

REGIONAL POST

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE



In September 2026, scientists discovered a new tiger-like animal in Bolivia, the first cat species to be discovered in 100 years. While this is truly a big deal simply in terms of the creature's size, the fact is that researchers around the world regularly discover new species that inhabit this wonderful planet of ours. For example, in early October, scientists announced 57 new species of marine life in the southern regions of the Atlantic Ocean. At the same time, threats abound against many of the species of plant and animal life that we have known about for centuries. We live in this strange period of time where many of the problems in the field of biodiversity are well known and understood, but the solutions are complex and often require coordination and collaboration, two areas where the human species have not always excelled. As you read through the pages of this special issue of Regional Post, you will notice a few things. It is a fact that COP17 is the largest event that Armenia has ever hosted, bringing together more people from more countries to Yerevan than ever before. A lot of effort has gone into making this event a success, from thoughtful branding to high-level political preparations. There is a buzz in the air, the feeling of a strong urge for action. In this sense, the many stakeholders featured in this magazine are optimistic and excited. My colleagues from other Impact Hubs around the world

are also happy to see our capital on the map of the biodiversity world for a couple of weeks. But one other thing you will notice in the various pages of this journal is the sentiment that nothing ends after COP17. In fact, in many senses, the real activists on the ground see this as only the beginning. The spotlight that comes with this major event needs to continue shining, so that the people who do important work for the diversity of our planet keep getting the resources that they need. The agenda for COP17 does not feature all the side conversations that need to happen to keep the wheels of collaboration moving, taking our planet in the right direction.

I would like to voice a clear message to everyone attending COP17 and reading these pages today. Whether it is a government-level initiative or a grassroots project run by a local organization, we need to recognize that effective solutions for biodiversity come from a range of places – there is no single approach that will solve the problem. At the same time, each of these efforts, run in silos, will not take us to the best solution either. The COP17 slogan suggests that the time has come for action, not just words. But as one of the articles in this issue aptly points out, there is an important word that is implicitly included in that slogan. We should be “taking action for nature together.”

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ARMENIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES AND THE LEGACY OF COP17

Interview with Hambardzum Matevosyan,
RA Minister of Environment

Ahead of COP17, Hambardzum Matevosyan discusses preparations for the conference, Armenia's environmental reforms and the outcomes he hopes will endure after international delegations leave Yerevan.

INTERVIEW : ARSHAK TOVMASYAN / PHOTO : RA MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

Armenia has won the right to host COP17, which is being described as the largest event the country has ever hosted. What do you hope Armenia gains from two weeks in the global spotlight?

— For Armenia, the real value of COP17 will be measured by what continues after the conference. We want to turn international attention into lasting partnerships, scientific and technological cooperation, and new investment in nature. We also see the conference as an opportunity to showcase Armenia's natural heritage and deepen our role in international environmental cooperation. The preparations themselves have already brought government institutions, experts and other stakeholders closer together. Biodiversity is no longer an issue for one institution alone. It is connected to water, food, health, the economy and the future of our communities. Ultimately, I would like COP17 to leave a stronger place for nature in Armenia's development decisions and in the choices we make as a society.

What has been the biggest logistical or diplomatic challenge in preparing Armenia, and Yerevan in particular, to welcome tens of thousands of delegates?

— The biggest challenge has been bringing many different parts of the preparation together at the same time. A conference of this scale requires transport, security, healthcare, communications, venues and arrangements for delegations to function as one system. There has also been a major effort to prepare the conference facilities and the surrounding infrastructure, in cooperation with the CBD Secretariat, Yerevan Municipality and other partners. But COP17 is not only a logistical exercise. As the Presidency, our responsibility is also to build trust among Parties, listen to different positions and help create the conditions for constructive negotiations. That is ultimately what successful hosting means: making it possible for countries to focus on finding solutions.

What have been Armenia's most significant environmental achievements over the past five years?

— The most important change has been a more integrated approach to environmental management. We increasingly address biodiversity, water, forests, land and climate as interconnected systems, linking individual interventions to the protection of entire ecosystems. This approach is reflected in Armenia's Biodiversity Conservation Goals and Action Plan for 2026–2030, which includes five national goals, 30 targets and 125 measures. Another important step is the revised Law on Specially Protected Areas of Nature, which entered into force on 24 July 2026. It broadens our conservation tools to include protected landscapes, ecological corridors, biosphere areas and effective conservation beyond formally protected areas. It also clarifies the role of local communities.

WE WANT TO TURN INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION INTO LASTING PARTNERSHIPS, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION, AND NEW INVESTMENT IN NATURE

THE KUNMING–MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK GAVE THE WORLD A COMMON DIRECTION IN 2022. COP17 NOW GIVES US AN OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK HONESTLY AT WHERE IMPLEMENTATION STANDS AND WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Work has continued on restoring Lake Sevan's ecosystem, supporting the recovery of Sevan trout and red deer populations, and improving sustainable forest management and reforestation. We are also developing air, water and soil monitoring, waste management and digital tools so that decisions are informed by scientific assessments and reliable data. Looking ahead, the Government's 2026–2031 Programme envisages afforestation and reforestation across approximately 10,000 hectares, alongside round-the-clock protection of forests and protected areas through the Eco-Patrol Service. These are priorities for consolidating the changes already under way. The important point is that these are not isolated projects. We are building a more coherent system for managing and protecting nature.

What is Armenia's message to the world through the theme "Taking Action for Nature", and how did the slogan take shape?

— "Taking Action for Nature" expresses the central demand of this moment: turning agreed goals into tangible results. The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework gave the world a common direction in 2022. COP17 now gives us an opportunity to look honestly at where implementation stands and what needs to change. The first global review at COP17 provides that opportunity. We want its findings to guide further action and engage everyone whose decisions shape nature's future, from governments and communities to scientists, businesses and financial institutions. Biodiversity loss, climate change and land degradation are closely connected. We therefore place particular importance on coordinating action across the three Rio Conventions, so that investment in one area also helps address challenges in the others. That interconnectedness is reflected in the conference's visual identity. Inspired by the Yerevan blue butterfly,

the logo draws on the colours of the Framework's 23 targets, reminding us that nature conservation is a shared, interconnected agenda.

COP17 will host the first global review of progress towards the 2022 Kunming–Montreal targets. Based on the national biodiversity strategies submitted so far, is the world on track for 2030? How is Armenia doing?

— The direction is encouraging, but the pace is not yet sufficient. Since the Framework was adopted, countries have stepped up the revision of national strategies, the setting of targets and the submission of reports. That represents important political engagement. Yet having plans in place does not, by itself, mean that biodiversity loss is being halted quickly enough. Preliminary assessments informing the global review highlight precisely this gap: strong engagement, but significant shortcomings in implementation. We need faster progress on finance, institutional capacity and access to data. Armenia has an approved national action plan for 2026–2030 aligned with the Framework. Our responsibility now is to translate its targets into funded, consistently implemented measures. We must assess progress through measurable indicators and be transparent about both achievements and the areas where further work is needed.

Which Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework target is most at risk of being missed globally, and why? Which is the most challenging for Armenia?

— I would be cautious about identifying a single target, because some of the most difficult targets are precisely those that require changes across the economy. Environmental institutions cannot deliver those changes alone. Reforming incentives that harm nature, for example, requires joint decisions involving



finance, agriculture and other sectors. The same applies to securing adequate financial and technical resources: without them, even ambitious plans are difficult to implement. For Armenia, expanding area-based conservation and restoring ecosystems are particularly demanding tasks. Our national target is to ensure effective conservation of at least 20 per cent of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems by 2030, through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, known as OECMs. But conservation is not simply about drawing new boundaries on a map. It requires connected habitats, sustainable financing, scientific monitoring and the participation of local communities. What matters in the end is whether conservation produces real and lasting results. The decisive measure for us is whether conservation delivers lasting results.

What outcome would you personally consider a success for COP17? Are you hoping for a new funding commitment, stronger monitoring rules or something else?

— I would consider COP17 successful if we leave Yerevan with a clearer understanding of how to close implementation gaps and the means to do so. First, the global review must provide an honest, science-based assessment of progress. That assessment must then guide countries' next steps: what needs to change, where action must accelerate and how results will be measured. The third requirement is access to finance, technology, scientific support and professional capacity. Our expectations therefore extend beyond a single funding pledge or monitoring rule. We need an outcome that strengthens both the ability to act and accountability for delivery. Coordinating biodiversity, climate and

land-related efforts will also help make better use of available resources. As Presidency, our role is to help Parties find workable solutions and ensure that different voices can contribute meaningfully to the process.

Resource mobilisation and the financial mechanism are on the COP17 agenda. What would a fair global biodiversity finance agreement look like from the perspective of a country such as Armenia?

— For a country such as Armenia, fairness means accessible, predictable and long-term support. Financing should reflect countries' circumstances, needs and the real costs of conserving nature. Ecosystem restoration and protected-area management do not end when a short-term project ends; they require sustained investment. We also need to broaden the sources of funding, combining public resources,



IF THE SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL AND FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIPS DEVELOPED AROUND COP17 TURN INTO LONG-TERM PROGRAMMES, THEY CAN SUPPORT CONSERVATION, MONITORING AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES IN ARMENIA WELL BEYOND THE CONFERENCE ITSELF

international support, private investment and innovative financial instruments. The Framework's objective of increasing international biodiversity finance flows to at least USD 30 billion annually by 2030 should help developing countries implement their commitments.

At the same time, the Presidency's role is to help Parties reach agreement. We must support common solutions that improve the effectiveness of finance and ensure that resources reach those who need them most.

How is Armenia financing its biodiversity commitments, and has international support been sufficient?

— Armenia finances biodiversity conservation through the state budget,

international assistance, grants and other financial mechanisms. International partners have made important contributions to work on protected areas, forests, Lake Sevan and local communities.

Nevertheless, our needs exceed the resources available. We must mobilise additional funding while improving the effectiveness of existing expenditure. The Ministries of Environment and Finance are working with Biodiversity Finance Initiative, BIOFIN, as Armenia develops a national Biodiversity Finance Plan.

We particularly value support that strengthens the country's own capabilities. Our goal is a sustainable financing system that allows essential work to continue after individual international projects have ended.

What experience do you expect Armenia to gain from COP17, including from hosting it, and how will this support further environmental progress?

— The most valuable experience is learning to bring different interests and professional perspectives together around a common objective. The preparations have strengthened cooperation across government and given Armenian professionals direct experience with both the Convention's substantive agenda and international negotiations. Those capabilities will remain in Armenia. Hosting the conference also helps us assess our infrastructure, organisational resources and management gaps more realistically. Equally important are the international relationships taking shape through this work. But perhaps the most important opportunity is the network of relationships being created. If the scientific, technological and financial partnerships developed around COP17 turn into long-term programmes, they can support conservation, monitoring and community initiatives in Armenia well beyond the conference itself.

The Gender Plan of Action is also on the COP17 agenda. What does gender-responsive environmental policy mean in the Armenian context?

— It means ensuring that women and men have equal opportunities to influence environmental decisions and benefit from programmes. Environmental pressures, as well as access to natural resources and finance, can affect them differently. Policy must recognise those differences. Women in Armenia's rural communities hold valuable knowledge and experience concerning water, land, seeds and natural resources. That expertise should be represented in decision-making, community management and scientific and professional work. Our national action plan for 2026–2030 provides for stronger participation and leadership by women in biodiversity conservation. Gender considerations need to be reflected in programme design, financing and the assessment of results, so that participation brings a real opportunity to influence outcomes.

How is your ministry involving local communities, civil society and young people before and during COP17, beyond the official "Road to COP17" events?

— We want society to participate in COP17 from the preparation stage onwards. In our work with young people, we have supported the formation of an Armenian chapter of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network and helped build its members' capacity. Through a university-led biodiversity coalition initiative, more than 300 student ambassadors have been selected to share knowledge about nature conservation within their communities. Civil society is involved in discussions on conference priorities and the national action plan. We also work with scientists, women's organisations and journalists. Local communities should be full partners in decision-making and practical conservation. The revised legislation provides additional opportunities to establish protected areas of local significance.



At the global level, the rights, traditional knowledge and experience of Indigenous Peoples and local communities are particularly important. During the conference, the Green Zone will give the wider public an opportunity to engage with the discussions. We want that dialogue to continue after COP17.

Some critics argue that COPs produce declarations without enforcement. How would you respond to scepticism that COP17 will deliver more promises than results?

— That scepticism is understandable. People want to know what international decisions change in the places where they live. We have a responsibility to answer with results. An important feature of COP17 is the first global review of progress towards targets already agreed. National reports and shared indicators should show where progress is being made, where there are setbacks and what prevents countries from acting. Making that information public strengthens accountability and allows society to follow the implementation of commitments. Implementation difficulties do not diminish the value of multilateral cooperation. Through the Convention, countries with different interests have been able to adopt complex and important decisions. Our task is to strengthen the connection between those decisions and national policies, budgets and practical programmes.

The answer to scepticism should therefore not be another promise. It should be implementation. After Yerevan, there should be greater clarity about the action required, who will take it and what resources are needed. That clarity is essential to building trust.

A year from now, what single indicator would you point to as evidence that hosting COP17 has made a difference for nature in Armenia?

— I would point to the number of environmental programmes that have entered implementation with new financial and technical support mobilised through COP17. That would show whether the partnerships formed during the conference have translated into work on ecosystem restoration, protected-area management, species conservation and community participation. Of course, launching a programme is not yet proof of an improvement in the state of nature. We must also track ecosystems and species through scientific data, recognising that some results will take time to emerge. A year from now, I would like to see programmes under way with secured resources and measurable objectives. Long-term success will mean that nature conservation has an enduring place in the country's development decisions. That is how COP17 can become the beginning of sustained action. ♦



ACTIVE, NOT NOMINAL

Interview with Voskehat Grigoryan, Armenia's National Focal Point to the CBD

Regional Post speaks with Voskehat Grigoryan, Armenia's National Focal Point to the Convention on Biological Diversity, about leading the country's preparations for COP17, the realistic limits of its 2030 targets, and why the hardest work begins after the delegates leave.

INTERVIEW : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : RA MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Grigoryan, Armenia is hosting the biggest event in its history, bringing thousands of people to our country to discuss the important topic of biodiversity. How does this make you personally feel and what has your day-to-day job looked like in the weeks and months leading up to this event?

— Personally, I feel a great sense of responsibility. As the head of the Department for Specially Protected Areas of Nature and Biodiversity Policy, I think a significant part of this responsibility has fallen on our department. Our work has been quite broad. We have been working on the conceptual side of COP17 – essentially, shaping the overall vision and philosophy of the Presidency – while also dealing with organisational issues and key elements of the communication campaign. And, of course, there is the direct work of preparing for the negotiations: we have done a lot of work on the draft COP decisions together with colleagues from other departments of the Ministry. On a day-to-day basis, this means a lot of coordination: within our department and the Ministry, with other government institutions, and with international partners. And everything is happening at a much higher intensity because of the scale and importance of the event. It has also required us to adjust the way the department works – to redistribute responsibilities, strengthen our internal coordination, and build up

the knowledge and skills of our staff. So, in many ways, the preparations for COP17 have also been a process of strengthening the department itself. And of course our current work still remains.

How many people do you manage on CBD coordination, and has that team grown as COP17 approached?

— Our department has 10 people directly working on these issues, and we are also supported by four experts working in different areas. Our department has become the core team working on the substantive preparations for COP17. As preparations progressed, this team expanded, bringing together the Ministry's leading specialists across different fields and colleagues from other government institutions. What began within our department has developed into a broader, cross-government effort, with our team providing substantive coordination and continuity. And yes, the team has grown quite noticeably as we approached COP17. I should also say that strengthening the

knowledge and skills of our staff, including their understanding of CBD processes, has always been an important part of our work. We actually started investing in capacity building well before Armenia decided to bid for hosting COP17. The numerous capacity-building activities and training opportunities that our colleagues have taken part in over the years have been very helpful. So, in a way, COP17 has accelerated a process that was already underway.

Which government bodies do you have to coordinate with most, and where does that coordination become most challenging?

— Our department has been responsible for preparing the meetings of the Organising Committee, which brings together practically all government institutions in Armenia, the Municipality of Yerevan, and civil society organisations. So, naturally, we have been working with all of them. With some institutions, the cooperation went well beyond organisational matters. Most importantly, this includes the

WE HAVE BEEN WORKING ON THE CONCEPTUAL SIDE OF COP17 – ESSENTIALLY, SHAPING THE OVERALL VISION AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE PRESIDENCY – WHILE ALSO DEALING WITH ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES AND KEY ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN



Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly when it comes to preparing for the negotiations.

With other ministries, we have been working together on specific COP17 activities and events. For example, this includes the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of High-Tech and Artificial Intelligence, the Ministry of Labour and Wellbeing, and many others. So I would say the main challenge has really been the scale of the coordination. We are bringing together many different areas of government work around one event, and making sure that all these pieces fit together has required a lot of day-to-day communication.

