

- 1) ІНТЕРВ'Ю З **NENSI MKRTCHYAN**, КООРДИНАТОР [NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ARMENIA / ԱՉԳԱՅԻՆ ԺՈՂՈՎ](#), EU4YOUTH ALUMNI Ү [EU NEIGHBOURS EAST](#), BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER & CO-FOUNDER Ү [VOLUNTEAM](#), YOUNG EUROPEAN AMBASSADOR Ү [EU NEIGHBOURS EAST](#)

*Nensi MKRTCHYAN*

**1. Which projects of Armenia do you consider the most significant for the social good?**

Talking generally about social good in Armenia may be sometimes considered as “what is your income?” And for that reason some people or initiative do not show up. But of course, bunch of projects is being implemented in the field of environmental protection, youth engagement, education and etc.

I consider the EU4ARMENIA Map (<https://www.eu4armenia.am/>) one of the biggest social and economic goods that Armenia could have benefit from. By clicking on a pointer, you can read about an EU-funded project, its regional and sectoral reach (public administration reforms, justice, private sector, energy efficiency, education, environment, civil society and much more), and its impact on the communities of Armenia. Human stories will tell about the tangible results that real people in Armenia’s communities have achieved.

One of the most remarkable ones, as for me, is “Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Development of Communities (ISSD - <https://bit.ly/2ZhU9KE> )”, which aims to create a waste sorting and recycling culture by installing sorting bins (one in my university as well) and increasing public awareness about waste recycling within “Recycle It” project. Day by day the numbers of eco-communities grow due to initiatives, such as “Eco Aghb” (Eco Waste - <https://bit.ly/2SINWvY> ) which is monthly arranging waste gatherings from houses (at least 600 families per event) in Armenia. With the help of amazing volunteers, they arrange door-to-door collection for free.

Next is “Teach for Armenia” - <https://bit.ly/2ZmIMRF> ... is in even the most remote communities of Armenia and Artsakh to work with 100 partner schools impacting over 12,000 children. Their vision is expanding educational opportunity to all children in Armenia.

Also, CityBugs: A social platform connecting citizens with government (<https://bit.ly/35SEdRt> ). It’s also platform where anyone can talk about communal and related unsolved problems in different cities, and make suggestions or propose innovative ideas to improve their communities. Everything started when we spotted a garbage problem by our office building - there was a huge pile that was growing every day and no one was collecting it”, notices Hovhannes Aghajanyan, co-founder of CityBugs.

**2. In Ukraine, a relatively small percentage of young people participate in youth projects. How are things in Armenia? Are there any recipes to increase the motivation of young people?**

As a Young European Ambassador I mainly promote young people get actively engaged in the opportunities offered and initiatives supported by the European Union. Thus, we are multipliers of the opportunities on EU projects and activities. The young participants of the info-days in the regions of Armenia (Armavir - <https://bit.ly/2sXlqG2> , Vanadzor and Masis - <https://bit.ly/2POI8cG> and etc.) also learn about Erasmus+ opportunities, as well as platforms and tools through which they can find more information on such opportunities. Besides that, in terms of formal education exchanges within Erasmus + Studio (e.i. international credit mobility) Armenia is after Ukraine and Georgia (more - <https://bit.ly/2Qh5c2L> ).

Of course, there are some challenges which we, in fact, face while applying for projects, for example, language barrier, conservative families, “school-university-housewife” model, visa application for travelling. At the same time, I could break those stereotypes by my own so far, and my mission is to inspire my acquaintances and society that the opportunities are equal for everyone. You should believe that you have a goal in front of you and give after it.

