

# SORRY CAMPAIGN

“The Human Rights Centre”  
„АУАԢЫТӘЫԢСА ИЗИНҚӘА РЦЕНТР“



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www.apsni.org

## SORRY

### An Appeal to Abkhazian People



Today we live apart.

Our past is a tragic war which resulted into the separation of two nations. Time passes, but the pain remains and wounds are still aching. Questions have not been answered. The future is still unclear.

The future will not change if we do not reflect on the tragedy that happened; if we do not seek ways to come together.

For us, for one part of the Georgian society, it is clear that the problems cannot be solved without admitting our mistakes. This appeal comes directly from our hearts.

Sorry for not preventing the war.

Sorry for not having avoided the disaster.

Sorry for every word that inspired the war; for every bullet that was shot.

We are fully aware that there are always reasons for war to break out; both opposing sides had provokers and encouragers who supplied them with weapons to kill each other.

Some are more to blame than others - but everybody is guilty of the war.

The war already meant defeat.

Let us not classify people as “ours” and “theirs”; “enemies” or “allies”. We are not enemies. We have nothing to fight about. We wish to apologize to the Abkhaz people because we failed to maintain the peace and started communicating using “the language of weapons”.

We want to hold out our hands to each other.

We believe that our cruel past should not divide us; just the opposite, it should bring our peoples together.

We should forgive each other for the war in order to avoid a second one.

Trust us, Abkhaz people, the Abkhaz language and culture are precious to us.

Our past, when we were together, is important to us.

We know that the friendship between Abkhaz and Georgian peoples is opposed by many and unfortunately, those opponents are present on both sides. But we can find the way to each other's hearts.

Sorry for not appealing to you before and for not saying these words publicly.

Sorry for not preventing tragedy from happening.

Sorry, we did not or could not do more.

We pray for you;

We pray for the Abkhaz and Georgian peoples;

We pray for peace;

We pray for reconciliation.

## WHY I APOLOGIZE TO ABKHAZ PEOPLE

Choice for Georgia:  
Georgian Chauvinism or Abkhazia?

Ucha Nanuashvili, Initiator of “Sorry” Campaign  
Executive Director of the Human Rights Center

“Sorry” Campaign was launched in March of 2007. It is not easy to apologize as well as to accept an apology.

The aim of the Sorry Campaign is to change the dynamics and direction of the relationships that have been established between Georgians and Abkhazians during recent years. The “Sorry” Campaign is not in any way connected with politics; it is a movement against war, as we consider that there is no alternative to peaceful dialogue and mutual settlement of the conflict.

The Campaign envisages the reestablishment of confidence between Georgian and Abkhazian people and to break through the informational vacuum. We want to encourage people to think about the horrors of war and the mistakes we have made.

When you toss a pebble in the water, the circles are produced; we hope that the Sorry Campaign will serve as a pebble in solving the problem”.

These words launch the website of the “Sorry” Campaign [www.apsni.org](http://www.apsni.org). Much was written and said on this topic particularly in internet and public discussions because leading media sources (among them so-called independent ones) systematically blocked information about this campaign. Not only the Campaign but even discussion of this idea had opponents. And yet, why do we apologize to Abkhaz people? I want to clarify this issue more in order to make everybody think about those mistakes that led us to the current conditions. We have not realized our mistakes yet and still continue living in the world of myths. Georgian people live with Georgian myths and Abkhazian people with Abkhaz myths.

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# MAKE TOMORROW TODAY!



## Editor's Opinion

ALEKO TSKITISHVILI

***"Stand Up, Malkhaz, Abkhaz Has Come!"  
Don't Think I am joking!******These stupid words are from the songs  
written for Georgian soldiers. To tell the  
truth, I have not listened to this song; my  
friend told me several years ago that our  
soldiers sing this song when marching. For  
a long time I thought it was a joke and  
could not believe it before I saw the  
quotation of Adolf Hitler in one of the  
advertising rolls on TV-Company  
"Sakartvelo" funded by the Defense  
Ministry of Georgia.***

**"It must be thoroughly understood that the lost land will never be won back by solemn appeals to the God, nor by hopes in any League of Nations, but only by the force of arms – Adolf Hitler"**, the stupid voice is heard in the advertisement and it aims to increase "military spirit" of young reservists. Particularly stupid stress falls on the name of Adolf Hitler in the ad as if he was any of famous and honorable Georgian people Ilia Chavchavadze or Ivane Javakishvili instead black stain of the humanity and bloody monster. My colleague Giorgi Janelidze prepared a special video-roll about this advertisement and I advise you to see it on: <http://www.hride.tv/index.php?a=view&id=336&lang=eng>

After seeing this advertisement on "Sakartvelo TV" I believed that Georgian soldiers really sang this song in the army and still sing it: "Stand up Malkhaz, Abkhaz Has Come."

Just imagine young generation is inspired with

## OUR SWEET PHOBIAS

the fear of Abkhaz people while Abkhaz people have also been afraid of Georgians for several years already.

I think when we are speaking about phobias, first of all, we should blame ourselves and not Russia in every problem resulted from those phobias; Russia with its state policy aims to instill similar phobias in our brains.

Our failure mostly results from these phobias. We seem to have genetic fear of somebody coming and eating us up. Unfortunately, it is not true only about Abkhaz people. We are afraid of Turkish Meskhs whom we do not recognize as Georgians and call them Turks. We are afraid of Georgians from Fereidani who have particular love for their historical homeland; though we also call them Tatars because of subconscious fear. It is well-known fact that many people who repatriated in Georgia from Fereidani returned back to Iran and said they preferred to be called Gurjs in Iran than Tatars in their homeland.

And so, our energy is spent on phobias which could have been spent on love, unification and integration.

I have been reading the discussion on online-forums; users mostly speak about the blood-color and genetics of Abkhaz people; they say real Abkhaz is Georgian and there is a different tribe – Apsuas who settled in Georgia long ago and they are bad guys.

This is anthropological discussion full of hatred and far from reality on which we have spent total 20 years. All this time, we have never wished to shake hands with at least one Abkhaz and to hear his sorrow and opinions.

We should not create our opinions about entire Abkhaz people in accordance to the state-

ments of Ardzinba, Baghabsh and Khajimba; like they should not think the position of entire Georgian society is equal to the positions of Saakashvili or Irakli Okruashvili.

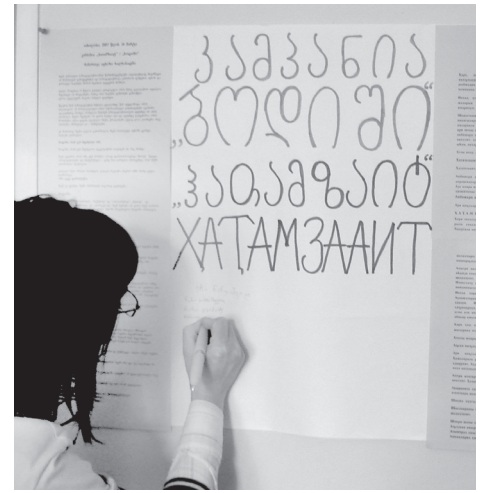
Despite the stupidity established in our country, I still hope that both nations – Georgian and Abkhaz peoples – still have power and resource to find ways to each other. If genetics is the main point, resource of reconciliation shall be encoded in both nations instead fear of each other.

I hope because of century-long relations. Maybe we will read our classic literature once more – "Haki Adzba" by Leo Kiacheli and "Tutor" by Akaki Tsereteli.

It was time when Georgian people trusted their most precious people and belongings to Abkhaz people – their children were brought up by Abkhaz people and according to this tradition their sons were brothers of Georgian men brought up in their families. Nowadays, we might dislike the fact that in "Tutor" by Akaki Tsereteli Georgian hero betrayed Abkhaz friend; that means Abkhaz man was more honest person than Georgian one. Although the topic of this poem is not relations between different ethnicities, historical reality is very well described in it; we see what relations we had in the 19th century.

Please, read "Haki Adzba" once more – in it Abkhaz man is very faithful to his friend and he dies for him without thinking. In this novel, role of Russia is also very well described; how it entered Abkhazia with blood and death and started intrigues to destroy century-long co-existence and relationship.

These intrigues are those wires now stretched on Enguri River at the so-called border.



Unfortunately, after the bloodshed in 1990s we did not have any compromising policy in regard with Abkhaz people. These years passed in gun-blazing and pseudo-romantic dreams to drink water in Psou River.

It is clear that Russia is aggressor, occupant and soon Abkhazia and South Ossetia will join Russian Federation; that means much time is not left before these lands are completely occupied. It is clear that it is tragedy for Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples because it means complete Rusification and disappearance for them.

But what do we offer better to Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples?

We are just waiting for them to realize the situation; we are singing stupid songs and live on the delirium of Hitler.

You will agree with me that it is unserious position and maybe we should be more sensible. Otherwise, if we really manage some day to liberate Abkhazia from Russian occupation, there we will find only ruins of houses of both Georgians and Abkhazs.

POLITICAL LEADERS ASSESS  
"SORRY CAMPAIGN"

EKA GULUA

17.07.2007

Political leaders made comments on the "Sorry Campaign" initiated by the Human Rights Center. Some of them don't see any problems in apologizing while others think that the Center started the campaign to gain some grants. There are people who think that the campaign will have bad influence on peace-keeping talks.

Here are the comments of representatives of the parliamentary and non-parliamentary political parties regarding the campaign.

**Mikheil Machavariani, leader of the "National Movement", Deputy Chairman of the Georgian Parliament:** "When we appear before the historic court, we should be guiltless to our conscious and to our country. I think that any grant, despite its value, does not cost as much as our history. Although the situation was complicated in 1992 in Georgia, it was a provocation initiated by Special Forces. Representatives of the North Caucasus took part in it too. Consequently, similar activities betray state interests, disfigure the history and are launched by crazy people... I prefer to negotiate face-to-face with Abkhaz people rather than to apology to them.

**Soso Shatberashvili, leader of "Labor Party":** "Georgian people have nothing to apologize for. It is only Edward Shevardnadze who has to apology to Georgian population for unleashing two civil wars in our country - in Tbilisi and in Abkhazia. Both of them were provoked by Russian Empire; but former Georgian president satisfied their wishes. Thus, Georgian people do not have to be sorry about anything as well as Abkhaz population. These two nations got into the Russian trap and that shameful war finished with bad results. Nobody should claim that either Georgian or Abkhaz people won the war; both of them were defeated. The position of our party is that Tengiz Kitovani, Shevardnadze and every person who unleashed the war should be prosecuted. In addition to that, we demand the punishment of Saakashvili who promised the demonstrators during the Rose Revolution to overthrow Ardzinba's Regime

in Abkhazia. In fact, now Abkhazia might be declared De-jure republic."

**Kote Gabashvili, a leader of the national Movement, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee:** "There are people who try to take advantage of every problem in order to make their activities more active. "I would have signed" the Sorry Appeal as a Georgian person for they have killed Vova Vekua; I would have apologized to them because they have cut off the heads of Georgian people and then played football with their heads on Gagra Stadium; because they pierced families together with their little children. I advise everybody to remember those pictures when apologizing to Abkhaz people. It would be better if both sides apologized to each other. We have equal faults and our society should not be masochist. This campaign is unreal and I cannot appreciate it."

**Elizbar Javelidze, representative of the political movement "Ena Mamuli Sartsmunoba" (Mother language, Motherland, Faith):** "Both sides have to apologize. Shevardnadze

launched the war. It was a provocation. The results were obvious from the very beginning. Nobody can persuade me that Kitovani wanted to go to Abkhazia for a walk and Shevardnadze accompanied him. The latter could foresee the results. We should apologize to Abkhaz people for having started the war; but whereas their playing football with the heads of Georgian people and their present aggressive attitude to us, Abkhaz people must apologize to us. Actually, politician's apologize does not mean anything. I support public diplomacy. People should reconcile."