What's the biggest difference between representing Armenia at a CBD meeting abroad and coordinating one that Armenia is hosting?

— In terms of the negotiations themselves, there is no fundamental difference. Even though COP17 is taking place in Armenia, we remain a Party to the Convention, just like everyone else. We still have our own national interests and positions, and we participate in the negotiations on the same basis as other Parties.

What changes is the additional role of being the host country. That brings a whole set of extra responsibilities –



from the practical and organisational side to supporting the Presidency and making sure the conference itself can function effectively. So we are essentially dealing with two roles at the same time: being a Party to the Convention and being the host country.

Armenia's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) was originally adopted in 2016 and has been under revision. What has changed most since then in how the country approaches biodiversity policy?

— A lot has changed. We have completely revised the NBSAP and aligned it with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Without going too far into the technical details, I would highlight a few things. The targets are now much more specific and measurable. The actions we have planned are also backed by an assessment of their financing needs, so we have a much clearer understanding of what implementation will require. We have also broadened the range of stakeholders involved in implementation – both across government and in wider society. And some of the important measures have already moved from planning to implementation, including the new legislation on specially protected areas. So, I would say this is not simply an updated version of the previous NBSAP. It is a different plan, based on a different approach to biodiversity policy and implementation.

What was the hardest target to set realistically for Armenia within the Kunming-Montreal Framework, given the country's size and resources? Who actually holds you accountable if Armenia misses its own NBSAP targets?

— Given Armenia's size and particularly its terrain, Target 3 was one of the more challenging targets to translate into a realistic national target. Taking into account our infrastructure, resources and a number of other constraints, we set what we believe is a realistic pathway. Our National Target ARM T03 provides that, by 2030, at least 20% of



the country's terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems should be effectively conserved through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, or OECMs. But this does not mean that we are going to stop at 20%. Recent legislative changes concerning protected areas open up new opportunities, and we will continue to look at what more can realistically be done. As for accountability, the Ministry of Environment has been designated as the responsible government institution for achieving National Target ARM T03. So there is a clear institutional responsibility for its implementation and monitoring.

You oversee Specially Protected Areas in Armenia as part of your role at the Ministry. Which existing protected area do you consider most at risk right now, and why?

— Every protected area is a complex combination of ecosystems, and each of them is exposed to different types of risks. So, in practice, we have to look at all of these risks and address them accordingly.

AS THE LARGEST FRESHWATER BODY IN THE REGION, SEVAN IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT NOT ONLY FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, BUT ALSO FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ARMENIA'S WIDER NATIONAL INTERESTS AND SECURITY

But Lake Sevan certainly has a special place. As the largest freshwater body in the region, Sevan is extremely important not only for biodiversity conservation, but also from the perspective of Armenia's wider national interests and security. This is why the Sevan ecosystem requires particularly comprehensive attention. It is not just about protecting a protected area – it is about maintaining the ecological health of an ecosystem that is important for the country in many different ways.

What's the process for deciding where a new protected area gets created, and who pushes back hardest against it?

— In Armenia, decisions to establish new protected areas are taken by the Government. The Ministry of Environment puts forward a proposal for a specific area based on an assess-

ment of the condition of the ecosystems, their importance for biodiversity conservation, and the threats that need to be addressed. Under the new version of our Law on Specially Protected Natural Areas, local communities can also initiate the establishment of certain types of protected areas. As for who pushes back the hardest, traditionally some government institutions and local communities have viewed protected areas mainly as a set of restrictions. One of our tasks is to change this perception and explain that a protected area does not necessarily limit development – it can also create new opportunities, both for local communities and for the country more broadly. We can already see this in some of our existing protected areas, where local communities benefit from biodiversity conservation programmes and



from opportunities linked to ecotourism. So the challenge is to make sure that conservation and local development are seen as complementary, rather than competing objectives.

How do you balance protected-area expansion against the land-use pressure from agriculture, grazing, and mining that communities depend on economically?

— Part of the answer is what I mentioned earlier: we need to make sure that protected areas are not seen simply as restrictions on agriculture, grazing or other economic activities. At the same time, we have to be realistic. Local communities depend on these activities, and their economic needs have to be taken into account when we plan conservation measures and decide how land should be used. I think an important part of the balance is also looking beyond immediate benefits. Sometimes there is a choice between a short-term economic gain and a more sustainable development path in the longer term. Our approach should be to make these decisions carefully, taking into account not only what brings an immediate benefit, but also what will remain viable for communities and the country in the future.

What has surprised you most about the practical work of preparing a country to host a COP? Are there everyday things a minister or diplomat might not see?



WHAT I PERSONALLY TRIED TO BRING TO THE COP AGENDA WAS SOMETHING LESS TANGIBLE, BUT, IN MY VIEW, EQUALLY IMPORTANT: TRUST AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

— What has surprised me most, in a very positive way, is the number of people – both biodiversity professionals and people outside the field – who have been willing to get involved in the preparations and contribute in one way or another. I have also been impressed by the willingness of colleagues from other countries to help, share their experience, and offer practical advice. I am genuinely grateful to everyone who has done that.

And there is another, perhaps less visible, aspect of this kind of preparation. With so many things happening at the same time, some issues could easily remain at the working level without reaching senior management. So I consider it quite an achievement that we managed to organise our internal coordination in a way that ensured that the Deputy Minister and the Minister were kept fully informed about what was happening on the ground. That has been very important for us.

How involved are Armenian scientists, universities, and NGOs/CSOs in shaping the technical content Armenia brings to COP17?

— If you mean the official agenda items of COP17, then, as I mentioned earlier, we have done a lot of technical work on the draft decisions, including with input from the scientific community. But Armenia is not bringing any separate technical proposal or special technical content for consideration by the Parties. If we look at it more broadly, however, there is very strong involvement from

scientists, universities, women and youth and civil society organisations in the COP17 programme. Many of the planned events in both the Blue Zone and the Green Zone will be organised or presented by representatives of these groups. The full list of events and their content is available on the official COP17 website, where people can see just how broad this participation is.

Is there a specific Armenian initiative or dossier you personally pushed to get onto the COP17 agenda?

— I would not point to a single agenda item or dossier. What I personally tried to bring to the COP agenda was something less tangible, but, in my view, equally important: trust and mutual understanding. Through extensive working-level discussions with colleagues from different countries, I tried to listen carefully to their concerns, their practical difficulties, and their expectations of the Armenian Presidency. I believe that understanding these perspectives is essential for a Presidency to build an environment where countries feel that their concerns are heard and taken seriously. I hope that, through our team's collective work, I was able to contribute to building that mutual trust and confidence – the sense that every Party will have an opportunity to be heard and that the Presidency will work to find common ground. To some extent, this approach is also reflected in the Presidency initiatives, in the development of which I was directly involved.

What happens to your team's work after COP17 ends and the delegates leave? Is it harder to go back to your everyday job, does the focus of decisions makers move to other topics?

— Actually, I don't think our work will simply go back to normal after COP17. As you know, Armenia will take on the CBD COP Presidency, which will continue until the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties – so for roughly two years.



We want to be an active Presidency, rather than a nominal one, and to contribute to the intersessional work of the Convention between the COP meetings. In particular, we have a lot of work ahead with our partners on the four Presidency initiatives that we are launching to support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. So there will still be a lot to do after the delegates leave. And as for our regular work, I am confident that the experience we have gained during the preparation for COP17 will help us continue our everyday work more effectively as well.

Of everything discussed at past COPs you have attended, what is one commitment where Armenia still has lots of work to do?

— I would say that we still have quite a lot of work to do across all of our commitments. We face challenges that are quite typical for developing countries, so I would not single out one particular area. Each target has its own challenges. Some require more financial resources, others require stronger technical capacity, and others depend on involving a broader range of stakeholders in implementation. Perhaps the more difficult ones are the targets that require institutional changes. Target 18, for example, involves addressing harmful incentives

and subsidies, which requires changes across different sectors and institutions. These kinds of changes are naturally more complex and take more time. So, for us, there is really no single priority that we can address at the expense of the others. The only realistic approach is to keep working across all of these areas and make progress on all of our targets at the same time.

You have spent years doing this work behind the scenes, often invisible. What would you want the Armenian public to actually understand about what a National Biodiversity Strategy means for their daily lives?

— I would like people to understand that biodiversity is not something separate from our everyday lives. Human well-being, our economy, business and sustainable development all depend, in one way or another, on healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. And I also think it is important to understand that everyone can contribute to biodiversity conservation. You don't have to be a scientist or work for the government. Even an individual person can make a difference. But if we bring these efforts together and act in a more coordinated way, we can achieve much more. That is essentially what the National Biodiversity Strategy is about. It gives us a common direction and sets out the steps we need to take together. ♦





GREEN LEADERSHIP:

Sustainability as a Value at Ucom

COP17 provides business leaders in the country with a great platform to learn from global stakeholders as well as provide lessons from Armenia. We spoke with Ralph Yirikian, General Director of Ucom, about sustainability leadership and how the time has come for real action.

INTERVIEW : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : UCOM

Mr. Yirikian, when people think of how business can impact the environment, digital technologies and telecommunications are not the first sectors that come to mind. As a telecom company and technology leader, what is your vision of environmental protection at Ucom? What personally convinced you that sustainability belongs in the center of the company's strategy, not on the sidelines?

— Let me approach this from a slightly different angle. Ever since I have been in the telecom sector, which is more than 25 years now, nobody has thought of the “unknown soldiers” who are at the very heart of our connectivity solutions – the engineers and

OVER THE YEARS, WE HAVE FOCUSED MORE AND MORE ON THE ENVIRONMENT. UCOM HAS BEEN ALLOCATING A GROWING BUDGET TO RUN PROGRAMS THAT HAVE A LONG-TERM, POSITIVE, SUSTAINABLE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

field workers that set up the infrastructure of the technology and keep it running. We're so used to connectivity these days, it is a part of our everyday lives. This is also true for the environment in which we live – we take it for granted in the same way! This is not the first year that I am trying to spread an ideology in our economy that businesses are not just supposed to focus on their bottom line. They need to be useful to the country – to our homeland – and to extend a hand to society. They should not just talk about having a positive impact, they should take clear action. Nobody can afford to remain indifferent anymore. ➤

Over the years, we have focused more and more on the environment. Ucom has been allocating a growing budget to run programs that have a long-term, positive, sustainable impact on the environment. We plan to keep continuing in this direction, delivering real solutions on the ground while raising the awareness of our own staff and society at large. Let me start with perhaps the simplest one of our many programs – Uforest. Along with our long-term partner in the environmental sector, the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC), we have committed to planting 10,000 trees annually and, so far, we have already planted 40,000 trees at the Urtsadzor forestry station.

Ucom recently completed a full carbon footprint assessment of its own headquarters. What did that process reveal, and what did it commit the company to changing in its own operations?

— This was an important milestone for us, and it has helped us relay a clear message – supporting external activities is good, but one must start from one's own “home”. Imagine how wonderful our cities would be if each of us cleaned the small public space in front of our homes and shops! This uses that same principle – each company must take steps to monitor and reduce its own carbon footprint, and that combined effort will have a tangible positive impact on our environment. Additionally, this comes with a strong positive consequence in terms of making our employees more aware of the issue and demonstrating to them that it is a real priority for the company.

As part of our carbon footprint assessment, we underwent an expert analysis and there was a clear list of recommendations, based on which we have come up with an action plan to reduce our emissions both at our headquarters as well as in the field. We should see the first results within a year or so, in terms of reduced foot-

WE HAVE FOCUSED A LOT ON THE TOPIC OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY, WHICH IS CRITICAL TODAY BECAUSE IT HELPS REDUCE WASTE AND PROMOTES A MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE USE OF THE LIMITED RESOURCES AND MATERIALS AVAILABLE IN OUR SURROUNDINGS

print. But we already see the impact it has had on our employees and their mindset. They realize now, more than ever, that this is a team commitment as well as an issue of individual responsibility. In the past, when we organized our tree-planting initiatives, it was not easy to get employees to volunteer for this work. Now, we are often oversubscribed – more people show up than we can accommodate! There is definitely a lot more interest in environmental issues within our staff today than ever before.

It's great to see increased awareness among staff members, and you have said often that we need to achieve something similar in society at large. What is the role of education and culture in this process?

— Of course, education is a key part of environmental awareness, and it is a critical piece that we need to put

into place in the puzzle. When we think of important subjects at school, the ones that come to mind might be mathematics, physics, chemistry, perhaps languages... But environmental awareness should be as high on that list as any of those other subjects, in my opinion. In fact, I believe that the environment should be a mandatory subject of study not just in school, but in universities as well. After all, these are the institutions that produce the citizens of tomorrow – our future businessmen, politicians, and decision makers of all kinds are sitting somewhere in a school or university today, learning all kinds of things that will affect the choices they make tomorrow. How can we imagine a better future if environmental awareness is not among the subjects they are learning?

This is also why we recently joined forces with FAST Foundation within the Generation AI program, linking AI education with environmental thinking and encouraging students to use technology to address real-world sustainability challenges. With Ucom's support, the project component of the program now has a green focus, with 10 student AI projects in the 2026–2027 academic year set to address environmental challenges aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We have worked for a long time with SunChild NGO, which has been educating the public through its film festival. Over the years, they have exposed our society to over 760 films from around 150 countries, continuously promoting dialogue and cooperation around environmental issues. This year's edition will coincide with COP17 and will provide a strong channel for the use of culture to convey messages in support of biodiversity. So SunChild is like a school that teaches the importance of the environment. But it is only one school out of more than thousand in Armenia, and a lot more needs to be done.



Speaking of biodiversity, Ucom has provided technological solutions to help educate the general public on the range of wildlife in Armenia, while also helping protect our flora and fauna. Tell us more about those solutions and how they have had an impact in the country.

— There are several important things we are doing in this area. Our thermal cameras in natural reservations give conservation experts much needed solutions that help them monitor and protect wildlife. This critical infrastructure allows them to keep a constant eye on the beautiful wild animals that roam our country, protecting them from poachers, forest fires, or other dangers. We have also invested in solar-powered off-grid cameras that serve this mission. The autonomous solar stations that power these cameras are critical because they allow the monitoring of remote areas that are

not covered by the power grid. The constant availability of data from these cameras allows experts to conduct in-depth scientific research on the movement of endangered species. Another interesting project we have on this topic is smart birdwatching. Ten AI-powered smart bird feeders have been installed in schools and communities across Armenia, allowing the public to observe and identify birds through an online platform. When a bird approaches the feeder, an integrated camera automatically activates, takes a photo, and records video. The AI algorithm then analyzes the image and identifies the bird species. This is a wonderful educational program that we are implementing with SunChild NGO, teaching our children and youth about the amazing diversity of birdlife in the country. It is very engaging and powerful, much more effective than textbooks.

Through the Ucom Fellowship program with Impact Hub Yerevan, you have supported around 20 environmental startups so far. What made you invest in Armenia's green entrepreneurship ecosystem, and where does that partnership go next?

— This is an excellent program where young entrepreneurs develop real solutions to our environmental problems and come up with business models that have a positive impact embedded in them. We have focused a lot on the topic of circular economy, which is critical today because it helps reduce waste and promotes a more efficient and effective use of the limited resources and materials available in our surroundings. Impact Hub Yerevan incubated startups that will be part of tomorrow's business landscape, providing practical solutions to real environmental issues, while also being profitable businesses. We believe that



supporting such teams is an investment in a more sustainable future for our country. The program lasts almost a year, and participants go through several intensive workshops and get mentorship support. The most promising among them also receive seed funding. We are happy to continue this partnership with Impact Hub Yerevan and keep investing in Armenia's green entrepreneurship sector.

Mr. Yirikian, you have been personally leading corporate responsibility in Armenia for several decades now, and all the programs you mentioned at Ucom are part of the consistent manifestation of your own personal commitment. But 2026 is special – Armenia is hosting CBD COP17 and the Government has invested a lot of time and effort in making this event a success. What does COP17 mean for the private sector in the country? What should Armenian businesses do to ensure that our country remains in the spotlight on important global issues?

— I hope that COP17 will boost environmental awareness among local businesses and increase their sense of responsibility on this topic. While I have seen businesses use environmental issues as a focus for their public relations activities, it is now high time to walk the talk. This event and the global attention that comes with it should be our signal to take real action. I am hoping that the state will adopt a program during COP17 that will lead to strong public-private partnerships. The state has lots of resources, of course, and can do much more than the private sector can do alone. Real change can only come when companies join hands with the government. There should be a sense of partnership without transactional expectations, which means action for the sake of real impact. After all, any damage to the environment will negatively impact us sooner

or later. We are alarmed when we see reports of wolves or bears entering villages, but why don't we stop to consider that this was actually caused by human interference in the natural habitats of those creatures? When you hunt and kill Bezoar goats, for example, this leads to a shortage of natural prey for wolves and, when they can no longer find food, those wolves are naturally attracted to farms and villages where they can attack sheep and other livestock. Both businesses and individuals must realize that we must be careful when we look at the environment in terms of economic gain, because there are always risks and consequences that must be included in our calculations.

