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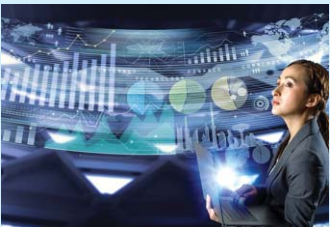
Girls in ICT Day



On April 26, the *International Girls in ICT Day* is celebrated across the world. The celebration has been initiated by International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which is a UN specialized agency. The purpose of the Day is to create a global environment which encourages girls and young women to think about launching their career in the expanding ICT field. Twelve per cent of Armenia's students are specializing in the information and high technologies field; one quarter of them are girls. Sixty-three per cent of specialists of Armenia engaged in ICT field are men, and 37% are women.

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Women Leaders in ICT



Women are running only 1.3% of ICT companies. Each one of these women can serve as an excellent role model for younger generations. The women leaders include Marie Lou Papazian, Managing Director of the *Tumo* Center for Creative Technologies, Eva Housman, Director of *Microsoft Armenia*, Zhenya Azizyan, Project Manager of *Enterprise Incubator* Foundation, Gayane Stepanyan, Director of *IDram LLC*, Anna Yengibaryan, Administrative Director for Armenian Virtual University, Sophie Mehrabyan, Director of *Macadamian AF CJSC*, Mariam Davtyan, Head of Regional Mobile Application Laboratory for Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia, Amalia Yeghoyan, ICT Deputy Minister, formerly Executive Director of the *Gyumri Center for Information Technologies*, and others.

Women in Science



The UN General Assembly resolution 70/212, which declared February 11th as International Day of Women and Girls in Science, targets to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls in science, to rule out discrimination against them and to promote their advancement. By the way, Armenia was among around forty states that had initiated this resolution.

It is known that only 3.1% of those awarded the Nobel Prize are women, whereas, according to the EU statistical data, one third of the scientists of Europe are women. According to the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (the RA NSS), women make up 37% of those having academic degrees, out of which 46% have candidate of science degrees and 20% doctors of science degrees.

Woman & politics

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Recipe for Success

Schoolgirls of the Village of Carbi Capture the Silicon Valley

The schoolgirls of the Carbi village secondary school after Vahan Tekeyan would not even have dreamed of themselves emerging in the Silicon Valley and receiving a prize from the hands of Google's General Manager, however, what seemed improbable became a reality for the girls. The *One Step Forward* group of girls from a small Armenian village found themselves in the Silicon Valley thanks to their original idea: a self-study mobile app for the language of gestures.

Svetlana Davtyan, Sona Avetissyan, Vardanush Nazaretyan, Violetta Mkrtychyan and Aghavni Hakobyan under the supervision of their teacher-mentor Vardanush Hovhanissyan had created the mobile app for Armenian and English gesture languages, which became a winner in the world's largest technological competition *Technovation Challenge* in August of last year. Participating in the competition were about three thousand teams of ten to eighteen-year-old girls from 105 countries of the world. This was the first year when Armenia took part in the competition.

"The victory was really unexpected; hugs, a little bit of tears from joy and a wonderful feeling, which was special and came about upon hearing this news," says Violetta Mkrtychyan. In her words, it was

a double joy because you realized that the victory was not only yours, but it also promoted the integration of persons with hearing impairment.

"This idea was born accidentally, when a cousin of one of our friends visited our school. Naturally, when we saw a new person, we tried to get acquainted, talk with her. However, it became clear that the girl had hearing problems. So, an idea was born: to create an app, which will help people to learn the language of gestures and will unite hearing and not hearing people," tell the girls.

Prior to departing for San Francisco, not less interesting 43 projects were presented within the framework of the competition *Technovation Challenge Armenia-2017*. The initiative belonged to the NGO *Women and Information Society*, whose leader Nar-

ine Abazyan is the Regional Ambassador for *Technovation Challenge* Project. In her words, the field of information technologies is primarily masculine and this fact is confirmed by years of her work experience.

"Today, our senior students show quite a good progress in mathematics and physics, but later, when they come to face career selection, they usually, guided by advice and stereotypes of their parents and relatives, almost never select IT. This is due to the lack of information, and besides, our society seems not to see those ideals of women which can set an example for the rising generation. Our organization is trying to bridge that gap and overcome the stereotypes, promoting the engagement of women and girls in Armenia's information society and revealing new names in this area."