**Jondi Bagaturia, "Kartuli Dasi" (Georgian Team):** "I am furious when any organization takes responsibility to make statements in the name of Georgian people. Moreover, nobody must apologize to others. As for the fact whether we have to apologize to them, I think we have to return our break-away region and restore our territorial integrity. In this situation it has no sense to find out who provoked the conflict. It is obvious that situation was terrible and devastating. There was one

group who provoked the hostility in the name of Abkhaz people. It resulted into the controversy in Sokhumi. It is not time to find out who should apologize."

**Gia Gachechiladze, "Georgian Greens":** "The point is that it is very naive attempt to make some corrections in negotiation process. If any representative of the government agrees with the campaign it will have negative influence on the process. Georgia will lose not only in Abkhazian-Georgian relationship but on international level too. Everybody knows that the conflict was provoked by Russian Special Forces. Their aim was to change demographic situation in the region that is to empty the Abkhazian territory from Georgian and Abkhaz people. The military operations were too successful against Georgians. But Abkhaz people are deceived and cannot even understand that there is no place for them in Abkhazia. Consequently, it is only Russian Side who has to apologize for the situation."

**Bachuki Kardava, "National Democratic Party":** "I would not apologize to anybody, because only Russian and Abkhazian sides have to be sorry about the situation. They have broken Georgian territorial integrity and forced out more than 100 000 Georgian people from there. It is a serious crime committed against Georgian nation. I really do not know what the aim of this campaign is -to gain grants or to follow somebody's orders; anyway we have neither moral nor historical basis to apologize. We cannot ignore those boys who were killed in Abkhazian war."

**Tina Khidasheli, leader of the "Republican Party":** "I have already expressed my personal position regarding the campaign. However I cannot speak about the position of our party because I have heard about it from you for the first time. As for my personal opinion, I think that not Georgian population but Georgian State should apologize. The state must apologize to those IDPs who were forced out from Abkhazia and to the victims of the war. If you consider yourself a state you should prevent the war on your territory. I cannot observe any problems regarding the campaign. Although I do not know the initiators, I appreciate the idea."





# WHY I APOLOGIZE TO ABKHAZ PEOPLE

Choice for Georgia: Georgian Chauvinism or Abkhazia?

*Continued from p. N 1*

## DIALOGUE WHICH DOES NOT EXIST

Today, Georgian society lacks the opportunity to speak with Abkhaz people directly and vice versa.

For many years, certain authorities have been leading Georgian society in the wrong way and they have constantly sought and continue to seek the avoidance of direct and open dialogues between the sides of the conflict. Consequently negotiations are being artificially hindered in the process. Shevardnadze was implementing similar politics during many years; after the Rose Revolution, particularly after 2005 – Saakashvili started it. Almost all leading political and public forces simplified this idea in Georgia.

Unfortunately, politicians do their job poorly or do not do at all. Extremely complicated situation is result of their poor work; the society sacrifices its life to these mistakes. It is natural to ask: Why should our people become victim of dirty games of our politicians?

Georgian and Abkhaz peoples need only peace and dialogue. Why cannot those powers realize it who dares to represent the will of the people? Everybody admits it superficially but what is happening in reality?

## WHOSE ORDERS DO POLITICIANS OBEY?

Politicians are obliged to obey the orders of the people and do their utmost to offer the people the way which will lead everybody out of this deadlock and transfer Georgian-Abkhazian relationship into a new phase. Unfortunately, most part of politicians does not express public interest; though they have appropriated the right to speak in the name of people. As a rule, public opinion is neglected. Nobody has asked people whether they wanted to start war in Abkhazia 17 years ago. Those formations, which initially raided Samegrelo and then Abkhazia, were called Georgian armed formations and acted in the name of Georgian state. Number of incidents was provoked in the name of Georgian state.

## INFORMATIONAL VACUUM AND MEDIA IN ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT

Today, we Georgian and Abkhaz peoples know much more about foreign countries, than about each other. Information war has been going against Georgian and Abkhaz peoples for many years already. Population receives extremely filtered information and in most cases it is disinformation. Every day, mass media releases false information and they create image of enemy of the opposite side. It continues endlessly.

People, who cannot get alternative information, unfortunately believe the disinformation. Only few people know that most of the released TV-items are either staged or only part of it is true. It will be nice if people will think seriously before they believe the information about conflict zone. We could check only small part of the information and it was enough to get convinced that the government successfully breeds false public opinion, manipulates with the information, and does not avoid fabrication of the facts and spreading of disinformation. All above-mentioned activities impact escalation of the conflict. So-called journalists actively participate in this process who, because of their poor professionalism, spread impartial information and sometimes purposefully falsify the reality and feed people with disinformation as it is ordered by the government.

Today Georgian-Abkhazian politics relies on inter-accusations. Our government applies to this method mostly before the elections. Let us recall inspiration of Khurcha incident during parliamentary elections in 2008. It must be noted that the government of Georgia does not have copyright on this incident. In February of 2008, government of Armenia used the same method to cover the falsification of elections – intensive fight started in the districts bordering with Karabakh.

We received confrontation which resulted into the violation of the rights of peaceful population. Enemy image is getting stronger and ordinary criminal facts in conflict zone are qualified like incidents committed by “Abkhaz criminals”, “Abkhaz armed formations”, “Ossetian separatists”, etc. We know the facts when for false statements made in front of TV-cameras respondents were paid. Video-recordings made in Tsalenjikha and Zugdidi districts are



declared to be recorded in Gali district.

We hope soon people will be suspicious about the facts and evaluations we have heard recently. We should respect and be more attentive to each other. Georgian and Abkhaz peoples living in the conflict zone have right on development and peaceful life. Does anybody remember these people? Do we remember tens thousands people who live in this atmosphere every day?

## WHO ARE ABKHAZ PEOPLE FOR GEORGIAN PEOPLE?

It is curious how sensitive is Georgian society about Abkhaz nation and how they respect them? Are we sincere in our statement – we want to live together with Abkhaz people when we cannot understand each other at all. If Abkhaz people are guests for us who “live on our holly land and should be grateful to us because they are alive and breath fresh air”, and translation of the Bible in Abkhaz language is unacceptable for many people and if we think that Abkhaz people are Georgians in fact and Abkhaz nation does not exist at all. Maybe we should find out who burnt state archive and scientific-research institute in Sokhumi during the war. Let us confess what we have done to save Abkhaz language and culture. How much lari we have spent on it? What have we done to resolve the conflict? What does it mean that 2007 budget of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia was 1,494 billion GEL while the budget of the administration of the State Minister for Conflict Regulation was only 610 000 GEL (approximately similar figures were in the following years)? What do we do to make Abkhazia Abkhazian and to develop their language?

In the constitution Abkhaz language is state language in Abkhazia. However, how many books were published in Abkhaz language for the last 18 years in Tbilisi? Maybe we also benefit into the rusification of Abkhazia?

## WHY DO ABKHAZ PEOPLE TEND TO RUSSIA?

We will not go far in this discussion because it is still clear for readers how Soviet Union and later Russian Federation worked to escalate conflicts. Eventually, our society will learn how it works today and who supports Russia to take advantage of these conflicts on local level.

Role of Soviet KGB has not been evaluated in this process and in national movement yet as well as in armed coup in 1991-1992. Why did the leaders, who supported the dialogue and problem resolution, die in obscure situations? Why did those powers develop who complicate already tense situation? There are many unanswered questions. Latest history has not been evaluated at all. Working on lustration law was suspiciously blocked and it was not accidental at all.

Maybe it is time for us to think why Abkhaz people are ready to urge Russia for help – the Russia which has fought against them in the 19th century severely and evicted most part of them and completely destroyed another part. Today, nobody speaks about the genocide of Abkhaz people by Russia in the 19th century. Why? Today, when we speak about repatriation of the deported Turkish-Meskhs, we do not remember about Abkhaz Muhajirs? If the society and the government states that Abkhazia is part of Georgia, why do not we act

successfully?

## RETURN OF ABKHAZ MUHAJIRS AND GEORGIAN IDPS IN ABKHAZIA

Georgian and Abkhaz peoples had collaborated for many centuries. Today, we do not give alternative way to Abkhaz people except Russia. Descendants of Muhajirs still live as refugees. Does anybody in Georgian society, Georgian politicians, remember those people? Which political or public group remembers them? I do not say anything about governmental officials or state agencies. Does the government want to learn about the problems of Muhajirs and start speaking about their repatriation? Who is ready for that? Are we ready for the return of Georgian IDPs? Do we really need it, or it is also component of political games and PR campaign which is promoted only when somebody needs it? Late in 1990s many residents of Gali district returned back to Abkhazia. This wave was so huge that the government of Georgia was really scared of it because it was losing tools to manage this problem and blocked the process again. Maybe we still need to have IDPs because it is easy to gain their votes by promises before elections. Does anybody remember to apologize to IDPs because the government failed to protect them? Just the opposite, the government have been degrading tens thousands of people for many years. When will Georgian state apologize to Abkhaz people and Georgian IDPs?

Working on the return of Georgian IDPs and Abkhaz Muhajirs shall start simultaneously. Percentage of Abkhaz people shall increase. IDPs shall return. Otherwise, Abkhazia will never look towards Europe. It is reality of the 21st century.

## HOW MANY ABKHAZIAN WORDS DO WE KNOW?

Does anybody remember in Tbilisi who are Abkhaz people and how many people know at least one Abkhaz word. Word “Hatamzaait” (Sorry) is the only Abkhazian word that is familiar to many Georgian people. Do we really need to settle our relationships with Abkhazia? Do we see our fault in what happened? Or only separatists and Russian occupants are guilty in everything? It is clear who is Russia and what it wants. Do we wonder about real interests of Abkhaz people, do we wonder what they think about? What are they worried about? Maybe they are right in something; it will be nice if we judge the situation from the side of Abkhaz people.

But no! Similar policy leads to a huge farce, which is called Russian scenario, and it is deadlock. Every authority of Georgia participated in the implementation of this farce reasonably or unreasonably. This policy has been working in our country for a long time against Georgian and Abkhaz peoples. It works by main characters, visible or invisible heroes. Who stood and who stands behind those people in fact? Which institution supported them? Most part of them feels comfortable and does not worry about their deeds.

## SEPTEMBER 27 – DAY OF DEFEAT OF SOKHUMI FOR GEORGIAN PEOPLE AND DAY OF LIBERATION OF SOKHUMI FOR ABKHAZ PEOPLE

Do we ask mothers if they still want to send their sons to the war where brothers kill each other? The

war, which will never have winner side, and everybody will be defeated in it. The war will be final collapse of Abkhaz people and final failure of Georgian state. Do we know that 5 % of Abkhaz people were killed in the war of 1992-1993? And if it happens again, the winner will be third party who will arrive and settle on the ruins of houses of Abkhaz and Georgian peoples. Many Abkhaz families lost at least one member in the war and you will see their photos in every family in Abkhazia. Who are those people for Georgia? For Georgians? Are they enemies? Both sides have their own heroes and enemies. What should most Georgians do in the place of Abkhaz people if armed gangs broke into their families? Should not they have taken weapon? Let us be sincere and understand each other. September 27 is the day of liberation of Sokhumi for Abkhaz people and for Georgians it is day when we lost Sokhumi. Children of both sides grow up with this mentality. Our wounds are still open and uncured. It is question do we really need to understand Abkhaz people? Shall we ever celebrate this day together?

