

AVANTI

A program to support
the South Caucasian Film Community
on creative, legal and technical levels

Proposed and implemented by



Foundation for professional training
in cinema and audio visual media

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AVANTI – WHAT IT MEANT FOR THE SWISS AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION

When SDC became engaged on a long-term basis in the South Caucasus in the early 2000s, its initial aim was to contribute to recovery from the conflicts that had emerged in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and to revitalize a certain spirit of cooperation among the countries. To that end, several programs were launched, to foster exchanges and capacity buildup for various professions in the three countries. AVANTI was one of those programs, focused on filmmaking. For SDC, supporting filmmakers was an innovative sector of intervention, and we did not have a lot of experience upon which we could rely.



Anne Lugon-Moulin, Deputy
Head of CIS Division, Swiss
Agency for Development and
Cooperation (SDC), Federal
Department of Foreign
Affairs, Bern

Under the supervision of FOCAL, the Swiss Foundation for professional training in cinema and audiovisual media, the project AVANTI was launched in late 2002, and gradually evolved from then on.

The first operational phase consisted in a training cycle for 50 film professionals (scriptwriters, directors, producers, lawyers) from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Training was followed by the awarding of co-financing grants to feature, documentary and short films. The project additionally entailed a legal aspect component, targeting an improved legal background for film development.

At a later stage of the project's life, equipment and technical training were made available in order to put the beneficiaries in a position to deliver films respecting international standards. In the final stages of the project, access to international film markets became an important element. To undertake all those activities, the Independent Filmmakers' Association – South Caucasus (IFA-SC) was created and anchored in Tbilisi.

SDC's long-term goal at the regional level proved to be far too ambitious. However, at the level of the projects themselves, excellent results have been achieved. This newsletter fully portrays the achievements marking AVANTI's history. Through the support it lent the filmmaking community in South Caucasus countries, the SDC has certainly contributed to providing opportunities for talented people, better defining legal and institutional framework conditions, and opening the South Caucasus film industry to international markets.

Anne Lugon-Moulin, Deputy Head of CIS Division, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Bern

FROM COLLEAGUE TO COLLEAGUE

As a film professional, you are often invited to talk and transmit your know-how and craft to younger filmmakers. But for those involved in AVANTI and IFA-SC, the challenge set with SDC was of another nature: to help revitalize filmmaking in South Caucasus. And by doing so, to contribute to the reinforcement of social cohesion and sustainable transnational cooperation in the region. Some hard facts were against us: the remains of Soviet times, strong and sometimes opposite national interests, no more production flow, no more distribution, hardly any film community still alive, and the technical tools' state of disrepair.

AVANTI and IFA-SC – The Cast in Alphabetical Order

Abdullayev Teymur
Azerbaijan

Abdullayeva Alina
Azerbaijan

Abovyan Vartan
Armenia

Abrahamyan Armine
Armenia

Abroyan Sirakan
Armenia

Adamia Levan
Georgia

Agazade Mirsadig
Azerbaijan

Agthe Pierre
Switzerland

Ahmadov Fariz
Azerbaijan

Akbarov Farhad
Azerbaijan

Akimidze Jarji
Georgia

Aliev Nasimi
Azerbaijan

Aliyev Abbas
Azerbaijan

Aliyev Shamil
Azerbaijan

Allahverdyan Zara
Armenia

Amberg Lorenzo
Switzerland



*Denis Rabaglia, film director,
AVANTI Program Designer*



*Pierre Agthe, Director of FOCAL,
AVANTI Program Leader*

Our proposal was very straightforward: let us update our South Caucasian colleagues to the latest European standards, let us give a push to production by co-funding some films and, finally, let us support them in getting organized to promote their own interests. Ultimately, these three “let us” have taken 10 years, from the initial mission to develop the AVANTI concept in 2002... until the publication of this fifth and final newsletter in 2011.

A legitimate question therefore is: what traces have AVANTI and IFA-SC left on the Georgian, Armenian and Azeri production and filmmakers' experience? The first point is that today, unlike 10 years ago, films are being made in the region. A critical mass has not yet been achieved, but there is the beginning of a steady production flow. More importantly, there is now a critical mass of independent professionals who know what needs to be done and are working on it, making advances within delicate political contexts. Most of them have been involved in AVANTI or IFA-SC at some point, and those who have not most probably work with someone who has. The professionals that FOCAL and IFA-SC trained are no longer passive artists complaining about the absence of state funding, but active filmmakers promoting their projects with new standards, equipped with the relevant tools and skills to confront the international market.

More concretely, the outcome of this initiative can be summarized as follows:

- 1. Recognition of independent production in 2 out of the 3 countries**
Azerbaijan and Georgia have restructured the public support to filmmaking by acknowledging the concept of independent production in their cultural policies. Georgia in particular now has a very pro-active and respected National Cinema Center, with AVANTI participant and former IFA-SC executive director Tako Tatishvili at the helm.

2. Implemented know-how on developing film projects with international standards

Project and script development over several drafts, preparation of a production package able to convince financiers and co-producers, and an active role by the producer within the creative process are now common professional practices in all three film communities.

3. Connection between the regional and the international scene

South Caucasian filmmakers are traveling the world, going to festivals, winning **Awards**, applying for specific fellowships, meeting their Western colleagues and rendering the word "coproduction" tangible. Networking is key in this industry, and we have seen a lot of active participants to AVANTI and IFA-SC building up networks of their own. With regard to film production, Europe used to be far away: now it is right next door.

4. Awareness of legal aspects in film production

In filmmaking, nothing can be achieved without proper contractual relationships. One of the unique aspects of AVANTI and IFA-SC was the active participation of lawyers in the training process. 10 years ago, legal aspects went unheeded by the regional film communities; today they belong to their normal practice.

5. Implemented use of direct sound in 2 out of 3 countries

The absence of direct sound was the most crucial technical aspect to be addressed by the initiative. Today's audiences demand direct sound. This technique is now mastered in Georgia and Azerbaijan, thus allowing international circulation of films shot in the region.

6. 14 films completed

Out of the 27 projects developed within the AVANTI Updating Program, 5 feature films, 6 short films and 3 documentaries, as well as 3 Legal projects, were made. (See relevant sections for more details)

The scope of AVANTI and IFA-SC, due to both its nature and magnitude - as well as to its financial costs of more than 3 Mio Euro covered by SDC - is most unique. As far as we know, no other initiative of such importance has been implemented to support filmmakers in emerging countries. Ultimately, the traces left are tools, networks and a fighting spirit for a large number of filmmakers, allowing them to contribute to the cultural life and social cohesion of their respective countries.

All this has been achieved through a "colleague to colleague" approach. No lessons were given. We updated those film professionals willing to carry out the standards and values in which we ourselves believe and which we apply in our everyday professional practice. We tried to make our South Caucasian colleagues stronger and in return, they made us richer.

