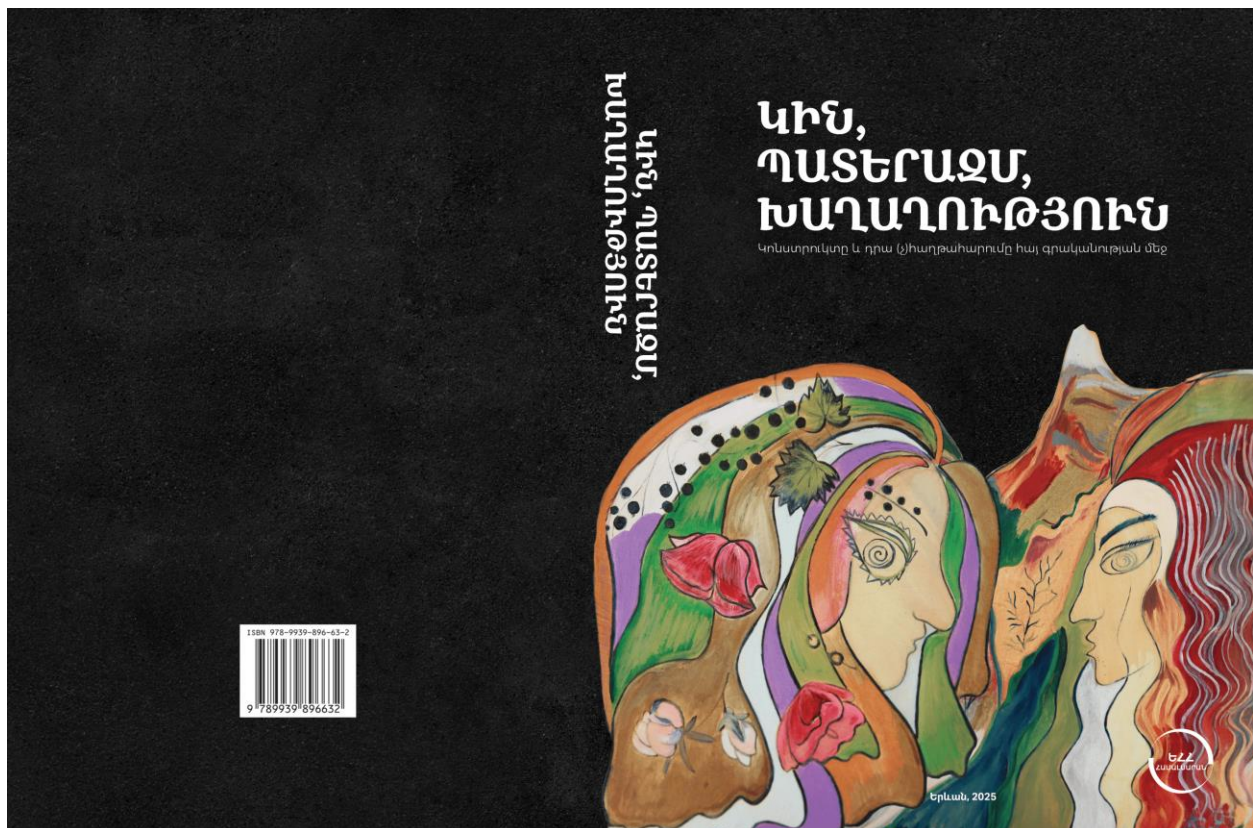


WOMEN, PEACE, AND WAR: THE CONSTRUCT AND ITS DE/CONSTRUCTION IN THE ARMENIAN LITERATURE

A Collection of Analytical Essays and Articles

Please see below an English-language digest of the book, which includes the foreword, the abstracts of the articles and information about the authors.





**EURASIA
PARTNERSHIP
FOUNDATION**



Funded by
the European Union

Edited by Ani Kojoyan and Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan
The project team: Isabella Sargsyan,
Nikolay Hovhannisyan, Samvel Khachatryan.
Cover picture: Anastasia Kachanova

Women, Peace, and War: The Construct And Its De/construction in the Armenian Literature. A Collection of Analytical Essays and Articles / Mher Arshakyan, Armine Danielyan, Sona Baldryan, Yelena Yeghiazaryan, Ala Kharatyan, Hayk Hambardzumyan Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2025.— 392 pages

The analytical essays in this collection present the multifaceted interrelations between women, war, and peace as reflected in texts from Armenian literature and folklore, in an accessible manner of popular scholarship. Positioned at the intersection of academic thought and artistic texts, the works offer innovative critical analyses of the ideas transmitted through literature and folklore - ideas that shape worldviews and dictate behavioral norms regarding the role and significance of women. The book explores the complexities of relationships between women and men, mothers and sons, within the contexts of war and peace, as portrayed in various Armenian literary texts. This collection is a rich repository that will help readers understand the historical dynamics, transformations, and developments of the roles and behaviors expected from women in Armenian society - both in times of war (and crises in general) and in periods of peace - as reflected in Armenian literature.

