
Interview: Aram Karapetian

Armenian MP Survives Knife Attack, as Presidential Campaign Turns Violent

Armenian Member of Parliament Haik Baboookhanian, a leader of the Union for Constitutional Rights (UCR) and long-time friend of the Schiller Institute, was stabbed during a Presidential campaign rally in the town of Artashat on Feb. 4. Baboookhanian heads the campaign staff of political scientist Aram Karapetian, whom latest polls showed moving into third place among the candidates for the Feb. 19 election. Haik Baboookhanian is known to readers of EIR and participants in Schiller Institute conferences since 1991, for his activism in the international fight to free and exonerate Lyndon LaRouche, and as a supporter of calls for a New Bretton Woods monetary system.

UCR leader Hrant Khachatrian charged government officials with instigating the rowdies who attempted to prevent the rally. Besides Baboookhanian, who lost a lot of blood and underwent surgery after the attack, regional UCR leader Hrair Khachatrian was also injured by the knife-wielding thugs. A statement released by the UCR said, "The Ministry of National Security has taken no action, maintaining that this matter is the Internal Affairs Ministry's business. Thus, the current authorities have crossed the line to open terrorism." President Robert Kocharian issued a pro forma denunciation of the violence.

Opposition candidates have accused the incumbent, Kocharian, of preparing to fix the election. On Jan. 27, Karapetian charged Kocharian was violating the Elections Code by using government buildings for his campaign, and said the authorities were mobilizing the police and "criminal elements" to create "an atmosphere of fear and terror." Kocharian has boasted that he intends to win a majority in the first round. Although the fragmentation of the opposition vote among ten candidates makes for a big gap between the incumbent and his nearest competitors in pre-election polls, it is widely recognized that Kocharian is not confident of winning a run-off.

Aram Karapetian gave this interview to Rachel Douglas on Feb. 5, by phone from his campaign headquarters in Yerevan.

EIR: The upcoming Armenian Presidential elections are discussed in the West chiefly from standpoint of "how democratic" they will be—will they be fair? It's reported that some transparent ballot boxes are being imported from Germany,

and so forth. Yesterday, though, violence flared in this campaign, with the attack on the chief of your campaign staff, Haik Baboookhanian. Why did this happen?

Karapetian: I think the first reason it happened is that a serious struggle has commenced, against the incumbent regime. I think it is without question that the popularity of the main opposition candidates, including my own, has begun to rise very greatly, and steadily. The incumbent President's popularity, by contrast, has peaked and has begun to fall.

I think that as this became evident, an attempt was made at a show of crude pressure, so that things would be weighted—regardless of who really enjoys popular support—to the side of the incumbents. This is, unfortunately, not the first such case in Armenia. Similar things happened in almost all our elections, except for the first one [in 1991] when Levon Ter-Petrosian was elected.

EIR: What effect did this attack have?

Karapetian: Today I was back out campaigning in the districts, continuing to hold campaign rallies and so forth, and I would say that opposition to the incumbents has risen sharply. Everybody thought that free elections would give them the chance to express their opinion and where they stand, but now it turns out that there are not going to be any free elections.

EIR: What are the most important questions facing the electorate and the country in these elections? Why are you running, and what do you offer the Armenian people?

Karapetian: There are several very important questions. The first is, what path of development will Armenia now take? Will it undergo an "Asiatic" sort of political development, or will Armenia ultimately become a normal European nation? This is very important. The latter means a place where law prevails, as opposed to clan relations. Where the level of corruption is not so high as it is now, which is an enormous problem at the moment, threatening our national security. Where a person can freely express his opinion, without fear of coming under some kind of pressure.

The situation in Armenia is very interesting right now. In the legislative field, on paper, everything would appear to be fine. But, when you take a look at real life, you find out that 1.5 million people have left Armenia. If this were to

continue, in three or four years we would not have enough children to make up the first-grade classes in our primary schools.

We now have a very harsh executive power structure: authoritarian Presidential rule. What this means, is that all the democratic procedures, including parliamentary ones, exist on paper, but have no effect in real life. The predominance of clan relationships is the main problem of Armenia today. There are many relatives [of other officials] who have no training or preparation to be government leaders, but occupy major posts.

