the abundant sunshine, volcanic soil, undulating terrain and magnanimous earth of a resilient culture.



▲ ArmAs vineyards in Nor Yedesia village, 30 minutes drive from Yerevan

THE ARMAS CELLAR & DISTILLERY IS AMONG THE BEST IN THE WORLD, HOUSING THE LATEST STATE OF THE ART ENOLOGICAL EQUIPMENT, AS WELL AS TRADITIONAL FRENCH AND KHARABAGH OAK BARRELS

HARVEST

We anxiously awaited the fruits of our labor, our first harvest in 2011, a yield of approximately 800 tons which we intended to sell as our winery was still under construction. However, as it was, man vs nature was not quite over. In the matter of minutes we lost our entire harvest following a hale storm. Apparently nothing of the like had happened in 40 years. We knew this, as we had studied 40 years of meteorological reports prior to selecting the land and commencing construction. As you may imagine, it was rather

disheartening. We didn't see my father much in the next few days, however, his first order of business when he came to was to install 3 anti-hale mechanisms throughout the estate. Produced in Armenia, these fixtures have been saving us from hale since. The effects from 2011, however, were so severe that we had half the harvest the following year. In 2012, when we proudly opened our cellar doors to produce our Estate Bottled ArmAs Wines, we also purchased 400 tons of grapes from the surrounding villages –

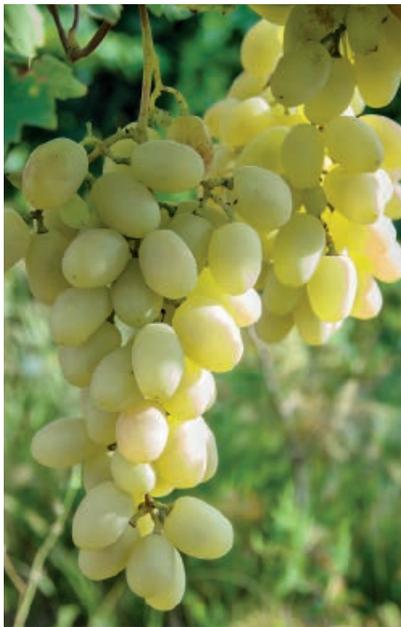


bottle. Certainly, our winemaker Emilio Del Medico, or the maestro in the cellar, has wholly expressed that any exceptional wine has at its heart the grapes from which it was crafted, and as its soul, the love and care it received from all who cultivate it into being, respecting and showcasing the best of its nature.

MILESTONES, AWARDS & ACCOLADES

To date, ArmAs Wines have received 33 wine competition awards, including medals from all of the most prestigious international wine competitions in the world – Decanter in London, Mundus Vini in Germany, and Concours Mondial Des Brussels, organized in China, as well as medals from Lithuania, Russia, Japan and of course Armenia. We also received a Gold Medal from our Ministry of Agriculture in 2011, Best Brand in 2014 from the Prime Minister of Armenia, and as “Agro-Product Female Hero” in 2016. Our agricultural development also garnered the attention of the UN FAO, Food & Agricultural Organization who awarded my father a medal for “Securing Food in Times of Crisis.” Indeed these awards and accolades have contributed to our ongoing phase of Wo/Man vs The Market. While we have exported to Lithuania, Germany, the US, Canada, Japan, and Belgium, the quantities are not nearly comparable to our capacity nor potential, and ongoing marketing and promotions are a necessary part of growth as we introduce the world to The Renaissance of Armenian Wine. Indeed, massive efforts on multiple fronts continue to ensue. We have been featured in Foreign Affairs Magazine and The Los Angeles Times, among many other publications and news outlets. We have produced documentaries, been featured in several movies and tv shows, sponsored events, and participated in various international wine expos throughout the world. Our efforts have also resulted in Armenia having the Place of Honor at The World Wine Symposium, or Davos du’Vin in Italy in 2014. Such platforms

allow us to educate and excite the wine connoisseurs and industry professionals who shape the international perspective of what is the next best thing in wine. It is certainly Armenia! And it is only a matter of time. I have personally traveled to over 20 countries to promote our cause, and have had the honor of presenting the revival of our cultural legacy, and the amazing contemporary wines that stem from it, at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, at the Asian Wine Symposium in China, as well as at special presentation at Mundus Vini in Germany, among many other events and promotions throughout the world. Locally, we have also partnered and collaborated with ICARE and dasaran.am, to create an agro-encyclopedia and games geared towards school children, as well as with the EVN Wine Academy and The Vine and Wine Foundation to ensure the sustainable growth of this burgeoning sector. The progress and ‘buzz’ is certainly palpable, particularly in the many fine Armenian Wines produced throughout our country. Certainly, among the best promotions for the wine sector is wine tourism. Napa Valley is a prime example of its potential. The farmers of the 1970s are now part of a \$10 billion industry, of which \$1 billion plus is from the tourism in this small region of Northern California. We have such hopes for Armenia, and they are completely grounded and feasible. All the necessary components are in place and continue to expand as we grow this industry. In fact, CNN named Armenia as one of the top 15 Wine Destinations in the World. We need to collectively and actively advertise and publicize, and each of us can play a positive role in promoting the sector that involves everything that our country needs – agricultural development, jobs for people in the rural areas, production, export, tourism, and cultural standards held high. Indeed, aside from all of that we need, the Renaissance of Armenian Wine is also something we can share with the world – an unmatched



much to the delight of the local farmers – using their grapes for the production of brandy. While our brandy is barrel aging as we speak, our very first 2012 vintages were released in the local market in December of 2013 to an overwhelmingly positive reception. Indeed, the achievement and individual features that each of our selection of now 12 wines have attained in the cellar are a testament both to the inmate characteristics of the vines, as well as the nurture that these grapes have received from vineyards to the

ArmAs Wines



RED DRY WINE 14%
Karmrahyut



WHITE DRY WINE 12%
Kangun & Rkatsiteli



SEMI-SWEET WINE 13.5%
Kangun



ARENI 13%
Red Dry Wine



VOSKEHAT 12.5%
White Dry Wine



ROSÉ 13.5%
Dry Wine



ARENI RESERVE 13%



VOSKEHAT RESERVE 13.1%



KARMRAHYUT RESERVE 13.4%



▼
Armenak Aslanian
and Victoria Aslanian



history, an idyllic terroir, some of the world's oldest native grape varieties, Armenian hospitality, and of course, authentic fine wines.

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF CULTURE

Armenian Wines are among the best of the arts that we produce today. This art form is telling of history, contemporary culture, nature, and the resilience and talent of man. Through this art, we may even forge the socio-economic facet of our future, while concurrently shaping the international image of Armenia. As such, at ArmAs, we take our winemaking very seriously and make sure to have an incredible time



▼
Mesmerizing view
from ArmAs
Estate's veranda



THE FAVORED ARMENIAN ARMAS LOGO IS DERIVED FROM THE ZOO-MORPHIC DESIGNS OF AN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF ARMENIAN ART HISTORY, THE 5TH CENTURY

along the way. We greet thousands of guests from all over the world, giving them an impression of the path of the grape to the glass. I see first hand the inspiration and excitement that these tours induce, as our guests are treated to sips of history and culture. Armenians and foreigners alike, marvel at the grandiose strides made in the past decade, and likewise appreciate our effort to articulate our art historical and secular heritage, as the first Christian nation, through our wines. As an art historian by education, this was also of utmost importance to me as I designed our logo and labels. The golden circular motif is often seen on cross stones, and the English ArmAs logo is likewise a derived from a cross stone motif, often used in architectural ornament. The favored Armenian ArmAs logo is derived from the zoomorphic designs of an illuminated manuscript from the Golden Age of Armenian art history, the 5th century. Their artistic significance is in the festivity of their designs, and is an ode to the resilience of culture. These jewels of art history make one

feel the power of art and the universality of its language. The same may be said of the power of nature, and the universality if the language of wine.

AGING AND GROWING

ArmAs continuously and consciously strives to be a place where the aspects of joyful and meaningful living come together – history, culture, celebrations, and achievements. Among the many events we have hosted, in June of 2017 we organized a three day Wine & Jazz festival at ArmAs Estate, featuring Armenia's Jazz legends and contemporary musicians with local and international guests who enjoyed a festival for the senses! We have many more to come. The possibilities for growth and expansion at the ArmAs Estate, and certainly for Armenia, are continuous and many-fold – production, edification and education, charity and development, intended for our community and the contemporary culture we strive to enhance, in honor of the rich one we have inherited. Kenats! ♦



SIRAMARK:

Networking the Syrian-Armenian Businesses

Since the war in Syria began, a large number of Syrian-Armenian refugees have opened businesses here in Armenia with the hope of not only generating sustainable income, but also integrating into their new community and regaining some much needed stability in their lives. These entrepreneurs are all extremely resilient and resourceful, but if they possessed the market visibility equal to those of their local counterparts, they would be able to not only survive, but thrive in Armenia.

TEXT : ANI SMBATI

PHOTO : REPAT ARMENIA FOUNDATION





LISTINGS BY CATEGORY

ENTERTAINMENT

RESTAURANTS & PUBS

ARTS & CRAFTS

SERVICES

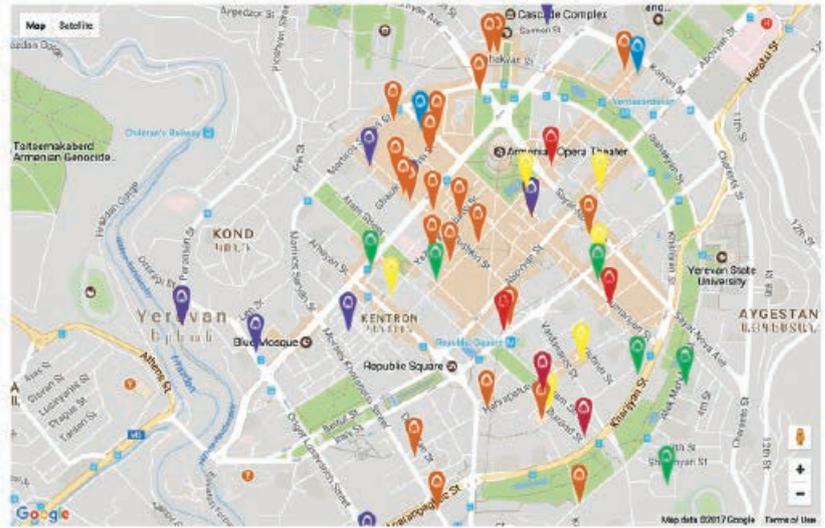
EDUCATION

HEALTH

SHOPPING

PRODUCTION

TOURISM



Repeat Armenia Foundation in collaboration with the Ayo! Crowdfunding Platform decided to create an Internet-based platform, which allows users to quickly find information about the wide array of restaurants, shops and cafes owned by Syrian-Armenians in Yerevan. It also enables Syrian business owners to broaden their clientele and to develop a better and sustainable client base. The platform is called Siramark, which is a play on "Syrian-Market," and the word for peacock in Armenian, an animal believed to be a sign of beauty and integrity.

This new Syrian-Armenian business directory was launched with the support from Armenians around the world, offering a comprehensive overview of each business, placing them on Yerevan's map and presenting a clear picture of the latest in food, clothing, services, etc. provided by the savvy entrepreneurs. Besides basic contact and location information, the profile for each business includes a personal story about the founder and CEO, boosted with photos and/or videos about each in order to really make it a multimedia directory. According to Siramark Project Coordinator, Dzovag Soghomonian, there are already more than 1000 Syrian-Armenians engaged in this project and the number continues to rise. "The most in demand business are food related businesses, then it comes to services. The visitors of the website are mostly from Armenia, then the US, Canada, Lebanon, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Germany, Iraq and Russia," she says. Later an application will be launched based on the project to provide better access. Siramark will grow, expand and include all repatriate businesses. Dzovag Soghomonian says, the next goal is to reach more people and engage them in the website, as well as present to Armenia and the Diaspora the interesting businesses that repatriates have established in Armenia. ♦





VASKEN BRUDIAN:

“One country and a common purpose”

A center of arts and a showroom which will open soon on the crossroad of Abovyan Street and the Northern Avenue, at Abovyan 2/5. The center will bring fresh ideas to Armenian culture and art as well as will create new standards in the service industry. The showroom exhibits the brand Ardēan. We spoke to Vasken Brudian, the director of the brand, and tried to find out the origins of this creative salon as well as discussing the future of Armenia-Diaspora relations.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN / PHOTO : ARDEAN DESIGN ARCHIVE

Mr. Brudian, how was Ardēan born?

— The idea came to me during my design workshops at TUMO Center for Creative Technologies. Having limited engagement with youth from Armenia, I was amused by their intelligence and ambitions to create the new, the interesting and the innovative. My students were extremely talented, but any innate gift requires refinement and development. By studying and learning, these youngsters showed the potential to create works that could be competitive on the international market. Another

encouraging factor is our rich culture which offers an endless source of inspiration: sculpture, architecture, miniatures, carpet weaving, etc. – all priceless treasures for contemporary artists. Being an architect myself, I have always been astonished by the fact that there is not a single identical cross-stone among fifty to sixty thousand artifacts. The same goes for hundreds of churches, as well as tens of thousands of manuscripts and miniatures preserved at Matenadaran. This innate creativity why Ardēan was created, to harvest the talent for the international market. It was not meant



to be just a design studio, but also to expand and become a manufacturing company which aims to develop the design industry in Armenia and create new employments.

What kind of production do you intend to produce?

— We work in several directions, but always keeping the Armenian culture and art as a starting point. Our intention is to create a new layer to our rich cultural heritage in the language of the 21st century. Though our scarves depict images taken from our cultural icons, however what we create are designs that hopefully appeal to non-Armenians as well: for example,

prayers of Saint Gregory of Narek, letters from the Armenian alphabet and ornaments from ancient embroidery. We have recently started to produce porcelain and glassware items with Armenian motifs as well.

Your team has also worked on several exhibitions.

—Our first exhibition was dedicated to the Centennial of Armenian Genocide. Some of the works depicted prayers of Saint Gregory of Narek along with other cultural icons. The following exhibition was about healing the soul and the body. The works again depicted the prayers of Saint Gregory of Narek and the plants used by 12th-century physician and monk Mkhitar Heratsi. One attempted to heal the soul with his prayers, and the other, the body, with his plants. We tried to combine these two ideas and incorporate them in our artworks.

You said that one of the aims of starting production based on our heritage is competitiveness on the international market. But do you think images which are perceptible to Armenians can also be interesting to non-Armenians?



➤ One of Ardēan's exhibitions, held in Cafesjian Center for the Arts

◀ The idea of Ardēan came to Vasken during his design workshops at TUMO Center



— We create art and other works which are competitive on the global market as well as visually appealing and interesting both to Armenian and to international audiences. There are, of course, Armenian ornaments, images that contain many Armenian details, like letters of the Armenian alphabet. Yet the overall design and decorations are created in a way that makes them quite appealing outside of Armenia. Our core activity is not handcrafting, but rather larger production. This is one of the most important conditions for creating a design industry, and we cannot limit ourselves just to consumers in Armenia and the Diaspora. Our products are desirable and accessible to everyone, and this is why Ardēan is represented in various other countries and markets.

And where can one find Ardēan products today?



— We now have an online shop at www.ardean.am and a showroom on the crossroads of Abovyan Street and the Northern Avenue. By expanding gradually, we will be able to achieve one of our main goals, which is to create new employments and develop the design sector in Armenia. Over the last three to five years, there has already been a serious increase in this field, yet problems still exist. For example, we do not produce the porcelain and glassware items in Armenia as the country doesn't have the technology and the factories to do so. The design, computer graphics and prototyping are done here, but manufacturing is done abroad. A high-quality and reliable brand may create a market around itself over time, and a developed market may provide an opportunity to import the technology and to start manufacturing locally. This, in its turn, will provide more employments and even wider opportunities. A small success leads to a new and larger achievement, and in this very way, step-by-step, we will be able to turn the design itself into a brand of the country.

As someone who repatriated to Armenia and started an ambitious and successful business venture, how can Armenia attract more repatriates?