Representatives of the organization are convinced that the victory of the Carbi village girls is not going to be the only one, since their example will encourage schoolgirls of Armenia's other schools. This is attested by the launch of a new competition - *Technovation Challenge Armenia-2018* - at the beginning of this year.

Top Ten Armenian Women-Innovators

Several dozen stories have been presented within the framework of the journalistic contest *Top Ten Armenian Women-Innovators* announced by WomenNet.am web site. These stories tell about those women who bring changes to the life of society, communities and the country with their innovative ideas and examples. The materials have been published at WomenNet.am web site and disseminated through the Facebook Page *Women Innovators*. Some of the stories have been incorporated into this issue

of the *Women and Politics* newspaper.

The authors and the heroes of the best ten stories will receive incentive prizes. The results of the contest will be summed up at the prize-awarding ceremony which will take place in May, 2018.

Let us remind that the contest was launched in December of 2017 within the framework of the Project *Women and Innovations*, which is being implemented by WomenNet.am web site with the help of Lush Charity Support initiative.

WomenNet.am expresses its gratitude to all contest participants.

Journalistic Contest



In the photo: Head of "Pepeu" innovative team Shushan Grigoryan

Smart Girls

Smart House



Monica Hambartsumyan and Gayane Demirchyan are programmers and work at Yerevan Telecommunication Research Institute. They create Android and web apps, do Java programming, and offer training courses and practice opportunities to students. This year a training manual on Java programming co-authored by Monica and Gayane has been published. The manual is used for teaching at Shushi Technological University. "This is a novelty in Armenia. The demand is not high yet, but I believe it will gradually increase," says Monica.

Intellectual Games and Useful Apps



In spite of her young age, the twenty-five-year-old Ani Karapetyan is already heading the Technical Department of the Codicus Programming Company.

"I have been working since I was in my third year. I joined Codicus as a junior programmer and in a few years became a manager," tells Ani. During these years Ani had participated in the creation of a number of apps. For example, she created an intellectual game for schoolchildren studying chess; with the help of this game children were solving puzzles. Ani also participated in the creation of the game *My Armenia* intended for children arriving in Armenia.

Remote Control Hand



Kristine Babayan and Anna Vardanyan are studying at the Department of Cybernetics of the National Polytechnic University of Armenia. The girls have created a remote control hand which is of strategic significance and can be used in such environments where human life or health are threatened. "The robotic hand can also be used in astronautics, and humans from the planet Earth will control it," explains Anna. In the near future, the girls are planning to develop a remote control palm of the hand through prosthetics. "We also desire to connect the robotic hand to human brain so that it can receive commands from the brain and perform them. It might, of course, take dozens of years, but it is our dream," says Kristine.

Successes of the Hackthon

Girls in Support of Humanitarian Ideas

Already for ten years, *Girls in Tech* NGO have, within their call for Hacking for Humanity, organized social innovation hackthons in different parts of the world pursuing the aim of uniting women involved in high technologies for solution to global problems. In Armenia, such a hackthon was first organized in October of 2017. The Innovative Solutions and Technologies Center (ISTC) brought together twelve teams from Yerevan and different regions of Armenia who had won the first stage of the competition and the opportunity to participate in the hackthon with their ideas.



Photo by Lilian Galstyan

Engage, Educate, and Empower

The initiator of the event was the NGO *Girls in Tech* Armenia, which had set at least 50% of women's and girls' involvement in the teams as a participation precondition. "As a result, 80% of the received applications were from girls. This is an indicator not only in terms of women's interest, but also in terms of the exclusiveness of the afforded opportunity," says Seda Papoyan, founder of *Girls in Tech* Armenia. According to her, *Girls in Tech* is an organization operating on a voluntary basis in the entire world. The organization was founded in San Francisco ten years ago. It set one goal: to try to eliminate discrimination against women and girls also in the technology field.

In 2016, Seda decided to seriously deal with the issue of women's engagement in IT and established links with the Headquarters of *Girls in Tech*. At the end of the year, the branch got officially registered in Armenia as

well, gaining the opportunity to use the network's capacities and resources.

