
Interview: Haik Baboekhanian and Hrant Khachatrian

Armenia could be destroyed, the same way that Lebanon was

Haik Baboekhanian and Hrant Khachatrian are leaders of the Union of Constitutional Rights in Armenia. Khachatrian is a member of the national parliament. Baboekhanian is a member of the city council in Yerevan, Armenia's capital, and a newspaper editor. They attended the June 4-5, 1993 conference of the Schiller Institute in Bonn, where they were interviewed on June 6 by Rachel Douglas.

EIR: When I was in Moscow in April, I met a lady, an activist in the human rights movement and a big partisan of Armenia, who compared the situation in Yerevan, Armenia this past winter, with Leningrad during the World War II siege. I would ask you to tell our readers what this was like, how you survived the winter.

Khachatrian: If we draw a parallel between the situation in Armenia now and the situation in Leningrad during the war, I should say that during the war, the people in Leningrad were rationed approximately double the bread, per capita, that Armenians are receiving now.

We can single out two aspects of the situation in Armenia. One is the same as what is happening in Russia, all the negative tendencies like the decline of the average living standard. But in addition, there is the effect of the long-term blockade against our republic, the impact of the war with Azerbaijan, as well as some internal questions that have not yet been solved, because the external pressure on the republic makes it impossible for the people, including the political parties created in Armenia, to tackle domestic questions. I am referring to the process of redefining spheres of influence inside the republic, which is a process common to Russia and the other republics that freed themselves from the communist regime.

Indeed, to raise domestic questions is very dangerous because the external pressure on the republic, both from neighbors—first off, Azerbaijan, and secondly Turkey, which is helping Azerbaijan and is itself blocking communications and transportation into Armenia from its territory—and from international financial organizations and great powers who aspire to have influence in Armenia, threatens the Armenian people with genocide once again.

In these circumstances, both the people and the political parties put on the back burner many questions which, in my

view, would be very important to resolve right now, because all this is leading to Armenia's possible transformation into a state like Lebanon. There could develop major mafia structures in Armenia, if things go on like this.

The good, or even excellent understanding of this on the part of the population and the political parties does not, however, make it possible for them to address domestic questions. The international community is doing almost nothing to find an acceptable solution to Armenia's external problems. That would mean, first of all, recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Armenia or even as a separate state, but independent from Azerbaijan. And secondly, that the blockade against Armenia be ended. Under those conditions, it would be possible to think about a normal internal political development for our republic.

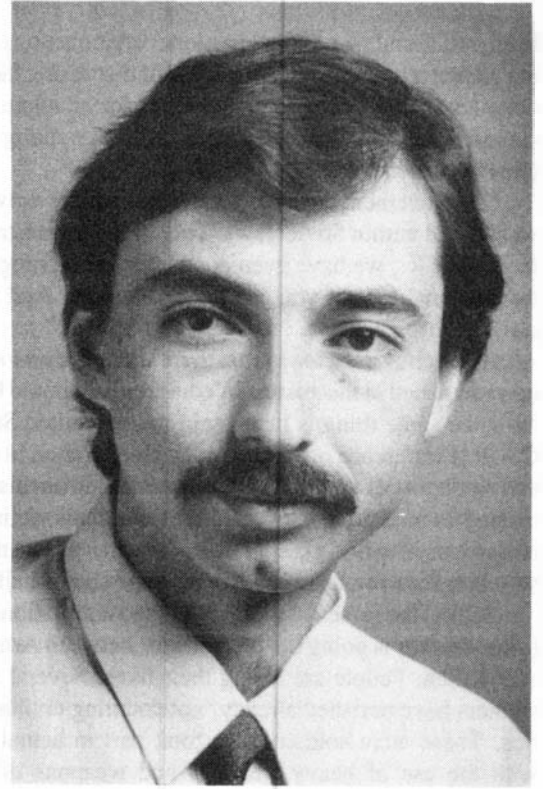
EIR: Mr. Baboekhanian, as a resident and a leader in Yerevan, perhaps you could describe in a little more detail, how the citizens of the city lived through the winter. You have mentioned suicides, and a rise in the number of people trying to emigrate. If these problems are not solved by this fall, what awaits the city?

