

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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THE AWARDS

THE SUN RISES IN THE EAST - AVANTI FOR THE SOUTH CAUCASUS.

"We filmmakers have to go back to our roots" - an AVANTI director.

"Avanti turned my whole perception upside down" - an AVANTI producer.

"There are no losers in this project, we've already won" - an AVANTI lawyer.



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 Georgian found it difficult - if not to a certain extent impossible - to maintain the film production output and grandeur of Soviet times. There was a need for changes and a will to update; personal opportunities existed but no revival process as a whole had been launched.

This is where the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) and FOCAL (Foundation for professional training in cinema and audiovisual media) stepped in. Some two years ago, after a long and careful exploratory phase, a single program addressing a unique combination of creative, legal and technical issues, tailored by European and for South Caucasian professionals was launched. Implemented by FOCAL and fully funded by SDC, this ambitious program called AVANTI - a somehow universal expression for "let's move on" - was created to :

- update local skills to recent European standards (Phase One),
- launch a vast production process through the co-funding of films (Phase Two),
- lay the groundwork for providing technical equipment on a sustainable basis (Phase Three).

For a three-country region producing barely two films a year, both the challenge and the risks were major : after all, only recently was a cease-fire established between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

THE GROUPS

How should AVANTI be understood ?

Feature Film Groups

Mirsadiyg Agazadeh, *Azerbaijan*
 Rusudan Chkhonia, *Georgia*
 Tigran Khzmalyan, *Armenia*
 Mirbala Salimov, *Azerbaijan*
 Aram Shahbazyan, *Armenia*
 Beso Solomanashvili, *Georgia*

Mentored by **Dagmar Benke**,
 Script Consultant & Screenwriter,
 Germany

Hovhannes Galstyan, *Armenia*
 Elchin Musa Oglu, *Azerbaijan*
 Ilgar Najaf, *Azerbaijan*
 Givi Odisharia, *Georgia*
 Artur Sargsyan, *Armenia*
 Niko Tsuladze, *Georgia*

Mentored by **Krzysztof Zanussi**,
 Film Director & Screenwriter, Poland
 and
Thomas Schlesinger,
 Script Consultant & Screenwriter, USA

Production Group

Mehriban Azizova, *Azerbaijan*
 Irakli Bagaturia, *Georgia*
 Tornike Berishvili, *Georgia*
 Melik Karapetyan, *Armenia*
 Rasim Hasanov, *Azerbaijan*
 Ismayil Mamedkirimov, *Azerbaijan*
 Ashot Mkhitarian, *Armenia*
 Ara Mnatsakanyan, *Armenia*
 Gia Saghinadze, *Georgia*
 Aram Zaryan, *Armenia*

Mentored by **Martin Hagemann**,
 Producer, Germany

Short Film Group

Alina Abdullayeva, *Azerbaijan*
 Levan Adamia, *Georgia*
 Levan Lagazidze †, *Georgia*
 David Matevossian, *Armenia*
 Irakli Paniashvili, *Georgia*
 Rusudan Pirveli, *Georgia*
 Asif Rustamov, *Azerbaijan*
 Anna Tadevosyan, *Armenia*
 Irakli Tsetskladze, *Georgia*

Mentored by **Antoine Jaccoud**,
 Script Consultant & Screenwriter,
 Switzerland

For the SDC, AVANTI is part of its good governance promotion policy in the region. The wager here is that this challenge will prove fruitful in terms of fulfilling one of the SDC's main objectives in the region : contributing to the definition of new socio-cultural values intended to reinforce the social cohesion of South Caucasian society.

Some tend to forget that film is more than the Seventh Art. Film is a powerful and unique way to create cohesion and develop identity within civil society. Filmmakers often shape the vision other countries have of a specific region, encapsulating the feelings and visions belonging to that region. As a result, filmmakers in emerging countries are often key players in unveiling local identities and thereby strengthening the general development process.

Subsequent to the fall of the so-called "Soviet Studio System", the South Caucasus filmmaking community needs tools enabling it to participate in the global audiovisual market successfully, without compromising its creative vision. Its current state can be partly remedied or improved in the short and medium term, provided it is addressed with specific tools, based on flexible and dynamic platforms. FOCAL and the SDC's answer to this is AVANTI.

One of AVANTI's main objectives is to encourage the development and reinforcement of a network of professionals open to new forms of collaboration, whether in South Caucasus or with international partners. Film production interweaves a great number of different skills (financial, legal, technical, creative) within the same process. As such, film production is a visible activity that triggers interest, almost necessarily requiring standardization and some kind of transparency. Many other civil activities demand the same conditions, but very few also build identity and capture the imagination to such an extent.

