
Interview: Anno Hellenbroich

West should not wait to recognize Armenia

EIR: You have just come back to Germany from Armenia, where you were part of a delegation of the Schiller Institute observing the referendum on independence from Moscow. What were your impressions?

Hellenbroich: The Schiller Institute delegation was officially invited by the Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament, to observe the conduct of the referendum on Armenia's independence. I must say that the impressions we had were overpowering, in the sense that we were able to observe on the day of the referendum, Sept. 21, how determined the people there were in deciding in favor of a free, independent Armenia.

First concerning the preliminary results, which were announced to the press on Sept. 23 by the Armenian vice president and the chairman of the electoral commission, Babken Ararktsyan. Altogether 2,163,000 people are eligible to vote, and of those, 2,056,000 voted, i.e., nearly 95% did go to the polls. That is already an overwhelming result.

Of course one thing that contributed to this result was the fact that the attempted putsch in Moscow in August had been crushed. That encouraged people. On the other hand we were personally struck, in our visits to over 22 voting districts, that people really want to build a new society.

The enthusiasm of the Armenians was demonstrated when by 11 o'clock in the morning in some rural communities practically everyone had already voted. We were in Yerevan as well as in Kirovakan, and even there, between 60 and 70% of the eligible voters had voted in the morning. What surprised us was the spontaneous warmth with which people congratulated us on German reunification. What leaped out in the conversations was the hope that Armenia, too, might soon be brought back together and the wound of Nagorno-Karabakh [an enclave within Azerbaidzhan with an Armenian ethnic majority—ed.] could be healed.

During our visit to the city of Spitak, which had been badly damaged by the [Dec. 7, 1988] earthquake, where we visited the reconstruction project of the German Red Cross, enormous gratitude was also expressed toward us. They will never forget the readiness to help on the part of all the Germans, who collaborated so intensively in relief efforts, to fix up the damages which in some areas are still very visible.



Anno Hellenbroich [holding tape recorder] in Armenia last June, interviewing refugees from Armenian villages in Azerbaidzhani territory. With him was Michael Vitt, also of the Schiller Institute.

EIR: At the same time as the referendum talks were held over the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh with the mediation of Russian President Yeltsin and the Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev. How were the results of these negotiations seen in Armenia?

Hellenbroich: I personally had the impression that the results of these talks are not awakening hopes as great as it appeared at first. I read the communiqué, and my impression is that it is not yet clear whether Yeltsin or Nazarbayev have the possibility to bring about a cease-fire and whether the door is still open for a possible unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, which I personally believe to be just, on historical grounds.

EIR: What role could the West play to stabilize the situation there better?

Hellenbroich: Something interesting happened in Kirovakan. We were invited there by the mayor and representatives of the city council to a reception, and while we were talking in walked the delegates of the American observer group under the leadership of Democratic Congressman Lehman. He gave a little toast and said that he personally hoped for Armenia to be recognized soon as independent and that he would share this view with President Bush. And with an eye on the German delegation he said, we would also like to share that view with Chancellor Kohl himself. I replied that I was extraordinarily happy to hear something like that from him and promised him to do my part for that.

My conviction is in fact that recognition should come soon, and that we should not—as happened in the case of the Baltic states—wait until all the other Transcaucasian states have effectively taken steps toward independence, and only then bestow recognition. Rather, we should use the potential which the Armenians are now offering and meet them half-way, especially in the economic realm.