This study was conducted with the support of the European Union as part of the “Cultures of Peace” programme. The content is the sole responsibility of its authors and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the European Union.



This publication is a part of the series of manuals published under the “EPF University” heading. This publication is a part of War and Peace (WP) direction. The series include texts which belong to four large thematic directions:

Critical Thinking (CT)

War and Peace (WP)

Civil Society (CS)

Education, methodology of history, culture and values (EMHCV)

ISBN 978-9939-896-63-2 (print)

ISBN 978-9939-896-64-9 (on-line edition)

© Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2025

FOREWORD

This collection is a continuation of the Eurasia Partnership Foundation's (EPF) strategic endeavour to explore the reflection and disruption of modern values in Armenian literature. The first such initiative was carried out in 2011, funded by the Government of Sweden, and focused on the examination of freedom of expression and democratic values in Armenian literary production¹. The outcomes of that initiative included several innovative publications, among them the first study in contemporary Armenia on Zabel Yesayan's prose, an analysis of "army literature" as a new phenomenon in the history of Armenian letters, and a comparison of the Parisian "la Boheme" with that of the 1960s Yerevan.

The next project resulted in the 2017 volume "*Manifestations of Tolerance and Intolerance in Armenian Literature*,"² which spanned a wide scope of Armenian literary tradition—from the "Daredevils of Sassoun" epic to Abovian and Nar-Dos, all the way to the figure of the "*kyartu*" in contemporary writing. Funded by the Government of the Netherlands, this volume also critically examined school textbooks on literature and history.

The aim of this approach is to modernize the study of Armenian literature, bridging the gap between literary enthusiasts, researchers, civil society actors, and institutions, and provoking public debate on how Armenian society has reflected values such as democracy, freedom of expression, tolerance, and the renunciation of violence in its centuries-old literary heritage—why it has done so in particular ways, and how this heritage is conveyed to new generations.

This endeavor represents a sub-track of EPF's broader strategy, which has included research and action targeting the cultures of violence³ and criminality⁴ in Armenia, as well as other present and enduring challenges, related to the mythologization of history; hate speech; the lack of critical thinking; and systemic crises in formal education.

The volume before you is another outcome of this strategy that uses literary inquiry to address social needs. It focuses on the role of women, war, and peace, as represented in Armenian folklore and literature. The project was supported by the European Union.

The significance of this research is shaped by a range of factors. The deceptive and fragile period of peace has come to an abrupt end, and both the region and the world now face much more brutal forms of warfare than those witnessed in past decades. Gender equality and the struggle

¹ See these publications available here: <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/program-portfolio/media-programs/%20freedom-of-expression-and-democracy-in-armenian-literature>

² Hambardzumyan, H., et al (2017, in Armenian with English summaries). *Manifestations of Tolerance and Intolerance in Armenian Literature*. <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Manifestations-of-Tolerance-and-Intolerance-in-Armenian-Literature>

³ For example, see this study: Hovakimyan, G., et al (2020, in Armenian with English summaries). *The Culture of Violence in Armenia*. <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Culture-of-Violence-in-Armenia>

⁴ For example, see this study: Tadevosyan, A., & Margaryan, N. (2023, in Armenian with English summary). *Dictionary of Armenian Criminal ("Thief") Slang*. <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/documents/dictionary-of-armenian-criminal-slang>

for it have become core societal values, pursued with an intensity unprecedented in the past⁵. The recognition of the objectification of women in conflict and larger settings and their active role in peacebuilding has become a strategic priority for democratic societies around the world as well as for Armenia. The Government of Armenia has adopted the National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace, and Security*⁶, becoming the 80th UN member state to do so.

Yet war always marks a regression of values and approaches. It drives societies to become more conservative, cautious, and resistant to progress, creating the illusion that history merely repeats itself. The 44-day war of 2020 and the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Artsakh in 2023 had exactly such an impact on Armenian society. These contexts underscore the need to impartially examine what positive and negative lessons Armenian literature and folklore can offer regarding the role of women in war and peace—not only as passive objects of impact but as actors and doers.