## MILITARIST HYSTERIA

War propaganda has occupied national TV-channels for last few years; they call for the war. Thousands of GEL is spent on propagandist video-rolls. “Hello, Abkhazia” without Abkhazians – “patriot” singers rush to be the first in empty Sokhumi (of course without President’s statement a song cannot be a song). 50 000 GEL was spent on low quality militarist hysteria on Psou River. We remember the fascist propaganda on TV-Company “SakarTVelo”, which was funded by the Ministry of Defense – in summer of 2008 TV-programs were full of quotations from Hitler’s statements. (“It must be thoroughly understood that the lost land will never be won back by solemn appeals to the God, nor by hopes in any League of Nations, but only by the force of arms.” Adolf Hitler, 1932) and it was funded from the taxes we paid to the budget.

Everybody knows what we have gained from this militarist policy and I will not go further. Unfortunately, we do not want to learn lessons on our past mistakes. We still go into the same water. The government continues old policy. Most part of the population has similar feeling. They want the same but under different leader and political team.

## WHO WANTS WAR?

Those call for the war who do not know what the war is and cannot say whom we have to fight against and why. Why should we believe and follow the provocations of other power which supplied both Georgian and Abkhazian peoples with weapon in the past too and encouraged us to kill each other. They still supply us with weapon today. They have gained billions of dollars by weapon trafficking and neither Russian nor Georgian governmental officials cannot help this temptation.

We got used to false information reported on TV about each other; we have got used to live in constant tension, fear and terror. We have got used to terrorist acts and staged performances in conflict zone. We have got used to the situation of neither war nor peace.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN “WE WILL GAIN ABKHAZIA BACK?” SHALL WE GAIN TERRITORY OR PEOPLE BACK?

And what does the well-known slogan – “We will gain Abkhazia back” mean? Shall we gain Abkhazian land or Abkhaz people and relationship with them back? Is it worth to return to the land of blood and death? What does Georgian society need – Revenge or normal coexistence with Abkhaz people?

Unfortunately, the war in August of 2008 in Tskhinali was not the war between political elites only. Most part of society and politicians supported it. Nobody supported anti-war statements even in civil society. It is pity that in July of 2008 that big part of Georgian NGOs avoided signing the anti-war statement.

And it is time to ask once more: What do we want in Abkhazia – war or peace? If we need war it is clear who we will be after the war. And if we need peace, we should think about each other and about future.

“There is no other way towards peace. The peace is the way itself.”

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# WHY I APOLOGIZE TO ABKHAZ PEOPLE

Choice for Georgia: Georgian Chauvinism or Abkhazia?

*Continued from p. N3*

## SORRY

Is not it better to really apologize and forgive past mistakes and sins to each other? Is not it better to be more concerned about each other's pains, to understand each other and say once and for ever that we, Georgians will never allow war with Abkhaz people. Besides that, we, IDPs from Abkhazia will say that we will never ask our government to use military force to send us back home in Abkhazia; we will say that we have made mistake when we could not prevent the war years ago and could not protect Georgian and Abkhaz peoples.

We know what defeat and betrayal means and if we want good for Abkhaz people we should never wish them to be defeated. We, Georgian and Abkhaz peoples will definitely win and victory of only one side shall not be the defeat of another.

Why is it so difficult to bring these two peoples close to each other and to find common interests? Is it really so difficult to find common language? How have we lived together for so many centuries? Some people cannot see it and do not want to admit centuries-long coexistence.

## WAR IN GEORGIAN MENTALITY

War initially starts in mind and mentality and then it starts in reality. The war launched between us years ago still continues. The war shall finish some day and it first of all shall end in our mind. The war is already defeat.

Very often the most complicated problem can be resolved by the easiest method – through realizing smallest truth. A person shall always get what s/he has done before; aggression breeds aggression, hatred breeds aggression, violence breeds violence. How much negative information, impulse and ideas were spread about Abkhazia and Abkhaz people recently? And vice versa... this negative feeling is mounting and impacts our daily relationship. If you send positive message, you will receive the same one back. We will gain love instead of our love. Instead aggression and hatred we will receive the same. It is truth taught by the Bible and our society cannot understand it. Do we really want to change this dynamic? Do we want to send positive messages to Abkhaz people?

We see the straw in the eyes of others and we do not see the beam in ours.

In the appeal of "Sorry" Campaign we suggested people to pray for each other. Many people laughed at it. Love and praying can change much and it is not dream that Georgian and Abkhaz peoples can respect each other. It is the only way to escape this situation because we all want it; however, because of pride and chauvinism in ourselves we do not want to notice it.

## GEORGIAN CHAUVINISM

How Georgian society and entire Georgian state will manage to decline Georgian chauvinism, making our history more beautiful and confess our own mistakes - the future of our society and state depends on it.

Of course, Abkhaz people shall answer many questions too. Neither Moscow, nor Brussels, nor Washington can settle the problems that are within competence of only two nations. Do we need it? How long shall we continue like that? We, Georgians, shall either decline our chauvinism or part with Abkhazia forever. Euphoria of recognizing the independence will fade away soon and we shall return back to reality. Huge Russian military machine works against Abkhaz people first of all. In ten years it will become more vivid. However, people in Abkhazia think that their number first threat is Saakashvili's government and Russia does not have alternative now.

## ABKHAZIAN ABKHAZIA

Georgian society shall do its best to promote the development of Abkhazian language and turn it into state language in Abkhazia. As soon as Abkhazia is Abkhazian, it will be free from Russia.

## GEORGIAN-ABKHAZIAN VISION DOES NOT EXIST

It is fact, that there are not unsettled conflicts and there are always ways out of the complicated situation and alternative. The question is how well does Georgian society realize it? Do we see it as a long-way perspective and pragmatically? Today, our society relies on emotions and cannot see the way to resolve the conflict peacefully. The society does not have clear understanding of war reasons and results; they see everything through narrow and



unilateral position and cannot confess its mistakes and problems. Today, people are looking for the answers except in themselves. We see guilty in everybody but not in ourselves: government blames Russia and opposition, opposition blames the government, people blame everybody: Russia, USA, Europe, Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples.

First of all, the problem is in us. Of course others also helped us in it and very strongly; however, initially we are the problem. We do not call proper name to the problem. It is time to call Georgian chauvinism its name - Georgian chauvinism.

It is fact, that large-scaled conception has not been created for many years where opinions of various layers of the society can be expressed. It is difficult for us to realize our tribute to the conflict and war. And we are ready to blame others. During recent years, only aggression, violence, war propaganda, attempt of threat and degrade was sent to Abkhaz people - and we receive the same.

Many people inquired us cynically – what did you gain from apologizing Abkhaz people? Nothing! They laughed at you and expressed aggression like Georgian people did.

The aim of the Sorry Campaign was not appeal to Abkhaz people to do the same. It was initiated for Georgian people in order to compel them to confess our mistakes and learn on these mistakes; we wanted to say that we have more responsibility for what is happening in our country. And it makes no sense whether somebody will apologize in reply now or ever. It is individual act – the point is that we have done our duty and will not keep those words in our heart and can be free from the burden resulted from the war.

Second opinion, which was often expressed, is that "those, who has not participated in the war, apologize". Maybe it is true. We want to underscore that during the war we did our best to prevent boys to go to the war in Abkhazia and change their mind on their way to the airport. We spent several days in detention setting for that and for our resistance to political events of the 1990s. And unfortunately, even then we were in minority.

Two years ago, sorry was tabooed. Speaking about this topic was neither popular nor safe. The campaign succeeded because many people speak about it now. And everybody thinks about it. In fact, it was provocation in positive. This provocation did its job. Sorry exposed many things; it showed whether Georgian society really has peaceful attitude towards Abkhaz people and how big is military spirit in the country; how far are the government and society from the peace.

## DIFFERENT GEORGIA

Radical steps are always painful for the society. Often we can be declared traitors but the society gets chance of reconciliation through these sincere, open and peaceful initiatives. Everybody looks back into the past; even those who resisted Sorry Campaign and even its idea. Sorry is not a panacea. It was message to Abkhaz people to remind that there is different Georgia too. There are other people in this country who want different Georgia - with different goals and mentality.

Today, everybody speaks about conflict resolution but unfortunately, people have forgotten simple reality – nothing can be done without love and forgiveness. Today, none of those who opposed this idea can say any arguments against the campaign. They have just shortcomings and pride because they think they have nothing to apologize to anybody. They think apologizing is weakness and cowardness. Useless debates are still organized and they argue who was first settler in Abkhazia – Georgian or Abkhaz person; how they dared it, etc. but nobody can say why it all happened.

Recently, they say that it was only Russian-Georgian war but if Russia is not tomorrow, shall we be able to coexist together with Abkhaz people? Maybe we are really guilty in something. How true is our history, theories of historian Marika Lortkipanidze and other scientists about settlement of Abkhaz people in the 16th century and whether "real Abkhaz people" are Georgians and Apsua are different nation who have done so much wrong. Let us say that all this is true, what then? Shall we resettlement Abkhaz people back to north Caucasus? Our society is so keen on this idea that they cannot adequately realize everything and have proper reaction. Our people were told various stories; 90 % of them were made to elect president and the same number of people elected the second one and then the third. And afterwards we always say that we had made mistakes in electing the previous president. The point is that it is very well governed from outside - either by visible or invisible powers and absolute majority cannot understand it. And every president promises us to reintegrate Georgia. However, everybody has similar goals and policy in regard with Abkhazia. All three presidents of Georgia so far have conducted similar policy. They forgot and neglected Abkhaz people during their governance. And this policy still continues.

During the campaign we have received many calls, threats and dirty slander. Nobody inquired why we launched this campaign. Several people called us traitors and spies. Others blamed we were governed by a political party; others, for example, president Saakashvili in his statement in November of 2007 stated: "why should we apologize to them? Shall we apologize to them because they cut our heads off and evicted us from there? Shall we apologize because they destroyed Georgian churches; for our children who got frozen on the mountainous pass and thrown out from the plane? Shall we still apologize for that? Who are those people and which international organization funded them to write such nonsense?"

Most part of Georgian media still blocks not only the campaign but the word "Sorry". Only several small-edition newspapers, radio and online sources spread information about it. The government and most part of the opposition use this word as an insulting one. One thing is clear - the campaign made Georgian society naked with its negative and positive sides; beyond their ostentatious democracy and tolerance chauvinism is very strong in our society.

## WHAT IS THE PHILOSOPHY BEYOND "SORRY" CAMPAIGN?

After physical violence and war end conflicts still continue in the hearts of people. Hatred and anger control human lives for a long time. These emotions paralyze people and make them hostages of hatred. When a person is occupied with anger and hatred, s/he cannot clearly evaluate situation and look forward in future. "Sorry" Campaign might be the first step to break negative circle. It creates awareness which promotes establishment of inter-respect of the peoples. The Campaign aims to prevent emotions and hatred to govern people. It is the way to look forwards, leave everything evil in the past and think of the future. It is not accusation to any of the parties of the conflict. It is first step to make people accept and forgive each other. Exposing human sides of the opposite side can make people overcome obstacles.

There is no future without forgiveness. The Campaign learns lessons our past mistakes. It is assuming of our responsibilities in the conflict. It was the conflict where both nations lost much. Having realized it people might come together. This step is always taken by one side and it will definitely have a follow-up; it shall become kind of catalyst for social changes. Sorry – this is the way towards each other's hearts.

## BREAKING THE CHAIN OF HATRED

What have we gained and what do we plan?

Many people asked us – you have launched "Sorry" campaign for more than 2 years and what is the result of it? The situation is more complicated. It is clear that similar campaign can have output only in 5, 10 and 20 years. The point is to stop negative attitude what exists now between two nations. The point is to break the chain of hatred between the two nations. Negative attitudes shall eventually turn into positive one.

We try to persuade people around us that Abkhaz and Georgian peoples shall respect each other. The campaign is funded from only personal donations because there is nobody to fund it. Several donor organization and embassies were interested in funding this idea but as soon as they learned government's position, they refused to fund the campaign.

