

REGIONAL POST

CAUCASUS

#2 / 2018

28

ANNE KEMPA:

"Look for role models
who will give you strength"

32

KATRIN
SCHAEFER:
"The aim is
to form viable
structures"

38

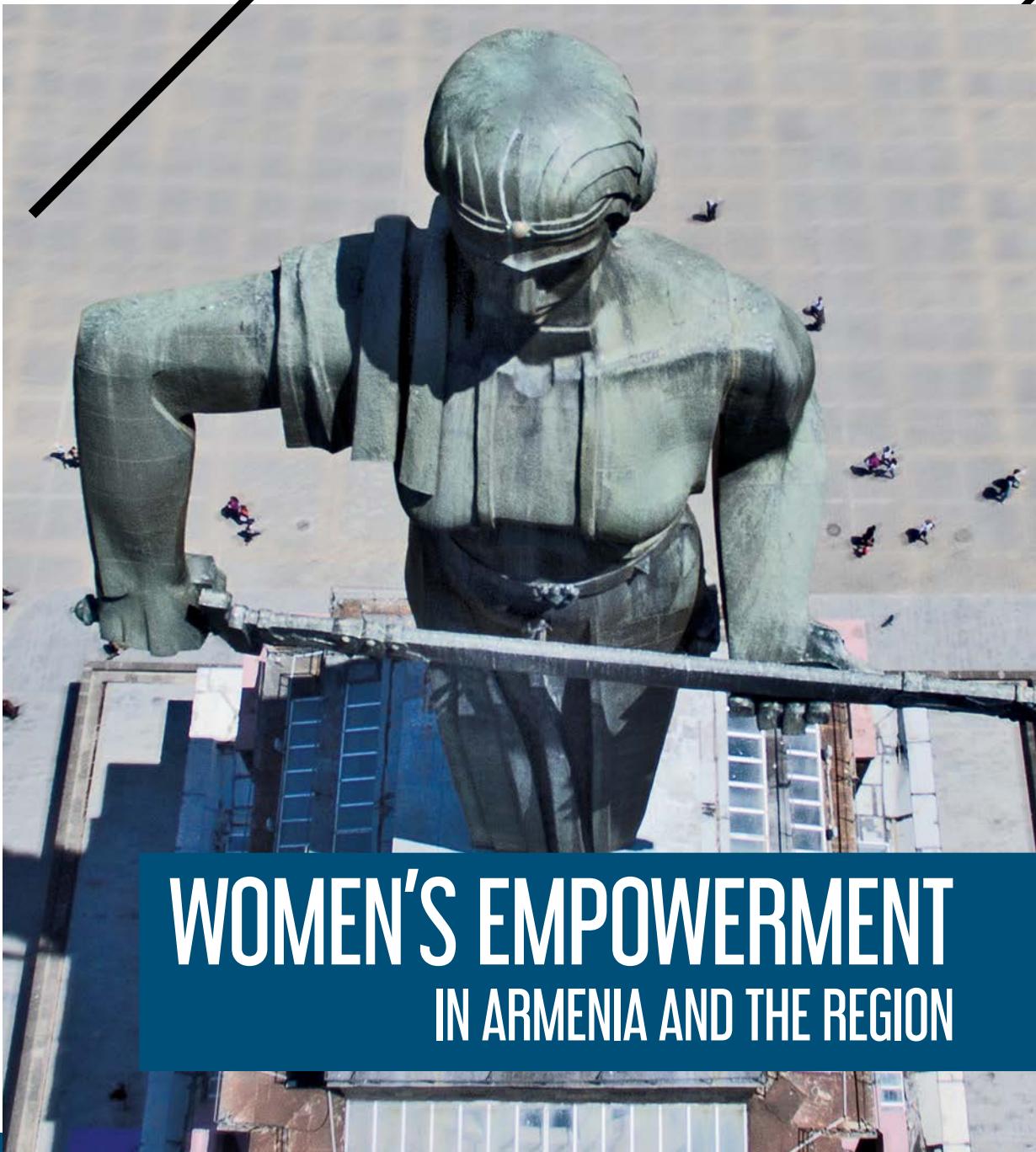
GIZ SUPPORTS:
7 woman leaders
in Armenian
communities

22

FEMINISTS
OF THE REGION:
Armenia, Iran,
Azerbaijan,
Georgia

88

ANGEL
OF LEBANON:
Traveling to the
post-war Beirut



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT
IN ARMENIA AND THE REGION



Gyumri Ceramics

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

The prestigious galleries such as “Galerie de la Tour” in Lyon in 2016 and “Galerie de Gourney” in Paris in 2017 held exhibition-sales 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 exhibitions were initiated by Muscari, an association for the promotion of Armenian and French cultural heritages, and its president Manoug Pamokdjian.

The events were organized as part of the global project aimed at the promotion of the economic and artistic prowess of Gyumri, initiated by Antonio Montaldo, 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 exhibitions 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 other prestigious locations in France followed by a tour in various European cities throughout 2018-2019.

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



DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Dear reader,

We are happy to present you our special issue dedicated to women's empowerment in Armenia and South Caucasus.

"Better than flowers" is the name of one of our articles, it can also describe the spirit with which we tried to tackle the very complicated topic of gender equality and female empowerment.

We like to boast about how gallant and gentlemanly our nation is and how much we value and respect our girls, our wives and our mothers.

After all, we are maybe the only country where you have two special days dedicated to women – March 8 and April 7, with the month spanning the two days often pompously declared as the women's month. During those days the sales of flowers, chocolate and even kitchen appliances go through the roof, and it really looks like in every family, school or workplace people are finding ways to honor women.

In reality, there is still a huge gender pay gap in Armenia, the domestic violence issue is still relevant, especially in the regions, and Armenia is still one of the leading countries in sex-selective

abortions despite the positive progress of the last years. The situation varies only slightly in the other countries of our region.

We keep saying that we need to radically rethink the women's role in our society and we need to make our men understand that women should be welcomed as equal partners both in their workplaces and in their families, but we are somehow unclear as to the way of doing it. Sure, a lot of progress was done during the recent years, but the gap, however, remains significant. I'm absolutely convinced that unleashing the potential of our women – or basically more than the half of our population – will not only bring an outstanding positive change to our society but also real and unparalleled economic benefits to our country.

What we have tried to do in this issue is to present this topic as best as we can, but above all, we tried to highlight the individuals who, be it activists or simply positive role models, often unconsciously, are changing our society for the better. One small step at a time.

Executive Director
ARSHAK TOVMASYAN



Cover Photo: DAVIT ABRAHAMYAN [DroDrone]

Executive Director
ARSHAK TOVMASYAN

Art Director
NONA ISAJANYAN

Editor in Chief
ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN

Layout Designer
ARTAK SARGSYAN

Proof Editing
SILVA HOVAKIMYAN

Sales Manager
MARIAM CHAKARYAN

Contributors

KARINE GHAZARYAN, LIKA MKRTCHYAN, AMALIE KHACHATRYAN, VIKTORYA MURADYAN, TIGRAN ZAKARYAN, MARINE MANUCHARYAN, LENA GEVORGIAN, SHARMAGH SAKOUNTS, TATEVIK STEPANYAN, ANET SHAMIRIAN

Photos and illustrations

MARIAM LORETSYAN, GIZ, WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER ARMENIA, AGBU, EIVA ARTS FOUNDATION, DEEM COMMUNICATIONS, USAID, PHOTO ATELIER MARASHLYAN, PHILIP MORRIS ARMENIA, BRAVO.AM, ZARUHI MURADYAN'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE

Regional Post LLC
Address: Augedzor 62/1
regionalpost.org
email: contact@regionalpost.org
phone: +374 55 387887

Printed in "TIGRAN METS" PUBLISHING HOUSE CJSC

© 2016-2018 Regional Post
Any use of the materials or extracts from the magazine in any language is permitted exclusively upon the written consent of Regional Post LLC

Գրանցման վկայական՝ N օ3Ա962676

Գրանցման ամսաթիվ՝ 07.05.2014

Հասցե՝ Ք. Երևան, Ալեքսանդր 62/1



Համարը լույս է տեսել
ՀՀ Մշակույթի նախարարական աջակցությամբ

CONTENT

EXCLUSIVE

- 04 GEORGES KEPENEKIAN:
“THERE IS NO DOUBT OVER MY ATTACHEMENT TO ARMENIA”
Exclusive interview of Lyon mayor.



EVENTS

- 07 ARARAT
THE OFFICIAL PARTNER OF BRODSKY/BARYSHNIKOV PERFORMANCE
When brandy meets poetry.
- 08 ARMENIA ART FAIR
One of its kind art event to take place in Yerevan.

BUSINESS & SOCIETY

- 10 NATALIA MAYOROVA:
“WOMEN CAN MAKE THE BUSINESS WORLD A BETTER PLACE”
General Manager of Philip Morris Armenia on company's special attitude towards gender equality.

- 18 ALAIN TOUHADIAN:
“ONE CAN USE LOCAL INGREDIENTS TO INVENT EXQUISITE MEALS”
Chairman of the Board of the French Armenian Development Foundation about its projects in two countries.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- 20 WONDER WOMEN
Women activists of the region: Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Azerbaijan.
- 28 ANNE KEMPA:
“LOOK FOR ROLE MODELS WHO WILL GIVE YOU STRENGTH”
Country Director of GIZ in Armenia about her recipe to stay protected from possible discrimination.



- 32 KATRIN SCHAEFER:
“THE AIM IS TO FORM VISIBLE STRUCTURES”
Team Leader of the Good Local Governance Program in Armenia the role of women in decision-making in Armenia and Europe.



- 14 DEBORAH GRIESER:
“TO SEE ARMENIA WITHOUT ANY NEED FOR ASSISTANCE”
Mission Director at USAID Armenia on bridging the gender gap in Armenia and in the US.
- 17 ARPİ KARAPETYAN:
“IF YOU DO NOT REGARD YOURSELF IN A DISCRIMINATIVE WAY, NO ONE WILL”
Founder of Cascade People & Business about the challenges the labor market faces.

- 36 BETTER THAN FLOWERS
“Women and Local Governance” conference took place in Yerevan.

**38 SEVEN STORIES:
WOMAN LEADERS IN COMMUNITIES**
As Part of the Good Local Governance Program South Caucasus, GIZ supports empowerment of local female politicians in the municipalities of Armenia.

**46 AMALYA YEGHOYAN:
"NOT BEING AN IT PERSON HELPED ME"**
Inspiring story of deputy minister at the ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technologies in just a decade.

48 PERSONAL CONVERSATION
Roundtable discussion with six young female entrepreneurs about what inspired them to found their own companies.

**54 WOMEN IN WINE:
STEREOTYPES BROKEN!**
More and more Armenian women demonstrate interest in winemaking on a professional level.

**56 FROM OPPORTUNITY TO EMPOWERMENT:
DARING TO LEARN**
The two internships in GIZ became life-changing for Asya Ghazaryan.

**58 NARINE ALEKSANYAN:
"NOT ONLY FOR 'TICKING THE BOX'"**
Women rights in Armenian from the legal point of view.

59 CRIME AND PUNISHMENT
Debates around Domestic violence law in Armenia.



**62 TALAR KAZANJIAN:
"WE WANT TO CREATE A REAL
COMMUNITY OF FEMALE LEADERS"**
Executive Director of AGBU Armenia on what the organization does for empowerment of Armenian women.



**66 LENA NAZARYAN:
"LIVING EXAMPLES OF POWER ARE THE
SHORTEST WAY TOWARDS EQUALITY"**
Interview with one of the most active female politicians in Armenia.

**68 ESTERA MKRTUMYAN:
"DIPLOMACY IS GOING TO BE EQUALLY
DIFFICULT FOR EVERYONE"**
Armenia's ambassador to Argentina talks about gender equality.

**70 ANNA AGHAJANYAN:
"I DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE ARMENIA IS
FUNDAMENTALLY A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY"**
Former Armenian ambassador to Indonesia on being a woman diplomat.

72 FEELING CLOSER TO ART
Art projects by Eiva Arts Foundation.



**74 ARMINE ZAKARYAN:
LEADER VS BOSS**
Insights from DEEM's Director.

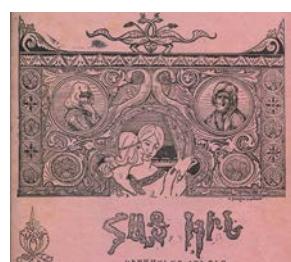
76 GIRLS IN TECH
Future for geek girls in Armenia.

77 INNOVATIVE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Association of individual women entrepreneurs owned and managed by women.

78 NOT 'IN SPITE OF', BUT 'THANKS TO'
Aub Club member Julia Danielyan about the importance of earning money in order to help others.

80 DEPRIVATIZATION
Ethnographers on why the state rules in Armenia are usually weaker than customs and traditions.

**82 ARMENIAN WOMEN'S LONG HISTORY
BEFORE 1920:**
**WHAT WE KNOW AND CHOOSE NOT TO
KNOW ABOUT ARMENIAN FEMINISM**



WORLD

88 THE ANGEL OF LEBANON
Regional Post's trip to Beirut.

ARTIFACT

94 TRADITIONS BECOMING TRENDY
Photoshoots wearing traditional taraz became trendy thanks to Marashlyan Photo Atelier.

96 WOMEN ON SOVIET POSTERS
March 8, fight for equality and other themes.

GEORGES KEPENEKIAN:

"THERE IS NO DOUBT OVER MY ATTACHEMENT TO ARMENIA"



Mr Mayor, you are in Armenia today to sign the protocol of cooperation between Lyon and Yerevan, the sister-cities. What are the benefits for both cities from such partnership? What is the added value?

— It's up to the cities to do with it what they can. Lyon has similar agreements with Frankfurt, Leipzig, Montreal, Turin... But the institute of sister-cities is not relevant anymore. It made sense some time ago, but now, especially for the smaller cities this type of cooperation consists of two visits in both locations, official speeches and a buffet. That's it. The city sisterhood or the pact of friendship, that's what we have with Yerevan, has the value both parties attribute to. This pact was first signed in 1992. Since then we had a lot of projects, visits and meetings. This time we also inaugurated the garden of Lyon created in Yerevan by the initiative of the Yerevan municipality. We also suggested to think about urbanism, but it's complicated as our approaches are quite different. So, in brief, we suggested our delegation to

▲ Képénékian and Armenian president Serj Sargsyan in Armenia, 2018

➤ Képénékian's inauguration as a Mayor of Lyon

be a little different this time – we do not need to have 15 Armenians on the delegation to show that the mayor of Lyon likes this country. There is no doubt over my attachment to Armenia, so we decided to go in another direction than before, we decided to bring people who can have a real impact – the president of the Lyon University, CEOs of some of the major businesses of our Metropolis, the head of the Lyon library, our vice-president who is in charge for digital and innovation, our directors responsible for the "Fête de Lumière".

Mayor of Lyon, France, Georges Képénékian was in Yerevan with an official visit: the two cities have had "sister" relations since 1992. Regional Post had an exclusive interview the French mayor of Armenian descent about the advantages of cooperation between the two cities, challenges of modern day urbanism, and similarities between being a mayor and a surgeon.

INTERVIEW : ARSHAK TOVMASYAN



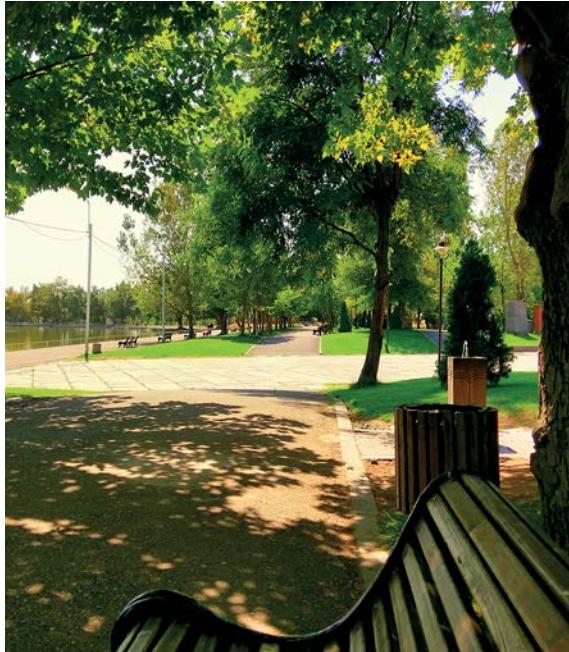
I can see the added value for Yerevan, but what about Lyon?

— Lyon does not participate in such partnerships just for pleasure. In return we have an opportunity for mobilization, for new projects. So, when, for example, we go to Japan, where we have a similar partnership with the city of Yokohama, we benefit from exchanging our experiences, from creating partnership opportunities for entrepreneurs, universities, and cultural establishments. This is an oppor-

tunity for our metropolis to open itself to the world and to also support our businesses to find new markets. Today, Yerevan is at the Eurasian Union. As President Hollande said, we are not offended that you are on the other side, on the contrary, we tell our businesses, if you are interested in the Eurasian market you should pass by Armenia.

You talked about the digital. In general, what are the challenges of the city management in the 21st century?

— The digital is just one of the tools available. The challenge is the new way of thinking. The smart cities start to reflect on new modes of decision-making, citizen relationship, transparency, interactivity... Just as in hospitals we can no more just heal the patients without explaining what we do, so they can check if they want to be sure our decisions are not wrong. We need to think about a metropolis as a place where the negative sides of the urbanism balance out with a lot of positive ones



Lyon Park in Yerevan



such as universities, clean environment, sustainable development, but also the economic power. You know today the 300 top cities in the world produce 48% of the global GDP. A metropolis is a place where the wealth is created and distributed, often better than anywhere else, but it's also a place where the inequality and the social injustice can form very quickly. That's why some people think metropolis is the devil, but it's not about the devil or the paradise, we simply need to find a balance. The concept of the smart city is to think of the city in its totality – from education to transportation, water quality or clean environment.



GEORGES KÉPÉNKIAN

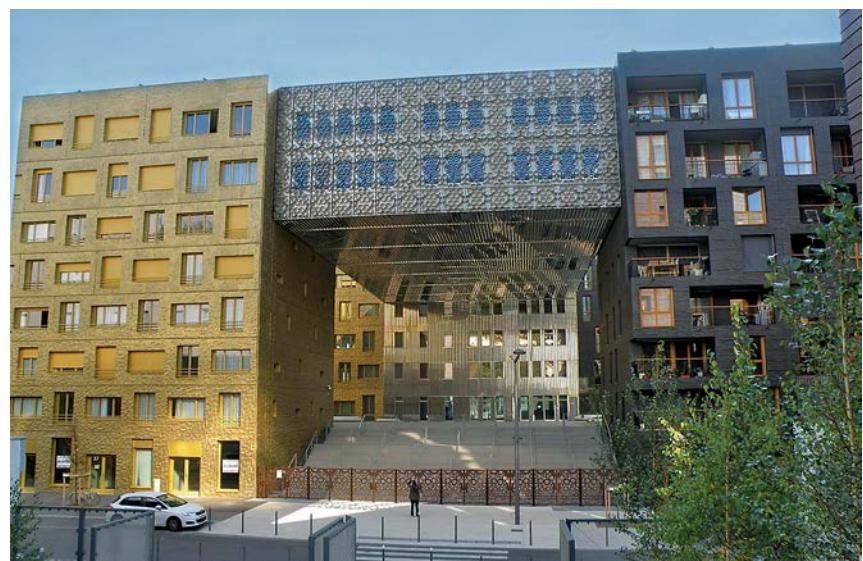
A member of France's Socialist Party, and a Mayor of Lyon since 17 July 2017. Born in the same city in Armenian family, he is a doctor and surgeon in urology and prior to his election as mayor was the strategic director of Centre hospitalier Saint-Joseph Saint-Luc in Lyon since 2005. He was elected as Lyon municipal counselor from the 3rd arrondissement of Lyon and became a permanent member of the greater Metropolitan Lyon area Municipal Council. Since 2008, he headed the municipality's culture, great events and citizens' rights portfolios and in 2014, was appointed as principal deputy mayor to Lyon mayor Gérard Collomb. On July 17, 2017, after nomination of mayor Gérard Collomb as French Interior Minister in the first Édouard Philippe government under president Emmanuel Macron, Képénékian was elected by the Municipal Council as mayor of the city with 49 votes, 13 more than the required absolute majority.

Lyon is an exceptional city when we consider the reflection behind its solutions in urbanism, sustainable development, recycling. Did you plan any workshops or knowledge transfer programs with Yerevan for such topics?

— This is the content of the program we are trying to prepare. We need to try. The mayor of Yerevan announced that Yerevan is qualified as a smart city. Very good. But for me it is a suitcase term, too general. For example, we collaborate very closely with the city of Montreal for a long time. We can see what kind of cooperation we need to have to really benefit each other. This type of cooperation is what we want to start with Yerevan.

You are medical doctor by your first specialty. Do you think it is something that helps you in city management? After all, we may apply the concepts of healing or prescribing meds.

— For many an illness is also an injustice. I became aware of the injustice from which the Armenian people suffered throughout their history many years ago. This same feeling of injustice pushed me to become a surgeon. And from being a surgeon to be involved in the social injustice is only one step. Of course, it's not the same and you have to be careful, but the surgical profession teaches you to manage a dossier, forge



an opinion, diagnose an illness and then apply a remedy. This is a method I find indispensable in my engagements as a politician and as a mayor. The politician often thinks that he makes a diagnosis, but he doesn't, or sometimes he does it but under the pressure of his environment. What is important is to stay lucid. In the beginning of my carrier as a politician I liked going to hospital from time to time to leave an open window towards the real life, as a politician can quite quickly lock himself in a beautiful tower where the perception of reality may start to escape him.

You are going to finish your mandate one day: what's next?

— I didn't plan to become the mayor of Lyon, so you see I don't really know, but I believe Armenia can be part of my future.

Become a mayor of Yerevan, maybe?

— Haha! There is a small problem of my age. I also believe we need to help the new generations taking responsibility, so probably I will be one of those who will help them to move forward. ♦

ARARAT

The official partner of Brodsky/ Baryshnikov performance

This February in the frames of the "Cherry Orchard" International Festival of the Arts on the stage of Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Chicago a one-man show Brodsky/Baryshnikov took place directed by Alvis Hermanis, director of The New Riga Theatre. The only performer of the play was Mikhail Baryshnikov, who celebrated his 70th anniversary this year.



The play, which makes people emigrate to the places where it is held, was defined by creators as "emotional journey into the depths of poetry." The unsurpassed Baryshnikov reads poetry and prose of the Nobel Laureate in literature, his friend Joseph Brodsky. Appearing on stage with the suitcase which might be the one Brodsky left his homeland with, the hero of Baryshnikov takes a book out of it, puts on his glasses and dives into reading... a memory, an emotional experience.

The culmination of the interweaving of the allusions of the great poet and great dancer became the voice of Brodsky himself heard from the old reel recorder, which found its harmo-

nious place in laconic, but emotionally incredibly dense decorations.

Reading the text, Baryshnikov, who has repeatedly overcome gravity in his ballet performances and has refused to believe in the inaccessibility of perfection, gradually starts to outline the words in motion, with a hint, but eloquently; involuntary gesture, but in the rhythm of the text; indirectly, but precisely, leaving the viewer alone with a whole gamut of inexpressible impressions.

At the end of the play, on behalf of ARARAT, in the quintessence of which is the mastery and search for new forms of its expression, a special reception was held, where the guests could share their impressions with a glass of legendary Armenian brandy. ♦



ARMENIA ART FAIR

The foundations of Armenian art are both ancient and modern, with a legacy that has continuously reinvented and adapted itself to the changes that have shaped the nation throughout its history. Today, Armenia is home to dozens of museums, a number of art colleges and a thriving art scene, making 2018 the perfect time to host the very first Armenia Art Fair. Regional Post presents the team behind this event, women devoted to art.



On May 11-14, Yerevan Expo Centre will welcome galleries from countries of the former Soviet Union, the Black Sea region, the UK, the Middle East and beyond, to exhibit their work and to promote new ideas and relationships that cross borders. The fair will have 20 booths of both emerging and established galleries, presenting artists at different stages in their careers. Young and budding talent will receive the same exposure as established practitioners with a Millennial Spotlight that will highlight artists aged 25-years and under, with recognized artists being represented by galleries.

Supported by art-world professionals and curators from France, Russia and Austria, Armenia Art Fair will also provide evening events which will feature leading critics and academics to discuss trends in the local and global contemporary art world and art market.

"The first international Art Fair in Armenia will bring together galleries, artists, collectors, and art enthusiasts to create an exceptional celebration of art that will drive momentum for galleries and artists and the whole Armenian art scene to demonstrate the financial potential of this market," says curator Eva Khachatryan.

To address challenges faced by Armenian artists in terms of gaining international visibility, the fair, which is organised and funded by the newly established Aragil Art Foundation, is striving to build a local art market that can function within the international and global art world, as well as promote Armenia as an international center for the creative industries.

Why Armenia? Situated at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, this historic country has a unique position at the intersection of cultures, traditions and ideas. A clear advantage in this endeavor is the large footprint the global Armenian diaspora has on the world. Leveraged properly, the diasporan experience, as well as the involvement of many talented Armenians in these



fields, can aid Armenia's artistic evolution as a center for creativity with something to offer the world at home and abroad.

"We want to encourage artistic investment in the country to advance arts education and foster a new generation of talent," says founder Nina Festekjian, and adds, "by showcasing creative achievements through the fair and similar cultural events, we will maintain international standards of professionalism."

The launch team for the art fair is comprised of successful professional women who bring specific areas of expertise as well as varied cultural and intellectual perspectives with a collective desire to make the international local and the local international, with the ultimate goal of Armenia Art Fair to be the bridge that links these two worlds.

By highlighting Armenia's appeal as an artistic hub, the fair will also help boost the country as a tourist destination. Yerevan is a short distance by car to many of the abundant historical sites across Armenia, providing ample opportunity for visitors to the art fair to add to their cultural experiences and enjoyment. We are preparing for your arrival and welcome you to Yerevan!



EXHIBITION AND MARKET PLACE FEATURING MODERN, POST-MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART



Boston based **Nina Festekjian** is co-founder of YerazArt, a non-profit organisation, whose mission is to assist young Armenian musicians and help them reach their full potential. Festekjian, the founder of Armenia Art Fair, is a successful businesswoman and art patron who has organised multiple fundraising events in support of Armenian arts and culture.



The fair's curator is **Eva Khachatryan**. She is the vice-president of AICA Armenia International Association of Art Critics and a member of the International Committee of ICOM for Museums and Collections of Modern and Contemporary Art. Khachatryan has curated exhibitions in Vienna and Yerevan, and worked in conjunction with the "Culturescapes" festival in Basel, Switzerland.