Baboekhanian: Although it is not within the live combat zone, the city nevertheless naturally experiences the full weight of the blockade, and of the war, except that there have not yet been any direct artillery hits. The complete lack of gas or other fuel in residential buildings and the almost complete lack of electricity mean that people not only are not thinking about normal social conditions, but are thinking most of all just about how to cook some food. There's nothing to cook with. There's no hot water, which means difficulties with sanitary conditions. This is all reflected onto people's psychological state. The extraordinary growth of prices, in the absence of any possibility for the normal organization of trade, or of production, leads to a growth of apathy. The number of suicides is growing, even now, when there is not the immediate problem of heat. It is rising markedly, especially among the elderly.

As for municipal services, during the winter virtually all types of communication were out of action—not only transport on the city streets, but pipelines, which frequently froze. The electrical supply system broke down, because it



Hrant Khachatryan (left) and Haik Babookhanian. "If we draw a parallel between the situation in Armenia now and the situation in Leningrad during the war," says parliamentarian Khachatryan, "I should say that during the war, the people in Leningrad were rationed approximately double the bread, per capita, that Armenians are receiving now."



was overloaded with use it wasn't designed for. Now, we have to spend huge sums to bring cables and pipes into Armenia, mainly by air, on planes, which is naturally very costly to the municipal budget.

At the present time, the city authorities are trying to do everything they can to prepare for next winter. They're working to lay in stores of coal and mazut [a petroleum product] for residential heating. We are planning to bring in firewood, and ration it out to the population. In northern Armenia exploitation of a coal deposit has begun, which is unfortunately not very productive, but so far it's the only one we have. This coal is being brought from the north to Yerevan for storage, so that it will somehow be possible to get through next winter.

EIR: How many refugees are there in the city, from the combat areas, and so forth?

Babookhanian: It's hard to give a total figure now, because the refugees from Karabakh, from the territory occupied by Azerbaijan in the northern part of Karabakh, are gradually returning home, as our troops are liberating villages in northern Karabakh. There is a certain inflow and outflow, as combat flares up in various border regions. When it dies down, people return to their homes.

A certain portion of the refugees from the disaster area, the [1988] earthquake zone, are still living in hotels and pensions in Yerevan. Now, a new influx of refugees has begun, from Abkhazia [in Georgia].

EIR: Of Armenians?

Babookhanian: Yes, Armenians who live in Abkhazia. There is a very large Armenian community there, but the combat has been very difficult for them. There is total anarchy there, total chaos. Their villages are often right on the front line, and they are bombed by both sides. So there are now a lot of people from Abkhazia. That's the situation now, with refugees.

EIR: Your military situation was discussed in the framework of the United Nations. How do you evaluate and react to the positions the various so-called great powers took during that discussion, for instance Britain, America, Russia?

Khachatryan: When, in the framework of the Soviet Union, we first began the Karabakh movement to reunite the two separated parts of Armenia, our whole people hoped for the support of international organizations, the international community. And there was also some hope staked on the policies of Gorbachov, on perestroika, because the Karabakh problem was so pure and crystal clear, that everybody thought that if it were raised at the international level, there would without fail be a positive solution. This was because the Armenians would not have to prove whether Armenians lived there or not. It was historically accepted everywhere, that this was truly Armenian territory. We thought we would not have to prove to anybody, that the Karabakh Armenians had the right to live on this land.

But after this question was raised at the international

level, we found that the international organizations were being played by certain forces. Instead of discussing these questions according to the U.N. Charter, for example, various countries would act as supposed mediators, wanting to reconcile the Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Our movement began in 1988. For a little over two years, we worked within Soviet laws. Then, after the destruction of the U.S.S.R., we have been conducting our struggle within international law, if you can put it that way. And we don't see any difference.