*Denis Rabaglia, film director, AVANTI Program Designer
Pierre Agthe, Director of FOCAL, AVANTI Program Leader*

Amirah Kamal Elmari
Azerbaijan

Anjaparidze Nino
Georgia

Arakelyan Arsen
Armenia

Arakelyan Anahit
Armenia

Arakelyan Damien
Armenia

Arsenishvili Vano
Georgia

Arshakyan Karen
Armenia

Asatiani Tina
Georgia

Asatiani Liana
Georgia

Aslibekyan Anush
Armenia

Avetyants Natalya
Armenia

Azizova Mehriban
Azerbaijan

Bagaturia Irakli
Georgia

Bagirzadeh Nargiz
Azerbaijan

Bashyan Paruir
Armenia

Basilaya Lika
Georgia

Beknazarov Genadi
Armenia

Bektashi Fikrin
Azerbaijan

Benke † Dagmar
Germany

Berger Jacob
Switzerland

AVANTI IN SHORT – HOW IT ALL BEGAN



Berishvili Tornike
Georgia

Bernier Ivan
Canada

Berthoud Jeanne
Switzerland

Bideau Nicolas
Switzerland

Bidou Jacques
France

Blaney Martin
Great Britain

Busidan Eric
France

Bziava Tornike
Georgia

Cafarov Natiq
Azerbaijan

Cafarova Gunel
Azerbaijan

Castera Gilles
France

Cavadzadeh Huseyn
Azerbaijan

Cherkezashvili Tamka
Georgia

Cheterian Vicken
Switzerland

Chieffo Vincent H.
USA

Chkheidze Gaga
Georgia

Chkhonia Rusudan
Georgia

Chknavoryan Armen
Armenia

Chlaidze Konstantin
Georgia

Comé Joëlle
Switzerland

During the years following upon the collapse of the Soviet Regime, along with that of its Studio system in all the former republics, film communities from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia found it difficult – if not to a certain extent impossible – to maintain the film production output and grandeur of Soviet times.

During the Soviet period, despite stiff censorship, cinema had played an important role in planting small seeds of civil society, thus preparing the South Caucasian countries for independence. After some 10 years of independence, South Caucasian civil society remained very weak. Strengthening filmmakers as a target group was therefore identified as a useful means to improve transparency, and to give a voice to independent and free opinion, to initiative and engagement in dialogue as a counterpole to political control.

This is where the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) and FOCAL (Foundation for professional training in cinema and audio-visual media) stepped in. After a long and careful exploratory phase, a single program addressing a unique combination of creative, legal and technical issues, tailored by European professionals for South Caucasian professionals was launched. Implemented by FOCAL and fully funded by SDC, this ambitious program, called AVANTI, entailed three steps:

- an **Updating Program** to update local skills to European standards,
- a **Co-Funding Initiative** to initiate a production process through the co-funding of films,
- a **Regional Scheme** to lay the groundwork for providing technical equipment on a sustainable basis.

For the SDC, AVANTI was part of its good governance promotion policy in the region. The challenge was to prove fruitful in terms of fulfilling one of the SDC's main objectives in the region: contributing to the definition of new sociocultural values intended to reinforce the social cohesion of South Caucasian society.

STEP I – THE UPDATING PROGRAM



Cross-Najafi Rowena
USA

Darchiashvili David
Georgia

Davituliani Elene
Georgia

Demetradze Irina
Georgia

Demetrashvili Goga
Georgia

Dostalizade Leyla
Azerbaijan

Downs Clare
England

Dürst Markus
Switzerland

Dziapshipa Anna
Georgia

Effenberger Julius
Switzerland

Eidenbenz Florian
Switzerland

Farajev Jamil
Azerbaijan

Farges Joël
France

Friedmann Julian
Great Britain

Gabashvili Giorgi
Georgia

Gachechiladze George
Georgia

Galdavadze Ketevan
Georgia

Galstyan Vigen
Armenia

Galstyan Hovhannes
Armenia

Gamrekeli Nino
Georgia

The Updating Program offered some 50 film professionals and lawyers (selected among 132 candidates) an opportunity to update their know-how about the environment of independent production and international standards of filmmaking in the 21st century, without compromising their creative visions.

From July 2003 to April 2004, 4 trans-national 10-day sessions were organized in Tbilisi, plus 1 national 4-day legal forum in each country.

The Development Workshop for directors and producers enabled the development of 27 projects (12 feature films, 9 short films, 6 documentaries), from the original concept to the final production package. During the sessions, mentors and high-level consultants from European and C.I.S. countries assisted the participants in properly developing their projects in terms of concept, content, format, financing and distribution.

The Legal Workshop for lawyers addressed the areas of law that are most relevant to the film business in a market economy:

- Laws: Intellectual property laws, with a focus on copyright/authors' rights.
- Contracts: Legal aspects of financing and commercial exploitation of films.
- Policies: Laws and policies aimed at maintaining and promoting cultural diversity in the audio-visual sector.

All in all, the Updating Program provided 54 training days over 2003 and 2004, coming to a total of slightly over 2'000 training days/participants which were organized.

The Updating Program Mentors:

Feature Films: Dagmar Benke †, Krzysztof Zanussi, Thomas Schlesinger

Short Films: Antoine Jaccoud

Documentary Films: Denis Gheerbrant

Producers' Group: Martin Hagemann

Lawyers' Group: Christophe Germann

Program Coordinator: Joëlle Comé

STEP II – THE CO-FUNDING INITIATIVE



Gaon Igor
France

Garaveliyeva Jamila
Azerbaijan

Gasanov Rasim
Azerbaijan

Gasparyan Arsen
Armenia

Gasparyan Hasmik
Armenia

Gegia Alex
Georgia

Germann Christophe
Switzerland

Gevorgyan Lusine
Armenia

Ghahramanyan Liana
Armenia

Gheerbrant Denis
France

Giorgobiani Besarion
Georgia

Gisler Marcel
Switzerland

Glonti Leval
Georgia

Gloor Luciano
Germany

Glurjidze Rusudan
Georgia

Grigoryan Areg
Armenia

Grigoryan Mikael
Armenia

Gujabidze Ketevan
Georgia

Gulbiani Mari
Georgia

The assumption was that to just transmit know-how and then “leave the region” would only create frustration, and that something was needed to link the “theory” and “practice”. The purpose of the grants was thus to shrink the gap between training and production.

FOCAL and SDC also hoped that preliminary funding for some of the films developed would kickstart production, resulting in the production of new films in environments where almost nothing was being produced at the time (and certainly nothing in terms of “independent film production” as we mean it).

Although not offering any guarantee that the production of the films would be brought to completion, the grants represented a serious push in the right direction and encourage other partners, like Studios and Ministries of Culture, to take up a position in favour of “independent film production”.

Between April and July 2004, 15 film projects and 3 legal projects were selected by International Juries and granted funding. Altogether, it was an investment of US\$ 450,000.

Feature films

In each country, 2 feature films out of 4 projects were granted the sum of US\$ 50,000 each.

5 feature films (4 with grants and 1 without) were produced. By August 2011, 2 of these are still in post-production.

Short films

1 film project from Armenia, 1 from Azerbaijan and 4 from Georgia were awarded the sum of US\$ 10,000 each.

All 6 short films were completed.

Documentaries

For each country, 1 documentary film out of 2 projects was awarded the sum of US\$ 20,000.

All 3 documentary films were completed.

Legal Projects

In each country, the sum of US\$ 10,000 was granted for interesting projects developed by lawyers.

3 of the 4 grant-winning legal projects were completed.

SHORT FILMS

Gulmaliyev Ogtay
Azerbaijan

Gurchiani Tamuna
Georgia

Gutman Alexandre
Russia

Gvatua Nino
Georgia

Gvindadze Nathalie
Georgia

Hagemann Martin
Germany

Hakobyan Hrant
Armenia

Harris Andrea
USA

Harutunyan Arzuman
Armenia

Havsepyan Sarik
Armenia

"Curfew Hour" by **Levan Adamia, Georgia**

Synopsis

In a city subjected to curfew by the occupying army, a group of men secretly prepare a highly important mission.

