

»LEADERSHIP ISN'T ABOUT HAVING ALL THE ANSWERS. IT'S ABOUT ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS, STAYING CURIOUS, AND LIFTING OTHERS AS YOU RISE.«

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*Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova,  
photos: Visa and IEDC*

**W**hat inspired you to pursue a career in finance and payments, and how did your journey lead you to Visa?

To be honest, I didn't set out with a grand plan to work in finance or payments. Like many of us, after I graduated from high school I leaned on the wisdom of my parents, who saw banking as a stable and respected path. That advice led me to study finance in my home country of Moldova,

and I began my career at Moldova Agroindbank—the largest bank in the country at the time.

What started as a junior role quickly became a journey of discovery. Over two decades, I grew within the organization, eventually becoming Deputy Chairman of the Board, overseeing cards, IT, and payments. It was in those years that I truly fell in love with the world of payments, its complexity, its pace, and its power to drive real impact.

Joining Visa felt like a natural next step. It's a company that sits at the intersection of finance, technology, and innovation—exactly where I wanted to be. Every day, I'm inspired by the opportunity to shape the present and future of payments and to help build more inclusive, connected economies.

**Looking back, what were the pivotal moments or decisions that shaped your professional path?**

One of the most pivotal decisions in my career was choosing to leave Moldova—the place where I was born, raised, and built the foundation of my professional life. Accepting a role at Visa's regional hub in Kyiv, overseeing 17 countries, was both exciting and daunting. I began as Head of Product Solutions, and soon after, transitioned into business development — a shift that not only expanded my perspective but also led to another relocation.

When the opportunity came to lead Visa's operations in the Caucasus, I said yes, even though I didn't yet have deep familiarity with the region. That decision opened the door to my next chapter in Almaty, where I took on the role of Regional Manager for Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Eventually, I was honored to be appointed Group Country Manager for the entire region. Looking back, each move—each leap into the unknown—was a defining moment. My journey has been shaped by a willingness to adapt, to learn, and to lead with curiosity. Another important factor was humbleness to acknowledge and deeply respect cultural richness and diversity of the countries I was privileged to live and work in. With the risk of stating the obvious: your real growth begins the

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**Would you say that Executive MBA at IEDC back in 2009 was one of the factors that impacted your career growth? If yes, in which way? Do you still keep in touch with your classmates or school faculty?**

Absolutely, the Executive MBA at IEDC-Bled School of Management in 2009 was a

interaction with world-class faculty challenged me to think critically and approach problems with a strategic mindset. I learned not only how to manage teams and organizations, but also how to lead with integrity and empathy.

Equally important was the personal growth I experienced. The IEDC culture emphasized ethics, responsibility, and self-awareness, which helped me become a more thoughtful and resilient leader.



pivotal factor in my career growth, and I consider it one of the most transformative experiences of my life. The program was not just about acquiring business knowledge — it truly shaped me both as a professional and as a person.

From a professional standpoint, IEDC provided me with a global perspective and a toolkit of practical knowledge that I could immediately apply in my career. The case-based learning, exposure to diverse industries, and

The IEDC Executive MBA was truly transformational. It gave me the skills and confidence to advance in my career, but perhaps more importantly, it helped me become a better human being—more open-minded, compassionate, and committed to making a positive impact.

**What were some of the key challenges you faced as you transitioned into leadership roles across diverse markets?**

Stepping into leadership roles across different markets has been one of the most rewarding and humbling experiences of my career. Each transition came with its own set of challenges, but also with immense opportunities to grow.

One of the key challenges was learning to lead in unfamiliar cultural and business environments. What works in one market doesn't always translate to another, so I had to quickly learn to listen deeply, observe carefully, and adapt my leadership style to resonate with local teams and partners. Another challenge was building trust from the ground up, especially when I didn't have deep roots in a particular region. I learned that trust isn't built through titles or strategies, but through professionalism, consistency, empathy, and showing up for your team every day. One of my colleagues at Visa, at the time Regional Manager in Asia Pacific region, once told me that you cannot consider you are rooted in the market unless you are invited to a client's children's wedding or family party. To me it says everything about the level of trust you need to build with your partners.

And of course, there's the personal side of change — relocating, rebuilding networks, and navigating the unknown. But I've come to see these moments not as disruptions, but as catalysts. They've taught me resilience, sharpened my instincts, and reminded me that leadership is less about having all the answers and more about creating the space for others to thrive.

## **How have you seen the banking and payment industries evolve over the last two decades?**

Over the past two decades, the payments industry has evolved in ways we could hardly have imagined. I still remember when swiping a magnetic stripe card felt modern. Today, we authorize payments with a glance or a tap—whether it's a fingerprint, a face scan, or a wearable device.