Gorbachov used to say that there should be no victors and no vanquished in this matter. A compromise should be found. Now the same thing is being said by the United States, the CSCE [Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe], and mediators of various rank. But mediation on this question resembles mediation between a robber and his victim. When it is proposed to find a compromise, this means that the victim should agree to being robbed, or at least to being half-robbed.

Behind the screen of these prolonged international mediations, the war is going on—a real war, between Armenia and Azerbaijan. People are losing their lives. Several thousand soldiers have perished already, not counting civilian casualties. These were soldiers who took part in actual combat, with the use of heavy weapons and weapons of massive annihilation.

And still, the intermediary activity continues. The latest was the "3 plus 1" proposal, the joint initiative of the United States, Russia, and Turkey, which the leader of the Minsk [negotiating] group subsequently joined, making it 3 plus 1. That proposal or initiative concerned the withdrawal of Armenian forces from just one region of Azerbaijan, occupied by the Armenians.

EIR: Is that the corridor?

Khachatryan: No, this region is between the administrative borders of Karabakh, and former Soviet Armenia, to the left of the humanitarian corridor. Historically, this region was also settled by Armenians and there are many historical monuments there. But we are not talking about that now, because during the destruction of the military bases located there, and actually before that operation, the Armed Forces of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic announced that they had no claims on that territory and that they would relinquish the region. The action was being taken out of military necessity.

EIR: To eliminate the bases?

Khachatryan: Yes. And actions of this type are regulated under international law. This concept of military necessity exists in the documents of international law. This was clearly announced. But there was an immediate reaction from Russia, Turkey, and America, that demanded the withdrawal of the Armenians. This was followed by a U.N. resolution. But there is no mention in it of any guarantees, of any principled

discussion of the question in the future. It is only said that the working group of the Minsk negotiations will be reconvened; which group until now has done nothing proper. This is my impression.

EIR: You have both just attended the conference of the Schiller Institute. It passed a resolution on Karabakh [see box]. Would you like to comment on the conference and the discussion there of LaRouche's ideas as an alternative to war? I think your reactions to the conference would be of interest to our readers.

Babookhanian: We came to the conference, because for more than two years now, we have been collaborating with the Schiller Institute. We are collaborating precisely because we share many of the positions and thoughts, both of Mr. LaRouche himself and of the whole organization. Unfortunately, there are few such organizations in the West, which approach questions dispassionately, I would say, in the sense of not having some specific, narrow political goals and ambitions. The Schiller Institute, rather, approaches each task from the standpoint required in order to ensure peace, stability in the world, and normal conditions of life for people throughout the world, and to direct scientific, technical, and other potentials not into wars and confrontation among peoples, but toward normal, long-term development.

We must, of course, express our thanks for the invitation and for the organization of such a conference, which we think could be of great significance not only for our problems, but for the atmosphere in which normal conditions of interaction may be created in the whole world, and in Europe in particular.

We are very glad that our question, once again, met with understanding from the participants in the conference. We were able again to convey our concerns and our understanding of how the problem may be solved.

Furthermore, we supported the demand for the immediate release of Mr. LaRouche from prison, because we believe that this was a political action we should support. We have supported that demand in the past, both individually and as an organization. Unfortunately, it does no honor to the United States, that such a citizen, scholar, and political figure is in prison. I think that the new administration will correct the mistakes of past years.

Khachatryan: I will add two words, on the moral side of things. I used to think that it was characteristic just of Armenians to prefer to learn from one's own mistakes, rather than from the experience of others. But I have become convinced, that all people experience this danger.

When our Karabakh movement was just getting started, many Russian friends called me and asked what was going on. I warned them: If you don't speak out now, the same thing will happen with you in a few years. They laughed, thinking I was joking. But three years later, there was the putsch attempt in Moscow, in Russia. What I would like to

say with this, is that people should be more attentive to the processes taking place in the world. I know that the warnings of Lyndon LaRouche and the Schiller Institute are greeted with some hostility by people, who take them as something alien or out of line.