Through a colleague-to-colleague approach, AVANTI has worked hard (and will continue to do so in the future) to:

- enable the professionals involved in the program to bring the best of their creative abilities to their art,
- enable them to lobby for the improvement of their situation,
- reinforce the region's cultural development, making a crucial contribution to its social identity through their films.

TRAINING > FILMS > REVIVAL > SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



What has been achieved so far ?

Documentary Group

Sirakan Abroyan, *Armenia*
 Nasimi Aliev, *Azerbaijan*
 Rusudan Glurjidze, *Georgia*
 Hrant Hakobyan, *Armenia*
 Malkhaz Kukhianidze, *Georgia*
 Nonna Muzaffarova, *Azerbaijan*

Mentored by Denis Gheerbrant,
Documentary Film Director, France
 and
 Alexander Gutman,
Documentary Film Director, Russia.

Legal Group

Fikrin Bektashi, *Azerbaijan*
 Parviz I. Isgandarov, *Azerbaijan*
 Irma Kavtaradze, *Georgia*
 Artyom Kostandyan, *Armenia*
 Nino Kuntseva-Gabashvili, *Georgia*
 Elmari Mamishov, *Azerbaijan*
 Nigar F. Melikova, *Azerbaijan*
 Armine Parsadanyan, *Armenia*
 Tamuna Ramishvili, *Georgia*
 Gohar Sardaryan, *Armenia*
 Tamara Tatishvili, *Georgia*
 Andranik Vahanyan, *Armenia*

Mentored by Christophe Germann,
lawyer, Switzerland.

THE GUEST SPEAKERS

Ivan Bernier
Legal Consultant on Cultural Diversity,
Canada
 Eric Busidan
Legal Consultant, France
 Gilles Castera
Production Management Consultant,
France
 Vincent H. Chieffo
Legal Consultant, USA
 Joël Farges
Film Producer, France
 Julian Friedmann
Pitching Tutor, Great Britain
 Marcel Gisler
Film Director, Switzerland
 Vadim Jendreyko
Documentary Filmmaker, Switzerland
 Pascal Kamina
Legal Consultant, France
 Björn Koll
Distribution & Marketing Consultant,
Germany

The first phase of AVANTI - the Updating Program - gathered some 50 participants (out of 132 candidates) from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from July 2003 to April 2004. During four 10-day sessions in Tbilisi—featuring international mentors and guest speakers—the professional skills and understanding of directors, producers, documentary makers and lawyers were updated to meet European film production standards, in an attempt to bridge the gap left by the fall of the “Soviet Studio System.”

The training was organized around 5 groups, with a selection process after Session 1:

	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Georgia	TOTAL
Production	5 / 3	5 / 4	5 / 3	15 / 10
Feature Films	6 / 4	6 / 4	6 / 4	18 / 12
Short Films	2 / 2	2 / 2	5 / 5	9 / 9
Documentaries	2 / 2	2 / 2	2 / 2	6 / 6
Lawyers	4 / 4	4 / 4	4 / 4	12 / 12
TOTAL	19 / 15	19 / 16	22 / 18	60 / 49

Plain text = Participants by country and by category in Session 1

Bold = Participants by country and by category in Sessions 2- 3 - 4

The Development Workshop for directors and producers enabled 27 projects (12 feature films, 9 short films, 6 documentaries) to be developed, 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. Intense group work and formal classes alternated with lectures, covering issues like classical and non-classical dramaturgy, script formatting, development packaging, budgeting and financing, and world sales. Also featured were numerous pitching sessions, presentations of the latest technology in digital video, and workshops on contractual law practices.

The Legal Workshop for lawyers specializing in audiovisual law addressed the areas of law and policy on the national and international levels that are most relevant to the film business in a market economy:

- Intellectual property laws, with a focus on copyright/authors' rights and performing rights;
- Film-related contract law (drafting, negotiation and enforcement of contracts related to the financing and commercial exploitation of audiovisual works);
- Private and public laws and policies aimed at maintaining and promoting cultural diversity in the audiovisual sector, including competition law specifically designed to achieve this purpose.

Lawyers from academia and law practices in six jurisdictions (France, Denmark, United States, Canada, Russia and Switzerland) provided lectures by international guest speakers on these topics. In addition, in each country an Avanti Legal Conference attracted many local professionals

All sessions were undertaken as planned (despite the Rose Revolution in Georgia); attendance was regular; collaboration between countries, groups and individuals was effective; homework projects were delivered on time; and the atmosphere remained friendly and highly professional.