Texts newly analyzed in this book—such as folktales, lullabies, soldiers’ songs, Raffi’s prose—present a somber landscape of subjugation, exploitation, and silent endurance of women. Yet they also offer counter-examples of resistance and agency. The book reveals how literature, remaining true to its mission of reflecting and responding to the life of the society, continually seeks new ways to challenge entrenched social constructs. Its central argument is that the historic path and progress of Armenian literature reflect society’s continual struggle to transform grim reality.

This juxtaposition of contemporary, classical, and folk texts holds many surprises. Whether in the prose of Lusine Kharatyan, Hrant Matevosyan, or the poetry of Slavi-Avik Harutyunyan, we observe how the glorification of war as a masculine pursuit and the subordination of women—so prominent in tales, folklore, and Raffi’s writings—gradually give way in modern texts to more nuanced attitudes and increasingly urgent calls to break free from imposed social stereotypes.

These stereotypes posit that war is an inevitable and eternal destiny (especially for Armenians); that the enemy is permanent and unchanging; that a woman is either a victim or a warrior; that peace means a stagnant life characterized by female subjugation; that power must be hierarchical, with humans reduced to tools; men – to “cannon fodder”; and that women have no value beyond heroism in battle or raising soldiers. Within this framework, people’s role in seeking and building peace—as a fundamental part of life—is erased, just as is the crucial role of women in peacebuilding and broader public life.

The collection also includes an essay by Hayk Hambardzumyan. Although not originally written for this project, it addresses its central theme head-on. In Hrant Matevosyan’s prose, Hambardzumyan identifies a particularly complex figure: a realistically depicted woman in power who is cruel and authoritarian. This figure can be compared to Raffi’s women rulers, though the latter often appear one-dimensional or fully fictional in novels about ancient history.

⁵ See the *Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (2013, Republic of Armenia, in Armenian). <https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/83841>

⁶ “*Women, Peace, and Security*” *Agenda in Armenia*. WomenNet.am. <https://womennet.am/armed-conflict/page19422055.html>

In contrast, Matevosyan's character, true to the author's literary ethos, is drawn from life and is inherently contradictory.

Hambardzumyan reveals the social mechanism of "evil": how moral corruption became possible and even desirable for some characters. For example, the heroine justifies violence against a relative by claiming that she no longer speaks as herself but as the (Communist) Party (though in truth she's acting in self-interest). Matevosyan also portrays the eroticization of power and violence (a teenage Rostom feels erotic attraction to the authoritarian woman leader), and how the idealized "pastoral" image of village culture is shattered piece by piece by the actions of a "civilizing" imperial power (e.g., military conscription), amid widespread poverty and hunger. Violence is further justified by the supposed need for discipline (as though there were no other means to organize a community apart from basing it on violence, - well, perhaps not, given that it is meant to be exploited), or in the name of false honor (not contributing "our share" is a shame vis-à-vis other communities or higher authorities). By drawing these patterns together, Hambardzumyan's analysis of Matevosyan's ruthless realism shows the explanatory power of the author's interpretation of social processes, with the precision and insight equal to if not surpassing academic scholarship.

The material in this book is rich, and every reader will find examples and lessons that resonate—contemplating the messages transmitted by oeuvres that picture a silent and struggling past as well as the defiant voice of the present. The book prompts reflection on how to pursue peace, how to build a just society, and how to redefine the traditionally subordinate and distorted role of women in the new and independent protagonist—the Republic of Armenia.

Three programs—components of a strategy spanning over a decade—all funded by Europe. This collaboration not only prompts us at EPF, past and present, to be grateful for this support on behalf of Armenia's civil society, students, and thinkers, but also serves as a new argument: that Armenian culture is profoundly European, and our cooperation is natural.

The book demonstrates that peace, the rejection of violence, tolerance, women's freedom and equality, and similar values are not imposed by the West or foreign to Armenian society. Rather, these values are inextricably linked to development, progress, and prosperity anywhere in the world. These are not "geopolitical" or polarizing values, but universal ones. Societies that seek sovereignty, stability, sustainable, deep and real democratic institutions, innovative growth, and principled peace define and operationalize these values in their own ways and act upon them.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan

ABSTRACTS

Mher Arshakyan: The Women of Lusine Kharatyan

Analyzing the image of woman in Lusine Kharatyan's *The Dead End of the Forget-Me-Not* collection and *A Syrian Affair* novel, the author shows how various realities—war in the past and future, fear of enmity, totalitarian society, women's lack of freedom, and the pressure of patriarchal reality—form artificial constructs that constrain the individual and lead human life into dead ends. The means to dismantle these constructs also lies within human language and its meanings, which, however, must undergo a radical transformation—revolution—in order to fulfill their mission of human liberation.