— As a developing country, Armenia provides opportunities that are noteworthy. As I have already mentioned, our youth has proved that Armenia can be very competitive in a variety of business sectors; the IT industry is a very good example. Over the past decade, Armenia has proved that when we have a clearly defined goal and a well-directed strategy, we can become competitive on the international market. The IT field is not the only one in this regard. There are different opportunities in Armenia. To discover this however, a repatriate should engage and assess all the possibilities. However, it is important for an individual to spend time and become involved in order to discover the possibilities.

What are the biggest challenges for a repatriate who moves to Armenia nowadays?

— Every country has its own challenges and Armenia is no exception. But as it is typically said in business, every challenge is an opportunity in waiting. As a nation, traditionally we have always been close to business and trading. Despite the fact that we have been out of the international market

for decades, nevertheless, as a nation we continue to have all the resources and capabilities to be competitive in the international arena. I think we are at that tipping point where we are eagerly searching for areas where we can be intensely competitive. The wine industry is such an example. I think the design industry will become another sector where we can be immensely competitive.

What can Armenia and the Diaspora give to each other apart from what there already is? Are these relations going in the right direction?

— In my opinion, it is incorrect to try to separate Armenia and the Diaspora from one other; this sounds somehow stereotypical. Today we need to think in a more comprehensive and all-inclusive manner. To measure our true strength in the global arena we have to think of Armenia not just within its physical borders. Because of our tragic past, the Diaspora was formed, but this didn't separate Armenians. Having a Diaspora, we have created a powerful network for over a hundred years. Now we have one country and a common purpose, developing Armenia as a nation. ♦

VAHE KEUSHGUERIAN:

“We have to focus on positive things”

Vahe Keushguerian visited Armenia in late 1990's for the first time and very soon got involved in the wine industry. Now he is a head of Semina Consulting's team, a winery incubator and consulting firm and a co-founder of Impact Hub, a social innovation co-working space. Vahe told Regional Post about his projects and thoughts about repatriation.

INTERVIEW : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : VAHE KEUSHGUERIAN ARCHIVE





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Founder of Semina
Consulting Vahe
Keushguerian

When did you first come to Armenia? Remember your very first impression?

— I was born in Syria, raised in Lebanon, then I spent two years in Italy, after that moved to the US. In 1997, when I was already producing wine in Italy, a friend of mine suggested to travel to Yerevan, to see Armenia. We arrived very late at night and I will never forget the moment when I got up in the morning and saw Ararat from my hotel room’s window. It was so symbolic and so impressive. And it was April, so I also spent Genocide commemoration day there, visited Karabakh.

In 1998 you started your business here. How did it happen, assuming the risky and unpredictable situation at the time?

— The funny thing was that although I was in the wine business, I never knew that Armenia had so much history and traditions in this sphere. Here, I met

some people who were producing wines and I soon learned that Armenia not only has an ancient winemaking tradition, but it was also one of the cradles of wine culture. So, in 1998 started a company, and later planted my first vineyards. A few years later, it appeared that I didn’t plan the business well enough. It was the first failure in my professional life. In 2004 I quit the project. It was one of the saddest days in my life, emotionally draining. I’ll admit, I had thoughts of not coming back.

But still, you did.

— Following that period, for a few years, I was just visiting, mainly as a tourist, because I still had many good friends here. In 2009, I came to Armenia with my family for a year to experience the country. Upon my arrival, I experimented with the Karas project and worked with a couple local wine companies.

PEOPLE WOULD ASK ME HOW I SAW THE FUTURE OF WINEMAKING IN ARMENIA. I USED TO SAY THAT WITHIN 5-8 YEARS ONE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE THE INDUSTRY. AND I WAS RIGHT



Now, besides Karas Wines, you are involved in the industry with Semina Consulting. What's its role?

— Semina Consulting started as a supplier of equipment for wineries. I had contacts in Italy, so it was a natural way of getting involved. In 2013, I started my personal winery which slowly transformed into a winery incubator and consulting firm. We now do experimentations with various Armenian indigenous grape varieties and within this winery, we have incubated many of the popular wine projects in Armenia.

Being involved in the industry, are you satisfied with its development in Armenia?

— In the earlier years, people would ask me how I saw the future of wine-

making in Armenia. I used to say that within 5-8 years one would not be able to recognize the industry. And it turned out that I was right, and a lot did change. Now, there are a lot of new great wine companies who are exporting. The country is importing wines from all over the world, and with opening wine bars, we have many opportunities to develop a wine drinking culture. The problem now, is that the industry is growing too fast. Not because we don't have the knowledge or investment, but that we do not have enough red grapes to keep up with the pace. Unfortunately, the industry and government were not prepared to face this reality.

Three years ago you co-founded EVN Wine Academy. What is its mission?

THERE ARE MANY VENTURES, LIKE TUMO, THE IMPACT HUB, THE TECH SECTOR IN GENERAL WITH PEOPLE AND PROJECTS THAT ARE REALLY TRYING TO MOVE THE COUNTRY FORWARD



> Wine nurseries of Semina Consulting

— It is a joint project between Semina and ICARE. Semina organizes short courses – training sommeliers, waiters, teaching fundamentals of wine, etc, while ICARE organizes the institutional part, an 18 month intensive oenology certificate program. Our students have been sent to many European countries for trainings. Most importantly, most come back and get involved in the local industry. Basically, that's why we started the academy, to have more young professionals in the wine sector.

So, you see the lack of professionals?

— Mostly when we talk about the technical part. Because education in





Armenia in that sphere had not kept up with global industry innovations. For decades, Armenia was more focused on brandy production, so fine wine received less attention.

Years ago you repatriated following your sense of adventure, but that obviously cannot be a general rule for everybody. How do you think Armenia can attract more Armenians from the Diaspora?

— The best time to move to Armenia is when you are young. You can recover very fast from mistakes or decide to move on. But to truly impact the economy, Armenia needs the 30-40 year-old experienced professionals. Potentially, they can contribute a lot. And here is

where the country can do a lot and they have not so far. They create a narrative in the country that creates an “it’s not the time yet” mentality. In my opinion, The Ministry of Diaspora is doing very little. We have to focus on positive things happening in Armenia. There are many ventures, like Tumo, the Impact Hub, the tech sector in general with people and projects that are really trying to move the country forward.

What about Diaspora? Do they have to change their approach too?

— Yes. For many people Armenia is something frozen in their minds, the way they left it or the way they saw it twenty or thirty years ago. Many organizations still only focus on Genocide and Karabagh War issues. What about today? What about the future? They have to cooperate with Armenia in a way that looks towards large scale impact. Of course, it’s very important to look at things realistically, without romanticizing and without demonizing.

You mentioned Impact Hub, one of the Armenian projects you’re involved in. How was it formed?

— With a couple other repatriate friends, we came up with the idea after the 2013 Yerevan municipality elections, where we helped to organize the monitoring. We involved over one hundred monitors from diaspora

▲
Impact Hub
Yerevan’s
open space

and local repats. It was a great experience and it gave us momentum. When the elections were over we understood that we can’t lose that spirit of activism and friendship we gained from those days. We thought about a co-working space for the civic society, or a coalition mix of NGO’s and businesses. We discovered Impact Hub, a global network of co-working spaces with impact oriented missions, and decided to become part of it. We had a one year feasibility study phase that proved it was time for Yerevan. Lots of great people were looking for the kind of environment where collaboration and change were intuitive. Now, I can consider it one of the success stories in Armenia. The beauty of it is that we are not just different teams working separately, but deeply cooperating with each other with common goals.

Seems like a bright success story...

— Of course one could say that we live in a bubble, while the country is in a deep crisis. I still see huge problems in villages, but still, there is a positive dynamic. I want to believe there is. It is a matter of time and political will. ◆

AREG GINOSIAN:

“My dream is to see Ginosi become a global household name”

Since its founding in 2010, Ginosi Apartels has emerged as a tech-based travel company in Armenia, where it is a top employer of choice. With hotel operations in the US and Europe, Ginosi Apartels is headquartered in Yerevan, where nearly 100 employees manage the company's apartels abroad using its technology backbone. The company has attracted talent from the global Armenian diaspora, which has been steadily trickling into Armenia following the country's independence from the Soviet Union. Co-founder Areg Ginosian lived abroad for over 20 years before moving back to Armenia with his international apartel brand. RP sat down with him to discuss the advantages of living and operating an international company in Yerevan.

INTERVIEW : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : GINOSI APARTELS ARCHIVE



Let's go to the very beginning. How did Ginosi Apartels start?

— We originally began as an online travel agency (OTA) at a time when there was no instant booking platform that listed most of the travel accommodations in Armenia. Instant booking was possible for only a handful of the major hotels in Yerevan. The idea to create our own selling platform for travelers came to us when we realized that we were not major hotel type travelers, and therefore spent a significant amount of time looking for accommodations when visiting Armenia. My partner and I recognized the need, and we had the right experience for this niche in the market, so we decided to launch a regional OTA for Armenia. We rented a small office room in Yerevan, in the very building where our global headquarters is

◀ Co-founders Areg Ginosian (right) and Amoor Avakian (center) together with members of Ginosi's engineering team

**MARIA KHACHATRYAN,
INTERIOR DESIGNER**

REPATS OFTEN HEAR THE QUESTION, “WHY DID YOU MOVE HERE?” THERE IS SO MUCH POTENTIAL IN ARMENIA. THE GREAT THING IS THAT THIS POTENTIAL IS SPHERICAL. ARMENIA IS ONLY 25 YEARS OLD. WHAT A GREAT TIME TO BE HERE. WHAT A GREAT TIME TO BE A PART OF THE RIPENING AND SHAPING OF THIS POTENTIAL. THIS IS THE REASON WHY I REPATRIATED. IN MY OPINION AND EXPERIENCE, THIS IS ALSO WHAT GINOSI IS DOING. I’M BOTH HAPPY AND HUMBLLED TO BE A PART OF THE GROWTH OF OUR HOMELAND.

CEO and co-founder
Areg Ginosian



currently located, hired a small staff of programmers, hotel account managers and customer service specialists, developed our own instant booking platform, secured contracts with most accommodation providers throughout Armenia, and started selling short-stay accommodations to travelers coming to Armenia. Unfortunately for us the big players like Booking.com soon entered the Armenian market and turned our business belly-up. Since then Ginosi Apartels has pivoted its business model and turned into an apartel chain.

How did that pivot take place?

— We had purchased apartments in Amsterdam to support our business in Armenia, and by following the money we realized that the winner in this industry is the product owner, not the middle man. So we began leveraging our existing systems and infrastructure by using our Armenia-based business “nerve center” to run our own hotels in strong touristic markets like Amsterdam. With a market demand that was growing fast, we began offering travelers an alternative to the traditional hotel: the apartel, a fully-furnished, ready-to-use apartment that functions as a hotel, but feels like home. That is how Ginosi began to turn into an international apartel chain. Our failure in the beginning as a regional OTA was a push to become what we are now. We have nearly 100 employees at our global headquarters in Yerevan today and about that many colleagues employed at our apartels in the US and Europe. Our engineers are building our own software and hardware such as kiosks for self-check in, for a fully-integrated, technology-driven product that allows us to focus on our customers. My dream is to see Ginosi

become a global household name one day and a symbol of Armenia, like IKEA is for Sweden.

What about the model? Is it really effective to run an international company from Yerevan?

— It sure is. I wish I could say I invented this model. I did not. I started my career in the pharmaceutical industry as a biologist in the US. After transitioning to the business side of the trade, I worked at a company that had a very similar model to the one we have today at Ginosi Apartels. At their headquarters in the Netherlands, I was in charge of clinical research projects conducted all over the world. That experience forced me to think globally and understand how to run a global project from one location by relying on powerful communication and organizational technologies.

You spent quite a long time in the US and Europe as you said. What made you come back here?

— I have never considered myself a spyurqahay (diasporan Armenian). I was born in Armenia and when the Soviet Union collapsed, our family moved to the US. I stayed there for

eleven years, and then lived in the Netherlands for another eleven years. When Ginosi was founded I was still employed in the Netherlands. In 2013, the pharmaceutical company I was with was bought by a French conglomerate, and our headquarters moved from Amsterdam to Paris. So I had a choice: Paris or Yerevan. I chose Yerevan.

So relocating to Armenia was a pragmatic decision, not a call of the soil, let's say?

— I'm not a patriot in the way that most people understand the word. I'm not here because the soil is calling, not at all. I could live anywhere in the world. I live in Armenia because the standard of living is high and the business environment is good. Armenia is very qualified to host the headquarters of any company that is in the business of exporting services. With a viable business model, any company can do what we do, and deliver services to vast global markets from Yerevan.



Company New Year's party, 2015-16

GINOSI APARTELS

Ginosi is an international Apartel chain company with apartels in the USA and Europe, headquartered in Yerevan. An apartel is a travel accommodation that fuses the concept of a hotel with the conveniences of fully furnished apartments. Founded in 2010 as an online travel agency, Ginosi Apartels has undergone many transformations throughout the years to become the company that it is now. Today, Ginosi attracts a fairly diverse and elite workforce, reaching a size of nearly 200 vibrant and talented professionals.



Areg Ginosian speaks at a Repat Armenia event in 2015

GARO AROIAN, GLOBAL COMMERCIAL MANAGER

I CAME TO ARMENIA FIVE YEARS AGO FROM SYRIA. I HAD ALWAYS PLANNED ON LEAVING SYRIA, AND THE WAR EXPEDITED THOSE PLANS. I DID NOT THINK THAT I WOULD INTEGRATE AS WELL AS I HAVE IN ARMENIA, AND GINOSI HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN THAT REGARD. I HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH HERE, AND CONTINUE TO LEARN EVERY SINGLE DAY. NOT ONLY HAVE I FOUND A WORKPLACE WHERE I CAN GROW PROFESSIONALLY AND BE A PART OF SOMETHING EXCITING FOR ARMENIA AND OUR INDUSTRY, BUT I HAVE ALSO MADE VALUABLE FRIENDSHIPS AT GINOSI. I DO NOT KNOW IF I WOULD HAVE STAYED IN ARMENIA WAS IT NOT FOR GINOSI.

You started with accommodations in Armenia, now Ginosi has apartels in the US and Spain. Why not Armenia?

— Armenia is a very small country with a small tourism industry centered primarily in Yerevan. It is not the next city that makes the most commercial sense after say Los Angeles, Chicago, and Barcelona. We do, however, believe in the continued success of having our headquarters here. There is a generation of well-qualified, highly motivated talent in Armenia whose potential we are unleashing with our business. That potential is being used to deliver a highly sought-after product in global markets.

Are you satisfied with the quality of the candidates you receive?

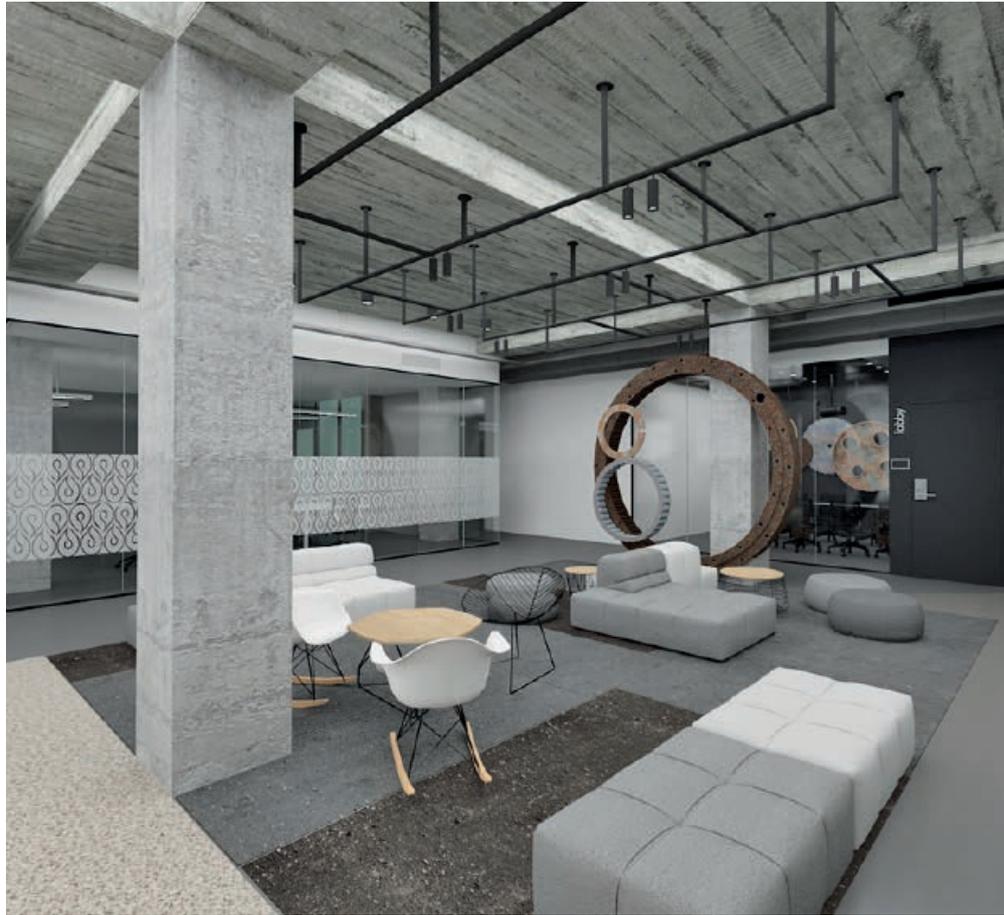
— For junior candidates – absolutely. We have lots of great young people entering the workforce every year in Armenia. When it comes to more se-

**KYLE KHANDIKIAN,
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIST**

THERE ARE SO MANY EXCITING THINGS HAPPENING IN ARMENIA, AND GINOSI APARTELS IS ONE OF THEM. AS AN EMPLOYER, GINOSI'S COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE IS SOMETHING THAT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME. YOU DO NOT SEE THAT IN MANY OTHER WORKPLACES IN ARMENIA. GINOSI REALLY IS SETTING A HIGH STANDARD FOR OTHER EMPLOYERS IN THE COUNTRY IN TERMS OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY AND WORKPLACE ETHICS.



