LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

JUNE, 1ST 2025 | NO. 27 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

ARMENIAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENC
THE DEFINITION OF READING BETWEEN THE LINES

FIRST ARMENIAN ANALOG ASTRONAUT - PART 2
ARMENIA JOINS ANALOG ISS MISSION TERRA-NOVA

UNLOCKING GLOBAL MARKETS
THE ROAD TO GDPR COMPLIANCE

THE SCENT OF ARMENIA
NOTES OF DUST, APRICOT, AND MEMORY

"BUILD TO SELL" VS "BUILD TO LEASE"
WHY ARMENIA'S REAL ESTATE NEEDS MORE COMMERCIAL SPACES

THE HIDDEN SURVIVORS
ARMENIA'S UNGRAFTED VINES AND THE PHYLLOXERA PLAGUE

MATHEW ZEIN

EDITOR'S LETTER

When asked how I find stories for the magazine every month, no one believes I already have enough material for the next couple of years, not just the next few issues. Armenia has been attracting foreigners from around the world, and many who come end up staying. Every time I meet someone, there's always a story: an American who found himself in the Tavush mountains, a Brit who started an office in Armenia, an Italian posted here by his company who never left, and so on.

Before traveling to Armenia, I was in China. If I had to describe China in a single word, it would be "magnificent" given the infrastructure, buildings, streets, technology, and everything else! When I arrived in Armenia, I fell in love with the country so much that I never left. If I had to describe Armenia in a single word, it would be "lovely".

That "lovely" is probably the reason my wife and I decided to spend more time in Armenia, though little did we know that "more time" would become nine years and counting. There is always a story in Armenia, and I hope the next story will be yours!

Mathew Zein

Travel & Tourism Award 2025
Best Digital Nomad Guide of The Year
London, UK
January, 2025

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Thinking about expanding your Armenian venture globally? GDPR compliance is no longer optional. Learn exactly what the GDPR entails and why it's important for Armenian founders. Understand the rules, protect your business, and unlock new markets.

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Ever felt a place before you've even seen it? Armenia is one of those destinations that arrive not in sight, but in scent. Explores how the scent of a homeland can bring back deep memories and a sense of belonging, even for those returning after decades.

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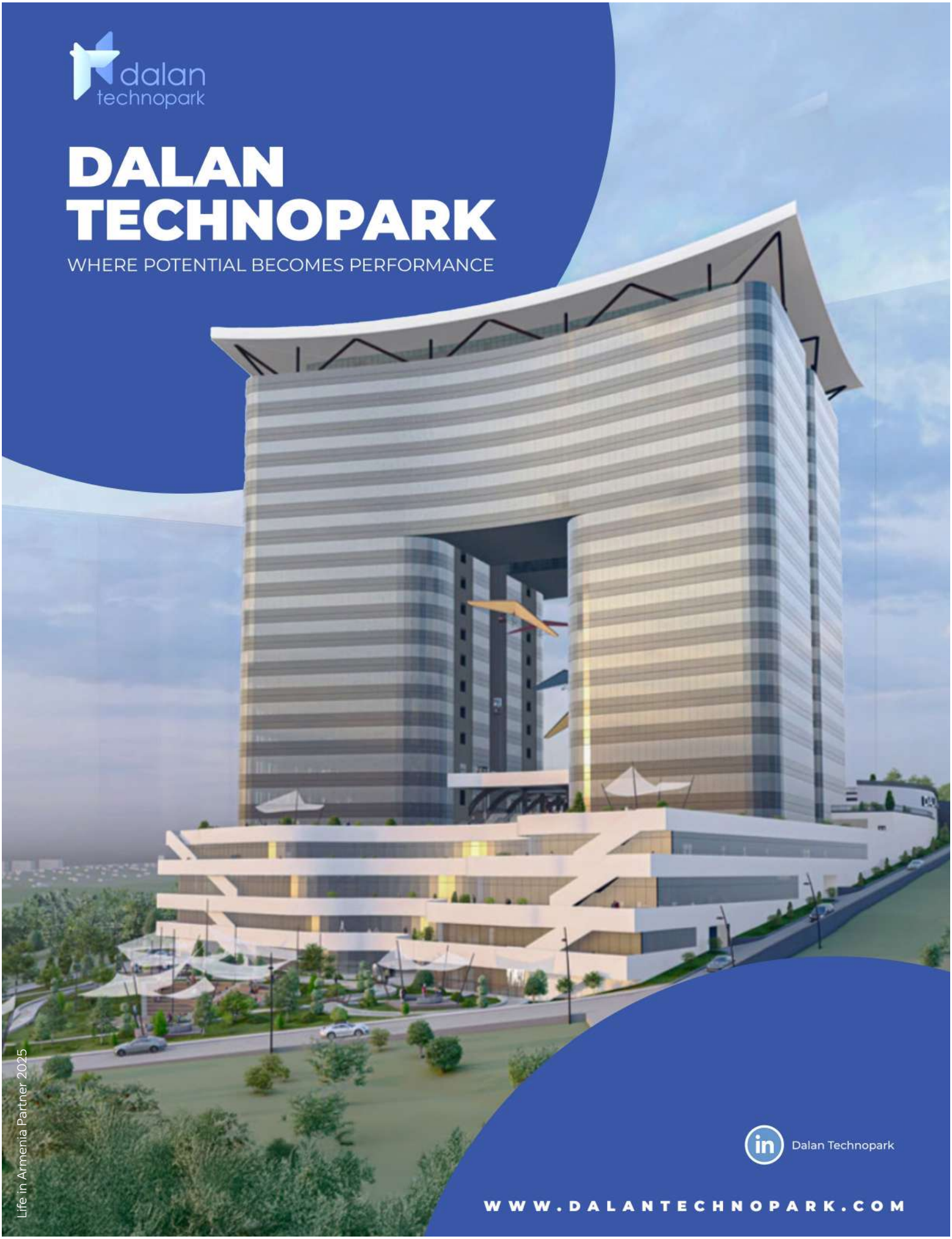
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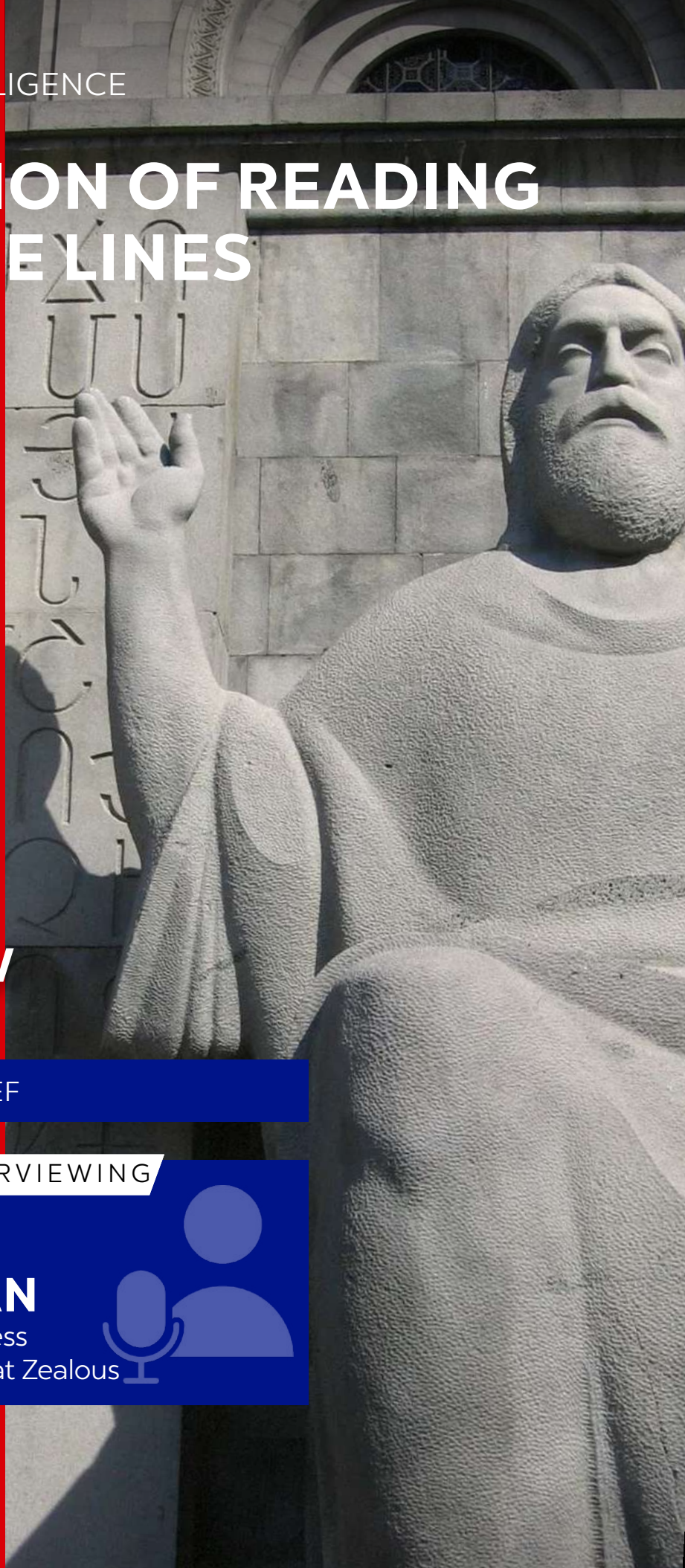
ARMENIAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

THE DEFINITION OF READING BETWEEN THE LINES



MATHEW ZEIN

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING

SUREN AZATYAN

Head of Business Development at Zealous

ARMENIAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
THE DEFINITION OF READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Over 1,600 years ago, Mesrop Mashtots, an Armenian linguist, composer, theologian, and statesman, gave Armenians a tool to codify thought: the Armenian alphabet. He designed this highly phonetic, 36-letter alphabet to accurately represent the sounds of the Armenian language. But what many don't realize today is that Mashtots's creation was never just about expression; it was about finding order in the chaos of human communication.

Fast forward to today, Armenian software engineers are building AI systems designed to interpret thought itself, perhaps unaware of the impact their language structure has on their work. They aren't just building faster text processors; they're focusing on a much deeper problem: How do you teach a machine to infer meaning when the most critical information is not explicitly stated but rather implied within the nuances of human communication?

Lots of AI solutions today operate at a surface level, extracting keywords, classifying sentiment, or summarizing text. But real-world decisions hinge on nuance. We're talking about understanding subtext, detecting omissions, and clearing ambiguity, the way a lawyer dissects a contract, a diplomat decodes a statement, or an editor spots what's not said.

Think about it for a minute, in legal contracts, does “reasonable efforts” mean the same in a startup’s term sheet as in a Fortune 500 merger agreement? Or in diplomatic statements, when a negotiator says, “We remain open to dialogue,” are they stalling or showing flexibility?

The ability to correctly interpret these subtle differences isn’t just about comprehension; **it directly impacts outcomes**, leading to costly errors, lost opportunities, or even international misunderstandings.

The future of AI isn’t just processing data, but understanding it. Since our world is drowning in text, the real advantage goes to those who can **detect what’s hidden, interpret what’s vague, and act on what’s implied**.

> **Suren Azatyan**
> Head of Business Development at Zealous Tech
>
> Misreading between the lines isn’t an academic problem, it’s an expensive one.”

What I’ll describe in the following lines might be hypothetical, but it makes sense and, in one way or another, **justifies the current status of the Armenian tech industry**.