Armine Danielyan: “The King’s Daughter and Other Tales”: The Warrior Woman in Armenian Folk Tales

In magical folk tales, the warrior woman is not seen as a hero; she takes up arms only out of desperation—when her beloved, family, or homeland is left unprotected. She does not receive the same respect as male warriors. When describing women, these tales do not employ the richness of synonyms found in the Armenian language. Sometimes the female figure is portrayed as a traitor or used merely as a pretext for war. Tales rarely glorify the heroic deeds of female saviors and, when they do, it is often with restrained or minimalistic language. The warrior woman who triumphs through courage and cleverness does not demand deserved rewards or recognition. She does not reject the social roles and traits assigned to obedient women—daughters, sisters, mothers. After the end of military action, her fate is once again decided by men—husbands, fathers, hidden adversaries, supportive saints, or characters with magical powers. In some cases, the woman must become a man to convincingly fulfill her mission and achieve happiness.

Sona Baldryan, Elen Mangasaryan: The Lullaby and the Soldier’s Song as a Dialogue of Pain: A Feminist Analysis

Interpreting specific genres of folklore—lullabies and soldier's songs—as embodiments of memory resulting from political displacement, this research uncovers the dialogue between these two genres and the overwhelming presence of death in their texts. Especially significant are the cases in lullabies addressed to daughters where the mother wishes for the daughter's death. These features are explained by the theory of the cycle of violence: unjust power exerted pressure on the community from above, the community pressured the family, the family oppressed the woman—typically the daughter-in-law. And the daughter-in-law often expressed her subordinate condition through lullabies, a materialized memory of her suffering, since she remained silent in all other cases. If the daughters were to repeat their mothers' tragic fate, the sons would face the threat of unjust death on the battlefield, and they respond to this fate through the soldier's song.

Elena Yeghiazaryan, Nane Arakelyan: The Image of Woman in the Contexts of War and Peace in Raffi’s Works

Through the study of a significant part of Raffi's literary heritage, this work highlights the portrayal of women and attitudes toward them in Armenian and neighboring societies during the times Raffi lived and wrote about. Although romantic and national ideologies influenced Raffi's goal of creating an ideal woman—as seen in works like *Samvel*—his sharp genius also portrayed

realistic and ethnographically significant characters, situations, and behaviors in many of his writings. One can say that his work serves as a textbook of traditions and customs that defined and directed women's lives in the region—particularly in Armenian society—both in times of conflict and peace. It is a merciless encyclopedia and diagnosis of negative manifestations of these traditions and customs and resulting traps, the main conclusion of which is that striving for societal development and gender equality requires independence.

Ala Kharatyan: From National Ideology to the Dehumanization of War

Through examining the works of Daniel Varoujan—the genius poet of the early 20th century and genocide victim, Hrant Matevosyan—the major prose writer of the 20th century, and Slavi-Avik Harutyunyan—a 21st-century poet and participant in the First Artsakh War (1988-1994), Ala Kharatyan shows how the image of the woman transforms, from being immersed in the context of war as inescapable reality up to the rejection of glorifying war for patriotic purposes. The author shows how the development of Armenian artistic thought, particularly after the attainment of independent statehood, leads to the unification of the concept of peace with the essence of womanhood.

Hayk Hambardzumyan: Widows and 'Stalin in a Skirt': War and Women in Hrant Matevosyan's Prose

Hrant Matevosyan has created a diverse and striking array of female characters who confront the realities of war on the home front during the Second World War. These characters include poor widows who have lost their husbands or live alone, performing traditionally male labor, as well as strong-willed, forceful, and at times ruthless women. There are also party-affiliated women in positions of authority in the village; these women exploit and oppress the villagers. The depictions of these characters' lives can be considered authentic documentation of the wartime and postwar Armenian village. Through them, the author presents various aspects of the wartime experience: the system of conscription and its violations, the collection of material resources for the army, the transformations in rural economy, shifts in social behavior within the traditional community, the collapse of the traditional village, and more. Particularly noteworthy is the contrast between the characters of Rostom and Siranush Vratsyan in the works *The Master* and *The Barrow*. A comparative study of these two figures offers insights not only into certain stylistic and thematic characteristics of Matevosyan's prose but also into key features of Soviet and wartime reality.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mher Arshakyan is a philologist by profession (Yerevan State University, 1995). He has worked in various news outlets and TV stations as a correspondent-journalist, editor, and presenter. Alongside his journalistic career, he is also engaged in literary work and has authored several books in prose and verse. He currently works at the news service of the Armenian Public Television as an editor.