Speaking of such calculations, you are speaking at several panels during COP17. One of them is on the topic of "The Invisible Supplier: Business, Biodiversity and the Unpriced Input." The other

highlights the necessary collaboration between environmental organizations, tech companies, local communities, and the Government. In your experience, how well do businesses actually understand these topics today, and what are the elements that help or hinder cooperation around the environment?

— The reality is that it's a lengthy learning curve that will take a lot of time. The state has an important role to play here. When businesses tell the state that they are on board, this is when the state can move more freely and take real action. Before that happens, the state can help raise awareness and educate the businesses that don't understand how to be environmentally responsible while also rewarding the companies that are having a positive impact. Businesses are used to thinking about supply chain risks from a financial point of view. But environmental issues related to the supply chain can also lead to a crisis, and the risk for businesses of losing everything is just as real in this case. On the topic of collaboration, any business that wants to do something on this topic today should not feel alone. There are so many organizations in Armenia today that are implementing good projects in these areas. Businesses that are interested should find them, learn from them, and work together. All the partnerships I already mentioned during this interview are an example of the collaborative approach that Ucom has taken so far. When it comes to working with communities, it is all about communication. There are many environmental projects today gathering dust on the tables of community leaders and policy makers. They are not coming to life because of a lack of understanding, which leads to the absence of funding. Of course, there are challenges. There are ignorant people in every community, and also in state bodies. But they are temporary and they should not cause individuals and companies to give up. A handful of ignorant people should not stop something that will benefit lots of people.

BUSINESSES ARE USED TO THINKING ABOUT SUPPLY CHAIN RISKS FROM A FINANCIAL POINT OF VIEW. BUT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE SUPPLY CHAIN CAN ALSO LEAD TO A CRISIS, AND THE RISK FOR BUSINESSES OF LOSING EVERYTHING IS JUST AS REAL IN THIS CASE

As soon as companies show the will to learn and act, they will start communicating and discussing these issues with the right stakeholders, and then these programs will kick off. I have been doing this for 20 years now, and I believe in its importance so much that I am now also investing my own personal resources. After all, I am thinking of my future grandchildren – what kind of country and planet do I want to leave them? I want to emphasize here that this is not just about Armenia. This is about the region and the planet. An environmental crisis in a neighboring country is just as much our problem as it is theirs. Migratory flows of wildlife will be affected by it, and that will impact our environment as well. Rivers and other critical resources that flow into our country will also be negatively impacted. We are all interconnected through nature, and this is why we

cannot find solutions alone – the only way is to act together!

If you had a magic wand, what is the one change in Armenia that would make the biggest difference for biodiversity over the next decade? What can individuals, companies, and public bodies do to make that "magic" a reality over the coming years?

— I represent a technology company, so I prefer not to think of it as a magic wand, but rather as a green button! I will be honest and say that my hopes don't lie with my generation or those who are slightly younger than me. I believe the solution is in the hands of the younger generation. First of all, it is important to say that Ucom will continue our programs in this area. We have not yet revealed our full arsenal when it comes to fighting climate change. But, as I said before, we need to scale this up, and we cannot do that without the state's endorsement and active engagement. It is very important that schools and universities have a compulsory subject teaching children and youth about environmental responsibility. This will shape the people who will take ownership for biodiversity and environmental protection in the future, whether in the private sector, public sector, or elsewhere. In the end, this is an issue that affects us all. Just like the visible wires and invisible waves that connect us and our devices to each other today, nature brings us together in a way that we have taken for granted. We pick up the phone and call someone thousands of kilometers away, no longer marveling at how this is actually a miracle of modern technology. In exactly the same way, the natural resources and biodiversity that we are blessed with in Armenia today are also miracles that deserve to be appreciated. Instead of hoping for magic, let's use our natural ability to communicate as human beings and our technological solutions to come together and build a sustainable future for our planet! ♦

WHERE DILIJAN'S HEART BEATS:

A Forest Town's Answer to COP17

As COP17 opens in Yerevan, Mareta Gevorkyan, founder of Green Rock Foundation, makes the case for Dilijan as a place where biodiversity is not only protected but understood and lived.

TEXT : MARETA GEVORKYAN / PHOTO : GREEN ROCK/ GREEN ROCK FOUNDATION & MEET DILIJAN



I identify as a small-town girl from Dilijan, Armenia. I remember September afternoons in the forest beside our house, when the first beeches turned copper and our pockets filled with hazelnuts. We walked home with wildflower wreaths. Our yard was located right next to the forest, so walking there daily with friends and family was a sacred and familial ritual. Forest and mountain air is hard to describe, even harder to compare with anything else. In Switzerland, many years later, I noticed that the air may be physically similar in characteristics, but not as ambient. I could open the window in Switzerland and breathe it in, thinking of those days in Dili, spending time in memories. Now that life has changed and I can spend time between the two places, it brings joy to my heart to know more people can catch this feeling. ➤



It was only when I came back as an adult that I began to look closely at the forest, at the tall firs and oaks, the hazels and the ferns along its paths. Ferns became my favorite plants. Even in Switzerland I keep them at home, so that a piece of Dilijan (Dili)

stays with me.

That forest is Dilijan's greatest wealth, its soul and its memory. Today it lies within Dilijan National Park, protected by the Republic of Armenia and home to more than a thousand kinds of plants.

The street of deodar cedars has watched over the town for as long as I can remember, old trees on both sides of the road touching branches overhead. Visitors often tell me it looks Swiss. There is beauty in common, it is true. Dilijan's nature and Dilijan's people have kept the street as it is to this day.

Yet I will always argue that Dilijan's other wealth is its people. The older generation has seen the town through hard years and better ones. Out of stubbornness and love for the land, they kept it for those who came after. At home, care was a given attribute; you were asked to care for others as you would for yourself.

When I studied in Yerevan, I came home every week, pulled back by something I could not name. Many young people in Dilijan feel that pull today and want to build their lives in the town, and the town is slowly making room for them and visitors who respect its serene lifestyle.

Since September 2025, Apicius Armenia School of Hospitality has trained students in Dilijan. Meet Dilijan puts local guides and artisans in front of visitors, so that knowing the forest can also be a livelihood. As a town changes, I want its character and warmth to come with it.

I believe the town's young people should learn more about the nature around them and how their town, its built-in nature spaces and its nature-loving community are connected. COP17 Week Dilijan, held from 19 to 25 September, was one small step in that direction. Across the week, public institutions, national park representatives, scientists, civil society sector, local businesses and young people came together to explore what biodiversity and the green transition mean here, in a place they know.



People explored the areas around Dilijan National Park and used iNaturalist to observe and record the species they found. Local businesses and women-led organisations joined green transition workshops, while films, an art competition and other activities created different ways for people to engage with the nature around them. Different activities, but the same idea: to make the nature around us something we do not simply live beside, but understand and care for.

The week was implemented by Green Rock, in partnership with and with financial support from the UNDP Armenia BES-Net Project, and approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Republic of Armenia as a COP17 preparatory event.

This October, COP17 comes to Yerevan to accelerate the global biodiversity framework agreed in 2022, under the slogan, "Taking Action for Nature". In Dilijan, that action begins in urban planning. The state wrote the idea of a clean and green city into its 2015 law on developing Dilijan and the park's management plan looks to run the park together with the communities around it. The next steps are both modest and practical, marked trails and signs so visitors can find their path to the forest and feel it. A town that becomes a place of learning and culture while staying close to nature, is perhaps where I believe Dilijan can thrive and prosper.

Green Rock will bring this experience to COP17 through its Green Zone conference, "Dilijan as a Biodiversity Hub: Sustainable Investment for Resilient Development," and a site visit to Dilijan as part of the official COP17 programme. Anyone who travels north during the conference will have the opportunity to see the landscape and meet the people who know it best. My hope is that those who gather in Yerevan will care for places like Dilijan: for their forests, and for the people who stay beside them and want to build their future there. May the children of Dilijan come to know this forest, and one day show their own children where to find the hazelnuts. ♦



WHERE FINANCE MEETS NATURE:

ArmSwissBank's Sustainability Journey

Ahead of CBD COP17 in Yerevan, we spoke to Gevorg Machanyan, Chairman of the Management Board and Executive Director at ArmSwissBank, about their two decades of sustainable finance and the growing role of banks in protecting Armenia's natural capital.

TEXT : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : ARMSWISSBANK



Gevorg Machanyan, Chairman of the Management Board and Executive Director, ArmSwissBank

While Armenia's financial system has had a strong foundation for more than a couple of decades, the banking sector was very different in the early 2000s to what it is today. Customers were much more limited in how they could manage their money or what they could get financed by a bank. Looking at the range of solutions available today, it is easy to forget that loans for renewable energy activities, for example, were not on the radar of most banks back then. But, even in the early 2000s, there were pioneers that stood out from the rest.

"We recognized early that renewable energy was both a national priority and a promising long-term business opportunity. Armenia has limited conventional energy resources but considerable renewable energy potential, so supporting this sector made strategic and economic sense," says Gevorg Machanyan, Chairman of the Management Board and Executive Director. But there are always challenges for first movers in a market. Back then, technical expertise was limited, regulation was evolving slowly and there was very little operating history on this topic. ArmSwissBank turned to international financial institutions to develop the necessary capacity to assess the financial, technical, environmental and social dimensions of such projects. "That early experience became part of ArmSwissBank's

> Industrial solar power station financed by ArmSwissBank



THE LESSON FOR OTHER BUSINESSES IS THAT **ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE CHOICES GAIN TRACTION WHEN CUSTOMERS UNDERSTAND THEM, CAN MEASURE THE BENEFITS AND SEE THAT THEY ARE FINANCIALLY ATTRACTIVE**

identity. Today, green and sustainable finance represents both a strategic business direction and an important element of our corporate responsibility," the CEO of ArmSwissBank says. In those early years, the Bank's renewable energy portfolio consisted mainly of small hydropower projects, which constituted the first commercially viable segment. But the company's approach evolved in line with market demand, technological development and Armenia's changing energy landscape. Declining technology costs created significant opportunities in solar energy, and ArmSwissBank was quick to explore the business case. "When evaluating new sectors, we consider market demand, technological maturity, environmental impact, regulatory conditions and long-term financial viability. We also assess whether the Bank can help create a new market rather than simply finance an established one," says Mr. Machanyan, "This approach now guides our work in areas such as energy storage, green buildings, industrial efficiency, sustainable agriculture, water management, circular economy and biodiversity-related finance." This same pioneering spirit made ArmSwissBank among the first banks in Armenia to finance a residential building with green certification, even when the market did not yet seem fully prepared for the concept. "Introducing a new environmental standard is never simply a financing exercise. Develop-

ers and buyers must understand the practical value behind it," Gevorg Machanyan recalls the story behind that business decision, "We worked with the client to establish benchmarks and demonstrate that green certification should be viewed as an investment rather than an additional cost. Lower utility expenses, greater comfort, improved building quality and stronger long-term marketability all contribute to its value. Preferential financing conditions provide an additional incentive." The lesson for other businesses is that environmentally responsible choices gain traction when customers understand them, can measure the benefits and see that they are financially attractive. Banks can accelerate this process by combining advice, credible standards and appropriate incentives. Meanwhile, ArmSwissBank is seeing evidence that the market is being positively influenced by the policy favoring construction projects with higher energy-efficiency ratings. "We increasingly incorporate energy performance and environmental characteristics into our financing decisions. We are already seeing greater awareness among developers and more frequent discussion of energy ratings, certification and operating efficiency during the project-design stage," says Mr. Machanyan. It is not easy to cite a clear figure in terms of impact. Comprehensive market-wide impact requires consistent, long-term measurement. But there is



a clear trendline. When stronger environmental performance is linked to better financing conditions, developers have a tangible incentive to improve their projects. So, ArmSwissBank is clear in its objective – making energy efficiency and responsible use of resources standard considerations in construction finance, not just optional features. There is also another area in which the Bank is having the double impact of economic acceleration and environmental conservation – modernizing aging industrial equipment. “Sustainable finance should not be limited to highly visible renewable energy projects. Replacing outdated equipment can reduce energy and water consumption, production losses, emissions, and the use of raw materials. For Armenian manufacturers, these investments can simultaneously improve productivity, product quality and international competitiveness. We see considerable potential to expand this segment in cooperation with international financial institutions,” says Gevorg Machanyan. ArmSwissBank recognizes the importance of partnerships in advancing positive environmental impact. In this context, the Bank collaborates with the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) on an initiative aimed at promoting sustainable tourism while protecting Armenia’s natural heritage. The cooperation focuses on developing eco-friendly accommodation facilities in the Vayots Dzor region, prioritizing environmentally sustainable structures over conventional concrete construction. As part of this initiative, ArmSwissBank provides concessional financing to support the development of environmentally responsible tourism infrastructure, helping make sustainable investment solutions more accessible and financially viable. The initiative seeks to demonstrate how



▲ Eco-shelter supported through ArmSwissBank’s concessional financing in cooperation with FPWC

▼ LUYSER residential complex, one of Armenia’s first green buildings, financed by ArmSwissBank



tourism development and nature conservation can go hand in hand, creating economic opportunities while minimizing environmental impact and preserving local ecosystems. “Our cooperation with FPWC reflects our belief that sustainable development should create economic value while protecting the environment. Through concessional financing and partnerships with specialized environmental organizations, we aim to demonstrate that business development and biodiversity conservation can reinforce each other,” says Gevorg Machanyan. This is, once again, a pioneering approach, this time promoting the idea of patient capital, which is important for biodiversity projects. Financial institutions must increasingly consider how economic activity depends on healthy ecosystems and how financing decisions can contribute to protecting Armenia’s natural capital.

The Bank’s commitment to the environment and biodiversity extends well beyond providing finance. “We believe that environmental responsibility should be reflected in the Bank’s everyday operations and in the personal conduct of our employees,” the CEO of ArmSwissBank explains, “This includes reducing paper consumption, using reusable materials, minimizing waste and encouraging more responsible use of energy and other resources.” The Bank’s long-term sustainability strategy also focuses on protecting biodiversity. ArmSwissBank and its employees regularly participate directly in tree-planting activities. “Our employees contribute through their direct physical participation. As a team, we organize planting events near schools and within local communities, combining environmental action with awareness building and community engage-



ment,” says Mr. Machanyan. One such significant initiative supported included new forest cover over approximately 150 hectares, implemented together with other Armenian banks, the Central Bank of Armenia and the Union of Banks of Armenia. This strong commitment to the environment has been accompanied by a consistent investment in institutional development at ArmSwissBank, through long-standing partnerships with international institutions such as the EBRD, which has influenced the Bank’s risk-management standards, lending discipline and internal culture. “Cooperation with international financial institutions has contributed significantly to our institutional development. It has strengthened our approach to project appraisal, environmental and social risk management, monitoring, reporting and transparency,” Mr. Machanyan states, “These principles have become part of our internal culture. We assess projects not only through collateral and repayment capacity, but also through technical quality, environmental impact, governance and long-term resilience.” Their pursuit of higher standards led ArmSwissBank to Green Climate Fund (GCF) accreditation in 2025. This enables the Bank to develop programs and mobilize international climate finance more directly for Armenia. In practical terms, this can provide local businesses with longer-term financing, blended and concessional instruments, and support for preparing innovative projects that the domestic market may not otherwise be able to finance. “Although the GCF is primarily a climate institution, climate resilience and biodiversity are closely interconnected. Sustainable agriculture, water management, ecosystem restoration

WE BELIEVE BANKS CAN ALSO SERVE AS CONVENERS, BRINGING TOGETHER BUSINESSES, PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITIES, AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AROUND SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

▲ ArmSwissBank’s accreditation by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) in Songdo, Republic of Korea (2025)

and nature-based solutions can simultaneously strengthen climate resilience, protect biodiversity and support local livelihoods,” the CEO of ArmSwissBank says, “Looking ahead, we intend to expand our work in energy storage, green buildings, industrial efficiency, sustainable agriculture, water management, circular economy and, increasingly, nature-positive finance.” Banks have an important role in this process, directing capital toward responsible businesses, developing measurable standards and helping turn environmental priorities into viable investments. But impact is always limited when pioneers remain alone. A real change happens when stakeholders come together to act in unison. “In this sense, hosting CBD COP17 gives Armenia an exceptional opportunity to bring biodiversity into economic and financial decision-making,” Gevorg Machanyan concludes, emphasizing that they have a bigger role to play than simply providing capital, “We believe banks can also serve as conveners, bringing together businesses, public institutions, communities and civil society organizations around shared environmental goals. Supporting biodiversity therefore means not only directing capital toward nature-positive projects, but also taking practical action and encouraging others to become involved.” ♦

THE DIGITAL ARCHITECTS OF A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE:

IDBank and Green Transformation in Armenia

Sustainable development is no longer a side note to business strategy for Armenia's financial sector. Ahead of COP17 in Yerevan, we talked to one of Armenia's longest-standing financial institutions, IDBank, and several of their partners about how business and stakeholders work together to develop urban forests and boost biodiversity in the country.