The society shall do what leading politicians failed to do. Common sense shall appear among society and we should realize that everybody can do something and we focus on the responsibility of each person, on public responsibility. Finally, this campaign has not said anything new. Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ came and showed us that future will not exist without regretting, confession. The god is ready to show an example of love and generosity and the god has allowed all this tragedy happen because of our sins and mistakes in order to make us think of our behavior – how correct we are when we think that we have not sinned, when we think that only the other is guilty and we do not confess anything.

Let us see everything in another way. Emotions fade away; pain also fades away and life continues. Despite our wishes neither Abkhaz nor Georgians will ever go elsewhere. We have to live here. Earlier or later we will have to evaluate our past and write true history. We will have to put Georgian and Abkhaz myths aside.

We will leave the deadlock where we have been stuck for a long time. We will respect Abkhaz people properly and will take advantage of Samegrelo region and its residents in this dialogue.

Simultaneously, we should collect and check information about war victims. They shall receive compensations. Those people, who are guilty in military and war crimes, shall be punished in accordance to the law on both sides. Impunity shall not reign in the region in future.

Trust shall be built between the two nations. They shall have daily relationship. We should create common field – informational, economical and other. We cannot resolve political issues but we can do something to end this abnormal relationship. Our opinion is clear in this issue. These relations shall rely on the truth, sincerity, love, forgiveness and those characters which were valued during many centuries in the Caucasus. It shall be done by people. It will be time when we have government who will agree even on political issues. The only guarantee for the safety of Abkhaz people can be EU. Neither official Moscow nor official Tbilisi will do anything positive in this direction today; just the opposite!

Who is fighting for it today in fact? Very few people do. Politicians, militants, media, civil society, church, international organizations do not have real plan for the conflict resolution. Do we use all our resources to stop military actions, militarization and war propaganda? Or just the opposite, like in August of 2008 we all keep in silence and wait for the statement of the commander-in-chief to free Tskhinvali region from criminals? We all keep silence – politicians and others. And when we could not hear similar statement, we started to criticize the government – "if we were there, we could have won." Have we thought a little, what do we encourage by keeping silence?

## SILENCE OR PEACE?

We value peace and we chose only the peace. War, appeal for the war, war propaganda, rattle of weapon and military rhetoric are unacceptable for us because war can seem fair and generous only superficially even if it is dedicated to restore territorial integrity recognized by the UN.

Georgian and Abkhazian people demand only peace and open dialogue between the sides.

Georgian and Abkhaz people have nowhere to go. Our children will continue living here after hundred years and they will maintain their language, culture, dignity and history.

Our peoples have a future and let's not destroy it!

www.humanights.ge



# ABKHAZIA - A TERRITORY OR A POPULATION?

EKA KEVANISHVILI

19.06.2007

"Does anyone still have consciousness in Georgia?" it was the question which appeared on one of the forums as soon as the Human Rights Center's "Sorry" Campaign started to be discussed publicly. The question was asked by an Abkhaz user. After the severe initial reaction, Heinrich Boell Foundation got interested in the campaign and dedicated one of its traditional discussions to the topic. On Tbilisi forum, users opposed not only the idea but the initiative of holding discussion on the topic.

"I think any kind of discussion on this topic will encourage the defeatist ideology and general feeling among the nation. I also think that today's meeting will be an attempt to establish such kind of feeling in our society. Any kind of discussion can be considered as a defeat."

"I want to underline one more thing and draw your attention to it. The date of discussion was announced on the political section of the forum and the authors foresaw the result very well. It was a very clever activity. However, we wonder who is the author -Republican-NGOs who work in a small room (the hall of the foundation is really too narrow) and want to make the discussion more public or their rivals who oppose the initiative and Republican-NGOs; or the organizers wanted to assess the public opinion on the initiative in order to use it as an indicator (a favorite term for NGO members).

"In any case the coin has already been tossed. At least we will see the public reaction on the initiative!"

"The greatest vileness starts from similar discussions. Let us arrange debates on the following topics too: "Should we grant Autonomy to Armenian people in Akhalkalaki?" or "Should we declare Abkhazia an independent country?" or "Should we liquidate Georgia and join Russia as wide cultural autonomy?" These discussions will be similar to the discussion "Should we kiss our Abkhaz brothers or not?"

"Do you think that they are apologizing to those people who have killed my and your relatives? You seem to think that every Abkhaz men was holding a gun and killing Georgian people in Gagra? What will you say if I tell you examples how Abkhaz people rescued Georgian families during the Sokhumi Assault? Maybe they are apologizing to those people who rescued our people at the risk of their lives and they acted more humanly than our own people? Or maybe they are apologizing to those mothers whose children were killed in a helicopter flying from Tkvarcheli in 1993; although members of the Mkhedrioni (armed formation) knew there were children in the helicopter, they bombed it. Somebody must take the first step,

however it is a pity that similar steps are taken only from our side. Abkhazian people demand apology from the government and the nation; the government is not going to apologize, they are going to unleash a war."

"The nation with hundred thousands of IDPs (in addition to that many other disasters to undergo) will not be able to apologize, especially when the other side is not going to reply in the same way."

As usually the audience was divided into two during the discussion of the "Sorry" Campaign. Three months have passed since the campaign started but the situation has not changed at all. However, the society has started to discuss the topic and there are people who are not ashamed to say sorry.

Irakli Kakabadze expresses his opinion on the "Sorry" Campaign openly on the Tbilisi Forum. "I personally think that everybody must apologize for his/her behavior and say that s/he is sorry about the disaster that happened. I am ashamed because Kitovani and Shevardnadze ran our country for so many years and I am apologizing to the people from Abkhazia, Kartli, Guria, Samegrelo, Imereti and many other regions for this reason. I think there are many honest people among Abkhaz who think in the same way about Ardzinba and his supporters. On April 9 we did not retreat when Russia attacked us and they lost the battle with us- unarmed people. When stronger opposes the weaker the results are always similar. I express my disapproval to Georgian people's intention to fight against eighty thousand people. Georgian people have higher dignity than Russian because we are not Imperialists and do not seek domination. I believe it is so but if I am mistaken, we are like Russians and I do not want to be Georgian anymore."

"I will be straight in my statement and say that everybody, (Georgian, Abkhaz and of course Russian people) must be severely punished for having unleashed the war. Every military criminal (of all nationalities who acted cruelly during those events) and also those people who bargained with weapons and gained much money must be punished. Those criminals were Georgian, Abkhaz and other nationalities too. I openly apologize and do not try to hide myself behind any kind of nickname. I personally apologize for being the member of nation who had Shevardnadze, Kitovani and many similar people in the government and for keeping Saakashvili in the authority now. It is personally a fault of mine and I prefer to admit my fault rather than pretend to be guiltless."

"In addition to that, I think any kind military activities and murder (especially murdering women) must be forbidden. Vaza Phshavela and Bob Dylan were stating it and whoever takes part in the war is guilty for this crime. The most coura-

geous is a person who can defend his truth without weapon. I appreciate such kind of bravery-weapon is for cowards."

"I know that my idea is not that much popular in society but "I am stubborn on my ideas and cannot act in other way" (quote from Georgian literature)-"You Shall Not Murder" - is one of Moses Commandments and I understand it directly. "

The memory of these people and rehabilitation of the self-esteem of our IDPs demand us to be courageous and return to Abkhazia as right people as soon as possible."

Ordinary citizens discuss the reasons why one nation should apologize to another one.

"I am eager to apologize to those Abkhazian families who were attacked by our military formations for no reasons. Many Georgian patriots were fighting in Abkhazia. Many of them were killed and they were shot from behind. We must apologize to their families!!!"

Neither president nor any other political party can make statements in the name of the whole nation and especially members of NGO cannot do that. After only a referendum we can make statements in the name of nation.

"I personally apologize to Abkhazian families who were harassed during the war as well as Georgian families in Zugdidi, Khobi, Senaki, Abasha and Samtredia. Those families were attacked by Georgian militants. Do you know the opinions of IDPs when you are speaking in their name? The IDPs have already apologized-they were hiding their Abkhaz neighbors when Georgian militants were raiding them."

"IDPs are less aggressive. Most of them do not really have to apologize and Georgian militants must apologize to these people first of all. Our warriors have lost the war but they are still boasting for having taken part in it. The same situation is in Abkhazia. A boy, who is sitting in a chair for disabled person, was eighteen when he was wounded in the war; but he is ready to reconcile."

"Sorry" does not mean that we must kneel down in front of Bagapsh and many others and beg pardon from them because we are such a scum. It will be the best apology if we judge those people who unleashed that awful war. Their statements before the war resemble the statements of current officials."

"I think these people want empty Abkhazia-without people. But it cannot happen to be so-it is 21st century now."

"We do not intend to creep to Zugdidi to apologize. We want to evaluate the situation in 1991-93 and in doing so we must draw our attention to Abkhazia too. We must admit that that-time Georgian government made the biggest mistake which resulted into the death of many Georgian and Abkhaz people as well as of people from other nationalities living in Abkhazia. As far as I remember over 300 000 Georgians and 70 000 Abkhaz people lived in the area. Let them apologize to those 300 000 Georgian people (Abkhaz) and then to those nations who remained in Abkhazia. Nobody demands to meet Bagapsh in Sokhumi!"

"Civil society in Abkhazia is less developed than ours and I think that we, as the people with greater culture, are more responsible for our mistakes. So it is natural that we must create the precedent as the nation with higher consciousness."

"Because they are repeating 24 hours a day, that fifteen years ago there was a coffin in every peaceful Abkhaz family and Georgian people were to be blamed for it. Now we are showing them how well those people live who made those families moan over the coffins. Those criminals are either living quite well or their graves are in public pantheons."

"Abkhazian people will not apologize to us because we are still threatening them with death, resettlement, genocide; we remind them that they have "arrived" here without invitation, that they are ungrateful Afsuas, strangers, that they are second-level ethnos and we reproach them for not having annihilated them yet and we are so kind to grant them with the chance to live on our land and breathe our air. They will not apologize because separatists will never let them do it. If any of them ever dares it, I cannot even imagine what will happen to them."



REVOKETHEGAMES.COM

## RUSSIAN OLYMPICS CLOUDED BY 19TH CENTURY DEATHS

A Muslim diaspora is demanding the Sochi 2014 Olympics be canceled or moved unless Russia apologizes for the 19th century deaths of many of their ancestors in the location where the Winter Games will be held.

The Circassian diaspora, Muslim indigenous people from the northwest Caucasus now scattered across the globe, join a swelling list of opponents to the Games — from environmentalist group Greenpeace to Amnesty International.

Circassians argue the Sochi Games are as insensitive as hosting a sporting competition on the grounds of the Nazi death camp Auschwitz.

2014 marks 150 years since a tsarist military campaign wiped out 300,000 Circassians in and around Sochi. Although recorded by Russian imperial historians in 1864, no nation has recognized the deaths as genocide.

Deportations and turmoil led many Circassians south to Turkey and elsewhere, and their seven million or so descendants are spread across the world from the United States to Jordan to Israel. About 700,000 remain in the northwest Caucasus.

"The Games are part of Russia's policy of eradicating Circassian history," said U.S.-born Lisa Jarkasi, co-founder of No Sochi 2014, a lobbying group comprised of 30 Circassian organizations.

"They are constructing on a mass grave. We need to put a stop to this," she told at a North Caucasus conference organized by U.S. think tank Jamestown Foundation.

No Sochi 2014, which held protests at last month's Vancouver Games as well as in New York and Istanbul, has appealed to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to reconsider the chosen site but has not received an answer.

The Sochi 2014 Organising Committee, in a statement to Reuters, said: "It is not our responsibility to comment on historic or political events or activity." The Kremlin declined immediate comment.