Armine Danielyan holds a PhD in Philology, and is a linguist and translator. She teaches at the Russian-Armenian University and is a co-founder of the “Text Platform” initiative. For about a decade, she has been researching visual interpretations of fairy tales, particularly their transformations in the context of fashion.

Sona Baldryan is a feminist researcher studying the neoliberal transformations in post-Soviet Armenia through the lenses of gendered citizenship and social movements. Her most recent article was published in *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science*, in a special issue dedicated to anti-gender discourse in international politics.

Elen Mangasaryan is a feminist researcher and emerging journalist. She is currently studying at the American University of Armenia, focusing on media, gender studies, and political journalism.

Elena Yeghiazaryan is a historian and psychologist. She conducts research using gender and feminist methodologies and writes essays and articles. Her academic interests include reproductive health and rights of women in the Soviet Union, gender-based violence, historical narratives about women, and the history of the queer movement in Armenia. She currently works at the NGO “Queer Qouir.”

Nane Arakelyan is a feminist and independent researcher. She is currently studying Chinese at the Brusov State University and is a linguist-translator by profession. Her academic interests include linguistics, Armenian literature, foreign language studies, and the feminist movement. This article is her first research work on feminism and Armenian literature.

Ala Kharatyan is a literary scholar, translator, editor, Candidate of Philological Sciences, and Associate Professor. She is a senior researcher at the Matenadaran (Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts), working in the Department of Ancient and Medieval Armenian Philology. She has also taught at the Brusov State University, offering courses in “Armenian Literature in the Context of World Culture,” “Semiotics,” and “Mythopoetics” at the master’s level. She has undertaken academic research visits to the University of Cologne, Humboldt University of Berlin, and the Leibniz Institute in Regensburg. She is the author of several dozen scholarly articles and reviews, as well as one monograph.

Hayk Hambardzumyan is a literary scholar, specialist of epic songs, translator, Candidate of Philological Sciences, and Associate Professor. He is the Director of the Publishing House of the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran) and a Senior Research Fellow there. He is the author of around seventy articles on Armenian folk literature as well as ancient, modern, and contemporary Armenian literature. He has authored five books. He is also the coordinator and editor of literary programs at Zangak Publishing House. Additionally, he is a scriptwriter, journalist, and presenter for the cultural and public television channel Shoghakat. He is the author and host of the Topic and Parallel Readings programs. Hambardzumyan has

created several dozen films and television programs on the topics of Armenian literature and culture. He is also the founder of the cultural and news website www.art365.am.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Ani Kojoyan is a philologist specializing in communication, women's rights, and gender studies. She graduated from the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology at Yerevan State University. Continuing her studies at the University of Oxford, she earned a Master's degree in English Language and Literature. In 2013, she pursued further academic and research work at Arizona State University in the United States, and in 2017, at the University of Oxford. She is the author of around thirty academic, educational, and research publications. She currently lectures at the Department of Translation Theory and Practice at Yerevan State University.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan was born in 1964 in Yerevan. He has lived, worked, studied, and taught in six countries. Since 2007, he has been the director of the Eurasia Partnership Foundation. He is the author of numerous literary works as well as books and publications on various social science topics. He has authored, co-authored, and/or edited many publications released within the EPF University series.

ABOUT THE EPF PROGRAM TEAM

Isabella Sargsyan is the Director of the Human Rights Program at the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF). She has 20 years of professional experience in the fields of human rights and development. Her main areas of expertise include human rights theory and practice, freedom of religion or belief, conflict transformation, qualitative research, and data analysis. For her contributions to the field of human rights, Isabella was awarded the "Defender of Freedom" prize in 2017.

Nikolay Hovhannisyan is a human rights lawyer and activist who has been engaged in the field of human rights protection within the nonprofit sector since 2011. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Jurisprudence from Yerevan State University (Armenia) and a Master's degree in International Human Rights Law from the University of Groningen (Netherlands). From 2018 to 2024, he served as Senior Program Manager at EPF, focusing on human rights programming and policy work. Currently, Nikolay works as a Senior Programmes Officer at ILGA-Europe.