\* *The 'Young European Neighbours' youth network aims at connecting young people and youth organisations from the EU Member States and the Eastern Neighbourhood countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine).*

**3. Tell us about the projects you have participated in? Challenges, successes and prospects «Mutabor Platform for Conflict Transformation» and «Volunteam»**

While answering to the questions above, I was generally talking about my participation in the activities by other networks and projects, but I would also like to mention some established on my own. One of them is Volunteam ([www.volunte.am](http://www.volunte.am)) which is a startup co-founded by a group of like-minded volunteers in Armenia. Firstly, we aim to share trustworthy volunteering opportunities via our webpage and various social media channels (mostly Facebook group). Then, we are doing corporate volunteering with different organizations to make them a socially-conscious workplace (More about corporate volunteering - <https://bit.ly/2tDrzHR>).

Furthermore, after completing summer academy of “The Fund for American Studies” (<https://bit.ly/2sVKpK9>) in Prague, Czech Republic, majoring in Political and Social Science at Charles University, with a group of Armenian friends we decided to raise awareness about Conflict Transformation via “Mutabor Platform” (<https://www.facebook.com/MutaborPlatform/>) and mainly write articles in this domain. As the group members are working in distance because of being located in different countries abroad, we mainly do research ourselves, then share the results after some time.

So far, new projects and initiative by me are coming soon, which will be implemented in 2020 and you can stay tuned with my updates via my social media channels.

**4. What features of the introduction and development of democratic initiatives do you see in Armenia?**

As every Armenia would say, situation has change a lot after the “Velvet Revolution” in spring 2018. I can also answer to this question with two words – “Spring Democracy”. That might tell the connection how we treat democracy and why after this revolution. The first-ever civic movement (at least for my generation) that wholly

changed Armenia's political landscape. Thus, it is also worth to note that we can see some steps forward especially in the area of freedom of speech, civil society, less cases of violence during electoral process and extent progress in construction of dialogue with its neighbors.

**5. Urban studies: what is the situation in Armenia with the development of open urban spaces for communication?**

Soviet housing remains highly present and influential in the daily experience of Yerevan, capital city of Armenia. And I hear that from every single friend of mine, who is travelling to Armenia. But still, the city is more than 2800 year-old and contains monuments and museums of modern art (e.i Cascade or Northern Avenue buildings, which represent a new Armenia). Tourists actually like the cozy and colorful Yerevan nights and can feel like home every time.

**6. Key problems of the post-Soviet urban space (chaotic development of the city, cluttering of streets with cars," building up " of balconies and destruction of the architectural unity of the old city ) – is there a positive experience of solving these problems in Armenia?**

As long as I am living at the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of a block of flats in uptown (with the majestic view of Ararat, which is considered a must for the Armenians), at the same time I can easily notice the "face" of the city of being blocked by other buildings (which we mainly consider as hotels, an icon of business). Yes, we love the DIY stuff because, for instance, there is hardly any official documentation detailing what can and cannot be built on plots in Armenia. After the 1988 Spitak disastrous earthquake in northern Armenia, in which at least 25,000 people were killed, "people continued to do things to weaken the structure of their buildings".

**7. Eco-initiatives: waste sorting, the problem of homeless animals - are there any positive experiences you have encountered in Armenia?**

As I have already covered the waste-sorting topic in the beginning, I will only add some statements. I have been one of the eco-initiators in my university (for instance to install the waste bins and collect them every month) and will carry on doing this after my graduation as well. But there are some challenges which might be disappointing for me. The society is getting used to recycling, but we still need time to find ourselves using more long-lasting products rather than plastic ones, or taking eco-bags instead of cellophanes and etc. In a nutshell, we should acknowledge how to REUSE, REDUCE then to RECYCLE. So far, we can take actions for the planet, not against it (unless it is too late).

Eventually, I will elaborate more on the homeless animals. As far as I know, DINGO TEAM" (<https://www.facebook.com/dingoteam/>) is the first, the largest and the most popular organization that provides urgent assistance to stray animals in Armenia. And they are doing a great job related to creation of the Culture of pet adoption (3000 homeless animals since 2011). Coming back to the positive changes after the revolution, the Armenian parliament recently passed bill to criminalize animal abuse.