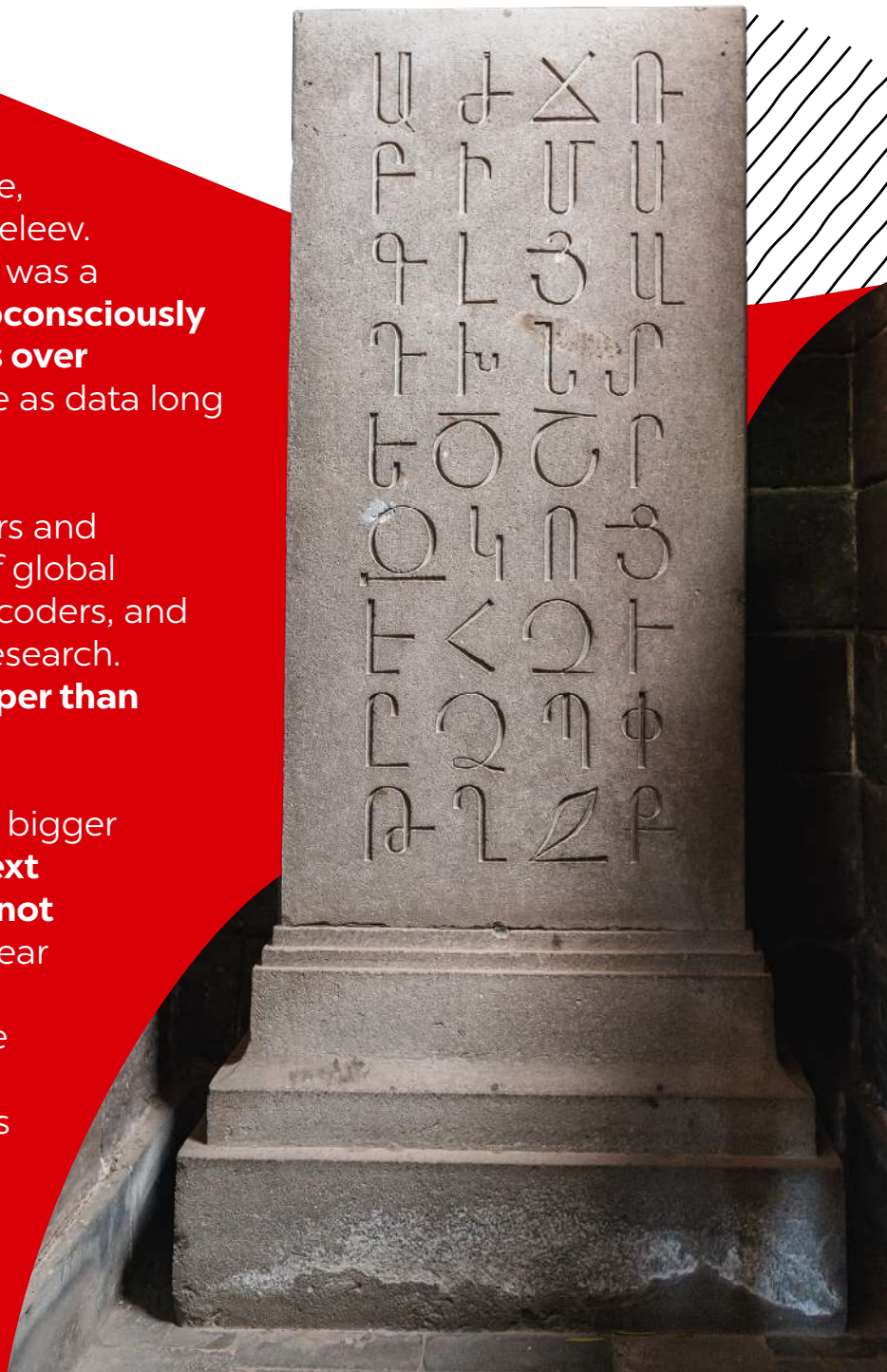
How a 5th-Century Alphabet Shaped 21st-Century AI

The Armenian alphabet was designed, not evolved! Each letter was crafted for maximal efficiency, like an ancient Unicode. Mesrop Mashtots didn't just create an alphabet, he engineered a system of thought. The Armenian script, designed in 405 AD, wasn't arbitrary. It was a structured, almost mathematical framework for encoding language. The alphabet carried numerical significance, as letters functioned as numbers, embedding logic into script.

Some scholars argue the alphabet's sequence mirrors patterns found in the periodic table, a system later formalized by Mendeleev. This wasn't just a writing system. It was a cognitive technology, one that **subconsciously trained generations of Armenians over hundreds of years** to see language as data long before computers existed.

Many nations have skilled engineers and AI specialists. Silicon Valley is full of global talent, India produces world-class coders, and European labs pioneer high-end research. Yet **Armenia's advantage lies deeper than technical skill alone.**

In the AI race, most focus on scale, bigger models, and more data. But **the next priority is depth, understanding, not just processing**. Armenia's 1,600-year head start in systematic language design gives its engineers a unique advantage. They don't just build AI that reads. They build AI that thinks like Mashtots, fi**nding order in the chaos of human communication**.



Why A U.S. Agency Hired Armenian Engineers

In the March 2025 issue of Life in Armenia, I interviewed experts from Canada, the United States, South Africa, Georgia, Switzerland, and, most importantly, Armenia to analyze the digital butterfly effect of the US $500 billion AI infrastructure investment initiative and its impact on Armenia's AI-powered educational software sector.

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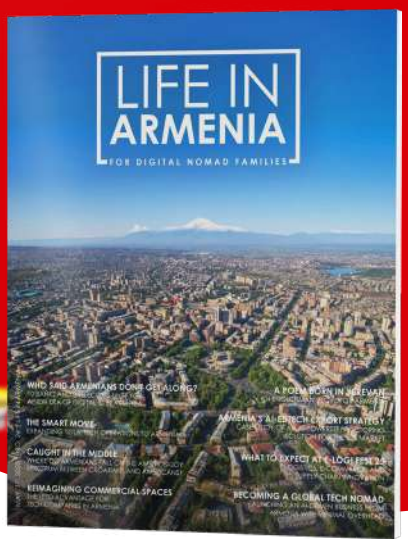

Today, we're following up on that article, but with a more hands-on approach, analyzing Armenia's potential and real challenges in this sector. For that, I had a long talk with Mr. Suren Azatyan, Head of Business Development at Zealous, a software engineering company based in Armenia. For context, Zealous has around 300 software engineers and 1 million+ hours of development experience across large-scale and mega-projects for globally recognized brands.

To my surprise, Mr. Azatyan opened with an example I hadn't anticipated: AI-assisted candidate evaluation. At first glance, vetting foreign specialists might seem like a routine task: check diplomas, verify credentials, tick boxes. But the real challenge lies in the gaps between those boxes. When a licensing body evaluates an applicant, the difference between "qualified" and "unqualified" often hinges on unstated assumptions. Does a degree in "Biomedical Engineering" align with the requirements for a "Clinical Equipment Specialist"? Is a course titled "Advanced Therapeutics" equivalent to "Pharmacology III" in another country's curriculum?

The system doesn't just extract data from diplomas and transcripts; it reconstructs meaning. By mapping coursework to licensing frameworks while accounting for semantic variations (e.g., "Robotics" vs. "Mechatronics"), the AI generates draft evaluations with confidence scores, flags discrepancies for human review, and iteratively refines its logic through feedback. Manual effort dropped by half, evaluation costs followed, and the system is projected to save millions over three years.

This isn't just about parsing text; it's about decoding context. Human evaluators do this instinctively, cross-referencing institutional reputations, regional accreditation norms, and even curricular trends. But when scaled across thousands of applications, subjectivity creeps in, along with bottlenecks, inconsistency, and cost. And that was precisely why a U.S. agency turned to his company, Zealous, in Armenia. They didn't need a keyword scanner; they needed a system that could weigh context like a human, balancing regulations with the fluidity of human experience. The result? An AI that doesn't just read lines but reads between the lines.

This is the Armenian advantage in action. After all, if an algorithm can't tell whether "Reasonable Efforts" in a contract means 80-hour weeks or best intentions, it's just a faster clerk, not a smarter one!

Documents Don’t Lie, But They Don’t Tell the Whole Truth Either

When Zealous first deployed its candidate evaluation system for a U.S. agency, engineers discovered their core AI engine, with strategic updates, could interpret far more than just candidate qualifications.

The same technology could scan and analyze documents across industries, extracting hidden meaning through its feedback-learning architecture. What began as a candidate evaluator is now a generalized “Context Engine.”

“

Suren Azatyan

Head of Business Development at Zealous Tech

We didn’t just remove industry-specific rules, we taught the AI to discover them.”

“

Suren Azatyan

Head of Business Development at Zealous Tech

Our system doesn’t just process documents; it reverse-engineers the hidden frameworks that govern how meaning is constructed.”

In the 5th century, Mesrop Mashtots did more than invent an alphabet; he encoded a worldview. Each Armenian letter was a deliberate act of cognitive engineering, a belief that language could be optimized for clarity, logic, and depth.

The Armenian alphabet was designed to reveal truth through structure. Today, its intellectual descendants are building AI to reveal the truth despite the structure.

UNLOCKING GLOBAL MARKETS

THE ROAD TO GDPR COMPLIANCE

MARTA HOVANESIAN

CO-FOUNDER OF NOR LAW

UNLOCKING GLOBAL MARKETS
THE ROAD TO GDPR COMPLIANCE

Privacy and data protection compliance are often considered roadblocks to growth. Tech founders want to grow rapidly, become a success story, and worry about compliance issues later. But what if you don't have to choose between growth and compliance? What if privacy compliance simply empowers and accelerates that growth and success in a sustainable way?

Contrary to popular belief, privacy regulations do not stunt your company's growth or prohibit you from developing your products. They simply tell you how to develop them to unlock growth opportunities. By gaining consumer trust. By becoming a preferred provider. By being in control.

Companies want to share their customer data with service providers who can provide appropriate protection. Consumers want to feel that they are in control of their data. Investors want to invest in a company that is not facing multiple litigation claims or regulatory enforcement. Now, more than ever, investing in privacy is a priority for your growth.

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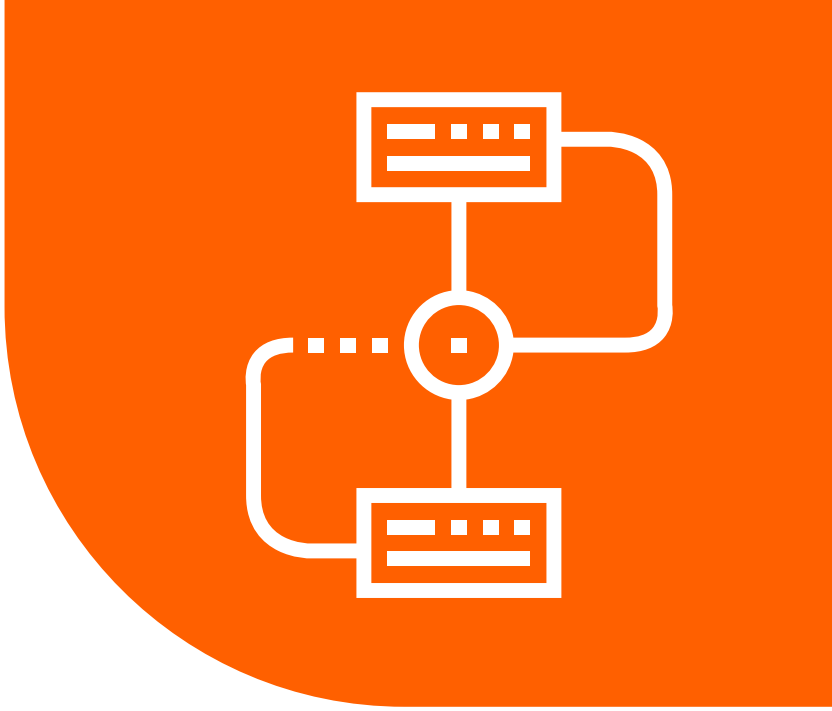
If you have customers established in the European Union (EU), or if you've developed a product meant for global use (including individuals residing in the EU), **chances are that you'll be required to comply with the GDPR** (whether by law or contract). My previous article explained how you can implement privacy principles into the design of your products. This is a huge step towards privacy compliance and prepares your product for global growth. This article sets out some other steps you should take on the road to privacy compliance. The order could be different depending on where you are in the process, but these key requirements remain the same in any case.

Data Flow Mapping



You can't control what you don't know! The very first step should be to map your data flows and assets. What is the source of your data? Where is it stored? Where does it go? Who has access to it? What processing activities does it undergo? What assets or systems do you have that process or store data? Create a visual map or any other format that works best.

Identify Your Roles

Data protection laws distinguish between two roles: The controller and the processor. The controller is the entity that determines the means and purposes of processing. In other words, the controller decides (or has decisive influence over):

- Whether personal data should be collected
- What categories of personal data should be collected
- Whose personal data should be collected
- What is the purpose of collecting
- How long should it be stored, and Who should it be shared with.