Samvel Khachatryan is a translator and author. He joined EPF's communications team in 2021, contributing to a number of publications under the "EPF University" series. He studied Political Science and International Relations at the American University of Armenia, where he earned a Master's degree. His thesis explored the potential link between democracy and populism.

PUBLICATIONS UNDER THE ‘EPF UNIVERSITY’ HEADING

- Tadevosyan, A., Margaryan, N., & Ter-Gabrielyan, G. (Ed.), How People Learn: Experiences of Learning: A Socio-Anthropological Research (in Armenian). (2025) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/documents/aghasi-tadevosyan-nikol-margaryan-research-how-people-learn>
- Hovhannisyan, D., Explanatory Dictionary of Islamic Terms (in Armenian). (2024) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/documents/davit-hovhannisnyans-explanatory-dictionary-of-islamic-terms-is-out>
- Culture, Literature and Art in EPF’s Work after 2018. (2024) https://epfarmeria.am/sites/default/files/2024-11/Annual_Report_2024.pdf
- Tadevosyan, A., Margaryan, N., Explanatory Dictionary of Criminal (“Thief”) Slang (in Armenian). (2023) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/documents/dictionary-of-armenian-criminal-slang>
- Tadevosyan, A., The 44-day War in the Stories of Participants: An Anthropological Research (in Armenian). (2023) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/The-war-according-to-participants-stories-research>
- Ter-Gabrielyan, G., Grigoryan, A., Paskevichyan, N., & Martirosyan, V., Guide to Publishing (in Armenian). (2022) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/publication-algorithm>
- Mkrtchyan, N., Ter-Gabrielyan, G., Karapetyan, V., Grigoryan, A., Four Stories about Power (in Armenian). (2022) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Four-Stories-About-Power-2022>
- Ter-Gabrielyan, G., Kharatyan, L., & Hovhannisyan, M., Towards a Civics Advancement Measurement Tool. (2022) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Towards-a-Civics-Advancement-Measurement-Tool>
- Ter-Gabrielyan, G., “Support to Civil Society,” A Creative Games: Final Report of the “State and Digital World” Group (in Armenian). (2021) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Creative-Game-State-in-the-Digital-World-2021>
- Verboolen, A., Gaon, I. D., Manual for Trainers Mainstreaming Gender into Policies (in Armenian). (2021) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/DATA-Manual-for-Trainers-Mainstreaming-Gender-into-Policies>
- EPF Education and Learning. (2021) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/EPF-Education-and-Learning>

- Ter-Gabrielyan, G., Armenia 3.0. Understanding 20th Century Armenia. (2020) <https://epfarmeria.am/document/Armenia-3-0-Understanding-20th-Century-Armenia>
- Hovakimyan, G., Smbatyan, H., Petrosyan, D., Avagyan, Y., Khurshudyan, Sh., & Ter-Gabrielyan, G. (Ed.), Culture of Violence in Armenia (in Armenian). (2020) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Culture-of-Violence-in-Armenia>
- Ter-Gabrielyan, G., Critical Thinking: Logical Fallacies and Misleading Rhetorical Tricks (in Armenian). (2019) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Logical-Fallacies-and-Misleading-Rhetorical-Tricks-Critical-Thinking>
- “Society and Local Self-Governance.” Conclusions and Recommendations from an Organizational Activity Seminar. (2018) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/OAS-Highlights-CELoG-2018>
- Culture, Literature and Art. (2018) <https://epfarmeria.am/document/EPF-Culture-Literature-Art>
- Hambardzumyan, H., Mirzoyan, V., Avdalyan, L., Hovsepyan, N., Khumunts, M., Nersisyan, L., Mkrtchyan, G., Gabrielyan, A., Nikoghosyan, A., Khojayan, K., Davtyan, A., Nedolyan, A., Jaloyan, V., Melikjanyan, S., Ter-Gabrielyan, G. (Ed.), & Margaryan, A. (Ed.). Manifestations of tolerance and intolerance in Armenian literature (in Armenian). (2017) <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Manifestations-of-Tolerance-and-Intolerance-in-Armenian-Literature>

Expected to be published

- June 14: Echoes of Silence — Stories of Repression and Resilience (in Armenian). (2025) <https://epfarmeria.am/documents/june-14-echoes-of-silence-stories-of-repression-and-resilience>