"At a first glance, women and girls do not seem to have any problems in the Armenian IT field. In reality, however, there are some profound problems in the area and our work targets to address them. Everything starts at school. When girls select technology area, they very often have to confront the public opinion and the existing stereotypes. Specifically already during professional education, when girls can express themselves, they are at some stage told that they are not smart enough for that field. However, even if girls succeed in overcoming these obstacles and enter the labor market, only secondary roles in the field primarily befall them. Very few make their way into engineering proper and programming because there is lack of trust towards women," says Seda. *Girls in Tech* is working based on the known 3E principle: engage, educate, and empower. Seda is convinced that if women have a desire and ability to work and create in any field, they, irre-

spective of the area, should have the equal opportunity for that. Exactly this ideology underpinned the foundation of the hackthon *Hacking for Humanity*.

Hosting for Humanity

The main prize in the amount of 1,000,000 drams fell to HostingForHumanity team, which is preparing to promote tourism development through hospitable families and cultural experience. The main award winner, Lusine Karapetyan, is from Vaiq. She applied for participation in the hackthon alone, expressing willingness to assist one of the teams or to find like-minded people along the way and form a separate team.

The team formed at the hackthon location: Lusine was joined by one more girl from Vaiq and a boy from Gyumri.

The nature of the project is very simple: the families that are ready to host tourists for one or a few days offer not only overnight stay and food to their guests, but share their everyday life with them. Thus, the hosting family gets income without exerting special efforts, and the guest has a much more affordable housing and food than those offered by hotels and hostels, as well as enjoys an unprecedented experience of living a villager's life for a few days and not only of seeing the villager's daily life, but also becoming a participant in it and understanding and feeling the local culture...

Ugly Duckling Turns into a Business Lady

Shushan Grigoryan's team from the village of Aygek of Armavir Province received a special prize and 600 thousand drams of financial assistance within the framework of the hackthon. The team had presented its first Armenian animation toy – "Pepen", which can be easily transformed into an animation film with the help of a mobile app. The same team received one of the special prizes of *Enterprise Incubator* Foundation: the opportunity for a free three-month-long use of the ISTC co-working space.

"This prize is very helpful to us. It is true that though the funding is not enough for establishing initial production, we are going to invest the received sum in developing, advertising and disseminating Pepen," says Shushan, noting that pepens (means freckles in Armenian) because of which she was called an ugly duckling as a child have become her team's success business card.

Creed

"Ensure you grow one per cent every day, learn something every day"

It has been more than 30 years since Sophie Mehrabyan started working in the IT field remaining faithful to her creed: never stop, never stop learning, and always move forward...She began her career as a programmer at the Scientific Research Institute for Mathematical Machines. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union she became unemployed and left for the United States. There she worked as a programmer for four years and then decided to return to Armenia and to achieve changes in the homeland. Today, Sophie Mehrabyan is General Director of the *Macadamian Armenia AR* Company.

The company is a branch of the well-known Canadian *Macadamian Technologies* which deals in programming and provides about 70 workplaces in Armenia. It is specialized in the area of Digital Health and develops programs which alleviate the burden of the area employees and enable them to concentrate on treatment. Yet another direction of its activities is Connected Health, which is a new area enabling to create monitoring devices.

"I have been interested in technologies since childhood, my parents were close to this profession; maybe it was preordained. Every man paves his way himself. The important thing is to set a goal and if you have that, you should take steps to achieve it, to smooth out your way every day, to have an action plan, to be able to set clear-cut timelines, and to work in that direction every day. It may sound pretentious, but I have not had many failures because I have always believed that my future depends on my actions. I have done what I have had to do. You cannot get disappointed in yourself if you move



forward. This is the creed of my life. The life is accelerating today, especially in the IT field. If you allow yourself to relax a little bit, you will not catch up. There is an American saying – long life learning; to learn your entire life seems to be a very important idea. It is the most inspiring thing to learn something every day. We have this motto at our organization: one per cent every day, i.e. ensure you grow one per cent every day, learn something new every day. This is a wonderful feeling: up to date I have been trying to learn everything from languages to music to sport. I learned swimming five years ago. I want to learn dancing and to play a musical instrument... You need to be always on the move, always developing. This is happiness. I believe that learning is the basis for happiness. Being happy can help you change the world, and we need that very much," states Sophie Mehrabyan.

Social Innovation

Ambassadors of Hope

“When you love someone without any reservation, you forgive all their shortcomings and do not accuse them of any lapses. I love Armenia without any reservations, and it is that that gives me a real and steadfast hope that Armenia has a future and changes are possible here,” says Larisa Hovhanissyan, founder of the *Teach for Armenia* program.



T*each for Armenia* is an educational foundation, which engages young leaders who are ready to invest their knowledge and professional capacities at schools in remote communities of Armenia where there is lack of teachers.