The processor simply processes personal data on behalf of the controller. The processor can decide on non-essential means of the processing, such as the security measures taken or hardware or software used, but should follow the controller's instructions in relation to the processing of personal data at all times.

A company can have a dual role. It can be a controller for the personal data of its own employees (as an employer), but a processor for the personal data it processes for its customers (as a service provider). It can also be a controller and a processor for the personal data it processes for its customers. For example, when it provides a service, but also uses end-user data for its own purposes to train an AI model.

The identification of roles is not always straightforward, but necessary to determine your obligations. Sometimes companies can also be joint controllers (but this is for another time). When you've finished mapping your data flows, the next step should be to determine your role(s) for the processing activities.

Determine The Purposes

Identify the purposes for which personal data are processed. If you're a mere processor, your purpose will be to provide a service to your customer. If you're the controller, it is your responsibility to determine for which purposes personal data are collected and processed further (including by the processor). Ideally, this is done before any collection of personal data takes place.

Apply Privacy by Design Measures

Based on your identified purposes, implement the privacy by design principles. These are set out in detail in the previous article. In short, you should:

- Only collect and process personal data that is necessary for your identified purposes
- Determine and enforce appropriate retention periods for the personal data
- Apply appropriate technical & organizational security measures (including confidentiality obligations)
- Ensure that individuals can exercise their data protection rights and that the processed data is accurate
- Ensure processing is fair, transparent, and lawful (see legal basis below for lawfulness)

One key element to keep in mind is that your processing activities should always enable individuals to exercise their rights. In general, individuals should be able to get access to their personal data, download their personal data, correct or update their personal data, object to the processing in certain circumstances, and withdraw their consent. These rights are core principles of the GDPR. Regardless of what product you're developing or service you're delivering, you need to always consider how you'll enable the individuals to exercise their rights (e.g., through self-service options).

Legal Basis For Processing

The controller is responsible for ensuring that it has an appropriate legal basis for processing. The processor will rely on the legal basis identified by the controller.

The GDPR provides for 6 different legal bases:

- The individual has freely given his or her prior informed consent
- Processing is necessary for the performance of a contract (or to take steps prior to entering into the contract at the individual's request)
- Processing is necessary for compliance with a legal obligation
- Processing is necessary to protect the vital interests of an individual (e.g., in a life or death situation)
- Processing is necessary for the performance of a public task, or
- Processing is necessary for the pursuit of a legitimate interest, and the individual's interests and data protection rights and freedoms do not override such legitimate interest.

There is no hierarchy in the legal bases. You'll need to determine for each processing activity which legal basis is appropriate (spoiler: it is not always consent).

The GDPR includes a general prohibition on the processing of special categories of personal data (information about health, race or ethnicity, religion or philosophical beliefs, political opinions, sex life or sexual preference, trade union membership, genetic data or biometric data).

If you're processing any of these categories, you'll need to identify an exemption in addition to a legal basis. For example, an exemption may apply if the individual has given his or her explicit consent, or if the information has been manifestly made public by the individual. Most other exemptions require a basis in Member State or European law.

Documentation

The GDPR has a few documentation requirements.

Privacy Policy

The most obvious and well-known requirement is the privacy policy. The controller needs to inform individuals in a clear, understandable, and transparent manner about the way in which it processes their personal data.

This includes information about the categories of individuals and personal data, the purposes for processing, the legal basis, disclosures of personal data, sources of personal data, retention periods, and transfers of personal data to third countries. This is where your data mapping exercise comes in handy.

Data Protection Impact Assessment

For high-risk processing activities, controllers should undertake a data protection impact assessment (DPIA). As a processor, you are required to assist the controller with a DPIA if requested. A DPIA is meant to **identify and mitigate risks associated with the processing of personal data**.

Data Processing & Transfer Agreement

The relationship between controllers and processors needs to be governed by a data processing agreement. The elements required for the agreement are set out in the GDPR (for example, the processor must follow the instructions of the controller, apply appropriate security measures, enable the controller's compliance with the GDPR, enable customer audits, notify personal data breaches, etc.).

If there will be international transfers (e.g., transfers of personal data from an EU controller to an Armenian processor), the agreement usually also includes standard contractual clauses adopted by the European Commission as the transfer mechanism.

The above provides a high-level (and non-exhaustive) overview of what compliance with the GDPR will look like. While it may seem daunting, it all comes down to being in control of personal data and providing individuals control over their data.

Magazine **Feedback**

Alex M.

Life in Armenia is my go-to for all things Armenia! As a diaspora Armenian, it keeps me connected to the homeland in a modern way.

Shant H.

Every month, I set aside time to slow down and reconnect with my roots, far from the noise of daily life. It's more than reading, it's like coming home.

Jonathan B.

Useful for understanding Armenia's business climate. You helped me relocate my tech team to Yerevan last year. Best English resource out there.

Sam S.

You capture Armenia's soul in your magazine. I really mean it, every time I read Life in Armenia, I feel the articles breathe Armenia. Hope I can visit one day and meet you for a coffee.

“BUILD TO SELL” VS “BUILD TO LEASE”

WHY ARMENIA’S REAL ESTATE NEEDS MORE COMMERCIAL SPACES

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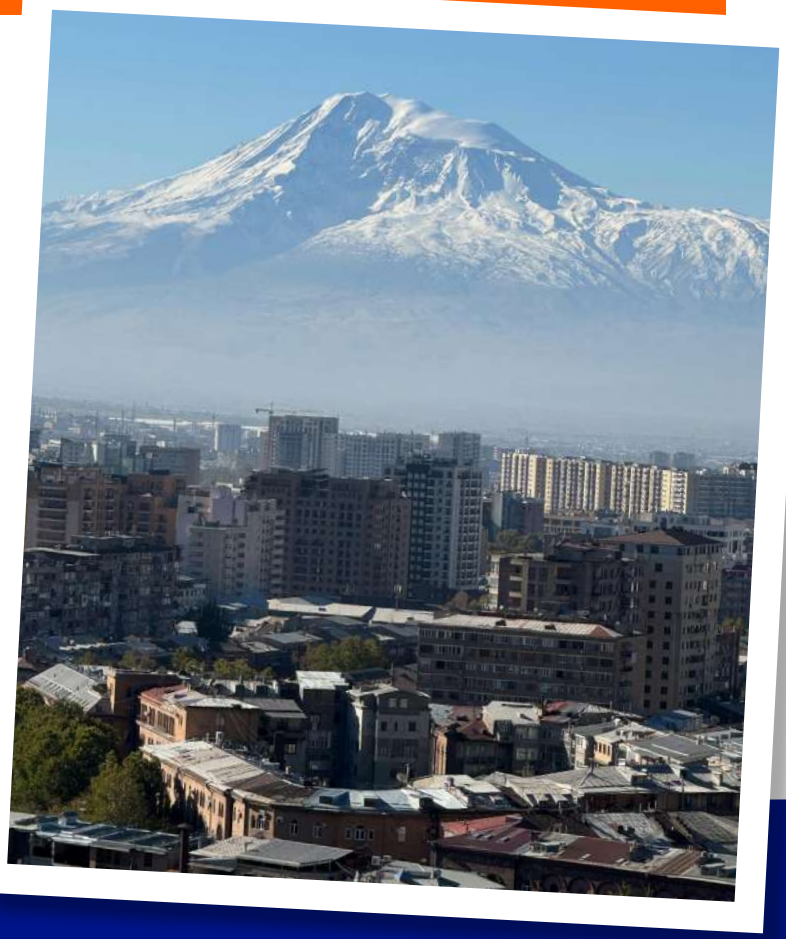


Armenia has so much potential!

I’ve heard this phrase almost daily since moving to Armenia in 2017. And while it’s true that potential is around every corner in this country, potential alone is not enough! Potential doesn’t attract foreign capital, potential doesn’t create jobs, and potential doesn’t contribute to the national income. Infrastructure does!

I’m not talking about ports, roads, or bridges, because those are obvious infrastructure necessities that don’t require further discussion. I’m talking about **office spaces and workstations built and maintained to international standards**. At first, second, or even third glance, it might seem hard to pin down why this matters. But dig a little deeper, and it becomes clear!

International-standard workplace infrastructure **signals that Armenia is open to meet international business demands**. This isn’t about having nice-looking office towers all over the country; it’s about functionality, efficiency, and competitiveness.

For global companies considering expansion into Armenia, subpar office environments can be a silent dealbreaker. On the other hand, modern, ergonomic, tech-equipped, and standardized workspaces send a powerful message: Armenia isn’t just catching up; it’s **positioning itself as a leader in regional business ecosystems**.

Apartments Everywhere!

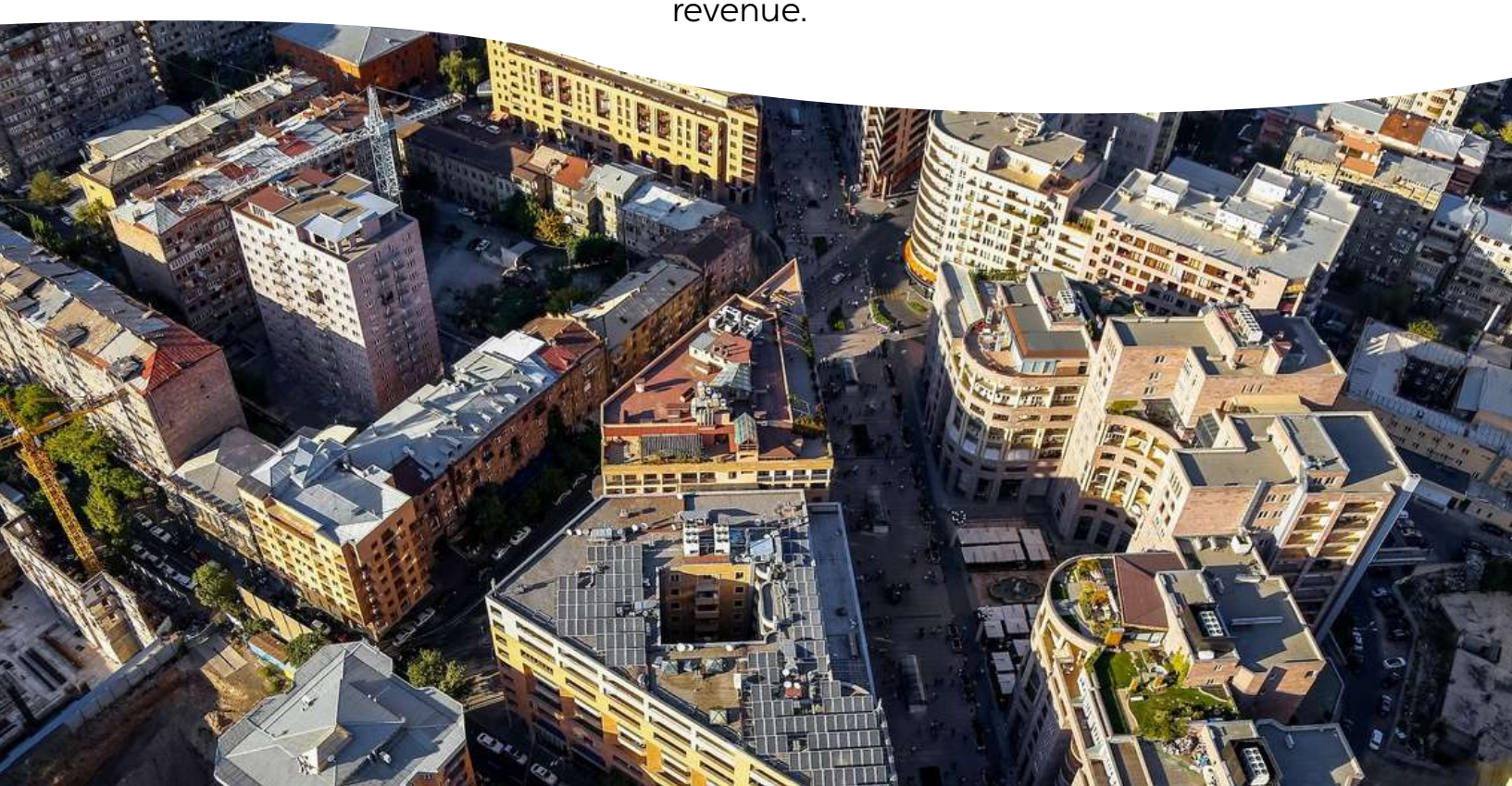
Currently, Armenia's real estate market heavily favors residential complexes over commercial office spaces, with developers prioritizing the build-to-sell model over build-to-lease.