Design concept for the future Ginosi Apartels headquarters in Yerevan which is currently being custom-built for Ginosi



nior jobs, we often have to turn to the repat community for colleagues who have had work experience elsewhere and are enthusiastic about the possibility of living and working in Armenia. The market for senior candidates is very small in Armenia. I am proud to say that we have created job opportunities for dozens of repatriates to come to Armenia and stay here with happy and sustainable lives.

As a person who lived abroad for many years and who employs many repatriates, what do you think is the most important element in the Diaspora-Armenia relationship?

— As an ethnic group, we have accumulated vast equity of success all over the world because we are adaptable and good at understanding how business in different cultures works. We use that understanding to thrive in foreign countries. If there was one big thing I could export from the Diaspora, it would be the

worldly perspective that comes with living abroad. As a small country, we can sometimes be too individualistic, tunnel-visioned, and self-centered. In fact, at our maneuverable size, we have the potential to solve our economic and societal setbacks relatively quickly, if we broaden our horizons, accept each other with all our differences, and correctly channel the knowledge that we collectively possess. This is a unique position of the Armenian people and of Armenia. We should take advantage of it.

Why is Ginosi a great place to work?

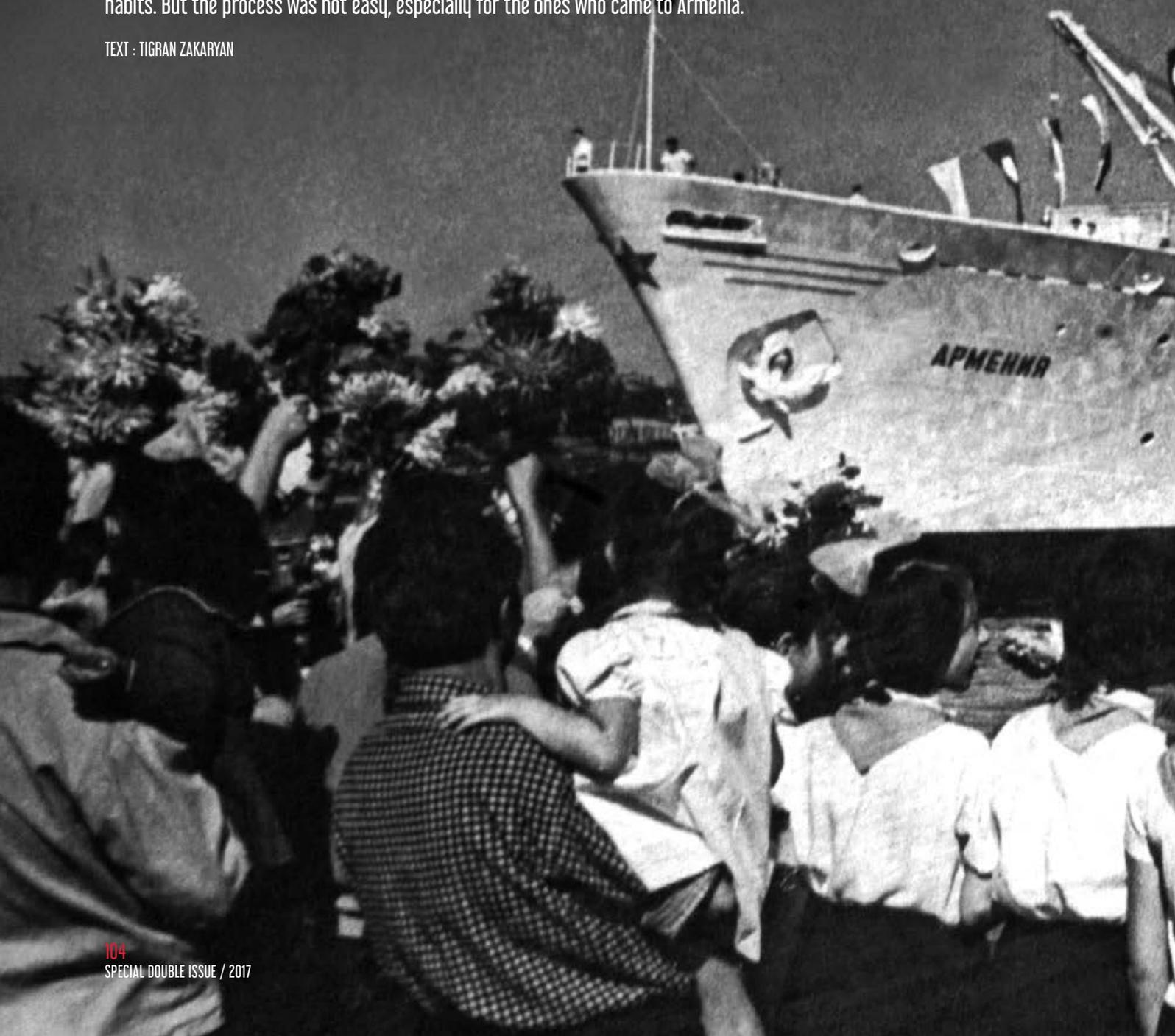
— We are creating a place of employment in Armenia where dedicated workers can spend their entire careers, not just to work but to grow and learn within the company. We are transforming Ginosi Apartels from a great place to work now and today, into a great place to retire from. This is expressed through one of our values as a brand —

continuous learning. The key to our success is and continues to be non-stop learning and self-improvement — improving ourselves, our product, and the Ginosi experience. We also value diversity, and recognize that the talents, experiences, and perspectives of all individuals contribute to our success. We currently have dozens of people from other countries, who have been able to create a life in Armenia because of the employment opportunities we provide with our business, and that number is going to grow as we move forward. If you are good at what you do, and we need what you can do, not only do you have a place at Ginosi, but a paved career path and an opportunity for a good life supported by a stable income in Armenia. Unfortunately, securing a stable income is still the biggest hurdle for the majority of diasporans who would like to live in Armenia, but must live abroad in order to sustain themselves. Ginosi solves that problem, for the right talent. ♦

RETURNING TO THE SYMBOLIC MOTHERLAND

The repatriation of the Armenian Diaspora was a unique event in the History of Armenia, an exceptional one in world history and can probably only be compared to the emigration of Jews from the Diaspora to Israel in scale. Repatriation changed both the lives of Armenians from the Diaspora and the face of Yerevan: the capital city of Soviet Armenia received cultural influences from Armenians who came from all over the world and they brought with them various traditions, knowledge and habits. But the process was not easy, especially for the ones who came to Armenia.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN





SYMBOLIC HOMELAND

Soon after World War II was over, the greatest wave of Armenian repatriates began. In two years, the wave brought 100,000 Armenians from the Diaspora in the Middle East, the Balkans, France, USA and other countries to Soviet Armenia. The emigration of thousands of Armenians was caused not only by the unprecedented growth of the country's image due to the victory of the Soviet Union in WWII, causing them to overlook the totalitarian system within Armenia, but also by the upcoming accession of Western Armenia, or at least the Kars province to Soviet Armenia.

It ended as suddenly as it started. According to rumors, in 1948 Stalin "advised" Malenkov to be wary of saboteurs among the repatriated Armenians. The next day Malenkov reported to Stalin that some repatriated Armenians left the "Pobeda" steamship in Batumi after placing a bomb on it. With this information, repatriation was halted and was resumed only after the death of Stalin.

Separated by the "iron curtain", Armenians from the Diaspora and Armenians living in Soviet Armenia, knowing very little about each other, meant that they were unprepared for their first meeting.



^ Egyptian repatriates arrive in Batumi port, Georgia



^ Repatriate Khosrov Shmavonyan working in the shop, 1950

REPATRIATE JOKES

Immigrants have kept memories and even a whole anecdote sub-genre of random immigration episodes, the reception they received in Armenia, unpleasant, sometimes funny encounters with "locals" and the Soviet reality.

Despite using the term "repatriation", there was no consensus of what constituted the real homeland (Patris) of the immigrants. Many of them were born in Western Armenia, Kilikia or other cities of the Ottoman Empire with large Armenian populations, Iran, and some of them were born in places where their parents were accepted and adopted elements of the local lifestyle and culture, which were totally foreign to Soviet Armenia. Thus, to the majority of repatriates, Soviet Armenia was a symbolic homeland, a place where they were excited to come to but had no idea about the local realities. For many of them, Caucasian, Russian and Islamic elements in the Soviet Armenian culture were unacceptable, compelling them to gather in repatriate 'ghettos', usually with internal groupings similar to their previous places of residence. For example, the "Greeks", "French" and "Bulgarians" who were solely urban residents abroad and had significantly integrated into their host country's society, looked down at those who came from the Middle East, particularly Syria and Iraqi villages or provincial cities, as the average European would look at people from the Middle East. Around 7000 of the repatriates were from France and formed a kind of "upper class" among the repatriates. Later they were the first ones to become disappointed with the Soviet reality and asked for support from France to help leaving USSR.



SOVIET DECEPTION

The first encounter with the Soviet Armenian reality was like a cold shower to many. Queues for bread, the poverty, poor clothing, the criminal environment, intolerance and provincialism, laced with elements of Soviet propaganda, made a hard impression on many of the repatriates. They remember the first encounter with the homeland as a combination of excitement and rapid disappointment. It can best be summarized in a popular joke of the century. According to the context, the repatriate had just arrived in Armenia, got off the train with their luggage, put aside their bags in excitement, bowed down and kissed the ground. He then puts his head on the ground for a while, but when he got up and went to pick up his luggage, he discovered that it had already been taken away.

Many of the repatriates were disappointed by the suspicious, and often discriminatory treatment that they experienced. Some of them, especially the older generation coming from rural regions of the Middle East might not speak Armenian at all, while the Russian language was totally unfamiliar to everyone. Although the Soviet authorities organized language (Eastern Armenian and Russian) and Communist Party courses, particularly those with ideological content, taking into account their complex language, were basically useless.

The Communist Party's doors were closed to the vast majority of immigrants (of course, except Diasporan members of the Communist Party), military service was not obligatory for them, because they were considered "suspicious elements". An immigrant was not trusted with high positions, head positions or responsible jobs. Even one of the immigrant com-

MANY OF THE REPATRIATES WERE DISAPPOINTED BY THE SUSPICIOUS, AND OFTEN DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT THAT THEY EXPERIENCED

munists would say: "The communists we know are totally different, these ones say and do different things". The Soviet reality was vividly expressed in another anecdote. Several months after arriving in Armenia, a repatriate wrote a letter to his friend. Describing the situation and conscious of the censorship he was trying to avoid. "We have everything in Armenia, the shops are full of goods, we all live here very well, we eat caviar every day, earn a lot of money," he wrote, and then added, "I write this, you understand the rest." a few days later, the security agencies called the repatriate and demanded an explanation for the last sentence in the letter. "Uh, what do you want? I wrote this all for you, can't I even write a single line for me?" marveled the repatriate.

THE UNDERGROUND CAPITALIST NETWORK

Migrant workers, especially tailors and cobblers, secretly undertook private business at home to make life more tolerable, hiding their business transactions from the "tax service" and the financial departments of regional councils. Such business activities were undertaken, for example, by my relative, Master Jacob, a shoemaker from Plovdiv, Bulgaria. In 1946, when he moved in, he quickly understood that the situation in the Soviet Union was significantly different from what



^
Nshan and Seraphina
Hovhannisyan
from Cyprus in
Kirovakan, 1963

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The Tagvoryan
family arrived from
Bulgary in 1948



he had initially pictured. Later, he was confused recalling how the Soviet officials on the migration ship were urging them to throw their bread into the sea, as they “would be given plenty of bread.” Many did so, but Jacob didn’t. He was given a place of residence in Akhuryan borough but Jacob moved to Yerevan on his own initiative and funds. Soon he resumed his ‘semi-secret’ business again. By registering as a worker at a shoe factory and literally giving away his product free of charge, he was somehow able to generate income for his small business. It is noteworthy that his clients were high party officials, ministers and other government officials, and the “local official” frequently visited the house of Jacob, the “Bulgarian” master, to order a pair of shoes for himself or a member of his family.

WEeping GARDEN

The first places of integration for repatriates were Yerevan’s “black markets”, where they sold goods that they brought with them (clothes, shoes, etc.) in order to make a living. The

A repatriate falls into a pit at night, breaking his hand. Another repatriate comes to visit him at the hospital. The first one complains, “In normal countries when they dig a hole, they put a red flag on it, so that people see it and don’t fall in it.” In response the other one says, ‘Eh, akhpar, there’s a big red flag on the border, didn’t you see it when you came here?’”

All the time a repatriate is confronted with questions regarding what they had “there”.

- Do you have horses there?
 - Yes, we do.
 - Do you have cows?
 - Uh, yes.
 - Are there sheep?
 - Yes.
 - And donkeys? Are there donkeys?
- After thinking for a while, the repatriate said:
- No, they all came here.

markets were also a meeting place where repatriates could exchange news and rumors and share their pain. One such place was the garden in front of the Immigration Committee building (currently near Shahumyan statue), which the repatriates called “weeping garden” (“latsin partez”).

REPRESSION

Shortly after World War II, the world was divided into opposing sides by the “iron curtain” again, and soon, after the Diaspora flow stopped, new and extreme repression took place within the USSR. During one night in June 1949 more than 13 000 people, mostly immigrants, were arrested and exiled to Siberia and other remote, unpleasant places. In particular, the target of the repression was immigrants, to substantiate which rumors were spread and materials were printed in newspapers about “sabotages”, the poisoning of drinking water in Yerevan and other “atrocities” organized by the “akhpars” (“brother” in Western Armenian; that’s what they called the repatriates).

They were fired from their jobs without any justification or were under threat of dismissal and were forced to provide evidence against other immigrants' anti-Soviet activities. They were accused of communicating with relatives abroad, which qualified under espionage activities. All of this gradually contributed towards making the decision to leave the country. According to a repatriate witness, some strangers arrived in a black car (most likely the Soviet security service) and knocked the door of a house late at night. The poor people were frightened to open the door, expecting to soon become a Siberian exile. In fact, the strangers had confused the address and they left. But it was clear that this fate awaited another immigrant family.

In another case, a teacher from the Diaspora was deported for a comment he made after seeing hungry children looking for food in the garbage. He shook his head, and said "Is this our future generation?"

Such events gave rise to bitter humor. For example, when a repatriate leaving for America was asked why he was leaving, whether there are friends or relatives there, he said, "in 1949 you sent me to Siberia, did I have any friends or relatives there?"