Sybille Kurz

Pitching Tutor, Germany

Thomas Krempke

Digital Video Consultant, Switzerland

Ursula Meier

Film Director, Switzerland

Wernfried Natter

Line Producer, Austria

Mads Olsen

Film Finance Specialist, Denmark

Luc Pagès

*Film Director & Director of Photography,
France*

Jean Perret

*Documentary Film Festival Director,
Switzerland*

Christa Saredi

World Sales Agent, Switzerland

Katrine Schlüter Schierbeck

Legal Consultant, Denmark

Sergey A. Semenov

Legal Consultant, Russia

Raymond Vouillamoz

*European Television Consultant,
Switzerland*

THE SPECIAL GUESTS

Jacob Berger

Film Director, Switzerland

Jamil Farajov

*Head of the Cinema Department,
Ministry of Culture, Azerbaijan*

Giorgi Gabashvili

Minister of Culture, Georgia

Besarion Giorgobiani

*Representative of National
Cinematographic Center, Georgia*

Rustam Ibragimbekov

*Writer, Member of
the Selection Jury for Azerbaijan*

Rasim Ismayilov

*Head Editor of Space Broadcasting
Company, Azerbaijan*

Otar Iosseliani

*Writer-director, Member of
the Selection Jury for Georgia*

Klaus Keil

*Former Head of the Filmboard
Berlin-Brandenburg, Germany*

Karine Khodikyan

Deputy Minister of Culture, Armenia

Cedomir Kolar

*Producer, Chairman of
the Final Feature Film Jury*

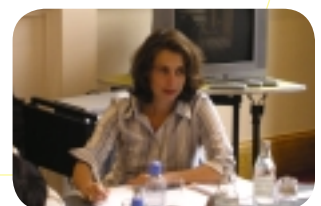
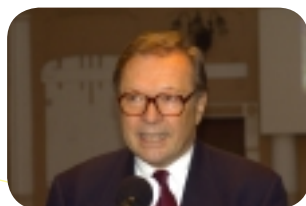
Vardan Kopyan

*Deputy Chairman, Council of Public
Television and Radio, Armenia*

How can these achievements be evaluated ?

Reviewing the main achievements of AVANTI so far, independent experts found evidence in April 2004 that the Updating Program:

- was the right project proposed at the right time, based on an innovative concept targeting sustainable development. It tends to validate the assumption that culture can have an influence on good governance.
- has shown the participants the way forward towards professionalism, while guiding them to uphold their own cultural roots and personal voices.
- has managed to tangibly implement the notion of the "independent producer" - an individual in charge of producing audiovisual works within a free market economy.
- has achieved the development of a strong portfolio of film projects, ready to be co-funded by the program and, especially - for a good half of them - ready to be co-produced by international partners and also funded by national bodies. Some of these are already in the pipeline, thanks to a final pitching session where European producers were brought to Tbilisi to learn about the projects.
- has prepared lawyers specializing in audiovisual law to come up with proposals for legal projects in the field of intellectual law, cultural policies and audiovisual contractual practice. By mixing the creative and legal communities, the program has managed to inspire mutual understanding of each other's preoccupations and practices.
- has achieved its purpose on schedule, at a cost below other similar European programs. FOCAL and its hired consultants managed to earn respect, despite any gaps in communication or cultural outlook.
- has created a real momentum and given the definitive kickoff to the long-awaited revival of the South Caucasus film industry, breaking it out from its isolation, setting new standards, and bringing hope and fresh ideas.
- has had an effect on other areas of civil society, by showing that Armenian and Azeri citizens can sit at the same table to exchange professional concerns and endeavor to draw up a common vision for the future. Thus, it has laid the groundwork for a transnational network of film professionals and media lawyers in a conflict-ridden region.
- has helped the SDC to establish itself as a no-hidden-agenda development agency, through its constant efforts to ensure transparency and fairness at every single step of the program (communication, selection, attitude).



