

## Proust Questionnaire



**Name:** Shirin Gurdova

**Age:** 31

**Hometown:** Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

**Current City:** Paris, France

**Current Employer:** I recently graduated from a Georgetown Law LLM program and sat for the New York Bar Exam. I am currently in the process of finding my next position in private practice.

**Education:** Georgetown University Law Center, US (LLM), Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies /

University of Geneva, Switzerland (MIDS), Riga Graduate School of Law, Latvia (LLM), American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan (LLB).

**How did you get involved in international arbitration?** After my first LLM I had the privilege and honor to work with the Ashgabat-based legal team that represented my home country before several investor-State tribunals. I was fascinated by the cross-border dimension of the disputes and unique career development opportunities the field offered. This experience encouraged me later on to pursue specialized studies in international dispute settlement at the MIDS program in Geneva, which in turn led to further opportunities in arbitration in Paris.

**What is your favourite virtue?** Humility.

**What are your favourite qualities in another person?** Integrity, kindness, and sense of humor.

**What is your chief characteristic?** Perseverance.

**What is your main fault?** I may tend to overanalyze things when in doubt.

**What is your favourite occupation?** I would say learning more about history and philosophy. Most recently, I have been reading about the history of Lebanon and the Levant region in general.

**What is your idea of happiness?** A big dinner with close friends and family. One does not need much to be happy.

**What is your idea of misery?** Wasting one's potential and time.

**If not yourself, who would you be?** I am intrigued by anything universe related. I could see an alternate version of me being an astrophysicist, attempting to make sense of what little is known about space.

**Where would you like to live?** Since I moved abroad, Paris is where I feel at home the most. However, if I could choose any place regardless of career or other considerations, that would be a Greek island. Probably Ikaria.

**Who is your favourite prose author?** Mikhail Bulgakov and his book “The Master and Margarita”. As far as contemporary authors are concerned, I have been recently discovering captivating books of Chimamanda Adichie and Elif Shafak.

**Who is your favourite hero/heroine in fiction?** By far Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot – an eccentric and relentless detective.

**Who is your hero in real life?** At the risk of sounding sentimental, my husband, for his endless support.

**What historical person do you most dislike?** Corrupt politicians who have no regard for the people and their needs.

**What is your favourite name?** Sophia and Alexander for European names, Tchemen and Arslan for Turkmen names.

**What do you hate the most?** Unfairness.

**What is your natural talent?** Connecting with people.

**What is your favourite arbitration-related decision?** I like cases that explore niche issues. A classic example is the award on jurisdiction in *Abaclat v. Argentina* where the arbitrators disagreed on the compatibility of mass claims with investment arbitration, ICSID in this case. The majority saw it as an admissibility issue, arguing that if they have jurisdiction over one claim then they have jurisdiction over all of them. On the other hand, the dissent saw it as an issue of jurisdiction. It argued that for such a large number of claims the State must provide express consent that cannot be merely deduced or assumed from the general consent to arbitrate a dispute. In essence, it was a consent v. access to justice issue.

**Who is your favourite arbitrator?** Professor Gabrielle Kaufmann-Kohler for her global contribution to the development of international arbitration.

**Who is your mentor?** I have been fortunate to have met many amazing people both in international arbitration and outside the field to whom I am grateful for their support and guidance.

**What is your motto?** “Fight for the things that you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you”, Justice Ginsburg.

**What do you hope to contribute to Young ICCA as co-chair?**

Young ICCA is an organization that truly lives up to its mission to open the doors of international arbitration to those that want to join the field, something that I have experienced first-hand coming from an underrepresented jurisdiction. Its workshops and network have afforded me new skills, including via my role as a Young ICCA Events Coordinator (2019-2021). I wish to create similar opportunities for others.

I have been fortunate to collaborate with and learn from several former Young ICCA Co-Chairs to whose standards, professionalism, and ethics I look up to. In the role of the Young ICCA Co-Chair, I envisage putting my energy and network to the service of the organization, continuing its legacy, and further expanding its reach to emerging jurisdictions. In addition to the overview of existing projects including the now legendary mentoring programme and the management of Young ICCA skills training workshops, I would like to work with other Co-Chairs to create a Young ICCA digital magazine that would serve as a platform to publish articles and updates on recent international arbitration developments. The project would be geared towards young practitioners, invite their participation, and function as a convenient catch up for the arbitration community.