AN ARMENIAN REPATRIATE FROM FRANCE

People who grew up and achieved a certain status in the Diaspora, were naturally unsatisfied with the local reality, where sometimes street "hooligans" would damage someone's fancy suit on public transport, mostly out of envy rather than for a particular reason. My father's friend, Joseph from France, was one of those Diasporans. Joseph was known for his wit and told many entertaining and real life stories but returned to France in the 1960s. I remember the French lifestyle on display all over Joseph's house, who was born and brought up in France. At noon and in the evening at the same time, everybody would gather together in the



◀ Repatriate university student in Yerevan, 1950

A S A RESULT OF REPATRIATION, ARMENIA RECEIVED HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND SKILLED PROFESSIONALS IN MANY DIFFERENT FIELDS

living room on the first floor, prompted by just one call. Once they called lumberjacks to cut and split firewood for winter. Joseph's mother offered the workers a little rest and she made them some coffee. One of the workers, unaware of what coffee was, quickly took the cup of hot liquid and said "cheers, dear ma'am", and proceeded to drink it in one gulp. You can imagine what happened next.

Another time, around the 1950s, when olives could be found in Yerevan's stores, and the demand for olives wasn't high, Joseph played a trick on a local who had no idea what an olive was. In the shop when he finally asked what it was and how to eat it, Joseph offered him his own "recipe" of the dish - boiled, then fried, with onion and spices. After this experience, the clueless citizen then started to frequently buy olives.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

As a result of repatriation, Armenia received highly qualified and skilled professionals in many different fields. The health sector gained doctors with specific areas of expertise and specialists in foreign languages who were also needed in schools and universities. Due to the immigrants' diverse and cultural backgrounds, the cultural life of Armenia was noticeably transformed.

The film "Tzhvzhik", screened from time to time, can be considered "akhparakan." Firstly, because the film's dialogues are only in Western Armenian and the cast is entirely made up of immigrants. I remember as a child how the old repatriates would watch the film and at a minor episode, seeing someone familiar, would leave and start talking about his life and work.

In addition, the arrival of repatriates was an opportunity for local people to raise the "iron curtain" a little bit and get acquainted with the reality beyond it. In this sense, we can say that the Soviet authorities' fear of repatriates' "ideological despair" was somewhat justified.

THE CAPITAL OF ALL ARMENIANS

Repatriation, despite all the disappointments and episodes of intolerance, gave a positive charge to post-Soviet Armenian society. Former Diasporan Armenians, after some initial difficulties and some return processes, integrated into Soviet Armenian society. Some representatives found their places among the upper class of society.

Yerevan's 1960s rapid urban culture development and ascent are very much related to the presence of repatriates. Yerevan, which was proclaimed "the capital of all Armenians," finally began to become consistent with this title. ◆

NUBARASHEN:

Built by Nubar Pasha

One of the most striking examples of the collaboration between the Diaspora and Soviet authorities to help repatriates was the construction of the Nubarashen district. Today this district, being one of Yerevan's 12 administrative districts, also used to be one of the many Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) projects in Eastern Armenia.

BASED ON INFORMATION FROM EDUARD MELKONIAN'S BOOK
"ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION: CONTINUOUS HISTORY"

CONTINUATION OF THE NAME

In 1923, only three years after the establishment of the Soviet Union in Armenia AGBU became the only traditional organization allowed to operate in the republic. In 1926, at the AGBU US Congressional Conference in Philadelphia, a decision was made on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Union and in honor of President Boghos Nubar, to raise \$250,000 in the next five years through special funding. Informing Boghos Nubar of the decision, the forum's participants asked him to express his opinion regarding how this amount was to be spent. It can be assumed that for many, the president's response seemed to be obvious – allocate this sum to the already existing institutions of the Union (orphanages, migrant aid stations, etc.) or establish new ones. However, at that time Boghos Nubar already considered the solution to the issue of immigration was to move them to Armenia. But mass immigration faced numerous and various difficulties, including a lack of housing, which the Armenian authorities repeatedly mentioned. The experience of past years proved that the Diaspora wasn't able for different economic and political reasons, or simply didn't



consider it appropriate to finance housing construction in Armenia, believing that the existing means should first of all serve community organizations in different countries and the needs of immigration in general. On the other hand, AGBU's own funds were insufficient to implement such a large-scale program independently. Boghos Nubar, having learned about the "jubilee" donation, decided to give the full amount of money to the construction of a special district in Armenia where repatriate Armenians would live. At the same time, wanting to encourage as many potential donors as possible, he announced that if the \$250,000 target was reached by April 30 1931, he would donate another \$100,000. The members of the Union decided to honor his name and work, naming the future settlement Nubarashen.

BECAUSE OF THE CRISIS

The early stages of the fundraising were very impressive and promising. The official opening day in New York was successful in collecting roughly \$102,000. During a similar gathering in Chicago,

BOGHOS NUBAR ALREADY CONSIDERED THE SOLUTION TO THE ISSUE OF IMMIGRATION WAS TO **MOVE THEM TO ARMENIA**. BUT MASS IMMIGRATION FACED NUMEROUS AND VARIOUS DIFFICULTIES



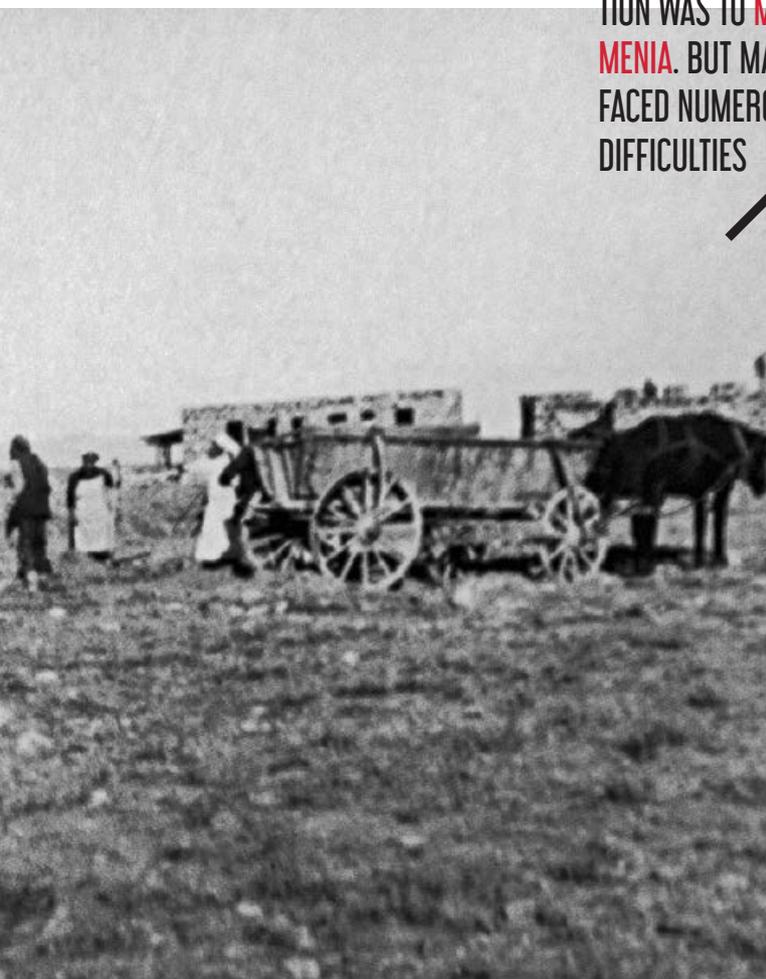
\$25,000 was donated. With such a successful start, the fundraising's momentum didn't continue, because the collection being slow and difficult. The main reason was the economic crisis that started in the United States at the same time of the collection, and a large number of American-Armenians were also the victims of it. According to "Miutyun" magazine, by the end of 1929, the total amount collected was only \$153,000. This raised doubts over the construction of the settlement in general.

FINDING THE RIGHT PLACE

The Armenian authorities, despite their principle agreement, delayed its implementation both directly or indirectly. In Soviet Armenia, it was very difficult to build a settlement in the name of a capitalist amongst an ideological struggle against the bourgeoisie. The government, not releasing the raised money, kept offering lands in Yeghvard, near Metsamor, in Sardarapat, leading to long disputes over the name of the settlement, even suggesting that the name of the settlement be left to the inhabitants to decide. Boghos Nubar agreed straightaway, just to see the settlement built during his lifetime. In the end, the land allocated for the settlement was not provided in Sardarapat, as Alexander Tamanyan had suggested, but in the Noragavit region near Yerevan.

BEFORE LEAVING

Boghos Nubar, expecting his imminent death, sought to do everything possible to contribute to the rapid construction of Nubarashen. And it's not hard to imagine the disappointment that he experienced, learning about the unsuccessful and slow fundraising. It is known that in May 1930, about a month before his death, Boghos Nubar told one of the AGBU leaders,



Malazian and his personal secretary, Hekimyan, that since the Diasporan Armenians were not able to raise \$250,000, he told them that he would be withdrawing his donation. They say that Malazian was trying to change Nubar's mind by employing "serious and stubborn language," and so did Hekimyan, using "his feelings with a friendly and domestic smile." But on the same day Nubar sent a letter to the Union with his decision. However, the next day he instructed Hekimyan to write two letters. One of them to the Swiss Lompar Otie Bank, to transfer his \$208,000 to the AGBU, and the other one to the Union, instructing them that \$100,000 of the \$208,000 should be allocated to the Nubarashen Fund.

TYPICAL SETTLEMENT

In April and May 1930, in Yerevan and Paris, the "Agreement on the Construction of Nubarashen Settlement" was finally signed between the Government of Soviet Armenia and the Central Administrative Assembly of the AGBU, followed by the Union's first contribution of \$50,000. By that summer, the construction work started on the southern frontier of Yerevan headed by a special commission created for that very purpose under the supervision of the architect of the project, Alexander Tamanyan.

During the next six years, Nubarashen and its construction issues were of particular importance to the Union's leadership and ordinary people. Moreover, after the compatriotic unions were proposed to participate in the construction of individual districts of the settlement, where deportees from Western Armenia were to reside, Nubarashen appeared at the center of much larger problems.

In July 1931, at the regular General Assembly it was stated that the construction of 100-120 apartments would be completed by the end of the summer, and immigrants from Greece and other places would be transferred to the newly built settlement. A year later, however, the Union's report showed the following situation: instead of what was planned, ten apartments were completed and eight were in poor condition. One of the reasons for this situation was the devastating earthquake in Zangezur region. The government's priority was to first solve the housing problem facing the thousands of people who suffered from the disaster.

ADDITIONAL RUBLES

Nubarashen was being built slowly and not just for the reasons mentioned above. On the one hand, it was the construction of a large number of big industrial enterprises in Armenia during the same period, and a constant lack of skilled manpower and building materials on the other. Be-



IN THE MIDDLE OF 1937 AROUND 1000 IMMIGRANTS WERE LIVING IN MORE THAN 100 APARTMENTS IN NUBARASHEN. A YEAR LATER, THE SETTLEMENT WAS RENAMED SOVETASHEN. ONLY IN 1989 FORMER NAME WAS RESTORED

sides the Armenian government's spending on managing immigration and implementation, the money (or some of it) provided by the Diasporan Armenians went to the construction of settlements, socio-cultural institutions and other institutions in the country for those same immigrants.

Due to the conditions and the means provided, the construction of the planned buildings was inevitably slow or was not carried out at all, which in turn, brought new challenges to the authorities' relations with relevant Diaspora organizations and immigrants. On the

other hand, when signing contracts with these organizations, the government, in fact, assumed obligations for the sums that were hard to find at the time due to the difficult financial and economic conditions. So, for example, on April 27, 1934, during the session, the government, discussing the issue of Nubarashen construction, decided: "Considering that the money collected through the AGBU does not provide the final construction of the buildings envisaged by the above-mentioned projects and welcoming the donors, find an additional 541,000 rubles for the construction of those buildings."

"WRONG AND INTOLERABLE"

On July 21, 1936 the Central Committee, First Secretary Joseph Stalin and the Council of the Soviet Union, President Vyacheslav Molotov, made an unprecedented decision on "Measures to accommodate Armenian immigrants in the Armenian SSR." In the document, from the very beginning, it was deemed "wrong and intolerable" for the Armenian government to have "the established practice of non-fulfillment of obligations undertaken by foreign non-governmental organizations and individual Armenian donors." Here are some of the most detailed measures that, according to the leaders of the Soviet Union, should fix the "ruse mistakes"



AGBU

The Armenian General Benevolent Union was founded on April 15, 1906, in Cairo, Egypt, upon the initiative of renowned national figure Boghos Nubar and other prominent representatives of the Egyptian-Armenian community. The goal was to establish a union that would assist the Armenian people in every way, the future of which, as a minority in the Ottoman Empire, was endangered. Between 1906 and 1912, the AGBU provided the villagers of Western Armenia with seeds, agricultural instruments and other resources. It established schools and orphanages in Western Armenia, Cilicia and other Armenian-populated regions of the Ottoman Empire. In 1914, AGBU had 142 branches in Western Armenia, Cilicia, USA, Argentina, Europe and Africa with 8,533 members. The First World War and the Armenian Genocide were turning points for both the Armenian nation and the AGBU. In 1914, Boghos Nubar left Egypt and moved to Paris. Despite the huge losses suffered in different chapters of the union, the AGBU managed to provide help to Genocide survivors (with a special focus on orphans). After World War I, the main goal of the AGBU was “to preserve and promote the Armenian language, identity and heritage.” During World War II, the AGBU headquarters was moved from Paris to New York. The AGBU’s activities aimed at national preservation became more effective during the post-war period, especially during Alex Manoogian’s tenure between 1953–1989. The AGBU expanded and became the biggest and most influential Armenian Diaspora organization in the world. Today, the AGBU has chapters in 90 cities in 26 countries around the world, with 22,000 members, 120 branches, and 27 cultural centers. In 1990, the AGBU opened a representative office in Yerevan. Resuming its activities in Armenia after a 50-year interval, as well as humanitarian assistance, the AGBU carries out projects (building churches, spiritual, educational, social, health, cultural and youth) aimed at contributing to the development of the country. With over a hundred years of nationwide activity, the AGBU has provided roughly \$1 billion to meet the needs of the Armenian people, of which about \$130 million has gone to programs in Armenia.



<
Fridtjof Nansen

FRIDTJOF NANSEN'S MESSAGE, APRIL 5, 1929

With great pleasure I learned that there is a movement among the Armenians of America to build a community in Armenia for the migrants and to call it Nubarashen in honor of Boghos Nubar, a prominent Armenian patriot and humanitarian. There is no need to say that I have the warmest sympathy for this initiative. For the last four years, I have been working with the nation's Organization for the purpose of promoting the Armenian lands, which is the best solution to the issue of refugees. I am sure that the dedication of Armenians to their homeland, as well as to the welfare of the troubled nation and the restoration of the small Armenian Republic, the courage, perseverance and sacrifice shown to them will cause admiration in the civilized world.

<
Nubar Pasha,
founder of AGBU

by the Armenian government and the Communist Party, 50% of all construction work should have been completed by January 1, 1937 and by July 1 of the same year everything should be completed, the Union and Public Institutions were given specific instructions to finance and provide construction materials; it was envisaged to provide the immigrant workers with the necessary raw materials, the rural immigrants were exempted from paying taxes for 3-4 years or would pay half, finally, the means of obtaining and selling various equipment and other items donated from foreign Armenians were defined.

The decision also included a special annex where given the list of the 12 buildings to be constructed based on the commitments of the Armenian government and 7 of which referred to Nubarashen. In fact, it was the first time that the leaders of the Soviet Union made such a decision regarding immigrant Armenians.

