

Interview: Vazgen Manukian

The challenge facing post-election Armenia

Vazgen Manukian, leader of the National Democratic Union, was the unified opposition candidate in Armenia's Presidential elections, held Sept. 22. Formerly head of the now-ruling Armenian Pan-National Union, he served as prime minister and defense minister of Armenia. The Armenian Central Electoral Commission certified a 51.75% return for President Levon Ter-Petrossian; even adjusting only for the vote fraud documented by observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), would have pushed Ter-Petrossian below 50%, requiring him to face Manukian in a run-off. Hovhannes Galajian's article in EIR on Oct. 18, 1996, reported on the vote fraud and post-election violence. Vazgen Manukian was interviewed for EIR on Oct. 14, answering questions from Karl-Michael Vitt and Hovhannes Galajian.

EIR: How do you assess the situation, after the Presidential elections? The OSCE observers established that there were electoral violations on a massive scale.

Manukian: The situation in Armenia may be said to feature a semi-dictatorial regime, with a democratic shell. Before now, the world had only seen the democratic shell. But the population of Armenia understands the essence of the regime very well: The population remembers the vote fraud that took place in the [1995] parliamentary elections and the vote on the Constitution, and so the citizens of Armenia realized, that there would be vote fraud, and the use of force, in the Presidential elections. Many parties and politicians wanted to boycott the elections, thinking that the result was a foregone conclusion. I was one of the few who thought that any chance should be utilized, either to achieve some results in the elections, or to show, once and for all, what kind of a regime has been established in Armenia.

Because L. Ter-Petrossian was sure that, with the population intimidated and lacking confidence in the electoral process, the opposition would be unable to run a successful campaign, he allowed fairly decent conditions for election campaigning, of which we immediately took advantage. It was only in the last few days before the elections, that the regime understood that it was losing the campaign, and again unleashed the fraud machine and resorted to violence. This time, however, our people's dream of having a regime, based on the people's power, was especially strong, and therefore the elections were followed by a powerful confrontation, and mass protest rallies. Our demand was not that L. Ter-Petros-

sian not be President, or that he resign; we were simply demanding verification of the election results.

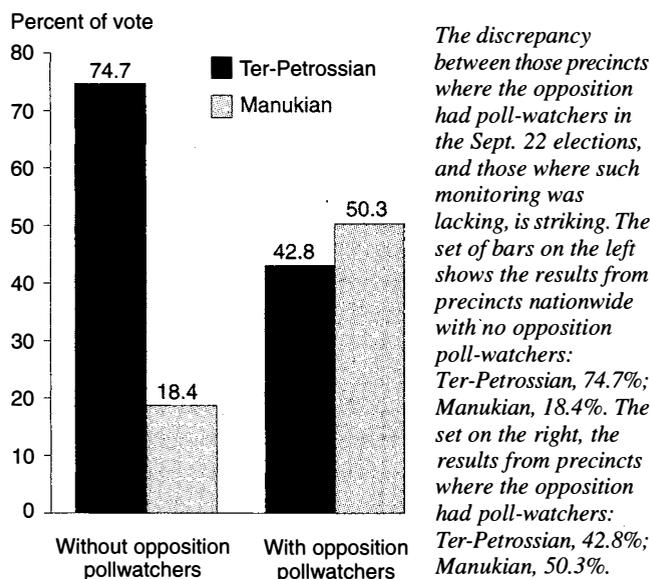
The population was very well informed about the vote fraud. What the OSCE observers confirmed, was only the tip of the iceberg, but the population is familiar with the deeper layers of the fraud.

The situation in Armenia is such that, if there is not now going to be complete openness on the question of the elections—i.e., if there is not a decision to hold new elections, or a second round, or to recognize the legitimate President—the Armenian population will not take part in elections henceforth, and we, as politicians, will also consider that it is useless to participate in any elections.

EIR: Armenia's physical economy has been destroyed, as a result of the extreme liberal reforms. Many Armenian citizens have left the country to work abroad, to be able to feed their families. The infrastructure has been destroyed. What is your analysis of the consequences of this situation, for the people?

