

My participation in the formation of AJA is one of the best achievements in my life.

In 1997 I was invited by the Armenian Government to join the efforts in building our homeland as the person responsible for investment promotion. I was to help build the policy for investment promotion and the entire infrastructure for implementation - which was very fragile and not efficient at the time of my arrival to Armenia.

Our work on policy took almost 6 months: the summary was a two-page paper highlighting the main directions for Investment Policy of Armenia. I have presented the government of Armenia with Policy that, among other important issues, suggested that State of Armenia should consider building much larger, a "virtual" state, and Armenian Diaspora as one of the fundamental blocks for building prosperity of both Armenia and Armenians around the globe. Diaspora was to be the principal supporter of FDI promotion efforts of Armenia in particular.

Garnik Nanagoulian, then the Minister of Industry and Trade, introduced me to the idea of AJA in early 1997, and suggested that I lead the project from Armenia. He suggested that there is already a very dedicated team he was already working with, Pierre Akkelian from Canada, and Vartkess Knadjian from Belgium, as well as Hrach Gaspar from the Embassy of Armenia in Canada. He gave much support and inspiration to all our future work: he was always active with all the matters from foundation to particular support to each project that originated from the work with AJA and individual jewelers/investors.

The rest is a story of a great journey we went through with this great team of people that I was happy to join. My team from ministry became the first secretariat of AJA, helping to form and disseminate invitations to Armenian jewelers around the globe, organizing the first meeting in Armenia, and helping build the foundation stone by stone with dedication and hard work. I want to give credit to my entire team, and especially to Nune Magoyan, my deputy, who assumed the role of the AJA secretary in the beginning, and was helpful throughout our joint work with AJA.

The role of Government, especially of the President of Armenia and the Minister of Industry and Trade, and later the Armenian Development Bank of Armenia, as **facilitators** of the foundation process was considerable, as it established trust and gave necessary weight to the foundation, as well as helped elevate the mission of AJA linking it with supporting Armenia's development. This, I believe, is what Armenian Government, with its unique mandate, should be doing as much as possible. There are not many cases where Armenians joint efforts to prosper, to do business, to share knowledge and experience, to help each other succeed: AJA is the pioneer that proved that Armenians can work together, and that there is much power and benefit in joining efforts.

From day one, we had the support of the Prime Minister of Armenia, then President of Armenia Robert Kocharian, who was a great believer in the success of AJA. I had several one-on-one meetings with him discussing the idea and issues of AJA: he always found time for AJA. He gave the first "Oscars" to Armenian jewelers that have made considerable investment in Armenia – the ones I was honored to present on his behalf to Armenian Jewelers in Basel, during the first founding meeting of AJA. The President hosted the solo reception of AJA, tribute to the success of the third AJA meeting in Yerevan in September 1997, and the considerable investments already made by members of AJA in Armenia. He, I believe, was instrumental to the success of our efforts in building AJA.

Getting to know and working with AJA, especially with Pierre Akkelian and his family, Vartkess Knadjian, Hayk Arslanian and his family, Vartan Sirmakes, Hrach Kaprielian,

Nazareth Sapounjian, Sarkiss Kitsinian, Grigor Istamboulian, Vahe Isnar, Janik Oskanian, Gagik Abrahamyan, Emil Grigoryan, and many many other great Armenian jewelers and friends, whom I had the honor to meet during the last 16 years, had an honor to be hosted by many at their homes around the globe, who extended great and unconditional support to me at times when I was in need, with whom we had spent endless hours discussing, debating, “fighting”, joking, working, creating, sharing, dining, traveling, was not only a great honor, but also a great fun! I take this opportunity to thank you all!

AJA is a major success of the Armenian Nation! It should serve as an example for other Armenians in industries where we have strong presence around the globe to follow. Every time when I hear that Armenian Jewelers are now a major force in the world jewelry market, I smile and feel proud that I, together with a great team and people, also have my small contribution!

Gagik Yeghiazarian