

Stanimira Hadjimitova



Stanimira Hadjimitova was selected for the 2011 Women Inspiring Europe Calendar.

A business spirit in the world of social change

With her smart haircut, tailored dark suit and crisp white shirt, Stanimira Hadjimitova is every inch the tough businesswoman. One of only a few women to graduate in a technical field from the University of Sofia, she could have stayed on the same path, climbing from one success to the next. But, after a fateful trip to Vienna, her fate was turned upside down.

After earning her first degree in technical science, Hadjimitova went on to receive yet another one in engineering – this time with even fewer female students at her side. She continued to defy gender lines, building her career in male-dominated organisations such as the Institute of Industrial Truck Research.

But what earned her lasting respect in the business world was her success in founding one of the rare private enterprises in Soviet-era Bulgaria. Despite specialising in the export of agricultural products – an industry heavily dominated by state-owned enterprises – the company succeeded to grow significantly during the 10 years of Hadjimitova's leadership.

In early 1995, the young mother and accomplished businesswoman traveled to Vienna for meetings and new acquisitions. The Bulgarian economy was slowly starting to open up and align with free trade, and the first stages of the free market economy had begun to prosper. It was at this time that Hadjimitova happened to meet a group of female Bulgarian lawyers, who had come to Vienna to prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

“This was the first time that I heard about this, but I immediately knew what this meant: I had to become a part of it.” Her life would never be the same again. Back in Bulgaria, the rational Hadjimitova figured out a way to follow her destiny – but in a very practical manner, of course! After a couple of months, she sold her company and – as was her pioneering nature – was the first to establish women shelters in Bulgaria. She also founded and served as General Director for the Bulgarian Fund for Women, as well as the Gender Project for the Bulgaria Foundation. Both were among the first NGOs in the “new” Bulgaria.

“I never ever thought about this being my choice. I think of it as my duty.” she says when asked if she found it hard to leave the business world where she had been so successful. Moreover, Hadjimitova managed to integrate strategies she learned in the private sector into her social work and lobbying: *“In fundraising,”* she jokes, *“I know how to handle money – and I know how businesses handle it.”*

Written by:

Shila MEYER-BEHJAT

International Editor – auFeminin Group

www.aufeminin.com

Metadata

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