The pace of change has only accelerated, especially in the last five years. We've seen a surge in e-commerce, the mainstreaming of contactless payments, and the rise of tokenization — all of which have made payments faster, safer, and more intuitive. But what excites me most is what's coming next. In April, Visa introduced the Visa Intelligent Commerce initiative—a bold

step toward a future where AI agents can shop, select, and pay on behalf of consumers using a Visa credential. It's not just about convenience; it's about reimagining the entire commerce experience.

This industry never stands still. And at Visa, we're proud to be at the forefront, helping shape a future that's more intelligent, more seamless, and more secure for everyone.

## **In your experience, how do consumer expectations around payments differ across regions like the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe?**

Across all the markets I've worked in, from the Caucasus to Central Asia and Eastern Europe, one thing is clear: consumers are increasingly eager for digital payment solutions. But each country moves at its own pace,





shaped by its infrastructure, regulatory environment, and cultural habits.

Some markets are still transitioning from a strong reliance on cash, while others—like Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Georgia—are setting global benchmarks. In fact, Georgia ranks first worldwide in contactless payment adoption, which speaks about the region's appetite for innovation.

What continues to inspire me is how digitally savvy and open to change consumers in this region are. Their enthusiasm for new technology has made it possible for us to pilot several first-of-their-kind solutions, not just within Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, but sometimes globally. That spirit of innovation is what makes this region so dynamic and exciting to work in.

### **What are the biggest regulatory or market shifts you've had to adapt to in recent years?**

One of the most profound shifts we're navigating today is the rise of artificial intelligence. With agentic AI on the horizon, where intelligent systems can act on behalf of consumers, the stakes around trust, ethics, and compliance have never been higher.

At Visa, trust has always been our foundation. As a leader in a highly regulated industry, we're committed to harnessing AI in a way that is responsible, transparent, and secure. AI thrives on data, but it's how we use that data—with

integrity and accountability—that defines our success. Our role is not just to innovate, but to do so in a way that earns and sustains the confidence of our partners, clients, and consumers.

### **What innovations within Visa are you most proud to have been part of?**

As a company Visa has been paving the way for so many innovations, which have become business as usual for all of us today – chip technology, contactless chip technology,

and I truly believe we're in a position to lead this next chapter of commerce. It's not just about convenience, it's about creating smarter, more intuitive experiences that meeting people where they are.

### **How does Visa strike a balance between innovation, security, and regulatory compliance?**

At Visa, we don't see innovation, security, and compliance as trade-offs—they are the pillars that support



ecommerce, paying with your phone, using a phone to accept payments and many others. Yet without a doubt, I'm most proud of our work on Visa Intelligent Commerce. What once felt like science fiction—AI agents that can shop, select, and pay on your behalf—is now becoming a reality.

What excites me even more is how this innovation is taking shape in our region. Our markets have a strong appetite for new technology,

everything we do. Innovation only matters if it's trusted. Security only works if it enables progress. And compliance is what ensures we're building for the long term.

We take a proactive, safety-first approach to innovation—one that's grounded in ethics and designed to deliver real value. We also work closely with regulators to help shape open, forward-looking environments. In fact, many of the markets in our region are among the most progressive, which is

why they're often the first to adopt new Visa solutions. It's a powerful example of how collaboration can accelerate innovation responsibly.

### **What role does Visa play in supporting SMEs and promoting financial inclusion in emerging markets?**

Small businesses are the heartbeat of local economies, yet many still face barriers to digital inclusion. At Visa, we're committed to breaking down those barriers with simple, accessible technologies.

One example I'm especially proud of is Visa Tap to Phone. It turns any smartphone into a payment terminal—no extra hardware needed. This is a game-changer for microbusinesses, from street vendors to home-based entrepreneurs, who can now accept digital payments with just an app.

We're also deeply invested in supporting women-led SMEs. Our She's Next Empowered by Visa initiative has been active in the region since 2020, offering funding, mentorship, and education. Over 60 thousand women have already participated in our programs, and we recently launched the region's first She's Next Hackathon to take this support even further. It's about more than access — it's about empowerment.

### **How do you foresee technologies like AI, blockchain, or biometrics shaping the future of payments?**

Each of these technologies is reshaping the payments landscape in powerful ways. Blockchain is transforming how money moves. Visa has been facilitating crypto transactions for years, and we're now expanding into stablecoin-linked cards, real-time settlement, and programmable money. Our recent partnerships with Bridge and Yellow Card are helping bring these innovations to life across Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Biometrics is another area of rapid progress. With Visa Payment Passkey, we're replacing passwords and one-time codes with fingerprint or facial recognition. It's already live in Ukraine, and I expect more countries in our region to follow. It's a perfect example of how we can enhance security without sacrificing convenience.

But AI is the most transformative force of all. From enabling intelligent commerce to powering personalized financial assistants, AI has the

potential to make payments more inclusive, intuitive, and empowering—for consumers and businesses alike. Imagine a world where every person, regardless of income or geography, has access to smart financial tools that help them thrive. That's the future we're building.