Awards

Ekaterinburg International Film Festival, Russia – Grand Prix

Credits

Writers: Irakli Solomanashvili & Levan Adamia

Director: Levan Adamia

Director of photography: Kaha Bukhrashvili

Additional filming : Mamuka Nodia

Art directors: Beno Chichiashvili, Nata Peradze, Nino Namicheishvili

Sound: Gia Javakhishvili, Levan Kikvidze

Editor: Levan Adamia

Music: Nika Machaidze

Production manager: Zviad Alkhanaidze

Producer: Levan Adamia

Cast: Beso Solomanashvili, Irakli Berdzenishvili, Davit Roinishvili, Davit Dolidze, Davit Gabichvadze, Sopho Gorgadze, Gitosha Khutsishvili, Nino Gachechiladze, Nika Voroshilov



"Try Not To Breathe" by **Alina Abdullayeva, Azerbaijan**

Synopsis

A unique poetic encounter between a man urgently in need of medicine and a girl just leaving her birthday party.

Awards

National Cinema premium of Azerbaijan "Gold Lamp" 2006 – Best Début

6th International Audiovisual Festival 2006, Azerbaijan – Best Producer

Credits

Writer & director: Alina Abdullayeva

Director of photography: Rovshan Kuliyeu

Art directors: Mustafa Mustafayev, Rashad Alekberov

Editor: Samir Kerimoglu

Sound: Teymur Abdullayev, Tariel Qasanzadeh

Music: Ali Qasanzadeh, Tora Agabekhova

Production manager: Ali Isa Jabbarov

Producer: Aynur Mustafayeva

Cast: Fakhreddin Manafov & Delyara Kazimova



Alina Abdullayeva, film director and producer, Azerbaijan

What impact did receiving an AVANTI grant have on your career? – *It was simply the most important thing in my career, as I was very young. It was the motivation boost. Through AVANTI, I confirmed my motivation to make a living in this film world. Currently, I am working on a film project about an old woman on a mission to save the world from loneliness. A professional matchmaker is the last hope for women in a remote village to bring back men to their place. The project received an award at "Pitch Doc", a section of the Tbilisi International Film Festival. Otherwise, I am casting for commercials and have my own production company.*

Hernandez Stephenie
Switzerland

Herren Urs
Switzerland

Hoganesyan Susanna
Armenia

Hovhannisyán Hasmik
Armenia

Hovnisyan Susanna
Armenia

Huseynov Elmari
Azerbaijan

Iashvili Levan
Georgia

Ibraimbekov Rustam
Azerbaijan

Iosseliani Otar
Georgia

Isayeva Seriyekhanim
Azerbaijan

Rusudan Pirveli, film director and producer, Georgia

What impact did receiving an AVANTI grant have on your career? – I got to know what the different production steps are; I received knowledge about financing, the functions of a sales agent. Following my short film, my first feature film "Susa" could be realized due to all this knowhow and the experience of AVANTI. "Susa" had a good career – the film was shown at the best festivals around the world (Cannes Market, Berlinale, Rotterdam to name just a few) and received 5 prizes. Currently, I am working on new feature film project, which I presented at Cannes 2011, in the "Cinéma du monde" sector.

"The First Word Is Missing" by Giorgi Tsikharishvili & Levan Lagazidze, Georgia

Synopsis

A young man is living with his grandmother when his mother returns from a long journey abroad.

Levan Lagazidze

Born in Georgia on August 21st, 1982, Levan Lagazidze was a member of the short film group throughout the AVANTI Program. On April 27th, 2004, he died tragically on Rustaveli Street, just a few hours after being awarded one of the AVANTI short film grants for his script "The First Word is Missing".

Credits

Writer: Levan Lagazidze

Director: Giorgi Tsikharishvili

Director of photography: Giorgi Navrozashvili, Guram Navrozashvili

Sound: Samir Kerimoglu, Irakli Ivanishvili, Paata Godziashvili

Music: Nika Machaidze

Producers: Lela Mosemghvdlishvili, Irakli Bagaturia

Cast: Tato Kotetishvili, Nino Kasradze, Lia Kapanadze



"The Window" by Rusudan Pirveli, Georgia

Synopsis

A woman accepts to marry a man. Yet the carefree exuberance of their first encounter soon turns into a domestic nightmare.

Awards

Tbilisi International Film Festival 2005 – Best Georgian Short Film, Special Prize

Isfahan International Short Film Festival 2005 – Honorary Diploma

Credits

Writer & director: Rusudan Pirveli

Director of photography: Mirian Shengelaia

Art directors: Vazha Jalaghania

Editor: Samir Kerimoglu

Sound: Madona Tevzadze

Editor: Rusudan Pirveli

Production manager: Zviad Alkhanaidze

Producer: Rusudan Pirveli

Cast: Barbara Dvalishvili, Beso Solomanashvili



Isgandarov Parviz
Azerbaijan

Ismayilov Rasim
Azerbaijan

Jabbarov Ali Isa
Azerbaijan

Jaccoud Antoine
Switzerland

Jaeger Niculin
Georgia

Janelidze Dato
Georgia

Janjgava Vasil
Georgia

Janjgava Irma
Georgia

David Matevossian, film director
and producer, Armenia

What impact did receiving an AVANTI grant have on your career? – A very positive one. It was a good chance to gain more professional knowledge especially in film production, to multiply capacity. And too, to share ideas, to have the possibility of criticizing and being criticized. In the last 2 years, I directed and produced one documentary film and was involved as co-producer in a second one.

Currently, I am working on a feature film project, for which I had won a DBA award at the Golden Apricot festival in 2008. I am the co-writer, director and producer of the film.

What remains of the AVANTI experience for you? – Good memories, professional skills and self-confidence. I learnt to deal with standards, to do things in a proper way. Now I have the wish to move more and more into the direction of being a film producer.

“The Enemies” by David Matevossian, Armenia

Synopsis

A magnificent landscape of hills and valleys whose tranquillity is troubled by two communities engaged in relentless conflict with each other.

Credits

Writer & director: David Matevossian
Upon an idea by Hrant Matevossian
Based on the story “The Enemies” by Vsevolod Garshin
Director of photography: Ashot Mkrtchian
Art director: Arthur Sargsian
Sound: Genady Beknazarov & Karen Arshakyan
Music: Shaghik Matevossian & Vahagn Papaian
Production manager: Ashot Mkhitarian
Producer: David Matevossian
Cast: Ashot Adamian, Edgar Minassian, Ani Matevossian, Ashot Mkhitarian, Guy Ohanian, Arno Oganyan, Haik Ayvazian, Robert Shamiryan, Rafayel Yegorian



“Sergo the Rogue” by Irakli Paniashvili, Georgia

Synopsis

A short story from the life of a refugee family from Abkhazia.

Credits

Writer & director: Irakli Paniashvili
Director of photography: Natela Grigalashvili
Art director: Teona Kavelashvili
Sound: Nikoloz Paniashvili, Vakhtang Jugeli
Editing: Irakli Paniashvili
Production manager: David Nikoladze
Producer: Irakli Paniashvili
Cast: Irakli Bulia, Revaz Chikovani, Bocho Kharchilava, Liana Bakhbaia, Nugzar Gvilava, Giorgi (Gela) Revazishvili

The DVD “Short film Collection from South Caucasus” was produced in 2008 by FOCAL and included 5 of the 6 films in their original languages, with English and Russian subtitles. It featured a booklet in English and Russian presenting each film and each filmmaker, including their filmographies, prizes and credits. Additional information includes a brief description of the AVANTI program. 1’000 copies of the DVD were produced and distributed among the filmmakers and sent to a selection of a hundred festivals specialized in short films all over the world.



FEATURE FILMS

5 feature films were produced – 3 with AVANTI grants, 2 without.