Erich Lackner

Producer, Lotus Film, Austria

Elizabeth Le Hot

*Counsellor for Multilateral Affairs,
National Center for Cinematography,
France*

Andrès Pfaeffli

Producer, Ventura Film, Switzerland

Milena Poylo

Producer, TS Productions, France

Aliona Shumakova

Producer, Downtown Pictures, Italy

Els Vandevorst

Producer, Isabella Films, Holland

Michael Weber

*World Sales Agent, Bavaria Film,
Germany*

Marc Wehrlin

*Deputy Director, Federal Office of
Culture, Switzerland*

Ursula Wolschlager

Producer, Lotus Film, Austria

ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS TO SESSION 1

From Georgia

Paata Gabelia, *producer*

Vladimer Kacharava, *producer*

George Ovashvili, *director*

Temur Tsaava, *director*

From Armenia

Edgar Baghdasaryan, *director*

Hrayr Yeghiyan †, *director*

Hayk Hakobyan, *producer*

From Azerbaijan

Gunduz Karimov, *lawyer*

Arzu Mamedova, *director*

Shamil Najafzada, *director*

Sevinge Samedova, *producer*

Vusala Suleymanova, *producer*

What are the upcoming challenges ?

Two major challenges are now to be addressed as a follow-up to and consolidation of the Updating Program.

The Co-funding Initiative

To keep up the momentum of the revival, to put the training into practice as well as to shrink the gap between development and production, AVANTI includes a process of co-funding some of the films developed within the Updating Program. Grants for a total of US\$ 420,000 have been awarded to 15 projects developed under the program :

- 6 x US\$ 50,000 for 6 feature films (2 per country)
- 6 x US\$ 10,000 for 6 short films (4 in Georgia, 1 in Armenia, 1 in Azerbaijan)
- 3 x US\$ 20,000 for 3 documentaries (1 per country)

International independent juries awarded the grants. Letters of Intention were issued to the awardees, and the contractual process has just started for the short films and the documentaries. Granting substantial sums of money is a tool towards standardization of contractual and production practice, structuring film communities to face the challenges of the global audiovisual marketplace.

Along with grants for films, legal projects were funded as well to further develop legal frameworks for the 3 pillars studied (US\$ 30,000- US\$ 10,000 in each country). As a direct follow-up of the Updating Program Legal Workshop, AVANTI will publish a legal textbook in Russian, addressing audiovisual laws and policies (to be ordered at www.focal.ch/avanti).

This sudden increase of production volume in the three countries, all obeying the same impetus and under the same umbrella (AVANTI and SDC), represents more than a kickoff. It is expected to actually re-launch film production, creating alliances among currently isolated partners (independent filmmakers, studios, ministries of culture, television companies, international partners). AVANTI's grants are important enough to incite other parties to invest. As a result, all the business transactions involved in the production of these 15 films will set new standards.

Once most of the films have been completed (probably by 2006), action to promote the best of them on the international market and at festivals will be undertaken, with an eye to reducing the gap between completion and commercialization by attracting the attention of key players in the business. Everything will be done so that the buzz about the potential revival of South Caucasus films reaches the film world.



The Regional Scheme

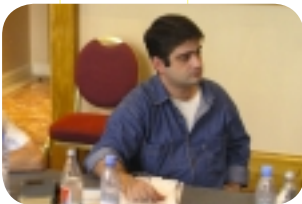
IN MEMORIAM



Levan Lagazidze †, *director*

Born in Georgia on August 21st, 1982, Levan Legazidze was a member of the short film group throughout the Updating 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". His close friends and family are working on making a film from his script, to be directed by a friend of his.



Hrayr Yeghiyan †, *director*

Born in Armenia on October 9th, 1972, Hrayr Yeghiyan died tragically on September 12th, 2003, between Sessions 1 and 2 of the Updating Program.

A member of the feature film group, he was killed on a highway while shooting a commercial.

This process is meant to deal with the need to update the equipment available for film production in South Caucasus. In many aspects (especially sound, camera and light), their current production means do not grant South Caucasus films access to the international market, simply because they do not meet international technical standards.

From Day 1 of the Updating Program, FOCAL implemented the idea that besides training and funding, AVANTI could bring equipment to South Caucasus, providing that the regional criterion (among others) is met: that is, only if access to all three countries is guaranteed would any equipment be worth funding. Extensive discussions were held with all participants during nine months. These led to the constitution of a Task Force of 15 filmmakers and lawyers (9 inside AVANTI, 6 outside AVANTI / 5 per country), to undertake the practical work of creating a transnational NGO providing new equipment as well as specific services for the film communities of the three countries.

If the Task Force manages to fulfill its purpose, this organization could be a major breakthrough in terms of positioning culture as a field where regional cooperation can be achieved effectively. Equal access to the NGO will be enforced by the participating lawyers, where sustainability will be planned with the assistance of European technical experts with respect to the appropriate production means. This NGO could set an indisputable example of regional cohesion for the whole good governance process in the region.

And now... avanti !

