

Portrait – Iryna Ivaschenko

hvg, July 22, 2010 ([Hungarian version](#))

It is not my job to be a celebrity – explains the 37-year Ukrainian financial expert who plans to continue her “hiding lifestyle” after the inefficient negotiations between the government and the IMF, and who tells us her age only after a lengthy request. She was born in a small town next to Kiev. Her father worked as an agricultural economist, while her mother was a dispatcher at an energy company and had a qualification of a cook. Both of them lost her/his job after the fall of the Soviet Union. Thus after finishing the high school with a mathematics-physics specialization in Kiev, and starting MSc in engineering at the University Architecture and Building in Kiev, Iryna immediately started to work. While studying systems of automatic control systems and management, at the same time she was working as a translator, then coordinating foreign student exchange programs, and also operated a small business that designed and made clothes. She started working at a consultancy firm making projects for the World Bank in 1994, and also worked as an external advisor of the Ministry of Economy one summer. Furthermore, she got into a MA in Economics program, and then advanced to complete a PhD in Finance in Stockholm. The IMF found her at a recruiting event in Stockholm School of Economics when she was already a teaching assistant. The Ukrainian PhD student started to work in Washington at the capital market group of the research department, and then worked as an economist on the U.S., Canada, and then Italy, with missions to Russia and Iceland. With this past, she was then selected to be the IMF’s representative in Budapest in charge of the affairs related to the IMF stand-by arrangement 1.5 year ago.

“I like classical music, nowadays I listen often piano concerto III and IV of Beethoven” – says the IMF-official who – at the same time – shares with us only the following information about her private life: “I live with my 6-year daughter in downtown Budapest.” After being an economist and a diplomat in workdays, Iryna changes her job in the weekend and “transports her daughter to tennis, swimming and other programs as a driver”.

- *When the financial world is talking about us – as it happened recently due to the comments made by government members -, are you nervous?*
- If possible, I would not like to make any comment on this.
- *Then could you please tell us up to what extent you have got to know us? Are you already able to order anything in the restaurant in Hungarian, or do you communicate with the waiters only in the “language of numbers”?*
- Unfortunately, I am not very good in Hungarian. I found a Hungarian teacher, but I did not have enough time to take lessons regularly. Believe it or not, I really want to learn your language at least at base level. I can already greet anybody and I learnt a few numbers as well.

- *It was a surprise for us that you worked as a dress designer during the university. Why did you not continue this work? Were you not talented enough or did finance seem to be more interesting for you?*
- I decided as a university student in what direction I want to advance in my life. Dress design was my hobby and also served the goal of earning money.
- *Why is your current work so fantastic? Why does anybody want to work at the IMF?*
- Why does anybody not want to work for the IMF?
- *We will then word the question differently: what is a challenge in a work which may seem to be boring for other people?*
- Every part of work is very interesting for an economist—and of course, the past two years were very challenging. We have been dealing with a crisis which is unprecedented in some regards. One can feel that she is a part of important things and the country needs her. If the international community did not offer its financial support and Hungary did not take decisive steps to manage the crisis 18 months ago, the economic decline could have been much sharper.
- *So it was not a punishment that the IMF sent you to Hungary.*
- It was my dream appointment two years ago. The Resident Representative has many tasks, including among others, monitoring the situation “on the ground;” facilitating the flow of information and knowledge between Budapest and Washington; and supporting government’s implementation of policies agreed under the IMF-EU program.
- *Are you so moderate in your private life as well? Do you take care of the details and are you so well-organized as in your work? Do you live according to a strict schedule?*
- Oh, no! As I have a small daughter, I have to be flexible: whatever one plans with a child, everything will happen in line with her request.
- *Have you ever borrowed from a bank? Did you also suffer from the crisis and the difficulties with monthly installments?*
- I am very conservative in financial affairs. When I bought my house in Virginia, the loan was three times as small as the amount the bank would have been willing to give me.
- *Since theory and practice met each other so well in your life, have you ever thought of using the advantages of your authentic personality? Would you change your current work for a position in a Ukrainian ministry?*
- Many friends of mine in Washington asked me why I do not step into Ukrainian politics. I have been away from Ukraine for too long, and I do not aspire to be a politician. I do not know whether you realized that I try to stay in the background, since my job is to be as efficient and professional as possible.
- *And does this allow for the variability of hairstyle? I found a picture in the Internet on which you have a much brighter hair color than now.*

- I do not color my hair. Unfortunately or not, my hair lives its own life, and goes through interesting color changes a few times. These changes are usually not dramatic, for example I have never been blond.
- *In one of the pictures on a social networking website, you wear a beautiful red dress. Do you have many occasions not to act as a strict professional but as a woman?*
- I can hope that “the woman is always inside me”, and it depends on the conditions how much I allow it to manifest itself. Anyway, I still have that dress. That picture was made in front of the Stockholm town hall after I received my PhD diploma. Unfortunately, I have not had time to wear this dress for many years.
- *Do you want to say that you have not had time to relax since then?*
- The best relaxation is my daughter. She is six years old which is a wonderful age. When we are together, we read (encyclopedias very often), or dance while singing as loud as possible. Of course, she has already watched each of the 18 series of Nu Pagagyí.
- *Honestly: which scenario would make you happier? If Hungary recovers from the crisis early and you can get back to Washington, or if this relationship becomes a little bit longer and you can stay in Budapest?*
- Please, do not misinterpret me, I like Hungary very much and it is good to be here, but it would be good if problems were addressed as soon as possible – we all have worked a lot for this. The goal is that Hungary is in a good stance, pays back the loan and get on a sustainable growth path.