“Bonded Parallels” by Hovhannes Galstyan, Armenia

Japiashvili Nino
Georgia

Javadzade Huseyn
Azerbaijan

Javakhishvili Nikoloz
Georgia

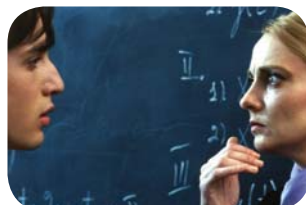
Jendreyko Vadim
Germany

Kacharava Vladimer
Georgia

Kajrishvili Tinatin
Georgia

Kamina Pascal
France

Karapetyan Melik
Armenia



Synopsis

Norway, World War II. Hanna, whose husband Henrik participates in the resistance movement, gives temporary asylum to a prisoner of war, Arakel, by hiding him in her house in northern Norway. The presence of this stranger changes Hanna's life, and she starts writing about her mixed feelings in her diary...

USSR, Armenia, 1988. Laura, 42, a single and fiercely independent math-teacher, lives a quiet and isolated life in Yerevan. It seems that nothing can change her rigidly ordered daily routine until she receives the diary of her mother, who died while giving birth to her. As Laura learns about her parents' story for the first time - a love story of desperation, loss and primal passion - she begins to experience a parallel story of forbidden love in her own life.

Festivals & Awards (selection)

World premiere at the 31st Moscow International Film Festival – Perspectives Competition 2009

European premiere at the 39th edition of International Film Festival Rotterdam 2010 – Bright Feature Program

North American premiere at the Reni Awards competition of 43rd Houston WorldFest -

Best Dramatic Film Award 2010

The film was included in the list of Best CIS Countries Films 2009 by the distribution company Sowexportfilm in Moscow.

Credits

Writers: Hovhannes Galstyan, Marine Zakaryan, Thomas Schlesinger

Script consultant: Krzysztof Zanussi

Director: Hovhannes Galstyan

Director of photography: Ruben Gasparyan

Music: Vahagn Hayrapetyan and Katuner Band

Sound Director: Garen Tsaturyan

Art directors: Armen Ghazaryan, Runar Jonsen

Costumes and make-up: Madlen Khachatryan

Producers: Hovhannes Galstyan, Gevorg Gevorgyan, Trond Brede Andersen, Mona Steffensen, Olivier Oursel

Production: Parallels Film production (Armenia), Armenian National Cinema Centre, Original Film AS (Norway), Quasar Pictures (France)

In association with: Hubert Bals Foundation – Netherlands, Ministry of Culture of Republic of Armenia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway, Film Camp (Norway), Norwegian Film Institute.

2009, 35mm, 89 minutes, format 1:1,85, Dolby SR

Hovhannes Galstyan, film director
and producer, Armenia

What impact did receiving an AVANTI grant have on your career? – First of all, money.

It is incredibly important to get more money and to get the financing going. In this way, the AVANTI grant helped a lot. The development of the film project was crucial: due to the quality of the production package it was more interesting for other investors. Also, the fact that there was already the AVANTI grant money helped.

Personally, I got a higher qualification. More know-how in script and financing matters. The more professional you are, the more successful you are. With my new know-how I have become more convincing when talking to possible investors.

What remains of the AVANTI experience for you? – My film!

Without AVANTI there would be no such film! On a personal level: AVANTI made me believe in my strengths and my possibilities.

"40th Door" by Elchin Musaoglu, Azerbaijan

Karimov Gunduz
Azerbaijan

Kartsivadze Eka
Georgia

Kassouny Vrej
Armenia

Kavtaradze Irma
Georgia

Kbeyan Harut
Armenia

Keil Klaus
Germany

Kerimov Teymur
Azerbaijan

Khachaturyan Ruben
Armenia



Synopsis

Rustam is a resourceful lad who, despite his poverty, seems to enjoy a somewhat idyllic life until news arrives of his father's death. The funeral forces responsibility on the poor kid, who resolves to find a job in nearby Baku. That decision entails passing through the metaphoric 40th door, despite his mother's wishes to the contrary. Rustam is young enough to still be optimistic, yet he's easily fooled when shady friends such as neighborhood hustler Edik enlist him in their petty cons. Rustam's initial goal is simply to earn enough so they won't have to sell the valuable old rug that has been in their family for generations, but once in the city, he stumbles across a drum band and begins to entertain fantasies of his own future as a musician. «Variety», Peter Debruge, Karlovy Vary 2009

Festivals & Awards (selection)

Houston International Film Festival (USA) 2009 – Gold Reni Award
44th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2009 (Czech Republic)
11th Baku IFF "East-West" (Azerbaijan) 2009 – Best Début Award
Pusan International Film Festival 2009 (South Korea)
Ghent International Film Festival 2009 (Belgium)
XIV International TV Festival Bar Montenegro 2009:
Award for Best Photography – Abdulrahim Besharat
Award for Best Directing – Elchin Musaoglu, Silver Olive
Sao Paulo International Film Festival 2009 (Brazil)
Cottbus International Film Festival 2009 (Germany):
International Film Guide Inspiration Award,
Prize of the Ecumenical Jury with a Special Mention
Tiburon International Film Festival 2010 (USA) – Federico Fellini Award

Credits

Writer & director: Elchin Musaoglu
Director of photography: Abdulrahim Besharat
Composer: N. Faig
Sound: Masoud Behnam
Art director: Elkhan Nabiyev
Editor: Kave Imany
Costumes: Turkan Siyasat Qizi
Producers: Khagani Savalan, Elchin Musaoglu
Cast: Hasan Safarov, Rovshan Agayev, Ghuler Nabiyeva
A Ritm Prod. production, presented with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan Republic

2008, 35mm, 82 minutes, format 1:1,85, Dolby SR

Ali Isa Jabbarov, producer,
Azerbaijan

What are the main changes in the audio-visual field in your country since AVANTI? –

There's the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers. New film companies have been founded by the young filmmakers. An awareness of what a "Western standard" quality screenplay has been aroused. And of how to write such a quality screenplay. We got know-how about how to talk to investors from the Western countries. How to pitch a project and how to get money in the Western countries.

Have the AVANTI and IFA-SC projects made a relevant contribution to the film production revival process? –

Yes. They made us – the young filmmakers – believe in our strength and made us active. We stopped waiting for orders from "above" and began to get moving ourselves.

"Buta" by Ilgar Najaf, Azerbaijan

Khakimov Aleksander
Azerbaijan

Khalapyan Pirusa
Armenia

Khodokyan Karine
Armenia

Khopperska Sophie
Georgia



Rasim Gasanov, producer,
Azerbaijan

In what way do you feel your film community works better now than before AVANTI started? – Till AVANTI, we knew how to make Soviet films, with little concern for the audience. Now there are producers, the relationship between filmmakers has become more professional. There are more movies and funding sources, although still not enough. Before AVANTI, Soviet filmmakers had the following idea of the European film industry: the producer brings a suitcase of money (and it does not matter where he got the money from), hands it over to the director, asking him to shoot his film as he likes. The producer then accepts the film with gratitude and gives the director another suitcase full of money. Unfortunately, this idea is still existent in the heads of some directors, even after AVANTI.

Have the AVANTI and IFA-SC projects made a relevant contribution to the film production revival process? Yes, due to AVANTI cinema in the South Caucasus has taken a huge step forward and the programme will remain in the history of cinema in the region as a very important event – for which we are very grateful.