On Saturday Circassians, using documents from the state archives in Tbilisi, formally presented Georgian lawmakers with a resolution asking them to recognize what occurred as genocide.

Should ex-Soviet Georgia agree to such a move it would likely further strain relations with Russia, still in tatters after the two fought a brief war in August 2008 over Georgia's breakaway region South Ossetia.

The closest the Russian government has come to apologizing for the bloodshed was in 1994 when former President Boris Yeltsin acknowledged that resistance to tsarist violence was legitimate.

(Reuters)

## "THIS CAMPAIGN IS A SERIOUS HONOR FOR GEORGIAN PEOPLE"

Russian citizen Sergei Khudiev has made one of the most important assessments of the "Sorry" Campaign; he published it on a Russian website: "one should be very brave and independent to launch similar campaign on the background of the post-soviet (and not only) violent nationalism. Irritated patriots are already sure that "everything is funded by hostile grants". Of course, without those "hostile grants" nobody will ever think of peace and working in this direction?! In fact, this campaign is a serious honor for Georgian people; existence of the people who do not follow the overall flow and try to reconcile with the enemy.... And by the way only these people create real chance for unification."





# PUBLIC REACTION ON "SORRY" CAMPAIGN

**NINO TARKHNISHVILI**

**04.05.2007**

The name of the Campaign, initiated by the non-governmental organization Human Rights Centre, sounds very simple and peaceful - "Sorry". It is not time to claim that only people of dignity can bid an apology; that apology is a generous behavior, etc.

The aim of the campaign is one more attempt to bring Georgian and Abkhaz people closer. That innocent "Sorry" was followed with various reactions from both Georgian and Abkhazian society.

Although, on March 14, a press-conference was planned regarding the appeal, only a small part of media arrived at the Human Rights Centre; they were representatives of the printed media. There was one exception - a journalist for the Abkhazian News Program from the Public Broadcasting Company attended the press-conference. On that very day it became clear that the society had various reactions on the campaign. However, we were too surprised at indifference that media sources demonstrated regarding our appeal.

The appeal was immediately spread on internet. The "Sorry" Campaign became a topic for consideration on many forum sites. Georgian and Abkhaz people had chance to speak openly about the "illness", which they have suffered from for fifteen years already.

Comments on the topic were so numerous that it is not reasonable to mention all of them here. It would be better if we draw reader's attention to those comments that mainly expressed general attitude to the "Sorry" Campaign.

Part of Georgian society thinks that we have to apology, while another part thinks that it is too offensive.

"Who will apology the mothers of those boys who were buried alive?! Or to the relatives of burnt, raped and tortured people?! They want to be humanists!!!!" similar was the reaction of the most users of Georgian forums.

"Let only those people apology who unleashed the war; who persuaded our boys that in the war they would defend their country; who was signing criminal agreements and treaties and even now go on speaking in mentor manner and tries to teach us good lessons; those people who profited from the war and got rich at the expense of others' disaster. Then they started to call marauders and bandits to those boys who died during the battles. ТОЖЕ МНЕ ГУМАНИСТЫ С ПАЦИФИСТАМИ НАШЛИСЬ (They want to pretend to be humanists and pacifists)," wrote one user of a Georgian forum.

However, "Sorry" Campaign has quite a lot of supporters too: "Instead of official confession of guiltiness" - who and why unleashed the war and other stupid things (that will never happen in fact), - we'd rather try to speak with Abkhazian people through public demonstrations. A little group of Abkhazian people might also start similar campaign there (I think at least we should try). My initial reaction was typical: "What kind of "Sorry" are they speaking about?" but some minutes later I realized the situation and I appreciated it in both emotional and pragmatic sides,"



said one of the users of the forum.ge.

"I cannot express everybody's ideas but personally I prefer sensitive method to the material one, the latter is offered by the government. Only people of honor can take similar responsibility and apology. I will sign the appeal," said one of the forum users.

"Yesterday I showed the appeal to my Abkhaz friend and he said that it was not easy for him to read the appeal because the words written in his native Abkhazian language glared at his eyes. Two more Abkhaz people appreciated the campaign without expressing any extra emotions. I would not say that the appeal will start a revolution in the Georgian-Abkhazian relationship but last evening showed me that sincerity is the only thing that might have positive result in the peaceful resolution of the conflict. This letter is little but valuable example of it for me. I felt what the author was feeling when writing the appeal and I think the readers will also understand it. I have often been told similar words of apology and I know their influence," was written on forum.

The appeal was followed with large number of comments on the forum <http://www.mygagra.ru/>. Some of the users considered, it was a provocation; others thought it was already late to take similar steps. And there were people who stated that Abkhaz people have already decided to be independent despite their economical problems.

"It is strange but you, Georgian people, often say that you want to live in peace with us though Moscow does not allow you to. However, alongside those statements you call us separatists who committed genocide on Georgian people. We used to listen to those sweet songs of friendship and love in the past, we are listening to them now and we will hear it in future too. Both parties are guilty for the war. I do not think it is a crime to defend my house form attackers who bombed us from tanks and helicopters. The roots of hostility are too deep in the ground. Thus, this single apology will not make us start life from the very beginning. Our grandchildren might live together as friends. Now, even my twelve-year-old brother knows that Georgian people are bad and we should not expect them to do any good to us. However, I should point out that we teach him to

respect other nations and cultures too. You should initially reach agreements among your society and with your government. You are those people who elect such authority and then you say they never express your opinions," said one of the members of <http://www.mygagra.ru/> a resident of Abkhazia.

There was the following phrase on the forum: "Our (Abkhazian) position is known to everybody for a long time already. First of all we need freedom, then Sokhumi, the sea and your abandoned houses. Those people, who did not fight in the war, can return to their houses and live in peace. But those people, who were fighting in the war, cannot reach Abkhazia at all."

"Unfortunately, those people, who are really guilty for the war, do not apologize to us. If we do not accept the apology it will be unfair and cruel. I want to listen to Shevardnadze, Kitovani, Karkarashvili, Saakashvili and Burjanadze. I wonder what they will say regarding the appeal. But I know that neither I nor my son and grandson will receive any reply from them. Thus I accept your apology and I underline once more - you need not to say sorry to us. It is unfair that honest people have to dig the rubbish instead of guilty ones. One more thing, you call September 27 the day of Defeat of Sokhumi, and I celebrate the Capture of Sokhumi on that day. Our mentalities radically differ and I think it will last for several dozens of years," said Abkhazian Dauri.

It should be pointed out that the chairman of the Abkhazian Supreme Council was the only governmental official who got in touch with the Human Rights Centre. His reaction was negative on the appeal.

Yesterday, at the meeting with the students in front of the Chancellery, the Georgian president declared: "No apologizes, they should ask pardon to the Georgian people!"

As for printed media, an article was published in the newspaper "Sakartvelos Respublika" regarding the "Sorry" Campaign. The headline of the article was "I am very 'Hatamzait' (sorry-in Abkhazian language) but have you hit anything with your head, my dear Ucha?" Thus, the title demonstrates the attitude of the author. Sandro Aleksidze, the author, wrote, "If you know that the government of the country, who does not take

the public opinion in consideration, will never support your initiative and call it capitulate position, why are you taking such a great effort to bid "Hatamsait"?! And one more important question - do you consider you are Mosey to lead the nation to distant and strange life?"

A special article was dedicated to "Sorry" Campaign in the newspaper "24 Saati".

"Apology is not a panacea at all. We should not gain the trust among Abkhazian people at the expense of Georgian people's support. Our people will get irritated. Our activities must be reasonable. Christian humanism - love your enemy - means loyalty and it should not kindle the complex of guiltiness in the society. However, the appeal of the Human Rights Center looks like self-flagellation (Sorry for not having been able to resist the disaster that transpired. Sorry for not having done more for you when we could have). Ok, let us apology but for what? For the War? For which war? For the war that was inspired by Russia and made Georgian people hit the Abkhaz people like bowling balls hit skittles. Ok, let's apology but both sides must say sorry..." "Everybody is guilty in the war, War means the defeat." Let us remove all incorrect definitions from the appeal that might cause controversy between the generations of fathers and sons," said journalist, Giorgi Kalatozishvili.

Various estimations were received from international society regarding the Sorry Campaign.

"I am very much attracted with the 'Sorry Campaign'. Asking for Sorry is the very brave step. I think you will find many supporters and other will join you soon as this is the only way for the peace reconciliation. You are brave and encourage you not to give up even if pressure comes upon you from anybody," Denis Matveev, Peace Building Consultant, stated to the Human Rights Center.

"What impressed me much with your campaign is that you do not say, that we also hope to hear the same soon... that you just dared to do first steps. I am sure many people will join you in this generous activity," said Helga Tempel, board member of Forum ZFD.

Bjorn Kunter, director of the Social Safety Federation (BSV, Germany) could not help tears when reading the appeal and said that "Reconciliation works through forgiveness. It is a precondition to sustainable peace. People who dare forgive and to ask for forgiveness, would always be treated as betrayers by their own people but I think on the other way round it's the people who think it's more important to hate the others or wait for them to take first step are the betrayers of the both people. And if I am asking for forgiveness, it does not mean that I will be forgiven."

On May 2, traditional Wednesday discussion at the Heinrich Boell's Foundation was dedicated to the Sorry Campaign. The director of the foundation said that almost none of their meetings had so large audience before. The discussion was too boisterous. Both supporters and opponents of the campaign could express their opinions.

The argument still goes on regarding the campaign and if we are too optimistic, it will end when Abkhaz and Georgian people overcome their pride and give up considering each other enemies. It is the aim of "Sorry".

**SHORENA KAKABADZE, KUTAI SI**

**05.07.2007**

"Sorry" Campaign - an appeal to Abkhaz people was initiated by the Human Rights Center. The society had various reactions on the initiative. Considerable part of Kutaisi population appreciates the idea and thinks that "Sorry" always succeeds.

The city population with 12 899 IDP residents among them states that "Sorry" Campaign is a perfect initiative and will certainly have result.

Mery Sanaia, an IDP: "To tell the truth I did not expect anyone to be concerned about us. I thought everybody seems to forget everything and our pain remains only with us. I want to express my gratitude to the Human Rights Center for sharing our tragedy and started to think about reconciliation, how to return to Abkhazia which has already become a dream for us."

Lela Tolordava, a journalist: "The goal always justifies the means of activities. The same situation is in this particular case. If our goal is to regain Abkhazia, any kind of campaign (particularly "Sorry" Campaign) is justified. I think only

## "SORRY" ALWAYS SUCCEEDS

generous people can apology. There is nothing shameful or degrading in this initiative. I appreciate the idea and I am ready to support the initiators of the "Sorry" Campaign."

Temur Barbakadze, a financier: "Sorry" Campaign is perfect form of public campaign. Even we, those people who had no connection with the Abkhazian war, should apologize to Abkhaz mothers whose sons were killed in the war. At first sight, sorry is not a great relief for them but it is worth one-minute consideration."

Natela Dzidziguri, an IDP: "Two days ago I saw a performance staged by Giorgi Sikharulidze at the Kutaisi Drama Theatre. I thought it was a continuation of the "Sorry" Campaign. The whole

story of the performance was based on forgiveness and I enjoyed it. Thus, I think the necessity of the "Sorry" Campaign is beyond consideration. Of course I appreciate it. Only in this way we will be able to return to the place from where we were kicked out for no particular reasons."

Irakli Kiknadze, a student: "The initiative is really wonderful. My friends and I will join the campaign with pleasure. I am ready to apologize to both Abkhaz and Georgian mothers hundreds of times, whose sons were killed in the war. My friends will do the same. It is high time to finish this endless obscurity."