Zara Ouzounian-Halpin is a cultural producer, and co-founder of the fair. Armenian-British, she grew up in Yerevan, and has lived in the UK, Rus-

sia, and the US. Ouzounian-Halpin developed a national art contest and exhibition of young Russian artists for the EU, as well as an art show and auction at Winzavod Gallery in Moscow. She has a background organizing diplomatic, charitable and social events and is the founder of an online gallery that features Armenian artists.



Ira Mnatsakanian is a project manager who has implemented arts and cultural projects in Geneva, Venice, and New York. In 2013 she produced the opera "Anoush." Among other international projects, Mnatsakanian organised a large exhibition of Armenian artists and a series of jazz concerts in Geneva. In AAF she heads up Cultural and Special Projects.



Sarah Watterson is a practicing abstract artist and communications expert with a background in journalism and graphic design. She has lived and worked in Africa, the Middle East, Russia, Georgia, and will soon relocate to Armenia. Watterson is fair's communications director.



Arevik Grigorian has been the studio design director for "– O –Soleill." Since 2013 she is a technical expert for a construction company which specializes in securing building projects worldwide. Arevik is leading the exhibition production process.



Lizzy Vartanian Collier is a writer, editor and curator based in London. She runs the Gallery Girl blog and has written for Harper's Bazaar Arabia, Canvas and the Guardian. Her Perpetual Movement exhibition was featured in Vogue Arabia and The Art Newspaper. She is helping write the AAF blog as well as with press and PR.



Nona Isajanyan, who is responsible for fair's branding, is one of the leading designers of Armenia. She is art-director of leading Armenian publications: "Yerevan" and Regional Post magazines.



Armine Aghayan is a Wikipidea editor, who provides project assistance.

NATALIA MAYOROVA:

“Women can make the business world a better place”

How and why one of the biggest tobacco companies in the world, Philip Morris International, pays special attention and supports women's empowerment in different parts of the world. Interview with General Manager of Philip Morris Armenia Natalia Mayorova.

INTERVIEW : AREG DAVTYAN /
PHOTO : PHILIP MORRIS ARMENIA, BRAVO.AM



This March Philip Morris International (PMI) presented its new revolutionary smoke free product IQOS to the Armenian legal age smokers. Since then, trained staff of a comfortable IQOS pop-up located in Dalma Garden mall has been presenting the new ritual of enjoying tobacco taste with no combustion through providing guided trials, explaining how the device works and advising how to use the benefits of IQOS compared with traditional cigarettes. A crowd of the first users that gathered at the pop-up showed a huge demand for IQOS, which highlighted once again the readiness

of Armenian people to challenge the status quo, their craving of innovations and the endless striving for new achievements. Meanwhile we learned that PMI also intends establishing an R&D facility here in Armenia, and the recruitment of the management staff is in process. Finally, the company just moved to the new comfortable office in the center of Yerevan, where the most creative and innovative ideas have a comfortable room to rise. All of these revealed our interest towards the company, and we decided to better understand the current situation and PMA plans.

By coincidence, we discovered the company is being managed by the General Manager Natalia Mayorova – a successful woman in business – who perfectly matches the topic of Regional Post's new issue. Our journalist had an interesting talk with PMA GM around what PMI is doing for empowering women in general and how Natalia personally feels being a businesswoman in Armenia in particular. We discussed with Natalia issues related to women's empowerment in the world and in Armenia: though a lot has changed during the previous years, women in our society still have a lot to achieve.

➤
PMI's new office
in Yerevan



Natalia, what are the main difficulties for women being in the workforce?

— Do you remember a quote from the famous song: "This is a man's world"? (*laughs*) Somehow it is true due to objective reasons. Except business results, the society expects many things from a woman: to care about the family, keep the household, bear children, be a good mother raising the next generation. So, for those women who, however, don't wish to leave business, it is twice hard as compared to men: And, oftentimes, this 24/7 "housework" calls for more of women's lifetime investment than the other one with its fixed eight-hour schedule. Still, whether to follow her career path or to go into the family – the choice is up to the woman. There can't be right answers, or recommendations: the choice is individual. Nevertheless, for those women who decide to take both "jobs", it is hard indeed. And for those women who, however, have decided to stay in the workforce, I recall a quote from the book "Lean in" by Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, a succeeding woman in business and a caring mother, who not once has faced issues related to women's empowerment. The advice that Sheryl gave women in business is simple – don't underestimate yourself. Negotiate for yourself. Attribute your success to yourself. On one occasion she also said: "Women

systematically underestimate their own abilities. Women do not negotiate for themselves in the workforce. A study in the last two years of people entering the workforce out of college showed that 57 percent of boys entering, or men, I guess, are negotiating their first salary, and only seven percent of women are. And most importantly, men attribute their success to themselves, and women attribute it to other external factors. If you ask women why they did a good job, what they'll say is someone helped them, they got lucky, they worked really hard".

How diverse is Philip Morris Armenia's staff, and how it affects company's work?

— We are proud to have adopted an inclusive attitude in our office. We demonstrate an open and equal approach to the employees of both genders, male and female. More than 40% of co-workers at Philip Morris Armenia and more than the half of the top management are women. There are also many mothers on maternity leave currently, who are taking care of their babies without any worry, knowing that they can go back to work whenever they find it convenient. Moreover, by practicing the buddies' assignment for both newcomers and those who come back from any work breaks, we keep thinking of adopting better working conditions and changing business reality.



What kind of impact in empowering women has your company had over the years?

— The women's empowerment is one of the cornerstones of Philip Morris sustainability strategy. This company with more than 150 years of history for decades does number of women's empowerment programs in different parts of the world. PMI is dedicated to ensuring that women and girls have equal access to quality education and economic resources in an environment free of violence, exploitation, or gender-bias. ➤



<

Launch of IQOS
in Dalma Garden Mall**Why do you think it is important for young women?**

— I think that only equipped with knowledge and skills women can unlock their full potential and enjoy equal leadership opportunities. That is why PMI has programs which enhance economic opportunities for women through vocational training and start-up grants.

How well does this approach work?

— Let me give you two examples. In East and Central Java PMI has Community Learning Center that helps women in farming families build their entrepreneurial skills. In tandem, our after-school program raises awareness on child-labor issues and ensures that children get proper education. Thousands of women directly benefited from it. Thousands! Since 2014, PMI runs a Women's Empowering and Leadership Program in the Nan and Phrae provinces of Thailand. Through these programs women learn how they can take lead-

ership positions in the local communities. They develop proposals and may get funding to realize their plans.

PMI is also partnering with Womanity Foundation. What is the aim of this partnership?

— Womanity Foundation is a non-profit organization that "undertakes to empower girls and women in developing countries to shape their future and accelerate progress within their communities." The company is supporting their WomenChangeMakers (WCM) fellowship program which identifies, supports, and connects transformational social entrepreneurs across India and Brazil. The program aims at advancing women's economic participation by supporting social entrepreneurship opportunities, boosting women's social and political leadership, and promoting their health and well-being.

What is it like being a female leader in Armenia, far from home, in a country with different traditions?

— I came to Armenia a year ago. And, even though Armenian and Russian people historically have a lot in common, when I was offered the position, I was asked if I was ready to take the challenge of working in a different environment, in a country with its unique – and as I later discovered for myself – quite incredible traditions and people, with its own way of going through life. I said yes, as you can see. Because, even though "this is a man's world", still "it wouldn't be nothing without a woman or a girl."

(laughs again)

If seriously, it is not important who you are – a man or a woman: there are basic principles of successful business relations, which I identified for myself here. First of all, in every situation it is important to understand the culture of the country, traditions of the society and the "rules of the game". It is necessary to adapt to the cultural characteristics and not to try to change people at your will: instead, try to adhere to their culture and to feel it through your heart.

Another important aspect is to enjoy and believe in what you are doing and love people around you. You need to invest your time and desire to build relationships and trust your partners and colleagues: be honest, walk-the-talk and listen to their needs, all this can help you to achieve win-win cooperation.

The last but not the least: start any business negotiations by inner spiritual message to the partner – "I wish you luck and happiness" – and no matter what, remember about the "big Armenian heart"!

So, now you know all my secrets, Areg-jan, and merci shat for the interesting interview! ♦

LET US
SPEL...L
IT OUT
FOR YOU

BRANDING | VISUAL IDENTITY | CREATIVE CONSULTING
PRINT ADVERTISING | WEB | RESPONSIVE | E-COMMERCE
MOBILE APPS | SOCIAL MEDIA

SPELL.AM | +374 55 387887

DEBORAH GRIESER:

"To see Armenia without any need for assistance"

Deborah Grieser has worked as Director of USAID/Washington's Europe and Eurasia Bureau's Technical Support Office and Office of Sudan and South Sudan Programs. She worked as USAID Deputy Mission Director in Uganda and served in leadership roles in USAID Missions in Ukraine, Ghana, Senegal, Guinea, and Rwanda. In 2016, she became Mission Director at USAID Armenia. Regional Post spoke to Ms Grieser on the broad scale of the organization's activities, bridging the gender gap in Armenia and in the US, as well as on development of US-Armenia relations.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN / PHOTO : USAID



Ms Grieser, USAID supports dozens of activities all over Armenia. Could you give us an overview of the directions you work in?

— USAID works in Yerevan and all 10 marzes. We support a range of sectors and projects, from agriculture to IT and civil society with a focus on two areas: economic growth and democracy and governance. The first one includes technical assistance and legal framework advice in energy sector, where we want to contribute to the liberalization of the market, to open it to broader regional and external markets. The idea is to make the sector more attractive for investors, and we see some developments here; there are some U.S. inventors in Armenian energy sector. In addition to this, we have our efforts in more responsible usage of water resources. A couple of years ago, USAID conducted a research showing that groundwater in Ararat valley was being

depleted. The government became interested in this issue, so we started implementing various activities to address this problem, providing systems so that the government can monitor the usage of water in fish farms, as well as working with communities to make citizens aware of more sustainable use of water. There is a very interesting pilot project in process now, where they irrigate land with the water that had been used for fish farms; 40 hectares have been irrigated this way, and now the government thinks of replicating that. We also provide some support to the agribusiness teaching center; we help to connect ATC to Virginia Tech University. Recently, some of the students did their training in food safety, and they got certificates from Virginia Tech. At the same time, our Innovative Solutions and Technology Center project serves all the universities in Armenia helping to develop IT curriculum thus enabling



students here to have a world-class IT education. ISTC is also a resource center for start-ups, and it's fully open to public.

You are also very engaged in tourism through My Armenia program.

— We are, and My Armenia is implemented by Smithsonian Institution, a major American cultural organization, which was very interested in working in Armenia. In Vayots Dzor, Syunik, Lori, Tavush and Shirak marzes they support local communities to make their regions more attractive for tourists, for, as you may know, tourists do come to Armenia, but they tend to stay in Yerevan, so people outside of the capital aren't necessarily benefiting. By the way, this year a number of local artisans supported by My Armenia will travel to the US and present Armenian culture and traditions in the 2018 Folklife Festival. It is one of the biggest cultural events in the country. It takes place in the National Mall in Washington DC, and – I'll tell a spoiler – they are going to have a real tonir and lavash baking right in the National Mall! I think, this kind of events may help foreigners to get to know Armenia and consider it as a tourism destination. USAID is also supporting local artisans and bed and breakfast owners through its Advanced Rural Development Initiative project implemented by the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia.



◀ Meeting with social workers at the community-based service center in Gyumri

^K Celebration of the 25th anniversary of USAID in Armenia

A SUCCESSFUL DEMOCRACY IS INCLUSIVE, IT IS COMPRISED OF ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE: DIFFERENT SEXES, DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Is My Armenia part of the USAID structure?

— USAID is not an implementing organization: we design a strategy, then we design a project, and then we hire an organization to implement it. In this case we partnered with the Smithsonian, but over the past years more and more of our partners are actually Armenian enterprises. And I must note that our cooperation with Fuller Center for Housing Armenia and SME DNC alone has created more than 2000 temporary and permanent jobs.

Could you tell about your partnership with the Armenian government?

— We work closely with the officials on conducting projects in democracy and governance. We support the realization of reforms, like the territorial administration reform. We help with policy development, provide infrastructure and equipment to consolidated communities, as well as work with NGOs and journalists to keep the public informed about the reform.

This issue of Regional Post explores gender gap in Armenia and in the region. The Armenian state

proclaimed democracy as its official system of government. Do you think democracy implies gender equality?

— I think it does. A successful democracy is inclusive, it is comprised of all sorts of people: different sexes, different nationalities, people with disabilities, etc. We in USAID consider gender to be crosscutting. We are attentive to gender issues in everything we do. For example, many of the artists and farmers we cooperate with are women. That is to say – we try to mainstream gender equality through everything we do.

What is your experience as a woman in a leading position in Armenia?

— You know, I have had a very positive experience. I feel like I have been well received. I had no one say she's not good enough for her work. Maybe it's because I'm very tall, I don't know. Also, out of the 34 employees we have 22 are women, and there is a pretty good percentage of female program leaders. So, I am surrounded with a lot of strong women who lead our projects and I am very impressed by the work they do. ➤

What are the differences in this regard between Armenia and the US?

— I'd say there are as many similarities as there are differences. It's a long road in bridging gender gap, and we still are not there in the US also. But we had our first female candidate for President nominated by a major political party. And in Armenia at least half of the students in universities are women: they are being educated, they are being trained to move forward and up. All these make me optimistic about where things are heading. Of course, it's a long run and even if you're moving in the right direction it might be slow.

You are in the Armenian office for 18 months already. Have you seen any positive changes in gender issues over this time?

— In my opinion, one of the most significant steps was taken by passing domestic violence law. That was a very positive sign; it creates a legal framework for protecting women's rights. However, even when laws are there people should be exposed to positive examples of what women can do. You know, former minister of justice was a woman, and now she's a deputy speaker of Parliament. And this is not the only case. When you see a woman do well and rise to the challenge you should present the positive example to inspire others.

Then I have to mention the law that allows NGOs to become independent and self-sustaining by doing revenue generating activities and having volunteers. Many NGOs work hard on human rights and gender equality initiatives, so this also may be a positive development.

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of US-Armenia relations. How would you evaluate the current state of cooperation between the countries?

— When the USA started working here, it was just humanitarian assistance – just providing food, shelter and



➤ Visiting the beneficiaries of "Orran" benevolent NGO in Vanadzor, which supports children 6-18 years of age from economically disadvantaged families.



STRONG DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IS GOOD FOR ARMENIA, BUT IT IS ALSO VERY GOOD FOR US. A SUCCESSFUL DEMOCRACY IS A POTENTIAL TRADING PARTNER, MOREOVER IT CONTRIBUTES TO THE GLOBAL SECURITY

fuel – helping with immediate needs. Over the time, it evolved to longer-term projects like market reforms, democratic reforms, building civil society. And then, more recently, the government is in the lead in these activities and we just assist and support it. For now, we have more sustainable activities.

The US puts a lot of financial resources in Armenia. What is the main goal the US aims to achieve?

— It's quite simple: strong democratic system is good for Armenia, but it is also very good for us. A successful democracy is a potential trading partner, moreover it contributes to the global security and peace. ♦

When Armenia became a part of Eurasian Economic Union, there was a lot of talk on reducing funding from USAID. Do you see the country different now?

— In 2015, shortly after Armenia signed the agreement with Eurasian Economic Union, USAID budget shrank. But then in just a year it returned to its previous level. In 2016 it was the same; in 2017 it was even bigger. And then Armenia signed the agreement with European Union, which is positive for USAID operation here. I can't say the funding will rise further, but the relations constantly grow and evolve. We would like it to evolve to the level when we see Armenia as a fully sufficient democracy with a strong economy and without any need for assistance. ♦

ARPI KARAPETYAN:

"IF YOU DO NOT REGARD YOURSELF IN A DISCRIMINATIVE WAY, NO ONE WILL"

Arpi Karapetyan, founder and chairman of Armenian HR Association, founder and managing partner of Cascade People & Business, initiator of Regional HR Conferences, told Regional Post about the current state and the challenges the labor market faces in Armenia.

INTERVIEW : TATEVIK STEPANYAN

Mrs Karapetyan, you are involved in two major organizations in the field of HR in Armenia. Tell us about the companies.

— Armenian HR Association is a non-profit organization aimed to contribute to the development of the field in Armenia. Our main goals are to study and share HR management practices, training and professional development of community, improvement of HR framework and, in general, advocacy of HR industry in Armenia. We do this by organizing different types of HR events throughout the year, providing international and local certifications in HR sphere, discussing and sharing concerns, insights and experience of the community members. Our biggest event is the regional HR conference which we have been organizing for already 7 years, and last year more than 200 participants from 10 countries took part in it. The Association currently includes around 60 members and is actively growing. At the same time, founded in 2008, Cascade People & Business evolved into one of the leading HR service providers in Armenia and continues to grow by expanding its work in the region. Our main motto is "we bring change" and we strongly believe in human and company potential. We are passionate about transforming

people and businesses and creating value that lasts. During the last 10 years we have worked with various industries and made numerous HR projects that we are proud of. We are considering with my close friend and partner Armine Hayrapetyan to initiate a couple of innovative and non-standard projects in the field.

As an HR specialist and a leader, what do you think is the key ability for a woman to be successful in the Armenian labor market?

— You know, I personally have never encountered gender discrimination. I think this comes more from childhood and the way I was taught by my parents to look at the world. I simply never thought some doors may not be open because I'm a woman. Also, this might be connected somehow with my profession, because Human Resources is considered to be a bit female occupation, so you never challenge gender issue here. What I believe in is if you do not regard yourself in a discriminative way, no one will. You should simply not allow yourself to think that you can be discriminated as the people feel that and react accordingly.

You have more than 20 years' experience in HR. Could you compare the field in the end of 1990s and now?

— We've witnessed a change of an amazing scale. I was 22 when I became the head of HR in Pernod Ricard Armenia, and my career began with dismissing and massive reorganization. The field was undeveloped then, and the new standards and approaches were just being established. However, we were able to come up with a strong motivation system and a correct salary range. We were regarded as the best employer at that time. I do remember the times when we were explaining the difference between HR and PR, and no one considered HR manager as a Business Partner. Now, the market has changed enormously, our profession is valued and every single day I receive inquiries from different employers looking for HR professionals to join their teams.

What do you believe in?

— The human being has unlimited potential, incredible capacities of self-knowledge and self-development. After all successful years of operation I can declare: When you don't lose focus and believe in the best outcome, all impossible things become possible, and the most challenging scenarios become incredible movies. The only thing you need is to pick the right keys. And yes, we do bring change. ♦



ALAIN TOUHADIAN:

"One can use local ingredients to invent exquisite meals"

The history of Armenian-French relations is quite unique. These two countries seem to have deep sympathy for each other's culture and people. One of Rodin's sculptures stands at France Square in Yerevan, and the monument of Komitas is erected at Jardin d'Erevan in Paris. Even the hard work of resettling French asylum seekers with Armenian nationality in their homeland is performed with mutual efforts and particular attention to everyone. Regional Post spoke to Alain Touhadian, President of Association Arménienne d'Aide Sociale and Chairman of the Board of the French Armenian Development Foundation about various projects that they implement in two countries: In France for over 130 years and in Armenia for over 14 years. Mr Touhadian received the Légion d'Honneur from the French Government in recognition of services rendered to France.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN

Mr Touhadian, the French Armenian Development Foundation has a long history. How did it start?

— In 1890, a group of Armenian businessmen in Paris got together to help students from Middle East who came to study in France. At that time there weren't many Armenians in Paris, but soon survivors of 1915 Genocide started to arrive, and this bunch of altruist people transformed into a kind of mutual help society. Thus, we established our organization, Association Arménienne d'Aide Sociale that supported Armenian community with their basic needs.

After the First World War the new wave of refugees formed the Diaspora, and our organization became very important for Armenians in France. A couple of decades later, when the Second World War ended, a problem emerged with aged Armenians who had no resources and were not really integrated into society. That's when we founded our first retirement home for Armenians. Currently we have 3 of them, although the proportion of Armenians among the residents is only 25%. At three retirement homes we have 150 employees and 250 residents. Apart from the elderly care we also support Armenians in extreme need and contribute to



➤
At the opening of
La Maison Rouge
boutique

Armenian permanent schools in Paris region. For several decades we assisted students of Armenian origin with scholarships.

When did you join the organization and what are your principal activities?

— It was in the 1990's. Back then I began as a volunteer and later the Board of Directors invited me to take some responsibilities in the organization because I was already a retired banker. We weren't doing anything directly in Armenia and our activities were mainly humanitarian and so in 2004 we decided to carry out our activities directly. So, we founded the French Armenian Development Foundation (FADF). We had already been assisting Armenian nationals to integrate into French society. And there was a significant number of Armenians who were in irregular situation in France: They wanted to return to Armenia and needed some support. So, together with the French migration management authorities (OFII) and with European Union funding in 2005 we launched "Return to Sources" project and thus we facilitated the voluntary return to Armenia. Once the returnee arrives in Armenia, our local organization FADF with the support of OFII assists the returnee for his or her social and economic reintegration. Since 2005 we have set up more than 300 businesses and helped about 1724 people to repatriate.

Are you still implementing the humanitarian activities as well?

— Our social projects are connected mainly with supporting vulnerable people: children, people with handicaps, etc. The Foundation has an ongoing project for deaf and hard of hearing community. We accompany



them in their daily life helping to cope with the difficulties they face with state authorities, judicial system etc. We organise sign language classes for the family members of the deaf so that they can communicate with each other easily; run www.deaf.am website which translates the weekly news into sign language. We even managed to pass a legislation which eliminated the ban for deaf and hard of hearing people to get driving license. Additionally, we have been working with N1 Republican special school to train psychologists so that children there could be treated kindly and educated professionally.

Does each project have a separate source of funding?

— We get funding from very different organizations. For us, funding is a matter of concern: you have no guarantee that one day the donors would not say "Armenia is no longer a priority for us." With that in mind, we decided to establish an independent source of revenue. Last year we started our first economic project. Our Arève Residence Boutique Hotel (www.areveresidence.com) is situated in Nork Marash. It's a very cozy place with just 11 rooms and an amazing

French Gastronomic Restaurant (www.lafayette-restaurant.com)

Could you tell us more about the production?

— Some of our star dishes we produce ourselves in cooperation with farmers have gained high reputation and we decided to open our Fine Food Boutique in the downtown of Yerevan (www.lamaison-rouge.com) on Tumanyan street. We are now producing the first ever Armenian origin Foie Gras and other duck products such as Magret and Confit. At our La Maison Rouge Boutique we offer our customers only 100% natural products which are homemade and exclusively free of additives, preservatives and colours. Even our sausages, ham and other meat products don't contain any nitrite and nitrate because we understand that all these additives are cancerogene, and we also know that the rate of related diseases is extremely high in Armenia. Needless to say that our products are produced from local premium fresh ingredients, albeit French recipes have authentic Armenian taste. In closing as our production is neither industrial nor automated we have several products which are prepared in limited quantities per month to ensure their high quality and freshness. ♦

WONDER WOMEN

Women face unequal treatment in nearly every country in the world. And our region is not an exception, rather a textbook example. Refusal to recognize the existence of domestic violence, unequal access to financial resources, absence in decision-making bodies are only few of the widespread mechanisms to keep women in the place traditional societies have allocated for them.

Regional Post spoke to leading women's rights activists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Iran to find out what developments are going on in their societies and how their nations fight discrimination in the world of blurring borders.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN





Nana Pantsulaia

Being a researcher with specialization in oriental studies, Nana Pantsulaia started her work at “Child and Environment” non-governmental organization. In 1998, she founded “Educational Cooperation and Development Center” NGO. Since 2005, Nana Pantsulaia is the Executive Director of Women Fund in Georgia, a grantmaking organization which supports women’s rights, and targets marginalized women who live in rural areas, women with disabilities, LBT women, young women and girls, and more.

Does the government of Georgia support women and equality issues? How do official bodies help the movement?

— It is important to mention that since the collapse of the communist regime in the beginning of the 1990s, the government of Georgia undertook a number of important obligations to improve the status of women in Georgian society, including ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as elaboration of National Action Plans to achieve gender equality. In the course of the past years, Georgia adopted the Law on Gender Equality in 2010, the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection and Assistance of Victims of Domestic Violence and the Law against Trafficking, both in 2006. In line with this, Georgian government has maintained a more or less liberal legislation on reproductive rights, abortion, and family planning.

What are the positive changes you see in the society?

— There is a huge discrepancy between the country’s official (and quite superficial) gender equality strategy and the real situation of women and girls. The legislative gains made in the past two decades were accompanied by growing

backlash against women’s rights and gender equality – a part of the larger tendency in the whole Southeast Europe. As a result of the conservative backlash and resurgence of traditions and customs, in Georgia women still face such problems as exclusion from public and political life, violence, projection of gender stereotypes and rigid gender roles, trafficking, marginalization of women representing ethnic and religious minority groups, oppression of lesbian and bisexual women as well as trans people. There is also stigmatization of women with disabilities, ignorance towards rural and internally displaced women’s needs, etc.

In your opinion, has there been any rise of nationalism in recent years in Georgian society? If yes, how does it affect women's rights movement?

— All of the above mentioned is very much connected to the rise of nationalism and religious fundamentalism over the course of past years. A post-Soviet Georgian citizen’s national identity has become strongly linked to the traditional Orthodox Christianity. Even though officially Georgia is a secular state, the Georgian Orthodox Christian Church has an unquestioned power and authority and it is traditionally limiting and oppressive towards women’s freedoms and human rights.

Apart from other issues, violence against women and trafficking are quite common in Georgia. The studies show that there is an extremely high rate of domestic violence.

According to statistics, every 11th woman living with a partner or husband is subject to physical or sexual violence, not counting other, more widespread forms of violence, such as psychological and economic violence, etc. Violence against women exists in every society, and encompasses different forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. However, despite its scale and social impact, due to different reasons it remains largely under-reported and relatively under-researched especially in regions of Georgia.

How does the ongoing improvement of the relationships with the EU affect Georgian government's approach towards gender equality?

— Speaking of the political orientation Georgia takes, it must be mentioned that in June 2014, the EU and Georgia signed an Association Agreement which entered into force on July 1, 2016. It is noteworthy, that one of the pre-conditions of signing the agreement was the adoption of the law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and amendment of related sub-bills in 2014, which was accompanied by a fierce debate with the Orthodox Church.





Lara Aharonian

Lara Aharonian is an Armenian-Canadian rights activist. She was born in an Armenian family in Beirut and left to study psycho-education in Montreal during the Lebanese Civil War. In 2003, she moved to Armenia and co-founded Women's Resource Center of Armenia. She is also the co-founder of Sexual Assault Crisis Center in Yerevan. Lara Aharonian was presented Woman of Courage Award by the Universal Rights Awards initiative.

The Women's Resource Center was founded in 2003. How has the situation with women's rights changed in Armenia since then?