### **What motivates you personally when leading large, multi-country operations?**

It is an opportunity to create a meaningful impact on a scale. There's something incredibly inspiring about aligning diverse teams across geographies, cultures, and time zones around a shared vision. It's not just about operational excellence; it's about building bridges that empower people to thrive and customers to feel seen, understood, and supported wherever they are.

There's also a deep sense of responsibility that comes with scale. When you lead across borders, your choices ripple further. That's a powerful motivator. It pushes me to



be intentional, to lead with integrity, and to always ask: Are we lifting people up? Are we leaving things better than we found them?

At the end of the day, it's people who inspire me most. The quiet strength and resilience of a team navigating change. The spark in someone's eyes when they realize they've made a difference. That's what keeps me going. That's what makes the complexity worth it.

**How do you manage to balance a high-responsibility career with your personal and family life?**

Balance for me has never been about perfect symmetry—it's about presence and perspective. I've been incredibly fortunate to have a family that not only supports my ambitions but actively encourages them. My daughter, now an adult, has grown up watching me navigate boardrooms and airports, and her understanding has been one of my greatest gifts. When I took on more senior roles — ones that demanded late nights, weekend work, and constant travel — she didn't just accept it, she championed it.



*Say yes to the stretch roles. Speak up even when your voice shakes. Surround yourself with people who challenge you to grow and remind you of your worth.*

My husband and daughter have been my grounding force. Their belief in me gave me the courage to say yes to opportunities that once felt daunting. And now, with more flexibility in our family rhythm, I can give my full energy to the work I love, knowing that the people who matter most are cheering me on. That kind of support doesn't just make balance possible—it makes it meaningful.

**Have there been any personal rituals or routines that help you stay grounded during high-pressure periods?**

Absolutely. In the whirlwind of high-stakes decisions and constant movement, I've learned the importance of intentional stillness. One of my favorite rituals is what we call "pajama day" with my daughter. It's exactly what it sounds like: a day at home, no agenda, just us in our comfiest clothes, watching films, cooking, reading, and reconnecting.

It may seem simple, but it's sacred. It reminds me that rest is not a reward — it's a requirement. These moments of pause allow me to return to work more centered, more creative, and more human. In leadership, especially during intense periods, grounding yourself isn't a luxury — it's a leadership skill.

**What advice would you give to young women who aspire to leadership roles in tech or finance?**

My advice is this: don't wait for someone to hand you a seat at the table — pull up your own chair. In tech and finance, you may find yourself as the only woman in the room. That's not a weakness. That's your power. Your perspective is not just valid — it's vital.

Say yes to the stretch roles. Speak up even when your voice shakes. Surround yourself with people who challenge you to grow and remind you of your worth. Find mentors who inspire you and be that mentor for someone else.

And remember: leadership isn't about having all the answers. It's about asking the right questions, staying curious, and lifting others as you rise. You belong in every room you walk in. Own that. The world needs your voice.

## WHAT ONE CANNOT FIND ON CRISTINA'S RESUME



EMBA 2009

**Cristina Doros**  
Senior Vice President,  
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### *What does your typical morning look like?*

*My mornings always start with a glass of water, followed by a quick stretch to wake up my body. I take a few moments to review the day's agenda, which helps me set my intentions and get ready to embrace the world.*

### *You travel a lot – what little things help make the journey smoother or more enjoyable?*

*Fortunately, I genuinely love flying, which makes frequent travel much easier and more enjoyable for me. To be honest, if I hadn't found my calling in banking and payments, I'm certain I would have pursued a career in aviation. There's just something about airports and airplanes that feels like home.*

### *What is the country or place you have never been to and is on your bucket list?*

*Normandy is at the top of my travel bucket list. Its rich history and stunning landscapes have always fascinated me, and I hope to experience it first-hand soon.*

### *The best band/musician of all times for you is...*

*It's impossible to choose just one! My personal all-time favorites include Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Queen, and Metallica. Clearly, I'm not a Gen Z! :)*

### *Is there a place, food, or tradition of your home country Moldova that you can't wait to experience when you have time?*

*Moldova is and always will be home for me. Whenever I have the chance, I look forward to returning and immersing myself in everything Moldovan—our music, our traditions, and, of course, our food. Each aspect of my culture holds a special place in my heart.*

### *If you could have any superpower, what would it be?*

*If I could choose, I'd love to have the power to help people stay resilient during difficult times. Supporting others and helping them find strength is something I value deeply.*

### *If you could choose a completely different life and career outside of banking, what would you be?*

*Aviation, without a doubt. Since I travel so often, I'm continually fascinated by the professionalism, complexity, and precision that define the aviation industry. I have immense respect for everyone who works in this field, and I know I would have found it a rewarding career path.*