This imbalance is a result of a simple economic reality: residential properties are easier to sell quickly. On top of that, residential demand is more predictable, driven by diaspora investments, local housing needs, and, until recently, a tax incentive for buying a newly built apartment. The result is a market saturated with residential properties.

Commercial real estate requires long-term planning, higher upfront investment, and active management. But the rewards, stable cash flow, premium tenants, and asset appreciation far outweigh the risks for those willing to play the long game.

While residential developments offer quick returns, their dominance comes at a hidden cost to Armenia's economic diversification. A market flooded with apartments does little to attract high-value businesses or contribute to job creation.

Worse yet, it risks creating a speculative bubble, where prices are driven by investor demand rather than real housing needs, leaving the market vulnerable to sudden corrections. Commercial real estate, on the other hand, anchors long-term economic activity, supporting industries that generate sustainable employment and tax revenue.



Cities like Berlin, Singapore, and Austin didn't become business hubs by accident; they strategically balanced residential and commercial growth. Berlin's revitalization of old industrial spaces into creative offices, Singapore's strict zoning for mixed-use districts, and Austin's incentives for tech campuses offer **blueprints Armenia could adapt**. Purposeful urban planning drives sustainable economic growth.

When Developers Cash Out!

The "build to sell" model dominates Armenia's real estate because it aligns with short-term financial incentives. Developers borrow, build, sell, and repeat.

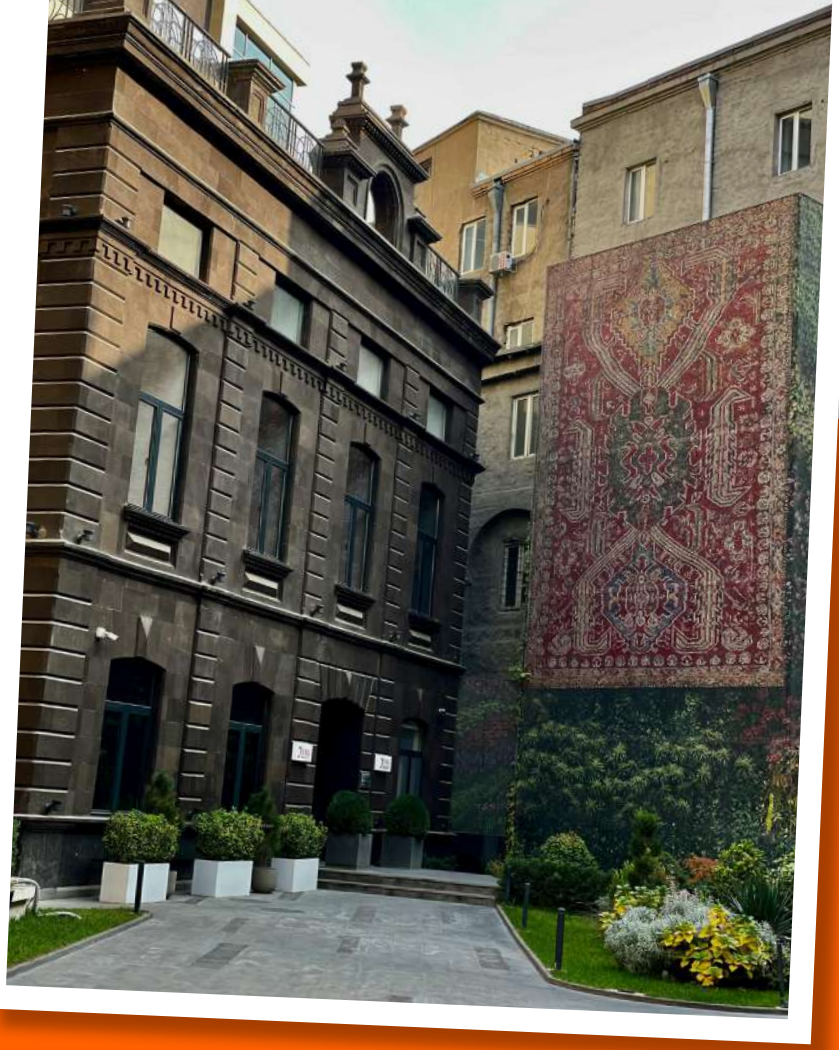
Now contrast this with the "build to lease" approach, where developers retain ownership and must ensure their properties remain competitive. Active ownership creates accountability. If a building deteriorates, tenants leave, and revenue drops. This forces developers to prioritize quality materials, professional management, and sustainable design.

A building's value isn't just in its physical structure, but in its ability to generate consistent, growing revenue streams. Currently, Armenian developers measure success by sales velocity and square meters built. A lease-focused model would establish new metrics: occupancy rates, tenant satisfaction scores, and net operating income growth. This shift in performance indicators would reward quality over quantity, benefiting the entire ecosystem.

The benefits extend beyond developers: tenants get better spaces, Yerevan gains vibrant districts, and the economy becomes less reliant on volatile sectors. Most importantly, Armenia becomes more attractive to foreign investors. Companies seeking stability prefer leased spaces from reputable owners over uncertain sublets. A well-managed office building attracts established firms willing to pay premium rents.

Some developers in Armenia may argue that commercial leasing is "too risky" due to uncertain tenant demand. However, mature markets such as Berlin and Singapore show that leased office spaces result in higher lifetime returns than one-time sales. Additionally, pre-leasing agreements with multinationals or tech firms can de-risk projects early.

Consider the difference between a developer-owned office building and one sold piecemeal to small investors: the former maintains high occupancy rates through proactive upgrades and tenant retention strategies, while the latter often suffers from inconsistent upkeep, declining rents, and eventual obsolescence. When commercial properties are sold to individual investors rather than retained by developers, maintenance and tenant relations frequently deteriorate. Without professional asset management, even prime locations lose value over time.



Patient Capital, Impatient Market

The most **successful real estate markets globally thrive on patient capital**; investment strategies that prioritize steady, compounding returns over quick exits. In Armenia, where debt is often short-term and expensive, developers face pressure to sell fast rather than hold and optimize.

Developers who secure long-term funding, whether through private equity, foreign investment, or alternative financing, outperform in the long run. A 10-20 year horizon allows for better construction, strategic tenant selection, and value appreciation.

Unlike residential units, which may peak in value quickly, prime commercial assets grow more valuable over the years as locations develop and demand increases. Many promising commercial projects in Armenia never materialize because developers rely on high-interest, short-term loans. **Banks favor residential projects with faster returns**, leaving few financing options for office towers, retail plazas, or logistics parks..

Pension funds, insurance companies, and wealth funds typically allocate 5-10% of their portfolios to commercial real estate, **precisely because of its stable, inflation-hedged returns**. Armenia lacks this critical class of investors, creating a financing gap that forces developers into short-term thinking. The emergence of local REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts) or partnerships with regional institutional investors could provide the patient capital needed for transformative projects.

The Office Upgrade Armenia Needs

Almost half of Fortune 500 companies have net-zero commitments. International businesses, such as tech firms, require Grade A offices (modern HVAC, fiber optics, ESG compliance). Armenia's current stock doesn't have many options. In fact, at the moment, Dalan Technopark is the first commercial building in Armenia that aims to become LEED certified. They are capitalizing on a market gap by creating Armenia's first sustainable, future-ready office building.

Grade A offices aren't just about prestige; they're about **meeting non-negotiable operational requirements for multinational tenants**. Modern corporations demand LEED or BREEAM-certified sustainable buildings, 24/7 operational capabilities with backup power, smart building systems with IoT integration, and ADA-compliant accessibility standards. Without these fundamentals, **Armenia remains off the shortlist for regional headquarters decisions**. A quick example would be Warsaw's "Mordor" district; what began as a few office towers now houses 70,000 tech workers across one million sqm of premium space.

"

Hayk Ter-Tachatyan

Operations Director at Dalan Technopark

Investing in LEED-certified green construction future-proofs our investment, ensuring our building remains competitive and desirable for multinational tenants who prioritize ESG compliance."

"

Hayk Ter-Tachatyan

Operations Director at Dalan Technopark

For global companies, stability is key. Our build-to-lease business model provides the secure, professionally managed spaces that make Armenia a preferred destination for foreign investment."

The Armenian government has a key role to play, not through heavy-handed intervention, but by incentivizing private developers to prioritize international standards. Tax breaks for green building certifications, streamlined permitting for commercial projects, and subsidies for tech-enabled office parks could accelerate progress.

Why should the government care about that? Simply because investing in world-class office infrastructure doesn't just benefit multinational corporations; it creates a ripple effect across the local economy. From construction and maintenance jobs to the demand for ancillary services like IT support, catering, and cleaning, these developments stimulate employment at multiple levels. Moreover, clustering high-standard offices in business districts can revitalize surrounding neighborhoods, spurring cafes, retail spaces, and public transport upgrades, turning underutilized areas into thriving urban hubs.

The Real Price Armenia is Paying

What I'm talking about in this article isn't theoretical. The gap between what Armenia has and what it needs is already costing the economy a lot in lost investment and missed opportunities.

Back to the commercial construction boom in Poland as an example. After the 2004 EU accession, Warsaw developers shifted from quick-flip residential projects to institutional-quality offices.

Within 15 years, Warsaw's skyline transformed, attracting regional HQs for Fortune 500 companies. Armenia's diaspora networks and tech sector growth could fuel a similar growth with the right infrastructure.

Potential is a starting point, but **proof is what converts skeptics into stakeholders**. Every multinational that chooses Yerevan over another regional capital, every diaspora professional who relocates back home, and every startup that scales globally from Armenia will **validate the country's infrastructure investments**.

The goal isn't just to have potential; it's to **create an ecosystem in Armenia where potential is realized, measured, and replicated**.

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FIRST ARMENIAN ANALOG ASTRONAUT - PART 2

ARMENIA JOINS ANALOG ISS MISSION TERRA-NOVA

ANNA HARUTYUNYAN

FIRST ARMENIAN ANALOG ASTRONAUT

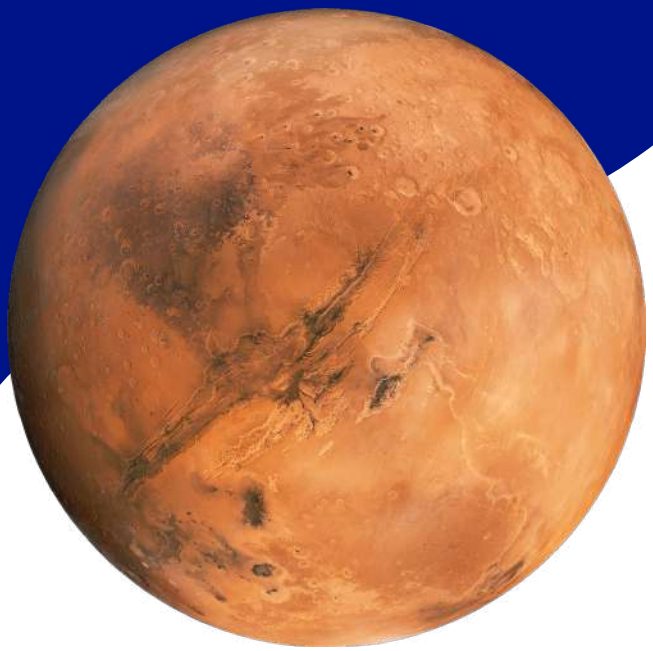
Hi, it's me, Hanna, again.

A few months ago, I wrote an article for the November issue of "Life in Armenia" about my journey as the first Armenian analog astronaut and how Armenia needs to build its space research ecosystem.

PAGE 8

I spoke from the heart, as **someone who has often felt like an orphan in the global space community**. What I didn't expect was that that article would connect me to Alexander Stork, the CEO of NINECUBES (creator of Interpersonal Skills LAB), someone who shares a passion for bridging human performance and space exploration, and is passionate about Armenia. That article sparked a conversation, and now, here we are, **announcing something we were working on for the last 6 months**.