TEXT : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : IDBANK



The bank is supervised by the CB of RA | www.idbank.am | 010-59-33-33

This is how the area adjacent to the Matenadaran in Yerevan will be transformed through the biodiversity garden restoration project.



COP17 is not just about the commitments taken at the state level and progress against those targets. The agenda looks in very practical terms at how finance affects the topic and what role the private sector should play in the story. "A modern banking system is no longer simply a financial intermediary. It is a driver of change, one whose decisions ripple outward to affect both the environment and society at large" says Tatevik Vardevanyan, Head of the Communications and Sustainable Development department at IDBank, Idram Payment System, "We are a financial institution with 35 years of history and a long record of transformation, and we are now ushering in the next 35 years of sustainable development in Armenia on a foundation of innovation and digitalization." Financial technologies today impact people's behavior on an everyday level and can be used to encourage more responsible consumerism. For example, customers can be nudged to reduce the use of paper and physical resources or encouraged to opt for cashless and digital transactions. All this also makes financial services more accessible, efficient and inclusive. A core part of this shift comes through IDBank's digital ecosystem, which consists of the Idram and IDBank app, digital and QR payment solutions, and remote banking services. This move toward modern digital products reduces the company's carbon footprint while also improving the speed and quality of customer service. More than 500,000 active users now avail of the Idram and IDBank app, resulting in more environmentally responsible behavior like less paper usage and fewer in-person visits. At the same time, this

means that access to financial resources is now possible for citizens in every region of Armenia, no matter how far they are located from a bank branch. For IDBank, protecting the environment goes well beyond standard corporate social responsibility. It is treated as a long-term investment in Armenia's biodiversity and maintaining environmental equilibrium. In the past five years alone, IDBank has allocated more than 100 million AMD for various environmental programs, resulting in more than 50,000 trees planted in new forests. In 2026, as part of the Bank's 35th anniversary celebrations, a new set of large-scale projects will ensure steps toward biodiversity conservation, the restoration of urban ecosystems, and a higher standard of environmental responsibility. In the heart of Yerevan, on land adjacent to the Matenadaran manuscript library, IDBank is supporting a large-scale project to restore a biodiversity garden and promote sustainable development. Through a partnership with the Matenadaran and the Armenia Tree Project (ATP), the residents of the capital will soon benefit from an educational and cultural garden set on 1.2 hectares of land in the heart of the city. The essence of this project is a marriage between cultural heritage and nature conservation. The garden will be designed by the Belgian firm Collectif Landscape through a process of public discussion and co-design, building solutions suited to local ecosystems. Initial plans consist of choosing drought-resistant, aromatic and medicinal plants native to Armenia, along with fruit trees and endemic species. ➤

The project also includes solutions to effectively manage water resources. A rainwater harvesting and reuse system, drip irrigation and water-permeable surfaces will all help reduce water consumption, while a “water theater” planned for the garden’s central area will combine a nature-based solution with the function of a public gathering space, creating a new venue for outdoor events.

“The objective is to beautify the areas surrounding the Matenadaran and create a garden that lends this historical and cultural environment an educational and cognitive dimension as well,” says Matenadaran Director Ara Khzmalyan, “Certain sections of the garden will feature plant species depicted in the miniatures of Armenian manuscripts, giving visitors the chance to encounter, in living form, the plant world they have previously only seen illustrated on parchment.”

The project’s long-term vision extends beyond the garden’s own boundaries. Plans call for exploring the feasibility of a “Green Bridge” connecting the Matenadaran with Victory Park, which could form a new ecological corridor in the center of Yerevan, supporting both biodiversity conservation and the development of green infrastructure.

Another green zone that is being developed in central Yerevan is Moskovyan Park, which has brought together Yerevan City Hall and IDBank. The bank’s 35th anniversary program includes a large-scale renovation of the park, aimed at making it greener, more comfortable and more contemporary as a public space. The program calls for restoring and expanding green zones, introducing modern lighting systems, and upgrading rest areas. Forests and culture come together again in the Symphonic Forest initiative, which is funded by the IDBank and Idram program



50,000+ trees for a greener future in Armenia: Idram and IDBank’s partnership with My Forest Armenia

Where future forests begin

called The Power of One Dram, through which small contributions generated from everyday payments are channeled into a range of social and environmental projects. Symphonic Forest was born from an idea by Sergey Smbatyan, artistic director and chief conductor of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, who wanted to celebrate the orchestra’s 20th anniversary concert season by creating a new forest. What makes the idea distinctive is that the arrangement of the trees mirrors the structure of a symphony orchestra itself, bringing music and nature together within a single, symbolic space. Carried out in the Shirak region, the project features a partnership between IDBank and Idram, on the one hand, and the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and My Forest Armenia, on the other. The plan calls for a total of 20,000 trees, of which 15,758 had already been planted in July 2026.

Given this high level of engagement in environmental responsibility, it is no coincidence that IDBank and Idram are one of the more visible corporate faces at COP17. IDBank’s presence at the conference will consist of programs, events and thematic pavilions implemented jointly with partners. At the Armenia Tree Project pavilion, IDBank will present initiatives built around the combination of cultural heritage,



AI for Biodiversity Hackathon 2025: idcoins to support biodiversity conservation projects

green space and nature conservation. Within the COP17 program, the Matenadaran garden will be showcased as a demonstration of nature-based solutions in Armenia, highlighting its potential to reduce urban heat islands, improve air quality and advance public environmental education. IDBank’s presence will also be felt at COP17 through the My Forest Armenia installation titled “Forest Biodiversity: An Immersive Experience.” The project sets out to show the extraordinary biodiversity of forests both above and below ground while giving visitors a direct, interactive experience of that world and the web of connections among living organisms that, together, form an ecosystem. It is important to use creative approaches like this to transform the environmental agenda into something people don’t just discuss but personally experience.

“We have been partnering since 2021, and this cooperation has allowed us to plant 58,500 trees. We are very happy that IDBank has a long-term vision and understands the crucial importance of forests for the future of Armenia and its people,” says Andre Gumuchdjan, Founder and Director of My Forest Armenia.

The future of biodiversity conservation is also unimaginable without new technology and knowledge. In this context, IDBank’s involvement in the AI in Biodiversity project carries particular significance. The new possibilities emerging at the intersection of artificial intelligence and environmental protection could reshape how we monitor nature, collect data, and analyze and conserve ecosystems. This clearly highlights once again just how closely digital innovation and sustainable development are intertwined.

IDBank’s involvement at COP17 also extends to the important theme of women’s role and leadership. Through The Power of One Dram initiative, the bank is taking part in the Women in Climate event, where close to 400 participants will discuss the role and opportunities of women within the climate agenda. IDBank will also moderate a panel discussion

at the event and will award idcoins to its winning women participants, combining financial technology, incentive and social impact in a single gesture.

“COP17 is an opportunity to look beyond the conference itself and think about the kind of future we want to build, and who needs to be part of building it,” says Nune Sakanyan, Founder and Director, Women in Climate and Energy NGO, “Our partnership with IDBank reflects this forward-looking approach by bringing together biodiversity, innovation, youth and women’s leadership. Building on last year’s AI4Biodiversity Hackathon, we are continuing this journey through an AI4Biodiversity panel at COP17, creating space to explore how artificial intelligence, new ideas and young talent can contribute to biodiversity conservation.”

For IDBank, the green agenda is ultimately about exactly this kind of interconnection – turning digital innovation into a tool for sustainable development, and social responsibility into long-term impact.

On the eve of the COP17 global summit, IDBank is reaffirming its readiness to continue and expand its environmental initiatives. Through the development of digital technologies, the introduction of green financing tools, and consistent steps toward biodiversity conservation, the Bank is helping shape a new culture of responsible business in Armenia. “Seen through this lens, sustainability for IDBank is not a single, standalone direction, but an interconnected agenda spanning business, technology and social impact. It is built to create long-term value, well beyond the conference itself,” says Tatevik Vardevanyan, “The work that we do in this area is through key partnerships. We rely on the expertise of organizations that have years of experience in biodiversity and nature conservation. At the same time, we recognize the power of culture in creating awareness and dialogue about important issues, like environmental responsibility. The slogan of COP17 is ‘taking action for nature’ and we take that a step further, believing that joint action is the best way to go.”

MAINSTREAMING NATURE

In this op-ed written for Regional Post's COP17 issue, Dr. Tiffany Grabski, Head of the SSE Academy at the UN Sustainable Stock Exchanges initiative, explains why stock exchanges hold the key to mobilising private capital for nature.

TEXT : DR. TIFFANY GRABSKI



As delegates gather in Yerevan for COP17, the conversation will turn, as it must, to money. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework set out what the world needs to achieve for preservation of biodiversity and nature by 2030. Meeting those goals is estimated to require around 700 billion USD a year. Public budgets alone will not close that gap. Private capital has to move too, and the fastest way to reach private capital is through the institution that sits at its center – the stock exchange. We often talk about “the market” as if it were one actor. It is not. It consists of listed companies, investors, banks, brokers, auditors, regulators and standard setters, each with its own incentives and each waiting for someone else to move first. Work with investors alone and you still depend on companies to disclose the information investors need. Work with companies alone and they will ask why they should report data no investor requires. Exchanges are different. Their core job is to connect all of these players, and they already speak to every one of them through their listing rules, disclosure guidance, market data, indices and capacity building. When you work with an exchange, you are not working with one part of the system. You are working with the system and when a stock exchange changes its guidance or launches a new bond segment, markets pay attention in a way they rarely do for outside voices. This is why the UN SSE initiative has worked with exchanges since 2009. It now partners with more than 130 exchanges worldwide. Each has committed at the level of its CEO or Board Chair to promote sustainable investment and better disclosure among the companies listed on its market. Over the past decade we have watched exchanges do this for climate. Sustainability guidance, green bond segments and ESG indices went from rare to routine. But how can we tackle climate change and its effects, without nature? Nature is now where climate was ten years ago. With more scientific data, scenarios and trends documented, we know now that nature and biodiversity are financially material to economies and to businesses. More than half of global GDP depends moderately or highly on nature, and nature-related risks are beginning to show up in how companies are valued. The frameworks to measure and disclose them now exist, led by the TNFD. What is missing in most markets is the capacity to use them. That is where education comes in. Guidance, standards and regulation are only as effective as a market's ability to put them into practice. Nature is harder than climate in one important respect – it is local. A ton of carbon has the same effect wherever it is emitted, but the effect of drawing water from a stressed river basin depends entirely on where that basin is. Companies need to learn to locate, evaluate and assess their dependencies and impacts on nature. Investors need to learn what good nature-related disclosure looks like. Boards need to understand that this is a question of strategy and risk, not only of reporting.



We launched the SSE Academy in 2021 to fill exactly this gap. We act as the back-office sustainability team that most exchanges do not have the resources to build themselves. Our workshops are expert-led, CPD-certified, donor-funded and hosted by exchanges free of charge for their markets. To date, more than 70 exchanges have hosted our training for over 60,000 market participants in more than 150 countries and territories. This year, together with the TNFD, we began dedicated training on managing and reporting nature-related issues, and exchanges across several regions have already brought it to their markets. By the end of COP17 we will have held 14 workshops with the TNFD and partners, reaching more than 4,000 market participants. The Euro-Asian region is well placed to lead in this space, to mitigate risks while also securing important opportunities related to nature. Yerevan is home to the Federation of Euro-Asian Stock Exchanges (FEAS), which has spent three decades convening exchanges across Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. FEAS has worked together with the UN SSE and its members to disseminate knowledge and build capacity across markets that are often too small to do it alone. Here in Armenia, the market is now growing important opportunities associated with nature. The country's first green bond and first sustainability-linked bond were both issued in 2024, the latter listed on the Armenia Securities Exchange (AMX). The Central Bank of Armenia has since recommended a dedicated green bond segment on the exchange. This is an opening for nature. Many economies across the region rely heavily on agriculture, water, mining and forestry, the sectors most dependent on healthy ecosystems. Those same sectors offer the clearest investment opportunities – sustainable agriculture, efficient water management, land restoration and the rehabilitation of mining sites. Since 2025, international bond market guidance has allowed green bonds whose proceeds go exclusively to nature-related projects to carry the “Nature Bond” designation. A labelled bond segment built with nature in mind from the start, supported by guidance and training for issuers and investors, would let the region's markets raise new capital for nature and give investors a credible way to find it. At COP17 we will launch the SSE Action Plan on Nature, a practical and flexible roadmap for exchanges and regulators. My invitation to exchanges and regulators across the region is simple. Use the Action Plan to identify where your market has the greatest opportunity. Then work with the SSE Academy and FEAS to bring education to every participant in your market, from the largest listed company to the smallest broker. Exchanges have the infrastructure that we have already seen mainstreaming climate into financial decision-making, and they can do the same for nature. It starts with making sure everyone in the market knows how. ♦

COP17 IN ARMENIA

SHAPING A NEW ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY



A PRIMER ON COP17

If you've heard all the buzz about COP17 in Yerevan but have no idea what is going on and why, we've got you covered with this writeup! Here's a look at what the event is all about and what to expect in Armenia during the second half of October 2026.

WHAT IS COP17?

The full title of COP17 is the Seventeenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which was a multilateral treaty that entered into force after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s. The Convention focuses on three main topics – the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. The event taking place in Yerevan from October 19 to 30, 2026 marks the seventeenth global meeting focusing on CBD and its objectives. Other small countries that have hosted this event include the Bahamas (COP-1 CBD in 1994), and Slovakia (COP-4 CBD in 1998).

WHAT IS ON THE AGENDA?

The agenda is actually much more complicated than a single meeting. Alongside the core CBD negotiations, Yerevan will simultaneously host the twelfth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CP-MOP-12) and the sixth meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (NP-MOP-6). These are protocols that are supplementary to the CBD.

The organizers are expecting around 20,000 delegates to arrive from the CBD's 196 Parties, plus observer organizations, Indigenous Peoples' representatives, businesses, youth groups, academics and civil society. That makes it the largest event ever hosted by independent Armenia. In 2022, COP15 in Montreal adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), which is the current strategic framework guiding countries on this topic till 2030. The KMGBF has set four overarching goals and 23 action targets,

such as "30x30" – conserving at least 30% of the world's land and sea by 2030. One of the key parts of the agenda of COP17 consists of the first formal Global Review of Collective Progress – participants will collectively assess, with real data, whether the world is on track to meet the KMGBF 2030 targets. In terms of how the event is structured, there is a restricted "Blue Zone" (the Meridian Expo and Event Center) which handles accredited negotiations. The general public, including civil society organizations, academic institutions, businesses, youth groups, and other stakeholders will have access (through prior registration) to the "Green Zone" (the Karen Demirchyan Sports and Concert Complex) where there will be a range of stands, lectures, workshops, and other sessions.

WHY IS ARMENIA HOSTING THIS EVENT?

The selection of the host for COP17 took place during the COP16 event in Cali, Colombia. Armenia won the right to host the conference with 65 total votes, while Azerbaijan, which was also in contention, received only 58 votes. The Government of Armenia sees this as yet another opportunity, after hosting the European Political Community Summit in May 2026, to put the country on the map as a focal point for international affairs.

It is also an opportunity to promote Armenia's own biodiversity to domestic and international audiences, given that the country boasts more than 3,500 plant species, of which 144 are endemic, along with 379 bird species, more than 200 butterfly species, and 75 mammal species. Armenia's rich ecosystem features 42 mountain ranges, 250 lakes, 9,500 rivers, and 27 reserves, which make the country one of the most biologically diverse places in the world. ♦

STRATEGIZING, REPORTING, AND TRANSLATING SCIENCE INTO POLICY

We see the public face of COP17, featuring meetings, events, workshops, and discussions. But a lot of work takes place in the background, where experts work diligently to develop the right strategies, produce accurate reports, and help inform policymakers on key topics. We learned more about this from Anna Aleksanyan, a biodiversity and environmental policy professional with two decades of experience in science, policy and practice.

INTERVIEW : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : ANNA ALEKSANYAN'S ARCHIVE, FPWC, KARINE AVETISYAN



Anna Aleksanyan,
a biodiversity and environmental
policy professional

Ms. Aleksanyan, you helped develop Armenia's national biodiversity strategies in alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). COP17 is conducting the first formal Global Review of progress. In this context, what would you say Armenia's biggest achievement has been so far, and what is the biggest remaining gap?

— Yes, I was involved in the team that developed the new national biodiversity strategy and action plan, which was published this April, and we also published our Seventh National Report on Biodiversity earlier this year. The COP17 review process is expected to take a decision on whether the progress on our National Biodiversity Strategy is aligned with the global strategy on biodiversity. Based on the results we have so far, I can say that we are somewhere in the middle tier in terms of progress, compared to other countries.

