



Listen Respectfully, Work Collaboratively

## **Crafting Peace**

### **Armenian-Turkish Stonemasonry Cooperation Project**

#### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Political tensions between Turkey and Armenia have persisted for over a century despite decades of official attempts at reconciliation. The failure of the most recent protocols, signed by Ankara and Yerevan in 2009, is a sign that reconciliation must be built on a more stable foundation of cooperation at the individual and community level. HasNa aims to empower Turkish and Armenian stonemasons and the respective renovation sectors by providing a platform for them to share expertise and to contribute to the peace-building process by utilizing their common cultural heritage.

The Armenian and Turkish border communities of Gyumri and Kars share a common cultural heritage which unites both sides despite the various ongoing disputes. Some of the most influential leaders of this unifying heritage are the Turkish and Armenian stonemasons who work to preserve the physical representations of regional coexistence. Stonemasons, who are among the most historically respected leaders of their community, have the potential to provide the solid foundation upon which sustainable peace can be built.

While the border is seemingly open between Istanbul and Yerevan – there are indirect daily flights and unofficial trade amounting to about \$250 million per year – the border is, in reality, closed between Kars and Gyumri. These communities are suffering as a result of this political conflict. They also face the highest rates of unemployment and poverty within their respective states.

Both border cities, constructed during the Russian period in the same unique Baltic-region architectural style, are well situated to attract domestic, international, and cross-border tourism. The quality of many of the remaining structures and of stonemasonry skills, however, have deteriorated significantly on the Turkish side of the border. While there is a wealth of knowledge on the Armenian side, masons in Gyumri lack access to more advanced Turkish technology and participate in a limited market. By collaborating to preserve and improve the artistic quality of these unique structures, Armenian and Turkish stonemasons will be pursuing common goals and encouraging cultural tourism within and between their countries. The heightened interest in regional tourism would provide significant economic benefits for residents of both Kars and Gyumri while increasing knowledge and tolerance of their neighbors. The program aims to link stonemasons, key civil society members, and influential businessmen in the renovation sectors from both sides.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- To increase the knowledge and skills of Turkish stonemasons in Kars and to introduce advanced technologies and new markets to Armenian stonemasons in Gyumri.
- To empower local Armenian and Turkish economies by 1) encouraging investment in new skilled human resources in the restoration industry; 2) connecting skilled stonemasons, key business representatives, and local political leaders; and 3) promoting the growing cultural tourism sector.
- To raise awareness of the rich common cultural heritage in the region through the restoration of architecture by Armenian and Turkish stonemasons.
- To provide an ongoing successful example of positive interaction between the Turkish and Armenian private sectors that can contribute to the peace building and reconciliation process.

## ACTIVITIES

- Partners will identify a diverse core group of 14 master stonemasons, apprentices, key renovation company leaders and local government officials from Kars and Gyumri
- Two-week long study visit to Washington, DC for training in collaboration and communication skills, action planning, community outreach, as well as engaging with best practices in restoration. For instance, meeting with companies and workers involved in the restoration of the National Cathedral and the Washington Monument
- Week-long stonemason “train the master” technical capacity and skill building program and site visits to well-restored buildings in Kars and Gyumri

### *Community Outreach*

- Major conference in Kars, Turkey, on regional architecture to discuss the architectural tradition and innovations in architecture, to promote cultural tourism, and to increase regional cooperation. The conference will include key community leaders in the renovation sector, local government, tourism sector, and civil society
- Initiation of an advocacy campaign through a bilingual (Armenian and Turkish) publication to be prepared by two stonemasonry experts for community members in Kars and Gyumri on the importance of the preservation of cultural heritage and ways to use financial and technical assistance to restore their buildings and residences

## OUTCOMES

- Network of Turkish and Armenian stonemasons with advanced knowledge, technical abilities, collaboration skills, and links to key community leaders, sectors, and markets
- Joint participant action plans for promoting the mutual Turkish-Armenian cultural heritage, regional cooperation, and social tolerance
- Improved quality of stonemasonry and restoration in the border region with visible examples of Armenian-Turkish collaboration
- Economic improvement of border communities through domestic and cross-border cultural tourism

## Partners

- City Research Center (CRC) - Gyumri-based NGO focused on the preservation of cultural heritage, economic empowerment, and community involvement
- Kafkas Kultur—Kars-based NGO focused on the promotion of the unique architectural characteristics of the region.

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**HasNa Inc.**

[www.hasna.org](http://www.hasna.org)

2401 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 410, Washington, DC 20037 Tel: 202.478.1034 Fax: 202.223.1380 Email: [info@hasna.org](mailto:info@hasna.org)

HasNa Inc. is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1998 that brings people together from diverse backgrounds to promote cross-cultural understanding and economic empowerment and to encourage individuals and communities to work together toward advancement and peaceful coexistence.