Lado Giorgadze, a teacher: "To say "Sorry" is a good manner. There is no man on the earth whom



you will apology to and he would not give in. Let us say "Sorry" and explain to those people that we are not indifferent to them. Believe me, we should not do anything better."

Maguli Mindadze, a retired woman: "I cannot help expressing my appreciation to the initiator of the idea. Believe me "Sorry" always succeeds and now it is in the nick of time."



presentation

# "SEASIDE OF SORROW"

BELA CHEKURISHVILI,

"24 hours, Review"

*The film, directed by Niko Tsuladze with the financial support of European Foundation "Union of Free Artists" and Georgian Cinema Centre, is called "Seaside of Sorrow". It tells about Abkhaz people, who were evicted from the Black Sea Coast and settled in Turkey.*

The story started in 1864, when Russia wanted not only to enter the Caucasus, but to rule the entire Black Sea Coast. They began to evict local tribes from Krasnodar – Jircks, Ubikhs, Abkhazians and Adjara residents. They started strict economical reforms for those who stayed in the area – they seized their properties and lands and made them write obedience notifications. There are many documents in the archive protocols signed by Russian generals and officials which describe how many people were evicted and confiscated.

The rebellion happened in 1867 in Abkhazia, which of course, was subdued and as a result repressions became stronger. Russia cleaned the entire coast from local inhabitants. Ubikhs as ethnos does not exist now – they were all murdered; those who remained were resettled. The Abkhazians, who live in Turkey now, remember the words of the last Ubikh: "I saw a dream in the Ubikh language but I do not know whom I can tell..."

Lots of people died during resettlement, especially – women, who were thrown in the sea. According to the film-director, Abkhazians living in Turkey do not eat fish. They say those fish have eaten flesh of their mothers... Documents



ments of Russian officials report how evicted people died of various diseases and starvation.

According to official information, the migration happened step by step and in total 120 000 Abkhazians left the country. The scientist, Niko Mari, wrote in the newspapers with sorrow: You will not recognize Abkhazia; there is nobody left there.

The Russian Empire settled Kazaks, Malaccans and Dukhabors in the empty villages, but they could not bear the local air and died of Malaria. Old documents reported that they would continue to settle new people in the area regardless the fact they die or not. The process lasted almost one century.

Nowadays, more than 100 Georgian-Abkhazian villages are in Turkey, where families, whose predecessors became victims of Russian policy, have lived together more than one century.

**Niko Tsuladze, film-director:** "This film is about century-long accusation against Russian Empire which started genocide of Abkhaz People. This is the message for the reconciliation of Georgian and Abkhaz peoples. I think we have

reached the condition when we realize that only politicians should not work on it. We are two nations living in a common area and friendship of Abkhaz and Georgian people in Turkey is good example of our future relationship – they are close friends and relatives; they marry and love each other," said the film-director Niko Tsuladze. Their villages are similar to Georgian villages with mills, Georgian neighborhood and traditions."

The greatest problem of these people caused by Russia is their changed name, surname, religion and posterity of those people; they managed to maintain their language and traditions unless they had kept relation with each other. Abkhaz people have still maintained their language; they still dance Abkhazian dances. We have filmed an Abkhazian wedding too".

The film-director tried to draw parallels and show the policy of Russia which has not been changed since 1864. According to Niko Tsuladze, the film is for the Abkhazian emigrants and generally for emigrants. A lot of people in Europe have a problem of roots".

People can see Russian documents in the film, where there are lists of the sur-

names, which do not exist now. Even toponymy of the villages is changed.

According to Niko Tsuladze, educated Abkhazians who live abroad know what Russia wants to do in Abkhazia. They understood that Russia is going to destroy them completely. The de-facto government of Abkhazia tries to get them back in Abkhazia. They want to make Abkhazian businessmen interested in the area, but they do not trust Russia. There is only one way left – Abkhazian and Georgian people should start sincere dialogue with the support of non-governmental sector, public diplomacy or manifesting. That is why the film is called "Seaside of Sorrow" to express our sincere sorrow.

According to the film-director, Abkhaz and Georgian people should save Abkhazia together. We cannot watch from outside how Russians will settle there. The dialogue should start on every level. Abkhazians who live abroad are ready for that. Abkhazians, who live in Turkey, directly suggest their brothers not to be provoked by Russia.

Niko Tsuladze decided to take the film to Moscow where lots of people are interested in what really happens. "I do not exaggerate the real situation in the film; I show only the documents from the archives of Royal Russia", stated the producer.

Niko Tsuladze has grown up in Abkhazia and knew these people very well. He stated he was in Gudauta when the conflict started in 1990.

**Niko Tsuladze:** "I tried to clarify to them how I could and they trusted me; but there is one thing, we should remember in regard with Abkhaz and Ossetian people. It is successive attitude towards them. When Georgian state became independent early in the 20th century it happened in isolation from those regions and

now they have this complex, that someone always oppresses them. It is true that Russia oppressed them through Georgian support and when Abkhaz people faced problems, they blamed Georgians instead of the communist regime. We did not think about it before.

Everyone has his opinions, what happened later. Shevardnadze did not want armed people in the capital of the country. He carried out expedition in Samegrelo region and then sent the army to Abkhazia. This war was not problem of only Russia, but our problem; neither Georgian nor Abkhaz people analyzed the situation and had spontaneous reactions.

Today Abkhazian Diaspora is in Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece and Netherlands. The educated people emigrated abroad, the minority, who could not leave the land stayed here and Russia oppressed them all these years.

We focus on those people, who have seen this disaster and had time to think over. People, who have seen the real states abroad, what political and cultural privileges national minorities have abroad and most important is that they have gained mentality of civil society. When I meet these people, I see they expect you to have sincere attitude and readiness for future relations".

Many nations fought each other in the European history, but each nation had progressive part of society. In the 19th century, when our intelligentsia wrote about the oppression of Abkhazian people in newspapers, they could not stop the process. Today Abkhaz and Georgian people can try together not to turn the territory into a Russian polygon. The aim of the film is to provoke the positive feelings, which our people still have in the depth of heart. We can see how emotional the documentary film is and how it can influence people during the presentation.

## LATE COMPROMISES OR SLOW PALESTINE PEOPLE

BESO KURTANIDZE, "LIBERAL"

After Israel side failed to persuade Arabs to accept the conditions of dividing the territory, the Foreign Minister of Israel Abba Eban said: "Arabs never miss opportunity to miss chance." Initially, they offered 60 % of disputable land to Palestine people. Since Arabs considered "one stadium" of land was too much for Jewish, they did not agree – and rebelled, started war and in 1948 already independent Israel offered only 44 % of the territory to the defeated Palestine in accordance to the UN plan. The opposite side did not accept their offer either. Israel was recognized by Nauru. On the same year, Israel defeated the coalition of Arab states and invaded 78 % of the territory. In 1967 after the "six-day war" they occupied 84 % of the entire territory. Arabs had left only 16 % of the initially offered 60 %.

Arabs declared three No to Israel: No to recognizing Israel, No to negotiations with Israel and No to peace with Israel.

In 2002, 35 years after three "No-s" Arabs admitted that if they had accepted 22 % of the land offered by Israel, it could have been enough to establish Palestine state.

In 2000 Bill Clinton offered them 20 % of the territory and Arabs agreed, though two years later.

"Half bread is better than no bread," Jewish people started to gain their lands back under this slogan; while Arabs always refused to get half bread.

Nobody will appreciate comparing Georgians with Arab people. However, I do not think Arabs would like to equalize them with us either. We also won all wars and after the war in August of 2008 we also lost about 20 000 sq. kilometers of the land. Although, Palestine was later abandoned by many Arab states, they are not alone in this world. Neither we are alone.

Before winning the war, Abkhazians could have been satisfied with the status of federation entity. However, in the past we did not want to grant them even autonomy and nobody has ever discussed the topic of federation at all. Autonomy was too little for Abkhaz people.

After losing the Abkhaz war, Ardzinba (de-facto president) arrived in Tbilisi based on the request of former foreign minister of Russia Primakov. The negotiation between President of Georgia Shevardnadze and Ardzinba lasted several hours. How do you think, if Ardzinba wanted independence of Abkhazia why did he arrive in Tbilisi? – to request recognition of their independence? No! He was ready to agree with confederation. Shevardnadze discussed Abkhazia as a federal part of the country; that means we agreed to grant Federal status to them; but it was after we lost the war; so, later Ardzinba did not agree with that.

In 1998 we lost one more war in Gali district. Our army left the

district earlier than people. Russians and others assisted Abkhaz people; it was not an unexpected fact at all. Later, representative of the Russian "King" in the Caucasus Ramazan Abdulatipov announced the three-point plan again: 1. Abkhazia recognizes territorial integrity of Georgia. 2. Government of Georgia shall not interfere in the internal affairs of Abkhazia and 3. Abkhazia shall become a de-militarized zone. Neither this plan was considered seriously. We concluded: "Abdulatipov is spy of Kremlin; he cannot give positive suggestions to us."

After Rose Revolution, some kind of relationships were restored between politicians and the de-facto foreign minister, Shamba, visited Tbilisi. He was walking along Sharden Street in Tbilisi when Saakashvili visited the military base in Senaki which was one of the nearest ones to Abkhazia; he checked the military readiness of the base. Why did Abkhaz people get afraid? What circumstances were changed in favor of us? Russia still supported them as well as north Caucasian nations and the only thing which encouraged Saakashvili was his army which "was no longer dirty, unclothed and hungry." How could rusty tanks and corrupted army of Abkhazia and Russia resist Georgian army?

The results of the war in August of 2008 were much worse. Besides additionally lost territories, the independence of Abkhazia and Ossetia were recognized. Situation was much better in South Ossetia to resolve the conflict than in Abkhazia. Here personal relation exceeded smuggler and criminal business; residents of Gori worked in Tskhinvali. They used to go to work in the morning and returned in the evening. Georgian journalists could visit Tskhinvali without companions and observers.

In the film of Nino Kirtadze about the war in August of 2008 Mikheil Saakashvili is watching Putin on TV. He gets astonished and throws control panel at the TV-set and cries out: "The war has not finished yet and let us see, who will win it." If we trust his words, maybe we face much more disaster in future. Besides that, after the war in August, commander-in-chief stated: "It is no problem that we have lost only two districts."

How can we blame Il-Ghaz or Tbilisi Amira in everything who did not allow Davit Aghmashenebeli to resolve problems diplomatically? However, our president is trying to be the governor like Aghmashenebeli. Maybe he is thinking about Ruis-Urbnisi meeting too (meeting of orthodox high-ranking clergymen in 1104 where serious reforms were initiated by the King Aghmashenebeli in Orthodox Church).

What do Georgian people think about South Ossetia and Abkhazia? On Facebook there is a group with this title where many people express their opinions. However, you have heard and read similar opinions since 1980s except several of them.

I think, after the first war of Abkhazia, we learned only one thing – Abkhaz people do not have Georgian hostages in Tkvarcheli mines and



we are deeply sure about it. On the other hand, nothing has changed; Abkhaz people are still Georgians like I am Imereli (resident of Imereti region of Georgia); very small nation of Apsua is people who arrived here from the mountains; and as for the innovation – soon 2 million tourists will visit Batumi unlike Abkhazian seaside. Anaklia will be a better resort than Gagra. South Ossetia is still Samachablo. Tskhinvali region is the only thing which is associated with Ossetians. But cultural autonomy is enough for them.

Leading politicians still offer federation to Abkhaz people. In current reality it is incredible. The only thing we can think of is co-existence in one state which will be impossible until we call them Apsua. In 1992-93, in 1998 and in 2008 we were defeated in Abkhazia and in Tskhinvali three times; after that, people who won the war three times will never accept our proposals. Besides that, Russia has already recognized them.