Born in Armenian-Irish family and having spent most of her life abroad, Larisa has never doubted that the last stop of her big travel is Armenia... She returned to the homeland in 2013. “I had always been confident that I would return, however I did not know when and what I was going to return for. While participating in the *Teach for Armenia*

program I clearly understood that this was the thread through which I wanted to connect with Armenia. This is exactly what I have wanted to do,” tells Larisa and adds that this was the way the concept of the *Teach for Armenia* program was formed.

As a result of studies conducted in the first stage of founding the program, schools of the neediest communities of Armenia were selected. “There were schools which had not had foreign language teachers for more than 20 years. The situation was hopeless, the level of responsibility was formidable, but we knew that we had a goal and a vision for a better country and better future,” tells Larisa. At the next stage, the recruitment of teachers to participate in the program started. “Nobody, even my relatives would believe till the end that this program would succeed... They did not believe that it would be possible to find young specialists in Armenia that would agree to leave Yerevan and move to a remote isolated village to do teaching. After selecting the first group of teachers, we clearly understood such specialists existed and their number would multiply,” says Larisa. According to her, she was sure that they would succeed also because they knew that they had done everything that depended on them.

Today, *Teach for Armenia* program has 71 teachers and more than 5000 schoolchildren in 52 schools of six provinces of Armenia. Larisa believes that the largest problem in Armenia is apathy, absence of hope. “I feel very sad when people resentful of each other, get disappointed, feel resentful of the country and fall out with the country too. I believe that this lies at the basis of all problems of Armenia: we personalize everything. Now it is clear that the country are not those who did not believe in our success. The country is this wonderful generation sitting in the country’s dilapidated schools, which simply should be given the opportunity to learn. For the past four years, *Teach for Armenia* has been delegating not only ambassadors of education, but also of hope to remote communities, those who want to be participants in the changes,” says Larisa.

A Woman Who Made a “Revolution” in Vardenis

Trained as a pedagogue, Melania Yepremyan lives in the town of Vardenis. For many years, she has worked in the field of education and in 2003 she founded the *Astghavard* NGO, which unites parents of children with disabilities. Within the framework of the NGO, a Center for Child Development was created in Vardenis. For the recent years, all children from the town of Vardenis and neighboring communities have had the opportunity not only to benefit from free rehabilitative treatment, but also to organize their leisure-time at the Center.

“At the example of my own family, I felt what problems children with disabilities and their families had, especially in the regions. I often learned that families who did not have the opportunities to take their children to Yerevan for rehabilitative treatment were trying to treat their children with folk medicine, which often worsened children’s condition. I thought a lot about this and finally decided to create a rehabilitation center right in Vardenis,” tells Mrs. Melania Yepremyan.

In 2004, the Vardenis municipality provided a space to Melania Yepremyan’s NGO to enable it to establish a rehabilitation center there. Melania recalls that in the beginning it was very difficult to explain to parents that visiting the center would positively affect their children. “I personally visited everybody’s house: some would be rude, others, respecting my age and reputation, would not be rude, but would still be suspicious; I convinced some and cried and cheered with others. I knew that although they did not understand then, but later they would feel the positive changes in their children. As a result, about thirty parents came together in support of the idea of establishing a rehabilitation center,” says Mrs. Melania Yepremyan.

At the Center, the children realize that irrespective of their physical incapacities they are all equal. “With this mindset, each one of these children goes to their community’s school, their class spreading the idea. A small revolution seems to be happening in the minds of the people,” says Mrs. Melania Yepremyan. In her words, since the estab-



lishment of the Center, a lot has also changed in the families of children with disabilities. “It is painful to say, but in the past these families were ashamed, for example, to take out a girl child on a wheelchair, but now they together come to Vardenis, participate in events and go onto the stage,” says Mrs. Melania Yepremyan.

After the foundation of the Center, Melania Yepremyan became known in the region of Vardenis not as a pedagogue of long years Comrade Yepremyan, but as Grandma Melan. “I physically get tired, but at the same time I get charged with indescribable positive energy when I receive a call from some family saying that the child has started to hold a spoon independently,” tells Mrs. Melania Yepremyan.

Since its inception, the Center for Child Development has been visited by more than 450 children from the region. As far as Melania’s grandchildren are concerned, the boys continue their rehabilitative treatment, study programming and get ready to receive professional education. One of them wants to become a football commentator and the other journalist.