— After the independence, many NGOs started to open up in the country including women's rights organizations, but they did not always approach women's issues from feminist point of view, that is to say, they didn't necessarily analyze the roots of inequality in the society. At that time NGOs were also based on a much smaller grassroots. Gradually, a kind of a movement started: the civil society became a bit more diverse; independent initiatives started to be implemented; individual activists, feminists, artists, lawyers appeared in the field. They did research, criticized each other, changing the discourse and creating much healthier atmosphere. NGO sector remains there with various organizations including those which not always identify themselves as feminist.

Do people fear the word "feminism" in Armenia?

— Not only in Armenia. We live in a patriarchal world, and when an ideology appears which breaks its values, the system starts to resist. And patriarchy is a very successful system as it manages to instill ideas in us from the childhood with the help of the media, the church, etc. As a result, there is also a radical stereotypic image of feminism in the society which has been misrepresented by the media. In the mean-

while, feminism is very diverse and has gone a long way of development, from suffragists up to intersectionalism.

Does the government support gender equality?

— The government wants equality to be pushed forward without serious changes in the existing system. So, they support the organizations which, for example, work on increasing the number of female parliamentarians, without trying to understand the reasons why there is a small number of women in the parliament at all. Quotas help, but it is important to turn to the reasons to be able to solve a problem.

The law on domestic violence was passed just weeks ago. Why it caused such dispute in the society?

— The government has an obligation to inform and prepare the society, which it did not. As a result, people were hearing only loud voices of nationalists spreading fear and insisting that what a man does in his family should not be regarded as violence but rather as a traditional value. People misunderstood the purpose of the law. Moreover, its final version was passed without participation of civil society, and even the term "domestic violence" was changed to something not recognized by international law. What is notable, just right after that Armenia signed Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against wom-

en which may have a much larger impact, yet no voice opposing was raised. This makes me think: why conservative activists appear in some cases and are completely silent in others? However, we have to recognize that having a domestic violence law is still very positive.

What is in your opinion the most effective way to inform and prepare the society for changes?

— It is crucial to work in the field of education, to create safe spaces for people to speak up and encourage kids to think critically because when they do, one does not need to prepare them for changes – the demand comes from below. But it is also worth shocking people from time to time, to show them what the reality is. Because one should never forget that today, at this moment, there are people suffering and they need help.

Is there an issue which you think the Armenian society overcame to some extent?

— The issue of speaking up. In 2003, people were more shy and afraid to talk about their problems. Now, victims of domestic violence, for example, are engaged in the movement themselves. And it is much more difficult to deny the existence of domestic violence in our society when those women stand up at the National Assembly and tell their stories.





Nasrin Sotoudeh

Nasrin Sotoudeh is an Iranian human rights activist and lawyer. She is famous for representing imprisoned opposition activists. The list of her clients includes Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi. She herself received the Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament together with Iranian film director Jafar Panahi. She also appeared in Panahi's documentary-like "Taxi."

Do movements like the latest protest against hijab law gain support in the society? In general, is there public support for women's empowerment?

— Many women and men approach me in the streets to support psychologically: they try to cheer me up, say how glad they are that I defend the Girls of Revolution Street. The hijab protest started from that street, and now regular strangers often offer money for bail to set free one of the girls, Nargis Hosseini, who took off her scarf in public and was arrested. So, I personally feel the movements have a wide public support. Just today a male friend of mine told me he would never think hijab is something that important for women, and these protests demonstrated him the opposite. Girls of Revolution Street showed many people hijab is a serious issue.

Does the government support women and equality issues?

— The government of Hassan Rouhani acknowledged there are numerous people who oppose the compulsory hijab. He even promised once to protect women's rights. However, during the last eight years no steps were taken to protect them in this regard and no woman was given a leading position in the government. Along with that, administrative cor-

ruption and poor economic state of the society do not let women achieve tangible political or business success. Moreover, activists are being prosecuted by the government.

What about religious institutions?

— The highest political and religious authority, the Supreme Leader, as well as the Guardian Council of the Constitution, which is subordinated to the Supreme Leader, insist on keeping the compulsory hijab. However, there are clergymen who do oppose compulsory hijab, sometimes. But they do not tell about this, for example, during a preaching in a mosque. It is said only unofficially. Still, even in this way they can have positive impact.

Do you think the Western sanctions affect women's activeness in social life?

— I do understand why Western countries use the system of sanctions. Still, the sanctions contribute to the worsening of the economic situation and the rise of tension in the society. Of course, in this situation women are more vulnerable – for one, it is much more difficult for them to find a job than for men. So, I think there is a link between the sanctions and women's rights.

What, in your opinion, are the main obstacles in the way towards equality in Iranian society?

— They are many, but hijab is one of the most important. Let me put it this way: the government quotes morality and religion to constantly control female body; it forces women to hide their hair, be regular, do not stand out, to censor their body on several levels: One should wear manto and then something under it in case of wind, etc. On the other hand, as anywhere in the world, in Iran also, there are cases when men abuse women and children sexually. And the judges of the men-ruled country always advise me not to take those cases, or not to follow them up too much. With all these in mind, I do come to a conclusion that a government which can force me to put that half meter of fabric on my head every single day, can do anything to my body. With the power it has in courts, in executive bodies and other institutions, that government can easily neglect my nature, neglect sufferings of women, not try to make their lives better.

Do you think there may be notable changes in the nearest future?

— I cannot predict that, I can only try to defend those girls who are at risk because of their protest. I think, regardless of what changes we will or will not see in the society, the winter of 2017-2018 will stay in the Iranian history.



Could you compare the situation with women's rights in Azerbaijan now and in the 1990s?

— This year we celebrate 100th anniversary of women's voting rights. During this century the situation with women's rights has been constantly changing, and in the last decades Azerbaijan as an independent state has acquired many international obligations, some of which put tone on

women's rights protection. For example, we have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995, so every 4 years the government of Azerbaijan presents an official state report, and the NGOs present alternative reports. Our organization also submitted a comprehensive shadow report in 2015 and conducted full advocacy, as a result

around 80% of our recommendation were reflected in the final concluding observations and recommendations of the UN CEDAW committee, as of 06 March 2015. The committee gave Azerbaijan 74 recommendations in 17 areas of concern. The economic situation in recent years empowered Azerbaijani women with more independence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a huge unem-



Shahla Ismayil

Shahla Ismayil has been engaged in public activism for women's empowerment and participation since 1998. She is a gender expert and certified international specialist on Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD). Since 2002, Shahla Ismayil serves as Chairwoman of Women's Association for Rational Development (WARD), a non-governmental organization registered by the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan in 2005.

ployment rate like in many countries of the region. Men migrated for earnings, and women undertook the burden of the household; they were kind of forced to become breadwinners for their families. As a result, they became economically engaged, and this was a big step forward. Now women in general have better access to the job market, to entrepreneurship opportunities, microcredits, etc. Still there is the unequal segregation of work in the household: women cannot dedicate as much time to job as men do, partially because the kindergarten infrastructure is not very well developed.

Do women also participate in political life of the country more actively?

— They do, and this activism is growing. But there are some challenges remaining as well. First of all, women lack self-confidence to step into politics. It is not regarded as a friendly sphere for them. Yet, there is no law which will prevent women from starting a career in politics. There is 35% of women in municipal governance, and it's a very big achievement compared to the 4% in 2004 and 26,5% in 2009. We have 16,8% of women in the Parliament. Other part of statistics says that among about 30 ministries and state committees only one is headed by a woman, and that's the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs. Women also keep the senior positions

of the first vice president, the vice speaker of the National Parliament, deputy prime minister of Nakhichevan, head of Ombudsman Office, vice president of the State Oil Company, etc.

Is equality a part of the government's agenda?

— Regarding the policy level, we luckily have it. We have adopted the Law on Gender Equality in 2006 and Domestic Violence Law in 2010. There are a number of upcoming legislative initiatives which are gender sensitive. In every ministry and state committee there are gender focal points. We work on National Action Plan of UNSCR 1325, which I hope will be adopted by the end of 2018. The latter also shows that the political will for gender equality is there. What the country really lacks are tangible action plans for implementation of the existing policies. The NGOs could help here, but unfortunately the situation with civil society is not very good now: in 2014, after the Ukrainian Euromaidan, the legislation regarding NGOs changed tremendously. The donors' community has shrunk, more than 50 international organizations closed their offices in Azerbaijan. But I have to mention that NGOs working with women's rights are not separately discriminated.

How do you think the developments on Nagorno Karabakh issue and the ongoing militarization affect the women's rights movement?

— The short escalation of the conflict in April 2016 really fueled the society and demonstrated that even a few days of war can rehabilitate all the hatred. Nagorno Karabakh is one of the two topics that can unite the entire country within few days. It is a sensible issue for everyone, it is regarded as a national honor. Yet the information about political developments around Nagorno-Karabakh is so scarce that it is also difficult for us to say what are the real moods in the society around these processes. For one thing, I can say that not everybody thinks war is the best option.

What do you think are the ways for Azerbaijan to achieve gender equality?

— The key, in my opinion, is still economic empowerment. This is by far the biggest achievement of ours, and it makes sense to intensify efforts here by supporting women's equal access to job market, equal pay, favorable childcare infrastructure, etc. We cannot start investing all the resources into engaging women in politics as this will be way less effective. They have to have self-confidence, they have to have resources, and they have to have their issues solved on a family level. If a woman is ready inside, if the family issue is solved, then she is ready to go against the flow. Economic independence will lead to political empowerment and it will be a natural and conscious progress. ♦

ANNE KEMPA:

"Look for role models who will give you strength"

Anne Kempa has been leading GIZ in Armenia since January 2015. She started her professional career as a personal assistant to a member of the German Parliament and got on an impressive professional path. Regional Post spoke to Anne Kempa about being a female leader in Armenia and about her recipe to stay protected from possible discrimination.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN / PHOTO : GIZ





MY BOSS IS A WOMAN, HER BOSS IS A WOMAN, AND THE CHAIR OF OUR MANAGEMENT BOARD IS A WOMAN. SO, FEMALE LEADERSHIP IS COMPLETELY NORMAL WITHIN GIZ

What was your experience as a woman who has built a successful career in GIZ?

— I was very lucky to be raised by my parents with the conviction that both my brother and I have the same opportunities to become successful and self-reliant. Both my parents were working, and they always supported us to find our own ways in life and told us that they believe in both of us. I started my career in 1999 as a personal assistant of a member of the German Parliament, and that was a woman. She was a long-standing MP [Member of Parliament], already very successful at her time by being not only an ordinary MP, but also Parliamentary Secretary of State to the Federal Minister of Defense. She taught me a lot, and at the same time she was a very strong role model as a successful woman dealing with all these hard issues. Later I joined GTZ, which is now GIZ, a company where gender equality is one of the fundamental values. In GIZ we are convinced that only if you provide equal opportunities for both men and women you will be able to unleash the potential of all your employees and by this also perform in the best possible way – which makes your work much more successful. From the very beginning in my life I met a lot of successful women who occupied very responsible positions. Now my boss is a woman, her boss is a woman, and the chair of our management board is a woman. So,

female leadership is completely normal within GIZ. This is really a surrounding where you know you can succeed, but there is still a lot of work to do: out of 57% of female employees only 38% work in management positions. So, we still get better and we do work on this, as these topics are part of our strategy and annual goals within GIZ as a whole.

Have you ever faced discrimination yourself?

— I'm very happy that I really have to say "no." For seven years I have served as Secretary to the Boards and Head of the Office of the Chair of the Management Board at GIZ Headquarters; and until the end of last year we had equal representation of women and men in our management board. During my career I have also been supported by many men in management positions who encouraged me as a young woman to become a professional leader. I was very lucky to feel backed by the people around me, and I try to forward this to the new generation of colleagues.

How do you make sure there is no discrimination inside GIZ?

— When we have a vacancy, we look for the best person to fill it – regardless of gender. We know that mixed teams with balanced presence of men and women are more effective, so we

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING CHANGES IN ARMENIA WAS THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM: FOR THE FIRST TIME THE EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IS ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION

always try to ensure this balance in order to bring in different perspectives and experiences. Further, we have corporate principles and a code of conduct which must be followed by every employee of GIZ: we treat each other with respect and fairness and we work together without any distinction in terms of gender, skin color, religion, culture, nationality, age, or sexual identity.

What about GIZ in Armenia? Is it any different?

— Everybody joining our staff knows our rules and values. New employees also get introduced to our corporate guiding principles. I have the impression that many come to GIZ because they know about these values, they know they will be treated equally. In GIZ Armenia 67% of the employees are women. That is really a lot, and many of them are very experienced advisors and professionals in responsible positions.

However, outside our office and our projects the environment is different than in Europe. But I have to mention that also in Europe this is an important issue; there, too, we still have a long way to go. In Armenia we work in three directions: governance, environmental protection and private sector development. And in all our programmes gender equality and equal opportunities are important components. Gender considerations are being integrated in all aspects of our project management. Hence, even if a programme does

not address this issue specifically, we always try to take into account what impact a project might have on women. For example, a couple of years ago the Legal Approximation towards European Standards Programme produced a publication in Armenian informing women about their individual rights in the frames of the Armenian legislation. We also actively support women in their entrepreneurial or political activities.

You have been working in Armenia for 3 years already. Have you noticed any changes in regard to gender equality in the country?

— To be honest, in my meetings with partners the overwhelming majority are men, but I am happy to say that there are also some women in leading positions. One of the most striking changes in Armenia was the constitutional reform: for the first time the equality between men and women is enshrined in the constitution. It is very important to unleash the potential of women by supporting them in their economic and political engagement because this can be one of the keys to structural change. For instance, being an important sector of the Armenian economy, the labor market in the tourism sector attracts many women as it offers flexibility to combine professional and private lives. And women make a serious contribution to the development of the field; a contribution which they can make to the growth of any sector. In regard to politics, it may take



more time but there may be serious changes as well if, for example, there are more women represented in local governance.

It is also important to understand that in Germany at least several generations worked hard to make it easier for us. Armenia is perhaps on a different stage currently, but this means that women who now have the courage and the power to make their way are very important for those to come after. And there are already some great role models in the country. By the way,



I think it is good not to stick to typical “female” occupations and do whatever is interesting and promising.

For sure, if you can manage it with kids and household on your shoulders.

— It is essential to help young fathers and mothers to balance family and a full-time job. GIZ has been investing a lot in this; in Germany our company even provides a kindergarten. Unfortunately, we do not have this in Armenia, but we try to be as flexible as we can.

You have such a positive experience, could you share the recipe of moving forward and protecting oneself from discrimination?

— First of all, unite with others. Get together, exchange experiences, talk about situations, and try to advise. It is always good not to feel alone and to have somebody very strong backing you up.

Also, look for role models who will give you strength in a way. I was lucky to have several such people around me, including my own mother who was

a professional teacher long before it was common in Germany that women and mothers work. There are strong working women in Armenia; I know this because we are cooperating with many of them, supporting them and trying to increase their number. So, look for somebody to believe in and most importantly, never stop believing in yourself. Try to trust the capabilities you have if you are a woman or a girl. And if you are a mother or a father raise your girls and boys in understanding that they have equal opportunities and rights. ♦

KATRIN SCHAEFER:

"The aim is to form viable structures"

For more than three years now, Katrin Schaefer has been leading the team of the Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus in Armenia, which provides support to the government in implementing a large-scale territorial reform. Regional Post spoke to Ms Schaefer about the process of implementation, the main obstacles and achievements, as well as the role of women in decision-making in Armenia and Europe.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN / PHOTO : GIZ



ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

The Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus advises and supports local government bodies in the South Caucasus to better carry out their responsibilities in line with the principles of good governance. The objectives of the Programme are the modernisation of the municipal administration, transparent and accountable use of public funds, regional and local development, as well as sharing knowledge and joint learning on good local governance across borders.



Implemented by
giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

The Programme is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In Armenia it is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and carried out in close cooperation with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development (MTAD) of the Republic of Armenia.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ONE OF THE BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENTS IS THE SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT IN IMPLEMENTING THE TERRITORIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

Mrs Schaefer, how did you become the team leader of the Good Local Governance Programme in Armenia?

— I joined GIZ in 2009, first in headquarters as a planning specialist. My job was to provide expertise to the field structure of GIZ in the areas of decentralization, local governance and civic participation. In 2015, I came to Armenia as a team leader for the Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus. The first phase of the programme was implemented in 2013-2016. We are currently in the middle of the second phase, which will run until the end of 2019.

In your opinion, what are the tangible achievements so far?

— One of the biggest achievements is the successful support of the government in implementing the Territorial and Administrative Reform. The aim is to form viable structures at local level by merging municipalities, which have been very small, and enable them to become responsible units which can effectively fulfil their functions and provide better services to the citizens.

During the last three years the government has reduced the number of municipalities nearly by half – from 915, when the reform started, down to 502 now. And it comes along with a very successful approach towards providing better services in the consolidated municipalities. For example, citizen offices have been introduced. These are one-stop-shops where citizens can receive their services at a one single location, without a need to walk from one room to another in search of specific responsible persons. Citizen offices are also connected to the e-governance system which uses innovative tools in the municipal administration to streamline the processes. This is the flagship of the programme which is more visible also for the people in Armenia.

Could you tell about the process of implementation? What are the main obstacles?

— The process is quite complex, and it started long before the actual implementation of the reform. GIZ provided conceptual support to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and

Development. The major milestones before the actual implementation were to design the concept and the strategy: what is the rationale behind it, why should the municipalities be merged, according to which criteria this should be done, etc. GIZ also provides advice to the Ministry in determining the ways how to inform the population about the reform and its development. Communication is very important because the Territorial Reform is not a means in itself; the idea is to form a proper structure so that the citizens will receive better services in the end. Besides, territorial and administrative reforms are always a huge transition effort encountering a lot of resistance at local level. When you merge, let's say, seven municipalities into one,

six mayors lose their positions. So, there are concerns among the local administrations on whether they will lose their jobs, as well as uncertainties among the population. One part of this problem is fully emotional: the identity of the people is connected with their villages, so they worry what will happen if their municipality is not a stand-alone independent unit anymore. Moreover, there are concerns regarding the services provided by the new administration: people don't know if they will have to travel to another village to get those services or what will happen if the mayor is not the next-door person anymore – everything gets more distant. If you talk to people from small municipalities in Germany, where such reforms were

conducted at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, they would still complain about losing their uniqueness due to the enlargement. So, it may take generations to get over this. I would not call this an obstacle, but it is a huge challenge that needs to be taken into account in order to reduce the concerns and to show the citizens that they will get positive results from the reform in the end. Of course, this has been more difficult at the beginning when the first municipalities were being merged, as there weren't any positive examples to refer to. But now, in the second phase, the government can take the previous cases and show the citizens that not only they will not lose anything, but in fact they will benefit from the changes.



▼
PHOTO ON THE LEFT PAGE:

Dmitry Mariyasin (Deputy Representative UNDP)
Anne Kempa (GIZ Armenia Country Director)
Katrín Schaefer (Team Leader of the Good Local Governance Programme in Armenia)
Ashot Giloyan (Head of Local Self Government Department, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development)
Loreta Vioiu (Deputy Head of the Council of Europe office in Yerevan)



FROM THE VERY BEGINNING I HAVE HAD A **VERY POSITIVE** **EXPERIENCE; I HAVE NEVER MET ANYONE NOT TAKING ME SERIOUSLY** **BECAUSE I'M A WOMAN**

Do you work with the local population introducing to them the advantages of the reform?

— GIZ does not work with citizens directly. It is the government's reform, and it's the government who should communicate their reform to the population. We support the government in doing so by elaborating case studies, compiling good practices, etc.

In the frames of the Good Local Governance Programme you celebrated International Women's Day by convening a conference on "Women and Local Governance." What were your impressions from that day?

— We had very interesting speakers on that day, both international and Armenian. There were, of course, men who congratulated women in a usual "you-are-so-beautiful" way. They were not being offensive, just trying to be nice. But what made me glad was that women responded to that by drawing their attention to the fact that treatment towards

women is often like those congratulations: taking into consideration only physical appearance and not recognizing women as people who have an opinion, skills and expertise, who have something to say and can raise their voice in local decision-making processes. Furthermore, it is this kind of behavior that hinders women from being taken seriously.

You yourself have been in a responsible position in Armenia for over three years. Have you ever encountered difficulties in this regard?

— From the very beginning I have had a very positive experience; I have never met anyone not taking me seriously because I'm a woman. Most of the people we work with – be it the minister, deputy ministers, heads of departments, mayors – are mostly men. And, not a single one of them ever treated me with lack of respect.

But is it different from working in Europe?

— I think this is also a question of where one comes from. As a planning specialist, I have been travelling a lot to the countries in the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, where the customs are very patriarchal. Back there I have not encountered gender discrimination either. Of course, there is a difference if you are on a field trip – being on a short mission – or if you have been living in Armenia for three years. But I think my positive experience partially comes from the fact that I am a foreigner, not a part of local culture and traditions. Maybe if there was an Armenian team leader working here, it might be different. However, I think that in most parts of the world women still have to be one step ahead, to achieve the same level of acknowledgment as their male colleagues. That also goes for equal payment: we know that women do not negotiate as hard as men do since from the very childhood they are taught to be modest and silent – same in Armenia, same in Germany, same in Europe. So, I would encourage women to respond to the fact, and work harder, not passively accept to be overlooked, but rather get their foot in the door and make their voice heard. ♦

BETTER THAN FLOWERS

On March 7, the "Women and Local Governance" conference took place in Yerevan. Held on the eve of the International Women's Day, the conference was aimed at covering and discussing the Territorial and Administrative Reform in Armenia and the political engagement of women in local decision-making bodies.

TEXT : TATEVIK STEPANYAN / PHOTO : GIZ



The conference "Women and Local Governance" was co-organised by GIZ, the Council of Europe and UNDP. The programme provides technical assistance to the Government of Armenia in the implementation of the Territorial and Administrative Reform, which was launched in the country in 2014 and is expected to end in 2019. "The programme addresses the need to increase the role of women in local and regional politics through strengthening the capacities of female local politicians and encouraging women's participation in local decision-making processes," said Klaus Wendelberger, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Germany in Armenia.

Armenian women leaders,
a photo exhibition

▼
 Martin Fredriksson (Charge d’Affaires, Embassy of Sweden),
 Shombi Sharp (UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia), Vache Terteryan (First Deputy Minister, RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development), Klaus Wendelberger (Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Germany), Adam Stefan (Deputy Director Sustainable Development office, SDC)



Government officials, representatives of international organizations, as well as recognized international experts attended the conference. UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Armenia Shombi Sharp, for whom the conference was the first public event in Armenia, highlighted the importance of joint efforts of international organizations, the government and civil society in supporting and strengthening the reform. Sharp also noted that due to this mutual effort from 2012 to 2016 there was an increase of 3% of elected women in local politics. However, President of the Communities Association of Armenia Emin Yeritsyan reminded that the statistics on women’s participation in local elected government remains worrying, if not

▲
 Participants of the “Women and Local Governance” conference

extremely worrying. “We should not applaud to the government’s adoption of certain laws or the policy of equality of men and women, but rather urge to precise the implementation of these laws.” He added that the main issue is not changing the women but changing the society, so that men also carry new ideas. Chargé d’Affaires and Minister Counsellor of the Embassy of Sweden in Armenia Martin Fredriksson emphasized the importance of picking the right audience in addressing women right issues. Talking about economic empowerment of women, Fredriksson said, “If you have these challenges in your country, isn’t it a good place to start and try to engage 52% of your society in solving the problems rather than say, ‘let’s wait, your time

will come when men solve the problems?’ So, on economic growth I think it’s mathematics: If you don’t use the full potential of human resources of your country you will lose productivity.” He also added that there are no fields that women cannot contribute to: even in the military the analysis of peace agreements globally shows that, when women were involved in negotiations, they were statistically more likely to succeed.” International Expert on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Dr. Alenka Verbole questioned the audience on the necessity for women to be economically empowered to be also politically empowered. “My answer is no,” she said. “When we speak on empowerment we have to speak on every form of empowerment: economic, political, social, legal. Armenia is quite empowered legally in terms of gender equality, now it is important to enforce this, to put this into practice, so that you can exercise all the rights that are written on the paper.” Alenka Verbole encouraged participants not to give up, as “times change all the time.” During the conference short films on women economic empowerment and women in local self-governance were screened. The day was closed with a photo exhibition where participants could see portraits and statements of women leaders from different communities of Armenia. ♦



SEVEN STORIES

Woman leaders in communities

As Part of the Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus, GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) supports empowerment of local female politicians in the municipalities of Armenia. The Programme cooperates with female mayors, councilors, holders of different leading positions in local administrations in order to capacitate them, further develop their communications skills, and to increase their knowledge and expertise. The active women are provided with trainings on project management, project proposal writing skills, as well as with networking opportunities. GIZ also provided them with small grants for implementing projects in their municipalities.

Regional Post collected some of the stories of those women who received support from GIZ and achieved significant results for the development of their communities.

TEXT : LIKA MKRTCHYAN / PHOTO : GIZ



LUSINE AVETYAN

Administrative head of Karahunj settlement of Goris municipality

Lusine Avetyan was the Mayor of Karahunj community for 14 years. After the Territorial and Administrative Reform in Armenia she was appointed Administrative Head of Karahunj settlement of the enlarged Goris municipality. "Syunik is a traditional marz, and it is difficult for a woman to be acknowledged in politics. At the beginning people were bewildered saying that I cannot perform. However, throughout the years I managed to distinguish our community from others," she says. It was in 2002 when Lusine was first elected as a Mayor. Engineer by background, she also had some managerial work experience. Though she was still young and had little kids, the motivation to do something good for her village and the villagers inspired Lusine to declare her candidacy. The competition was quite high, as she was the only woman among the other candidates. At some point she was thinking of resigning but recalling the pre-election competition and the hopes of her voters, she found the strength to resist and to overcome the difficulties. Of course, back then having a big family and small children it was a hard task for her to govern a village with all its problems. However, Lusine always strived for improvement. She was constantly participating in diverse trainings both in and outside Armenia, and after some time she got used to the vibrant rhythm of being a mayor.

By solving the problems of asphalting, construction of lighting networks, sewage lines, as well as setting up a wonderful school and a kindergarten, Lusine was able to break the stereotypes that women are not able to deal with issues that are believed to require interventions of men. From then on, when talking about women in politics, Lusine Avetyan's example was always highlighted.

"They would say, 'just look at Karahunj, the hands of a woman have touched the village; see how beautiful it is.' I feel very good when I am able to solve at least one issue in the community, be helpful to at least one resident," Lusine says.



She believes that experience and knowledge are key to success, especially for women in politics. Besides, there is also the issue of finances: "It is a bit more difficult for women to become a mayor, as it is important to have financial stability. Not only relevant experience and capacities should be in place to become more competitive in the local elections, but it is equally important to strive for economic empowerment of locally active women." With the support of different organizations, a number of development projects are being implemented. They vary from the improvement of pastures and cattle breeding to municipal planning and e-governance. Lusine especially highlights that due to the hardware and software provided by GIZ, and especially through the Municipal Management and Information System (MMIS), their daily performance has become more effective, as the automatic flow of information simplifies and speeds up the processes of handling the needs of the citizens.