FOCAL is proud to have been able to put the best of its know-how and network at the disposal of its Georgian, Azeri and Armenian colleagues. After over 12 years of servicing Swiss filmmakers, the SDC has given the Foundation the opportunity to embrace a challenging mandate - that of creating a unique and ambitious training program to cater to the main needs of a re-emerging film community.

We thank the principal mentors for devoting almost a year of their life to nurturing the creative process of the AVANTI participants. Our thanks as well to the more than 20 visiting guest speakers and the 15 special guests who brought an even broader vision of film professions to Tblisi. And last but not least, we are grateful to our local Georgian team, responsible for making all the sessions go so smoothly..

So keep your eyes peeled for upcoming names and titles : the months and years ahead will confirm that the South Caucasus film community is ready to offer new images and stories from its part of the world.

The Avanti Team for the Updating Program :

Pierre Agthe, Project Leader
Joelle Com  , Program Coordinator
Denis Rabaglia, Program Consultant
Christophe Germann, Legal Workshop Adviser

THE AWARDS

FEATURE FILM AWARDS

Georgia – **Keep Smiling**
 Writer & Director : Rusudan Chkhonia
 (US\$ 50,000)

Georgia – **Naturmorte 1937**
 Writer & Director : Givi Odisharia
 (US\$ 50,000)

Armenia – **Bonded Parallels**
 Writer & Director : Hovhannes Galstyan
 (US\$ 50,000)

Armenia – **Chnchik**
 Director : Aram Shahbazyan
 Writers : Aram Shahbazyan, Ara Mnatsakanyan,
 Mariam Asriyan, Harut Kbeyan
 (US\$ 50,000)

Azerbaijan – **Enemies of the Sun**
 Writer & Director : Mirsadiyg Agazadeh
 (US\$ 50,000)

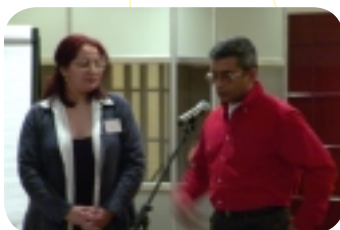
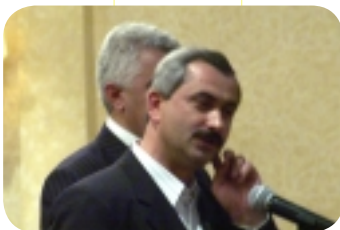
Azerbaijan – **40th Door**
 Writer & Director : Elchin Musa Oglu
 (US\$ 50,000)

DOCUMENTARY AWARDS

Georgia – **Children of War**
 Director : Malkhaz Kukhianidze
 (US\$ 20,000)

Armenia – **Habitants of the Lost Islands**
 Director : Hrant Hakobyan
 (US\$ 20,000)

Azerbaijan – **The Way Out**
 Director : Nasimi Aliev
 (US\$ 20,000)



SHORT FILM AWARDS

Georgia – **Curfew Hour**
 Witer & Director : Levan Adamia
 (US\$ 10,000)

Georgia – **The First Word is Missing**
 Writer : Levan Lagazizde †
 Director : Giorgi Tsikharishvili
 (US\$ 10,000)

Georgia – **Wild Dogs**
 Writer & Director : Irakli Paniashvili
 (US\$ 10,000)

Georgia – **The Window**
 Writer & Director : Rusudan Pirveli
 (US\$ 10,000)

Armenia – **The Enemies**
 Writer & Director : David Matevossian
 (US\$ 10,000)

Azerbaijan – **Try Not To Breathe**
 Writer & Director : Alina Abdullayeva
 (US\$ 10,000)

*Producers are not mentionned
 because at the time of print,
 negotiations between producers
 and writer-directors are still on going.*



LEGAL PROJECT AWARDS

Georgian - **Legal Guidebook to the Film Sector in Georgia**
 Head of Project : Tamara Tatishvili
 Associate Partners : Tamuna Ramishvili and Irma Kavtaradze
 (US\$ 10,000)

Armenia - **Lawyers for Armenian Cinematography**
 Head of Project : Andranik Vahanyan
 Associate Partners : Armine Parsadanyan,
 Gohar Sardaryan and Artyom Kostandyan.
 (US\$ 10,000)

Azerbaijan - **Copyright Centre**
 Head of Project : Fikrin Bektashi
 (US\$ 5,000)

Azerbaijan - **Legal Consulting and Enlightenment in the Field
 of Film Production**
 Head of Project : Elmari Mamishov
 Associate Partners : Nigar F. Melikova and Parviz I. Isgandarov
 (US\$ 5,000)