One big challenge is that we developed our strategy quite late, so we have not had much time to work on our targets and implementation. The other gap that we have is in terms of a lack of human resources in the field, meaning that many of our actions are delayed or not implemented fully. There is also the major gap – a world-wide problem this time – of financing. Believe me when I say that there are countries that have accepted serious commitments and undertaken commendable actions, but have no money to hire an expert team and submit a report. We actually discussed this issue at pre-COP17 meetings, and it is quite prevalent. We are fortunate enough to have financing from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), but several delays meant that we had limited time and capacity. ➤

IN TERMS OF ACHIEVEMENT, I WANT TO HIGHLIGHT TARGET 3, WHICH FALLS UNDER THE FAMOUS “30 BY 30”, MEANING THE INTENTION TO TAKE THE SHARE OF PROTECTED AREAS TO 30% GLOBALLY BY 2030

There is also another big gap – a lack of coordinated data collection and coordination between different stakeholders. Once again, this is a global problem. For this reason, the CBD Secretariat has decided to introduce a new mechanism to help evaluate implementation levels of KMGBF using a panel of non-state actors, where stakeholders can register their commitment under different global or national targets. But we will only see the benefits of this during the next stage of reporting because the number of commitments has been low so far. Just to give you an idea – when the seventh national reports were due, we only had around 100 commitments. Now, you can find more than 2000 commitments there, meaning that there are 20 times more stakeholders around the world today that will be providing data that can go into the next round of reporting, and this number will naturally keep rising. This is great news because it means that data collection is now not limited to the Government's domain, anyone can contribute. There is, of course, a verification mechanism, which ensures that the submitted data is relevant.

In terms of achievement, I want to highlight target 3, which falls under the famous “30 by 30”, meaning the intention to take the share of protected areas to 30% globally by 2030. We have two targets in Armenia under this one, focusing on the enlargement and the increased effectiveness of our protected areas. In May 2026, we successfully adopted a new law on protected areas. As part of that legislative package, we now officially

recognize Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), which is a big step forward in how we calculate protected areas.

One challenging topic is the valuation of ecosystem services and integrating natural capital into policymaking. How much has Armenia actually used these tools for real decisions, and why does that matter for the biodiversity-finance debate during COP17?

— This is a very sensitive topic but, once again, it is not an issue specific only to Armenia. First, you need to have the legislative basis for this, without which it is very difficult to have the right tools or to report on it correctly. We have a few ongoing projects in this area. We will be presenting one of them, financed by Germany, in the Green Zone during COP17 and it will feature the first prototype of ecosystem service accounting in Armenia, which can then be used by the Government in the National Accounting System for the valuation of ecosystem services. On the topic of natural capital, Armenia has had the chance to pilot a project with Stanford University, financed by the Asian Development Bank. As part of this effort, the project team mapped current and future contributions of nature for replenishing water resources using the InVEST Seasonal Water Yield Model on a national scale and in a changing climate. This can also be integrated with other management plans, like the ones developed for forests or protected areas. There is a lot of work to do in this area, but we have already planted the first seeds.

One of your topics of research is invasive species management. What are the most pressing invasive threats facing Armenia's ecosystems right now, and how prepared is the country to respond?

— Again, a hot topic worldwide, and there is a dedicated target related to this in KMGBF, which aims to reduce invasive species and their distribution by 50%. Our national target is focused more on management, control and distribution because we first need to have a database of all the invasive species in the country. Once more, we need legislative changes here. Currently, we only have a list of animal invasive species that have been officially approved. Strangely enough, we

have more research on invasive plant species, but no legislative approval for them. We need modifications to the law on flora, the next steps in this area will only be possible after that. When it comes to the scientific side, we need to divide invasive species into different groups. For example, there are invasive species which damage urban green areas and forest ecosystems, like *Robinia pseudoacacia*. Then, there are those that are harmful for human health, like *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*. But there can be no mechanisms for preparedness if there is no legislative basis for control and management. Our forest management plans from the last 3-4 years

have maps with the distribution of the most dangerous invasive species. The term “invasive species” has become more popular of late, but that does not mean that we have achieved the right level of awareness. For example, if you pluck these plants from the soil, you may think that you are removing them. In fact, you may actually be helping them spread more during this process. There are very few experts on this topic, which is a big problem.

Ms. Aleksanyan, tell us more about your work UNCCD's Science-Policy Interface (SPI) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IGPBES)? What makes this work important?

— UNCCD SPI and IGPBES do similar work – scientists like me go beyond our usual focus of work and try to transfer our scientific knowledge into language that policymakers understand. As part of that work, I was in a team that developed Global Land Outlook 3 this year, which focuses on land stewardship and transforming financial pathways for land restoration worldwide. Globally, a hot topic we are all discussing is how to find synergies between all three COPs this year – UNCCD COP17 which took place in Ulaanbaatar in August, CBD COP17 in Yerevan in October, and Climate COP31 in Antalya. The focus areas for these events are land degradation,



biodiversity, and climate change respectively, and these are all clearly interconnected topics. A lot depends on our policymakers, which makes it crucial that we efficiently “translate” the latest research into the kinds of documents with which they can work.

Speaking of land degradation, what are the issues we have on this topic in Armenia? What changes are you currently seeing in Armenia’s forests, grasslands or wetlands?

— These are all very relevant topics for Armenia. There is a lot of degraded land, which is a direct influencing

factor for biodiversity loss. It gives an opportunity for invasive species to become dominant, which causes changes in the ecosystem. Traditional, uncontrolled agricultural practices are a leading cause of this. In the early 1990s, we damaged our ecosystems because of the socioeconomic crisis. People logged forests and nature conservation took a back seat. Farmers allowed uncontrolled grazing or overgrazing in grasslands. We did not understand how important wetlands were in terms of ecosystems, especially in a mountainous country like Armenia.

Now, we are seeing a lot of afforestation and reforestation. I know that this does not always mean that you will reach your targets and it will take 50-60 years to have a full, healthy, new forest. But at least there is some action in the right direction. There are also initiatives to restore wetlands. Perhaps the biggest challenge lies with grasslands, where we are not yet using the right approach.

Finally, your work also includes training the next generation of Armenian biodiversity researchers. With global attention focusing on Yerevan for two weeks, what do you hope will be different after

COP17 IS THE BIGGEST EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF ARMENIA IN TERMS OF NATURE CONSERVATION. IN TERMS OF GENERAL PUBLIC AWARENESS, THERE HAS BEEN TREMENDOUS IMPACT. NOW, EVEN SMALL CHILDREN IN OUR COUNTRY KNOW THAT THIS IS A BIG EVENT THAT IS ALL ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THEY ARE ASKING QUESTIONS ON THIS TOPIC

COP17? Do you think the biggest impact on the context in Armenia will be in funding, policy, or public understanding?

— COP17 is the biggest event in the history of Armenia in terms of nature conservation, and I am extremely happy that Armenia has taken the commitment to host it. In terms of general public awareness, there has been tremendous impact. Before COP17, nobody gave a thought to nature conservation. Now, even small children in our country know that this is a big event that is all about the environment, and they are asking questions on this topic.

When it comes to decision making, there will be higher level impact in the near future. COP17 is just the beginning of Armenia’s presidency, which will last the next two years. This means that Armenia can bring more money into the country for nature conservation, and we also get more global attention. We need to work hard, of course, but there can be lots of benefits.

In terms of educating the next generation, we used to have faculties of biology in various universities, but no specific programs related to biodiversity or nature conservation. In 2024, the International Scientific Education Center of Armenia launched a new master’s program in biodiversity research

and conservation. This year, our first cohort graduated and we completed our third year of admissions. These specialists are really unique because they are familiar with modern methodologies, the current literature, and their education has been based on real research. Almost all of them are already working in various organizations in the fields, from non-profits and research institutes to the government and even private consulting. Most of them started to work there after completing the master’s program. This is just a small step, but it is very important to maintain this and push forward. We should focus not only on formal education but also promote non-formal environmental education. For a country like Armenia, which is small but has a high level of biodiversity, we need all our stakeholders to have a high level of education and awareness on this topic. In this sense, COP17 provides a unique opportunity. The agenda is huge and very diverse. There is a focus on synergies, like biodiversity and health, biodiversity and climate, and so on. There are all kinds of sessions, negotiations, side events, and informal meetings bringing a very diverse group of stakeholders together. I look forward to seeing Armenia grab this opportunity and the consequent presidency to usher in a new era of biodiversity and nature conservation in the country! ♦



SUN, WIND AND WINGS

Armenia's greener energy transition

In this interview for Regional Post's COP17 issue, Hayrapet Hakobyan, NDC Partnership In-Country Facilitator for Armenia, discusses how the country can expand solar and wind power without sacrificing its biodiversity, and why the synergies discussed in Yerevan must translate into coordinated action on the ground.

INTERVIEW : NAZARETH SEFERIAN

How would you describe where Armenia's renewable energy sector stands today?

— Armenia's climate policy plan, known as its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), places a strong emphasis on the energy sector, not only because it accounts for the largest share of the country's greenhouse gas emissions, but also because the wide range of available solutions offers significant opportunities for economic growth, decarbonisation, and greater energy independence.

Armenia's renewable energy sector is at a pivotal stage and at the center of national energy transition, moving from rapid growth in solar power towards a more diversified, flexible and resilient energy system.

Solar energy has been the main driver of this transformation. With approximately 1,100 MW of solar capacity already connected to the electricity grid, Armenia is well on track to achieve its unconditional target of 1,200 MW of installed solar capacity by 2035, as established in its current NDC – NDC 3.0 under the Paris Agreement. This progress reflects a combination of strong private-sector investment, legislative incentives, net-metering arrangements and policies encouraging households and businesses to generate electricity for their own needs. The next phase is about building on this momentum. Armenia aims to increase the share of renewable electric-



ity to 50% by 2030 and around 60% by 2040, while maintaining a balanced and reliable energy system that combines renewables with nuclear power. Achieving these ambitions will require further investment in wind energy, electricity storage, grid modernisation and system flexibility, alongside stronger regional electricity interconnections and cross-border cooperation.

Armenia is also advancing legislative reforms to strengthen the electricity market and create a more competitive environment for investment. Our NDC 3.0 sets additional conditional ambitions, including increasing solar capacity to 1,375 MW and developing 200 MW of wind capacity by 2035, alongside expanding energy storage. Delivering these higher ambitions will depend partly on access to international climate finance, technology cooperation and capacity-building. Overall, Armenia has made significant progress in establishing solar power as a key pillar of its energy system. The priority now is to translate this success into a diversified and well-integrated renewable energy sector that can deliver reliable, affordable and increasingly clean electricity for the country's long-term development.

For readers less familiar with the NDC Partnership, what does a national facilitator actually do day to day, and where does biodiversity enter that work?

— The NDC Partnership is a global coalition of countries and institutions working together to advance the Paris Agreement and support country-owned climate action and sustainable development. With more than 270 members, it brings together governments and development partners to help countries translate their climate commitments into concrete action. As the NDC Partnership's In-Country Facilitator for Armenia, my role is to serve as the link between the Government of Armenia and the Partnership's global network. Day to day, I support the Ministry of Environment in identifying priorities for implementing Armenia's



ARMENIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR IS AT A PIVOTAL STAGE AND AT THE CENTER OF NATIONAL ENERGY TRANSITION, MOVING FROM RAPID GROWTH IN SOLAR POWER TOWARDS A MORE DIVERSIFIED, FLEXIBLE AND RESILIENT ENERGY SYSTEM

climate agenda, assessing where technical assistance and financial resources are needed, and connecting these needs with partners that can provide the relevant expertise and support. It is essentially about turning national climate commitments into actionable projects and ensuring that the right partners are working together to deliver them. Biodiversity is an important part of this work because climate action and nature are closely interconnected. When identifying projects and mobilizing support for NDC implementation, we need to ensure that climate measures do not come at the expense of biodiversity, while maximizing opportunities for positive outcomes for ecosystems and communities. For example, nature-based solutions can help communities adapt to climate change while also protecting ecosystems and biodiversity. Similarly, climate-smart agriculture and sustainable water management can strengthen resilience against climate change while reducing pressure on natural resources.

Armenia's NDC presumably focuses more on expanding solar and wind to hit decarbonization targets. As

we grow capacity in these areas, what biodiversity risk comes with this in terms of habitat fragmentation, protected areas, and migratory corridors?

— Managing biodiversity trade-offs in climate-positive investments is a global challenge, not one unique to Armenia. In our case, the key is to ensure that the expansion of solar and wind power goes hand in hand with biodiversity conservation. The foundation is our Environmental Impact Assessment and Expertise Law, which provides the national framework for assessing the potential environmental impacts of proposed projects. This needs to be complemented by sound site selection, biodiversity baseline assessments, appropriate monitoring, and measures to avoid or minimize impacts on sensitive habitats, protected areas, and migratory bird corridors. International good practices, including biodiversity assessment, monitoring standards and safeguards applied by multilateral development banks, climate funds and bilateral development partners, provide important guidance for this process. Meaningful stakeholder engagement, including free, prior and informed

ONE OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE COP17 PRESIDENCY IS TO STRENGTHEN SYNERGIES AMONG MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS, RECOGNIZING THE INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN BIODIVERSITY LOSS, CLIMATE CHANGE, LAND DEGRADATION, AND POLLUTION

consent where applicable, is also important in projects affecting local and Indigenous communities.

You have helped mobilize financing from the GCF, EIB and others for Armenia's energy transition. Do the environmental and social safeguards attached to that financing meaningfully account for biodiversity impacts, or is there a real gap between what climate finance requires and what biodiversity protection would require?

— In my experience working on climate finance and supporting Armenia in mobilizing resources for its energy transition, environmental and social safeguards are an essential part of ensuring that climate investments deliver sustainable outcomes. Institutions such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have environmental and social requirements that can help identify and manage biodiversity risks. However, the key question is not simply whether safeguards exist, but how effectively they are applied throughout the entire project cycle.

There can be a gap when climate benefits are assessed primarily in terms of emissions reductions or renewable energy capacity, while biodiversity impacts are treated as a secondary consideration. A project can make a significant contribution to decarbonisation and still create pressure on sensitive habitats, fragment ecosystems, or affect migratory bird routes. Therefore, climate finance needs to look beyond the volume of clean energy generated and ensure that biodiversity risks are adequately assessed, monitored, and managed throughout project implementation and operation. The proposed 150 MW wind power plant at Karakhach provides a relevant example for Armenia. With support from the Asian Development Bank, the Renewable Resources and Energy Efficiency (R2E2) Fund completed wind resource measurements and identified the site as promising for wind power development. Ultimately, I do not see climate and biodiversity objectives as competing pri-

orities. Rather, the challenge is to ensure that climate finance delivers both. This requires robust environmental assessment, appropriate biodiversity baselines, careful site selection, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and monitoring systems that allow mitigation measures to be adjusted when necessary.

You have helped shape Armenia's positions at UNFCCC COP and SB sessions. With COP17 now happening in Yerevan, what are we doing well in terms of coordination between Armenia's climate negotiators and its biodiversity negotiators, and where do we need to do better?

— One of the priorities of Armenia's COP17 Presidency is to strengthen synergies among multilateral environmental agreements, recognizing the interlinkages between biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, and pollution. This is an important opportunity to move beyond treating these challenges in isolation and promote greater policy coherence, coordinated implementation, and more effective use of resources. Two agenda items under the CBD COP17 negotiations are particularly relevant to this priority: "Cooperation with international organizations and bodies established under other conventions" and "Biodiversity and climate change." Both provide opportunities to strengthen coordination between climate and biodiversity agendas, including at the national level. For me, some of the key topics to be discussed in this context include strengthening the Joint Liaison Group, which provides a platform for cooperation and information exchange among the conventions. Strengthening its role can help identify common priorities and promote more coordinated approaches to implementation. Next, a supplement to the Voluntary Guidelines for the Design and Effective Implementation of Ecosystem-based Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction. These guidelines help countries use healthy ecosystems to strengthen climate resilience and reduce disaster risks while supporting

biodiversity. The supplement aims to further support the practical application of these approaches. Third, a multilevel road map for enhancing cooperation, policy coherence, and synergies across the Rio Conventions. This road map provides a framework for coordinated action at global, national, and subnational levels through short-, medium-, and long-term measures. Fourth, exploring options for integrated programming and synergistic funding. Countries should have greater opportunities to develop coordinated projects that address biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, and pollution together, rather than preparing separate interventions for each environmental challenge.

Given the growing international push to align climate and biodiversity agendas, do you expect Armenia's next NDC update to integrate biodiversity considerations more explicitly?