Bohem Unites Sevan Youth

“When, after graduating from the university, I returned to my birthplace, I had a personal problem to confront: not to leave Sevan and try to do something to adapt Sevan to myself. Along this way, I met like-minded people and “Me” became “Us” and my need became our need,” this is how the idea of creating *Bohem* came about, according to Gohar Mnatskanyan.



After graduating from the Department of Art of the Faculty of Artistic Education of Yerevan State Teachers’ Training University, it becomes clear to Gohar that it is necessary to enliven the native town, to eliminate the chronic passivity and disappointment in

order not to leave. Young people with the same concerns and ideas come together and establish the Sevan Youth Club thinking along the way about implementing cultural projects. The idea cherished for many years becomes a reality thanks to the program on *Community Development through Social Enterprise*: *Bohem* teahouse-studio is created, a place where people are offered to rest through a cultural pastime.

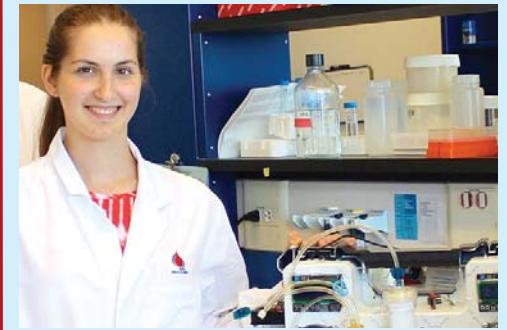
Although the teahouse-studio has only a seven-month working experience, it has managed to receive many individual tourists from France, Germany, Poland, Norway, Finland and Russia.

“Most of all, they note that they like the atmosphere and when they make their way through the door they seem to find themselves in a different world. They are also very much interested in the exhibition of the museum of souvenirs.”

The creation of *Bohem* has introduced changes into the life of the youth. According to Gohar, it was important for the residents that the town have a place where it would be possible to go with your friends or family, with women and girls. Especially stressing the social impact of *Bohem*, she notes that they have done nothing special to be different. They simply did everything with much love and reflected their dreams in the idea. As a result, they got what they have now.

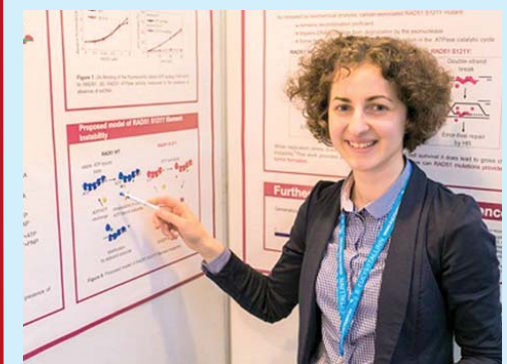
Inventors

Canadian-Armenian Anya Pogharian Creates a Life-Changing Dialysis Machine



Armenian by origin, Anya Pogharian, a youth from Montreal, has made an invention which can save countless lives in the whole world. The seventeen-year-old girl has presented Do It Yourself dialysis machine, which costs 500 dollars, which is several times cheaper than the usual dialysis device worth 30 thousand dollars.

The Best Young Scientist in Europe



Karina Movsesjan, a student of Armenian origin residing in the Czech Republic, was acknowledged the winner of the EU Contest for Young Scientists 2017. The girl has discovered a mechanism preventing development of cancer. The contest winners get the opportunity to undergo probation in major international research organizations, as well as receive financial awards. Let us note that 38% of 146 participants in the EU Contest for Young Scientists 2017 were women. In reality, the gender composition of the participants in this contest initiated by the European Commission in 1989 reflects the problem of poor representation of women and girls in science. Over the period of 29 years, this contest overall saw the participation of 313 women and 916 men.

Revolutionary Invention



The invention co-authored by an Armenian graduate from Cambridge University can introduce a revolutionary change in the field of production of devices working on energy, making it possible to create telephones as thin as paper. Having been awarded scholarship by *Luis* Foundation, Amalia Kostanyan, with her teammates from Cambridge University, is dealing with growing nanostructures and on their basis with the design of screens of new generation which are entirely carbon-based.

“They have the advantage of being able to be designed with substances of new type, which are developed in laboratories and have the properties that we want them to have. We can create such devices which will entirely change our environment; they will provide the opportunity to replace silicon-based devices in the mass production by devices created on the basis of nanostructures,” said Amalia Kostanyan.