"We accept the applications from citizens and through MMIS process them quickly and send the documents back and forth to the municipality online. Our residents are very active; they follow online the status of their applications, the decisions of the mayor, the circulation of the documents, etc."

In order to increase public awareness on participatory mechanisms and women's engagement in community life and decision-making, Lusine submitted an application for the small grants initiative provided by GIZ. As a result, in all the eight settlements of Goris municipality women empowerment and participation workshops were conducted, thus positively affecting not only the participants, but also the trainers. Similar events can trigger women's engagement in political and social life of the municipality and thus contribute to the increase in their self-confidence and capacities.

"There are many intelligent and experienced women. It is very important to have such people represented in the local council – people who have their opinion, who have knowledge and do not simply sit in the meetings for voting. The council institute is becoming more stable, thus leading to more transparency, investments, and solutions," Lusine says.



MARO ARAKELYAN

Council member of Urtsadzor multi-settlement municipality,
nurse in Shaghap settlement

Maro has been working as a nurse in Shaghap settlement for over two decades. Every day she comes to the former municipality building of Shaghap. The room that serves her as a medical station is located on the ground floor of the building. She is the only nurse here who takes care of approximately 1000 inhabitants of the settlement. Maro enjoys the trust and confidence of the fellow villagers. Perhaps this was the reason why in 2008 she decided to run for the council election. "People would come to me and say 'Maro jan, can you solve this or that issue, you are on the ground floor and the mayor is on the first floor, he will definitely listen to you.' This made her think that if she became a council member, she would definitely be able, at least, to help raising issues. Having the support and encouragement of her family, Maro has been elected for the second term as council member of Urtsadzor municipality. She recalls that earlier people in the village would go from door to door and ask their fellow villagers to vote for this or that candidate. As a tradition, her father-in-law would gather the family for a family council and tell them that one of the candidates was a person close to their family and urged them to go and vote in favor of him. "At those times, we didn't realize the role of council members, what functions they performed, what impact they could have on the development of the community, what interference in the council decision they could have and at last what they could change locally. People would not raise any questions if there was a problem, they would directly approach the village mayor," she says.



Maro remembers how hard it was for her at the beginning, "Before being elected a member of the council, I was afraid even to open the village mayor's door and raise any questions on behalf of my fellow villagers. However, in 2008, when I was first elected, everyone would say, 'Maro jan, you are a council member, solve the water problem, the mayor will listen to you'. After one year in office, opening the mayor's door was like opening the door to my medical station. I became more self-confident because I felt more responsible for my community."

In 2017 Maro together with other local female politicians from Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan participated at the regional networking event organised by GIZ in Tbilisi. Maro always strives for self-development, and she believes that apart from duty-related contacts and capacity-building measures, such events give an opportunity for personal growth and direct communication with other women. During the event Maro was once more convinced that women's activity and cooperation can indeed have a very significant importance in revealing and solving municipal problems.

As part of the GIZ Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus small grants initiative, Maro had organised four seminars and roundtable discussions in the municipality of Urtsadzor, to which she invited active women from all the three settlements of the municipality, namely, Shaghap, Urtsadzor, and Lusashogh. The seminars mainly covered the topics of women's leadership, participation of the population and council members in local governance as well as perspectives for future development. The seminars allowed the local population to get acquainted with the processes and functions of the council and the mayor, to get to know the role and the significance of a council member, and how citizens can actively engage in local decision-making processes.



IRINA ARSENYAN

Council member of Kanakeravan municipality, teacher of Armenian language and literature

It's been a year since Irina was elected as a Council member in Kanakeravan municipality of Kotayk marz in Armenia. Considering herself a newcomer to politics, Irina took the decision to run for council elections because she got inspired by a collective image of active female politicians. Believing in the power of women to introduce changes, even little by little, she decided to prove her strengths and contribute to the development of her community. Her decision was supported by her family and friends. They encouraged her to use her potential for the welfare of others.

Being the only female council member in her community, Irina says that she does not meet any obstacles, as both the mayor and other members of the local council are very caring towards the issues of the municipality: they always raise the problems during the meetings and never leave any issue unattended.

"I consider it my sacred duty to attend all the council meetings, participate in all the discussions to be able to handle all the issues raised, thus contributing to finding appropriate solutions to them," she says. "After being elected a council member, I have become more attentive and responsible towards the needs of my community and my surroundings, towards every tree and bush. I try to notice everything that may escape from the eyes of a male council member." Irina feels more comfortable dealing with education and protection of environment, as she also teaches Armenian language and literature at the local school. Having a journalist's background, she considers it her duty to inform people, educate and help them combine efforts for making their community prosper.

As a newcomer she constantly participates in any workshop, training or seminar she is invited to, as



there is always something new to learn, even if it is repetitive. Irina always self-reflects and reaps the most important for herself. Out of GIZ events she benefited greatly from a regional conference in Tbilisi, as an important question on the role of an equal opportunities officer in the municipalities was raised there. She used to think that this position could be combined with another one, for example, a consultant or adviser: however, after the discussion in a mixed group, she got convinced that this position required a specialist in the field, as there is practically no community in the country that wouldn't have social problems. And now Irina says that after the enlargement if the issue is raised in a newly formed municipality, she will try to be helpful by transferring the knowledge acquired through GIZ.

In 2017, Irina was one of the winners of the small grants initiative of the Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus, implemented by GIZ. As a result, she organised four events, which mainly included seminars and discussions on the role of women in political participation, inter-municipal cooperation and on how to promote women's potential in local governance. She says that these events were a novelty to their communities, at least considering the last 25 years she has been living there. Hence, she tried to create a diverse list of participants, including students, teachers, art workers, rural intelligentsia, housewives, etc. She wanted to assess the levels of interest of people with various age groups and occupation, in order to raise more female potential for the development of their municipality.



ARUSYAK ARAKELYAN

Secretary of staff of Abovyan Municipality

To create and to strive for innovative assignments – this is what Arusyak Arakelyan, the secretary of staff of Abovyan municipality, likes most about her job.

Though her daily functions include leading the municipal staff and coordinating the circulation of documents, she always finds time to improve her routine by developing new templates and examining individual cases based on citizens' applications.

"I like to create something new, to develop necessary documents and templates. I truly avoid stereotypes and patterns," she says. "Every single situation requires an individual approach, even though it means looking through various legal acts. Sometimes I open the drafts of the decisions that I had prepared, and I always look at them critically, thus motivating myself to improve, to grow professionally and enjoy my work."

Constant discussions with fellow colleagues from other municipalities and study trips within Armenia or abroad always influence positively by giving food for thought or by inspiring to improve the practices in their municipalities. As best examples Arusyak highlighted the study trip to Estonia and the conference in Ukraine that were dedicated to the exchange of knowledge and experiences in the field of e-governance. The trips were organised by the Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus.

"Thanks to GIZ we could witness the serious achievements in e-governance in Estonia, which is leading when it comes to digital service provision. Basically, each citizen can fully make use of state or local services without even leaving the house.



The visit allowed us to understand the whole infrastructure in order to incorporate the system in our municipalities. And I have to admit that step by step we are heading towards that," Arusyak says. The conference "Best Practices of Administrative Service Delivery in Small Communities of Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia" held in Ukraine in spring 2017 proved to be even more fruitful as it contributed to bringing the good idea of information cards to Armenia.

"Information cards allow summarizing information regarding a specific service. The compilation includes all the parameters that a citizen needs to know, mainly what documents are required, contact details, whether the service is to be paid for or not, the legal acts that serve as basis for this or that decision, etc. The idea of the information card is to serve as a guideline for citizens."

On her own initiative Ms Arakelyan continuously adds more information cards in her municipality, as the provided services are numerous. "Usually we work on templates to simplify the lives of citizens, because they particularly need the application form and the necessary documents," Arusyak says.



NAIRA ABRAHAMYAN

Council member of Arpi municipality of Shirak region

After graduating from Yerevan State University, Naira Abrahamyan moved to Garnarich settlement of Arpi municipality in 1989 and started teaching physics in the school, where she is the principal today. Apart from educating the younger generation for almost 2 decades already, Ms Abrahamyan has also been engaged in local politics for 13 years already. Having started as a secretary of staff in the municipality, she later on had difficulties in combining the municipal work and the school. Thus, she took the decision to run for local council elections and carry on her duties as the school principal. Twice nominated and twice elected, the only female council member of her municipality Ms Abrahamyan always gets actively engaged in the social, political and, of course, educational life of the municipality. "It is very important that the local self-government bodies cooperate with educational institutions. As a school principal and council member, I can say that it is the village that benefits from this cooperation. Educational programmes for local governments are also very important, as you get thematic literacy from each course and subconsciously give your consent to previously disagreed lines," Ms Abrahamyan says. A mother of four daughters and a grandmother of three grandchildren, Ms Abrahamyan is very caring towards every inhabitant of her settlement. When needed, she can even repair the heavy machinery, the leaking pipeline, the school classroom and the broken windows, help pull out cars stuck in the heavy snow and do any other work to support her fellow villagers. Thus, every day she is breaking the existing stereotypes that women cannot do the same work as men. "Problems have always existed in our community; however, if we look at all the settlements of Arpi municipality separately, it will be visible that



the ice got broken. For instance, with the enlargement the provision of administrative services has become easier. GIZ has provided computers and we have hired a young operator in our settlement, who, with the help of the new software [Municipal Management and Information System], will provide reference notes and other necessary services to villagers," Ms Abrahamyan says. Alongside the daily routine and numerous issues, Ms Abrahamyan always strives for participating in trainings and updating her knowledge on any aspect that might directly influence her activities. She believes that awareness and being informed are crucial if you want to make a change. "In order to learn what provisions in the Law on the local self-government have changed or what the functions of the local council are, it is important to constantly communicate and share information with colleagues and residents," she states. To make this come true, Naira participated in the small grants initiative of the Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus. Having won the grant, she has organised a series of seminars and round-table discussions and prepared an information leaflet on "Women's active political participation in local self-government." She pursued the idea of engaging as many women as possible from all the settlements of Arpi municipality to discuss issues of participatory democracy and bring up opportunities for local women to enhance their participation in local self-government and decision-making. With this initiative it became possible to attract women's attention to municipal problems and to activate their role as citizens who want to make a change in the lives of their communities.



SUSANNA GEVORGYAN

Mayor of Arevashat municipality

For more than 25 years already Susanna Gevorgyan has been heading the community of Arevashat in Armavir region of Armenia. In 1993 her fellow villagers, knowing her diligence and dedication to the community, suggested that she took the reins of the community and started solving existing problems. Back in those years it was the village council ("sovkhоз") that she became the president of. Only in 1996 when the local self-government was formed, Mrs Gevorgyan nominated her candidacy and was elected as the mayor of the community. "Armenia was going through very hard times in those years; there was no electricity, no water, no gas. One day several villagers came to our place, and taken my organizational skills, asked me and my husband whether I could become the president of the sovkhoz. I wanted to refuse. However, after a second thought I got persuaded, and my husband also agreed that I became its head," Mrs Gevorgyan remembers. She had to overcome many challenges, the primary one of which being the irrigation water. The whole village was and is irrigated through deep wells, which didn't work. Having solved this issue, she focused her attention on other major problems, such as asphalting, establishment of nocturnal street lighting, gasification, renovation of pipelines for drinking water, and so on. However, she managed to quickly catch up with her position and began to find solutions. In 2017 Mrs Gevorgyan conducted a series of meetings with women of her community and adjacent villages in the scope of the small grants initiative of the Good Local Governance



Programme South Caucasus implemented by GIZ. The aim of the meetings was to increase women's awareness and political participation. "Many women do not even have a slight idea what local self-government is. These trainings were very informative for them, because apart from theoretical knowledge they also had to come up with ideas, bring up issues of their communities and prepare group presentations. They understood how important it was to maintain good relations with local self-government bodies, to participate in discussions and run for local elections," Mrs Gevorgyan says. At present there are seven council members in Arevashat municipality, two of which are women. As Mrs Gevorgyan notes, they are all very conscientious, constantly participating in all council meetings, raising primary issues, working towards the solutions. "The experience gained throughout these years has proved that if I'm planning something, I must do it, otherwise I cannot sleep at night. However, there is one challenge that I have been facing for several years already – that is, having a kindergarten. I cross fingers to see kids of my community attending kindergarten while I am the mayor of Arevashat," concludes Mrs Gevorgyan with hope.



JEMMA HARUTYUNYAN

Mayor of Amasia municipality

Jemma Harutyunyan was elected as a mayor of Amasia enlarged municipality in the local elections of October 2016. As of today, Ms Harutyunyan is the only woman mayor of an enlarged municipality. As a result of the Territorial and Administrative Reform in Armenia, municipalities were enlarged. Out of initial 915 municipalities the number was reduced to 502, including 52 consolidated municipalities, whereas the final goal of the reform was to reach approximately 150 municipalities.

"After being elected a mayor, I frequently visit all the settlements in order to personally get acquainted with the problems of the settlement and the concerns of the population. Being in office for a year and a half already, I got convinced that the territorial and administrative reform is a progressive step, as it gives an opportunity to solve important issues in each settlement," Ms Jemma Harutyunyan says.

She mentions that all the settlements have many issues that need to be solved in the course of time. Nevertheless, one of the advantages of the reform that Ms Harutyunyan mentions is the common budget. "The budget is managed from the center of the municipality, and thanks to that we have already been able to solve certain problems of some settlements," she says.

The modernization of the municipal administration through introduction of innovative e-governance tools, such as Municipal Management and Information System (MMIS) and the establishment of the Citizen Office and training of the staff by GIZ, helped the municipality to provide more effective and efficient public services to the population.

"This was a huge support by GIZ to our population. There is now no need for citizens to spend finances and drive from their settlements to the



center to pay property or land taxes or get a reference note: for instance, now they can address the administrative head or MMIS operator directly in their settlement. If not for this system and GIZ, there would probably be no Internet connection and internal network with some settlements," Jemma says.

Despite the hardships and high level of labor migration, Ms Harutyunyan does her utmost to create favorable conditions for her compatriots. She tries to trigger both women's and men's attention towards municipal problems and contribute to equal participation in local development and decision-making processes. In the framework of the small grants initiative of the Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus, Ms Harutyunyan conducted a series of discussions and seminars on "Developing civil initiatives and enhancing political participation of women in multi-settlement communities."

Jemma Harutyunyan's day is too overloaded since it is not an easy task to live with the problems of a whole community. She gets the support from her family and friends; however, she finds inspiration in her regular meetings with the younger generation, "In my work, most of all I enjoy being around young people and children. I often visit kindergartens, the art school, and the sports club. I greatly enjoy the meetings with children." ♦

AMALYA YEGHOYAN:

"Not being an IT person helped me"

Amalya Yeghoyan's career can serve as a plot for motivational book: taking a job of receptionist in Gyumri Information Technology Center in 2007, she became Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technologies in just a decade. Her story proves that hard work and a little bit of courage are all it takes.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN

Mrs Yeghoyan, you have had a very impressive career growth. How did you start?

— By the time I graduated the university in Gyumri, I was married with a three-year-old daughter. As many of my fellow gyumretsies, I decided to leave the city and find a job in Yerevan. It was the day of my final exam that my English professor approached me and said: "Amalya jan, there is an information technology center opening in Gyumri, and they need a receptionist. You should try." The idea behind Gyumri Information Technologies Center was that after graduation students will come to the GITC to learn programming, while the management will work on convincing IT companies to open their branches in Gyumri. So, I went there without any hope they would take me as I had heard for years that in order to get a position one had to have right connections or pay a bribe. And still, I was accepted as a receptionist.

Was it hard for an English language specialist to enter the tech field right after graduation?

— I was so afraid that I would get lost in the world of java and c++. But over

time I understood that in the field of IT you do not necessarily have to be a technical specialist: there are many other occupations needed, communications for example. My main task as a receptionist was to accept applications from students. In one year after the GITC was established, we had our first company to open an office in Gyumri. And that was a big success. In a while, I was promoted to academic coordinator and concentrated on the business side of the project to understand the needs of companies and work with the academic boards to align the curriculum. In a few years I was promoted as deputy director, and in 2010 I was appointed executive director of the GITC. In the same year, thanks to the success of GITC, the Gyumri Technology Center was established. It was officially opened in 2014. And from 2016 I was managing both the GITC and the GTC. By the way, not being an IT person actually helped me: people couldn't see what value an IT center could bring to the city. And I understood that my talk to the community should not be technical. I used to tell them three things: IT can create employment, IT can

create possibilities in other sectors of economy, and in IT we can work using only our brains – no distance or border matter. This approach proved to be effective.

How did you create those job? Was it easy to convince companies to invest in Gyumri?

— I used to come to Yerevan, go from one company to another asking them to open branches in Gyumri. I promised them I would be available for 24 hours a day. We also managed to attract international clients: I travelled to many countries, and wherever I went I came back with a contract. Many international organizations work with us: the World Bank, the EU, GIZ, etc. For now, in the GTC there are 28 companies, more than 400 students and 200 employees from all over Shirak region. And all these is happening also in Lori region, where Vanadzor Technology Center operates. We wanted to stop migration, to attract investment. And the GTC is on a right path. I even can brag about five our graduates who actually came back from Yerevan and established their own startup in Gyumri.



Are there many girls among the students?

— About 40% of students are girls. And in management there are more women than men actually. I think we should attract girls in IT very actively. Despite the common stereotype, this is a sector where only knowledge and hard work matters: I, for example, have never seen gender-based discrimination. On the other hand, being a developer allows you to work from home whenever needed, so if you have a newborn you do not necessarily have to abandon your career for a couple of years.

I know that you cooperate closely with GIZ. Could you tell what projects are being implemented now?

— With GIZ we work in two directions. First, there is dual education system implementation supported and implemented by GIZ in cooperation with GTC. The system is now being introduced in the Shirak Regional State College. This is a very important initiative, because thanks to it in standard education system we will see updated curriculum based on market needs.

Then, we work closely with EU SMEDA project. Together with EU SMEDA and EU4Business we have implemented a number of projects in Shirak. For example, more than 150 people from all over Armenia – the government officials, the Prime Minister, several ministers, public and private sector representatives, international organizations, they all came together in Gyumri to discuss developments in the field of information and communications technology, bringing Gyumri as a success case. All these were mainly supported by EU SMEDA. I also have to mention that EU SMEDA project is not only about financial support, but also about content support. They not only give money, but stand next to us to support in management, in organization, in mentorship, to bring experts outside of Armenia. This is a very effective approach as it ensures sustainable continuation of the project. By the way,



N THE FIELD OF IT YOU DO NOT NECESSARILY HAVE TO BE A TECHNICAL SPECIALIST: THERE ARE MANY OTHER OCCUPATIONS NEEDED, COMMUNICATIONS FOR EXAMPLE

in Gyumri they also work in textile, in creative industries, in education etc. Being a gyumretsi and being in touch with the local I know what huge impact these projects are making. I also have to mention how much I personally have learned from the team leader of EU SMEDA, Eva Näher. She actually was one of the first people I called to ask for advice when I received the offer to become Deputy Minister.

Why did you decide to work in the government?

— It is important to know, that both Gyumri and Vanadzor Technology Centers are implemented by Enterprise Incubator Foundation with direct support from the government of Armenia. I know very well that even one person can bring a big change, and every one of us should be actively engaged. Government is supporting a lot of great initiative, but this is not spoken a lot. At

the meantime, international investors should see that the official support is there because they will trust the government more than a private initiative.

Should we expect any changes in the work of the Ministry?

— We will work on strengthening public-private cooperation. For example, we are going to meet the small start-ups which get tax privileges to discuss how we can bring their solutions to use in the government. I am also in touch with the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments to see the result of the research they were doing and to work out the ways to use information technologies in different sectors of economy: in textile, wine production, etc. That is to say, I don't want to change the directions for 180°. But I want to update, to introduce more innovative approaches. ♦

PERSONAL CONVERSATION

Regional Post's Executive Director Arshak Tovmasyan and the Team Leader of EU's Support to SME Development in Armenia project Eva Näher spoke to six young female entrepreneurs to find out what inspired them to found their own company and why everyone should do just the same.

SPEAKERS:



ARSHAK TOVMASYAN
Executive Director
of Regional Post
Magazine



MANE VAROSYAN
Co-founder of Triple-E
augmented reality
platform



FLORA BABAJANYAN
Sales and Customer
Relationship Manager
at "Earlyone" queue
management system
company.



ANUSH ARAKELYAN
Co-founder of
"Koreez" game
development startup



EVA NÄHER
Team Leader of
EU Support to SME
development in Armenia
(EU SMEDA) project



ARMINA ANDA
Actress, writer,
producer, founder of
"Hoshkee Film" film
production company



SHAGHIG AGUILIAN
Co-founder
of "Gettreated"
digital medical
tourism startup



LILIT MISAKYAN
Co-founder of
"Areguni Machine &
Humans" precision
engineering company



EVA NÄHER: A while ago, we travelled to Berlin where we organised a 7-day Armenian Startup Academy project; nearly everyone during the discussions at the panel were men. And there was a question from a GIZ colleague from headquarters in Germany who asked whether women are active in the Armenian startup scene. There were a few women taking part in that discussion and people even recalled numbers from Silicon Valley which were lower than in Armenia. However, we know that in many fields this is a widespread international problem, and Armenia is not an exception. So, it is interesting for us to hear your perspective as women who work mostly in classical male domains – engineering, IT, film production, etc.



ARMINA ANDA: Inside your small social circle no one treats you differently because you're a woman. But when you start to be involved in, for example, policy development activities, as we are now involved in film industry development (including the law), there you can feel the difference. When you are a stand-alone writer or a film producer no one cares you being a woman or a man. Yet, once you start doing more, once you want to influence the whole system, there you can see the difference in how men and women are treated. Not the same trust is given to women. But I am sure any policy development process will be more productive if both women and men are engaged.



MANE VAROSYAN: Actually, I have never felt uncomfortable as a woman in this field because our team is partly male and partly female. Complications happen only during the meetings with partners when they see suspiciously young people. All of us are young and it often creates difficulties.



EVA NÄHER: Time will solve that! But in general, in entrepreneurship there are less women than men. Do women have less ideas? I doubt that. So why does it happen? And what made you found a company, developing a startup? Also, why do you think other women are not interested in entrepreneurship?



SHAGHIG AGUILIAN: When we started the company, I wasn't involved as a co-founder. It was actually my male partner who realized that I had a lot to offer to the company; he realized that he needed me to kind of complete the set. So, he pushed me to be more involved. Actually, my friends had always pushed me to start something on my own, but I had never given it a serious thought. I'm not saying I doubt myself but in entrepreneurship it is very difficult to start a business when you do not have financial means to go into such burden, because for someone completely independent – it's, really, risky.



LILIT MISAKYAN: I work in engineering but I'm not a specialist in the field: currently, I do PhD in religious studies. When me and my brother decided to start this project, it was very hard for me as I wasn't sure I could cope. It took me six months to understand what the field is about, and once I did, I felt I'm just in the right place. I enjoy doing this business. Of course, I had many problems because we work mainly with older generation and for now I haven't met a single woman engineer. People usually do not even imagine that a woman, let alone non-specialist, can work in this sphere and really understand it. At first no one even took me seriously; they thought I'm someone's secretary or a young girl who knows languages and can assist in some way. But gradually they saw I had a lot of good projects to offer and started to respect me. We even found



EU4Business



The interviewees all participated in various activities organised by the EU4Business "Support to SME Development in Armenia" project. The mentioned events include roundtables for creative industries and precision engineering, participation at DigiTec, study trip to Startup Ole in Salamanca and the Armenian Startup Academy in Berlin. EU SMEDA seeks to strengthen the private sector in Armenia and put a special focus on women in business.

out that while male engineers cannot bring all specialists together, I can do that. Armenian men are known to have very complicated character and they are sure their project is always the best. When we try to handle big industrial projects for manufacturers, it is quite hard for men to come together and work out some mutual solution. In such cases my presence often solves this problem.



FLORA BABAJANYAN: Although I'm not a co-founder, I have been a part of Earlyone's team from the very beginning and I learned a lot about entrepreneurship. The founder of Earlyone has always told all of us that we work now to establish our own business one day.



ANUSH ARAKELYAN: But through the history women were less highlighted as creators or entrepreneurs than man. This is not only an Armenian issue; it is common for very many nations. From ancient times it was clear that women's main function is to take care of the household and to be a mother (which is true by nature). We also know, that female and male organisms are different from nature. But how you use your own capabilities is a big game changer. There is no law in nature that will prove women are less capable to create. We have an unlimited opportunity to explore and challenge our possibilities. So from one point we can understand men when they do not think about giving a responsible position in business to a woman, not because of gender but relying on statistics of female leadership in history. However, I think if you prove you are a person to rely on, you will be given a chance. And you will become an example of a new model of women that will change the image built for centuries. I think it is worth to do it. Eventually our goal is not proving who is stronger – men or women, but to contribute to the progress of the modern world.



ARSHAK TOVMASYAN: So, a woman has to work to prove herself harder than a man, does she?



ANUSH ARAKELYAN: Yes, we should act more self-confidently, speak up more. I worked very hard, and my male colleagues invited me to be a co-founder in Koreez. I wasn't the one who came up with that idea.



EVA NÄHER: But did you tell them you were interested in the position?



ANUSH ARAKELYAN: No, and I wasn't really. I'm an artist: the most I wanted was being an art director. But I managed to contribute to the company growth and also found a lot of cool people who could be a part of a new beginning. So I became one of the co-founders of the company.



SHAGHIG AGUILIAN: I moved here 14 years ago from Syria and I still don't understand the idea that in Armenia women should always be taking care of the household. As far as I know even in the Soviet times gender equality was an official strategy. It might be not entirely fulfilled in the society, but it still was unique. So, I assume at some time a change happened. I don't know how, because even after the collapse of the USSR and during the war women worked more than men. I know so many stories of mothers who were the one to earn bread for the family. So, it's a bit contradictory for me: on one hand, women are not considered breadwinners; on the other hand, in so many cases they were actually the ones taking care of the family financially. I really think this is a message to men to see that their mothers and wives were out there working, not only cleaning dishes all the time. I'm not saying there are no women enjoying being a housewife: it's perfectly

ARmenian men are known to have very complicated character and they are sure their project is always the best. When we try to handle big industrial projects for manufacturers, it is quite hard for men to come together and work out some mutual solution

T'S OK TO BE A HOUSEWIFE BUT WHEN YOU SEE THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEWIVES IN THE SOCIETY IS OVERWHELMING, IT'S AN ALARMING SIGN THAT THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG. THIS IS A PROBLEM, AND PEOPLE SHOULD SEEK SOLUTION

fine, and I appreciate it. But putting that image on everyone is really frustrating for me because that was not always the case. At least it looks different from my perspective.



ANUSH ARAKELYAN: It is true, women were always working. For example, there were many female painters who were not less talented or successful than men, but the history just does not recognize them as notable figures.