Synopsis

The film is a tale-myth about a great love. Buta, the main character, is a boy who is lucky to have a tutor, a wise old man advising him on every step he takes. The tutor sells soap and dreams of restoring an old mill. Buta has a dream of his own: he wants to create a big pattern on the top of the mountain by using stones. This pattern would be seen and admired by birds and people in planes. But envious village boys prevent him from making his dream come true. They have confrontations every now and then.

A representative of a soap company comes to the village to promote his products. Since he falls in love with Gyoncha, a local girl, he decides to stay in the village. He tries to present his products to the villagers, but they prefer the soap made by the old man.

Multiple storylines cross each other in this film and come to an end at the same time – the pattern on the mountain is created and the wise old man falls into an eternal sleep after having restored his mill. His soul flies high over the village, watching all that is happening there.

Completed in 2011, the film is presently being presented at festivals.

Credits

Writer: Ilgar Najaf, with the participation of Ramiz Fataliyev

Director: Ilgar Najaf

Director of photography: Georgi Beridze

Music: Javanshir Guliyev

Art director: Aziz Mamedov

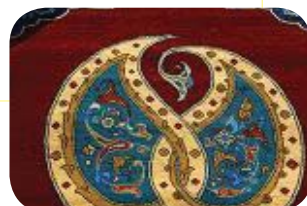
Producers: Khamis Muradov, Ilgar Najaf

Cast: Rafiq Guliyev, Tofiq Aliyev, Elnur Karimov, Laman Nabiyeva, Arzu Isayeva,

Mirmohsin Mirzayev, Baxadur Safiyev, Kimyahanum Dashdiyeva, Suleyman Najafov

Production: Film studio "Buta Film", Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Film studio "Azerbaijanfilm"

2011, 35mm, 98 minutes, format 1:1,85, Dolby Digital



"Keep smiling" by Rusudan Chkonia, Georgia

Khugashvili Edik
Georgia

Khvedelidze Ekaterine
Georgia

Khvedelidze Beso
Georgia

Khzmalyan Tigran
Armenia

Kiknavelidze Tamara
Georgia

Kipshidze Maia
Great Britain

Kirvalidze Nato
Georgia

Kobaladze Vakhtang
Georgia

Kocharyan Shushan
Armenia

Kolar Cedomir
France



Synopsis

It's a beauty contest babe, so keep on smiling! 10 women, 7 of whom belong to the poorest population layer, are desperately trying to win a beauty contest for mothers with more than 3 children. The winner will obtain an apartment and \$25,000.

When achieving an object is driven by a strong self-denying desire, and you are ready to do anything that serves the purpose, you may suddenly realize that, you have to walk on the sharpest edge of jeopardy, where it is so easy to lose your dignity and self-esteem... It is only then that you question yourself: was it worthwhile?

Credits

Writer & director: Rusudan Chkonia

Director of Photography: Konstantine Mindia Esadze

Art directors: Mamuka Esadze, Sopo Bazgadze

Set designers: Dima Arsanis, Giga Iakobashvili

Editing: Jean Pierre Block, Rusudan Chkonia, Levan Kuckashvili

Costumes: George Nadiradze

Sound designer & rerecording mixer: Paata Godziashvili

Production manager : Vladimer Katcharava

Producers: Rusudan Chkonia, Nicolas Blanc, Marc Bordure, Jani Thiltges

Cast: Ia Sukhitashvili, Nana Shonia, Tamuna Bulhnikashvili, Eka Qartvelishvili, Shorena Begashvili, Oliko Babluani and others

Production Companies: Nikê Studio (Georgia), Ex Nihilo (France), Samsa Films, (Luxembourg), Alvy Production (France)

2012, 35mm, 90 minutes, format 1:1,85, Dolby D/SR

Irakli Bagaturia, producer and
production manager, Georgia

**What impact did receiving an
AVANTI grant had on your
career? – I got a lot of knowledge.**

*I learnt to make a package, how
to sell a project. To make it short
– I learnt what it means to be a
producer. And it turned out that I
am a producer now!*

**Have the AVANTI and
IFA-SC projects made a
relevant contribution to the film
production revival process? – Yes,**

*of course, a huge contribution.
Their influence was also very big
concerning direct sound. A lot of
people were very doubtful at the
beginning, but AVANTI and IFA-SC
made them change their opinion;
even the older generation got
influenced positively, and now work
with direct sound.*

«Chnchik» by Aram Shahbazyan, Armenia

Koll Björn
Germany

Kopyan Vardan
Armenia

Kostandyan Artyom
Armenia

Kiusaar Kadri
Estonia

Krempke Thomas
Switzerland

Kuchaidze Maka
Georgia

Kukhianidze Malkhaz
Georgia

Kuntsev-Gabashvili Vakhtang
Georgia

Kuntseva-Gabashvili Nino
Georgia

Kurz Sibylle
Germany

Kvatashadze Aleksander
Georgia

Kvatashidze Aleksander
Georgia

Vrej Kassouny, animator and
festival director, Armenia



Synopsis

Chnchik is the nickname of a 24-year-old lame, hunchbacked girl - a name that means something puny and insignificant. In her village, no one can even remember her real name. The girl is constantly teased and excluded from village activities. One day, Chnchik tumbles down a slope with a milk jug on her back. Saro, a young villager of 19, under the pretence of helping her, rapes her. Lusik is the only one who notices Chnchik's physical and emotional suffering. The lonesome Lusik is pregnant out of wedlock, a village taboo. One day her fence is marked with a black stain and she is forced to flee. After Lusik has escaped, the villagers throw stones at her house and kill her cow.

Chnchik is shepherding goats in the mountain far from the village when she meets a soldier, who is doing his army drills. He captures the girl's heart with his human compassion. For the first time she experiences what it is to fall in love and gives the soldier all her devotion and passion. Their moment of love is brief: a helicopter takes the soldier away to an unknown destination. In winter, the all-knowing village healer is the first to discover that the girl is pregnant. Soon Chnchik's parents and the entire village find out. At night, the village healer and Chnchik's mother Maret attempt in vain to induce an abortion. At dawn, in a blizzard, Chnchik escapes to the mountains, taking a cow with her. A few days later, the villagers bring the exhausted girl back to the village by force. A black stain is now marked on Chnchik's gate, demanding that the situation be resolved. Chnchik's mortified mother confines herself to a room and refuses to come out. Meanwhile, Chnchik's father executes her death sentence, using the same pick that he used to kill Lusik's cow. In this sleepy village, everyone pretends that nothing ever happened.

Credits

Director: Aram Shahbazyan

Writer: Aram Shahbazyan, Harutun Kbeyan, Mariam Asriyan, Ara Mnatsakanyan

Director of photography: Hayk Kirakosyan

Editing: Nathalie Alonso Casale

Producer: Ara Mnatsakanyan

Co-Producers: Els Vandevorst, Martin Hagemann

Production Companies: Armna LLC (Armenia), Isabella Films (The Netherlands), zero fiction film (Germany).

2012, 35mm, 85 minutes, format 1:1,88

What are the main changes in the audio-visual field in your country since AVANTI? – *There's a new and more professional approach of the younger filmmakers towards their projects. We now know how to prepare projects according to European standards from A to Z, and we prepare the projects before going anywhere with them, be it to producers, markets, competitions or the Cinema Centre. AVANTI is like the Bible: it tells you how to do it in the best possible way. But after over 2'000 years, we are still not able to live after it properly. (laughter)*

FROM A GOVERNMENT-STUDIO-SYSTEM TO INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION STRUCTURES

Lackner Erich
Austria

Lackner Denise
Switzerland

Lagazidze † Levan
Georgia

Le Hot Elizabeth
France

Linder Toni
Switzerland

Litmanovitsch Andreas
Switzerland

Lopez Estella
Switzerland

Mamedkerimov Ismail
Azerbaijan

Mamedov Zaur
Azerbaijan

Mamedova Arzu
Azerbaijan

Mamishhev Elmari
Azerbaijan

Mammadov Nariman
Azerbaijan

Andranik Vahanyan, Lawyer,
Armenia

In what way do you feel your film community works better now than before AVANTI started? –
When driving in the bus to Tbilisi together with all the other AVANTI participants for the first session, I asked all the film professionals in the bus, what a producer was. No one knew what the work of a producer was. Everyone knew about the artistic aspects of filmmaking, but no one knew about the economic side of it. Now there is an understanding of producing, and producers have appeared. Film professionals learnt how to work with foreign co-producers, how to get money abroad from funds.