Thus, the top two questions are the prevalence of clan relationships, and corruption.

Next, we have what I think is a terribly wrong concept of an economic model for Armenia. It is said that we should become a “service” country, to satisfy various demands, actually the demands of the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank—because we’re talking about *their* program. According to this program and the demands they make, Armenia should be a country with a lot of restaurants, casinos, good roads, and hotels. We should be providing such services. I’m not sure to whom, exactly, because the geopolitical situation is such, in and around Armenia, that we can scarcely expect tourism to flourish here in the near future.

I also don’t know for whom and why we should have all these services, because Armenia in the past had a highly developed industrial sector. This was a relatively advanced country, as far as industry is concerned. In Soviet times, 98% of the Armenian budget was associated with 35 factories. Now, however, we hold that if we don’t do some work in the real sector of the economy, if we don’t reopen those factories, or new ones, by making new investments, our people will simply not survive.

Armenia has a foreign debt of \$1 billion. We have 588,000 pensioners, who receive an average monthly pension on the order of eight dollars. If it were not for the \$500 to 600 million sent [by emigré Armenians] into our banking system annually from Russia and America—two-thirds from Russia, one-third from the United States—I think that nobody would be left here. They would simply all leave. That assistance from the diaspora helps us to keep going, so far.

Many such questions originate not from within the domain of domestic policy, but from abroad.

EIR: In various scenarios for war, for the so-called “clash of civilizations,” the Transcaucasus region figures as a zone of tension and military conflict. And Iran, Iraq, the Persian Gulf are not so far away. On the other hand, your colleagues from the Union for Constitutional Rights, Haik Baboekhanian and Hrant Khachatryan, were co-initiators of the latest appeal for a New Bretton Woods system. You support the principle of “peace through economic development” and construction of the Eurasian Land-Bridge. How would this aspect of Armenia’s policy change, if you became President?

Karapetian: I support all solutions based on principles of justice. The world’s problems cannot be solved through hegemonism. We’ve been through that, already. I recall how, at one time, the Soviet Union wanted to have a presence absolutely everywhere. But they couldn’t manage it, and the result is known. The same applies, I would like to say, to the United States. It seems to me that one power will not succeed in ruling the world. The Roman Empire demonstrated that, Alexander the Great’s empire showed it, and so on.

I see developments proceeding, such that the Arab countries, the Commonwealth of Independent States members, and Europe constitute the backbone, the main axis, on which our new geopolitical policy can be based. At the same time, we should have normal relations with a normal United States of America. Because, and this is my personal opinion, ultimately the Americans will move to a new Monroe Doctrine; after some period of time, there will be a new attempt by the U.S.A. to withdraw and concentrate on their own problems. As far as I know, domestic economic problems have arisen within the United States, so this could happen fairly soon.

At the same time, I would like to stress that it is very important, that the Franco-German combination appears to be picking up steam. This is very important, despite the fact that the rest of the countries, globally and in Europe, do not yet support them entirely. But it would seem that Russia may join them, because on Feb. 8 [Russian President Vladimir] Putin will travel to Paris. This provides a good base on which to attach the axis that runs Georgia-Armenia-Iran-Arab countries. This is a major axis. Not all the Arab countries, of course, but certainly Syria, Egypt, and the Gulf states, which do not have big geopolitical problems among them.

Of course, there are serious questions related to China. There you see a tremendous potential, which, so far, has been held within the country, under great tension. Where that potential will break out, and how it may be harnessed for constructive purposes, which may be brought into being; or, whether it might go in the other direction—this is not yet known.

EIR: Of course, relations between Armenia and the United States could also become quite different, if LaRouche became President.

Karapetian: Yes, of course! But, I think that relations at present are already quite interesting. There are the strictly economic relations, but there is also a degree of concern among Armenians—not on account of LaRouche, but connected with the people now in power—because the United States tends to see Turkey as its agent of geopolitical interest, unfortunately. That complicates matters, from Armenia’s geopolitical standpoint.

EIR: Thank you for this interview. Best wishes for your campaign!

Karapetian: Thank you.