SHAGHIG AGUILIAN: I was raised in a society where women were mostly at home. Even my generation of girls were less likely to go to college, and most of my classmates are already married with kids. It's ok to be a housewife but when you see that the percentage of housewives in the society is overwhelming, it's an alarming sign that there is something wrong. This is a problem, and people should seek solution. For me, the solution was leaving Syria.



FLORA BABAJANYAN: I think one of the best ways to overcome that is education. A child should know he or she has a right and ability to have a professional life. Moreover, I think no parent wants the worst for his kids, so it is possible to find a way to explain them, to show how important their support is.



ARMINÉ ANDA: But for now, Armenian families in general do not encourage future businesswomen; they encourage daughters to become daughters-in-law. I think it is connected to the struggle of men to keep the power. Of course, it exists everywhere but in the Caucasus or in Asia the fear to lose power even partially by sharing it with someone equal is much stronger. And that is why entrepreneurship for women is twice as hard.



ARSHAK TOVMASYAN: People usually have both kinds of aspirations: ambitious professional dreams about a great career and personal dreams about family and children. As entrepreneurs, do you think family and job are compatible? Is it possible to manage or should you sacrifice one for the other?



FLORA BABAJANYAN: I have always wanted to work as I saw my parents' example. My mother worked in medical care where the schedules are crazy. But she managed to cope perfectly fine. I also want to build a career and not to miss the opportunities that turn up. But if you have a husband who understands and supports you, everything is manageable.



MANE VAROSYAN: I also don't have my own family yet so it's hard to answer this question. But in university, for example, when I asked my supervisor about different materials and approaches in my work: "What do you think, can I do this or that?" He used to tell me: "There is one thing you can for sure: get married." He was around 70, and that was a great example for me of how people from previous generations think about having family and job combined. I personally think we will have to sacrifice something, because, well, I work from early morning to late evening and, naturally, I will have to change my schedule, but I won't have to leave my work.



ARMINÉ ANDA: I decided to become an actress when I was 10 and everybody kept telling me I might not have family if I choose this profession. As a kid, I was saying it was ok. When I grew up, I understood that it really was ok. I understood I needed to sacrifice, and I sacrificed having kids.



ANUSH ARAKELYAN: Don't gradmas ask you whether you have any news? ➤



ARMINE ANDA: I hear all the time that happiness is about having a husband and kids. For me, life is not divided on personal and not personal. Everything that I do is personal: my book is personal, my film is personal, my friend is personal, my cat is personal. Everything is a part of my life, and life is one. And I'm happy.



EVA NÄHER: But do you think that there are many girls for whom the choice is to abandon their ambitions as entrepreneurs? Because this may be a task that takes too much of their resources and time.



MANE VAROSYAN: I actually have a friend who is a co-founder of an IT company, she has a full-time job and kids. But she is, of course, an exception rather than an average example.



SHAGHIG AGUILIAN: There is no black-and-white answer to this. It depends on your expectations: if you want to be a first player in the field, you will have to sacrifice a lot: family, friends, leisure time. It will be quite hard to manage with kids, as not many in Armenia would agree to be stay-home fathers. But if you want a family and average good career, you can always find time. Sacrifices will be needed, but not necessarily in a negative way. I also think that not only mothers, but fathers as well should encourage girls. My father always believed I could become something greater. This was so valuable for me, and I'd love to see more men being a part of their daughters' lives rather than saying "she's a girl, she should be with her mother." That is a terrible approach from the first man she meets. But I see progress here. A lot of people tell me how they were pleased to see a young father with his kids, without moms. Yes, something started to change. And that gives hope that our nation is becoming more progressive in regard of childcare.



LILIT MISAKYAN: Woman or man, entrepreneurship needs sacrifices in all cases. For example, my brother has a wife and a child, but he cannot be at home as much as it's needed. So, I think it's quite hard for both women and men who want to be entrepreneurs and have family. I would like to have a child if I succeed in my academic career as theologian, as well as if I succeed in doing business: I really want to be an example for my kids. It's the best way to bring change, in my opinion.

ANUSH ARAKELYAN: It's the question of developing yourself, preparing to having kids because you should be a good example for them. And that is a great motivation.



EVA NÄHER: I think young women lack also role models. There are no strong women, say, in business that girls in school might look up and think: "This is a direction I could go." I imagine that entrepreneurship is also not the idea that is shared with daughters in many families, and it is almost similar to our German culture. Also, entrepreneurship is a question of choice between taking the risk or staying in the safe position of an employee. It's not only men fearing loss of power but also women understanding what they really want and can contribute to. Another case is getting together, networking. You know, when we are preparing for a trip to Germany, I'm always kind of confused: men shake hands only with men. I tell participants not to do that in Germany as it may be offensive. It's a small detail, but it strikes me every time.



SHAGHIG AGUILIAN: It is true! It was one of the oddest things when I came to Armenia. They bring traditions from some 16th century and make those a common thing. And it becomes common for everyone: now, I don't shake hands with my male colleagues.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS A QUESTION OF CHOICE BETWEEN TAKING THE RISK OR STAYING IN THE SAFE POSITION OF AN EMPLOYEE. IT'S NOT ONLY MEN FEARING LOSS OF POWER BUT ALSO WOMEN UNDERSTANDING WHAT THEY REALLY WANT AND CAN CONTRIBUTE TO

I AM SURE ONE WILL SUCCEED IF HE TRIES AND WORKS HARD. IN IT, KNOWN FOR BEING A MALE DOMAIN, I HAVE STILL NEVER ENCOUNTERED A GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION. IF YOU DON'T TRY THINKING "NEVER MIND IT'S A FIELD FOR GUYS" OF COURSE YOU WON'T ACHIEVE ANYTHING



FLORA BABAJANYAN: I also learned about this when we were getting ready for the Berlin trip. I have never payed attention that I do not shake hands but learning business ethics of another country is very important. After our trip it became kind of a habit: now when we meet partners and they don't offer me a handshake, I do.



ARSHAK TOVMASYAN: Actually, men don't always know how women would react if they offer a handshake.



ARMINE ANDA: It also matters a lot what visions we put in front of little girls. What we do to help them to have courage to dream and have courage to follow those dreams.



ANUSH ARAKELYAN: I agree; all these happens not only because of traditions but also due to lack of information. People don't really know where certain skills can be learnt; they think that being an entrepreneur is a secret ability that is accessible for the special ones. So, some workshops and trainings on doing business may be helpful because if people have the information how to run a company, they will at least try. And that may also automatically teach the men to shake hands.



EVA NÄHER: What inspired you to become entrepreneurs? What helped you and what, in your opinion, could help others?



MANE VAROSYAN: I grew up in a family of entrepreneurs. My father has had his own business and has always encouraged us to start our own company. That is why me and my brother became co-founders of Triple-e. Father always believed in both me and my brother, he was encouraging us, moreover, we saw support from all our friends and family. And it really helped me to start.



ARMINE ANDA: I haven't dreamed of being an entrepreneur, but I've always wanted to create – characters, stories... And entrepreneurship is a way to create, a form of creativity.



ANUSH ARAKELYAN: I just had a big motivation – which later became a skill – of bringing people together, giving them an idea and following the implementation. It's basically like solving a puzzle: you take the right people with right skills and put them in right positions. And when you look at the overall picture, it's pretty cool.



LILIT MISAKYAN: I started my career as a researcher. But I soon understood that wasn't what I wanted. On the other hand, what inspires me about business is continuous self-development, a need to work out a unique solution to a unique problem each time.



SHAGHIG AGUILIAN: When you are just a performer, you are restricted by the vision of people on top. And one of the reasons I agreed to become a co-founder of our company is that when a project becomes yours, you get more freedom of action.



FLORA BABAJANYAN: I am sure one will succeed if he tries and works hard. In IT, known for being a male domain, I have still never encountered a gender-based discrimination. If you don't try thinking "never mind it's a field for guys" of course you won't achieve anything. You should rather think you can bring new approaches to a field with lots of guys.



EVA NÄHER: We want to show others that running your own company may be an option, a good option. And I think our conversation may help to transfer this message to women and to motivate them to become an entrepreneur. At least, to try. ♦

WOMEN IN WINE: *Stereotypes broken!*

Traditionally, winemaking and enology have been considered first and foremost as a masculine occupation. However, more and more Armenian women demonstrate interest in taking up the trade on a professional level.

TEXT : GIZ PSD TVET

PHOTO : ZARUHI MURADYAN'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE



GIZ PSD TVET

It's been 6 years now that GIZ's Private Sector Development and Technical Vocational Education and Training South Caucasus (PSD TVET) programme has been supporting wine sector, among others relevant for employment in Armenia – tourism and precision engineering/IT. Being a priority economic area declared by the government, wine production in Armenia has been growing over the recent years.

Throughout all the phases of its implementation (the regional programme started back in 2013) the programme supported local winemakers to promote their products and enhance wine quality, as well as to establish an 18-month educational programme "Enology and Wine Business" and provide EVN Wine Academy with top-notch equipment and expert knowledge.

Zaruhi Muradyan, head of Wine and Vine Foundation of Armenia, is a pioneering woman winemaker in Armenia. She has been partnering GIZ's Private Sector Development and Technical Vocational Education and Training South Caucasus (PSD TVET) programme since 2013. Here are a few thoughts she shared on how it feels like to be a woman entrepreneur in a predominantly male environment and her career development as now Head of Wine and Vine Foundation of Armenia, etc.

I am an enologist by profession. I graduated from the Agrarian University of Armenia after which I moved to California to study at Fresno University. It was at that time that I realized what winemaking was like and I fell in love with this profession.

Since 2001 I have been breaking the stereotypes, doing business in wine in Armenia and promoting Armenian wines in different contexts. Who said that winemaking is solely the prerogative of men?

Now I produce my wine – Zara Wines – which was recognized as the "Best Female Entrepreneur's Brand of the Year" in 2017. I was pleasantly surprised because I was thinking that there are many companies and many business women whose products are more popular. But I think one of the main reasons why I was awarded the prize was that I work with less common and less familiar sorts of wine and, also because of my motivation to create unique wines.

I understand that winemaking is a tough profession for a woman because it needs physical work. But if you correctly organise and manage the work of the wine factory combined with a good team, the job becomes quite easy.

I am happy that Armenian winemaking has seen prominent growth over the recent years. During the Soviet Union we were known for our dessert wines while now we have a quite wide range of assortment and we are still working on more. We have enhanced the quality of wines. Many investments are made for the industry development; new vineyards are established, and wine factories are provided with modern equipment and technology. Our wines are already recognized outside of Armenia.

Our goal is to create our Armenian brand, Wines of Armenia, also to present it in international wine markets. It's been already three years that Armenian wines are represented at ProWein exhibition in Germany with the support of GIZ PSD TVET programme.

Another great achievement was participation in Mundus Vini 2017 where our wines were awarded 10 gold and 13 silver medals, which is, definitely, only the beginning of our successes.

These and other achievements helped us gain more consumption in the country. Recently, we have been organizing interesting wine events in the domestic market; wine festivals, wine tasting, wine evenings, etc. Last year "Yerevan Wine Days", a two-day wine festival, was organised in Yerevan in May. It is already two years that the students of Yerevan Wine Academy have had master classes at different places, bars and restaurants on how to serve wine, drink and mix it with other dishes.

The development of wine tourism has its special role as well. Some years ago, you could hardly find a wine factory which was able to host tourists while now almost all wineries currently provide this service. We are also planning to establish wine routes, e.g. in Vayots Dzor region. All these items contribute to the increase of Armenian wine consumption in the domestic market.

To develop and promote Armenian wines, Wine and Vine Foundation of Armenia was established within RA Ministry of Agriculture. The Foundation is operating in several areas aimed at promoting export, science, education, winemaking and wine tourism. Different events are being carried out both in Armenia and abroad to raise the awareness of our wines. We're working to promote preservation and dissemination of endemic and local grape varieties.

And of course, it's worth mentioning the first International Wine Conference held in Yerevan in October 2017, organised with support of GIZ PSD TVET and other international and local partners. It brought together wine sector representatives from different parts of the world to discuss top issues in the sphere and exchange opinions and experience. We hope the conference will become a good tradition and expand its geography in the years to come.

The Foundation takes efforts to improve visibility of Armenia as a wine country: visits of wine bloggers to Armenia are also organised, which aim to raise the awareness of Armenian wines in the international arena.

There is still a lot to do in the sector, e.g. we together with partners, like GIZ, are trying to set the wine industry's legal framework and engage other young women to work in the sector. ♦



WINE AND VINE FOUNDATION OF ARMENIA IS OPERATING IN SEVERAL AREAS AIMED AT PROMOTING EXPORT, SCIENCE, EDUCATION, WINEMAKING AND WINE TOURISM



FROM OPPORTUNITY TO EMPOWERMENT:

Daring to learn

Asya Ghazaryan, who got both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the Armenian National Agrarian University, Chair of Land Management and Land Cadastre, tells her story on how she took courage to build her career in a male-dominated discipline. The two internships, which she successfully completed, became life-changing for her future. When talking about the pitfalls of her profession, Asya says, "Neither the weather conditions nor the difficulties can become an obstacle for me, because I love what I do."

TEXT : VIKTORYA MURADYAN / PHOTO : GIZ

An unexpected encounter in 2015 with the integrated expert of GIS technologies and guest lecturer from Germany supported by GIZ Armenia at the Agrarian University is probably where her story of empowerment starts. Asya recalls, "At first, I had no idea what GIS technologies are and what kind of role they would play in my life. A geographic information system (GIS) is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present spatial or geographic data. Generally, the term describes any information system that stores, edits, analyses and displays geographic information. And this system is universally useful for all the domains – starting from health, economy, and ending with construction and entertainment. As we had a guest lecturer from Germany, my curiosity was provoked, and I started to learn more about the topic. Besides, the presentations and lectures were very useful and interesting. In the beginning, I stood out from my course-mates thanks to my language skills. As our main language of interaction was English, which I mastered quite well, I became "the right hand" of the professor in my course, trying to help him during the classes to make his seminars more comprehensive for the Armenian students."

At the end of the semester, GIZ Integrated Biodiversity Management South Caucasus Programme (IBiS) announced a call for the students to pass a 4-month internship in the environmental sector, where students could not only learn how to practically use the GIS technologies, but also to participate in field visits. GIZ IBiS supports internship opportunities in GIS in the field of environment and biodiversity in different organizations promoting wider application of GIS by women in particular.

Thus, it was initially decided that the preference would be given to girls. The internship was a perfect combination of office and out-of-office activities. After the selection, Asya was

sent to work in the Acopian Center for the Environment, and the Center for Responsible Mining at the American University of Armenia.

When working for the Acopian center, Asya was participating in the mapping of the Red Book of Armenia for Plants and Animals using GIS. Around a year after her internship, she learnt that based on her mapping, the Center had created an online portal, which enabled everyone to have a full access to the map of all the animals and plants that have become extinct in Armenia.

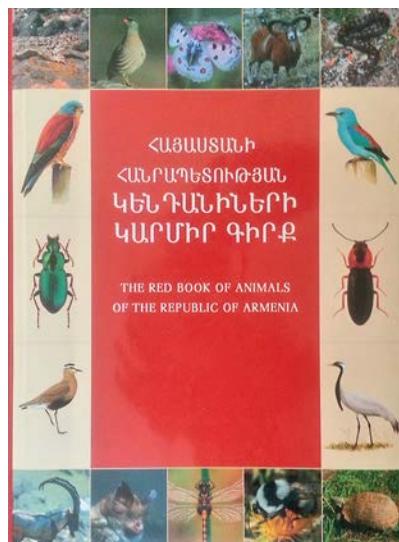
In the framework of the internship measure of GIZ IBiS, Asya was offered a second part-time internship opportunity at the Agrarian University to be conducted in parallel with the former one. In this second internship Asya was involved in a project in the area of private sector development that was working for the qualitative and quantitative examination and reporting of the vineyards located in Vayots dzor region. The professor and guest lecturer was Asya's supervisor in this project as well.

During the project, they visited many communities of Vayots dzor region, examined the vineyards, farmlands and pastures. They gathered huge amount of data in order to input and use them later in the system. "For me, those field visits were the best part of my internship. It was then that I had a chance to interact with people, to communicate with them, to learn about their problems and, last but not least, to work with nature rather than with numbers," says Asya. "I remember that during one of our field visits it was heavily raining, and the area that we were examining was muddy and wet. My supervisor said to me then, "I thought that these weather conditions would be too tough for a girl." That was the time when I realized that I was already breaking stereotypes."

These two internships had not even ended yet, when Asya got an offer from the GIZ Good Local Governance

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

Integrated Biodiversity Management South Caucasus (IBiS) programme is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The programme aims to develop strategies to support the sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystem services across sectoral and administrative boundaries. It contributes to safeguarding the species and habitat diversity for future generations in the three countries in South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia. IBiS programme is operating from 2015 to 2019.



Programme South Caucasus to participate in the creation of cadastre system for contaminated lands of Armenia in collaboration with the Ministry of Nature Protection, Vanadzor Municipality and with the State Committee of the Real Estate Cadastre. Thus, she got another 4-month internship. During the project, a study tour to Germany was planned. After the return from the study tour Asya's work was assessed by German experts, "who seemed to be impressed" she

recalls. Besides the research, Asya also organised training for the employees of the State Committee of the Real Estate Cadastre in order to teach them how to work with the data.

"The experience that I got from these internships helped me to get a job in the "Center of Geodesy and Cartography" SNCO of the State Committee of the Real Estate Cadastre of RA. Recently I received an offer from one of the leading construction companies in Armenia where I will work as a GIS and CAD expert. Thanks to the support and advice from all my supervisors and professors I was able to implement my work at a high level of quality and work according to the European standards and ethics. All the people surrounding me shared their expertise, experience and knowledge with me. I learnt how to be punctual, responsible, meet the deadlines and, to tell the truth, that was one of the biggest assets I could get from my internships," says Asya. But the biggest outcome for her was the empowerment and encouragement that she received from her colleagues and supervisors. She confesses that being a young girl is very difficult in this sector because the older generation doesn't give much space for freedom, initiative and creativity. "All the geodesists I know are men because women prefer to work in administrative positions and with computers rather than with nature. And both sides are to blame for it because girls in Armenia usually don't express any interest and curiosity in environmental studies, too." As one of my favorite actors Ethan Hawke once said in one of his roles, "Don't you find it odd, that when you're a kid, everyone, all the world, encourages you to follow your dreams. But when you're older, somehow they act offended if you even try." Asya's inspiring story should be a guide to all the young girls and women out there to go after their dreams and never give up. ♦

NARINE ALEKSANYAN:

"Not only for 'ticking the box'"

In 2017, PhD in Law, Associate Professor Narine Aleksanyan, with the support of Coalition to Stop Violence against Women, conducted a research on Law on Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men which was adopted by the Government of Armenia in 2013. We spoke to Ms Aleksanyan to understand why this law lacks mechanisms to be fully implemented.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN

First of all, what one should do if he or she thinks their rights were violated based on their gender?

— There are three types of remedies: the right to apply to state and local self-government bodies, the right to receive support of Human Rights Defender, and the right to judicial protection. The first remedy is abstract, because the regulations for the implementation of this right do not provide details on the powers of those bodies, on the decision to be adopted, on the legal consequences, etc. As to the second remedy, Human Right Defender has no power to adopt an obligatory decision on the case of gender discrimination. The third remedy has not been implemented in the judicial practice, as the Law has been applied in very limited cases, which did not concern the consideration of a certain case of gender discrimination, but cases of divorce or childcare. The implementation of the right to judicial protection is ineffective because of lack of procedural rules and guarantees.

The law on equality was adopted five years ago. Why do you think there are problems with its practical enforcement?

— The reason is the lack of legislative and institutional guarantees for its enforcement. The Law and branch legis-

lative acts do not define responsibility measures for violation of prohibition of gender discrimination. No criminal sanction, administrative fine or other type of responsibility, such as, for example, compensation of pecuniary or non-pecuniary damage, license suspension, etc., is stipulated for any manifestation of gender discrimination. This means that the legislative prohibition has a declarative nature. Furthermore, the institutional mechanisms are incomplete. In Armenia there is no authorized body with a relevant function for considerations of complaints on cases of gender discrimination. The gender expertise of normative acts is not enforced because there is no institution with the power to implement gender expertise, and it remains "on paper."

What should be done to ensure most effective implementation?

— First, the laws should define sanctions for discriminating based on gender. Secondly, those sanctions should be applied by an authorized institution or courts to the relevant persons violating the law, which will create case law having, *inter alia*, preventive significance. Third, the awareness raising campaigns should be implemented, informing people about law and the available remedies.

Besides the Law on Equality and recently adopted Law on Domestic Violence, is there any other law on gender issues?

— There is not, but I would like to mention, that during the constitutional reform in 2015, for the first time the principle of equality between men and women was separately stipulated in the Constitution. This statement was supposed to be followed by respective legislative acts, but there has been none so far.

Should a law be created when there is a public need or demand, or should the government prepare citizens for certain changes in the legislation?

— It can be from both sides. The demand is crucial, because laws exist for regulating public relations. However, in the case of domestic violence, discrimination or gender equality, the problems do exist, but they are not spoken much due to a number of objective and subjective reasons. Armenia also has international obligations to develop these laws and regulate the field. But the Parliament should not adopt the laws only for "ticking the box" next to the sequential international obligation, but should adopt enforceable, applicable and effective laws, which have all legislative and institutional guarantees to meet the needs of the society and be fully implemented in real life. ♦



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Violence against women and the subject of Domestic Violence (DV) has always been a taboo in the patriarchal Armenian society. Family is seen as the foundation of the society and as a preservation for the Armenian traditional values. There has always been a widespread belief that whatever happens inside the family is the business of the family and nobody else's and especially state or the society have nothing to do there. Due to this patriarchal and conservative state of the society all the attempts to raise awareness about DV were accompanied by very emotional discussions, debates and attacks on human rights defenders.

TEXT : MARINE MANUCHARYAN / PHOTO : WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER ARMENIA

THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS

If Armenia was by the ocean then we could say that the country was hit by DV tsunamis during 2016 and 2017. We even could give it a female name like in most of the cases with real tsunamis. The Armenian society was discussing the draft law on Domestic Violence (DV).

To understand how Armenia finally came to a state where a law has been introduced we need to go back for 11 years. The Women's rights organizations started advocating for the need to have a law on domestic violence since 2006. There was a draft law back then which was not adopted but it did open the door to the topic. In 2010, there was a resonating case of domestic violence which brought even more public attention to the subject. 21 year old Zaruh Petrosyan was murdered by her husband and the trials of her case during which the activist from women's rights groups were periodically attacked for "destruction of the traditional Armenian families," resonated in the wider public. Among civil society and human rights defending organizations it was clear that the need for the law is high and that the government should do something to make sure that the cases receive proper attention and there is proper intervention by law enforcement agencies. Besides, back in 1993 Armenia took an obligation on itself by signing and ratifying international conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



I N 1993 ARMENIA SIGNED AND RATIFIED INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS LIKE THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

which makes it obligatory to adopt a law on domestic violence. Coalition to Stop Violence against women which was created after Zaruh's death started raising awareness about different cases, media started reporting on the cases and in 2013 there was another attempt to adopt a law on DV. However, even after revising the draft the government did not come back to it for the next three years.

A DECADE LATER

New wave of heated discussions over DV law came in the beginning of 2016 when the ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia first time ever initiated a draft law on Domestic Violence. Organizations working in the field were invited for consultations, the draft was published on edraft.am webpage where legislative proposals are being discussed. However, the draft was hanging on the online platform only for two days because yet again there was a big opposition wave against the initiative and the draft itself. The officials who were responsible for the draft were targeted, and social networks were filled with hate speech against them. It was not clear when will the discussions around DV topic be back into the agenda of the government.

In 2017, the ministry of Justice came back with a new draft. This time it stood online for a longer period and all the parties had enough time to present their suggestions for amendments. Parallel with the discussion of the draft law the government initiated an awareness raising campaign and media was also invited to pay closer attention to the subject. The ministry held meetings with media representatives and women's rights groups prior to public hearings.

There were many concerns regarding the draft law. Women's groups were worried because the law did not criminalize domestic violence right away, also the law insisted on reconciliation which is in the DV cases is an uncommon practice as the pressure on the victim is enormous.



The Ministry of Justice held a public hearing which was interrupted by a group of citizens opposing the law, believing that Armenia has no such problem as domestic violence, that Armenian families are strong and that the ministry with such initiatives is trying to destroy the traditional Armenian family, thus harming the foundation of the society.

After all these heated debates and discussions the Armenian Government managed to present the draft law in the National Assembly. The law was adopted, however as a result of pressure from conservative camps, number of significant changes were made in it. The title of the law was changed from "Law on Domestic Violence and Protection of the Victims of Domestic Violence" into "Law on Prevention of Family Violence, Protection of Victims of the Family Violence and Reestablishment of Peaceful Coexistence in the Family." Women's rights group believe that



"peaceful coexistence in the family" is not a subject to regulations but the rights of citizens and the dignity of individual are.

However, the law is just the beginning. In order to put it in action there will be number of regulations in place and the women's rights groups will for sure continue suggesting amendments to already existing law. The "battle over DV law" was very heated mostly because the timing of it was very controversial.

POLITICS AROUND DV

Political scenery around DV law fueled the debates because it was seen as further Europeanisation of Armenia. And this has a negative connotation in the eyes of those who oppose the law. Many saw it as a pressure on Armenia, to adopt the law before it signs the Comprehensive & Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with European Union. The law actually was adopted after CEPA

WOMEN'S GROUPS WERE WORRIED BECAUSE THE LAW DOES NOT CRIMINALIZE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RIGHT AWAY, ALSO THE LAW INSISTS ON RECONCILIATION

was signed. Many saw the ears of Russia behind the anti-DV law groups as they, usually the same people, oppose every initiative that can improve the protection of human rights in Armenia.

IN CONCLUSION

Adoption of the law on family violence is a significant step towards elimination of this crime from the lives of many in Armenia. Ten years ago the subject itself was a taboo, today there is a law in action. More and more victims started to speak up and it is getting more and more difficult to silence them. ♦

TALAR KAZANJIAN:

"We want to create a real community of female leaders"

AGBU is one of the oldest Armenian organizations with activities that impact lives of Armenians in the homeland and in different parts of the world. We spoke with AGBU Armenia Executive Director Talar Kazanjian to find out what the organization does for empowerment of Armenian women.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN / PHOTO : AGBU ARCHIVE



Ms Kazanjian, AGBU had a female president in a very difficult period for the country. Could you tell a bit about the role of women in the organization?