Coming to the South Caucasus for the first time in 2003, I was really surprised at the open, interested welcome I received from the 30 producer colleagues. Pitching their projects, explaining their background and sharing professional experiences soon revealed a lot of similarities and shared hopes. All of these were connected to the goal of producing films in a “new film world”, something they could not yet achieve due to the lack of financing and co-producing structures. However, my enthusiasm after this first morning session was tested immediately during the first break. One of the Armenian participants came back from the lunch break happily showing around a pump-gun that he had just bought on the black market. In his words, that was supposed to be the best weapon for his 11-year-old son to seriously learn shooting. A long discussion followed on the violent and tragic experiences among these 3 countries, the civil wars that had ended only a couple of years ago, and the end of the Soviet empire, whose shadow remained on everything. That took the second half of the first day. As a producer, I immediately thought about the great storytelling possibilities in connection with these experiences, but my Caucasian colleagues took a totally different approach: not every story told verbally was meant to be made into a film immediately. A sensibility to their tradition, which does not necessarily use the direct entrance to an experience, came up. This surprised me and made me learn a lot in the years to come.



*Martin Hagemann, film producer,
Mentor of the AVANTI Producers' Group*

The stories that the participants had brought with them were a very mixed bag, and of totally different quality levels. After 1 year of the Updating Program, in its studio-like setup including writers, directors, producers and lawyers, we managed to boil it all down to 10 fully developed major feature film projects, 5 of these ended up being produced, a quota exceeding our expectations. Some of the projects fell apart several times on their way to the screen. The very fact that the 5 films did get produced in the end is a little miracle. In my opinion, the long-running structure of the AVANTI workshop is the reason that all these teams and projects survived as long as they did. The participants' trust in their own project, their stamina to stand back up again and again, is directly connected with the idea of independence in the market and responsibility toward original ideas. In all 3 countries, these personal and culturally important projects were finished and shown at international festivals and on their respective local markets. For the teams and filmmakers of the South Caucasus - I hear it today every once in a while - there is a before-AVANTI time and an after-AVANTI time. Yet, today none of the countries can boast a fully functioning film production industry. But many people have survived the post-Soviet era and are writing, producing, and directing independent short and long-feature films and documentaries, mostly in coproduction with Western Europe. And the Armenian participant's son never learned how to shoot with a pump-gun: the weapon was confiscated at the border, when we returned from Georgia to Armenia that year.

Martin Hagemann, film producer, Mentor of the AVANTI Producers' Group

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Documentary film has a great tradition in the South Caucasus and in the CIS region. Experienced documentary filmmakers have impressive filmographies of long documentaries shot in 35mm, prior to the '90s.

The AVANTI Updating Program integrated a Documentary Film group of 6 participants - mostly young filmmakers, mentored by various consultants from Russia, Switzerland and France. These mentors accompanied them in developing 6 film projects over a period of almost 10 months. Of those 6 films, the 3 following films were eventually granted production money.

Mammadov Jahangir
Azerbaijan

Mammadov Ismayil
Azerbaijan

Manafov Tarlan
Azerbaijan

Markosyan Magda
Armenia

Martirosyan Vahram
Armenia

Matevossian David
Armenia

Mchedlishvili Ioseb
Georgia

Mehdiyev Huseyn
Azerbaijan

Meier Ursula
Switzerland

Melikova Nigar
Azerbaijan

Meyer Thomas
Azerbaijan

Mkhitaryan Ashot
Armenia

Mkhitaryan Vahram
Armenia

Mkrtchyan Ashot
Armenia

Mnatsakanyan Ara
Armenia

Mshvidobadze Zura
Georgia

Mueller Derek
Georgia



"Children of War" by Malkhaz Kukianidze, Georgia

The 52-minute film depicts a special train journey from Tbilisi to the seashore in Western Georgia, as taken by a small group of young boys and girls returning to the seaside for the first time since the war ten years ago. As the train starts moving, they tell us about the dramatic circumstances surrounding their departure from Sukhumi: terrible memories begin to unfold as the train brings them closer to the events that so brutally interrupted their childhood innocence.

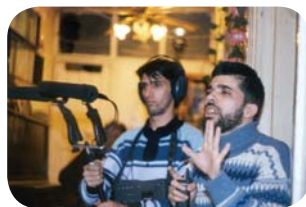
Credits

Writer: Ketii Pataraiia

Director: Malkhaz Kukhianidze

Producer: Gia Saghinadze for SDF Film

Year of Production : 2005



"The Way Out" by Nasimi Aliev, Azerbaijan

This 52-minute story of a musician's hard life in Baku grants viewers entry into the privacy of Ali and all his family. Ali is struggling to make a living by teaching and composing music. Despite his obvious disability (cervical vertebra birth defect), Ali remains full of energy and hope. He lives with his parents, wife and son in a small apartment, and we follow him in his daily routine, always accompanied by music... always looking for money...

Festivals and Awards

Saratov Film Festival, Russia 2006

5th Central Film Festival of Azerbaijani Cinema "Gold Lamp", 2006 – Best Documentary

6th International Youth Festival of Audio-Visual Works, Baku 2006 – Grand Prix & Best Film Award

The film was broadcast on several Azeri TV channels in 2006.

Credits

Writer & director & producer: Nasimi Aliev

Year of Production: 2005



Muradyan Seda
Georgia



Musa Oglu Elchin
Azerbaijan



Mustafayeva Aynur
Azerbaijan

Muzaffarova Nonna
Azerbaijan

Naghyev Vugar
Azerbaijan

Najaf Ilgar
Azerbaijan

Najafzada Shamil
Azerbaijan

Najafzada Gunel
Azerbaijan

Natter Wernfried
Austria

Navasardyan Levon
Armenia

Neimanis Egons
Latvia

Noschis Mathias
Switzerland

Odisharia Givi
Georgia

Oganyan Mariam
Armenia

Oganyan Vahe
Armenia

Olsen Mads
Denmark

Orjonikidze Nino
Georgia

Ovashvili George
Georgia

Ovashvili Bachana
Georgia

Pagès Luc
France

"Inhabitants of Forgotten Islands" by Hrant Hakobyan, Armenia

Chronicling a world of poor, insecure, forgotten and dreaming people living an unusual life in some forgotten and dreadful corner of an Armenian suburb, this film was the last of the 3 AVANTI documentaries to be shot.

Shot in 4 periods over 1 year, covering all seasons, the film introduces more than 10 characters, each of whose dramatic life is depicted in detail by the film director who, over time, established a close relationship with them.

The 2 versions of the film – a long 128-minute version (director's cut) without music, and a 52-minute one edited by the producer with an original score – are both devoid of either commentary or dialogues.