How can any of separatist government persuade their population that accepting the proposals of the defeated Georgia is not treason? Neither our presidents could take adequate measures because of fear of being traitor; so we cannot request the separatists to do the same.

Geese have rescued Rome but nobody respects them now for their deed. If we want to gain respect from our opponents, we should build strong and fair state. "It is no matter what Gos say about us, the point is what Jewish do," said Ben-Gurion and these words are important for us too.

If the society requests the government to look for those three missing Ossetian fellows – a bit older than those Georgian children who were kidnapped from Tirdznisi, it can be considered as a first step taken towards Ossetian people. Those young people disappeared after the war last year. You can see the video-recording how those young boys were beaten on the following site: <http://cominf.org/video>. It should be done today. Children from Tirdznisi were released and now it is our turn to do the same. I personally feel ashamed and think that we owe something to Ossetian people because we do not do anything to find those missing Ossetian fellows.



## reporting

## MUHAJIR-ABKHAZIAN DISTRICT IN BATUMI

MAKA MALAKMADZE

1558 ethnic Abkhazians live in Adjara Autonomous Republic, 800 of them in Batumi, 645 in Khelvachauri district. This is the data provided by statistical department based on 2002 census.

A narrow street in so called Pivzad settlement will bring you to Abkhazian residents. This district is called "Abkhazian neighborhood". Young people avoid speaking with journalists, though the elders will even teach you some Abkhazian phrases. Mainly there are private houses in the neighborhood. We noticed two men sitting on the bench in front of one house and approached them.

"I was born and grown up here. My sons-in-law and grandchildren are Georgian. Politics is Politics, we live together and we are one unity. We had one King and one enemy; we had common pain and happiness. The relation of Abkhazians and Georgians was spoiled by nasty third party," said one of the Abkhazian men.

Dursun Ninidze lives in Abkhazian neighborhood; he is from Adjara, but he knows Abkhazian language better than many Abkhaz. "I grew up with my Abkhazian friends; I have many Abkhazian friends and relatives. We are one unity; time has parted us for a short time," said Dursun Ninidze.

Ethnic Abkhaz people worry about lack of Abkhaz language courses. "We know Abkhazian language, I even can be Tamada of Abkhazian wedding-party, but young people do not know Abkhazian

language. We do not ask Abkhazian schools, but it would be nice if we had Abkhazian language courses," they said.

77 years old Ismet Kaitamba joined our conversation. He does not live in this neighborhood any longer: "I miss my district and now I am visiting my

brothers. He is my brother too (he speaks about Dursun Ninidze), because he is Adjarian, I am Abkhazian. He knows Abkhazian language better than me. There is no difference between us. I have Georgian sons-in-law and grandchildren," Kaitamba said.

Kaitamba recalls past time, when he could visit his relatives in Abkhazia: "Earlier we used to visit each other. I want to visit them now but I can't. After the war I was in Abkhazia 11 times. The government should open the way and people will reconcile with the support of music and love. Often visits make people friends..."

The Abkhazian Muhajirs, living in Adjara say that unity is inevitable: "Water is looking for the old river-bed and will definitely find it".

A Megrelian lady, Guli Kutelia, recalls several Abkhazian traditions which still live in their families: "Respect of older people is the one of the oldest and deepest traditions. For example, daughter-in-law cannot sit next to her father-in-law; father and son can't drink the wine together". As Guli Kutelia said, non-Abkhazian daughters-in-law cannot follow the traditions, but she is not angry about it.

At the end of our conversation my Abkhazian respondents said goodbye in Abkhazian language:

"Amcha gubziara" (God gave you health);

"Hapsuara iahmurzai" (Let's don't lose Abkhazians);

"Haitsunui hakhazai" (Let's be together).



## "RECONCILIATION WILL START AFTER CLEMENCY"

TEA TOPURIA, TBILISI

**On September 21, Word Demonstration started in Gurjaani and finished in Zugdidi on September 27. The aim of the demonstration was to collect messages to Abkhaz people throughout Georgia. The question "What Would You Tell Abkhaz People Fifteen Years later?" was asked by Human Rights Center (HRIDC) in five regions of Georgia. The demonstration showed that Georgian people have much to tell their Abkhaz brothers and all their messages are almost similar.**

"I love you Abkhazia, I have not lost hope to return to you,"

"We are "doomed" to live together";

"We will be able to live together";

"Some day we will return to Abkhazia";

"We are coming";

"Let's forgive each other and repent our sins";

"Let's forgive each other to survive";

"God will bless you"...

Word Demonstration was organized by the Human Rights Center and it started in Gurjaani on September 21, on the International Day of Peace. The street that was called as "a road to Abkhazia" was blocked for two hours in Gurjaani. Nearly one thousand young people were painting and writing their messages on the road. Organizers selected the best messages among them and their authors received prizes. The demonstration ended with free concert in Culture Center.

People from Abkhazia responded on the demonstration in Gurjaani and appreciated the event. Abkhaz people learned about the Word Demonstration on internet.

Next demonstration was arranged on September 24 in Kutaisi. Local people sent messages to Abkhaz People-"it's time to meet each other at Enguri River", "Abkhazia belongs to us all"... The Word Demonstration in Kutaisi was accompanied with the songs written about Abkhazia and Kutaisi Civil Radio provided the organizers with those songs. On that day the radio prepared a special program "Ochamchire" regarding the event. Rep-

resentatives of mass media and other NGOs also joined the demonstration; Fund "Sokhumi" was one among them.

"They say that sea-gulls abandoned Abkhazia when we left it..." wrote Tinatin Beruashvili on September 25 during the Word Demonstration in Gori. She had heard those words from her group-mate from Abkhazia several years ago.

"More time passes, better I realize that Abkhaz people and we need each other. We should forget our painful past; this demonstration is good to remember about Abkhazia. My relatives died during that war, many people have disappeared but anyway we should support each other," said Zurab Tielidze, Dean of the Gori University.

Rezo Nadiradze, journalist for "Khalkhis Gazeti" (People's Newspaper) said in pain that because of carelessness and grave mistakes of several high ranking officials the whole generation was punished. "We know about Abkhazia and

Abkhaz people only from TV and old people. Despite that, I hope that we will be the first who will hold out hand to Abkhaz young people and return to our dream-land."

People were given out sweets with Abkhazian words such as "sea", "let's reconcile", "mother"...

Last demonstration was arranged in Zugdidi close to Abkhazian territory, on September 27, the day when Abkhazian War ended. There are two schools in Zugdidi district that are subordinated to Abkhazian Ministry of Education and IDP children study there. Pupils of these schools sent messages to Abkhaz children. The demonstration took place in the Palace of Dadianis and people wrote their messages on the board there. The idea of all messages is general and they demonstrate that Georgian people miss Abkhazian people and want to reconcile.

"I want to see you, I miss you!"

"It is not so far till Sokhumi!"





# "THERE IS NO WAY TO PEACE; PEACE IS THE WAY"

## AN APPEAL TO THE GEORGIAN NATION

Today, Georgian society lacks the opportunity to speak with Abkhaz people directly and vice versa.

For many years certain authorities have been leading Georgian society in the wrong way and they have constantly sought and continue to seek the avoidance of direct and open dialogue between the sides of the conflict. Consequently negotiations are being artificially hindered in the process. People are being persuaded that peace-talks are deadlocked and that starting a war is the only option left to bring about a final resolution to the conflict. Nonetheless, it is most unfortunate that this comes at a time when peace talks have not even actually started or have time to take root in our hearts or minds.

Unfortunately, however, politicians either do not fully implement their responsibilities or they are unable to work effectively. As a result of a less than full effort, which equals a "bad job" - the situation has become extremely tensed and society, like many years ago, will suffer the most at the expense of innocent lives lost or destroyed. There is one key question: why should our people become victims of political nasty games of politicians?

Georgian and Abkhazian people want only peace and honest dialogue. Why cannot those officials realize this desire as they make the lame claim that they are representing the will of the people?

Politicians should be obliged to obey the desire of those that they represent; they must do everything in their power to offer people some way out from a complicated situation. It is only by finding the proper way out from a stressed situation will we overcome the deadlock, and then be able to start a new phase of Georgian-Abkhazian relations.

Today, we know much more what is happening in distant countries and continents. However, at the same time we do not know anything about each other. An information war is on-going against Georgian and Abkhazian people, and this has been continued for many years already. People received completely filtered information from the media and the leadership. Moreover, in most cases they are being misinformed. Everyday, TV Companies are releasing a cycle of false and misleading news. They are endlessly creating so-called enemies for us. Unfortunately, many people, especially those who do not have alternative source of information, start to believe such black PR that is well-disguised as news. There are very few who can fully understand and appreciate that most of the delivered information is either completely, or at least partially false and misleading. Everybody should carefully consider the source and motivation before they believe in any story about the zone of conflict from most sources.

It is time to finish with the unabated

policy of contradictions that is being so relentlessly used by the government. It is time to put an end to the confrontation that will only result in the violation of human rights of peaceful citizens.

We call upon everybody to respect and pay attention to each other and our shared needs. Georgian and Abkhaz people living in conflict zones have the right to live and develop in a peaceful environment that is free from war.

There is a question how attentive and respectful Georgian Society is towards the Abkhaz nation? Are we sincere in our statements when we claim that we want to live together with Abkhaz people, and even when we cannot understand each other? We need to go beyond of Abkhaz people being considered as guests from the North "who live on our holy land and that they should be grateful for existing here and breathing our air."

Many people detested when the Bible was translated into the Abkhazian language. Maybe, however, we should find out who was actually responsible for burning the Abkhazian State Archive and Scientific-Research Institute in Sokhumi to the ground in the early 90s. Let us come to terms and confess what we have done to save Abkhazian language and its rich culture. How much money we have spent in that direction? What have we done to really resolve the conflict? How can the fact be justified when in 2007 the budget of the Georgian Defense Ministry was 1, 494 billion GEL while the budget for the administration of the State Minister for Conflict Resolution (now Ministry of Reintegration) was just a mere 610 thousand GEL? What are we doing to maintain Abkhazian as Abkhazian and to develop the Abkhazian language?

Maybe we should turn our attention to why Abkhaz people are ready to seek help from the Russian Federation in the first place. They have turned to Russia, a nation which Abkhaz people have fought so severely several times in the 19th century; Russia, which exiled the majority of Abkhaz people to foreign land and killed off another part of their nation. Today nobody speaks about the genocide of Abkhaz people by Russia. Why? Today, we are not giving any other opportunity to Abkhaz people except Russian Federation. Descendants of Muhajirs are still refugees in foreign lands. Does anybody remember about them in Georgian society? Does anyone want to understand their problems and to open negotiations about their eventual return to their homeland? Are we Georgians ready for that? Are we prepared for the return of our own Georgian IDPs to Abkhazia? Or it is just another political game and only an integral part of some PR campaign that starts when somebody finds self-interest?

Are we asking any mother whether or not she wants to send her son to participate in this brother killing war? Such a war will have no winners, as all will be

defeated in the end. This war will be the final chapter for the Abkhaz nation and it will bring about a final disaster for the Georgian state. Can we recall that nearly 5 % of Abkhaz people died in the last terrible war? And if the same happens again, the real winners of the war will be those who will follow after the hostilities and settle in the houses of Abkhaz and Georgian people who once lived together in Abkhazia.

Those who are unaware about war are the same people who are eager for war. However, they cannot or will not tell you who and why are we fighting. Why should we believe what they say and allow us to be provoked by the force which supplied Georgian and Abkhazian sides with arms in the last bloody war. It is this terrible force that only wants us to kill each other for their blood-soaked profits. And even now they are enthusiastically supplying us with weapon as they dream how we will kill each other in unabated carnage.