— For all 112 years of its existence AGBU has accompanied and mirrored the life of the Armenian Diaspora. And it has always valued each individual's contribution to the improvement of the Armenian society, irrespective of their age, location or gender. After the Armenian Genocide of 1915, it was one of the first organizations to establish orphanages and schools for women and girls. Therefore, AGBU's focus on women has been very specific. We can even venture to say that it has had women's empowerment and educational programs from the start. And, as you mentioned, we had a woman president during one of the toughest periods of modern Armenian history: Louise Manoogian Simone headed AGBU from 1989 to 2002. Under her leadership, AGBU was quick to react and send humanitarian aid after the Spitak earthquake, during the Karabakh movement and the first years of independence. There was not only

humanitarian aid, but also other support: when a need came to create an institution that would teach Armenian youth to think in a Western mindset, and with Louise Manoogian Simone's vision, AGBU became one of the first founders of American University of Armenia. Currently, there are five women on the Central Board, which is the highest global decision-making body of AGBU.

What do you think are the biggest challenges for women's empowerment in Armenia?

— In the last few years we have been trying to look at women's issues a bit differently. If at a time it was all about humanitarian aid, these days we look at those in the framework of socio-economic development, where women's empowerment is actually one of the keys to achieve success. And women's empowerment, in my opinion, is never an end in itself. The ultimate goal is to build a healthy society that is able to explore all its potential and utilize it for the good of the nation and the country. This is the context in which AGBU started



GAYANE MARKOSYAN

Vanadzor Guesthouse
Vanadzor, Lori

"Vanadzor is a developing city. According to PM Karen Karapetyan's Master Plan, the tourism potential of Vanadzor will soon be maximally utilized. Thus, in order to manage the upcoming flow of tourists and offer visitors a convenient and pleasant stay, I want to open a hostel."



IRINA MKRTCHYAN

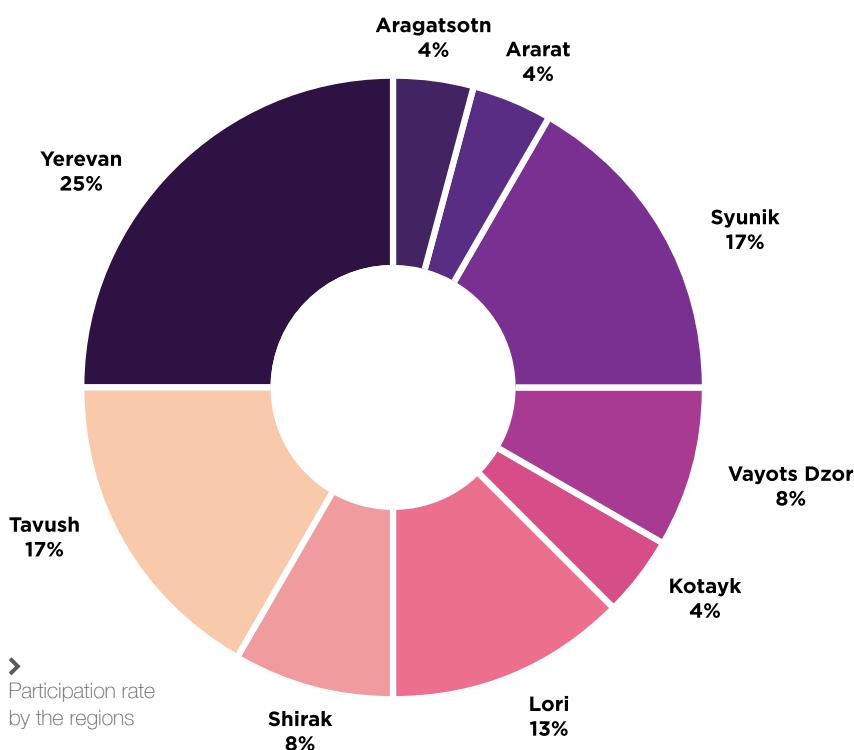
Freshness
Yervandashat village, Armavir
"Herbs are in high demand in Armenia. However, transporting herbs, keeping them fresh and growing them throughout the year is not an easy task. Our customers – the residents of border villages – will be given the opportunity to always have fresh herbs with a late expiration date which we will achieve by offering those herbs in pots, i.e. with roots."



HRIPSIME PETROSYAN

Poultry Farm
Krashen village, Shirak

"In Krashen village, people have to cross a long distance to Gyumri, the regional center, simply to buy eggs and chicken. In order to save their time and money, and also create a few new jobs, I want to establish a poultry farm. An important consideration in the project is that 10 poor families will become shareholders in the farm."



to look at women related issues in Armenia. Last year we also conducted a very thorough analysis of the topics and approaches of the international organizations, the government, as well as other organisations working with women in the regions. We wanted to have a more comprehensive framework to think about women, the needs and the challenges they face, thus determining the priority areas. We agreed that it is of crucial importance to raise awareness about domestic violence, abuse, sex-selective abortions because those are major social issues that our society faces today. By the way, when the draft law on domestic violence was being discussed, we were one of the few organizations to



ANIK ASATRYAN

Arpi Dried Fruits Production
Zangakutun village, Ararat

"As a Zangakutun village resident, I sense its issues and see the existing potential for the village to blossom. In Zangakutun, agriculture is not developing and the distance between the village and Yerevan creates additional obstacles for villagers to sell their harvest. In order to solve this problem and raise the quality of life of my fellow villagers, I have decided to establish a dried fruit production unit."



make a statement in support of it. We did this to show that AGBU does care about it, as domestic violence is not a local or internal issue, but it matters to the whole Armenian nation. We also focus on raising awareness about parenting challenges since, as you know, there are numerous women whose husbands, being labour migrants, leave wives as basically single parents forced to take the full responsibility. These are all important challenges, but when you start to study them you realize these are results of root problems: lack of education, lack of information on what women can do in terms of employment and entrepreneurship, lack of financial means, lack of networking. These problems are what we build our programs around.

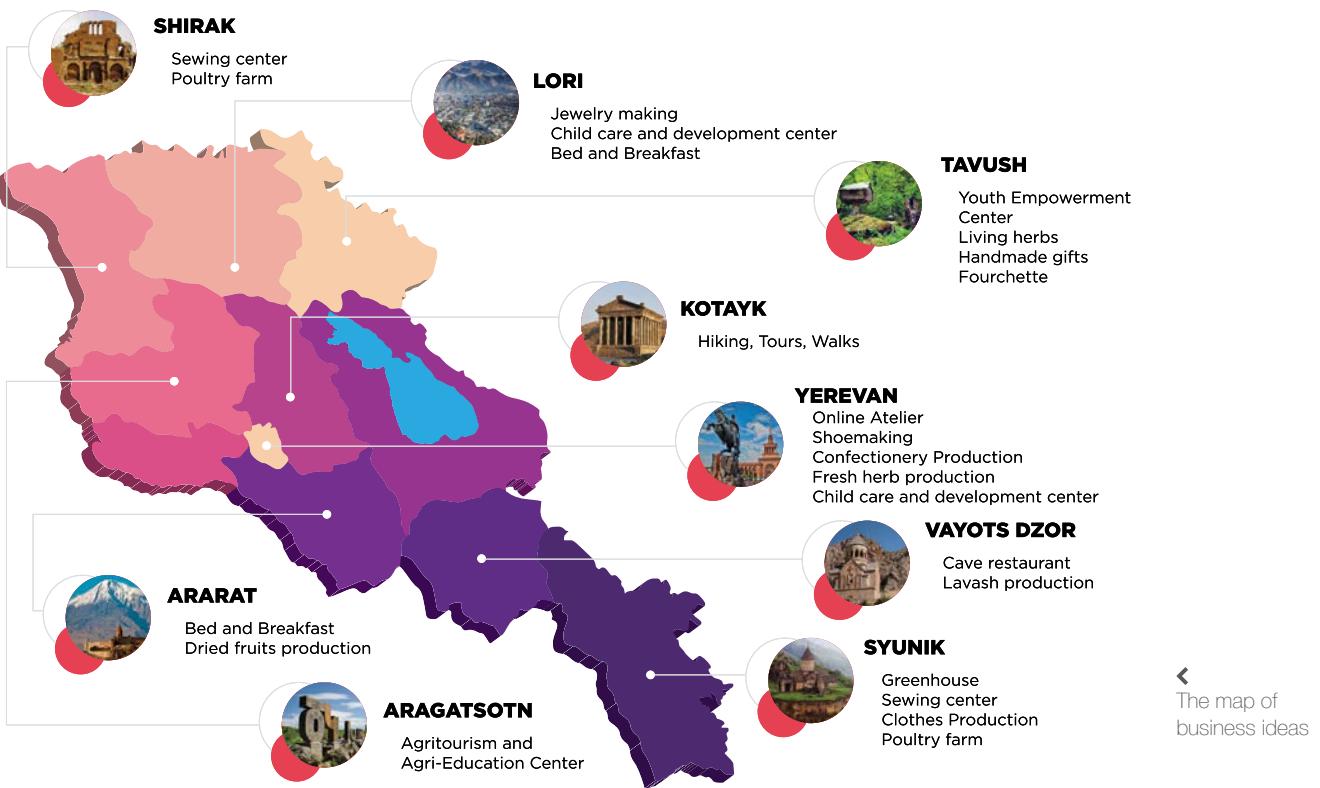
What kind of programs do you implement specifically?

— One of our initiatives, "Hye Geen" ("Armenian Women"), has been going on for about 16 years now. It was started by AGBU California – Western District. They gather donations on their local basis to send to the support centers for pregnant women that they have created in Vanadzor,

Yeghvard, Talin, Yerevan and Charantsavan. Groups of women gather twice a week starting from their third month of pregnancy. They have trainings with experts: gynecologists, pediatricians, health nutritionists, specialists in judicial matters, etc. In a while, it turns into a self-support group, and they all become friends. At the end AGBU also provides them some financial support for the first few weeks of having the baby. Alongside this, just last year we initiated AGBU W.E., a project which targets women entrepreneurs. With this we want to cover women across Armenia to give them training on how to establish their own business. This year we initiated our pilot project. We received about 60 applications for this program, from which we selected a group of 25 women who got trainings at the American University of Armenia on taxation, auditing, marketing and branding, on how to present ideas, create a proper business plan, etc.

How do you select participants?

— We asked women who had a business idea or already owned a small business to apply. Then we carefully



◀
The map of
business ideas



TATEVIK MANUKYAN

Coordinator

AGBU Women's Empowerment Program
After this first pilot project of AGBU Women Entrepreneurs program, it became clear that the program will be continuous. Of course, we will now work on making the process more effective. For example, the pilot showed that 20 hours of training is not enough for women without any business background to absorb all the information, so we will extend the course.

I want to mention that not only the finalists but all the participant will continue to receive support from us. During the one-year Handholding we will bring them expertise, introduce new skills, provide training. We want to show that not only financial aid matters: the real empowerment should be all-around.

conducted a selection process. We cooperated with AUA to design the training methodology having in mind women from the regions, and 75% of applications were not from Yerevan. We had all types of proposals, from agri-education center in Byurakan to a cave restaurant in Yeghegnadzor! At the end of the training course, all the participants competed in a pitch battle presenting their ideas in front of the jury. The jury selected four best ideas which got grants based on the potential and scalability of the proposal – from 500 000 to 800 000 drams.

I bet everybody were cheering on the cave restaurant.

— Well, it was a fantastic project. Manik, the woman who offered it, even did a drone shooting to give us the idea of what it could look like. Unfortunately, the resources needed for this extended our budget, but I know that Manik is now applying for another grant to build the restaurant. I have to mention that the most important part of our program starts after the pitch battle and it's called "Handholding." Armenia is a kind of place where you cannot just give a training and then let people go and struggle by themselves.

You have to provide continuous help, and that is precisely what we want to do. After receiving the money, not only the finalists but also all participants go through incubation acceleration program to gain deeper understanding of the process of turning an idea into a successful business. At AGBU Armenia we have a monitoring and evaluation expert who interviews every participant to learn what their needs are. And once we define these needs, we design individual development plans which will be the basis of each participant's one-year handholding.

Do you think the pilot was successful? Are you going to continue the project?

— In about three months another group of women will start their training. Moreover, we want to create a real community of female leaders with the help of these projects. We already told our participants they are not going to get rid of us any time soon! We want them to feel AGBU, to understand AGBU's values of inclusiveness, excellence and respect for all. Moreover, we want them to be empowered to become strong women entrepreneurs who are able to bring real change to their communities. ♦

LENA NAZARYAN:

“Living examples of power are the shortest way towards equality”

In April 2017, Lena Nazaryan was elected Member of the National Assembly from the “ELK” alliance of parties. We spoke to one of the most active female politicians of Armenia about women's leadership, transformation of attitudes and the preconditions for equality.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN



How did you start a career in politics?

— It was a very logical transition for me as I have always worked with people of high civil responsibility. Both in Transparency International Armenia and in Hetq investigative journalism outlet I was engaged in public interests advocacy mainly in the field of environmental protection. At that time I heard the story of Teghut forest in Lori Region which was going to be destroyed by the government and a mining company. We fought for Teghut warning the government that environmental problems would make the land dead for future use and would not let the mine function properly. We are witnessing now exactly that: Teghut Mine stopped operating, more than 1200 people got fired. During this campaign I realized that politics penetrates every single aspect of life, that decisions are made by officials in political institutions – in National Assembly, in executive bodies. And if one really wants to make a change, he or she should take the responsibility and perform action. It is not necessary becoming a member of parliament: If you disagree with the government on a certain issue, like in destruction of Teghut Forest, you go out to the streets to protest thus addressing your issue to the officials. And once your particular demand is fulfilled, you go home. Still, when you disagree on many issues, when you disagree on fundamental issues, a protest is not enough. You have to dive in and try to replace the politicians whose agenda you do not accept.

It is almost a year you are in National Assembly. Could you tell a bit about your experience?

— During the first weeks, the staff of the NA didn't believe I am a parliamentarian. Whenever I went to the departments they would ask whose assistant I was, as most secretaries are young women. Middle-aged parliamentarians have told me they genuinely believe women's place is in the kitchen. Even young friends of mine ask how I "stay

in that atmosphere," and this question amuses me. Who said I am the one in the wrong place? I feel like I am just where I have to be, working on what matters to me as a citizen. After all, you can, of course, do nothing in NA, and for years many prove that possible. But you also can perform positive changes.

Do you think people trust men politicians more?

— People generally do not trust politicians. Women are just thought to be weak. For example, I funded my campaign from personal savings. A couple of friends did symbolic donations, and that's it. I don't think anyone would se-

— I want to be a role model because I myself have had no female politicians in Armenia as an example. I work to make my reputation and my influence more valuable than someone's money and force. It is not at all easy: as a woman one should be more careful in politics, especially when people start to take her seriously. In our society it is much easier to discredit a woman than a man, telling "you devote yourself to work and neglect your kids" is quite enough. But being told so, one gets is a great opportunity to reply, and it is important not to leave such remarks unanswered. It is just necessary to be brave, as fear is the most weakening thing.

WHETHER A WOMAN OR A MAN, IT DOESN'T MATTER – A POLITICIAN CAN SHAPE A SUGGESTION WHICH LATER MAY TRANSFORM INTO A DEMAND

riously invest in my campaign precisely because they'd fear people won't vote for a politician without muscles. This stereotype does exist, yet I believe that stereotypes are there to be broken.

How can it be broken?

— For now, women help each other in household or in raising kids, but they do not support one another in social life. They do not call the police when they see a domestic violence case, do not vote for female leaders, do not believe in female leadership at all. But I think we should empower others with positive examples. You know, we always speak about women's oppression and vulnerability, creating a certain image of women as those who need to be protected. I think women should rather claim their territory, and I myself try to change perceptions and attitudes with my professional skills, experience and political flexibility.

Can you be a role model for young girls who want to start political career?

What people expect from female politicians?

— Whether a woman or a man, it doesn't matter: A politician can shape a suggestion which later may transform into a demand. For example, I am working now on a legislation, which will allow young moms and dads to finish their work at 5:30 p.m. as this is when kindergartens close. When I presented this project I almost immediately started to receive positive feedback and requests about the status of the proposal. And that is a motivation for me to work harder. After all, among all the enormous reforms that politicians always promise, we should not forget about routine problems that people face every day.

Can Armenia have a female leader soon?

— No, that's not possible any time soon. However, I am convinced more and more girls will achieve big success in many fields that are now completely controlled by men. And this living examples of power, in my opinion, are the shortest way towards equality. ♦

ESTERA MKRTUMYAN:

“Diplomacy is going to be equally difficult for everyone”

H.E. Ester Mkrtumyan is the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to the Argentine Republic. She also represents Armenia in Uruguay, Chile, and Peru. Being in such a demanding position, she is convinced that it is for the good of a traditional family to have a working woman.

INTERVIEW : TATEVIK STEPANYAN



Your Excellency, how would you evaluate the state of Armenian-Argentine relations?

— The Argentine Republic is 200 years old, and for about 100 years – half of its history – it has had close and constantly improving relations with Armenia. Argentina was one of the first countries in the world to recognize the First Republic of Armenia in 1918. Moreover, it was the first country in Latin America where an Armenian embassy was opened. By the way, in April we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of opening the embassy in Buenos Aires. The country has a big and well respected Armenian community. When I first came here I was amazed by how well our culture is known here. Furthermore, Argentines are well informed about the Armenian Genocide of 1915: school and university textbooks have respective references to the issue and

April 24 is officially observed as a day of remembrance here. And this is largely thanks to the efforts of the Armenian community. Since the independence of Armenia, the two countries have always supported each other on international platforms. By the way, in 1998, when President Carlos Menem first visited Armenia, I had just graduated from the Yerevan State University and was volunteering as a translator for the official delegation.

Are there positive results in economic sphere?

— In terms of economics, the distance of 14 000 km separating us matters a lot. This makes it harder to increase the volume of commodity turnover substantially. However, thanks to the efforts of Mr Eduardo Eurnekian, Argentina is considered the fifth biggest investor in Armenia. This also speaks

about the valuable contribution of the Armenian community in Armenia's social and economic development.

It is known that the closest cooperation is in the field of arts and culture. What projects in this area are you implementing currently?

— Did you know that Armenian literature days are being held here for 42 years now? They are organised in the framework of Buenos Aires International Book Fair. Before the embassy was established, the Armenian community proved to be instrumental in ensuring Armenia's presence in the fair. Now we work on this together with "Hay Kentron," the administrative body of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The event is visited by many Armenian authors who present their works to local readers. Alongside with this, numerous Armenian performers also are often guests here. By the way, the Argentine side invited Cadence Ensemble from Yerevan to participate in Buenos Aires Tango Festival and 90% of the audience were Argentines.

In regards with cultural cooperation, I have to mention that Argentina is a country where they have many places with Armenian names. There is even Zoravar Andranik street in the city of Córdoba. 35 Armenian monuments stand in Buenos Aires only, and the largest park of the city, around eight hectares, bears the name of our country – Armenia.

This issue of Regional Post is dedicated to women's empowerment in South Caucasus. As a very successful woman, could you share the experience of building a career in a field which is traditionally regarded as "male" occupation in Armenia?

— Throughout the history, Armenian women played a significant role in the society. We know that Armenian queens were not only supporters of their husbands but also important decision makers. However, the country had long been a part of Eastern empires where a certain, very strict gender perception existed and the right of

women to education was restricted. This, of course, left its imprint on the Armenian culture. However, Armenia is amongst the most progressive countries to stipulate the right to equal rights between men and women, including the right of women to education in the legislations drafted by Mkhitar Gosh and Shahamir Shahamiryan in the 12th and 18th centuries, respectively. It is worth remembering that even during the First Republic, Diana Abgar, Armenia's ambassador to Japan, was one of the first female ambassadors in the world. Today we have very brave women working in, for example, demining. I say this because I believe that everybody should have equal opportunities and do what they are most skilled in.

I personally have had no difficulties because of my gender. I started my

prevailing values. Besides, there are many cases when men dedicate too much time to work, thus neglecting the basic needs and attention they have to devote to their families. So, there always should be a dialogue between partners not to let one's professional occupation to be an obstacle. Also, as mothers are the ones who are considered to be more responsible in raising and educating children in the traditional family, their work, skills and knowledge may only have a positive impact on kids. So, I do not see any contradiction here. Lastly, we have to be prepared for anything that can happen in life: unfortunately, families may sometimes split up. In this case women should be able to support themselves.

Is working environment in Argentina different in terms of gender equality?

T IS WORTH REMEMBERING THAT EVEN DURING THE FIRST REPUBLIC, DIANA ABGAR, ARMENIA'S AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN, WAS ONE OF THE FIRST FEMALE AMBASSADORS IN THE WORLD

career in the National Assembly, and all my men superiors supported me and played a major role in my achievements and career promotion.

Do you think professional and personal lives may be combined even if you are in a top managing position?

— I am convinced that job and family do not exclude each other. Vice versa, they supplement each other. People may have different priorities in different stages of their lives. It is really difficult to have a newborn and continue your working carrier at the same time, but there are necessary conditions in many countries to make it easier. I am proud to say that Armenia, where maternity leave may last up to three years, is one of the leaders here. That is to say, a working woman is an asset to the family where love and respect are

— Argentina is a country where they pay a lot of effort to protect human rights and eliminate discrimination. Many top positions in the government are occupied by women, including the acting Minister of Security.

What would you recommend to the young generation of fellow females who just start their careers in diplomacy?

— I would not separate men and women in this field – diplomacy is going to be equally difficult for everyone. It requires a complex of multiple skills and professions to succeed in your career, and sometimes a combination of an economist, a psychologist and a foreign policy expert. And if you have excellent communication skills and the will to improve constantly, you will certainly make a great contribution to the future development of your country. ♦



ANNA AGHAJANYAN:

"I don't want to believe Armenia is fundamentally a patriarchal society"

In March 2018, Armenia appointed its second ambassador in the Republic of Indonesia. Notably, both representatives of the Republic of Armenia in the world's largest Muslim-majority country have been women. Regional Post discussed the relations between two countries and the experience of being a strong woman diplomat with Anna Aghajanyan, the first ambassador of Armenia in Indonesia.

INTERVIEW : TATEVIK STEPANYAN

Your Excellency, what achievements have there been in Armenian-Indonesian relations in recent years?

— The Embassy of Armenia in Indonesia was established in 2013. Before that, we had good relations, but we did not have physically present resident embassy. So, we are really talking about four years of dynamic development. Over this time, we have tried to find potential areas of cooperation to, in a way, put Armenia on Indonesia's map.

We have had a number of official visits from both sides, and we put special accent on parliamentary cooperation: the National Assembly established Armenian-Indonesian friendship group; we hope next year, after the elections, the Indonesian side will do the same. We are looking for finding more contacts in business and trade. That is not at all easy given the distance and the fact that both countries are right now most interested in attracting investments rather than investing. But I'm sure we will soon have achievements here as well.

What potential areas of cooperation exist between the two countries?

— We have relatively tangible success in tourism. Last year Indonesia was one of the countries that contributed to the increase of incoming tourism to Armenia. The numbers went from zero to couple of hundreds but that still was an increase. In general, there is a lot of interest towards Armenia here as we work actively with the media. A crew from Antara News Agency, one of the biggest local news outlets, traveled to Armenia and came back with a series of articles. After that everybody would reach us to find out what and where Armenia is.

Is there Armenian community in Indonesia?

— There used to be. Here in Jakarta there was an Armenian church. It

does not exist anymore, not because it was a Christian church, but because it was located in a district in the city center which was completely modernized in the 1960s. There exists an Armenian church in Surabaya, the second largest city. It is run by the local Christian community. They bought the church from Armenians I guess in the 1970s. It looks completely different from how we usually imagine our churches, but the pastor and the people know it is Armenian. Moreover, it is preserved as cultural heritage, which is very sweet. Along with that, one of the most famous hotels in Surabaya – Marajahit Hotel – was established in the early 20th century by Sarkies brothers, famous Armenian merchant family. It is a very import-

sonally have 27 years of professional experience, and I have never had any serious gender issue.

What about Indonesia? When one thinks of a country with a majority of Muslim population, like Indonesia, one automatically pictures a quite conservative society.

— I have never been more welcomed in my life. This country had a female president who, by the way, did not wear hijab. Now the Minister of Foreign Affairs is a woman, and there is a significant percentage of women in the Cabinet, including in very key positions. Of course, there were minor anecdotal cases, like that one time when I was waiting for an official meeting, and the assistant came out and said, "Well, madam,

M Y ADVICE IS NOT TO BE AFRAID. TO MOVE FORWARD, TO SPEAK UP, NOT EXPECT THAT SOMEONE WILL TREAT THEM UNFAIRLY BECAUSE OF GENDER, FOR GOOD PROFESSIONALS DON'T DO THAT

ant place for locals, as this is where they raised, for the first time, the flag of independent Indonesia.

In Armenia politics and diplomacy are not really regarded as "female" occupations. Have you ever encountered any difficulties in your career because you are a woman?

— More and more do I hear phrases like "the main role of an Armenian woman is maternity." Apparently, the younger generation of girls hear this a lot, and it worries me. I wasn't raised like that: my mother worked, my grandmother had a university degree and worked back in the 1930s! None of my friends had a stay-home mother, and nobody thought those mothers were somehow worse. I still don't want to believe Armenia is fundamentally a patriarchal society: it is a society where women have always had an important role. I per-

let's wait for the ambassador to arrive." Another assistant approached my deputy, who was a gentleman at that time, to invite him to the meeting, naturally assuming that a gentleman with a briefcase should be the ambassador. But at the same time, there were no such cases with acting officially: they are very attentive and respectful.

What will be your advice to the younger generation of girls who think of a career in diplomacy?

— My advice is not to be afraid. To move forward, to speak up, not expect that someone will treat them unfairly because of gender, for good professionals don't do that. So, when you start your career do not think in gender terms, think in professional terms. Do your job, do a little bit more than average, and you will for sure be noticed and appreciated. ♦

FEELING CLOSER TO ART

Arvest is one of the highlighted projects of Eiva Arts Foundation, which illustrates the 24 artworks of 12 Armenian painters. It is not necessarily only for artists or children interested in art, it is meant for everyone irrespective of their interests. However, the purpose of the game is not merely to entertain, rather it is all about implementing art education through fun activities. With the mission of contributing to the development of arts in Armenia, Eiva has accomplished many other projects since 2012. We spoke with Lia Mkhitarian, the Co-Founder and CEO of the foundation, about Arvest and the other successful projects.

TEXT : AMALIE KHACHATRYAN / PHOTO : EIVA ARTS FOUNDATION

ARVEST AS AN EDUCATOR

The pictures of Arvest are not large enough to frame and hang on the wall of our room, but they can be the reason to visit the museums and to admire the originals. The cards contain information about the location of the works and the painter. Moreover, players can learn the story behind each artwork in an informative book that will be included in the



lovely box. Co-Founder Lia Mkhitarian says that they purposely chose pictures that might be not the most famous art pieces, but have a nice story to tell. In order to obtain first-hand information, the team worked with the artists' families and the museums. They spent one and a half year developing the game for different age groups. "We became concerned with the lack of information on Armenian art and culture. Afterwards, there was a second problem – how to teach culture to children and say that it is fun and 'cool'. a child playing football would not take an art book and read unless the mom or the teacher forced the child to do so. Hence, we intended to make the teaching process playful without any force. By learning the art through playing, children will easily remember the names and recognize the specific color palettes and styles," said Lia.