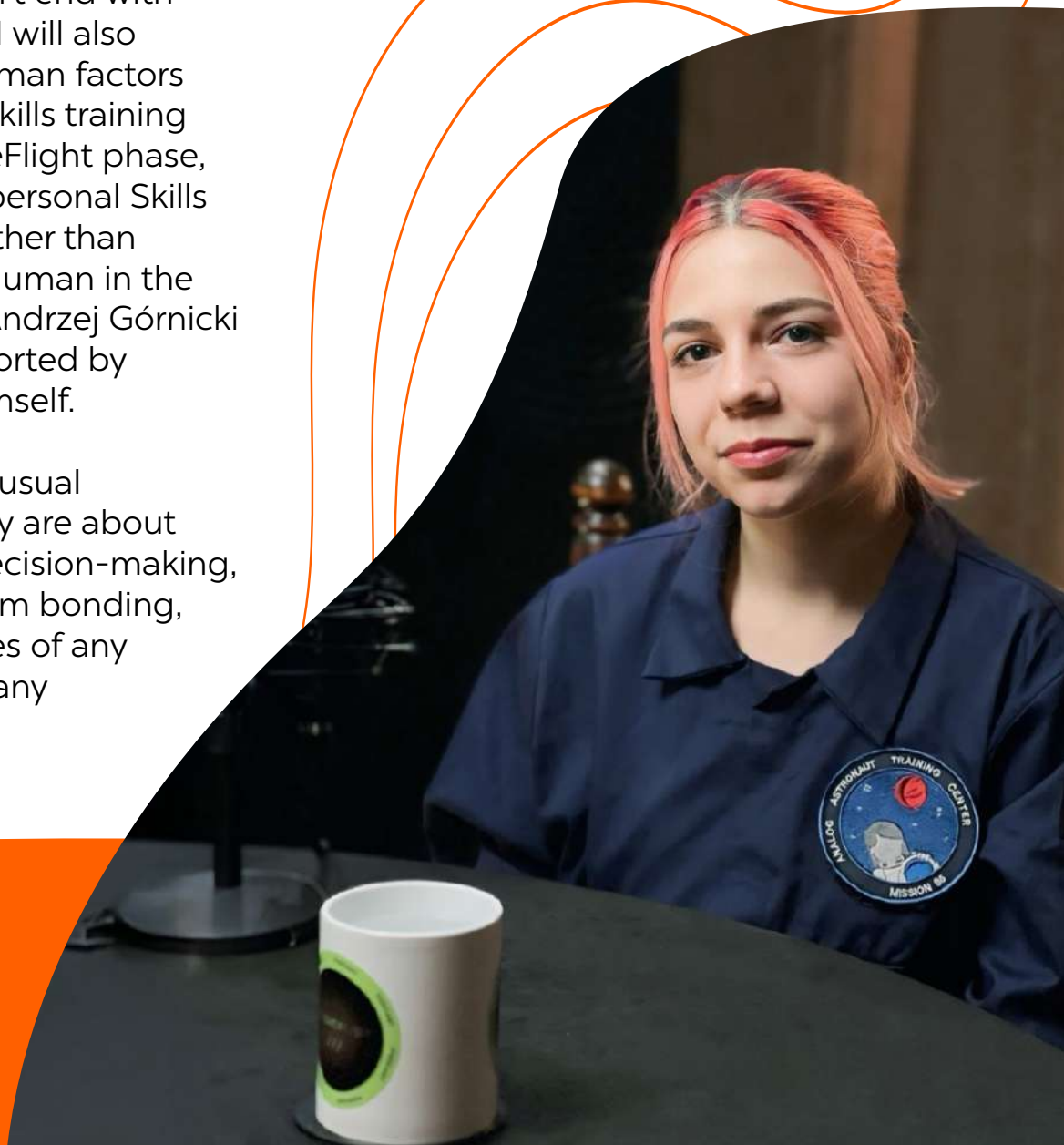
I'm proud to share that I will be part of the Axiom-4 mission mirror analog mission, Terra-Nova, taking place in the LunAres habitat in Poland. This is more than a mission. It's history for Armenia. Thanks to the sponsorship of NINECUBES (Switzerland), I will spend a month (May 28 - June 21) as part of an analog ISS crew inside one of Europe's most advanced analog habitats, while astronaut Sławosz Uznański represents Poland and the European Space Agency aboard the ISS. This will be the first-ever analog-ISS synchronized mission, bringing together analog astronauts on Earth and astronauts in orbit, focusing on mental health, team dynamics, and work performance in space-like conditions.



For me, this mission is a bridge between Armenia and the space community. It's a chance to bring our perspectives, culture, and skills to a global research effort. And personally, it's a continuation of my mission to represent Armenia in the space world.

But the story doesn't end with the mission patch. I will also take part in two human factors and interpersonal skills training days during the PreFlight phase, organized by Interpersonal Skills LAB, led by none other than Gareth Lock from Human in the System (UK), with Andrzej Górnicki (Poland), and supported by Alexander Stork himself.

These are not your usual technical drills. They are about communication, decision-making, leadership, and team bonding, the invisible muscles of any mission, analog or any other.



Day 1

Will focus on the fundamentals: situational awareness, assertive communication, and team resilience inside the habitat and command center.

Day 2

Through the Discovery of Nexus simulation, we'll step into a metaphoric world of complex decision-making under pressure, preparing us for structured thinking and better leadership in high-stakes environments.

For an Armenian engineer like me, trained mostly in the technical world, this is an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen the human side of space missions, a side that often gets overlooked but is critical for mission success. These trainings will bond not only our crew inside the analog station but also the MCC(Mission Control Center) team, simulating the real-world isolation and communication challenges of deep space missions.

In parallel, I will also conduct my research experiment on mental math performance in analog spaceflight conditions, exploring how stress, isolation, and team dynamics influence cognitive functions like mental calculation speed, accuracy, and decision-making. It's a small but meaningful contribution to better understand how human cognition adapts in space-like settings, and how astronauts can train their minds for long-duration missions.

This mission is the perfect symbol of what I believe in. Space is about crossing borders. I see it as an invitation for Armenia to enter the software of human performance, decision-making, and analog space research.

From a "Life in Armenia" article, to a conversation with Alex, to now being part of the Terra-Nova mission and its PreFlight training with some of the best in the field, this journey is proof that when you're doing what you love, the right people find you. And together, you build the next chapter.

This mission is not just mine. It's Armenia's. It's a message to all young Armenian scientists, engineers, and dreamers that space is not far away, it's as close as the next project, the next mission, the next training. And it's also a message to the international space community: there are talents, stories, and **perspectives waiting to be included from nations without space agencies**. Let's open those doors together. Because every mission is human, and sometimes, it starts with an article like this.

TECH EVENTS with ARTAK N. G.

TECH BLOGGER

JUNE 4	QIC Tech meetup by ITA-
JUNE 5	The art if letting go by HR Drone
JUNE 11	Creating engaging game systems
JUNE 14-15	Securty BSides Yerevan
JUNE 16	Atlassian community first meetup
JUNE 24	Tech transformation for bussiness growth

THE SCENT OF ARMENIA

NOTES OF DUST, APRICOT, AND MEMORY

DIANA TCHALIAN

WRITER AND STORYTELLER

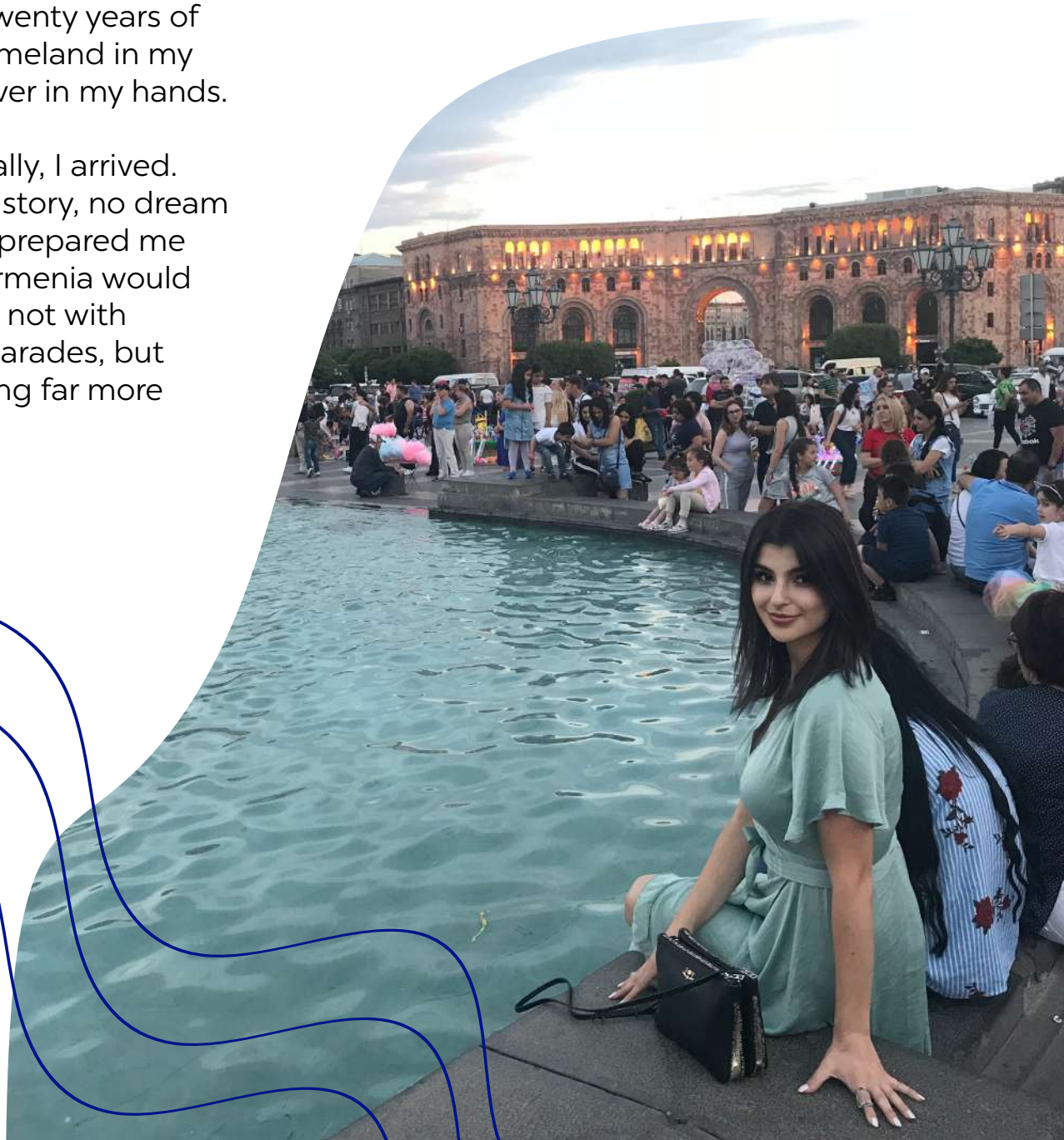
THE SCENT OF ARMENIA
NOTES OF DUST, APRICOT, AND MEMORY

It took me twenty years to finally stand on the soil of Armenia again. Twenty years of hearing about it – in lullabies sung by my mother, in black – and – white photographs tucked into drawers, in the way my grandparents' eyes softened whenever they spoke of "Hayastan." Twenty years of carrying a homeland in my blood but never in my hands.

And then, finally, I arrived. Nothing – no story, no dream – could have prepared me for the way Armenia would welcome me: not with fireworks or parades, but with something far more powerful.

A scent

The air smelled dry, warm, and old. Not dusty in a forgotten way, but in a way that spoke endurance, of wisdom. It smelled like home, even though it was my first breath there. I stepped out of the airport, my heart pounding in my chest, and whispered to myself: "Yes...I'm finally here."