Old and New

Not to Forget Our Roots and History

The retro *Photo Atelier Marshlyan* founded by Emma Marshlyan is known both in Armenia and beyond the republic's borders.



The photo studio is rather unique with its attractive combination of old and new. Emma Marshlyan's idea of having one's picture taken in national costumes revived the Armenian national costume and interest towards it. One can say that it has shaped a new photo culture, at the same time advocating for not forgetting our roots and history.

In 2010, Emma Marshlyan with her family moved to Yerevan from Moscow where she had lived, got educated and worked for many years. She always dreamed of having her own photo gallery which would be connected to Armenia one way or another. So, when the idea matured, no questions arose: it was clear what she was going to do in the homeland. She says that in the beginning she aimed to just restore the family photo tradition, which, however, quickly transformed into the idea of taking pic-

tures of people in national costumes.

The launching of the project actually proved that people really want their pictures taken in national costumes. This also attracts the attention of numerous tourists during their visit to Armenia.

"Many ask me how come I have succeeded and how come I was not afraid to try to begin. Just like that: you come and try to convince someone who has the means to financially assist you so that that person believes in your project. In my case, it was James Toufenkian, he believed and felt that I lived by this idea," tells Emma Marshlyan.

She says that over five years of its operations the photo gallery has never introduced any changes in the prices. In her words, this is a matter of policy: not only to come up with an innovative idea, which was expected as the time has shown, but to maintain the level that offsets art and business.

Live-Love Armenia

Getting Strength and Might from This Soil



Turning brave and interesting ideas into reality, Syrian-Armenian Shaghik Rastgelenyan had since childhood heard and read about Armenia and had always dreamed of seeing her homeland. However, she could not imagine that that the war erupted in Syria would be decisive in connecting her future life and activities with Armenia once and for all. One of her dreams was becoming a model which turned into reality after coming to Armenia. Leaving Syria with her mother and sisters, Shaghik decided to continue her interrupted education in Yerevan. She resumed her studies of international business at the European University and at the same time cooperating with *Atex Fashion Center* acquired her second profession – that of a model.

At the international competition of models held in the Spanish city of Alicante she was entrusted with the responsibility to represent the Caucasus. After some time, at the suggestion of her friend Stephanie Sanosian who lived in Lebanon Shaghik decided to localize *Live-Love-World* "Live-Love-Bracelet" international programs and to present, through these programs, also Armenia's historical and cultural values and the nature on the Internet (Facebook, Instagram).

According to Shaghik, the programs aim at promoting tourism development. In 2015, she, together with her Syrian-Armenian friends – Sari Biuzandyan, Stephanie Sanosyan and Alin Azoyan, started to realize the Live-Love Armenia project on social networks. Today, the project has already 40 thousand followers on the Internet.

"Live-Love Armenia is an advocacy campaign, whose aim is to present Armenia's attractive sights, nature and historical and cultural places, everyday life and customs of Armenians on social networks. We are confident that the coverage of the Armenian people's cultural riches on the Internet will help tourism development in our homeland. The aim of our project is also to strengthen the Diaspora-Armenia links."

Shaghik Rastgelenyan's programs give special attention to benevolent initiatives aiming to assist socially insecure Syrian-Armenian and local families. She says that she has a number of ideas connected with socially insecure families and children living in the marzes and with the Gyumri orphanage children. The revenue received from the sale of goods (bracelets, blouses) with *Live-Love Armenia* logo produced by her small group is directed to implementing benevolent projects in the marzes of Armenia. She is also cooperating with the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and *One Armenia* charity organization. "Now that I am living in Armenia, I do not want any Armenian to leave the country. Armenia became "the cradle" of my successes. I really get strength and might from this soil and I want everybody to find their desired jobs and get enrooted in the homeland, and love and cherish it," says Shaghik.

LUSH FRESH
HANDMADE
COSMETICS

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The issue has been prepared by Lia Khojoyan, Sona Martirosyan, Arman Garibyan, Marianna Ghahramanyan, Gayane Sargsyan, Anush Nersisyan, Marjan Chobanyan, Yana Shakhramanyan

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BusyMom

Combining Motherhood with Career

Recently there has been an addition to the Yerevan map – a new place with an absolutely new idea which will make happy especially mothers with small children. A center with a symbolic name of *BusyMom* offers "busy mothers" to turn a childbirth not only into happy motherhood, but also a period of individual development.