EIR: As the Croatian journalist [Srećko Jurđana] said at the conference, "A TV broadcast from another planet."

Khachatryan: But we can be sure that it is not from another planet. It is from our planet. The Schiller Institute has people who are more sensitive to what is happening around them. We experienced this sensitivity in relation to ourselves, when the Schiller Institute people came to visit us after we became acquainted, and they immediately began to look around and to discern what was happening. They are still following it closely, and giving timely signals to all humanity, that in such and such a place, such and such is happening, and that it has the tendency to spread.

There is now occurring an expansion of negative actions, both in our region, and already in the center of Europe, as we discussed. And even if these tendencies don't—God forbid!—lead to a third world war, it is already apparent that there will be a series of little wars in the world, which are no less cruel and destructive in nature. Maybe humanity will not go to the point of war being waged with the use of nuclear weapons. Probably this is everybody's hope, that people, and politicians, won't go that far. But it is not excluded that a series of little wars will be more destructive.

Babookhanian: I would like to add that perhaps your readers would feel sorry for us. Such a feeling usually leads to people sending humanitarian aid—candy, rice, or something else.

I would like to say that our people always had an adequate potential for development. When the circumstances were such that nobody was trying to enslave us, we developed very well. In our time, we were one of the foremost states. We have all the possibilities for development. We have fine engineers, fine scientists. We have a good industrial base, and hard-working people. We have brave soldiers, who today are demonstrating that it is not easy to conquer us or bring our people to their knees. And we will fight, until we are left in peace.

I would like to say that expressions of pity, in the form of all sorts of humanitarian aid, is just an attempt by some western politicians and political organizations to justify themselves in their own eyes. In reality, this is strangling the windpipe with one hand, while with the other, putting drops of oxygen in a person's mouth so that he not die. If a politician, the international public, or some organization wants to help, they should first of all do everything possible to stop the aggression by Azerbaijan and remove the Turkish and Azerbaijani blockade. This will be help. It can be called humanitarian; it will be real help.

I would like to say that the Schiller Institute, within its

Resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh

The Bonn conference of the Schiller Institute adopted the following resolution on June 5.

In order to ensure lasting and stable peace and cooperation in Europe, and to orient the scientific and technological potential of its peoples toward peaceful development, it is urgently necessary to solve, not only the Bosnian problem, but the question of Karabakh.

In 1920, Nagorno-Karabakh was occupied by the Bolshevik Russian Red Army; after that, by the arbitrary decision of Lenin and Stalin, Karabakh became an autonomous region in Azerbaijan. Even during the tyrannical years of communism, the people of Karabakh rebelled many times against that arbitrary decision, and in 1988 they declared their independence from Azerbaijan—a declaration which they supported in three nationwide referenda, as well as choosing their own legislative and executive bodies, and creating their army, police, and legislature.

It is now six years that Azerbaijan has had no power over Karabakh, and six years since Azerbaijan began trying to conquer it by aggression and to "cleanse" it ethnically of Armenians. Forcing the Armenians to their knees, Azerbaijan and Turkey have blockaded the communications leading to Armenia, leaving the civilian population hungry and cold. Weapons of mass extermination have been used on all the borders of Armenia, especially against the civilian population of Karabakh. In the regions occupied by Azerbaijan, the whole population was exterminated or deported.

Unfortunately, the world community not only did not recognize the right of Karabakh to live in freedom; it also failed to prevent Azerbaijan from launching aggression and imposing a blockade.

It is necessary to prevent Azerbaijan from waging aggressive war and maintaining the blockade, and to recognize the right of self-determination of the people of Karabakh.

capabilities, has taken precisely this path: the demand to stop aggression, to recognize the rights of people to live freely as they wish, in whatever country they would like. We have enough determination to see this through, to defend ourselves to the end. For those who would like to help, I have said how this may be done.