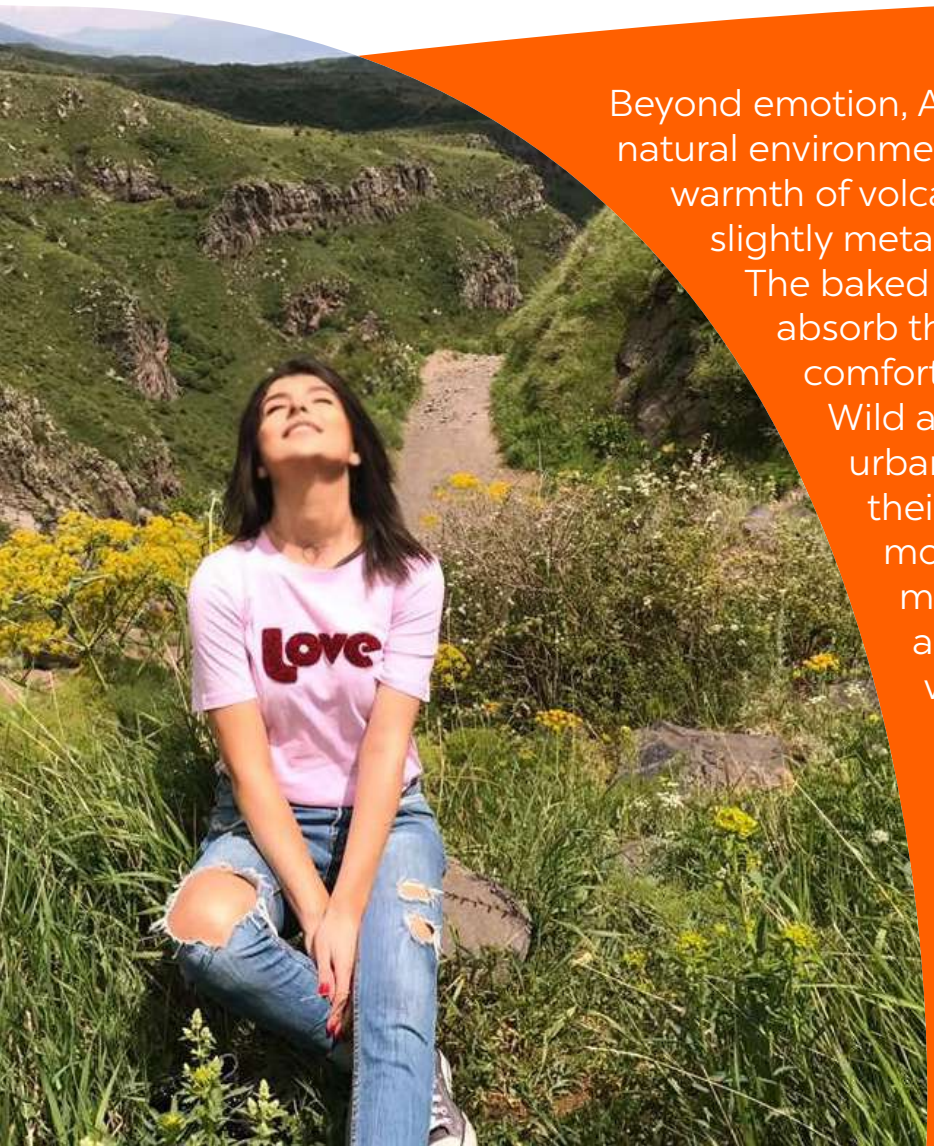


Breathing in Belonging

I have always been in love with perfume. Ever since I was a little girl, I believed that scent was the closest thing to magic. A single breath could take you back to a childhood kitchen, a lost summer, a first love.

In Armenia, it wasn't perfume that found me – it was life itself, perfumed in ways I had never imagined. The morning of freshly baked lavash rising like a prayer from outdoor ovens. The tick sweetness of ripe apricots sold in roadside stands, warm from the sun. The spicy, resinous tang of church incense curling up into the cool stone arches of ancient monasteries. The clean, metallic smell of rain on tufa stones, after a long, parched afternoon.

Every corner, every breath, stitched a new note into my heart. And somehow, every scent felt both brand new and impossibly familiar – like a forgotten memory waiting to be claimed.



Beyond emotion, Armenia's scent is rooted in its natural environment. The dry air, infused with the warmth of volcanic tuff stones, releases an earthy, slightly metallic aroma under the strong sun. The baked streets and ancient architecture absorb the day's heat and give back a comforting, mineral-rich scent at dusk. Wild apricot trees, abundant even in urban gardens, perfume the air with their sweet, ripe fragrance. In the mornings, the crisp breeze carries the mingled smells of fresh bread, fruit, and warm stone through the city's winding alleys. Armenia's altitude, dry summers, and ever-present sunlight all intensify these smells, creating a distinct atmosphere that feels both timeless and deeply alive — a scent woven into the very geography of the land.

The First Embrace

I will never forget the moment I saw my grandparents again. After twenty long years – twenty years of missed birthdays, missed stories, missed moments – they stood waiting for me, just outside the airport.

My grandmother's hair had grown whiter, her back slightly more curved. My grandfather's hands, always strong in my memory, now trembled slightly at his sides. But their faces – oh, their faces – still lit up the same way when they saw me. I dropped my suitcase and ran. "Tatik! Papik!" I cried, my voice cracking open. They held me so tightly I could barely breathe. And I didn't want to.

I buried my face into my grandmother's shoulder and smelled her – the soft scent of rosewater she always wore, mixed with something else, something unmistakably Armenian: dust, fabric, and tears.

I had dreamed of this hug for years. But dreams never smelled this real. Dreams didn't leave salty tear stains on my cheek, or a trembling hand brushing my hair away while whispering, "Apres, bales, apres..." Bless you, my dear, bless you.

In that moment, I realized: Home isn't a place. Home is a scent. Home is arms that have waited twenty years just to hold you.

A Symphony of Smells

The days that followed were a feast for the senses. Everywhere I went, Armenia revealed itself not in grand monuments, but in smells stitched into everyday life.

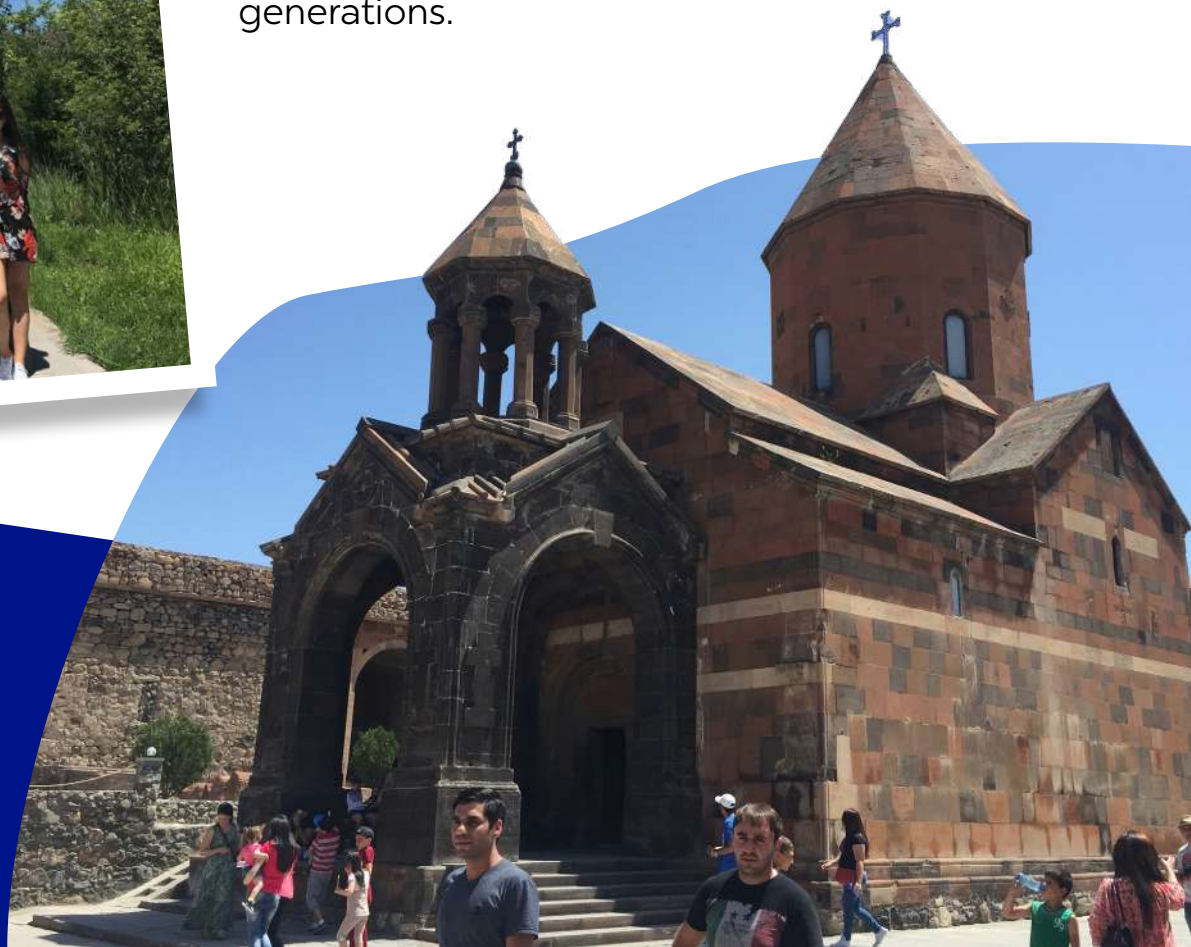
- At Vernissage market, the scent of polished wood, old leather, and sun-drenched carpets hung heavy in the air.

- In Kond, the oldest part of Yerevan, the smell of earth and crumbling stone mingled with the sharp sweetness of backyard grapevines.

- Inside ancient churches, it was beeswax and old stone, thick with centuries of whispered prayers.

- Near the Cascade, I inhaled the metallic tang of sculptures heating under the noon sun.

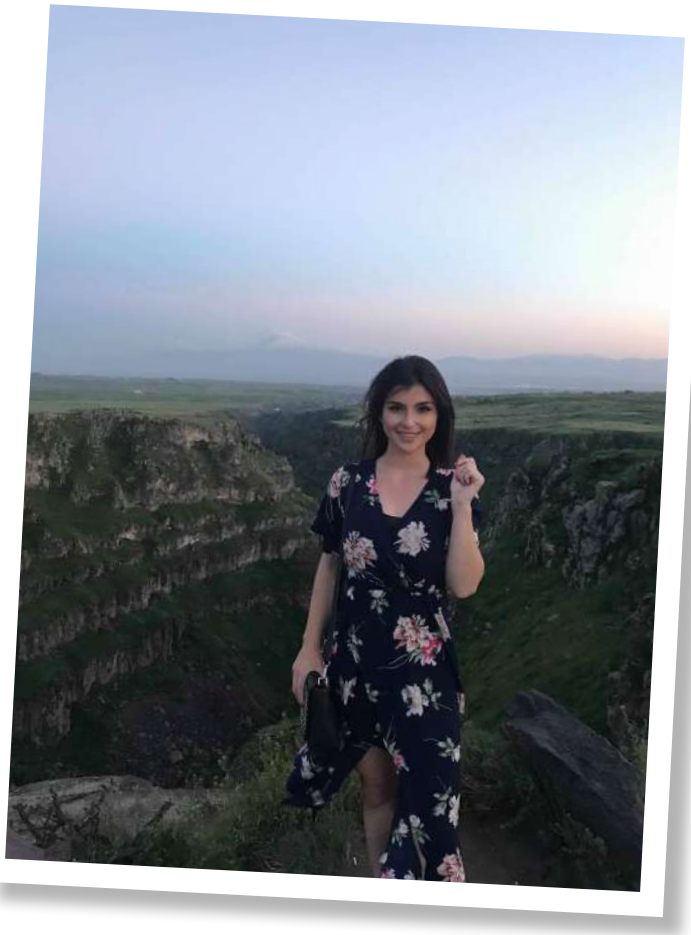
One evening, my family took me to a hill outside the city. We sat in silence, watching the sun melt behind Mount Ararat. They turned to me and said quietly, “This dust is our time.” I didn’t understand fully then. But I do now. Dust, in Armenia, is not dirt. It is the dust of history, of ancestors’ footsteps, of love that outlives generations.