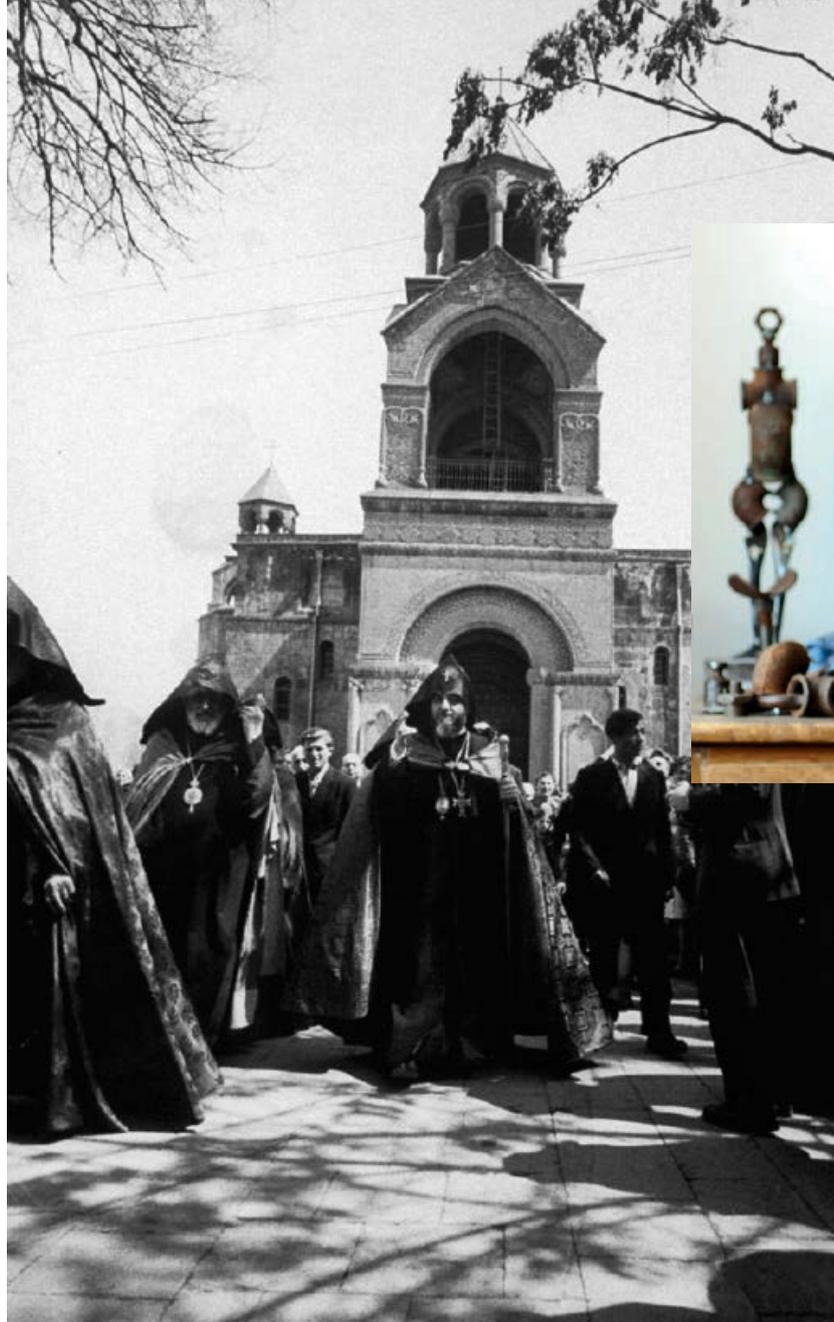
Besides the funding, the most difficult problem to overcome was the problem of the Nubarashen canal and water supply. They were scheduled to be fully operational on July 1, 1937. However, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia had to register during the sitting of July 3, “The construction of the water pipe has not been completed in time... to put the problem of providing the tubes on time back on the Union Council agenda before the President of the Council of Europe (Douloian).” But there was a reason for pride, too. “... The construction project of Nubarashen 1937 is basically finished. The school, the kindergarten, the theater, the bathroom and the residential buildings are completely finished... Only the hospital building is yet to be completed.”

In the middle of 1937 around 1000 immigrants were living in more than 100 apartments in Nubarashen. A year later, the settlement was renamed Sovetashen, and only in 1989 the Soviet Union's Supreme Council restored its former name. Later Boghos Nubar bust was erected in Nubarashen. ♦

HISTORICAL REPATRIATES WHO CHANGED THE LANDSCAPE OF ARMENIA

It is difficult to overestimate the role that repatriates have played and continue to play in different spheres of life in Armenia. The repatriation, which started from the very beginning of Armenia's independence (the first Republic of Armenia) and continued in distinct stages from the 1920's and 1930's into the 1940's and then during the 1960's, is in some sense still ongoing, providing a source of hope to change the quality of life here in Armenia. This is by no means a comprehensive list of individuals born and raised in the diaspora who chose to settle with their families in Armenia (in and after the 1940's), enriching Armenia's culture and academic life. The list is of course a contentious one and therefore, admittedly, some personalities who played a very important role in their respective areas are not in the list due to the constraints of space.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN

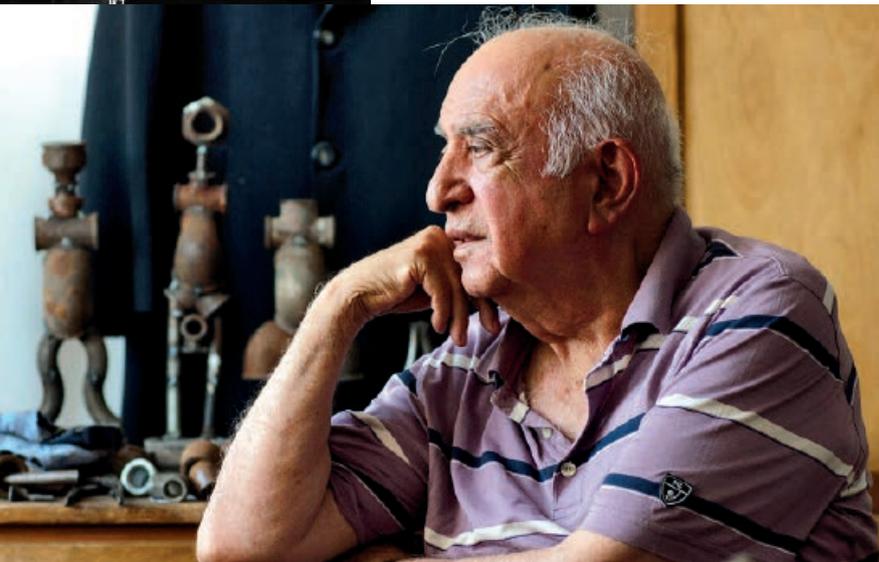


VAZGEN I

Catholicos of all Armenians, whose secular name was Levon Garabed Baljyan, was born in 1908 in Bucharest. He studied Literature, Philosophy and Pedagogy at Bucharest University in the 1930's and pursued a teaching career up until his ordination in Athens in 1943. In 1947-1955 he was the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church Diocese of Romania, and in 1955 he was elected Catholicos of All Armenians moving to Echmiadzin, Armenia. Vazgen I's long tenure (1955-1994) was very important for the history of the Armenian Church, along with major social and political changes and upheavals in the political and social life of Armenia.

In the absence of independent Armenian statehood he was the person who represented Armenian communities in several Middle Eastern countries, and their heads received him at official receptions, making about 30 pontifical visits to different Armenian communities worldwide. In 1962, under his leadership the Armenian Apostolic Church became a member of the World Council of Churches. At the time of the Karabakh movement, during the final years of the Soviet Union, Vazgen I made several appeals to the Soviet leaders to contain the violence and resolve the conflict. As the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church he contributed to the restoration of old monasteries and churches throughout Armenia, restoring several dioceses and reviving the previously lost prestige of the institution thanks to his own charisma. It was not uncommon to see his portrait in people's homes and elsewhere.

Vazgen I was awarded many different international and national medals and awards, including medals from the USSR and Romania. He was the first to be given the highest Armenian order of National Hero as well as receiving the new Armenian passport, which then President Levon Ter-Petrosyan personally handed the ailing Catholicos in 1994. Vazgen I died the same year, leaving behind a solid legacy of Armenian religious restoration and a deep popular respect and affection.



Naregats Art Institute

HAKOB HAKOBYAN

Diasporan painter, born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1923. Graduating from The Melkonian Educational Institute in Cyprus, he continued his artistic education at the Cairo Academy of visual arts in 1944-1948, continuing his studies in Paris, studying at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in 1952-1954. He represented modern Egyptian art at international art exhibitions and festivals, but in 1962, along with his family, he moved to Soviet Armenia where he lived up until his death in 2013.

Hakob Hakobyan's paintings are distinctive with limited color range and melancholic appearance, in which personal and deep internal experiences are of paramount importance. He dedicated some of his paintings to traumatic periods of Armenian history, including the genocide of 1915-1923 and the subsequent cases of mass violence against Armenians, such as the Sumgait pogrom in 1988. His artworks are currently preserved in museums and personal collections around the Middle East and former Soviet capitals. Hakobyan was awarded the Mesrop Mashtots medal in 1996 and the St Sahak-St Mesrop medal of the Armenian Apostolic church in 2003.



GOHAR GASPARYAN

The most famous Diasporan Armenian opera singer was born in 1924 in Cairo. She had already been actively engaged in her career (since 1940) before moving to Armenia in 1948 and resumed her career in 1949 at the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. Her unique voice was symbolic for generations in Soviet Armenia and beyond, earning her the highest Soviet title of "People's Artist of the USSR". Dubbed as "The Armenian nightingale", Gohar Gasparyan performed dozens of operas. She travelled extensively abroad, performing in the USA, Canada, France, Great Britain, Central European countries, Japan, Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey and across the whole of the USSR. In 1984 Gasparyan was awarded the title of honorable citizen of Yerevan and after independence she was also awarded the medal of Mesrop Mash-tots in 1994. Gasparyan died in 2007 and is buried in the Pantheon of Yerevan.





SIMON KRKIASHARYAN

Krkiasharyan, born 1924 in Athens, Greece, was a major translator of old and classical Greek texts, including Homer's *Odyssey*, Xenophon's *Anabasis* and Herodotus' *History* and Plutarch's *Lives*. An active member of the Greek resistance movement during Nazi Germany's occupation of Greece, Krkiasharyan moved to Soviet Armenia in 1947, leaving his studies unfinished at the local National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. He resumed his studies years later and graduated from the Yerevan Pedagogical Institute in 1954. In 1959-1962 he pursued his postgraduate studies in Leningrad, under renowned historians, archeologists and orientalists of the USSR. Fluent in modern and classical Greek languages, he was a renowned translator of literature and was also a historian, who conducted interesting research on ancient sources of Armenia as well as other countries. The ancient Greek dramas Sophocles' *Antigone* or Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the comedy *Lilistrata* of Aristophanes were set in Yerevan in his translations. For his contribution to Armenian, but also worldwide studies of antiquity, he was elected member of Rome's *Accademia Tiberiana* and a member of the USSR Union of Writers.



PERCH ZEYTUNTSYAN

Zeytuntsyan was born in 1938 in Alexandria, Egypt and is one of the most renowned contemporary novelists, playwrights, scriptwriters and translators who was also independent Armenia's first minister of culture from 1991 to 1992. He moved to Soviet Armenia in 1948 along with his family and received his education in Pyatigorsk, Russia and in Moscow, where he pursued postgraduate studies in script writing, graduating in 1964. Zeytuntsyan was the editor-in-chief of *Hayfilm* (1965-1968) and *Yerevan* (1975-1986) film studios, and in the meantime he was also busy developing his career as an author. Twelve of his plays were staged in theatres of Yerevan and elsewhere in Armenia, and beginning from 1956, his short stories, novels and translations were published. Zeytuntsyan's works have been translated into 11 foreign languages, including English, French, Arabic and Russian. Zeytuntsyan also translated from English, including several works by Ernest Hemingway, like *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *A Farewell to Arms*. Zeytuntsyan was elected a member of the *Accademia Tiberiana* and was awarded a number of state awards and medals and the title of Honorary Citizen of Yerevan.

TIGRAN MANSURYAN

A renowned modern composer, Mansuryan was born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1939 and moved to Armenia in 1947. He studied composition at the Romanos Melikyan College of Music in Yerevan in 1956-1960 and continued his studies at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan in 1960-1965, completing his post-graduate studies in 1967.

His creative efforts were well received from the very beginning of his career, testament to the fact that he won two First prizes at the All-Union Competition in Moscow in 1966, and in 1968. He taught modern music theory at the Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory from 1967-1986, and held the position of rector at the Conservatory from 1992 to 1995.

Mansuryan is recognized as one of the most important figures of contemporary music in the former USSR, being the first to introduce modern composition techniques in Armenia. His compositions have been performed to great critical acclaim on some of the biggest stages in the world.

Mansuryan's compositions are an interesting mixture of Armenian art music and folk traditions, with bright, expressive melodies and exquisite, impressionistic tone color.

Roberto Masetti / ECM Records

OHAN DURYAN

Born in Jerusalem, Duryan started his musical education in his home city and in 1939-1945 he studied composition, conducting and the organ at the Jerusalem Conservatory. He completed his education in France and Switzerland, returning to Palestine where he continued to teach at the Bierzeit University in the West Bank.

At the invitation of Catholicos Vazgen I, Duryan settled in Armenia in 1957 and between 1959-65 and 1972-1974 he was conductor of the Armenian State Philharmonic Society. Due to Soviet restrictions on artistic expression, he left Armenia for Europe, and from 1963-1968 Duryan served as Musical Director of the Leipzig Opera and was guest conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. He also worked with other orchestras, including the Avignon and Cape Town orchestras. From 1971 to 1972 he was the conductor of Yerevan State Opera and Ballet Theater and finally left Soviet Armenia in 1975.

After Armenia gained independence in 1991, Duryan returned to serve as the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Ohan Duryan Radio and TV Symphonic Orchestra, which he founded, and was also the Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Yerevan Opera Theatre from 1998 to 2001. After his retirement in Armenia, in 2002-2006 he was director of the Moscow Symphonic Orchestra at the Stas Namin Center. Duryan invented a musical system which he called Universalism and composed a number of songs and pieces for the orchestra.





MKRTICH TER-KARAPETYAN

The important, yet hitherto largely obscure biochemist Mkrtich Ter-Karapetyan was born in the city of Izmir (Smyrna) in 1910. He pursued his studies at the French College in Beirut, Lebanon, after which he graduated from the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1933. As a researcher he started his career in France, where he was awarded his Doctorate in 1944 and his first professorship in 1945.

After moving to Armenia in 1946 he started working at the research Institute of Stockbreeding and Veterinary. In 1947 he became a member of the Armenian SSR Academy of Science and received his second doctorate in Moscow in 1959. During the 1960's and 1970's he was head of biochemistry at Yerevan State University. He was given professorship and was the head of the Biochemistry Department between 1972-1981 at the University of the Pierre and Marie Curie in Paris.

ARMAN MANARYAN

The renowned Armenian film director, Arman Manaryan was born in Iran in 1929 and moved to Armenia along with his family in 1946. First, he started studying music at the Romanos Melikyan College from 1947, continuing his studies at the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan in 1954. In 1962 he graduated from the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (the so-called VGIK) in Moscow.

His 1961 short movie Tzhvzhik marked his directorial debut, and was so impressive at the time that it still remains a masterpiece of Armenian cinematography to this day. The renowned Soviet film director Mikhail Kalatozov was reportedly one who praised Manaryan's work, while US Armenian celebrities William Saroyan and film director Ruben Mamulian, having watched the film, were very excited. However, Manaryan's later films were not received well by Soviet censorship, who banned his film the Artist, which was based on a story by novelist Alexander Shirvanzade.

However, soon Manaryan returned to the spotlight with the musical film "Karine" (1967), in which he invested his previous love and utilized his professional musical skills to become an emblematic figure for a generation of Soviet Armenians. Another monumental work by Manaryan was the first Armenian full-length animated film David of Sasun based on the medieval Armenian epic, which was released in 2010 after overcoming heavy financial difficulties.

Manaryan was awarded the title of people's artist and died in 2016. ♦

ENGLISHMAN IN YEREVAN:

An experience with Armenia's parliamentary elections

Peter Edwards has been living in Armenia since August 2016. He talks about his experience working with the Citizen Observer Initiative and his impressions of Armenia's parliamentary elections that were held on April 2nd 2017.