5 GAMES, 5+

There are 5 games that can be played with the same cards (from 5+ to 9+). However, it is surprisingly less tricky for children. "Once we got feedback from adults that the rules are quite complicated, but children have never had any problem," says Lia. Some of the games are entirely new and others are based on the rules of classic games of the 18th century. For example, Art Collector is completely new, and the goal is to teach to analyze artwork and learn art styles by collecting sets. The Co-Founder told that there was no game relating to Armenian art before: Arvest is the first one, which is, first of all, an aesthetic educational material. It was highly important for the team to build a game that would have easily understandable rules for everybody. For that reason, they worked at many schools in Armenia, as well as played it with various people from different backgrounds and social skills.



SUPPORTERS AND SPONSORS

There were many supporters that joined the Eiva team to develop the game project. With the support of the Ministry of Culture, Youth foundation of Armenia and Pyunik Benevolent Foundation, they managed to provide the game to all art schools and cultural centers for free. At the same time, through the support of the European Union, UNDP and Kolba Lab, they presented it as a startup project and began selling it. The price is 9500 AMD. "The more funders you have, the more people will have the feeling of belongingness. Similarly, the more we can help the game to spread. We do our projects for the entire society, therefore we want the game to be available for many children. Of course, since there was no precedent before, we also sometimes had to persuade people we worked with to support us with the process of obtaining information, etc. There was no expression like "Wow, such an awesome idea." We've had all the work done through negotiations," said Lia.

ABOUT US

Since 2012 Eiva Arts Foundation has implemented projects to value the role of art globally, as well as contribute to the development of arts in Armenia and foster the global recognition of Armenian art. In order to fulfill this mission, Eiva implements projects that are directed to fostering art education and education through art, socially engaged art and pure art. Arvest is the first game initiative within the frames of Eiva's art educational programs. Valuing the role of art, the foundation has chosen different ways to develop arts in Armenia. Over the course of years, Eiva has published various educational books, catalogs and newspapers that address topics of fundamental human rights and equality and are intended to raise public awareness of other social issues in Armenia. The other art form that has been prioritized during the six years of work is social art. The Co-Founder told that they have always been intending to help the art community cooperate with civil society organizations.



GENOCIDE IN THE ART OF EIVA

Given the importance of the global acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide, Eiva have started as well to illustrate the topic in some of their projects since 2015. They managed to gather 100 artworks dedicated to the genocide created by outstanding Armenian artists from all around the world and placed them on the 100years100arts.com website, creating a permanent online exhibition. In the same year they had the chance also to present Armenia at the Prague Quadrennial, which is the world's largest festival in the field of scenography. In the museum of Franz Kafka, the Eiva foundation presented "Red Hail... because it never ends" art installation which is a reproduction of an unfinished game played by children who fell victims to the Armenian Genocide. It is notable that the music of the video was written by Tigran Hamasyan. Currently, the video art installation of the project is still being presented in different festivals and it has been already received multiple awards. In 15 days the exhibition had more than 150.000 visitors.

PUBLICATIONS. SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

The Eiva foundation can even use art as a tool to teach children the Constitution and the Convention on Children's Rights. Rights and Freedom and I am a Child are book projects which were presented in many schools and communities. The child-friendly books are illustrated with diverse human characters who teach children their rights. It is worthy of attention that a new book for adults will be released this year – Twentieth-Century American Art by Erika Doss, published by the Oxford University Press. Over the years the team has also found another hot topic to tackle through art publications – gender selective abortion, which was illustrated in one of their recent projects. Story of a Girl comics-newspaper tells about a pregnant woman who is forced to consider having an abortion. The project was so successful that even doctors called them asking to provide their hospitals with newspapers in an attempt to influence the final decision. Lia considers all their highlighted projects as success stories, since the books have been included in the school curriculum and the exhibitions have participated in popular festivals. The Eiva foundation believes that Arvest is also in this list since from now on art has been made available to everybody. ♦



ARMINA ZAKARYAN:

Leader vs boss. Insights from DEEM's Director

Armine Zakaryan joined Deem Communications in 2011. Now she is the director of the agency, leading the business for over 5 years. As a female boss in the Armenian creative industry, Armine faces the “male vs female boss” stereotype almost every day, yet never gets disappointed. Stereotypes can't affect the quality of work if you are confident in what you do- this is one of the secrets of her career success. Regional Post talked to Armine about what it is like to be a female director of a company in Armenia.

INTERVIEW : AMALIE KHACHATRYAN / PHOTO : DEEM COMMUNICATIONS



“Male and female bosses.” Is there a difference to you?

— There are two approaches- how they treat you and how you feel. Clients usually expect to see a male boss. Just before this meeting we had another case when the client expected to be welcomed by a man in the position of the director. Actually, this is just the beginning of any meeting, afterwards we start speaking, introducing the company and the stereotypes are left behind. It no longer matters if you are a “male or a female boss.”

What are the difficulties of being a female boss?

— First, it is about stereotypes, and second – mistrust. It requires more effort to persuade that you can also be right by being a woman. However, I have been in the industry for more than 10 years now and luckily I can notice a positive change in the attitude.

There are clients who are more open to new and creative ideas and there are those with more traditional mindset. For more conservative clients there always needs to be a second person, preferably a man to reaffirm the rightness of what you said, being a woman, at least for the initial stage.



Any advantages?

— In some cases it is easier for women to handle certain situations, we are more flexible. I am not saying that women are trickier, or they use their charm intentionally but there are cases that are easier for women to handle. I have been in the same field for years, and my experience helps me a lot in communication and business management, as well as in breaking the stereotypes. As a female director I believe that we can ensure a more balanced working environment in Armenia where professionalism and not gender will matter. Today it still takes a while for some clients to perceive a woman in the position of the director: at first you notice and feel a difference in their attitude even if you don't want to, however, stereotypes are broken when you get down to business and they see that you take your work seriously. Mostly this happens during meetings and discussions.

Overall, society is not used to seeing female leaders in Armenia. There are very few female employees even in Armenia's Government or Parliament.

— Indeed, but the number of women leaders is growing. Even small businesses run by women have been growing in number and that is why it has been significantly easier to be a female director over the last few years, compared with the past years. Women have stopped being housewives, now they realize the importance of being self-reliant. Even at home a woman can start her own business which I believe is very important for self-esteem. So, managing to balance family and work is the best case.

Do you manage to balance work and family?

— I have two children and another big family: DEEM team. I have full support and understanding from my family when it comes to work. Sometimes I might work late hours and my family never complains about it.



At the same time DEEM is one big family where we share the same problems and happy moments. This helps us better manage our work and projects. Besides sharing office space and time we also share some leisure time. Teamwork, hiking, and a lot more: this all creates a sense of connectedness, boosts creativity and DEEM spirit.

They say women prefer male bosses and vice versa.

— In my experience I have never faced such a stereotype during a job interview. However, the sooner you deal with and overcome stereotypes in business, the better.

I have noticed that there are more female than male employees at DEEM

— I always want to give my preference to male employees to keep the gender balance but it is not always that it works. Recently we announced two job vacancies and I finally managed to hire men employees. I do our best to improve gender balance at our agency. Actually, it is not about preferring to work with women because it is easier to work with them as a female director. I believe that balance is always essential for any team. The more girls there are in a team, the more emotions there are!

Do you think that people's attitude has changed towards women or maybe you yourself have changed over 14 years of experience in Armenian market?

— Both have changed. Of course over the years you get used to it and learn how to handle awkward moments in communication. Actually, I don't get ready for business meetings differently because of the gender of the client: Client is a client. If you have the right ideas and if you are confident in your work, there is absolutely no difference. You just move forward with your ideas – this is what is important. If I am self-confident and I have interesting ideas, that is all what matters.

What are your top 3 strong features as a company director?

— Responsibility, multi-tasking, conflict management skills both internal and external. However, leadership is not only about this, it is an essential quality that you must build over time. It is about trusting and respecting your team members and enjoying their respect in return, it's about listening to their opinion, encouraging them and boosting the company's team spirit. These are essential qualities that come together in a good leader. This forms the foundation of any successful business. ♦

GIRLS IN TECH

"It's enough to have a desire to change something and believe that you can do it," says the founder of the Girls in Tech Armenia, Seda Papoyan, who established the Armenian chapter of the world-famous NGO in 2016 to help Armenian girls and women to advance in tech through engagement, education and empowerment.

TEXT : VIKTORYA MURADYAN

Founded 11 years ago in San Francisco by Adriana Gascoigne, a global non-profit organization called Girls in Tech focuses on the engagement, education and empowerment of girls and women all over the world who are passionate about technology. Girls in Tech has become so widespread in only 10 years that it covered more than 35 countries from Brazil, Mexico to India and Australia with over 60 active chapters. The founder of the Armenian chapter, Seda, who didn't have any interest in tech and coding before, says: "The Armenian chapter is the only one in the region for the moment as the closest chapter is situated in Jordan. That makes us very proud." The global NGO has already a formed structure, working model, ideology and projects and each chapter that is being established can take the ready models and use them, which makes the process of creation much easier.

Each newly established chapter has a right to choose its legal status. As Seda already had an experience in NGO management, she preferred to stay in the sector, as she considered that the chapter can work more efficiently there. The NGO accepts both men and women who want to increase the participation of women in technological advancements. Interesting to note, that there are a lot of board member men in the foreign chapters of Girls in Tech. For any initiative, that they're undertaking, they only have one precondition which is at least 50% participation of women. Hence, the interest among women is increasingly higher than among men, as the Armenian society isn't ready to positively perceive the participation of men in "girly" projects. What the Girls in Tech team tries to do is to create that connection between men and women. The NGO's long-term strategy, the Triple E, bases on 3 pillars – engage, educate and empower, which are complementing each other. "It is important for people to understand, that we do not strive for women's presence in the IT sphere," says the founder. "When we look at the current IT companies, the gender balance in the staff is mostly preserved, but



the women are usually either on lower positions, or they're occupying administrative positions like HR and Marketing Management." We can count on one hand's fingers the tech companies in Armenia that are led by women. Though, this issue is common for the whole world and not only for Armenia. The primary cause of this is that women are not being let to climb the career ladder. Even in the US and the UK, where the situation is relatively better compared to the whole world, the women leadership of IT companies is only 18%. And even if we notice some progress in hiring women, it's sad to confess that top management does it not because they acknowledge the woman's talent or experience, but because they want to provide diversity in the workplace.

To be able to tackle this situation, the first step is the Engagement that can be realized via two approaches – career orientation from an early age or the second one, which is becoming increasingly popular recently, the change of profession. After the engagement, the Education pillar comes into action. Education programmes include many non-formal teaching and learning methods like bootcamps and mentorships. The last year showed that everywhere in the world there is a high demand of learning coding skills. That is why a recently opened coding school will add a value to the Education processes. And the last but not the least, the Empowerment pillar comes into force, which flows as a red line through all projects and aims to give confidence as well as excitement to the potential target audience. As an example we can take the Catalyst conference which usually takes place in San Francisco and brings the biggest names in the tech industry in one venue to discuss the recent trends of the market.

With many projects and interesting initiatives, Girls in Tech opens the doors for anyone who is interested in cooperation and change making. As the founder and director Seda Papoyan says, "You don't need to write codes to empower people around you. Use your experience to organise change and make the world a better place for everyone." ♦

INNOVATIVE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Never before in history has the innovation mattered as much as it does now, as it's considered a key instrument for the development, world progress and a solution to the problems that the societies all around the world are facing now. The capacity of innovation to break global development trends is recognized everywhere and Armenia is trying to keep up with the global novelties and boost the power of innovation to achieve better business environment and opportunities.

TEXT : VIKTORYA MURADYAN

Innovative Women Entrepreneurship is an association of individual women entrepreneurs and businesses owned and managed by women. Founded by two experienced management consultants and well-known business trainers Naira Margaryan and Silva Mesropyan, the association is planning its official launch this summer. One of the founders, Silva Mesropyan says, "For now we are all into the strategy, membership acquisition and formalizing processes but it won't take



long since we are not starting from a scratch, we've been informally acting for a few years now."

It all started in spring 2016 at the "Keys to Financial Management" training organised for women by EBRD Women in Business program where Naira Margaryan was the lead trainer. Around 20 women representing their pretty famous businesses came to spend a week to familiarize themselves with corporate finances. It was a perfect networking opportunity for women where they shared their pains, challenges and success stories.

Consequently, this training gave a start to a Facebook group which was initially planned as a communication platform for all the participants. In the next months around 4 cooperative projects have been launched by the members. Little by little the group grew and that's where Silva Mesropyan stepped in and transformed it into a community with 120 active members, some of those international, all elevating women in business who are pushing the boundaries of innovation. Naira Margaryan expresses her excitement toward the new initiative, "Women are creative and enthusiastic, they sometimes run their businesses on intuition and you can't believe how often they don't even notice that they've just came up with or are 'this close' to an innovation." The Innovative Women

Entrepreneurship will play a consulting role for all the women that need encouragement and support to put into practice their brilliant and innovative ideas. Because, what good is an idea if it remains an idea?

While being board members of IMC Armenia for many years, Naira and Silva had clear idea about benefits and opportunities a well-managed professional association could bring to its members and decided to honor their constant requests through transforming this platform into an official, well managed, regulated and strategic association covering all the areas already mentioned with a special focus on women entrepreneurial and innovation capacity building.

The co-founder Silva Mesropyan states, "Throughout years of experience both me and Naira have built networks of people and organizations that smartly combined can appear to be quite powerful for change making. The capital 'WE' in our logo also stands for 'We Empower' as our motto which applies to our members and to the alliances we are planning to build." How the brave idea of these two women will develop in the future, we will be able to assess by the end of the year. For now, let's just brace ourselves and wait for the new amazing changes that innovative women can bring to the Armenian society and culture. ♦

NOT 'IN SPITE OF', BUT 'THANKS TO'

One of the most active members of Ayb Club, entrepreneur Julia Danielyan told the Regional Post about the importance of not being on the sidelines and earning money in order to help others.

INTERVIEW : SHARMAGH SAKOUNTS

Could you please tell about your career?

— Personal growth allows one to switch from doing what is necessary to doing what one likes most. My current project is a small guesthouse in Italy, and if it is successful, I plan to expand it into a chain. I enjoy doing this, and one of my favorite aspects is that there is no Board that demands growing numbers, and I can work in a way that fits me and lets me enjoy every working day. I started my career as a bank clerk in Moscow and eventually rose to become the deputy CEO of the bank. I then left to become a managing partner for a real estate development company, where I worked for seven years. I then took a break to join the Executive MBA program in one of the top business school in Europe, INSEAD.

Why did you join the Ayb Club?

— I was always most motivated when creating something or changing things for the better, and especially creating opportunities for other people, giving them the means to achieve their dreams. Projects such as Ayb allow me to do this through both financial and non-financial support. The idea that we can contribute to the development of our country is a huge inspiration, which is on a different scale than anything else that I have ever experienced. Here, the investment of your



experience, time and efforts as well as financial resources truly produces amazing returns – a change on the level of the whole nation.

Early members of the club were friends of my husband, and then many became my friends as well. These are among the most talented and smart people whom I have met throughout my career. We are all united by common goals and values, so joining this community was a natural step for me.

As an active and successful entrepreneur, please, share your experience. Have you ever had difficulties just because you are a woman?

— There were situations that I would call challenging, and I think many women have encountered them, when the hard work and achievements are attributed to male coworkers and ultimately contribute to their reputation instead of hers. Eventually, the salary gap only widens as this situation repeats again and again. And in CIS countries this issue is more common than in Western cultures, especially when you receive a traditional oriental education, such as the one I had in Baku. Then you start accepting this order of things as a norm instead of fighting it. The first step to changing the status quo is propagating the idea that this is a real issue that needs to be addressed.

That is, initially, the problem is in education, in the family, and then in the kindergarten, at school.

— I would say that the key thing is that in order for it to be a fair race, both genders have to begin from the same starting point. Most often, this is not the case. The way life goals are initially shaped for female children by parents is often different from male children, and education only serves to further compound the issue. Even my father, who was a very enlightened man, told me not to overexert myself: «you are a girl, you don't really need to do this». My brother was taught differently, of course.

How to get rid of the traditional paradigm?



— It is difficult to get rid of the traditional paradigm, it is a step-by-step process, but once it's started, it unravels quite quickly. For example, 50 years ago in the United States men were completely dominant over women, but now the situation is different. In this case, several decades were enough to bring about a radical change.

How did they do it?

— The first step was admitting the problem, and that is also what we need to do. Afterwards, measures can be adopted on both state and corporate levels, and the concept of equality may be promoted using PR and marketing tools.

Is it possible for us?

— Yes, if we alter the ideas which the new generation is brought up with. A different paradigm has to be installed in the society through the young minds, which will defy the traditional ways with the right encouragement and education.

Where do you see the problem?

— It would be false to say that men do not trust women, and I am even sure that the opposite is actually true. Deep down, men have always trusted and relied upon women, which is conveyed through something as simple as trusting women to raise their children. However, the leadership role is still hard to abandon or share for men, because it has been solely their domain for centuries.

As an example, 63% of all graduates of Ayb school are girls. And they are knowledgeable, well-developed both intellectually and spiritually, talented, bright. They are well versed in both technical skills and arts. But once they leave the school, they enter the world of men. And in this world, the ultimate purpose of a woman is to give birth. While I wholeheartedly agree that it is truly the most important purpose, it is not the only one. There are many options that a person could pursue in their lifetime, regardless of gender, so it makes little sense to pass up all of them. Besides, being fully dependent on someone is never a secure position, because life may not always turn out the way we expect it to.

What can be done?

— We need more active and successful women who can share their experiences, be mentors and tell our girls more about how and why they made these decisions. Role models are needed as a catalyst to make people think about the issue. It would be great to have something like the Ayb club platform in all schools, with active female members.

I think that in the diaspora women are more engaged in social and economic life and it would be wonderful if they thought about joining our club. I believe in our model of a club member, or donor, or mentor, as it transfers the right values to the students, such as making money to support the ideas that you respect and the cause that you love. ♦

DEPRIVATIZATION

In the Middle Ages, Armenian women had a legal right to divorce: this was fixed in Mkhitar Gosh's «Lawcode». The history, however, knows no woman who has ever used this right. Wives knew well enough that once divorced, they would have nowhere to go. Intrigued by this revealing story, I went to the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of National Academy of Science to find out why the state rules in Armenia are usually weaker than customs and traditions.

TEXT : KARINE GHAZARYAN

When Armenia's first lady Rita Sargsyan was asked whether she helps her husband with advice, she was quick to reject, noting that she does not like those wives who advise their husbands, and, moreover, she would never have respect for those men who listen to their wives. As surprising and disagreeable as it sounds for a representative of a generation of multicultural millennials, I must acknowledge that it is not accidental that Rita Sargsyan is the kind of a first lady that she is. Armenian society has always been patriarchal. 19th-century Armenian writers Srpouhi Dussap and Zabel Yesayan were creating the first Armenian feminist literature and were actively participating in public life of Ottoman Empire where they lived. At the same time women in towns and villages lived by strict standards: first as a victimized newlywed, then as a mother-in-law with her own victim, and finally as the absolute authority of the house, who was forced to obey only every single man around. Being illiterate, what

possible access could they have to Dussap's and Yesayan's liberal ideas? In 1920s, the Soviet Union introduced the new rules which included literacy for women, equality and participation in social life, but they did this without caring about the other side's convenience or opinion. "Generally speaking, Bolsheviks forced women to go to school, to do men's work, to be visible in the public sphere," says ethnologist Svetlana Poghosyan. "But this was not easy for women. First, they had to do twice as much work as men, since they already had a full-time housework that wasn't going anywhere. Then, they were told to take off the headscarf, cut their hair short and go to the streets, when for their entire life these things had been considered a big shame." During World War II, the Soviet government even developed images of hard-working heroic women coping on their own who were meant to be role models for everyone else. These were not the new women, but the women who were masculine and, therefore, strong.

Svetlana Poghosyan notes that at the end of the day the innovations resulted in women's presence and activeness in life outside of their houses, which were once their entire world. Of course, the activeness was never connected to important leadership positions as the glass ceiling was – and is – always there. Ethnologist Ruzanna Tsaturyan says that the government of independent Armenia failed to use the achievements of its predecessors. "One challenge was overcome. Women were doing more work, but the self-called democratic government failed to stop the exploitation. Instead, we have regressed and now the women's role is reduced to just giving birth to future soldiers." The researcher says that the poor quality of education also creates a solid ground for the rise of militarism, violence and inequality. "When conscripts are taken to the army, mothers are the ones associated with the horrible sorrow, yet their voice is never heard in peacebuilding initiatives."





Education is a proven method to break the stereotypes in society, but its potential changemaking power does not seem to be used to build equality in Armenia. Ruzanna Tsaturyan recalled the story of a section in elementary school textbook which Armenian and international education specialists had created to show the kids that gender roles are taught rather than inherited. This initiative was called off because of a complaint from a conservative activist, Khachik Stamboltsyan. "This man does not represent any institutional power, he is basically one citizen whose complaint was used to explain the government's unwillingness to work for gender equality," says Ruzanna Tsaturyan. Almost the same happened to the domestic violence law just last year, which was eventually edited before passing.

Svetlana Poghosyan is quite optimistic about women's education. She says that despite all the big gaps, education has never been as important for women as it proved to be during

the last decades. She shares her impression that more and more girls pursue a career while building a family. At the same time, she highlights the prevailing importance of the family: "Even female leaders in business and politics proudly mention their ability to manage with housework and kids, as regardless of public position they always try to match the ideal that the society has created."

This ideal is protected and controlled by the customs of the society, which very often replace the law when the latter is not applied effectively. Ruzanna Tsaturyan mentions that people use the cultural capital of their social ties more than the force of law, not because they don't want to rely on the law but because they have no trust in it. "And if you use social ties you accept the respective rules."

In answer to my confident remark that the global conversations such as Hollywood harassment scandal can influence our society, too, Ruzanna Tsaturyan drew my attention to the

most popular shows on Armenian television – low-quality Indian serials with very conservative content. "The common public does not really get the information. No one speaks about women's issues on TV, the most accessible and popular media. Most people just see violent and absurd attitude towards women in an Indian soap opera and feel more secure about their lives: At least, they are allowed to go to school."

The images and values that mass media transmits match the characteristics of inequality. This content is full of militarism and involves very sensitive and emotional topics for Armenians: motherhood, children, loss of a child. Ruzanna Tsaturyan notes that it is impossible to discuss gender inequality without speaking on the long list of the types of violence and assault. "Individuals and groups will always have a chance to live a different life. But the real issue is in the path that the government paves for you as a citizen." ♦



ARMENIAN WOMEN'S LONG HISTORY BEFORE 1920:

What we know and choose not to know about Armenian feminism

Armenian academic and popular history, like in many other nations' cases, concentrates heavily on men as actors. We know Hayk to be the legendary forefather of Armenians, but we know nothing of the foremother of Armenians. However, in comparison with other nations the situation is not at all desperate if we look into ancient and medieval Armenian history.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN

ARMENIAN WOMAN'S UNKNOWN PLACE IN HISTORY

We know of several ancient and medieval queens who ruled over the country (Erato, Parandzem) and princesses and even laywomen who took part in political or military, also in cultural and religious life of Armenia. In the ethnic epic tale of "Daredevils of Sasun" female characters are represented as conspicuous women who are independent in making choices in life.

Armenian archaeologist, historian Sedrak Barkhudaryan's research (1898-1970) established that out of about 1300 documented medieval inscriptions around 500 included some mention of women. An Armenian chronicle's mentioning of Sahakandukht – the sister of 7th to 8th century Armenian philosopher and clergyman Stepanos Syunetsi, was the first documented case of an Armenian woman as a poet and a singer. A most influential Armenian Law Codex by Mkhitar Gosh (12th century) stipulated that marriages were to be made by mutual consent and that if a man failed to "make his woman happy" then the latter had the right to divorce in which case the woman was entitled to the property that she owned by the time of the marriage (dowry presented by her parents, etc.) and to leave the custody of the children to the father. The Codex also was called to prevent what currently is termed as "domestic violence" stipulating double sum of penalties for beating one's wife, or possibility of divorce if such a case was repeated.

According to medieval sources, Armenian women were also entitled to own property, which they could sell, donate or bequeath independently from their husbands. A married woman could bequeath her personal property to her children at her own will.



Queen Zapel of Cilicia,
by Vardges Surenyants



A German traveler and soldier of late 14th and early 15th century Johann Schiltberger in his memoirs asserts with a certain degree of surprise that among Armenians in case a married couple "neither wishes to have the other, they are separated so that each can take another spouse," meaning that a divorce could happen by a mutual and not unilateral decision.

However, with centuries of foreign yoke, coupled with the degradation of the Armenian society's social fabric and its gradual transformation into an exclusive religious community, things took a turn for the worse.

By mid-19th century, Armenian society, under both the Russian and the Ottoman Empire, was almost totally traditional with few or no prospect for women beyond acting as potential and actual mothers. ➤

> Article about Armenian singer Zapel Panossian, 1919

EDUCATING GIRLS. EDUCATING THE NATION.

Meanwhile, in the 19th century in Europe and other corners of the world national identities were being shaped and the eyes of architects of those nations were getting fixed on women. “Educating a boy – you educate a boy only, educating a girl – you educate the nation,” a common saying was going in those times. Armenians were no exception to this trend and education for women became a pressing issue in the second half of the 19th century.

It was no wonder that almost all the prominent Armenian liberal intellectuals of the period were also promoters of women's education and were promoting their role in the nation as educators of their own and others' children. Initially, it was the men who were promoting or even starting education for women. Armenian writers (Perch Proshyan, Raffi and others) were also at the inception of that movement, particularly among eastern Armenians.

Proshyan is known to be actively involved in opening girls' schools in Tiflis, Shushi, Agulis and elsewhere. However, the idea of educating women was not universally greeted among Armenians even as late as in 1870's.

Raffi, when teaching at the Aramian school in Tabriz, Persia (1875-1877), met fierce resistance by the local Armenian religious and lay notables in the city as he was trying to introduce female education among the local Armenians. He barely saved his life by fleeing the city and escaping an angry mob.



Armenian educational institutions for women were established in Armenia proper, too. For instance, Hripsimyan school for women was active in Yerevan since as early as 1850. Another school called likewise Hripsimyan was founded in 1870 in Karin (Erzurum). In the same year Sankukhtyan-Mariamyan higher school for women was established in Van.

On the whole, women's education among western Armenians concentrated in Constantinople was somewhat more ahead than among eastern Armenians whose cultural center was Tiflis – a regional capital less open to European influence than the Ottoman capital.