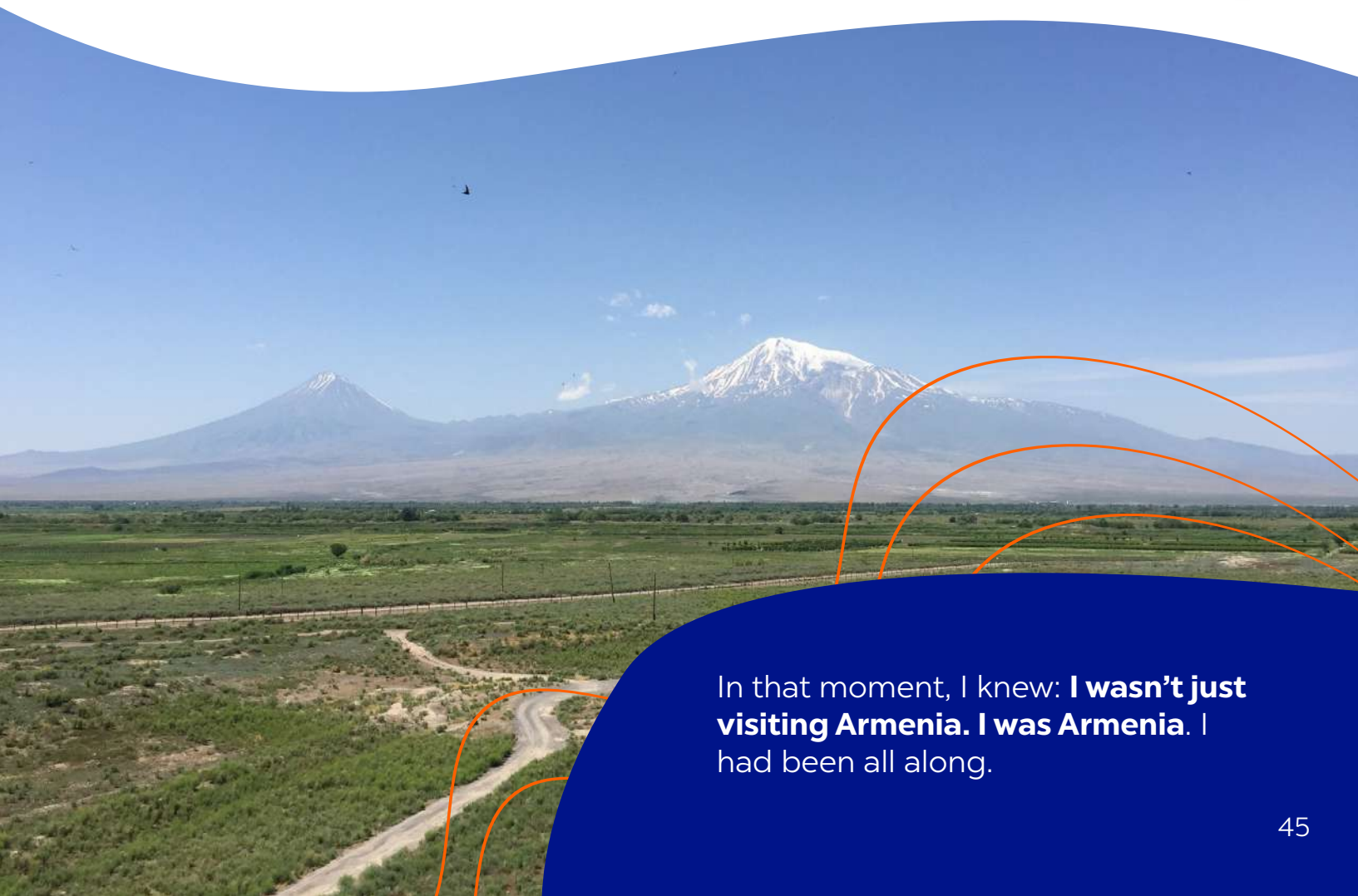


Apricots, Blood, and Belonging

One afternoon, my grandmother handed me an apricot from her tree. It was misshapen, bruised, imperfect. “It’s not fancy.” She said, smiling. I bit into it and was hit by a flood of flavor – honeyed, floral, sun-drenched. Tears stung my eyes.

It wasn’t just a fruit. It was the taste of resilience. Of summers that survived winters. Of roots that dug deep even when the earth cracked with thirst. The smell of that apricot stayed on my hands for hours. I didn’t want to wash it away.





In that moment, I knew: **I wasn’t just visiting Armenia. I was Armenia**. I had been all along.

Scent as Memory

As my trip drew to a close, I tried to memorize everything. The scents, especially. I knew that they would be my souvenirs.

- The smoky kiss of barbecue grilling on a street corner.
- The sharp green of crushed apricot leaves between my fingers.
- The floral bitterness of black coffee shared under a vine-shaded balcony.
- The powdery softness of old velvet seats inside an empty theater.

I didn't buy many things. Instead, I bottled up memories inside me, **each one tied to a scent I could summon with a single breath**. And when the time came to leave, as the plane lifted off the tarmac, I pressed my face to the window, breathing in one last time.

The scent of Armenia clung to me like a second skin. It still does.

Never Really Leaving

Even now, when I'm far away, Armenia finds me. In the smell of fresh bread pulled from an oven. In the smoky waft of a wood fire on a cold evening. In the sudden sweetness of an overripe apricot at the market.

Each time, I close my eyes. And I am there again – walking the dusty streets, hugging my grandparents, breathing in the story of a land that had been waiting for me all along. Armenia is not just in my passport. It is in my pulse. In my breath. In every silent memory that smells like belonging. It is the scent of dust, apricot, and memory.

And it is mine forever.

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THE HIDDEN SURVIVORS

ARMENIA'S UNGRAFTED VINES AND THE PHYLLOXERA PLAGUE

DIANA KHANDILYAN

FOUNDER OF GLASS NOMAD

THE HIDDEN SURVIVORS

ARMENIA'S UNGRAFTED VINES AND THE PHYLLOXERA PLAGUE

In the late 19th century, an invisible threat crept into Europe—tiny, quiet, and unstoppable. It didn't march in with armies or roar like a storm. Instead, it arrived in the damp soil clinging to the roots of American plants, tucked innocently into shipments sent by curious Victorian botanists. Some believe it may have first landed in Britain, perhaps during one of the grand expositions of the age, like the Great Exhibition in London, before making its fateful journey to the vineyards of France.

The culprit? Phylloxera, a near-microscopic insect with a taste for grapevines and a reputation for destruction.

Don't be fooled by its size. Barely visible to the naked eye, this yellowish louse looks harmless, just a soft-bodied dot scuttling around the roots of a vine. But its bite is lethal. Phylloxera feeds by piercing grapevine roots and sucking out sap. In doing so, it injects toxins that cause the roots to swell, rot, and eventually die. It's a slow, silent suffocation.

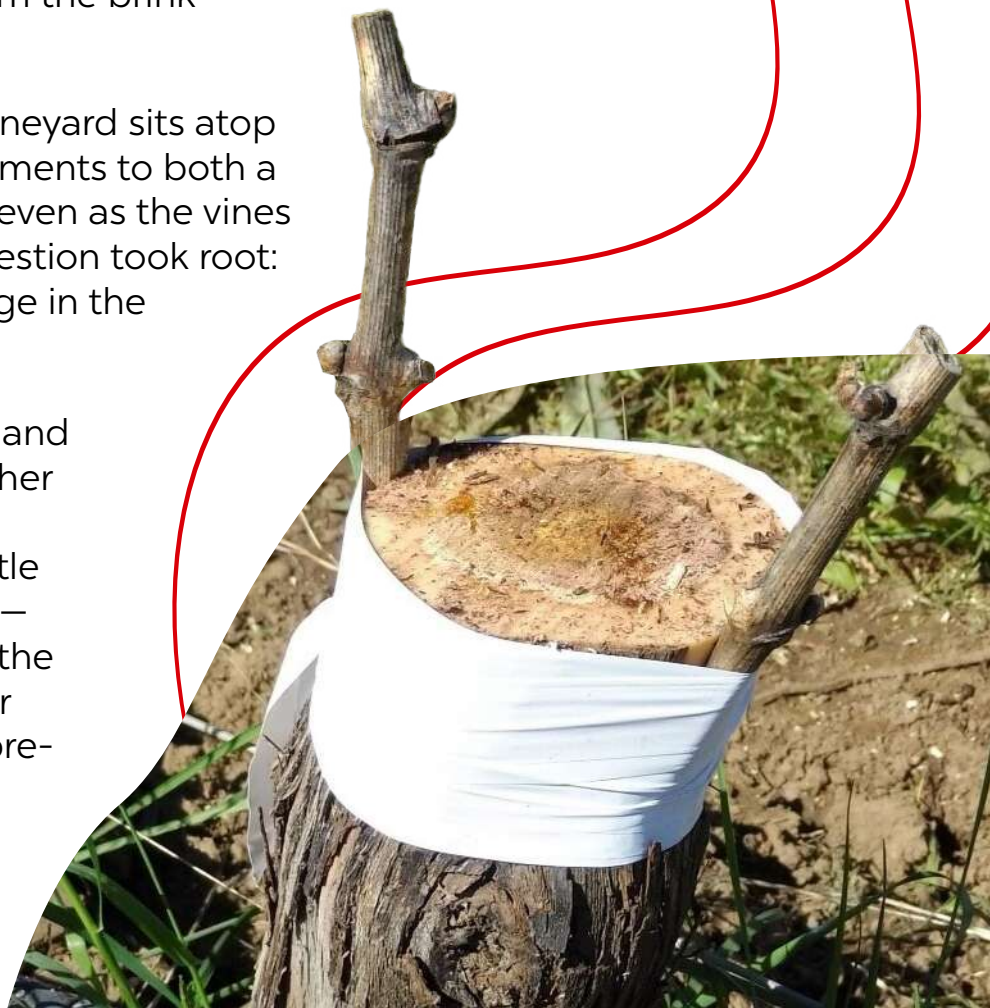
European Vitis vinifera vines had no natural defenses. Within decades of its arrival, phylloxera had swept across the continent, leaving once-glorious vineyards from Bordeaux to Burgundy in tatters. Entire regions were stripped of their livelihoods. The wines that had flowed for centuries ceased, and with them, a piece of cultural identity began to fade.

Winegrowers were desperate. They tried everything: flooding the vineyards, burying toads beneath the vines, dusting the soil with chemicals, even burning entire fields. Nothing worked until help arrived from across the Atlantic.

Thomas Volney Munson, a Texas horticulturist, proposed a bold idea: graft the fruit-bearing European vines onto the resistant roots of American species. The solution was imperfect, like fitting an old soul into a new body, but it worked. And it saved the Old World's wine legacy from the brink of extinction.

Today, nearly every European vineyard sits atop grafted rootstocks, living monuments to both a crisis and a clever solution. But even as the vines flourished again, a lingering question took root: Did something intangible change in the wine itself?