TEXT : PETER EDWARDS / PHOTO : PAN PHOTO



> Gagik Tsarukyan, head of Prosperous Armenia party

AN INTERN

I joined Transparency International Armenia (TIA) as an intern in February 2017. TIA was looking for an intern to assist with tasks related to the parliamentary elections, which I immediately started working on. I became involved with Citizen Observer Initiative as TIA is one of the main organizations involved. Citizen Observer Initiative was founded in 2013 by a number of local NGOs and activists who shared concerns over the state of democracy in Armenia. The Citizen Observer Initiative (COI) is currently headed by Transparency International Armenia, Asparez Journalists Club and Europe in Law Association. For this election, there were 2725 local observers, 147 Diasporan Armenian observers and 100 non-Armenian observers registered under COI who took part in

observing the parliamentary elections. Among the Diasporan observers were celebrities Serj Tankian, Arsinée Khanjian, Atom Egoyan and Eric Nazarian. Previous to interning at TIA, I was researching Armenia's elections from the time of independence up until the 2013 presidential election, with a focus on electoral fraud. I welcomed the opportunity to work once again on elections, and this time, I was to gain a more practical experience of Armenia's electoral process. I felt that what I had worked on previously set me up for my tasks ahead. Part of my work involved creating a logistical guide for observers coming from abroad to observe the elections, reviewing the shortcomings of the new Electoral Code and general tasks assisting and supporting the election team.

THE OBSERVER

Although I was not an observer at a polling station, I had previously familiarized myself with observer manuals. I knew that as an observer, your task is far from straightforward. During each election in Armenia, polling stations are filled with party proxies, national observers and international observers. The polling station can look chaotic at times, making an observers' task complex. It is well known that there were many observers present at the polling stations, approximately 28,000 in total were registered as observers. However, the purpose and impartiality of many of these observers can be questioned. Many of these observers were believed to belong to political party controlled groups or people posing as observers, neither of which were concerned about free and fair elections.

Ամ ԸՆՏՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐ 2017
անվճար քարոզչական պատամենք



Ամ ԸՆՏՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐ 2017
անվճար քարոզչական պատամենք



MANY OF THESE OBSERVERS WERE BELIEVED TO BELONG TO POLITICAL PARTY CONTROLLED GROUPS OR PEOPLE POSING AS OBSERVERS

▼
Nikol Pashinyan,
from Yelq bloc

On the day of the elections, I was working at the Citizen Observer Initiative's press center. My tasks involved looking after the press desk, making sure that journalists attending our press conferences signed up and received press releases, general support tasks and monitoring the web-cameras at polling stations. The latter task involved sampling 10% of web-cameras during voting hours at polling stations and a further 10% during the vote count procedure, employing a pre-approved methodology. In total, there were 1500 cameras installed at polling stations throughout Armenia. My task was to observe each camera for at least one minute in order to see whether the web cameras were working and then record the data. The task was simple and laborious but important nonetheless. >



➤ Former president and head of Armenian National Congress Levon Ter-Petrosyan



◀ Prime-minister and member of Republican party Karen Karapetyan

Armenia's 2017 parliamentary elections marked the first time that web-cameras were operational at polling stations. The move came as part of the new Electoral Code that was adopted in time for the parliamentary elections. There was a lot of pessimism surrounding the introduction of web cameras in polling stations, with many quick to dismiss them as a gimmick. There seemed to be some trouble with accessing the web camera portal during the start of voting, leading people to disregard them as a credible and useful asset. My experience suggests otherwise. The majority of the web cameras I sampled during voting and the vote count were working. Moreover, for the brief time I observed each camera I happened to come across several electoral violations such as violating the right to secret ballot. If a special team of observers were tasked with observing a range of web-cameras on election day, then instances of electoral violations could be observed and recorded via web-camera footage. Thus, serving the very purpose that they were set up for.

➤ Mayor of Yerevan, Taron Margaryan

NEW ELECTORAL CODE, OLD PROBLEMS

Although having researched Armenia's elections and expecting electoral violations, keeping up to date with the media, social media and the COI interactive map of recorded electoral violations was a totally different experience altogether. Instances of large scale electoral violations has accompanied each election in Armenia. Armenia's new Electoral Code was adopted with the negotiation and input from all major parties addressing longstanding issues with Armenia's electoral process, but fell short of

addressing all issues, with loopholes still remaining. However, even if the Electoral Code addressed everything comprehensively then this would not necessarily mean that the Electoral Code would be followed to the letter in practice. Furthermore, the Electoral Code alone is not enough to address all of the issues and longstanding concerns associated with Armenia's electoral process. Vote buying and pressure on voters still remains an issue and the recent parliamentary elections were no ex-



ception. There is no will on behalf of the government to open and conduct large scale investigations into the matter. Just before the parliamentary elections, the media reported that 100 schools were conducting illegal campaigning for the ruling Republican Party. Recently, the owner of the SAS supermarket chain can be heard on a leaked audio recording pressurizing employees to collect names of relatives and friends who will be voting for the ruling Republican Party, and threatening to punish those who do not comply. This is not an isolated case and the threat of losing one's job makes people highly susceptible to this pressure.

THE FUTURE

In recent years there has been a rise in civic activism in the form of mass mobilization. We can see this at protest movements such as the 2012 "Save Mashtots Park" movement, the 2013 protests against the hike in transport fares from 100 AMD to 150 AMD and the "Electric Yerevan" protests (2015 protest against a planned rise in the cost of electricity). These protest



movements have been successful in reversing government decisions. The protests have centered around one objective, and have been successful in uniting citizens of all backgrounds. It is evidently clear that citizens will mobilize in large numbers on the streets where they believe the government has crossed the line. This energy and willingness to rapidly mobilize needs to be channeled into working towards long term solutions towards

the improvement of life in Armenia. The process will of course not be easy and requires the whole of society to work together. In a country like Armenia where there is a detachment and increasing isolation between citizens and those that govern, Civil Society Organizations, community groups, NGOs and the media can help bridge the gap between citizens and the government. This of course depends on the willingness of civil society, citizens and the

IT IS EVIDENTLY CLEAR THAT CITIZENS WILL MOBILIZE IN LARGE NUMBERS ON THE STREETS WHERE THEY BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT HAS CROSSED THE LINE



◀ Arsinée Khanjian, Atom Egoyan and Serj Tankian

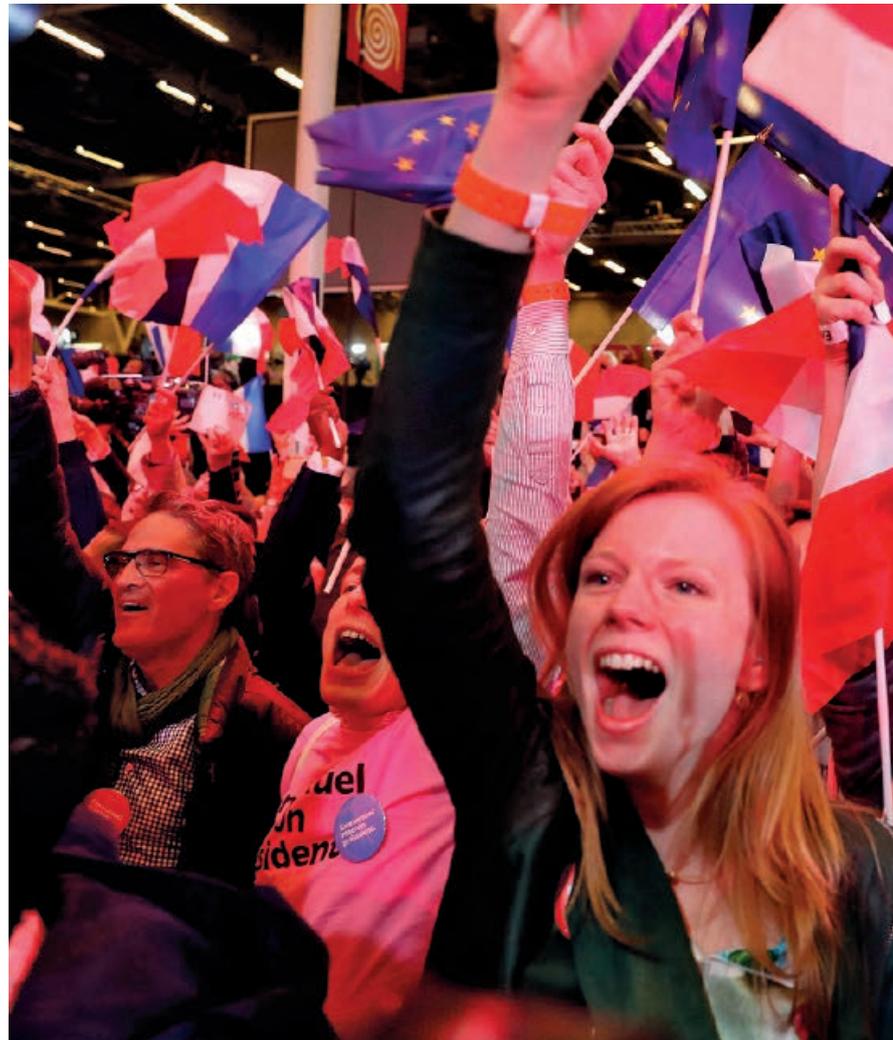
government to start constructive dialogue and build healthy relationships. The contract between citizens and the government needs to be renegotiated. Citizens must demand a greater stake in the decision making of the country and not just leave it until election day. History tells us that no government can be left to their own devices. Politicians alone cannot act in the best interests of the citizens they represent. It's up to the citizenry to relentlessly continue negotiating a greater stake and say in the process of government. ♦

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN FRANCE:

Towards a historical rupture

Will the political regime of the Fifth Republic, introduced by the General de Gaulle in 1958, survive the presidential elections? By eliminating the two traditional parties in the second round, this election has confirmed the end of bipartisanship in France. The duel between the two finalist candidates, who both present themselves as being “outside of the system”, constitutes a true upheaval in the history of French political life, reinforcing a true need for change.

TEXT : TIGRANE YEGAVIAN



Sunday, April 23, 2017 will certainly mark a special place in the history of the Fifth Republic with the qualification of Emmanuel Macron (23.9%) and Marine Le Pen (21.4%) through to the second round of the presidential elections. The first (39 years old) is presented as a champion of liberal globalization and fervent proponent of European integration, while the second (48 years old), is an anti-liberal and anti-EU populist leader of a far right-wing indirect line of descent with the authoritarian regime of Vichy (1940-1944), nowadays engaged in a process of “de-demonization”. The results of this first round are the culmination of a campaign full of twists and turns, a long and stormy campaign, underpinned by terrorist attacks, that

began in the fall of 2016 with the holding of the primaries in the camp of the right and the center. At the end of the poll, the two favorites (former president Nicolas Sarkozy and former prime-minister under Jacques Chirac, Alain Juppé) were swept away in favor of Francois Fillon, a conservative candidate, close to radical Catholic circles. The other rebound was Francois Hollande’s decision in December 2016 not to stand again for a second term, accelerating the pre-

the main media outlets and a large part of French employers. For her part, Marine Le Pen settled even more comfortably into French political life. With 21.4% (7.7 million votes), this is the highest percentage that the National Front has ever secured in a presidential election and has surpassed the historical record number of votes that the party has received in any election. However, it wasn’t sufficient to win first place, despite the poll forecasts.

JUST THREE YEARS AGO, THIS YOUNG BUSINESS BANKER WAS A PERFECT UNKNOWN TO THE FRENCH PUBLIC. IN THE FIRST ELECTION OF HIS POLITICAL CAREER, EMMANUEL MACRON BECAME PRESIDENT



dictable implosion of the Socialist Party; which already became a moribund party torn between a liberal reformist wing and the “slingers” opposed to the economic line of government.

DAZZLING RISE OF AN AMBITIOUS YOUNG MAN AND A BREAKTHROUGH OF THE FAR RIGHT

Taking advantage of the extraordinary circumstances resulting from Francois Hollande’s withdrawal, Francois Fillon’s legal setbacks and the fall of the Socialist Party, the former Minister of Economy, Emmanuel Macron, achieved a meteoric rise. In the aftermath, a quasi-sacred union even formed behind him, and the majority of the leaders of the right and the left officially supported him. The candidate of the movement “En Marche!” is more than ever in a favorable position to succeed Francois Hollande. If he is elected, it remains to be seen what majority he will depend on in Parliament after the June legislative elections. Just three years ago, this young over-qualified business banker was a perfect unknown to the French public. For the first election of his political career, Emmanuel Macron achieved first place in the first round. If he took advantage of his “neither right nor left” strategy, he was favored with strong support from



DEBACLE OF HISTORIC PARTIES

The first consequence of this election is the explosion of the left and the right of government. If many French commentators see this result as the sign of the agony of the current political regime, it marks above all the end of bipartisanship. The reconfiguration of the political chessboard will be painfully done without leading to any clear majority. We would then enter a new era: the uncertain and unstable age of parliamentary coalitions. The candidate of the PS Benoît Hamon (6.3%) was dropped by most

of the cadres of the centrist wing of the party, while Francois Fillon from the party The Republicans (19.9%) registered a total of 26%, a historically low score, and found themselves eliminated from the second round for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic. François Fillon who had been given great favor to win the election has suffered various setbacks due to the various scandals that have spanned his campaign in recent months. For the Republican party, and significantly for François Fillon, it is a historic decline of more than two million votes compared to Nicolas Sarkozy who was the outgoing president in 2012. As for the socialist candidate Benoît Hamon, a large winner of the primary of the left, he never managed to create a dynamic around his campaign and saw intentions to vote for him drop day after day, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, at the far left (19.6%), managed a major breakthrough. In this, the off-system strategy will have been successful. The French left is on the way to being recomposed by two antagonistic poles.

THE COLD WAR INVITES ITSELF TO THE ELECTION

For France’s European business partners, the result secured by Emmanuel Macron was welcomed with relief. Le Pen, who wants to put an end to the euro and free movement in the European Schengen area, risked causing a “major disorder” and a “dislocation” of the European Union, warned the Managing Director of the IMF, Christine Lagarde.

If the right-hand division does not make sense in reality then France does not offer such a fractured image so much as the duel between two finalists resembles a class struggle. From this perspective, the National Front vote was massive among the popular layers and those “forgotten by globalization”, whereas it is more the well-to-do and graduated of the population that have given their votes to Emmanuel Macron. Those whose jobs benefit from the breakdown of international borders.

➤ Carnival characters depicting French presidential candidates Marine Le Pen, François Fillon and Emmanuel Macron



▼ Debates of the candidates before the first round



On the other hand, if foreign policy issues seem to have been stifled, a cold war revival has taken place around the campaign. A supporter of Crimea’s accession to the Russian Federation, Marine Le Pen officially met Vladimir Putin on March 24, 2017. Informal meetings were held in 2014 and 2015, where the FN and Jean-Marie Le Pen had managed to secure two loans amounting to a total of € 11 million. In 2014 the far-right party sent Moscow a request for financial needs estimated at 40 million euros, by 2017, mobilizing a range of intermediaries and oligarchs.

For his part, E. Macron conducted an “American-style campaign”, the results of the first round were testament to this “show”. This former business banker would now like to play a central role in the reorganization of a social-liberal pole making his future party a pale copy of the American Democratic Party. Little is known about the links between the Liberal candidate and the French American Foundation (FAF), the instrument of soft American power in France which aims to encourage an active dialogue between the two countries. One of its main activities is



> Emmanuel Macron, the new president of France

to organize seminars for French and American young leaders (Young Leaders) from the areas of politics, finance and the media, of which Emmanuel Macron was awarded in 2012.

THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY'S WORRIES

For Armenians in France, this election marks a profound rupture that foreshadows strong uncertainties about the future. Armenian leaders in France, who are organized around the French Armenian Association Coordinating Council (CCAF), are pleased that they have succeeded in promoting visibility of the community and attracting the sympathies of many right-wing and left-wing politicians. It was during François Hollande's tenure that the Genocide commemoration ceremonies on 24 April and the traditional annual dinner of the CCAF were held with the attendance of the Head of State. Indeed, close ties already existed because of the close proximity between the co-chair of the CCAF and a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's world bureau Mourad Papazian, and François Hollande when the latter was secretary-general of the PS who became president in 2012. The Armenian community has attempted to build a relationship of trust and work with the socialist power, but the record has been mixed. Apart from the strong symbolic and emotional burden, little progress has

THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY HAS ATTEMPTED TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST AND WORK WITH THE SOCIALIST POWER, BUT THE RECORD HAS BEEN MIXED

been made on central issues such as the recognition and integrity of Artsakh and the issue of penalization in regards to the denial of the Armenian genocide. The Parliament had been censured by the Constitutional Council headed by a close relation to President Hollande. It is also under his mandate that arms sales to Azerbaijan have increased significantly. Disappointment at these arms sales to Azerbaijan fuel a popular distrust among the Armenian community towards the notables who represent it. Most of the critics point out the lack of vision and long-term strategy. In the context of the deep breakdown of the PS, no instructions were given to the Armenian sympathizers to campaign in favor of Benoît Hamon, candidate "default" of the party, which had been the only candidate invited to attend the traditional CCAF dinner in February. While a good number of Franco-Armenian notables among whom officials of the AGBU have expressed their support for the candidacy of François Fillon who had clearly taken the lead in the vote of the French of Armenia. Nouvelle d'Arménie News magazine, for its part, sent questionnaires to the

main candidates which questioned their level of sympathy towards Armenians in France, and their position on the memory of the Genocide, reflected a profound ignorance regarding the question of Artsakh. The sharpest was the position of Marine Le Pen, who called for a pure and simple attachment of Artsakh to Armenia, while waiting for the Armenians of France to assimilate, denying the right to commemorate and remember the Genocide to be included in the calendar of official commemorations of the Republic. Also the climate was deleterious on this April 24 Armenian Genocide commemoration day, the day after the results of the first round in the presence of François Hollande but also his successor and heir Emmanuel Macron. If the remarks of the Liberal candidate made on the respect of the memory of the genocide reassured the Armenians of France, these remarks on the issue of Artsakh remained evasive. For French citizens of Armenian descent, the wait is mixed with a sense of urgency to adapt to the new political situation, characterized by strong instability. ♦

REFERENDOOM'S DAY:

How the Outcome of the Constitutional Referendum will Shape Turkey

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's disputed victory in the referendum has made Turkey more unpredictable than it was before April 16, both in terms of its internal stability and its foreign policy.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN





➤
The Economist's
scandalous cover

Several days before the constitutional referendum in Turkey, “The Economist” went into press with the title “Turkey’s Slide into Dictatorship”, and the cover featured an image of an angry Erdoğan, making it clear to everyone who the dictator is. On the day after the referendum Foreign Policy shocked its readers by pronouncing Turkish Republic dead: “RIP Turkey: 1921-2017”. Obviously, if Turkey’s international partners in places like Washington and London were worried, it is easy to imagine how nervous Turkey’s immediate neighbors are: Erdoğan’s close win in the referendum made Turkey even more unpredictable than it was before April 16, both in terms of its internal stability and its foreign policy, and, at least for the time being, it dashed hopes that Turkey might return to the track of the European integration.

“THE MOSQUES ARE OUR BARRACKS”:

HOW ERDOGAN USED NATIONALISM TO DEFEAT KEMALISM

The referendum marked the end of an ideological transition that Erdoğan and his AK Party went through: from a liberal version of political Islam, akin to “Christian democracy”, to an explosive mix of Islamism, populism and nationalism. Starting out as supporters of a more traditional Islamist prime-minister Necmettin Erbakan, who was deposed by the military in 1997, in the early 2000s Erdoğan and his allies redefined political Islam in Turkey. In 2001 they founded the Justice and Development Party, known by its Turkish initials, as AKP, which claimed to be an Islamic version of conservative Christian-Democratic parties in the West: a party that stands for democratic rights and freedoms, while upholding conservative family-oriented values. Anti-Western rhetoric of older Islamists like Erbakan was largely gone, at least for the time being, as AKP advocated

ERDOGAN AND HIS AK PARTY WENT FROM A LIBERAL VERSION OF POLITICAL ISLAM TO AN EXPLOSIVE MIX OF ISLAMISM, POPULISM AND NATIONALISM

democratic reform and integration with Europe. The reformed Islamists won the election in 2002 and set out to transform the Turkish state.

In the beginning this meant significant liberalization of Turkish society, removal of some of the old taboos, limiting the influence and the so called “deep state” (i.e. the security apparatus). If we add to this economic liberalization, carried out by Erdoğan’s party, it would be easy to understand the popularity Erdoğan and AKP enjoyed for years. Erdoğan managed to create a wide coalition, which included diverse groups of the Turkish society, such as the pious conservative voters from Central Anatolia, his core electorate that supported his Islamist message; liberals from big Western cities, who supported democratic reform and European integration; as well as many Kurds in the South-West, who saw an opening for a peaceful solution of the Kurdish issue. It is no coincidence that at the time many in Turkey’s Armenian minority also supported AKP policies, as they saw in them an opening for minority rights, as well as for normalization of relations with Armenia. Even though Erdoğan and AKP largely continued the traditional policy of denial regarding the issue of Armenian Genocide, increased political openness inside Turkish society meant that more and more Turkish intellectuals and journalists were able to speak openly about the events of 1915, stirring a discussion that was unimaginable under AKP’s predecessors. ➤

Interestingly, all this did not prevent Erdogan from flirting with the nationalist discourse. In theory, turning to nationalism would be a strange choice for Islamists, as the Kemalist tradition of nationalism was closely tied to the Kemalist tradition of secularism: both nationalism and secularism were considered the pillars of Kemalism and were protected by the Turkish military, the nemesis of Islamists. But in Turkey, when it comes to religion and nationalism, things are much more complicated. Erdogan's version of political Islam also had a nationalist streak to it.

Back in 1997, Erdogan received a jail sentence for inciting ethnic and religious hatred, for citing a poem by the founder of Pan-Turkist nationalism, Ziya Gokalp: "The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers...". At the time, the arrest was seen as part of the secular establishment's repression against Islamists. However, the quote from Gokalp is highly indicative of Erdogan's mix of nationalism and Islamism. Today we can see that while Erdogan largely succeeded in dismantling the Kemalist version of Turkish secular nationalism, he seeks to replace it with his own version of Turkish nationalism, which blends nationalism and political Islam. As time passed, not only Erdogan's leadership style took authoritarian turn, but he also gravitated toward Turkish nationalism. It was against this background that the negotiations on the Kurdish issue stalled, while Turkey's policy of "zero problems with the neighbors" was turning into "zero neighbors without problems", to quote some of Erdogan's critics. As Erdogan's policies were changing, so was the electoral coalition that provided him with power: while he was losing support among the liberals and minorities, he was working with the ultra-nationalist sector of the electorate. Xenophobic rhetoric on Erdogan's part became a part of the electoral campaigning. Thus, in 2014 he raised eyebrows by implying that being called "Armenian" was an insult, and one worse than being called "Georgian". "I was called a Georgian [by my opponents]... I apologize for this, but they even said [something] worse: they called me an Armenian", he said in an interview at the time. The recent campaign was not very different in this sense, but this time Erdogan went beyond Turkey's immediate neighbors: Erdogan's accusations of Nazism levelled against Holland and Germany made headlines all over the world. The proponents of the "No" camp were presented by pro-Erdogan media as "stooges" of the imperialist West and, essentially, traitors of the Turkish nation.



Protests against referendum's results

It may be a sign of this trend that Erdogan's position in the constitutional referendum was supported by Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of ultra-nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Though Bahçeli's support was not shared by all his party members and actually led to bitter divisions within the party, the fact that the only major politician who supported Erdogan came from the ultra-nationalist camp, says a lot about the direction of Erdogan's political evolution. Ultimately, in the referendum on April 16, it was this mix of political Islam and Turkish nationalism that prevailed over the secular nationalism embedded in the Kemalist republic.

FREE AND FAIR VOTING OR ELECTION FRAUD?

Thus, skillfully using the nationalist card, Erdogan was able to win the referendum. However, even though this is obviously a success for Erdogan, the referendum also exposed serious challenges for him and his party. First of all, the advantage that allowed "yes" vote to win was minimal: 51.41 vs. 48.59 %. The two parties supporting the "Yes" vote, AKP and MHP had together gained over 60 % in the last election (respectively 49.5 and 11.9 %). This means that some of MHP supporters refused to support Erdogan, in spite of the calls for support voiced by MHP's leader, and it could also mean that some AKP voters refused to support Erdogan's constitutional reform. Moreover, "No" camp won in all major Turkish cities, not only in the Kemalist stronghold Izmir (by 68.8 %), which was expected, but also in the capital Ankara (51.15 %), and in Turkey's biggest city, Istanbul (51.35 %). The loss in Istanbul was especially painful, given the fact that it was from this city that Erdogan's rise to power began, when he was elected mayor of Istanbul. It is no coincidence that



<
Recep Tayyip
Erdoğan

to an extent the advantage of “Yes” votes was due to voting in Turkish Diaspora communities, who received the right to vote recently, under Erdoğan’s government: the first election they were allowed to vote was the presidential election of 2014, which Erdoğan won. In the referendum about 1.4 million votes were cast by Turkish citizens abroad and about 60 % of those were for the “yes” camp. “Why should they decide our country’s future, when they do not live even here”, complained some furious “No” supporters on social networks. All the above mentioned numbers are based on the official results of the election. However, for the first time in recent Turkish history, the official results of the vote are disputed, as the opposition has accused the government of election fraud. In the past, in spite of numerous flaws of Turkish democracy, at least in one sense Turkey could have claimed that it was ahead of various authoritarian and hybrid regimes around the world: the official outcomes of the elections were usually accepted by the losing political forces. This time, however, both the opposition and observers put the election results under doubt. Moreover, while some post-Soviet autocrats have mastered the art of an election fraud to an extent that it is often almost impossible to detect and prove, in Turkey everything has been done in somewhat crude way, undermining Erdoğan’s victory. The big issue was the decision of the Supreme Electoral Council (the body overseeing the election process) to lift the rule that required all ballots to be stamped. This meant that unstamped ballots could also be counted as legitimate, unless there was a proof that such ballots were a result of a fraud. This decision, which essentially meant changing the rules of the game in the middle of the game itself, raised serious

THE LOSS IN ISTANBUL WAS **ESPECIALLY PAINFUL**, GIVEN THE FACT THAT IT WAS FROM THIS CITY THAT ERDOGAN’S RISE TO POWER BEGAN, WHEN HE WAS ELECTED MAYOR

doubts, especially as the number of unstamped ballots reached it about one and half a million. In addition, the conditions for campaigning were extremely unequal. The referendum was taking place against the background of mass arrests and purges that started after last year’s failed coup d’état. Some politicians advocating the “No” vote, particularly from the pro-Kurdish People’s Democracy Party (HDP), were arrested and thus deprived of opportunity of campaigning. Moreover, the media coverage was deeply skewed toward “Yes” camp. State owned media, as well as private media owned by figures close to Erdoğan, actively propagated the “Yes” vote, marginalizing the voices arguing against it. International journalists reporting from Turkey in the days before the election said that while “Yes” posters were everywhere on the streets of Turkish cities, posters advocating for “No” were difficult to come across. Taking all this into account, even OSCE and PACE observing mission, who are usually known for using diplomatic formulas, gave a harsh: the election failed to meet international standards. Erdoğan’s response was defiant: he accused the monitors of prejudice against Turkey and told them that they “should know their place”. So, while Erdoğan did achieve his immediate goals, the referendum result was hardly the one he had hoped for. Several hours after the results were announced, a photo of Erdoğan preparing for his “victory speech” went viral on social networks:

the man in the photo does not look like a winner, the photo shows him visibly shaken and confused. Instead of a definitive mandate, on which Erdogan could rely in order to cement his power, he received questionable legitimacy and an even more divided society, as opposition against him is likely to grow. So far, the groups who have opposed Erdogan have been too different to unite around a single agenda: it is not easy to imagine liberal intellectuals, traditional Kemalists and Kurdish activists coming together around a common platform, let alone a common candidate in the upcoming presidential election. However, the challenges presented by the opposition are likely to grow, especially as the economy is showing no signs of quick recovery.

In this situation, it may have made sense for Erdogan to try to find a compromise with at least part of the opposition, and to abandon some of his most divisive positions. However, this is unlikely to happen, since nationalist rhetoric and marginalizing opponents, together with arrests and purges, have so far worked for Erdogan, at least in the short term. Thus, most probably, we are likely to see more repression against government opponents, more violence in the Kurdish-populated areas, as



^ Devlet Bahçeli, one of Erdogan's main allies

> Erdogan's supporters celebrate the victory

∨ Protesters marching in Istanbul



well as more nationalist and populist rhetoric. All this may help Erdogan in the short term, but it is likely to undermine Turkey's internal stability further.

RALLY AROUND THE FLAG: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM ERDOGAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

How will all this influence Turkey's foreign policy and its relations with neighbors? Obviously, the fact that someone as impulsive and unpredictable as Erdogan, will now wield almost unchecked power, can spell more complications on the international scene. In the late 19th century Ottoman Empire, which was going through a crisis, was known as "the sick man" of Europe. Erdogan, who in the past has picked fights with various neighbors and international actors, created a reputation for himself, which can be summed up as "the crazy man of Eu-

THE FACT THAT SOMEONE AS UNPREDICTABLE AS ERDOGAN, WILL NOW WIELD **ALMOST UNCHECKED POWER**, CAN SPELL MORE COMPLICATIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

rope”, a leader, whose actions can be as radical and dangerous, as they can be unpredictable. It is enough to remember the whole story that involved the shooting down of the Russian airplane, or the tone, with which Erdogan has essentially blackmailed EU using the threat of unleashing migrants through the border, to understand why Erdogan is a tough leader to deal with for his international counterparts.



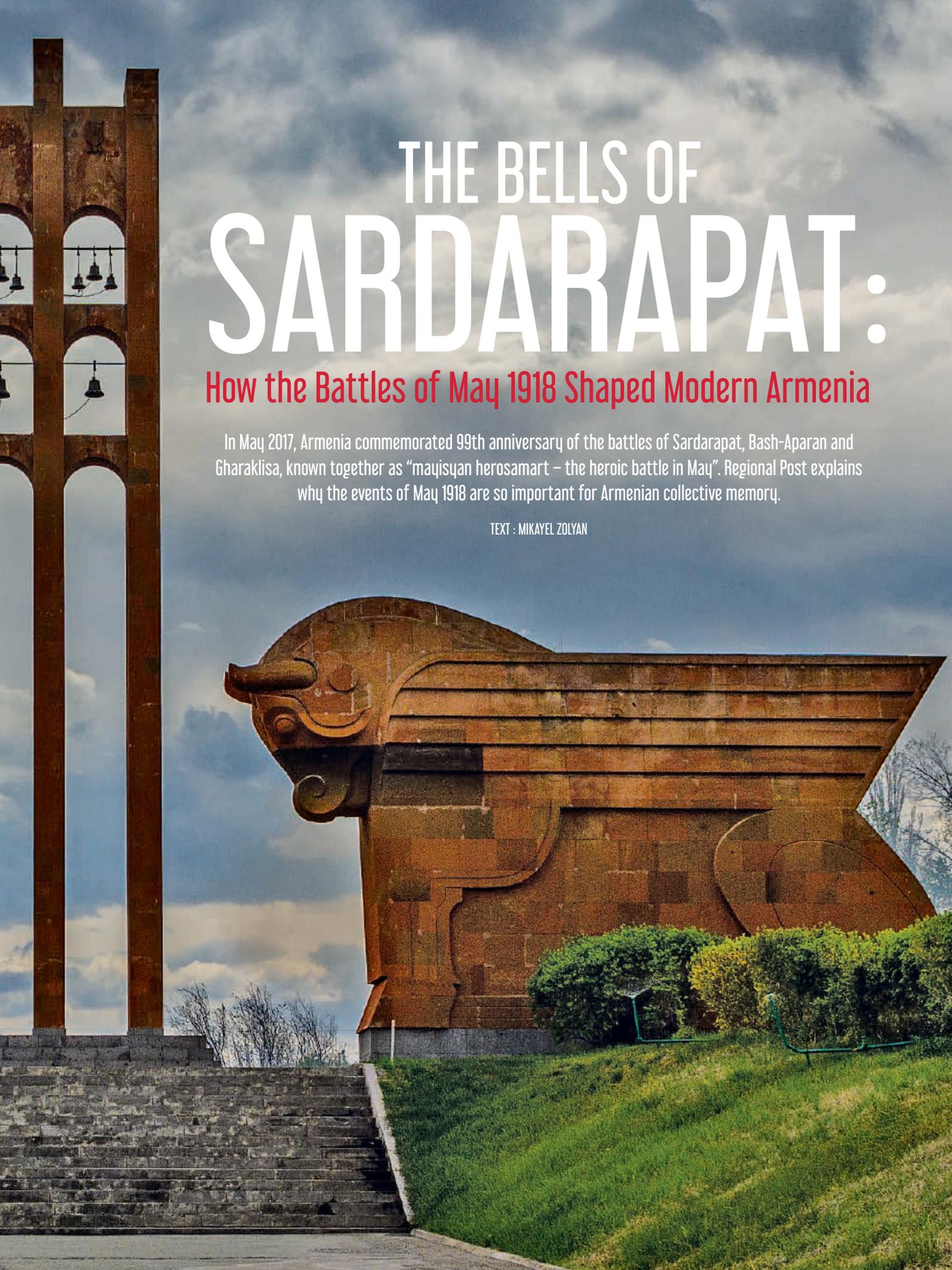
Of course, this image of unpredictable strong-man that emerged around Erdogan, should not hide the reality behind it: Erdogan is a pragmatic and calculating leader, who realizes his own interests and limitations. Besides, he has to deal with leaders, who have been cultivating a similar “tough guy” image, like Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin or Benjamin Netanyahu. No wonder that in relations with such important players as Russia or Israel, periods of staunch confrontations have been followed by attempts to mend relations. And, with all his anti-Western rhetoric, there is so far no indication that Erdogan is actually planning to pull Turkey out of NATO. In fact, relations with the USA, it seems have improved. Observers are noting that Trump and Erdogan share some important characteristics as politicians and this may have helped to establish a new relationship

between the two leaders: Trump was quick to congratulate Erdogan with the victory in the constitutional referendum.