ARMENIAN WOMEN EDUCATING THEMSELVES

Educating Armenian women became widely spread only from the second half of the 19th century and closer to its end, as women's organizations aimed at collecting funds and supervising educational institutions for women started to mushroom in both empires, most notably in Constantinople and Tiflis, although not confined to only those two cities alone.

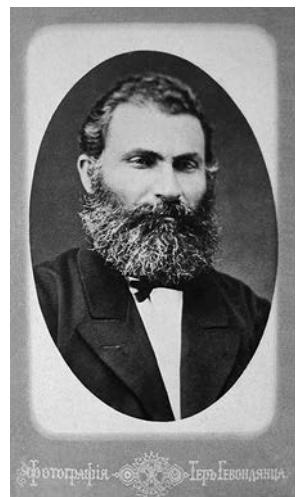
In one and the same year of 1879 alone two most influential organizations – named Patriotic Armenian Women's Association and School-Loving Ladies' Association – were set up in the Ottoman capital. While the former of them was engaged in supporting women's education, the latter was actively promoting female instructors' education for instruction to female students.

School-Loving Ladies' Association opened its school in 1879 which is still functioning. Their aim was to train female teachers for women's schools. Most students were enrolled with a financial waiver which covered their tuition fee and, if needed, accommodation.

In the Russian Empire an Armenian Women's Charity Association was founded in Tiflis in 1882 (renamed into Caucasus Armenian Women's Charity Association in 1907



◀ Armenian writer and historian Raffi



▶ Armenian writer Perch Proshyan



EDUCATING ARMENIAN WOMEN BECAME WIDELY SPREAD ONLY FROM THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

and active until 1921) which enjoyed a membership of more than 3,000 from different cities, including Yerevan, Baku, Batumi, Kars, Tabriz, Moscow and many more. The organization funded activities at 10 schools and one kindergarten in Tiflis.

Another Tiflis-based women's organization called Meghu ("Bee") was engaged in the issue of women's employment and their decent remuneration. They were calling for equal rights of women in employment. The organization funded the training of women for various works (like sewing clothes) and held their own workshops employing women for almost zero profit, so that they could sustain their families and themselves.

It was not an easy task to keep those institutions functioning under the repressive Ottoman and Russian authorities who periodically cracked down on Armenians to rule out any serious expression of political identity or cultural activity. Under Hamid at times those institutions were shut down to be reopened after 1908 Young Turk coup, whereas in Russian Empire Armenian schools, as well as those for women, had to disguise themselves as what could be termed in those days "vocational termed as centers."

INFLUENTIAL FIGURES IN ARMENIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

The resolution of problems of feminism, however, did not end but rather started with providing education for women. Next issue on the agenda of the feminists was the full right to participation in social and economic life.

As a forerunner of feminism, a playwright and a political writer, Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) argued in the years of the French Revolution, "A woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the pulpit." ➤

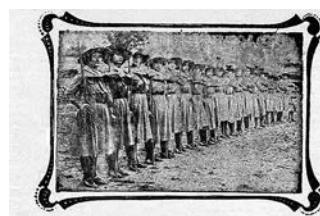
Armenian women – first and foremost western Armenian women – for the reasons stated above became active champions of their own rights in the meantime having both supportive and discouraging reactions from male intellectuals. A pioneer in Armenian feminist movement was Nazly Vahan (Arzumanyan) (1814-1884) who was actively engaged in charity and education. Originally from Caesarea, she was well versed in French and Greek languages. Nazly Vahan initiated the foundation of St. Hripsime girls' school in Constantinople in 1859 and in 1864 founded the Charitable Women's Association. Another prominent intellectual and writer Srbuhi Dussab (1841-1901), Nazly Vahan's daughter, was actively involved in her mother's social activities. Married to a French musician Paul Dussab, Srbuhi's first essays written in early 1880's were concentrated on the issues of women's education and their employment, as well as the concept of free choice in their marriage arguing that the ideals of the French revolution did not extend to women.

Zabel Asadour (Sibil) (1863-1934) was another prominent western Armenian feminist, writer, poet and educator who authored a textbook of modern Armenian grammar. Together with Srbuhi Dussab, Zabel Asadour made a project of an Armenian declaration of women's rights claiming for equal rights in all spheres; social, moral, economic, etc., but it was, however, never published.

Zabel Yesayan (1878-1943) was an influential figure of the later period of Armenian women's movement. Educated in Sorbonne, she was a prolific writer, translator, and an active social figure. Yesayan was the only woman who was in the



Article about Armenian girl scouts during WWI, 1919



Cover of a collection of stories of Srbuhi Dussap, USSR, 1960's



Ottoman list of Armenian intellectuals to be arrested on the night of 24 April 1915, in the prelude of the genocide, however, somehow she managed to evade it. It was ironical that after returning to soviet Armenia in 1933 she ended up being arrested by NKVD and died in prison in Siberia.

A prominent supporter of women's full right to self-realization, she wrote on one occasion: "A woman is not born simply to be pleasant. A woman is born to develop her own mental, moral and physical features."

Shushanik Kurghinyan (1876-1927), who wrote in Eastern Armenian, was a member of the Social Democrat Hnchak party. Her writings concerned both class and gender issues. "I wanted to sing: they told me I could not, / I wove my own songs: quiet, you are a girl! / But when in this troubled world / an elegy I became, / I spoke to the hearts of many," she wrote after the 1907 failed revolution in the Russian Empire. Ultimately, she became affiliated with the Bolshevik party and welcomed the October revolution in 1917 being equally active after Armenia's sovietization.

Nevertheless, there was no genuinely mass feminist movement as such in the Armenian society by the turn of the century and later to press for equal political and social rights, partly also because in many cases men lacked them, too.

◀
Zabel Yesayan (sitting)

▶
Diana Abgar

NATIONAL-CONSERVATISM VERSUS FEMINISM

There was not a universal consensus among Armenians as to how “women’s issue” should be treated. Although most agreed that women deserved having education at basic level, still there was no unanimity on how their education should be used and whether their participation to social life was acceptable.

Those factions, which can conditionally be called national-conservative, expressed concern that any “inappropriate” emancipation of women in family, social and economic life could threaten “national values” including the harmony in family. Surprisingly, among such writers of the late 19th and early 20th century were Mikayel Nalbandyan and Grigor Zohrap – who otherwise would be considered as liberal – and, occasionally also satirists Yervand Otyan and Hakob Paronyan.

Meanwhile there were others like Raffi, Zabel Yesayan and Mariam Khatisyan who argued that the Armenian women’s traditional role as primary caretakers of the younger generation in the family could be projected onto the nation, and their more active social role could be fully legitimized through that fact.



ARMENIAN WOMEN AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF POLITICAL UPHEAVALS AT THE TURN OF 20TH CENTURY

Armenian women understandably could not stay uninvolved in the political upheavals marking national history of the turn of the 20th century. Educated women, including in some cases siblings or spouses of Armenian political figures, became active champions of the national cause, even sometimes soldiers in the direct sense of the word.

The armed movement of fedayiis in Western Armenia in 1890-1900's, although intended to be a purely male business, included some remarkable women. Not rare were cases when women were fighting or helping fighters in self-defense during the massacres under Sultan Abdul Hamid or in Adana massacres of 1909.



**A WOMAN IS NOT BORN SIMPLY TO BE PLEASANT.
A WOMAN IS BORN TO DEVELOP HER OWN MENTAL, MORAL AND PHYSICAL FEATURES**

Many educated Armenian women, who otherwise would have served the cause of the women’s emancipation, fell victim to the genocide. Those women, however, were not just victims of the 1915-1923 genocide; they actively took part in humanitarian resistance, secretly distributed aid to the survivors, and were engaged in the armed fight, as in earlier years against regular Ottoman troops and irregulars’ bands set for killing, raping and looting. In the self-defense of Urfa (Edessa) a detachment of 30 young women, headed by Khanum Khatenjian participated in fights. There were other cases of women fighting on the frontline along with men or even commanding whole detachments.

Proclamation of the Armenian Republic in 1918, which was intended to be modeled according to European pattern, brought sudden and unexpected opportunities for feminists who would like to see more women’s participation in social life.

Armenian women, unlike some of their European counterparts, did not have to fight long for their voting rights as they were granted them without much opposition and some were elected in the parliament in 1919, well ahead of certain European states including, for instance, France or Italy who gave such rights to their woman citizens much later. Diana Abgar was appointed by the Armenian government as ambassador in Japan in 1919-1920 being one of the first women in the world to be appointed to such position.

It is difficult however for us to judge what would become of the Armenian feminism and movement for the rights of women should Armenian independence last longer. Sovietization of 1920, which ended the brief period of independence also marked a new stage in the history of Armenian women. ♦

THE ANGEL OF LEBANON

"You have your Lebanon and its dilemma... My Lebanon is a flock of birds fluttering in the early morning as shepherds lead their sheep into the meadow and rising the evening farmers return from their fields and vineyards. You have your Lebanon and its people. I have my Lebanon and its people..."

Khalil Gibran

TEXT : LENA GEVORGIAN / PHOTO : MARIAM LORETSYAN



Do you believe in love at first sight? Well, I do and I have always remained true to the phenomenon of never having a second chance to make a first impression on both people and places. I believe you either feel the vibe inside at the first moment or lose it forever. Lebanon was love at first sight. It embraced us from the very first second our plane rushed into the Lebanese clouds, opening its warm heart of blue lagoons, jungle of skyscrapers, gradient of beige shades and scent of jasmine. Lebanon is love.

For many people Lebanon is associated with blood, conflict, politics and war. But just come and visit this place. Lebanon, that has been occupied by at least 16 countries is about strength and wisdom, patience and gratitude. This is a land of feasts, happiness, tasty food,





FAIRUZ – THE DIVA OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY IS STILL TRENDY THROUGHOUT THE REGION. HER VOICE IS **SWEET AS MIDDLE EASTERN DESSERTS AND AS FEMININE AS BEIRUT**



Traces of war on the abandoned building

oceans of coffee, unstoppable conversations and love. This country breathes contemporary art, architecture and design. The cultural identity of Lebanon has become its strong character.

THEY CALL HER BEIRUT

They say she always finds her way to each person's heart and does the impossible to bring you back to her shores. They believe she is the Paris of the Middle East. They call her Beirut. We drive along the streets of Beirut devouring the distance and reaching the other cities and villages in Lebanon. The music is playing. Fairuz – the diva of the second half of the 20th century is still trendy throughout the region. Her voice is sweet as middle eastern desserts and as feminine as Beirut. The car windows are open and the wind steals the lyrics of the song... "She is made from the people's soul, from wine, she is from... Jasmin, a taste of fire and smoke, Beirut has a glory of ashes. Hug me, you are mine..." They say this city is female, astonishing, I always compare cities with people and believe they have a gender.

Zaitunay bay around Beirut Marina, breathing with modern architecture by Steven Holl, or Bernard Khoury is an excellent answer to war. One can hear the city whispering "destroy me, I will be reborn by arising from the ashes." But Beirut is about preservation as well. She is like a strong woman with a broken heart, ready to admit the fact that her wounds are still open and bleeding, but proving life is about catching the moment. She understands that the process of healing needs much time, but she is brave enough to look forward, magically turning the wounds into scars of experience and living evidence of her own life and story. There is a building situated in the Centre Ville territory in Beirut, once a border between Muslims and Christians that has become living evidence of the civil war. The bullet riddled building has preserved all its wounds to become a museum exposing the traces of war in the nearest future. ➤



Mornings in Beirut begin very early, when the fragrance of coffee with cardamom fills every inch of the house. Our friends say that eating is the most important activity here and I love that. No, “eating” is the wrong word, better to say “feast,” because people in Lebanon never just eat to satisfy the feeling of hunger. They enjoy the process, making it a sacred ritual. People can just sit in a restaurant for hours enjoying the variety of meals, one tastier than the other, talking, smoking argileh and singing traditional Lebanese songs. Every day is a festive meal day here. How can one eat so much? Just go and dance all night long in Mezyan, or drink wine in Bartartine, one of the oldest spots, and enjoy the nightlife of Beirut.

Buildings in Beirut are like pages from books, or websites, maybe even blogs or digital stories exposing the latest samples of visual elements. The information seems to be a real burden for them, but they carry so many words in them that one can just stand and read, or watch them. Dozens of advertisement signs, nameplates exposing the detailed information about a person, door signs, instruction plates, posters with different quotes, all mark their own spots on buildings, shining bright at night. These open books are silent storytellers giving a voice to the entire country.

I was not born in Beirut, but this territory is a land of ethnic diversity, so it hugged me. I feel home here and it's mine too.



Armenian district
in Beirut

BUILDINGS IN BEIRUT ARE LIKE PAGES FROM BOOKS, OR WEBSITES, MAYBE EVEN BLOGS OR DIGITAL STORIES EXPOSING THE LATEST SAMPLES OF VISUAL ELEMENTS

THE ANGEL

I love the moment a new city opens up and starts speaking to you via quotes written on walls or through people. We met Angel who was sitting with a cat on some of the oldest stairs connecting Mar Mikhael street with Achrafieh. Her voice interrupted to ask if we are from Armenia. She spoke western Armenian, the old wrinkled woman who was dressed in nostalgic clothing. “What is war, that once ruined this land? Nothing. Life is a war, we fight every day for our existence. But do you know that at the same time life is

the most magical phenomenon of all that I love so much,” she said. Her name is Angela, but everyone calls her the Angel of Beirut, as she takes care of all the cats in the district, her only true friends. Angela is a descendant of Armenian genocide survivors, born and raised in Beirut. “My big family is gone, I’ve lost my husband because of the doctor’s failure a few years ago. My son and daughter, the only people alive, live in the USA, they want me to go and live with them. But look into my eyes, this is my Lebanon,



➤ Beirut's population is more than 1 million people

my beautiful Beirut, my stairs and my cats, how can they go on without me? And believe me, you should trust no one but yourself," Angela says. The Angel of Beirut saves and feeds cats, hosting them in her apartment. She has experienced all the disadvantages of post-war Lebanon, which has taken its toll on her skin, but proudly highlights that the land is not to blame for that. "Lebanon is a land of happiness and love. I loved my husband. I don't know where he is now, I do not know where I will go, I do not know what there is in the sky, but there is only one universal truth for me. I want to cherish my life every second up until my breathing stops in my sleep. I pray and demand this from God, I have the right," she says. Beirut spoke to us via this woman blessing us to live – "There is nothing more dangerous than someone who wants to make the world a better place. Start from yourself, this is where an endless source of inspiration is hidden." Beirut is a teacher and the greatest lesson it gives us is to be reckless, infinite, emotional, human... "My people's wounds have flourished, and mother's tears, you are mine, hug me..."



THE CEDARS OF GOD

I love how the amazingly unexpected view of a new city opens while observing a country from inside a moving car. Some three or four hours' drive and here is fairy Bsharri- a tiny town of the only preserved original cedars of Lebanon. So, do you want to see the giant cedar, the symbol of Lebanon depicted on the national flag? Just come and visit Arz ar-Rabb, translated as the "Cedars of God," a forest of cedars.

Also, this town is known as the birthplace of great Khalil Gibran. Phoenicians lived here in ancient times, now the silence of this town with apple and walnut trees is filled with Gibran's poetry, "Your Lebanon is a political knot, a national dilemma, a place of conflict and deception. My Lebanon is a place of beauty and dreams of enchanting valleys and splendid mountains. Your Lebanon is empty and fleeting, whereas my Lebanon will endure forever."

THE BIRTHPLACE OF CONTRASTS

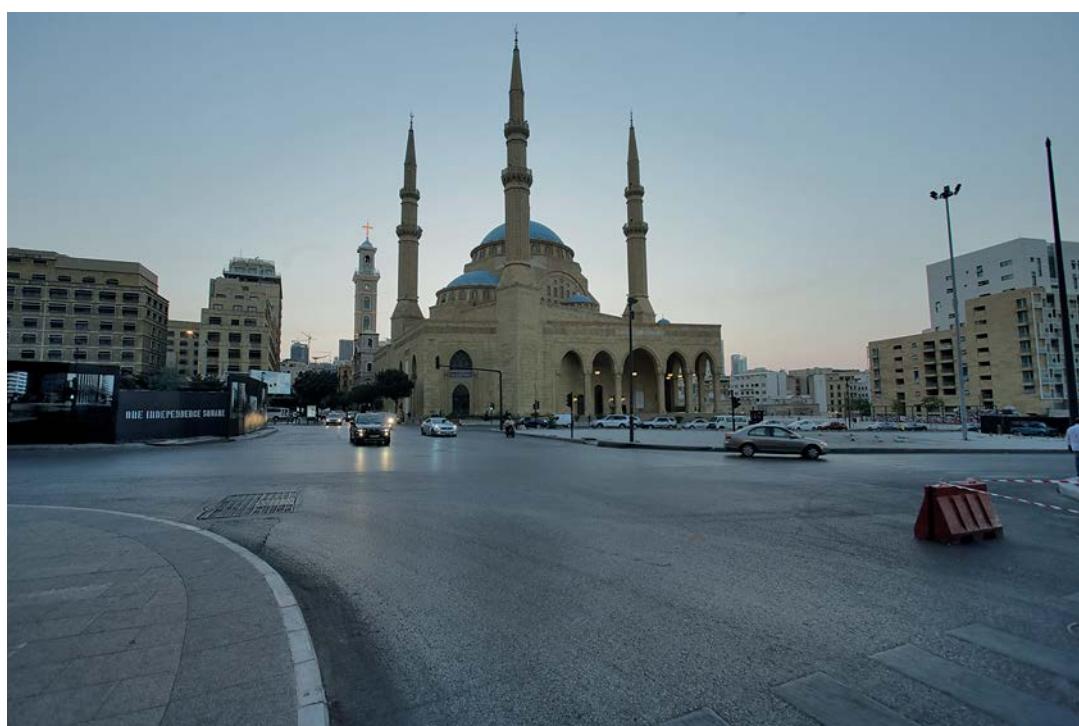
Bourj Hammoud is a town in Lebanon mainly populated by Armenians but also home to others. I guess this territory is the birthplace of contrasts.

Bourj Hammoud was founded by survivors of the Armenian genocide. All the posters and the writings around feature Armenian surnames. Although the town is diverse you can hear people speaking western Armenian. It is one of the most hospitable spaces in Lebanon, though each place visited here breathes hospitality. If you want to try real basturma (dried beef), visit "Basterma Mano" and you will be rewarded with happiness. Don't ever forget to eat the best shawarma with sujuk (a dry sausage). Your life will never be the same again after tasting it in front of the café where the smiling guys make it. Go and eat shawarma outside to make a simple cafe into a theater where you take the first row to watch a real performance of life running at that very moment in Bourj Hammoud. The taste of sujuk here really differs from what we have in Armenia. Arax street, with its hundreds of shops is the most desirable place in Bourj Hammoud. Every second passerby will probably approach you to ask for directions to Arax – the heaven for shopaholics.

All the buildings here are dressed up with millions of different curtains, covering each balcony like a blanket despite

the hot weather. This place has an honorable position and can compete with Naples, Sicily, Toscana, or with Stepanakert in the Republic of Artsakh with the amount of laundry on display hanging out to dry. You can certainly read the stories of the people living in these houses from observing their laundry. And you can read these laundry books for hours. This district is a real authentic open-air museum telling the real story of the residents. By the way, while discovering the streets of Bourj Hammoud buy some raw fsto halabi (pistachios) from the local bazar, though your fingers will become red and you'll break all your nails while trying to eat them, but trust me it's worth it.

Everywhere you look are overhead electric power cables blocking the view of the sky above. I just wonder how these millions of endless multicolored cables work all together. And believe it or not, each cable matters in creating its own significance in the entire structure of existence. It seems they dream to become real lines in a notebook making the sky into a blank page so you can write down your own story.



Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque, opened in 2008



I think electrical engineers are kind of geniuses here. How do they navigate the millions of multicolored cables? Bourj Hammoud is beautiful along with its trashy streets, paper like houses, noisy people, bikes, refugees and the smell of the sea. And this place is a real heaven for those forever in love with the texture of layers.

"BATROUNIAN" FRESH MADE LEMONADE

The music is still on in our car. Ziad Rahbani the son of Fairouz has often satirized Lebanese politics and has been strongly criticized. He brought new jazzy waves to Lebanese music and is well known for his performances. "Talfan Ayyash" seems to be a humorous song at first listen, but our friend translates the lyrics about Ayyash, who called and said why he did not call before, he lied and said much that was untrue. A simple story of a general issue hangs in the air the moment we reach Batroun, one of the oldest cities in the world founded by the Phoenicians. This city is unique with the wall the Phoenicians built for protection from the waves and their enemies, with St. Stephen's Church that reminds me of the houses in Gaudi's Park Güell, with narrow Greek-style streets and with an indescribable lemonade. Whenever in Batroun just go and drink the local freshly made lemonade, take away a big glass or you will regret it after. Bring your lemonade to the terrace of the Greek Orthodox church overlooking the sea and the remains of the ancient wall. A sunset here is a must-see view through arched belvedere framing. A perfect place to think about "all the

➤ Famous Pigeons' Rock in Beirut



◀ St. Stephen's Church

WHAT IS LIFE? MAYBE NOTHING ELSE BUT A PERIOD CONSISTING OF SECONDS THAT BUILD OUR STORY LIKE BRICKS. CATCH THEM, DANCE ALL NIGHT, CELEBRATE EVERY MOMENT

details you can find only caught between syllables and breaths."

"YOU HAVE YOUR LEBANON, I HAVE MINE"

Lebanese people celebrate being alive each single day. So, what is life? Maybe nothing else but a period consisting of seconds that build our story like bricks. Catch them, dance all night, celebrate every moment, spend your time with those who are worthy of it and who deserve your time, don't be a puzzle, be a sponge, ready to absorb everything new. Catch the milliseconds and all the in-betweens, make them yours, create your day, explore the life beyond "what if" and design your own

story. Watch the reflections, there is always another side to what you see. Liters of Lebanese coffee with cardamom and tons of middle eastern desserts, hundreds of miles driven, unlimited portions of the tastiest meals, rivers of lemonade and local beer, endless seconds of unstoppable conversations, and a million minutes of happiness and laughter with those I've chosen. Choose those who choose you. "Finifugal" means I hate endings, trying to prolong the final moments of what I love, but Lebanon is the beginning and "It will endure forever." "You have your Lebanon with her problems, and I have my Lebanon with her beauty," Khalil Gibran. ♦

TRADITIONS BECOMING TRENDY

Once upon a time, traditional Armenian costumes, taraz, were only seen in black and white photographs. Nowadays, social media is full of bright pictures of men, women and kids wearing taraz. It has become a trend among many locals and tourists to be photographed in these traditional costumes. Since being established five years ago, Photo Atelier Marashlyan has become very popular among the Armenians and non-Armenians. It is certainly a tourist attraction for anyone visiting Yerevan.

TEXT : KARINE GHAZARYAN / PHOTO : PHOTO ATELIER MARASHLYAN



"When the photo atelier was established, I imagined our clients would be mainly Diasporan Armenians, – says founder and photographer Emma Marashlyan. – But just in a couple of years we got really popular among locals as well." Marashlyan family repatriated to Armenia in 2010. Working as a pharmacist in Moscow, Emma Marashlyan practiced photography only as a hobby. After moving to Armenia, she decided to change her profession, doing what she genuinely loved, and established the photo atelier which not only became the most popular one in the city, but managed to make traditional costumes and family style photographs trendy again.

"It is very important for us to have authentic design and high quality costumes, – notes Emma Marashlyan. – To ensure the quality, we conduct detailed research in the archives and work with highly professional designers and tailors." Marashlyan says, that people often ask for a costume from a specific region of Eastern or Western Armenia. "It is very symbolic for many of them to be photographed in the taraz from the place of their ancestors." One of the most memorable and emotional photoshoots took place in Western Armenia in 2017, in Ani, Van, Moush and Karin.



Emma Marashlyan



Armenia with Own Face Project

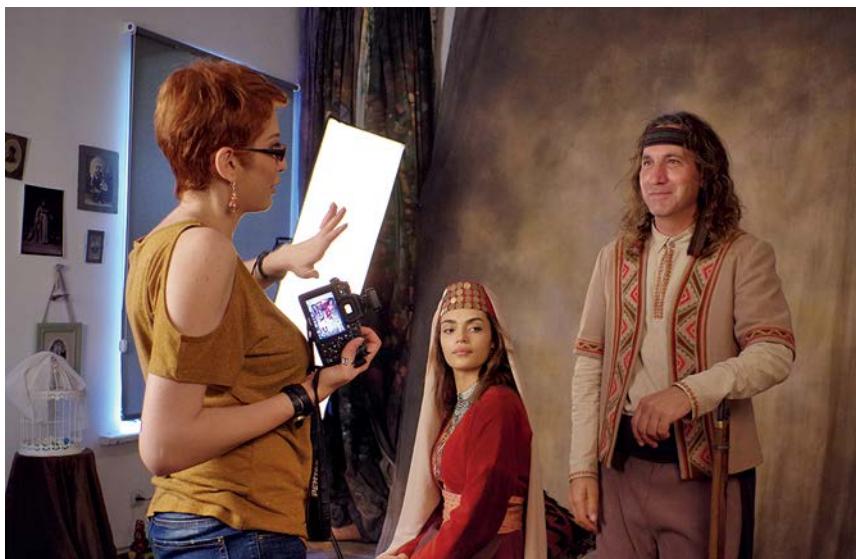


Photo atelier is always looking for new ways of popularizing the Armenian culture. In 2017, together with make-up artist Bella Grigoryants, they created an exhibition depicting works of famous Armenian artists, including Martiros Saryan and Minas Avetisyan, painted on the faces of the models. The exhibition was presented both in Modern Art Museum of Yerevan and in the Armenian Museum of Moscow. The photo atelier also collaborates with the State Tourism Committee of Armenia, Yerevan Municipality, and other international and local organizations, by actively participating in exhibitions, touristic and cultural fairs in Armenia and abroad. ♦

WOMEN ON SOVIET POSTERS

Poster art was an important tool for Soviet propaganda. And women of USSR were one of its main targets.



➤ Fighting for gender equality in the Middle East



▼ March 8: against the "kitchen slavery"



➤ Soviet woman on the front line of the construction of socialism

➤ March 8 – International Women's Day
"Be ready for labor and defense!"



➤ Against the "kitchen slavery"



MANUFACTURE OF FURNITURE AND DOORS





THIS ISSUE WAS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

REGIONAL POST

CAUCASUS

The **Good Local Governance Programme South Caucasus** is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and in Armenia is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The **Integrated Biodiversity Management South Caucasus Programme** is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).



Գերմանական
համազորժակցություն
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by:

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

The **Private Sector Development and Technical Vocational Education and Training South Caucasus (PSD TVET)** programme implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

The **Support to SME Development in Armenia (SMEDA)** project is co-funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by GIZ's Private Sector Development in South Caucasus Programme. EU SMEDA is part of the European Union's EU4Business and EU4Innovation Initiatives.