Festivals and Awards

Golden Apricot International Film Festival Yerevan, 2006. Armenian Panorama section – First Prize

Kinoshock Festival Anapa (Russia), 2006, Digital and video films» section – First Prize

Credits

Writer & director: Hrant Hakobyan

Producer: Ara Mnatsakanyan

Year of Production: 2006

LEGAL PROJECTS

Paniashvili Nika
Georgia

Paniashvili Irakli
Georgia

Parsadanyan Armine
Armenia

Paskevichyan Tigran
Armenia

Perret Jean
Switzerland

Pertakhia Otar
Georgia

Pfaeffli Andrés
Switzerland

Tako Tatishvili, Lawyer & Director
of Georgian Film Centre, Georgia

What impact did receiving an AVANTI grant have on your career? – *It was a very important step. It was a life-changing experience as it made me focus in the direction of film business. And I progressed very much in that field. And the fact of having been the director of IFA-SC influenced the final decision of becoming the director of the National Georgian Cinema Centre.*

Have the AVANTI and IFA-SC projects made a relevant contribution to the film production revival process? – *It was a major thing and contributed a lot. It broke the ice and brought the interest back to film. It had a major impact of the reshaping of film production. AVANTI became a brand in the Caucasus and to a certain extent even abroad. It is definitely a plus to be able to mention in one's CV that one has been the recipient of an AVANTI grant.*

The existence of the Legal Workshop was one of the most specific accomplishments of the Updating Program. Never before had there been an attempt to train lawyers and filmmakers in parallel, to have them work together at some point. This was possible because everything remained to be done in these countries in terms of project development and copyright issues. The very existence of IFA-SC (see chapter “Step 3 – The regional scheme”, leading to the foundation of IFA-SC –Independent Filmmakers Association – South Caucasus») was only possible because lawyers were involved in AVANTI right from the beginning. Without them, no NGO whatsoever would have been set up in the following years.

“Lawyers for Armenian Cinematography”, Armenia

The Armenian project was headed by **Andranik Vahanyan** and his associates **Armine Parsadanyan**, **Gohar Sardaryan** and **Artiom Kostandyan**. It ran from February 2005 through February 2006. The project entailed legal services, organization of an Essays Competition, a research publication of its own, and student training. It attracted professionals and interested persons not only from the film sector, but from all walks of life. Constructive and close cooperation between the participants led to an appreciable input of IP law knowledge, especially regarding copyright law and the ensuing moral rights for the Armenian film community. The published booklet deserves attention in Armenia and abroad by cinema professionals interested in working in that country.

“Copyright Centre”, Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, the Copyright Centre project by **Fikrin Bektashi** and his associates, **Ismail Akhmadov** and **Javidan Nabiyeva**, started end February 2005, and was also completed within 6 months. It elicited a strong response in the Azeri medias, especially in the press, thus rendering the AVANTI initiative well known throughout the country. The legal assistance to film professionals, the Copyright Enforcement seminar in cooperation with the Baku State University, the joint conference on Copyright Law with State Copyright Agency and State TV & Radio Council, the Round Table at the International Press Club, the distribution of a thematic leaflet and the training course on “Copyrights & Audiovisual Production” with eminent experts from the university and legal sectors – all deepened or created the basis for copyright awareness in the Azeri film sector.

“Legal Consulting and Enlightenment in the Field of Film Production”, Azerbaijan

Elmari Jabir Mamishov headed the second Azeri project group, which he initiated with his associates **Nigar F. Melikova** and **Parviz I. Isgandarov**. The project targeted Legal Consulting and Enlightenment in the Field of Film Production, and featured the following activities: identifying copyright violations, creation of a webpage with a copyright infringements collection, seminars, a round table, free legal counseling. An AVANTI Legal Project public presentation took place at Baku's International Press Center. Training sessions with the Chairman of the Copyright Agency, Kamran Imanov, were attended by 28 students. Finally, 10 000 booklets on copyright law were published. In January 2006, the group was solicited to develop a course for universities on copyrights and to put it into practice, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

STEP III – THE REGIONAL SCHEME, LEADING TO THE FOUNDATION OF IFA-SC – INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS' ASSOCIATION – SOUTH CAUCASUS

Late in the 1990s, the technical state of the South Caucasian film industry was appalling. The 35mm-equipment, once the pillar of the former Soviet Union film industry, appeared to be in a derelict condition and, although a minimum of video equipment existed, access to it was problematic and its quality was often inadequate. Given the production budget in these countries, the films had no chance of meeting proper international standards as long as they would depend entirely on equipment coming from abroad.

The **Regional Scheme**, the third step of the AVANTI program, was an attempt to address this need, but also to link it to a better good governance attitude by regional filmmakers and officials in the use of such equipment. Originally called the **Technical Scheme**, it foresaw the bringing of technical equipment to the South Caucasus, as the lack of such was considered by the local film professionals to be the major problem. However, assessment of the first 2 steps of the AVANTI program showed that this third step should focus mainly on building up know-how in business (production and promotion of films) and project development. The setting up of the technical infrastructure remained just one component of the whole program and was, moreover, solely focused on sound, as this aspect of film technique presented the biggest gap relating to European standards. The concrete actions of the program of the Regional Scheme were elaborated with members of the film community of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2 transnational workshops.



Pirveli Rusudan
Georgia

Polukhov Elkhan
Azerbaijan

Poylo Milena
France

Qasimov Rashad
Azerbaijan

Rabaglia Denis
Switzerland

Ramishvili Tamuna
Georgia

Rasulzade Chingiz
Azerbaijan

Rüegg Thomas
Switzerland

Rustamov Asif
Azerbaijan

Rzayev Yaver
Azerbaijan

Sadagashvili Shorena
Georgia

Sadradinov Vaqif
Azerbaijan

Safat Ilgar
Azerbaijan

Saghinadze Gia
Georgia

Salimli Mirbala
Azerbaijan

Samedova Sevinge
Azerbaijan

Sandini Michela
Italy

Sardaryan Gohar
Armenia

Saredi Christa
Switzerland

Sargsyan Izabella
Armenia

Extensive discussions with all participants of the Updating Program in 2004 led to the constitution of a Task Force of 15 filmmakers and lawyers, consisting of former AVANTI participants and additional members of the film communities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Each country was represented with 5 members. Their task was to undertake the practical work of creating a transnational project: **The Independent Filmmakers' Association - South Caucasus IFA-SC** was founded in October 2005, started its public activities in June 2006.

The goal of IFA-SC was to assist the film communities of the 3 countries in South Caucasus in their endeavours to grow into a culturally and economically established sector of society. To reach its goal, the transnational association implemented and ran activities within the film community in the South Caucasus, with the four following objectives:

- strengthen an awareness of - and a commitment to - common interests in the film community of the three countries Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia,
- improve the quality of production,
- support the building and strengthening of the distribution system,
- improve the film community's lobbying position.

From June 2006 till June 2009, IFA-SC succeeded in

- training over 200 producers, authors, directors, technicians and lawyers in scriptwriting, directing, development packaging, animation, budgeting, financing, promotion and world sales, direct sound recording and digital sound post-production;
- leading 14 training workshops and extensive market research projects on national and transnational levels, not counting numerous information days on different topics in all three countries;
- acquiring sound-recording and sound-postproduction equipment at the disposal of the filmmakers in each country;
- setting up functioning bodies forming an adequate infrastructure in all three countries, with a Head Office in Tbilisi and National Offices in Baku and Yerevan;
- acquiring a democratic status complemented by a number of regulations and building up experience in democratic functioning;
- creating a solid network and successful cooperation among different organizations working in the film sector and other realms of the cultural scene;
- developing lobbying actions for the integration of South Caucasian filmmakers into the international film community and becoming a point of reference on the international level and a key player in the South Caucasus.