Manukian: Two aspects of the economic policy, implemented in Armenia, should be delineated. The first is the official economic policy, which will lead to the total destruction of industry in Armenia; a population of only a half-million will be left, working in small-scale handicrafts and primitive agriculture. I do not exclude, that a few major industrial plants will also exist, owned by foreign capital or with mixed ownership, but on the whole, the result of this policy will be Armenia's transformation into a third-rank country, and the loss of everything we had in the preceding period. The fact

FIGURE 1
Poll-watchers reduced fraud in Armenian elections



remains, that despite the totalitarian Communist regime, Armenia, in recent decades, became an industrial country with a powerful scientific and technological capability, and there is a danger of all this being destroyed.

The second aspect, is that, besides the official economic policy, there is also an unofficial one, which features clan relations, corruption, and the total suppression of any investors who don't belong to the five or six clans that have a monopoly in the Armenian economy.

The continuation of both the official and the unofficial economic policies dooms Armenia to the position of a fourth-class country, of no interest not only to surrounding countries, but even to its own people. The greater part of Armenians will be scattered to various countries, and we shall lose all the potential we had. Thus, what was at stake in the Presidential elections was not only to replace the President and establish people's power, but also a change in economic policy.

EIR: L. Ter-Petrossian, the International Monetary Fund, with its conditionalities, and the World Bank are responsible for the present situation. What is your alternative?

Manukian: After the destruction of the U.S.S.R., the World Bank ran into a new situation. The World Bank had drafted projects, which were supposed to bring undeveloped African and Asian countries into the mainstream of world economic integration. It had dealt only with countries that lacked the relevant trained personnel and had a very low standard of living and education, but the World Bank attempted to apply the same methods, in the countries formed as a result of the break-up of the U.S.S.R.—where, I am convinced, this policy could not succeed.

Leave aside the circumstance, that the international financial organizations wanted to have levers, by which to exert their own influence in these countries. In and of itself, the implementation of a Keynesian, purely monetarist model does nothing for their development. In Armenia, the monetarist model leads to the destruction of industry, since it is entirely based on the principles of economic Darwinism: strong sectors of the economy develop, while the weak ones perish. Under current conditions of world economic competition, however, a small country like Armenia cannot have strong sectors of industry, so the application of the "natural selection" model means that *all* sectors perish. I do not attribute malicious intent to the international financial organizations, but they do not understand the processes that are under way in the post-Soviet area.

EIR: American economist and former Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche has proposed to reform the current financial system, including the IMF and the World Bank, and to create a new system, based on the real possibilities for the economic development of nations. He proposes to build a Eurasian land-bridge, with big infrastructure projects, such as railroads, linking Europe and Asia. Armenia, being at the

crossroads between East and West, and North and South, would be in the middle of this development corridor. What do you think about these ideas, particularly, the revival of the old Silk Road?

Manukian: After the break-up of the U.S.S.R., we are living in a new world; unfortunately, few people understand that. As a result, the philosophy, and the economic and political methods, typical of the Cold War, continue to be applied in practice. The world has changed, which should lead to a change in the principles of international relations, and in political approaches. A time has come for new politicians. In many countries, rather than political players, leaders will come to power, who possess a philosophical way of thinking and a vision of the contours of the future world community.

As for this concrete program, it is one feature of a new world community, which is still hidden in the mist, but its contours will gradually become more defined. Of course, Armenia is interested in these programs—the rebuilding of the Silk Road, the Eurasian bridge, and so forth, but I repeat, that these are only details of the picture that is still only barely seen in the smoke.

EIR: Iran, China, and some other countries have already oriented toward this. As President of Armenia, how will you promote the Eurasian development program?

Manukian: Of course, we are taking steps in the direction of implementing these programs. I advocate helping politicians, economists, and philosophers to change their approaches to the future. It is necessary to take the right path, but at the same time, to take into account the opinion of the international community, and to take steps to prevent this path from being termed offensive, since that would be a blow against the development of one's own country.

Armenians can do a lot to help change the world climate, because we are not only citizens of Armenia, but we are also scattered across the whole world, and in some countries, we have considerable weight and influence on public opinion.

EIR: After the Presidential elections, there were large protest demonstrations in Yerevan, against the vote fraud. After a provocation, the Army was brought in, many people were wounded, and political activists jailed and beaten. What should the so-called "free world" do, to help democratic forces in Armenia improve the situation?

Manukian: The world community has an interest, in each of its members being a normal, democratic state. In this sense, their interest is obvious. It must be taken into account, of course, that specific powers have their own interests in this region, and sometimes these two factors come into conflict.

I think that each people ought to win its own freedom. The help we would expect from the international community, is to understand the situation in Armenia, and refrain from supporting those forces which are pulling the country backwards.