
Interview: Hrant Kachatrian

Armenians vote for their independence

On Sept. 21, the Republic of Armenia voted in a popular referendum to become independent of the Soviet Union. Anno Hellenbroich, as part of a Schiller Institute delegation, was invited by the Armenian Parliament Foreign Relations Committee to be an observer of the elections.

In May, thousands of Armenians living in the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh inside Azerbaidzhan, were forced to flee to neighboring Armenia, as a result of inter-ethnic fighting, encouraged and even joined by Soviet central government troops. Hellenbroich visited Armenia in June, and filed a report which appeared in our July 19, issue.

Hellenbroich conducted the following interview with Hrant Kachatrian, head of the Union of Constitutional Rights, on Sept. 24.

EIR: Now, after a successful campaign, finally you have achieved an overwhelming vote for the independence of Armenia. We congratulate you, your party, and also the people of Armenia for this success. Can you tell us what you expect from this declaration of independence?

Kachatrian: Thank you. The population of Armenia—Armenians, and those of other nations who live here—voted three days ago for the independence of Armenia, and observers from many countries saw with their own eyes that this was a democratic action, that everybody came to vote with enthusiasm and hopes for the future. I am sure that every nation and the population of every country would vote for independence if it had a little guarantee that this action would not bring genocide down upon them. Now, just at this time, this little guarantee was present in Armenia—foreign observers—and this little guarantee for Armenians was a victory of the democratic forces in Russia after the coup. We are very glad that democratic forces of the world, the forces who are interested in human rights throughout the world, took part in our very important action and made possible what we have wanted to do throughout 70 years of slavery, and what we have wanted to do for the last three years.

EIR: If I understand it correctly, the President and Council did not include Nagorno-Karabakh in the preparations for the

referendum. Also, that when the memorandum for declaration of independence was read in Parliament on Sept. 23, there was a reference to the effect that Nagorno-Karabakh would sooner or later become part of Armenia. Can you please explain this?

Kachatrian: When I said “a little guarantee,” I realize that it is a *little* guarantee, indeed. Everybody knows that the Armenian population, the main part of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, has continuously, and especially for the last three years, struggled for unification with Armenia. Now, even though the coup is over, and democratic forces in the Soviet Union have had this victory, and foreign observers are here, still the Nagorno-Karabakh problem remains a very difficult one, because the Azerbaidzhanis and maybe other forces standing behind them don’t let the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh conduct referendums and lawful elections to have their own representatives solve this problem.

Practically speaking, the referendum did not occur in Nagorno-Karabakh, but the declaration of the independent state of Armenia included this problem, because it is based on what we said on Aug. 23 last year—that Armenia has begun a process of independence on the basis of other resolutions, including resolutions about the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. But practically, it was not possible to have a referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh.

EIR: During the press conference which the vice president gave before the referendum, he mentioned that Nagorno-Karabakh is considered as an autonomous region, and it is now up to them to decide whether they want to hold a referendum for independence or not. Is this contradictory, or can you elaborate?

Kachatrian: We see the only solution of this problem as unification with Armenia. There are other options proposed, but they are not real options, because they lead the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh away from the main direction of their struggle.

During the last year, many democrats said that there is a solution to this problem, to take Nagorno-Karabakh out of Azerbaidzhan and make it a separate republic, out of the administrative control of Azerbaidzhan. We are against this plan, because we know that for Azerbaidzhan it makes no difference whether Karabakh is out of Azerbaidzhan in a union with Armenia, or is constituted as a separate republic. We have a policy [which is unification], and if anybody suggests another variant which is not really a solution, this is a side-track.

EIR: At the moment when the parliamentary discussion and declaration of independence took place, the President and the prime minister were basically called in by the visit of [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin and [Kazakhstan President Nursultan] Nazarbayev. Do you have any further information on the results of the negotiations?

Kachatrian: Today, in a session of the Supreme Soviet, our President, Levon Ter-Petrossian, reported about the negotiations, and we now have a communiqué from these negotiations. It has six points, and I think that it's a bad result for us, because after Yeltsin and Nazarbayev organized this meeting, nobody remembered historical truth, nobody remembered the rights of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh to be free.