— Yes, I expect biodiversity considerations to become increasingly integrated into Armenia's climate policy, building on the progress already made. From a country perspective, one of the most important lessons we have learned is that moving from principles to practice requires moving from parallel processes to more integrated implementation across climate, biodiversity, and land agendas. Armenia has already taken an important step in this direction. Our recently approved NDC 3.0 was developed in alignment with our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), reflecting the importance of ensuring that our climate and biodiversity commitments reinforce one another. While fully respecting the distinct mandates of each convention, it can help reduce administrative and reporting burdens, make better use of limited institutional and technical capacity, and shift the focus from fragmented compliance towards more coherent implementation on the ground. This is closely connected to one of the important issues to be discussed at



CBD COP17 – a multilevel road map for enhancing cooperation, policy coherence and synergies across the Rio conventions. Among other things, the road map highlights the need for joint guidance and practical tools to align NBSAPs, NDCs, National Adaptation Plans, and Land Degradation Neutrality targets. At the national level, this includes using ecological resilience, including the health of freshwater ecosystems, as a lens through which to review and align national strategies and plans. It also promotes mainstreaming nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches into those plans, supported by common indicators and practical tools for conservation, restoration, and sustainable ecosystem management.

What does Armenia hosting COP17 change for your work specifically? What needs to happen at COP17 for your work to become easier or more impactful?

— Hosting COP17 in Yerevan has made biodiversity an even more integral part of my work. As the NDC Partnership In-Country Facilitator for Armenia, I increasingly focus on biodiversity considerations just as much as climate action. For my work to have a lasting impact, a political declaration alone is not enough. It needs to be accompanied by strong, action-oriented decisions under

the formal COP17 negotiations. In my view, these decisions should reflect the Declaration's ambition in several areas: strengthening cooperation among the Rio Conventions through their existing mandates; mobilizing additional and catalytic finance; strengthening whole-of-society implementation arrangements; and improving coordination among science-policy interfaces to support evidence-based decision-making. If COP17 delivers meaningful progress in these areas, it would make this work more impactful by providing a stronger international framework for aligning national priorities, mobilizing partners, and developing integrated projects that deliver benefits for both climate and biodiversity. It would also help countries like Armenia make better use of limited institutional capacity and financial resources, rather than approaching each environmental convention through separate processes. Eventually, what I hope COP17 changes is the way we translate international commitments into action. Success would mean that the synergies discussed in Yerevan lead to better-coordinated national planning, more accessible and complementary financing, and practical investments that simultaneously advance climate action, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable land management. ♦



SUNNY DAYS AHEAD:

Tigran Okhanyan, Founder of EcoVille Holding

Solar energy presents a significant opportunity to individuals and businesses for savings, independence and predictability. We spoke to Tigran Okhanyan, Founder of EcoVille Holding, who told us more about the holistic solutions his company is providing in this area.

TEXT : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : ECOVILLE HOLDING

Please walk us through EcoVille's 11-year journey and how the company has grown to become one of Armenia's leading names in renewable energy.

— EcoVille was founded in 2015, but our roots in energy and infrastructure go much further back through OST Group. From the very beginning, our ambition was not simply to sell solar equipment, but to develop long-term energy solutions and contribute to Armenia's transition toward greater energy independence.

Over the past 11 years, EcoVille has evolved from a solar energy company into a diversified energy holding. Today, we have designed and installed more than 400 MW of solar capacity and implemented over 10,000 energy systems for households, businesses, and large-scale projects.

Our development has also expanded beyond Armenia, with activities in Georgia and Switzerland, while locally we continue to invest in advanced technologies, engineering expertise, energy storage, electricity supply, and innovative energy management solutions. One of our most important achievements is that we have built not just a company, but a complete energy ecosystem. Today, we are able to support our clients throughout almost the entire energy cycle – from project development, investment, generation, and infrastructure to storage, electricity supply, operation, and long-term maintenance.



EcoVille also actively invests in and develops renewable energy projects, combining technical expertise, financial solutions, and long-term strategic vision to create sustainable energy infrastructure for the future.

What is EcoVille's approach when designing a solar solution? How do you tailor a project to each client's specific needs, whether a household or a business?

— There is no universal solar solution. Every client has a different consumption profile, location, technical infrastructure, financial objective and long-term strategy.

That is why our work always begins with analysis. We study the client's electricity consumption, available space, technical conditions and future energy needs. Based on this, our engineers design a system specifically for that project.

For a household, the priority may be reducing monthly electricity costs and gaining greater energy independence. For a business or industrial client, the priorities can be very different – reducing operating costs, improving predictability, increasing energy security or integrating solar generation into a much larger energy-management strategy. We also look beyond the installation itself. A properly designed solar system should remain efficient and reliable for many years. Therefore, equipment quality, engineering, monitoring, maintenance and future scalability are all part of the initial design process.

EcoVille Holding brings together several companies – EcoVille Solar, EcoVille Energy, Synex, and Arega. How does this combined structure allow you to offer clients a more complete, end-to-end energy solution?

— This structure is one of our strongest advantages because today energy challenges cannot always be solved by one technology alone. EcoVille Solar focuses on solar generation. EcoVille Energy works in electricity supply and energy-market

solutions. Synex provides transformer, substation and electrical infrastructure services, while Arega develops and manufactures energy-storage and battery systems in Armenia.

Together, these companies allow us to approach a project as one interconnected energy system rather than as separate products.

For example, a commercial client may need solar generation, a transformer substation, battery storage, electricity supply and long-term monitoring. Instead of coordinating several unrelated contractors, the client can receive these services within one integrated ecosystem.

This also allows us to think strategically. We are not simply asking, "How many solar panels should we install?" We are asking, "What is the most efficient and reliable energy model for this client over the next 10 or 20 years?"

For someone considering solar power for the first time, what would you say are the biggest practical benefits? How does solar energy translate to savings, independence, and reliability?

— The first and most visible benefit is financial. Solar allows households and businesses to produce part of the electricity they consume and therefore reduce their dependence on electricity purchased from the grid. But the value goes beyond savings. Solar gives consumers greater control over their energy. When it is combined with energy-storage systems, this independence becomes even more significant because electricity can be stored and used when it is needed. For businesses, energy costs are also an important part of long-term financial planning. Producing your own electricity can make these costs more predictable and protect the company from some of the uncertainty associated with future energy prices. There is also the question of reliability. A well-designed system using high-quality equipment, professional engineering and continuous monitoring can operate efficiently for decades.

So I would describe the main benefits in three words: savings, independence and predictability.

Looking ahead, what does the future of energy look like, in your opinion, both globally and in Armenia? What role do you expect solar and renewable technologies to play in that future?

— I believe the future of energy will be increasingly decentralized, digital and intelligent.

Globally, we are moving from an energy system dominated by a small number of large producers toward a model where households, businesses and communities can generate, store and intelligently manage their own electricity. Solar energy will be one of the key technologies in this transformation, but solar alone is not the complete answer. The next stage is the integration of renewable generation with battery storage, smart monitoring, artificial intelligence, electric mobility and more flexible electricity markets.

Energy storage will be particularly important because it allows us to use renewable energy when it is actually needed, not only when it is being generated. This is one of the reasons why we invested in developing Arega and local battery-system production. For Armenia, this transformation creates a major opportunity. Expanding renewable-energy generation, developing local technologies and creating smarter energy infrastructure can strengthen the country's energy independence while also supporting economic and technological development. I see EcoVille's role in this future as broader than simply building solar plants. Our ambition is to participate in the creation of a complete energy ecosystem – one that combines generation, storage, infrastructure, intelligent management and reliable energy supply. Ultimately, the transition to renewable energy is not only about changing the way we produce electricity. It is about creating a more independent, resilient and sustainable energy system for the future. ♦

SEEING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES:

ATP's Contribution to Biodiversity

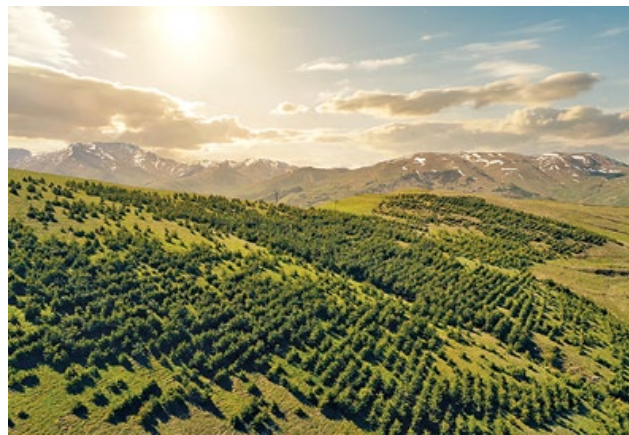
A short drive outside the capital of Armenia, the Armenia Tree Project (ATP) has spent three decades doing in practice what many will be discussing within the Blue and Green Zones of COP17. We spoke to the team at this organization and asked them directly how it connects to the COP17 agenda.

TEXT : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : ATP

One of the many miracles of nature is that a massive, towering tree once started as a tiny seed that you can hold in the palm of your hand. In the right conditions, the seed sprouts and grows, spreading roots and developing a shoot that then turns into a sturdy trunk with branches and leaves, becoming a permanent feature of the landscape for many decades ahead. This same process can also be used symbolically to describe what the Armenia Tree Project (ATP) has experienced. It was founded in 1994 by activist Carolyn Mugar, who was appalled by the widespread deforestation in Armenia that had resulted from the energy crisis in post-independence Armenia. Today, ATP has grown into Armenia's largest reforestation organization, with more than 10 million trees planted, over 1,850 community green spaces established, and



a footprint across all 11 regions of the country. It started, like a seed, as an idea in one person's head and today the organization runs four full-scale nurseries producing more than a million native trees a year, a network of more than 150 household-run backyard nurseries, and two environmental education centers that have reached over 120,000 students and teachers. One of ATP's newest undertakings sits in Pempashen, in the Shirak region, where cold winters and poor soils make tree survival genuinely difficult. The teams there are essentially building a forest from nothing. There is a clear connection between this work and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework that COP17 is reviewing in Yerevan. As the forest matures, it will provide habitat, shelter and feeding grounds for a range of species, while helping prevent soil erosion. In addition, the developing forest is expected to provide climate-regulation, wind-protection and water-regulation functions for the farmland around it, strengthening the resilience of the wider landscape rather than just the site being planted. "In this way, creating a new forest can strengthen the resilience of the wider landscape, not only the area being planted," says Ara Barsam, ATP Executive Director. The right species mix, the right soil preparation, the right long-term maintenance – these lay the foundation for a richer, more resilient ecosystem years and decades down the line. Creating new forest cover on degraded land, improving landscape condition, and making room for biodiversity to return are interconnected goals rather than separate boxes to check. "In terms of quantitative evaluation, we track measurable indicators such as the area where the new forest is being established, the number and diversity of trees planted, and the development of the site over time. However, we would be cautious about presenting these figures as a direct quantitative contribution to Armenia's national biodiversity targets without a nationally agreed methodology for attributing specific outcomes to individual projects," Barsam clarifies, "Our contribution is more appropriately understood as part of the broader national effort to create new forests on degraded land, increase forest cover and strengthen biodiversity and landscape resilience." ➤



One of many important conversations at COP17 is on benefit sharing from genetic resources, and this has also been an important topic for ATP over the years. Forest tree species do not produce seeds reliably every year, and after three decades of growing and planting trees, ATP kept running into years when it simply could not source enough of a given species. They tackled this problem by creating a Seed Storage and Research Center at the organization's John and Artemis Mirak Forestry Nursery in Margahovit, which was already Armenia's largest forestry production site, holding 2.5 to 3 million seedlings at any given time. The new facility stores seeds from forest tree and shrub species over the long term, including species listed in the Armenian Red Book, reducing ATP's dependence on any single year's seed harvest and allowing it to grow a wider range of species for more diverse, mixed forests. "The facility has a direct connection to the objectives of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, particularly its focus on ecosystem restoration, biodiversity conservation and the sustainable management of forests. By preserving seeds of a wider range of forest tree and shrub species over the long term, we can make the production of diverse planting material more reliable, even when seed availability varies from year to year," says Ara Barsam. In practical terms, the benefits are shared across different levels. Armenia benefits from the conservation of native genetic resources, future restoration programs benefit from reliable access to locally appropriate seed, and communities gain from healthier and more resilient forests. "The fact that the facility is being made possible through support from a private

donor also highlights a broader challenge. Infrastructure like this is essential for long-term resilience, but it can be difficult to finance through conventional institutional funding, where projects often need to demonstrate relatively immediate and measurable outputs. Seed storage may not produce a visible result immediately, but its value lies in creating the conditions that can support forest restoration for decades," says Barsam. In Fioletovo, in the Lori region, ATP recently helped establish a community-led governance model for the Hrant Dink Memorial Forest, putting the village itself, rather than a central agency, in charge of protecting it. The logic behind it runs through much of ATP's forestry work. Rather than acquiring land outright, ATP typically signs agreements with communities for 15-20 years, investing in planting, maintenance and protection while a young forest is at its most vulnerable. By the end of the agreement, what remains with the community is not a plantation project but a mature forest, which is an asset that belongs to the place where it was created. Over three decades, this approach has given ATP partners across Armenia accumulated local knowledge about what restoration requires in very different landscapes.

"That changes the relationship. A community is not simply the location of a project designed elsewhere; it becomes a partner," explains Barsam, "And we took that distributed logic one step further with our Backyard Nursery Program (BYN). Instead of producing every tree centrally, we established more than 150 small nurseries run by households. We provide training and technical knowledge while families use their own land to grow trees to ATP standards. We purchase the resulting planting material which helps to financially subsidize our BYN families." There are many advantages to the BYN program. It diversifies production, reduces some of the risks of relying entirely on centralized infrastructure and places tree-growing knowledge inside communities. A household that grows trees for several years acquires skills, a relatively high-value source of income and a very different relationship with restoration. Forestry stops being something that an environmental organization or the state does somewhere else.

"That is where we see a connection with the wider COP17 conversation about local-community leadership. Participation becomes more meaningful when responsibility is accompanied by knowledge, economic incentives and a tangible stake in the outcome," Barsam explains, "ATP's approach creates practical reasons for families to participate as it teaches understanding and creates ownership." This is a scalable and replicable practice. The architecture behind it can be used in other settings – decentralize production, transfer knowledge, create local economic value, build long-term partnerships and leave communities with stronger natural assets. But some aspects of it need to be adapted to local conditions, like the particular incentives, species and institutional arrangements.

COP17 gives ATP the opportunity to promote these learnings and reach bigger audiences in new ways. Beyond the negotiating halls, the organization will be running youth conferences,



a documentary festival, and public education programming during COP17 itself, on top of the 120,000+ students it has already reached. ATP is working with the Asian Development Bank to help advance the conversation through documentary films, biodiversity-focused youth initiatives, Green Talks, PechaKucha-style events and other public formats, creating different doors into what can otherwise be a highly technical discussion. Academia and experts provide essential knowledge, but ATP has tasked itself with helping to translate, localize and democratize that knowledge.

"A COP ultimately succeeds not only through the text negotiated by governments, but through what happens afterwards. International commitments have to become national policies, investments, institutional practices and changes in behavior," says Barsam, "We are the grassroot engagement that helps build the constituency to make those changes possible." The organization is measured when it comes to discussing how COP17 will actually change in its own work. Hosting the conference gives biodiversity unusual visibility in Armenia and opens doors to scientists, governments, businesses and donors passing through Yerevan, but ATP is careful not to assume that visibility automatically becomes funding or lasting public engagement. Laid side by side, ATP's own programs and the items on COP17's negotiating agenda map onto each other almost point for point – ecosystem restoration in Pemzashen, seed-based genetic conservation in Margahovit, community-led governance in Fioletovo, and public engagement built to outlast the conference itself. None of this was designed as a response to COP17; ATP has been doing this work since 1994, planting its first trees years before the Convention on Biological Diversity existed in anything like its current form. But the conference gives them the opportunity to bring one clear message to everyone attending it as well as the general public outside the Blue and Green Zones. "We want people in Armenia, not only accredited delegates, to come away understanding that biodiversity is not an abstract global agenda," Barsam says, "It is about the forest above their village, the trees that cool their street, the water and soil on which their food depends, and the decisions they make about the places they share." ♦

WHAT IF WE WERE NEVER THE CENTER?

In this essay, Inna Hovhannisyan, PR and Special Projects Lead at Rien-à-Porter follows a wool sweater back to the landscape it came from to argue that luxury now lies in knowing where things come from, and that we were never the center of their story.

