

Your Vision of Europe

The Unexplored Corner of Europe

A young lady got out of the airplane and took her first steps on the Armenian land. While walking in the airport and looking around, she thought to herself, “this place is so different and at the same time so similar to where I come from.” As soon as she left the airport, her taxi was waiting outside to take her to the hostel, where she would spend her next week. She was very excited to explore Yerevan, the capital of Armenia that she had already planned her 7-day schedule even before arriving to Armenia. She was Adalene Bernard from Marseille, France. Adalene came to Armenia to participate in Model European Union conference that this time was open to all European youngsters.

Over the last decade, the opportunities of engagement and interaction among Armenian youth and the youth from other parts of Europe has incomparably grown. It is all thanks to the new and existing non-governmental organizations and government officials efforts’ to maintain and strengthen the link between Armenia and Europe. One manifestation of those efforts is the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed between Armenia and the European Union. A key outcome of this agreement that is already evident is the enhanced opportunities for student mobility to and from Armenia throughout Europe. Over the last decades, the dreams of many Armenian students were crumbled under the artificial constraints that acted as burdens for them. Many Armenian students strived to study abroad, acquire knowledge and skills, experience intercultural diversity, and bring the international expertise back to Armenia but were limited by either the unavailability of appropriate projects or difficulty to complete the extremely complex obstacles related to travel and visa documentation.

It is also indeed essential to mention the role of the latest political changes in Armenia and the possible outcomes that it may have on youth-government relations. It is not a secret that today a great preference is given to innovative and critical approaches that are usually offered by the youth. Full of enthusiasm, motivation, and different aspirations, the Armenian youth strives to have the possibly greatest contributions to the advancement of their motherland. Nonetheless, it is only after exploring broader horizons that one can make significant changes to the local regime. In this sense, CEPA plays a vital role as it tremendously encourages the concept of borderless Europe without leaving anyone out and without limiting the dreams of youth. I believe that such agreements as CEPA can undeniably play a vital role in transforming not only the local perceptions of the Armenian statehood but also increase the legitimacy of the existing government. Therefore, considering the multiple aspects and dimensions that come along with

CEPA, student mobility that brings along innovative solutions to the issues that Armenia is encountering today are some key priorities after the implementation of CEPA.

On the other hand, besides the external relations of Armenia, there are a number of issues related to the internal affairs that play a significant role in developing Armenia. One of the most common issues that Armenia faces today is the extreme urbanization. What I mean by saying this is that all prominent companies, organizations, attractions, etc. are centralized in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan. This centralization leaves the Armenian marzes behind any real possibility to develop. Tourists book most of their stay in Yerevan, and chasing possibilities to receive high-quality education, the youth moves to bigger cities, especially to Yerevan. Marzes stay out of attention and deprived of any means of advancement.

It is highly important to give credit to those who eventually go back to their villages and cities located in Marzes to implement any kind of educational projects. Thanks to such projects, the residents of rural areas and small towns have an opportunity to exchange their opinions, share their thoughts, and even learn from the youngsters who have organized and hosted those projects. However, these projects cannot be continuous if the youth who is very enthusiastic about developing their native villages and towns does not have a real back up. I believe that every moral and motivational support received from both local and foreign organizations counts. Those small projects can one day turn into a series of annual events where again the youth can take the most initiative towards developing and working on all kinds of innovation and training. Having the developed and developing countries of Europe as real-life examples, Armenia should also strive to overcome the centralization and concentrate on developing separate marzes gradually. In this sense, I strongly believe that the advancement of Armenian marzes is another pressing priority upon the successful implementation of CEPA.

... Eventually, Adalene managed to allocate some time to visiting Armenian villages with her new friends. She was astonished by the beauty of Armenian nature, inspired by the historical sites, and bewildered by the hospitality of Armenian people. She tasted the Armenian fruits, took amazing photos, participated in food festivals all around Armenia. The only regret that she had in her mind was that she had not discovered Armenia earlier. By the end of her trip, Adalene already felt as a part of Armenia because she found a smaller Armenia within herself. She had a burning desire to continually explore it. She promised herself to come back one day--this time with her family because she wanted everyone to know about this little corner of Europe too. Adalene left Armenia with a great hope that the ties between Armenia and Europe will tighten gradually, with a hope that the people of Europe, including Armenians, will advance and move forward while cherishing their traditions and learning from their history.