However, while Erdogan certainly can be pragmatic and compromising when it suits him, it is highly likely that internal politics will push him to be more aggressive on the international scene. Gaining popularity at home by being tough to the “enemies” abroad (and within) is one of the most common tricks successfully employed by autocratic leaders of all times. As the rift in Turkish politics is deepening, insecurity as a result of various terrorist attacks is growing and economy is facing serious trouble, Erdogan’s support at home is likely to fall. To prevent this from happening Erdogan may opt once again for what has so far worked well for him: foreign policy based on populist nationalism. Such policy may involve more xenophobic rants, like accusing the Dutch of “being Nazis”, but it may also include more serious steps, such as increased military intervention in Syria, military operations against Kurds inside and outside Turkey, rejection of the migration deal with the EU, and many other things. Even before the constitutional referendum, Erdogan and his allies vowed to re-introduce death penalty, which would automatically mean an end to EU entrance negotiations (which have been stalled anyway). Erdogan’s love affair with Turkish nationalism, which has so far brought him significant political dividends, is unlikely to be over soon.

What does this mean for Armenia? Obviously, if the Armenian-Turkish normalization process failed during much calmer times, it is extremely hard to imagine the political process going forward today. In the past, however, even when the political relations between the two countries stalled, still there was a continued active dialogue on the level of civil societies. Today, this dialogue is also threatened. Turkish civil society has found itself in a restrictive environment, very different from the one several years ago, when Turkish NGOs engaged in numerous projects with their Armenian counterparts. Besides, absence of realistic perspectives of Armenian-Turkish normalization could mean that international organizations and donors may lose interest toward funding Armenian-Turkish initiatives, and international funding has been a major factor, which allowed the Armenian-Turkish civil society dialogue to happen. Finally, the atmosphere of intolerance and repression which is on the rise in Turkish society, will make it more difficult for open-minded Turks to continue their work on dismantling taboos, especially when it comes to such sensitive issues as the memory of Armenian Genocide. ♦





THE BELLS OF SARDARAPAT:

How the Battles of May 1918 Shaped Modern Armenia

In May 2017, Armenia commemorated 99th anniversary of the battles of Sardarapat, Bash-Aparan and Gharaklisa, known together as “maqisyan herosamart – the heroic battle in May”. Regional Post explains why the events of May 1918 are so important for Armenian collective memory.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN

“THE MAD ONES FIND A WAY”

When American rock band System of a Down was playing in Ziggo Dome arena in Amsterdam on April 17 2015, most of their songs were in English, except one. It was an Armenian patriotic song, called “Sardarapat” (Sartarabad in Western Armenian pronunciation). A week later, when the band played the song on the Republic Square in Yerevan, the crowd joined in singing along:

*When there is no choice or way out
 The mad ones find a way
 Thus was conceived
 The great battle of Sardarapat.*



Collectible Armenian coin, dedicated to Sardarapat battle, 1994

The song itself, is not a Diasporan Armenian or “Dashnak” song, as some System of a Down fans seem to think. In fact, it was written in 1968 in Soviet Armenia and is a result of collaboration of poet Paruyr Sevak and composer Edgar Hovhannisyan. Moreover, it was commissioned by the government of the Soviet Armenia to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the battle of Sardarapat, as a grand memorial was being built at the site of the battle. It was the architect of the memorial, Rafayel Israyelyan who suggested that Hovhannisyan and Sevak write the song. Probably, this is why the song contains a reference to “the bells of Sardarapat”: the memorial building includes an impressive bell tower. Interestingly, the battle of Sardarapat was one of the few episodes of history of 1918-1920, which by the 1960s came to be viewed in positive light in Soviet Armenia. Other aspects of the history of the “first republic” were largely seen in a negative light, since “Dashnaksutyun”, which was the dominant party in the period of independence, was considered “anti-Soviet”.

It is not coincidental that the battle of Sardarapat in May 1918, when Armenian forces defeated advancing Turkish army, occupies a major place in Armenian national imagination. To be fair, Sardarapat was only one of the three battles between Turkish army and Armenian forces, which played out between May 21 and May 27. Apart



“Battle of Sardarapat”, Sargis Muradyan



◀
Armenian volunteers during World War I, 1914

from Sardarapat, Armenians also fought the Turkish army at Gharakilisa (Vanadzor) and Bash-Aparan (Aparan). The three battles are known together as the “heroic battles of May” or “the May victories”. Sardarapat is the most well-known of the three, probably because it was here that Armenians defeated the Turkish troops advancing in the direction of Yerevan and Echmiadzin. The significance of the “victories of May” is difficult to overestimate. The consensus among most Armenian historians is that without these victories the Armenian population of Eastern Armenia could have been subjected to a genocidal campaign, similar to the one carried out in Western Armenia in 1915-1916. Moreover, arguably, the very existence of Armenia as a political unit (whether as an independent republic or as a “Soviet republic”) is to a large extent a result of “the victories of May”. Such an assessment of the “May victories” may seem somewhat exaggerated today, yet in spring 1918 Armenia and Armenians faced an existential danger.

OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND THE CAUCASUS FRONT

By 1917 it seemed that the worst had already passed for Armenians, as the Russian army, having defeated Turkish forces, controlled most of Western Armenia. Some genocide survivors, who had sought refuge in Eastern Armenia, were even returning to their destroyed homes, protected by the Russian army. When in February 1917 a democratic revolution took place in Russia, at first, it seemed there was no cause for concern from the point of view of Armenians. The Provisionary Government, which was formed in Russia, ensured its allies that it would continue its participation in the war against Germany and its allies, including Turkey, and Russian forces, which included Armenian volunteer regiments, stayed on their positions in Western Armenia. Yet, by the end of 1917 situation had changed completely. The October coup-d'état (or October

THE VERY EXISTENCE OF ARMENIA AS A POLITICAL UNIT (WHETHER AS AN **INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC** OR AS A “**SOVIET REPUBLIC**”) IS A RESULT OF “THE VICTORIES OF MAY”

revolution, depending on one’s point of view) carried out by Bolsheviks, became the turning point. Under the influence of Bolshevik propaganda of “immediate peace with no annexations and contributions” Russian soldiers started leaving their positions. In March 1918 Bolsheviks signed the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, by which Russia not only promised to withdraw from the territories it had occupied during the war, but also ceded new territories to Germany and its allies. Thus, by the Brest-Litovsk Russia ceded to Turkey the territories Russia had received as a result of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, namely the regions of Kars and Batumi.

Since winter 1917 Turkish army started advancing on the positions left by retreating Russians. To Armenians the arrival of Turkish troops meant almost certain death, so thousands of people, who had managed to escape the genocide in 1915-1916 and had returned to their homes, became refugees once again. Armenian volunteers and ethnic Armenians serving in the Russian army, formed the Armenian military corps, led by General Tovmas Nazarbekyan (Nazarbekov), which resisted the advancing Turkish army. However, these Armenian forces were small in numbers, lacked equipment, and many Armenian fighters also lacked military training. In addition, the Armenian population of the region, where the fighting was taking place, had dwindled as a result of the genocide, while the local Muslim population was hostile to Armenians and helped the advancing Turkish troops. As a result, the Armenian forces, were not able to stop the Turkish offensive. ➤

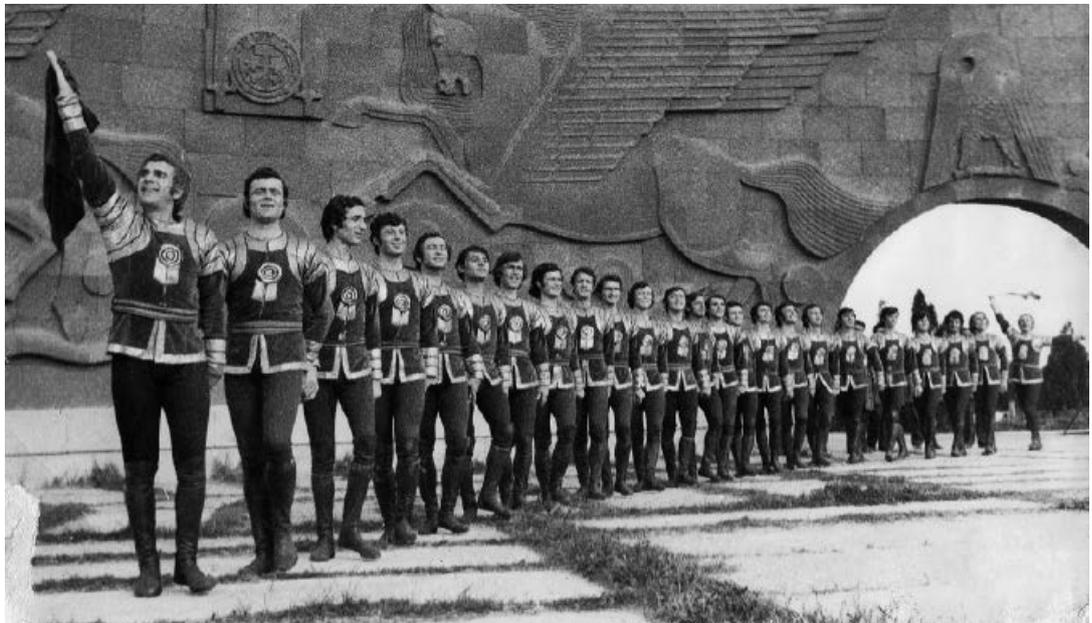


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 Eduard Shevardnadze, Karen Demirchyan and future president of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev in Sardarabat memorial, 1980's.

TRANSCAUCASIAN FEDERATION: AN ATTEMPT DOOMED TO FAILURE
 Turkish advances had not just military, but also political causes, namely the political vacuum left by the Russian revolution. After the Bolsheviks seized power, most of the South Caucasus refused to acknowledge their legitimacy. Yet the future of the region remained unclear. In February 1918 a legislative body, the Transcaucasian Sejm, was formed from the ranks of those deputies of Russian Constituent Assembly, who had been elected from Transcaucasian region (the Constituent Assembly had been shut down by the Bolsheviks by that time). On April 22, 1918 they declared Transcaucasia an independent federative republic.

Yet, Transcaucasian Federation was a stillborn political project. The three main ethnicities in the region, Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis (at the time commonly referred to as Caucasian Tatars, or simply Muslims) had conflicting interests, especially when it came to the issue of dealing with Turkey. Armenians were reluctant to secede from Russia, as they still saw Russia as a bulwark against Turkish aggression. Georgians were hoping that it was still possible to reach a peace deal with Turkey through diplomatic means. Finally, most Muslims in Transcaucasia saw advancing Turkish armies as a friendly force. Armenian, Georgian and Muslim “national councils”, which claimed to represent the interests of their respective ethnicities, often clashed on the most important issues, making efficient decision-making in the Transcaucasian Federation virtually impossible. Here is how the Transcaucasian Federation is described in his memoirs by Gevorg Melik-Gharagoyan (Georgi Melik-Karakozov), a contemporary and participant of these events, who later went on to serve as a minister in the government of independent Armenia: “the more the Turks advanced on the Caucasian front... the more obvious became the nominal nature of power of the Transcaucasian Sejm and government, heterogeneity and even sharp contradictions of national-political orientations of the main Transcaucasian nationalities. Transcaucasian Tatars unequivocally wished for the arrival of the Turks; Georgians hesitated, choosing between diplomacy and war; while Armenians,

>
 Armenian folk dance berd performed in Sardarabat memorial



knowing that no conciliation and peace was possible between them and Turks, were in a feverish state as they realized that they were completely on their own and faced a mortal danger”

FROM HUMILIATION TO VICTORY

It was against this background that Turkish forces were advancing on the front. The Kars fortress was surrendered without a fight on April 25, 1918, in spite of the immense amount of weapons and ammunition that was stored there. According to historian Richard Hovhannisian’s assessment, there were 11 000 guns, 2 million bullets, 67 cannons and 19 machine guns and the fortress could have defended itself for at least two months. The surrender of Kars was a result of the disarray that existed in the Transcaucasian Federation both on the political and military levels. On May 15, Turkish forces entered Eastern Armenia’s second largest city, Aleksandrapol (Gyumri). They now directly threatened the heart of Eastern Armenia, the Ararat valley and Yerevan, which by that time were flooded by refugees from territories already occupied by Turkish forces. It seemed that ultimate military defeat and subsequent destruction of Armenian population were imminent, and only a miracle could have saved them. Indeed, what happened next, seemed like a miracle.

Faced by the threat of ultimate destruction, Armenians mobilized all the resources. There simply was nowhere to run to. The choice was between fighting till the end and perishing. Here is what the Catholicos Gevorg the 5th said at the time. “The Turk, our bloodthirsty enemy, has captured Aleksandrapol and is moving into the heart of our country, of our history, of our faith, into Echmiadzin. Our generals suggest that we leave to the enemy the Holy See of Echmiadzin, our shrines and find refuge in Byurakan. No, no, thousand times no, I will not leave the Holy See, which we inherited from our sacred ancestors. If our soldiers are unable to stop the advance of the enemy, if they cannot save our shrines, then let me perish right here” (“Azdak” newspaper, May 25, 1918).

It was this spirit of resistance, coupled with the expertise and experience of Armenian officers that allowed to stop the advancement of Turkish forces. This was the first time in the campaign that Armenian forces were able not just to stop Turkish troops’ advance, but also to force them to retreat. Strictly speaking, of the three “May victories” only two, the battles of Sardarapat and Bash-Aparan ended in a definitive Armenian victory. The battle of Sardarapat that started in the early hours of



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May 22, ended with the victory of Armenian forces commanded by Movses Silikyan (Silikov). On May 26 the Turkish forces had to retreat toward Aleksandrapol. In Bash-Aparan Armenian forces led by Drastamat Kanayan (Dro) defeated the Turkish troops, preventing them from threatening Yerevan from the North. Finally, in Gharaklisa the Armenian forces, commanded by Nazarbekov himself, had in the end to leave the town, but the fierce resistance they had offered the Turkish troops, forced the latter to halt their advance.

But by the end of May, the Transcaucasian Federation no longer existed, as the independence of both Georgia and Azerbaijan was declared and the Armenian National Council had no choice but to declare itself as the highest authority in Armenian lands on May 28, 1918. Armenians were left on their own against an overwhelming Turkish force, and, obviously, the risks of continuing the fight were too high. The leadership of the newly independent republic had to agree to extremely severe conditions of peace treaty, which was signed on June 4th in Batumi. Not only Armenia’s territory was limited to about 10 000 square kilometers, but Turkey also received the right to use Armenia’s territory for transportation of its military forces, as well as an ability to interfere into Armenia’s internal affairs. However, the main result of the treaty was that a state called “Armenia” appeared on the map. Since then, in the course of almost a century, the borders and the status of the political unit called “Armenia” changed several times. Yet, the possibility of the name “Armenia” simply disappearing from the map was averted, thanks to the “May victories”. ♦

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