The points in the communiqué are not exact; they do not solve the problem. Armenians in Karabakh never would agree with such a solution, because this is not a solution at all. It's trying to stop the bloodshed, but without a solution, and I think that if the problem is not solved, nobody can stop [the bloodshed].

As a compromise, they suggest that the Armenians in Karabakh agree with creating a separate, independent republic, perhaps together with the Russian Republic, out of Azerbaidzhani administrative control. Armenians in Karabakh agree, as a compromise. But now we see that even the point about reconstruction of constitutional order in Nagorno-Karabakh is very vague. I don't know what the main reasons are for such a solution, but I know what we shall do.

EIR: Let me go back to the situation as it has developed over the last six months, and specifically since we visited your country in June. Can you tell us more about the economic supply situation? We noticed the shortage of gasoline; we had been discussing the meat situation, the milk situation, but on the other side, we saw, in visiting your six election districts, rich activity by the farmers who have now got a piece of land to produce tomatoes, etc. What is the economic situation in Armenia now, and what would you like to happen?

Kachatrian: After the privatization of land this spring, the situation in the villages has become more difficult. All the villagers got their piece of land, and they have a good harvest. But there are problems with achieving agricultural productivity, because of the problem with gasoline, and problems with transport.

There is a difficulty linking up with privatization, with factories, and with productive industries, because the agreements are just not there—there are no agreements with republics to have a healthy exchange of materials and production. I think one of the difficulties is that we have no possibility for contacts with other countries outside of the Soviet Union.

EIR: Does the blockade on the railroad via Georgia or via Azerbaidzhan still exist?

Kachatrian: Periodically there are blockades from Azerbaidzhan. There was a blockade of roads in Georgia, but it lasted a short time, and the Georgians telegraphed us and they said it was a political action, not against Armenia. But everybody knows the main reason for these blockades from Azerbaidzhan: that throughout the Soviet Union the old con-

tacts were cut off and the new contacts [in other countries] are not ready.

EIR: I understand that today you registered for the presidential elections in October. If I'm correctly informed, you are running for vice-president, on a ticket with Mr. Ashot Navasardian. Can you tell us what your program is for solving this situation, specifically also in respect to Nagorno-Karabakh?

Kachatrian: At the moment, our two organizations, the Republican Party of Armenia, whose President is Ashot Navasardian, the presidential candidate, and our organization, the Union of Constitutional Rights, have approximately 5-10% of the vote. But we decided to enter the election campaign with our program, because we are not sure that other candidates will have in their programs a conception of independence of Armenia and a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Today we registered as official candidates and presented our campaign platform.

The points are that Armenia would be unified Armenia, because in our opinion, Karabakh is unified with Armenia. It's not only declarative by resolution, it's practically unified, because Armenians live there, the Karabakh economy is supported by Armenia, and only military force keeps Karabakh out of Armenia. We think that we shall accomplish more by refusing [each and every attempt to] take Karabakh out of Armenia.

We support, as do other candidates too, Armenia's having economic contacts with many countries, in order for it to be free and independent in reality. We are working on such contacts with other countries, and we are for defending our laws, our rights, our rights as the Armenian nation, in the realm of international law.

The economic part of our platform is that we in Armenia will have actual rights to all kinds of property, including private property, and the government will support owners to promote good business.

EIR: What was the response from the other republics in the former Soviet Union to the overwhelming vote for independence and the declaration of independence of Armenia?

Kachatrian: I am sure that people voted with the hope of being independent, but the problem is that leaders of national movements make many maneuvers. For example, I think that this conflict in Georgia is not artificial, it has many foundations in [history]. Azerbaidzhan declared independence too. I'm sure that the Azerbaidzhani population is for independence, but leaders of this republic use this fact. . . .

I cannot understand how a republic can declare its independence and at the same time sign a document creating a new Soviet Union. Only the Baltic republics, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldavia, didn't sign this document. We know that these republics were really for independence. Kazakhstan, Azerbaidzhan, and other republics have created a new union, but there is no guarantee that this new empire won't be as aggressive as the old union.