TEXT : INNA HOVHANNISYAN / PHOTO : RIEN-À-PORTER



Inna Hovhannisyan,
Cultural Manager, MA,
King's College London



We are very good at noticing beautiful things. We are considerably less practiced at noticing everything that had to happen for them to become beautiful things. A coat hangs on a rail, coffee arrives in a cup, a book sits on a table. We encounter the finished object and, quite naturally, behave as though this is where its story begins. It almost never is. At Rien-à-Porter, we spend a perhaps unreasonable amount of time thinking about objects. Not only whether something is beautiful – beauty, after all, is the easy part – but why it deserves to be there. A dress by an Armenian designer, a publication found somewhere far from Armenia, a particular coffee bean, a dessert, a song playing at four in the afternoon. On paper, these things have very little business being discussed in the same paragraph. In life, however, they coexist quite happily. As Rien-à-Porter CEO Manana Grigoryan puts it, “We have always thought of Rien-à-Porter as a universe rather than simply a store. Fashion does not exist separately from the way we drink our coffee, the books we read, the music we listen to, the objects we surround ourselves with or the

conversations we have. Why should it be separated here? For us, the interesting part has always been in bringing these things together and allowing them to speak to one another. Because that is much closer to how we actually experience life.” Categories are useful for shelves and spreadsheets; life is considerably less obedient. Nothing interesting really exists alone. The more we think about this, the more difficult it becomes to look at an object as simply an object. Take a wool sweater. Fashion can tell you who designed it, where it was made, what collection it belongs to and, if necessary, what trousers to wear with it. Nature would begin the story much earlier. Before the sweater, there was a landscape; before the wool, vegetation, water, soil and an animal. Somewhere there was a shepherd, then someone who knew how to turn fibre into material, using knowledge learned from somebody else, who had learned it from somebody before them. There were hands, techniques, transport, imagination and labour; eventually a designer, eventually a shop, eventually us. And even then, the story is nowhere near finished. There will be time and wear, perhaps repair if we care enough, another owner, another purpose, another form. Suddenly, the sweater is no longer just a sweater. It is almost a map. ➤

✓
Rien-à-Porter CEO
Manana Grigoryan



LANDSCAPE → MATERIAL → CRAFT → OBJECT → OWNER → TIME → NEXT LIFE

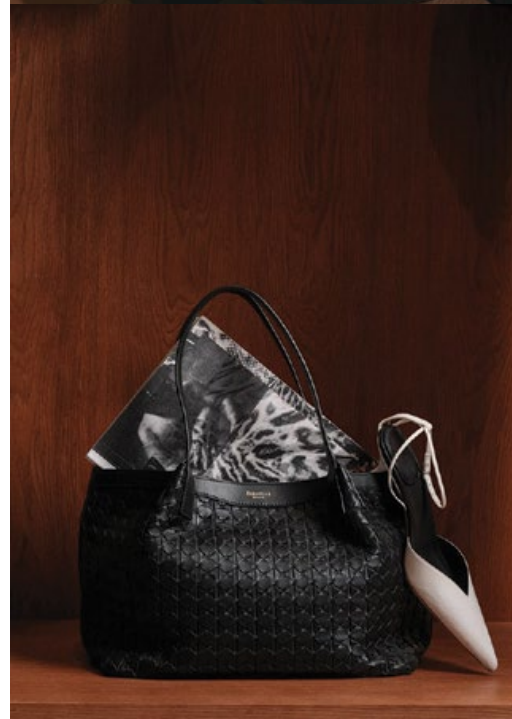
Fashion is, by design, intensely anthropocentric. Everything eventually leads towards the human body: our comfort, our identity, our pleasure, our desire to become someone slightly different by Friday evening.

Nature, meanwhile, tends to receive the supporting role, supplying wool, cotton, leather, silk, pigments, wood, stone and water. We have become remarkably sophisticated at discussing what nature can become for us, and rather less accustomed to asking what we are within it.

This becomes particularly interesting when you look at something made close to home.

Armenian designer Varduhi Torozyan works with materials connected to her native Syunik and with local women whose intricate knitting techniques bring another kind of knowledge into her clothes – knowledge carried through hands, repetition, memory and place.

You can encounter one of her pieces simply as fashion, through silhouette, texture and form, but look a little longer and there is Syunik in it too: its materials, its landscape, the hands of local craftswomen, techniques passed from one person to another, Varduhi's contemporary vocabulary and, eventually, the person who wears it.



← Presentation of MAROM



A garment can carry geography without printing a map on itself.

And once you begin looking at objects this way, even the word local starts to change.

“Local” has spent a long time being treated as the smaller cousin of “global” – charming, authentic, worthy perhaps, but somehow secondary. Global was where sophistication happened; local was what you brought back in your suitcase.

At Rien-à-Porter, we have always been interested in the opposite possibility: **LOCAL IS THE NEW LUXURY.**

Not because something becomes precious simply by being Armenian – geography is not a quality certificate, and patriotism is a poor substitute for taste – but because proximity offers something increasingly rare: the possibility of knowing.

Knowing the maker, the material, the place and enough of the story to understand that an object did not simply materialise beneath flattering retail lighting.

Perhaps that is a more interesting definition of luxury now: not abundance, but intimacy; not necessarily having more, but knowing more about what we choose to have.

A coffee tastes slightly different when you know where the beans came from. An object changes when you know whose hands made it. A book discovered unexpectedly in a small shop feels different from one placed in front of you by an algorithm that has already decided what sort of person you are.

Context does not diminish beauty; it gives beauty somewhere to come from.

And perhaps it also changes the way we understand ownership.

We borrow materials older than we are, inherit knowledge we did not invent and live inside landscapes we did not create. Even the things we confidently call ours are ours for a surprisingly small fraction of their possible existence.

There is something liberating in that. We do not have to be the final destination of everything we touch; sometimes we are simply the person holding it for a while.

This is not exactly how contemporary culture likes to imagine the individual. We are encouraged to occupy the center – of the photograph, the experience, the feed, the personal brand, the universe – while the world quietly becomes our background.

But the world is not a background, and perhaps a garment is not simply an object waiting to belong to us.

Perhaps the future of luxury has less to do with placing ourselves at the center of increasingly beautiful worlds, and more to do with understanding what had to exist before we arrived in them.

After all, we were never really the beginning of the story. ♦

UNLOCKING ARMENIA'S GREEN FUTURE

How Hospitality and Sustainability Are Rewriting the Rules of Tourism

As Yerevan hosts the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17) in October 2026, Armenia steps onto the world stage as a living demonstration of responsible transformation.

PHOTO : GREEN KEY



Courtesy of Armenia Marriott Hotel Yerevan, the first Green Key certified hotel in Armenia

Swiss Hospitality Business Advisory LLC (SHBA), drawing on over 300 years of combined hospitality expertise and working in collaboration with leading international hospitality institutions, including EHL – École Hôtelière de Lausanne, the world's leading hospitality school, has chosen to anchor that commitment through a strategic alliance with "ISSD" Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Development of Communities" NGO, the National Operator of Green Key in Armenia.

"SUSTAINABILITY IS STRONGEST WHEN IT IS BUILT INTO THE BUSINESS, NOT ADDED TO IT."

Irina Mkrtchyan - Cofounder ISSD/Green Key Armenia - issdngo.com/en/

Formalised through a MoU signed in Yerevan in October 2025, the alliance bridges two critical dimensions of sustainable tourism: **operational excellence and environmental certification**. SHBA brings executive education, service culture transformation, operational advisory, and workforce intelligence, helping hotels, investors, and governments build hospitality that meets international standards. ISSD brings deep expertise in sustainability and circular economy, having played a leading role in advancing circularity and sustainable practices in Armenia. Nationally, it represents Green Key – a globally recognised programme present in over 90 countries with 9,000+ certified establishments covering energy management, waste reduction, responsible food sourcing, biodiversity protection, and Corporate Social Responsibility. Both operate with an international dimension and local execution.

BEYOND HOSPITALITY: LEADING THE GREEN ENERGY STORAGE TRANSITION

SHBA holds a unique position at the intersection of hospitality and Armenia's clean energy future. As Official Advisor to South Korean LG Energy Solution, and as the exclusive representative of Leclanché, a Swiss pioneer in e-mobility solutions and clean energy transition advisory, in Armenia and Georgia, SHBA is the essential point of contact for any serious energy storage initiative in the country. LG Energy Solution is the **number one Battery Energy Storage provider in the United States**, a technology leader whose production facility in Poland makes it fully aligned with US and EU standards, and proudly Made in EU. For a government committed to energy independence and a low-carbon future, and for international investors seeking bankable, Western-aligned infrastructure projects, this is the partnership that turns ambition into reality. We all know that energy costs will only increase. By incorporating sustainability from the conceptual stage, with the combined support of SHBA and Green Key, properties will greatly benefit their bottom line. Armenia's solar potential is significant. The expertise and the technology are here.

A COMMITMENT THIRTY-FIVE YEARS IN THE MAKING

Long before sustainability became a boardroom priority, Charles Egli, founder of SHBA, was already part of that con-



versation, as AIESEC President at his university. At a moment like COP17, authenticity matters: the world can quickly distinguish genuine commitment from greenwashing.

"EVERY EXECUTIVE WHO THINKS SUSTAINABILITY COSTS MONEY IS LEAVING MONEY ON THE TABLE!"

Charles Egli - Founder, SHBA - shbadvisorq.net

A FRAMEWORK BUILT FOR IMPACT

Together, SHBA and ISSD/Green Key Armenia are redefining what sustainable hospitality looks like in practice. Through their strategic alliance, hotels and investors are guided through the Green Key certification pathway while management teams are equipped with the tools to sustain it – combining SHBA's advisory depth with ISSD's expertise in sustainability and circular economy. Joint educational initiatives, workshops, awareness campaigns, and training programmes empower hospitality professionals to embed sustainability as a core business value: one that drives guest loyalty, reduces operational costs, and opens doors to internationally conscious travellers. For ISSD and Green Key Armenia, COP17 in Yerevan is not just a backdrop, it is a milestone. As the national operator responsible for expanding Green Key across Armenia's hospitality, food service, and tourism sectors, ISSD is working toward a future where environmental certification becomes the expected standard, not the exception. The goal: a certified Armenia that international travellers and investors can trust. Eight leading properties already carry an active Green Key certification in Armenia: Armenia Marriott Hotel Yerevan, Holiday Inn Yerevan, and The Alexander, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Yerevan, Tsaghkadzor Marriott Hotel, Holiday Inn Express Yerevan, Ramada Hotel & Suites by Wyndham Yerevan, ibis Yerevan center and SunHome Stepanavan Guesthouse. The alliance is designed to significantly broaden that number. As the world convenes in Yerevan, Swiss Hospitality Business Advisory and ISSD/Green Key Armenia stand together as proof that ambition and accountability can share the same roof, and that Armenia is ready to lead. ♦

FROM UNINTENTIONAL CIRCULARITY TO A NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM

One of the many topics interrelated with biodiversity is that of the circular economy, which brings together businesses that replace their linear value chains for models that reduce, reuse, and recycle raw materials and finished products. Silva Mesropyan, the President of the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition, tells us more about what is happening on this front in the country.

TEXT : NAZENIK SAROYAN, NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : IMPACT HUB ARMENIA

Armenia may be more circular than it appears. Across the country, businesses already repair, reuse materials and find new value in what would otherwise become waste, often without calling any of it “circular economy.” But it is an open secret that this is mostly done to save money. So there is the need to develop a system around these businesses – the expertise, connections, policies and incentives that could help such individual practices grow into something larger and more impactful in terms of environmental protection. That is the gap that was being addressed by the EU-funded CirculUP! project, implemented by Impact Hub Yerevan and Environment and Health NGO. Before the project ended, it set up the Armenian Circular Economy Coalition, bringing together experts and practitioners to provide institutional and sustainable solutions to this problem. Silva Mesropyan, a business consultant and the Coalition’s President, refers to the Armenian reality of “unintentional circularity” – companies may already be saving materials, repairing products or finding uses for production waste simply because it makes business sense. The challenge, she argues, is to turn those scattered practices into a more deliberate way of doing business. “Circular economy has two components,” she says, “There is the environmental part, but there is also the economic aspect.” The Coalition is being built with that balance in mind. For small and medium-sized enterprises, it plans to provide access to qualified experts, consultations and mentoring, capacity-building opportunities and international networks. Just as importantly, it aims to bring companies around the



same table when the obstacles lie beyond their own operations, whether in regulation, collection systems or access to incentives, and to represent those shared concerns in dialogue with policymakers.

A company called Bio Oil shows both the opportunity and the limits of acting alone. The company collects used cooking oil from more than 1,300 food establishments across Armenia, filters it and exports it to EU countries as raw material for biodiesel. Its ambition is to take the next step and produce biodiesel in Armenia. Pavel Oganessov says the company had the investment and processes ready more than a year ago, but moved more cautiously because of gaps, not so much in legislation itself as in how existing rules work in practice. That business logic is also reflected in research conducted by Ameria Management Advisory and Modex under Impact Hub Yerevan’s CirculUP! project, which found that circular interventions can create value, support jobs and reduce import dependence. That same piece of research also revealed key barriers that continue to exist, like regulatory gaps and weak coordination.

The Armenian Circular Economy Coalition brings together specialists from business, environmental policy, waste management, agriculture, consulting and civil society. Among its



members are economist Tigran Jrbashyan, waste governance expert Harutyun Alpetyan, ISSD chairman Mkhitar Avetisyan, MAquaponics director Ani Mkrtchyan and other professionals working across different parts of the circular economy. For Silva Mesropyan, the Coalition is also about overcoming the limits of isolated effort. “When several organizations are working separately, at some point they are left on their own,” she says, “One person’s voice is not as easily heard. But when it is the voice of a hundred influential people, it becomes more difficult to ignore.” Beyond that collective voice, the Coalition offers direct, practical capability. Armenia currently has several qualified experts in the Netherlands-based CIRCO methodology, all connected to the Coalition, alongside specialists ready to provide businesses with targeted consulting, mentoring, and access to international best practices. This mix reflects the Coalition’s broader role. Its work spans technical assistance for businesses, policy advocacy, capacity building and public awareness, with the aim of connecting practical business needs with the regulatory and institutional changes required for circular models to grow.

COP17 CBD gives the Coalition a larger platform for that work. With a masterclass on circular design principles and business models, alongside a panel discussion on circular economy in the Green Zone, the Coalition is engaging with the public on these key issues. The Coalition is also preparing to open membership to businesses, NGOs and individual experts. When Pavel learned about the initiative during our conversation, his response was clear. “If we have the opportunity to join, we will probably be among the first to do so,” he says. For Armenia, the next challenge is no longer simply to find examples of circularity. Many already exist. It is to connect them, give businesses the tools and conditions to go further, and turn individual practices into a more circular economy. ♦



YEREVAN'S BLUE BUTTERFLY:

What lies behind the COP17 Brand?

Months before COP17 opened its doors, the residents of Armenia and COP17 delegates from around the world were introduced to the event's official logo and slogan. We spoke to Hovhannes Margaryan, Chief Creative Officer and Partner of Doping Creative Agency, who told us more about the work that went into this brand concept and his expectations for how it will support the success of the event in Yerevan.

TEXT : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : DOPING CREATIVE AGENCY



COP17

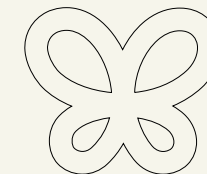
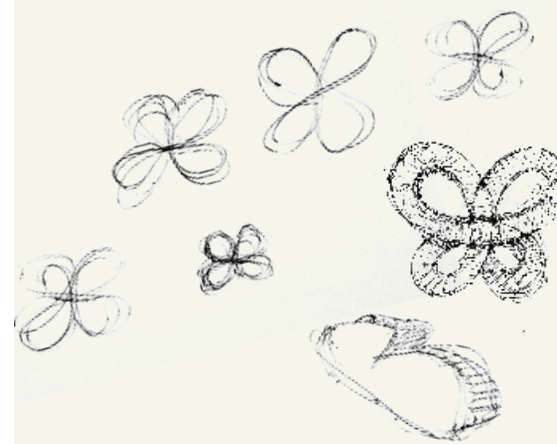
YEREVAN ARMENIA



Hovhannes Margaryan,
Chief Creative Officer
and Partner of Doping
Creative Agency

LOGO VISUAL

Symbol sketches



In December 2025, Armenia unveiled a blue butterfly, *Polyommatus eriwanensis* as the logo of COP17, presenting the result of months of work to a global audience almost a year before the start of the event in Armenia. Why was an unassuming species like that little butterfly chosen to bear the full weight of this global event? "When we were preparing for COP17 in Yerevan, we looked at the past COPs and noticed something interesting. The first seven CBD COPs used the same logo and simply changed the number and host city's name. After that, the hosts began to use the event branding to communicate their local culture or aspects of their own biodiversity – China used a panda, and Colombia featured an endemic flower species," says Hovhannes Margaryan, Chief Creative Office and Partner of Doping Creative Agency, "So we decided to go for a species endemic to our country and we chose the blue butterfly because its Latin name, *Polyommatus eriwanensis*, actually features our capital, the host city of COP17."

The choice is also considered symbolic of regeneration and transformation, given its

life cycle from larva through cocoon to butterfly. The logo's gradient uses 23 distinct colors, each mapped to one of the KMGBF's 23 action targets, and the stages of the life cycle are mapped to clusters of those targets. But to what extent are these nuances of the brand appreciated by the general public or even the average conference attendee? "I believe that there are many well-known brands whose immediate stakeholders are unaware of their brand stories. Do you think every single person who shops at Amazon sees that the company's logo includes a smile that goes from A to Z, symbolizing that they have everything a consumer might need?" Hovhannes explains, "It is not an absolute must for every single person

to understand the brand concept from start to finish. But for those of us that work in this field, it is crucial for a creative and coherent story to exist behind the brand. We also need to make sure we communicate that story for those in the audience who want to dive deep into it, which is why we produced a video, brand book, and other material to tell the world about our blue butterfly."