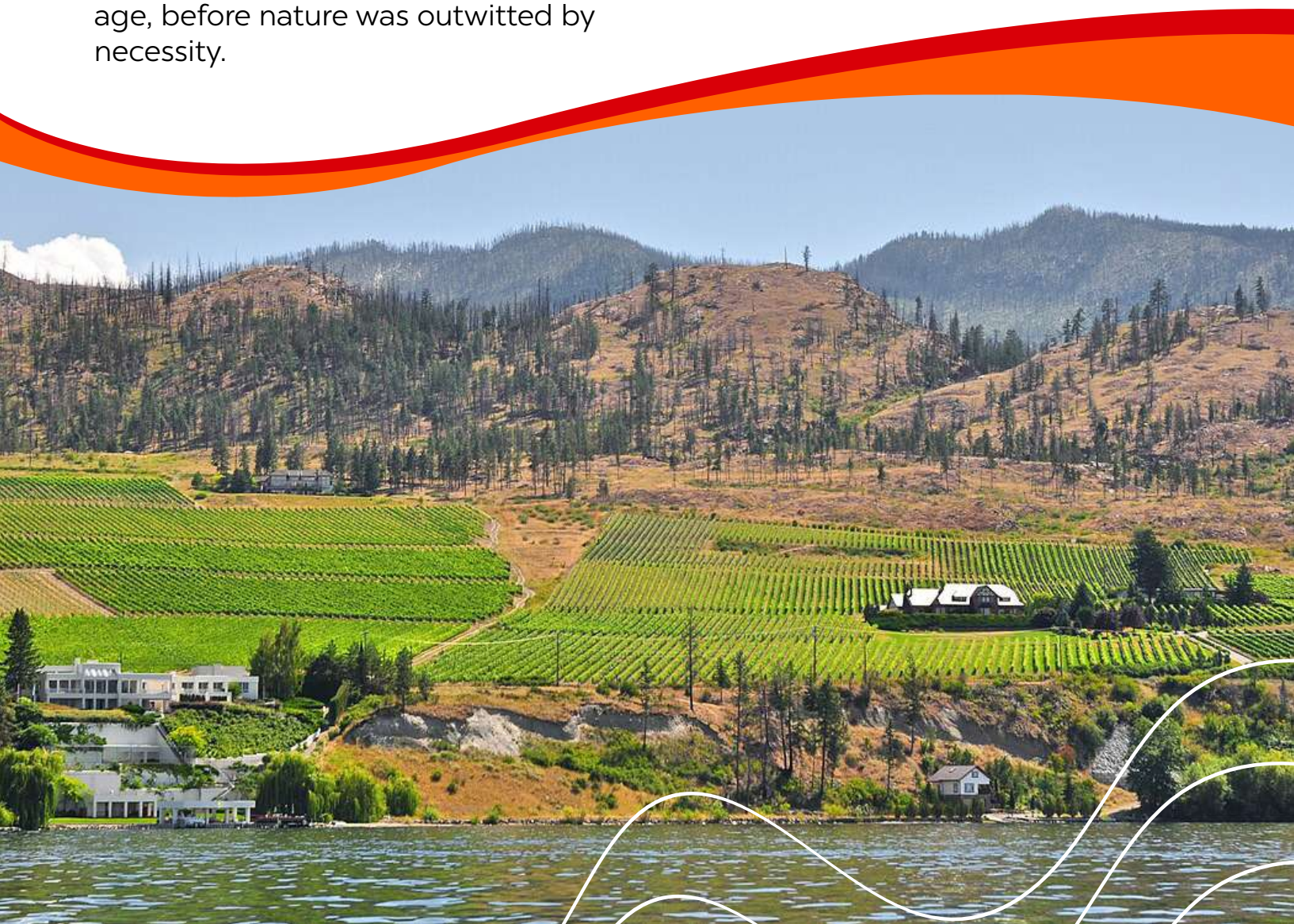
For over a century, winemakers and oenophiles have debated whether grafting altered the essence of European wines. Could the subtle dialogue between vine and soil—the famed terroir—truly survive the intervention of foreign roots? Or was there a purity, a depth, in pre-phylloxera wines that we may never fully recover?



This mystery continues to captivate the wine world. Bottles of pre-phylloxera vintages, if found, are treated like relics, attracting astronomical bids at auction. In 2011, a bottle of 1869 Château Lafite Rothschild—made before the grafting era—was sold for $233,000 at Sotheby's in Hong Kong, setting a world record at the time. Such wines are not just valued for their rarity, but for the opportunity they offer: a fleeting taste of history untouched by disaster or modern intervention.

Today, the few places where ungrafted vines still survive have become more than just viticultural curiosities. They are portals to a lost sensory world, windows into what wine tasted like before the grafted age, before nature was outwitted by necessity.

Such places are exceedingly rare. A handful of phylloxera-free zones dot the globe, protected by nature's quirks. In Portugal's Colares region, deep sandy soils created an impenetrable barrier against the insect, allowing old Ramisco vines to flourish unscathed. In Chile's Maipo and Itata Valleys, the pest never crossed the Andes. The volcanic island of Santorini, the remote Canary Islands, and the high, sandy plains of Mendoza in Argentina all tell similar stories. These are outliers—survivors.



And then, there is Armenia

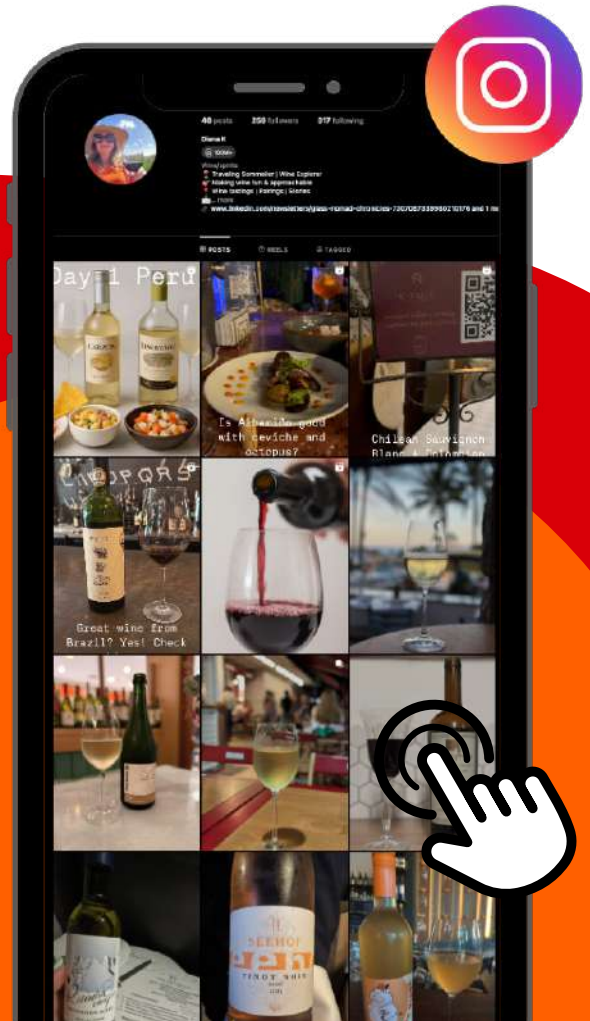
Tucked into the folds of the South Caucasus, where volcanic soils meet dizzying altitudes and dry, stony terrain, Armenia quietly guards one of the wine world's last bastions of ungrafted viticulture. Here, vines plunge their own roots deep into the earth; no American intermediaries, no post-crisis interventions.

The result is extraordinary. Wines made from these vines are vivid, powerful, and fiercely expressive of place. Indigenous grape varieties like Areni, Voskehat, Kangun, and Kakhet carry ancient DNA lineages untouched by the grafting knife.

Producers such as Zorah, whose vines grow at altitudes above 1,400 meters in Vayots Dzor, craft award-winning wines like Karasì, fermented in traditional clay amphorae. Trinity Canyon Vineyards bottles the soulful Ancestors Voskehat, made from vines over a century old. And Voskevaz Winery, nestled in Aragatsotn, celebrates its native whites and reds with a mix of heritage and innovation.

These wines don't just taste different, they feel different. There's a kind of wild elegance in the glass, an honesty that speaks of wind, stone, and time. For wine lovers seeking authenticity, drinking ungrafted Armenian wine isn't just a pleasure; it's an act of discovery.

So if you're chasing the flavor of something truly rare, something primal and untouched, set your sights on Armenia. The vines here still speak in their original voice, and they're waiting for you to listen.



And tonight, I will raise a glass of Trinity Canyon Vineyards "Eh" Voskehat. Let's toast to the history and future of Armenia, a land where the past is not forgotten but poured fresh into every bottle.

Curious to explore more and build your wine confidence? Follow Glass Nomad Chronicles on LinkedIn for stories that connect wine, geology, and culture and join me on Instagram @glass_nomad for weekly wine insights, hidden gems, and glimpses of terroir around the world.

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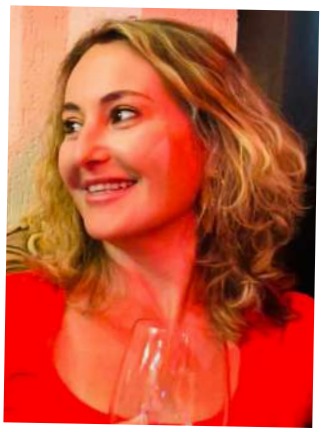

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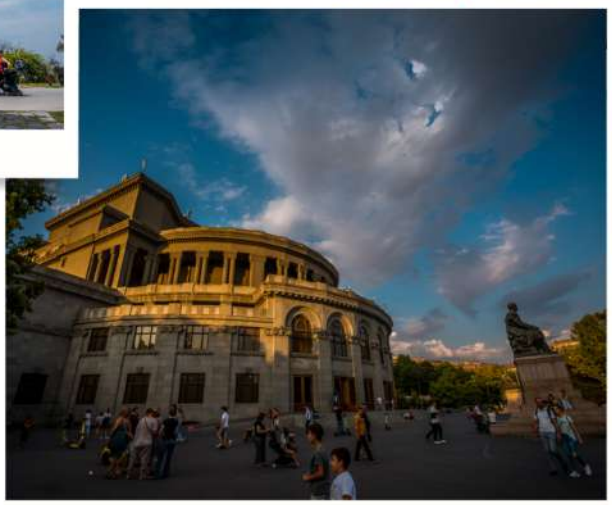

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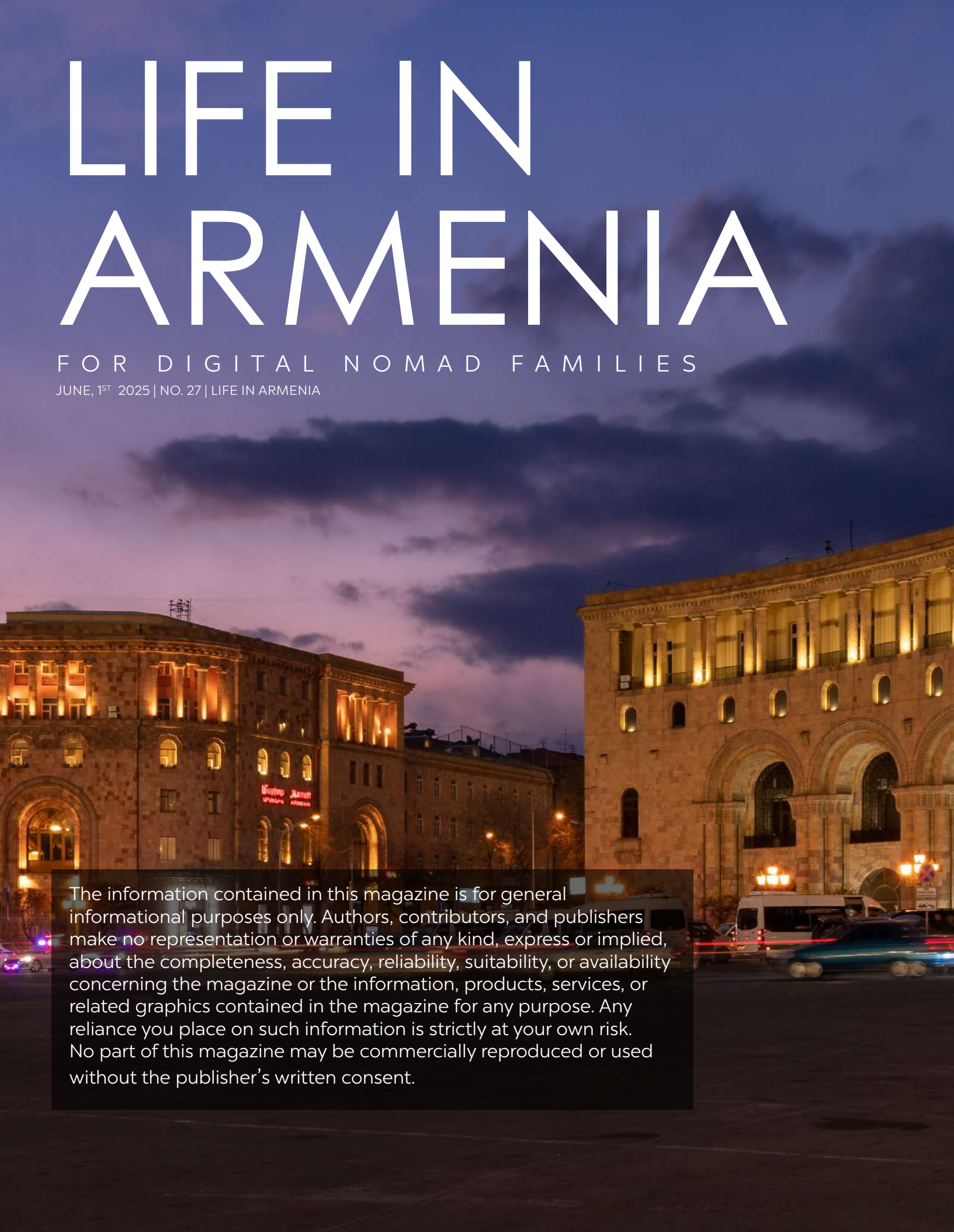

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