Here mothers come with their children and while little ones are playing and entertaining themselves in one room, in another room mothers receive the knowledge necessary for their future career. According to the Center's co-founder social scientist Varduhi Harutyunyan, the center is yet in the process of development, but she is sure it will succeed since it is a project born from her own experience and encountered difficulties when after giving birth to two children she came face to face with a serious problem of finding a job. "The job that I eventually found was connected to human resource management and it even more clearly revealed the problem that exists in our society: after becoming mothers, women

have major difficulties returning to or finding their place in the labor market," she says.

In later years, having participated in numerous training courses, she came to the conclusion that mothers need a center where they can receive practical knowledge without being concerned about who to leave the child with. That is a priority problem which is a serious obstacle for a lot of women.

She says that the idea and initiative of opening a center is entirely theirs and they have no financial assistance from anywhere, so they are trying to work in a way which will allow the center's activities to maintain it. "It is very difficult, but we should try. This is not just a business, but a project of serious social sig-



nificance. The training courses are yet free, later there will be a charge for them, but it will be very reasonable, of which everybody will be convinced when comparing it with that of other training centers. However, the important thing is that we will not be charging money for taking care of children," says Varduhi.

Political Technologies

If Afraid, Stand behind Our Backs

Today, Zaruhi Postanjan is the most widely discussed female political figure who in no way corresponds to stereotype perceptions of the woman's place and role: she comes up with novel approaches in the political field and assumes the role of the so called rule breaker.



One year ago Armenia's political field saw the emergence of *Yerkir Tsirani* party headed by Zaruhi Postanjan. In the modern history of Armenia it was not the first political force run by a woman, however, it was rather the first one whose female leader, right from the party's inception, tried to direct it to and transform it into an extreme uncompromising opposition which does not make any concessions. Was it a political calculation to attract the attention of the electorate or a manifestation of the rebellious character of a party leader? Most likely it was the case of the complementarity principle in the working. As an attorney in the Court, as a deputy to the National Assembly, as a municipal councilor at the Yerevan municipality or as a demonstrator in the street, Zaruhi Postanjan has always displayed a unique working style which has become a reason for intensive discussions and often for sharp criticism.

In 2007, she is elected a deputy to the National Assembly through the *Heritage* party electoral list. There were twelve women in the National Assembly of the fourth convocation and only three of the faction's deputies were women: Larisa Alaverdyan, Anahit Bakhshyan, and Zaruhi Postanjan. Their activism had an essential role in over-

coming the existing stereotypes of the public about women's political participation. They had different approaches and work styles which sometimes became a reason for internal disagreements, however, it did not reflect on their public activities.

"In those days, all our teammates were like-minded. As regards the toolkit, I remember that when I was pregnant and would take to the streets with a poster, Larisa Alaverdyan and Anahit Bakhshyan did not encourage me to come out in that condition, but when they saw that I would do that all the same, they would join me. It was very important for me that even though they disagreed they would stand by me," recalls the former deputy.

In the National Assembly of the fifth convocation, Postanjan was the only woman in the *Heritage* faction, whose members did not have the former unity any more. Postanjan tried to fill that gap by adopting a harder line of action... Before the 2017 elections she left *Heritage* and formed the *Yerkir Tsirani* party, which almost immediately took part in the elections to the Yerevan municipality. The party's electoral campaign started with a bicycle march instilling new breath into the electoral process.

"We are used to seeing officials driving by cars as large as buses without interacting with the public in any way. Whereas, by riding a bicycle you cannot remain separate from the public. By riding a bicycle you get and convey the spirit of freedom and independence, it is youthfulness, health," says the party leader.

After the known incident which took place at the Yerevan municipality session on February 13 of this year, some criticized Postanjan and her teammates for their work style considering it to be extremist. Zaruhi Postanjan explains this by the fact that we are living in a closed society where their means of political struggle may not be accepted by many. "But when a just political structure is lacking, you do not have other possibility of attaining your goal and have to apply risky means of struggle and not be afraid of consequences."

The *Yerkir Tsirani* party often visits the marzes (provinces) of Armenia with the aim of calling on citizens to rebel. Postanjan notes that it is no longer unusual for citizens to see a woman with a loudspeaker in her hand leading marches and rallies. "I believe that women's leadership is in demand, especially today. Many men have left the country in search for jobs and women understand that they have to shoulder the decision-making responsibility. We are saying: no problem, even if men are afraid, let them stand behind our backs and we will lead," notes Postanjan.