The main COP17 slogan is "Taking action for nature" which signals that we need urgent global coordination and shared responsibility. The slogan was designed to be flexible, so that it can be adapted for different stakeholder groups, such as "Businesses taking action for nature," or "Women taking action for nature." This adaptability underscores the importance that this involves every aspect of society, rather than simply focusing on policymakers, scientists, or other small groups. "Adaptive slogans help large events like this get greater public coverage," Hovhannes says, "COP17 is targeting a range of stakeholder groups, and it is important for each one of them to be able to use the slogan and own it."

Any brand book should plan for a broad range of usage scenarios, and the team at Doping Creative Agency knew that the devil is in the details when it comes to large events like COP17. The brand guidelines define four tiers (full, standard, simplified, minimalist) for different surfaces. "One might think that, if you develop a brand without of very detailed guidelines, you give full freedom for the people to

use it, but this is not true. In fact, you give them chaos. For example, if someone has a black and white printer and they want to use the COP17 logo for a letter, how is he supposed to use the logo in the way that best meets his own needs? Nobody should have to make decisions about logo placement or usage that will waste their time while also threatening the integrity of the brand,” explains Hovhannes. Indeed, the team behind the COP17 brand worked in close collaboration with a range of official bodies to understand the whole range of scenarios in which the visual identity and other brand elements could be used. “When we thought about vehicles, for example, we realized that there might be differences between smaller cars and vans or buses,” Hovhannes says, “This is not just about preventing the misuse of the logo. It is supposed to make future work more efficient – imagine how many phone calls with questions about brand usage can be avoided if you provide a detailed brand book in advance!”

Nonetheless, it is not possible to foresee every single situation in advance, and Hovhannes has a creative take on the nature of his work. “Have you noticed that ‘branding’ is a noun, but it ends in ‘-ing’, like a verb in the present continuous tense? This is because it is never-ending work. Branding is a constant process, a brand is like a living organism,” he says.

It is clear that this brand package is the result of a close partnership with the key stakeholders involved in the organization of CBD COP17. “In general, you have to go through the stages of developing a brand strategy, conceptualizing the brand design, and delivering on brand promotion,” Hovhannes outlines, “For the brand strategy, for example, we spoke to dozens of field experts, state officials, and other stakeholders – we are not experts in biodiversity or in high-level international negotiations, so we needed to build the brand concept on the right foundation.” The collaborative process that led to the development of the brand involved a core team of more than twenty individuals from Doping Creative Agency. “I think we were lucky to work with the kinds of individuals from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Environment, and the United Nations who respect the work we do and value a good brand. In turn, we valued their feedback and inputs,” Hovhannes recalls, “On several occasions, the Ministry of Environment or another stakeholder provided feedback, telling us how some of our ideas would not translate across cultures or be appreciated by guests with different religions. There were many important insights coming from their expertise and many years of experience of events at this level.”

A key part of the communication campaign for COP17 features several Armenians and the actions that they are taking for nature. For a topic like biodiversity, which might seem abstract to many in the general public, these human stories deliver a crucial message. “Human beings are an important element in the story around biodiversity, because we can harm nature or we can nurture it. We wanted to include people in the campaign who act for nature and thus embody the slogan of the conference. They may be people who work in the field or simply do research in front of a computer, all for the sake of protecting our natural resources. These are the silent heroes, and their stories need to be told,” Hovhannes explains.



As a result of all this work, COP17 visuals across the country have heralded the event months in advance, signaling to residents that something big is happening in Yerevan in October 2026. But to what extent does a brand lead to results on the ground during an event of this kind? Could good branding actually lead to better outcomes in terms of key negotiations, or even to higher attendance or broader media coverage? “When you think about the range of factors that can affect a negotiation, the list is very long. Were the negotiators in a good mood? What was the weather like that day? What had the negotiators had for lunch? After all, human beings are emotional creatures, nothing that we do is purely rational. And that’s where brands come in – they impact on the emotional level,” Hovhannes says, “We are appreciative of the fact that we are not just branding COP, we are branding a very important piece of Armenia not just for the guests visiting us from other countries but also for our own people. This will help our own people appreciate how important this event is to us and to the world.” When it comes to the question of how important branding is to an event’s success, Hovhannes’ response is relative. “While good branding is not a prerequisite for an event to be impactful, there is no doubt in my mind that bad branding negatively impacts the outcome of any event. Indeed, we often appreciate the good by comparing it to the bad, we value beauty because we know what is ugly,” Hovhannes explains, “We don’t want the participants to see beautiful branding elsewhere and compare it to Armenia, and then say that this one is beautiful, the one in Armenia was ugly.” This is part of the philosophy at Doping Creative Agency about how branding is a never-ending process. “I don’t think the impact of our work ends on the last day of COP17. After all, people from all over the world will be in Yerevan, and they will then leave Armenia and return to their own countries,” Hovhannes says, “What will they take back with them from here? The COP17-branded items that they will carry home will allow them to return with a story, something that can spark a conversation with someone in another corner of the world. I love to imagine all the little dialogues about our country that will be happening months after COP17 thanks to the brand that we developed for Armenia!” ♦



The Government
of the Republic
of Armenia



United
Nations

UN
environment
programme



Convention on
Biological Diversity



COP17
YEREVAN ARMENIA

Գործելու հստակ բնութիւն

COMMUNICATING BIODIVERSITY:

HOW ARMENIA IS FRAMING THE COP17 AGENDA AND ITS OWN ROLE

Given that biodiversity is an abstract concept to everyday people, the organizers of COP17 CBD have a clear approach to communicating the event to the general public. We took a closer look at the layers behind the public communications campaign that is accompanying the Conference.

TEXT : NAZARETH SEFERIAN / PHOTO : DOPING CREATIVE AGENCY

This October, Yerevan is the center of international environmental diplomacy as host of COP17, the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Bringing together around 15,000 delegates from over 196 parties, COP17 marks the first major progress check for the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), which set 23 ambitious targets for 2030, including protecting 30 percent of the planet's land and oceans. As Armenia assumes the UN CBD Presidency for the next two years, hosting the summit thrusts a small country with rich ecological importance into a primary diplomatic role. To translate complex UN terminology into a meaningful public conversation, Armenia's communication approach follows a phased narrative arc that moves from personal human stories to national identity, and ultimately to global diplomacy. >

PHASE 1: CHAMPIONS FOR NATURE

Because biodiversity can sound abstract or overly technical, public outreach begins at the human level. Before introducing statistics on species or numbers from international policy targets, the narrative spotlights local individuals who protect, study, and document Armenia's environment in their daily lives. By sharing their work in their own words and authentic personal language, these practitioners demystify environmental care, showing what conservation looks like through concrete, individual action. Some of the faces of this campaign include:

- Berta Martirosyan, wildlife photographer and author of Birds of Armenia
- Karen Antashyan, creator of the Armenian mushroom nomenclature dictionary
- Gohar Mnatsakanyan, pioneer in Lake Sevan conservation and ecotourism
- Narek Ohanyan, member of the Youth Council on Climate Change
- Babken Khachatryan, eco-producer using natural recycled materials

While these featured advocates offer a visible glimpse into local conservation, they represent a far broader network of dedicated individuals whose daily contributions across the country are deeply valued. Grounding the narrative in their stories demonstrates that long before environmental policy reaches international negotiation tables, stewardship is driven by people taking action on the ground.



PHASE 2: "OUR BIG HOME" – SPECIES AND REGIONAL DATA

Phase 2 expands from individual actions to collective identity with a clear message – Armenia is a small country, but a big home. While people typically limit “home” to just their household, town or state, focusing only on the human population, the narrative re-frames the country as a shared living space hosting thousands of species alongside its human inhabitants. Some of the numbers from this campaign include the following statistics about Armenia's biodiversity and natural ecosystem:

- 17,500 insect species
- 370 bird species
- 100 lakes
- 3,800 higher plant species
- 4,580 fungal species
- 230 butterfly species
- 95 mammal species
- 50 fish species
- 7 amphibian species

These figures carry distinct regional significance. Covering just 6.7 percent of the Caucasus landmass, Armenia harbors over 60 percent of the region's total biodiversity. Connecting these metrics to daily life transforms abstract environmental awareness into a matter of shared heritage and national responsibility. >

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COP17
ԵՐԵՎԱՆ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆ
19-30 ՆՈՎԵՄԲԵՐ 2026



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PHASE 3: THE GLOBAL STAGE AND EVENT REALITY

Under the official summit tagline “Taking Action for Nature”, Phase 3 connects local awareness directly to the Conference itself, outlining why Armenia was selected to host and what hinges on these two weeks in Yerevan.

As host and incoming UN CBD President for a two-year term, Armenia will lead global negotiations testing whether nations are honoring their Kunming-Montreal commitments or if new financial mechanisms and collaborative tools are required. This phase brings the global event down to earth for the public, detailing the practical scale of welcoming 20,000 international visitors and highlighting the historic significance of the summit for the host nation.

EVENT ARCHITECTURE: BLUE AND GREEN ZONES

To serve both official multilateral diplomacy and local public participation, COP17 splits its activities between two distinct spaces:

- **Blue Zone:** The official UN-managed venue restricted to accredited state delegations, heads of state, observers, and official press. This is where binding negotiations, high-level ministerial sessions, and bilateral policy agreements take place.
- **Green Zone:** A public platform managed by the host country, designed for civil society, youth groups, academic institutions, businesses, and the general public to host exhibitions, cultural showcases, and open debates.



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AN OPEN INVITATION TO THE PUBLIC

As Armenia steps onto the global stage for the largest international conference in its modern history, COP17 is designed to extend far beyond diplomatic meeting rooms. The Green Zone, hosted at Yerevan's Karen Demirchyan Complex, will be fully open to the public throughout the summit. It offers civil society, students, families, local entrepreneurs, and international guests an open door to engage directly with the event. By connecting high-level UN targets with accessible personal stories and local ecological data, Armenia sets the stage for a summit that is not only diplomatically consequential, but genuinely inclusive. ♦



TWO WEEKS, THREE TREATIES:

A Guide to the COP17 Agenda in Yerevan

COP17 is often described as a single event, but it actually features three overlapping negotiations, several hundred individual agenda items, and close to two weeks of parallel meetings happening at once. We went through the official provisional agendas and the Bureau's scenario note to map out how the conference is actually structured, the various blocks that make up the program, the topics that are likely to dominate the headlines, and the days that deserve special attention.

What the public calls "COP17" is, technically, three meetings running concurrently in Yerevan from October 19 to 30, 2026. The first, and perhaps the one on "center stage" is the seventeenth Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or the COP CBD. The second is the twelfth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CP-MOP-12), and finally there is the sixth meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (NP-MOP-6). Collectively, the CBD Secretariat refers to this as the United Nations Biodiversity Conference. Around 200 Parties are expected, alongside observer states, UN agencies, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, scientists, businesses and civil society groups, all converging on Yerevan for twelve days. There are two preliminary events before the formal agenda even opens. Armenia hosts a Leaders' Summit on October 16, bringing together heads of state and government to set the political tone, followed by a formal opening ceremony on October 18 featuring the outgoing COP16 presidency, the host country and the United Nations. The main sets of negotiations begin the following morning. There are two distinct formats for the negotiations. The plenary sessions and the two working groups are formal, interpreted into all six official UN languages, open to every registered delegate, and livestreamed on UN Web TV. The contact groups, in contrast, are smaller, only in English, closed to recording, and built specifically for the kind of back-and-forth text editing that cannot happen in a room of several hundred people. But these core negotiations are surrounded by several outer layers and communication opportunities consisting of country and organization pavilions, side events at lunchtime and in the evening, workshops, and the large public-facing forums that make a UN biodiversity conference feel, to most visitors, less like a treaty negotiation and more like a festival of competing agendas. The conference runs on a fairly consistent rhythm, with a morning block (10 am–1 pm), an afternoon block (3–6 pm) and an evening block (7.30–10.30 pm), repeated daily. Almost all substantive work is split between two Working



Groups. Working Group I handles the bulk of the CBD's institutional and access-related items such as resource mobilization, the Global Review, Indigenous Peoples' participation, and digital sequence information, together with most of the Nagoya Protocol's agenda. Working Group II takes on the more scientific and technical items like synthetic biology, protected areas, climate change, wildlife management, and marine biodiversity, together with most of the Cartagena Protocol's business on living modified organisms. Items that remain unresolved after discussion are pushed into smaller, more informal contact groups, which do the real line-by-line text negotiation away from the plenary floor. The two weeks break down into four distinct phases. The first (October 19–23) is the opening sprint, where both working groups move through their full agendas, spinning off contact groups on the thorniest items almost immediately, before a joint stocktaking plenary on the evening of 23 October reviews what has (and has not) been agreed. The next phase is a deliberate pause. No formal negotiations are scheduled for Saturday, October 24 or Sunday, October 25. This gives delegations some breathing room and allows space for the host country's own thematic program. The third phase (October 26–28) adds political weight – technical work resumes alongside a ministerial High-Level Segment on October 27 and 28, closing with a second stocktaking plenary. The final phase (October 29 and 30) consists of cleanup and adoption. The conference room papers get a last review before the closing plenary formally adopts whatever decisions have been agreed. Not all of the 50-plus agenda items carry equal weight. A handful stand out, both because of how many supporting documents the Secretariat has prepared for them and because of how early and how often they appear on the contact-group schedule, suggesting that the Parties expect disagreement here and need extra time to discuss these topics. The single most document-heavy issue is digital sequence information on genetic resources. This is mostly about how to operationalize the Cali Fund, the new mechanism for sharing benefits when companies commercially use genetic

data drawn from nature. It comes with three separate addenda covering fund governance, a disbursement methodology, and a contested study on how much companies of different sizes should contribute. It is also the item with the most contact-group sessions scheduled across the first week, a strong indicator that Parties remain far apart on the details.

Close behind is the Global Review of collective progress on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). This is the first formal instance of stocktaking – where does the world stand in terms of its 2030 targets, including the flagship commitment to protect 30 percent of land and sea? It is significant enough that a contact group on it is convened on the very first negotiating evening, October 19, and it resurfaces repeatedly throughout the week. Resource mobilization and financing mechanisms make up a third major battleground. This is a global challenge today – how can we close the global biodiversity financing gap? This is also the one topic with a dedicated day of its own outside the formal negotiations. Aptly called Finance Day, it is organized by partner organizations on October 26, immediately preceded by a Business Day on October 25 aimed at mobilizing private capital.

A smaller cluster of items has been fast-tracked for “full first reading,” a procedural flag the Bureau uses for topics expected to need the most floor time – biodiversity and climate change, biodiversity and health, and the Conference’s own multi-year program of work through the next several COPs. Indigenous Peoples’ role under Article 8(j) of the Convention is another recurring flashpoint, drawing contact-group sessions on nearly every day of the first week.

It is easy to let the main Convention agenda overshadow the two protocols meeting alongside it, but each has its own friction points. Under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, Parties will revisit risk assessment and risk management of living modified organisms. Synthetic biology, formally an agenda item of the main Convention, runs on a closely related track and will be handled by the same working group as most of the Cartagena Protocol’s business, reflecting how tightly biosafety and biotechnology oversight have become linked.

Under the Nagoya Protocol, the headline items are the global multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism and specialized international access and benefit-sharing instruments, both of which intersect directly with the digital sequence information fight happening in parallel under the main Convention. In effect, the Nagoya Protocol track is being asked to settle questions about physical genetic resources while the Convention track settles questions about their digital data, and the two conversations are expected to lean on each other’s outcomes.

For anyone trying to follow the conference without sitting through all twelve days, a handful of dates are worth circling. October 16 features the Leaders’ Summit, setting the political



framing before anyone touches a negotiating text. October 19 is the real opening and, interestingly, the Bureau has already scheduled contact groups that same evening on both the Global Review and Indigenous Peoples’ participation, suggesting that those two issues need every available slot. October 23 is the first checkpoint, featuring a stocktaking plenary that will put on public display the consensus that may or may not exist at the halfway mark. Business Day and Finance Day, mentioned earlier, will be the most visible moments for the private sector and financial institutions, running alongside (but formally outside) the treaty negotiations. October 27 and 28 will see the ministers take over for the High-Level Segment, typically the point at which the most politically sensitive compromises get settled, such as financing figures, DSI contribution rates, and any outstanding texts on the Global Review. The closing plenary on the morning and afternoon of October 30 is where everything negotiated over the previous eleven days is either adopted, watered down, or in rare cases, dropped altogether. Taken together, the agenda tells a fairly clear story. COP17 is being built around one central question – is the world actually keeping its 2022 promises on nature? The two big topics at this event – decisions made on the money to make good on those promises, and the rules for sharing nature’s genetic data fairly – will likely decide whether Yerevan is remembered as a turning point or just another stop on the calendar. ♦



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