On the 30th June 2007, FOCAL handed over the future of the NGO to the regional filmmakers. It then became an independent organization contracting directly with the SDC. IFA-SC remained active until September 2009.

IFA-SC IS DEAD! LONG LIVE IFA-SC! NOT AN OBITUARY...

IFA-SC was created, based on the needs expressed by a group of representatives of the film sectors of the South Caucasian countries; it was made possible thanks to the financial support of SDC, which wanted a transnational best practice project proving that peaceful cross-border cooperation is possible - even in a region with so many "frozen" conflicts. In its 4-year term of existence, this fascinating and unique South Caucasian experience went through many stages, both, ups and downs. On the one hand, it confirmed that yes, actors in civil society are capable and willing to be good neighbours and to understand common interests. On the other hand, even if authorities informally and at a personal level were supportive of the project, it never became possible to receive official support from 2 of the 3 countries for the initiative's transnational character. However, within each country and with the growing development of the IFA-SC activities, the recognition of the value of these activities for the local film sector grew step by step. Within the association itself, at the beginning the groups of members from each country were pretty much prey to suspicions about each other: they tended to express their positions "by nation". Increasingly, however, the debate grew into one between defenders of different positions, where passports were no longer the only common denominator between members.

Sargsyan Artur
Armenia

Sargsyan Lilit
Armenia

Schlesinger Thomas
Germany

Schlüter Schierbeck Katrine
Denmark

Semenov Sergey
Russia

Sepashvili Salome
Georgia

Shahbazyan Aram
Armenia

Shashuvarli Anfiya
Azerbaijan

Shek Nika
Armenia

Shekoyan Evgenya
Armenia

Shumakova Aliona
Italy

Sikharulidze David
Georgia

Silvanyan Hratch
Armenia

Solomanashvili Beso
Georgia

Solomanashvili Irakli
Georgia

Spurk Christoph
Switzerland

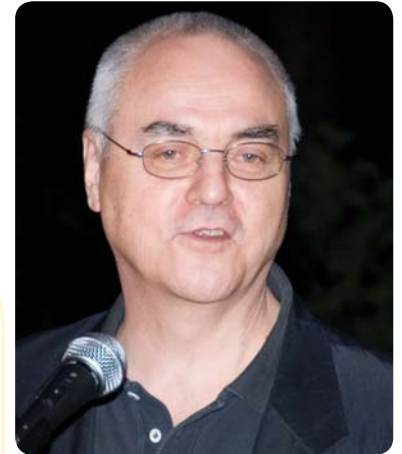
Steiner Dominique
Switzerland

Sulamanidze Tamara
Georgia

Suleymanova Vusala
Azerbaijan

Tadevosyan Anna
Armenia

With regard to its objectives, IFA-SC was certainly successful in contributing through its activities to the improvement of the lobbying position of the film community, at least in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Whether the quality of production has improved at a sustainable level remains to be seen in the coming years. At the end of the AVANTI program, all 3 countries have undeniably progressed in their awareness of international standards, and of the need for professionalism in craftsmanship and in skills related both to creative functions like scriptwriting and directing, and the entrepreneurial functions of producers. Achieving connection with the rest of the world for the pretty much isolated film communities of the 3 South Caucasian countries can be ascribed to IFA-SC and the overall AVANTI program. This is confirmed by the fact that more and more projects from these countries are being introduced to project markets, and films are being screened at festivals all over the place, from Europe to Asia. Also, awareness of common interests in the film sectors of the 3 countries has in principle increased, with cooperation and exchanges at the personal level starting to develop. Nonetheless, the political context is still an obstacle to any further practical materialization of the gained awareness. Where a failure is to be acknowledged, it is with regard to the steps envisaged towards building up a distribution system. The members of IFA-SC, professionally stemming from a realm traditionally focused on filmmaking, saw this as a task beyond their capacities - a task to be handled by investors and business people. The IFA-SC consultants did not manage to convince the association that audience building has to go hand in hand with making movies, and any proposed grass root initiatives found no response.



*Luciano Gloor, Swiss
Consultant of IFA-SC*

At the end of 2009, IFA-SC ceased to exist. The Swiss funds had been consumed and no alternative donor was in sight - someone willing to contribute to the notable running cost of a multi-country member based non-profit organisation. No follow-up projects of any substantial size had been developed to allow for project-related fundraising, which would have helped the association to survive.

After all the efforts put into this extraordinary undertaking, it has been a big disappointment for the IFA-SC consultants to learn about the team's all-too-early vanished energy and resources, which had been carrying the association. When the IFA-SC website went offline, the documentation of this collective South-Caucasian adventure, so rich in lessons and experiences, went lost as well. A search on the Internet for the association's name produces links to the Swiss websites of SDC or FOCAL, and only one trace is left in the South Caucasus (on the Georgian job platform JobGeo.Com where one can still read a very persuasive presentation of the previous employer's mission and objectives). The page ends with a laconic "no jobs found for this employer".

The irony of destiny would have it that, half a year later, EuropeAid, the Directorate General of the European Commission (EC) in charge of international cooperation, launched a call for proposals under the new Eastern Partnership Culture Programme. The call was open to any sector of culture; it had serious funding attached to it and was looking for projects with a regional approach and aimed at exchanging best practices and increasing capacities and know-how between public and private cultural actors. Switzerland had been the pathfinder, now the EU followed with a program seeking to promote cultural policy reform and enforce the role of culture in the sustainable development of the Eastern Neighbours of the EU. And the profile and track record of IFA-SC would have made it the perfect candidate to receive a grant from this culture programme.

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The lesson to be learnt is that the Swiss consultants of IFA-SC would have had to put even more emphasis on the crucial need for institution-building for any sector of society that wants to develop and grow. The team of and around IFA-SC seems to have dramatically underestimated the long-term value of the instrument, that, built with the support of SDC and FOCAL, could have made them eligible for major grants from any international donor.

So, IFA-SC is dead – but nonetheless: Long live IFA-SC!

Probably the 2 most encouraging moments in its short history were when IFA-SC became the official partner of the Asia Pacific Screen Awards for the selection of entries to the awards from the South Caucasus, a real sign of international recognition; and when it organized, without any outside help, the so-called Film Policy Dialogue in all 3 countries, engaging in a private-public dialogue with their authorities. Be it because of the capitalized impact of the overall AVANTI programme, be it because AVANTI came just at the right moment: it is a fact that since 2003 the landscape with respect to the film sector has substantially changed and is still changing in all 3 countries (although not equally). Awareness by the public authorities, and specifically by the Ministries of Culture, of the relevance of the film sector has clearly improved. Public funds made available for the sector have increased in Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the regulatory frameworks ruling the disbursing of funds, are gradually becoming more transparent and accountable.



The most precious result of the whole IFA-SC project, however, is the personal and professional networks that it created among stakeholders in the film sector of the South Caucasus, and that remain alive to this day: any relevant film-related event, even in Europe - be it a smaller festival, like Cottbus, be it the "big two", Berlin and Cannes - gives proof of this grown and functioning network. And the networks are composed of film professionals - people growing in their functions within their countries, directing or producing movies, creating new companies, founding new festivals, taking the direction of public film funds, becoming members of national film strategy committees, and so on. And in this sense, it can be said with satisfaction: the seed that the AVANTI Programme intended to plant for the filmmakers in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia grew into IFA-SC; it seemed to have died in winter 2009, but, as nature proves every spring year after year: life is strong, and the former seed grows and grows...

Luciano Gloor, Swiss Consultant of IFA-SC

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