Much effort has gone into making us grow accustomed to hearing false information about each other from TV. We have been conditioned and taught to get used to living in a state of constant tension, fear and terror. We have grown used to acts of terrorism and staged performances on a constant basis. We were made to get used to live in the virtual reality that is neither war nor peace.

And actually what does the very famous slogan mean: "We Will Get Abkhazia Back"? Shall we get Abkhazian Land or Abkhaz People back? And do we need to return to the country that is identified with blood and death? What does Georgian society want - to seek revenge or to find the path to normal and close relations with the Abkhaz people?

And it is time to ask ourselves once more what do we want in Abkhazia - War or Peace? If we want war it is clear who we will be afterwards. And if we want peace then we should be now thinking about each other and our shared future.

"There is no way to peace, peace is the way."

Maybe it will be better if we actually apologized to each other and start forgiving past mistakes and mutual sins. Perhaps it will be better to be more sensitive about each other's pains; make a concerted effort to understand one another. We should say once and forever that Georgian people will never start a war with the Abkhazian people. In addition, we IDPs from Abkhazia will promise that we will never urge our government to use military force to bring about our return to Abkhazia despite whatever difficulties we now face.

We know the meaning of defeat, betrayal, and if we want good for the Abkhaz people, then we should never wish them to be defeated. We, Georgian and Abkhaz nations will win by all means and the victory will be ours together and this does not mean the defeat of one



over the other.

Why is it so difficult for two nations to come together and to find common ways for shared interests?

The war initially starts in our minds and then follows in reality. The war that started years ago continues to this day. The hostilities must end someday and it will end initially in our mind. The war symbolizes defeat from the very onset.

The Campaign values peace as we choose only the path of peace. We cannot accept war, the appeal for the war and all the war-related propaganda: gunblazing and military rhetoric. War can seem just and generous only at first sight.

Georgian and Abkhazian people demand only peace and open dialogue between the sides.

We appeal to all, including politicians,

militants, media, civil society, religious organizations, and international bodies to come together and garner all their resources in bringing a stop to hostilities, rapid militarization and the never-ending propaganda of war.

Georgian and Abkhaz people have nowhere to go. Our children will continue living here after hundred years and they will maintain their language, culture, dignity and history.

Our peoples have a future and let's not destroy it!

**Human Rights Center (HRIDC)**

**War Resisters' International  
- Georgian Section**

**This appeal has been published  
before the war in August, 2008**

## IT WASN'T OUR WAR IN SOUTH OSSETIA!

### Human Rights Center Requests Establishment of International Mission to Assess Human Rights Violation in Georgia during Conflict

The Human Rights Center attempted to gain the attention of international organizations and Western countries about the looming escalation of the violence and military operations in Georgia in recent years, which included widespread human rights violations, militarization of the country, a campaign of war propaganda, violation of rule of law, and the demonstrated sense of total impunity and malfeasance and neglect on the side of civil institutions. Collectively such a set of factors have created fertile ground for the unpre-

dictable situation that now faces Georgia. Such a situation can only further benefit our enemies.

The Human Rights Center condemns the military resolution of the conflict that occurred on August 7-8 on the Georgian side and it considers the launching of the war in Tskhinvali region as a huge and fatal mistake on the part of the Georgian government. Despite many provocations, the government should have attempted to find all means to further hamper the escalation of violations on the part of the Russian Federation.

We condemn war and thought that it was not the war of Georgia and Georgian people against Ossetian people but was rather a war conducted by the small "war group" of the central authority against its own peaceful population, and against both innocent Georgian and Ossetian people.

In parallel, we also condemn Russian aggression and the subsequent occupation of Georgia by the armed forces of the Russian Federation. The entire world is astonished by the activities of Russian troops, which has included the robbery of Georgian population, looting of property and acts of vandalism, which has recently taken place. Thousands of people have become the bewildering victims of Russian aggression. Russia continues in its concerted efforts to destroy Georgia with the kinds of methods that were common to middle ages and it continues to openly interfere with Georgian affairs.

The Human Rights Centre requests international organizations to set up an investigation body to assess the human rights violations committed by all parties to the conflict. We are seek-

ing out the truth and not wanting to take out revenge. We should know what has actually happened, and not base our understanding of the events of the war that is rooted in the propaganda provided by the parties to this war.

Georgian society should think over those reasons that caused the recent disaster that we cannot currently overcome. All parties - Russia, Georgia, de-facto South Ossetian authority and the United States should accept their fair share of the responsibilities for the current situation that now exists in Georgia.

Only truth and peaceful resolution of conflicts will be the foundation upon which we could establish peace in Georgia and bring peace and stability to the entire region.

**22.08.2008**



# WEBSITE IN FOUR LANGUAGES: FOR GEORGIAN AND ABKHAZIAN USERS

**NONA SUVARIANI, TBILISI**

“We must admit to our mistakes,” is the main message of the Sorry Campaign that has been initiated by the Human Rights Centre. On April 19 Georgian-Abkhazian website and a hard copy newspaper was presented at the gallery “Kopala” as PR for the peace and resolution initiative. Although only a short time has passed since the presentation, it has already caused some serious outcome as the first reactions are being voiced.

www.apsni.org, the website, was created in Abkhazian, Georgian, Russian and English languages. The newspaper is published in two official state languages - Georgian and Abkhazian.

Rezo Bendeliani, the director of the Association for Mixed Georgian and Abkhazian Families, has been working on Abkhazian issues for a considerable amount of time already. He stated that Abkhazian people are in dire need to have access to more and more information. He considers that such initiatives will support the bringing of Georgians Abkhazians closer together.

“Abkhazian people suffer from a dearth of all sorts of information. When they arrive from Abkhazia and see what is going on here, their opinion changes. When one Abkhaz arrives here for the first time there is a second who is motivated to arrive next.”

Tea Topuria, the PR Manager of the Human Rights Centre speaks why the “Sorry” Campaign was initiated in the first place. “We wanted to reduce tensions in the fifteen-year-old conflict between Abkhazians and Georgians with the campaign. This campaign is a two way street and is designed for both sides. Georgians should realize that neither one side nor the other is totally responsible for what has happened. Moreover, Abkhazians are not guilty for this conflict; the Abkhazians should also know that every Georgian does not think of taking out revenge over what had happened.”

Ucha Nanuashvili, the executive director of the Human Rights Centre, stated that according to the Georgian Constitution the Abkhazian language is also an official Georgian State Language. Consequently the state should work towards the development and popularization of the Abkhazian language. He added that Georgian-Abkhazian relationships will not be restored unless we assume responsibility for being guilty and take into consideration current problems in working towards solutions.

“It is the first time where such website or newspaper was created in Abkhazian language. We must send positive messages from Tbilisi. The Abkhaz people should feel that there is not only an environment of aggression in Tbilisi. We need to get away from the image of an enemy and work towards friendship. The website was opened several days ago but several hundreds of people have already visited it. It

does appear at first impression that the level of interest is great.”

However, the presentation of the initiative did not end without some problems.

“What and to whom are you apologizing? And why are you apologizing? Have you done any harm to the Abkhaz People? I have a list of executed Georgians! Are you apologizing to them for not killing all of us? Are you apologizing to them for those 300, 000 Georgians who were kicked out from Abkhazia and are IDPs? And for our wish to go back to Abkhazia, a place where we are not allowed to return? Why should we apologize? For having protected my family? Should we support the warriors to meet each other and negotiate? When they reconcile, both sides will apologize to each other. You think only about grants in order to carry out such demonstrations,” said Gocha Gvaramia, independent expert-editor of the “Gruzia on-line”. His opinion was shared with others who did not support the campaign. They even went as far to suggest that the centre would be more effective in using its resources to buy guns with the money they had spent for the cake for the presentation.

Aleko Tskitishvili, representative of the Journalistic Centre-Discover Georgia: “There are lists of those that died on the Abkhazian side. Most of them were Russian, Chechens, Kazaks, and as for the death toll of the Abkhaz people, they lost only about 10% of the total. We want to apologize to Abkhaz people.”

Ima Kintsurashvili, a representative of the Abkhazian group from Georgian Public Broadcasting, could not remain indifferent to the controversy. “You want Abkhazia without Abkhazians living there,” she replied to one of radical journalists, Giorgi Tsiklauri, who insisted that Abkhazian territory is most important for them.

She said “I think that a similar initiative should have started before as Abkhazians need to be able to obtain more information about Georgians. Moreover, the younger generation lacks information about all what happened. Abkhazian youth now know that Georgians are their enemies because they were taught this from childhood. We should create new websites where people with different opinions will be able to discuss problems in order to avoid similar stereotypical opinions. There are those who appreciate the idea and can agree that we should apologize. However, there are also many people who cannot accept the thought of apologizing. If Georgians think that they are elder brothers for Abkhaz people then they must take the first step and show them that they can be forgiven.”

Although General Lieutenant Giorgi Shervashidze, former Commander of the Georgian Armed Forces thinks there is a long way to go the stage of apology; he discusses the campaign as a shared common attitude to the problem.

“Bidding somebody an apology is not the main issue here. What is needed is to be able to share attitudes between one another. Let us apologize to each other if it is really necessary. We are ready to do it; I have understood that for sometime.”

The discussion of the campaign did not end with the argument in the Gallery “Kopala”. The discussion had a wider audience with various forums. Gocha Gvaramia did not finish his discourse during the presentation. He continued insulting the Human Rights Centre on Abkhazeti.ru too. He called the campaign an insulting name “Bodishvilebi” (bodishi-means “sorry” in Georgian and it is Georgian name of the campaign; bodishvili sounds like “a son of a bitch” in Georgian).

“The most important element in this campaign is the fact that people are actually participating in this campaign and they have never lived in Abkhazia; actually they might have never seen Abkhazian too.”

“These are people who do not know what war is about; what is the sorrow that resulted from the hostilities. Most of them are free from patriotism, even citizenship, as they sat in Europe when the war was going on here. Most of them were very young and under the age of five at that time.”

“These are people who never honored the Memorial to the Heroes who Died in the “War for Territorial Integrity.”

“These people cannot realize that with this campaign they insult even those people whom they are apologizing to. They also had people killed during the war.”

“These are people who, having lost the sense of what is an honorable war, widened the divide between Georgian and Abkhazian people because of their senseless activities.”

“They have forgotten one truth - if you do not respect yourself, nobody will trust you, and even if you claim that you respect the opponent!!!”

Here we want to give examples of the comments made by users on various Tbilisi forums:

“Most of them (Abkhazians) must be killed, we should leave only women and children, and we must then send them to Chakvi (a Georgian resort town on the seaside) as a step to reconciliation; they do not deserve more than that.”

“Most Georgians consider that we do not have anything to apologize to Abkhaz people for. When I hear about that campaign I always want to curse and use foul language.”...

“It does not mean that we should start war with them and kill all of the Abkhazians. However, there is nothing for us apologize to them for.”

“You should write that appeal on Abkhazian forums and we should see what they would reply. Just try...”

“Enter their sites and tell them...guys, we are brothers...let's reconcile...we want to tell you -Sor-

ry! Let's live together in peace.”

“We must not apologize because we are from a holy land.”

“Why should we apologize? Don't they also have to apologize? Just remember, members of Republic Party were the first to make similar statements. I think it was Paata Zakareishvili, an expert in conflict resolution, who was the first who told that we should apologize to Abkhaz people. They have grabbed our land; our people froze on the Chuberi Road as they were escaping and we should apologize for that?!”

It is completely clear that these people are aggressive not only towards the Human Rights Centre but to the Abkhazian people in general. They can understand to restore territorial integrity and not resolve the conflict with the people because the second excludes the possibility of hostilities unlike the first account.

Tea Topuria shares some of her comments about the results and reactions that followed the “Sorry” Campaign:

“Many people reacted towards the campaign. Some of them did not like it; others became extremely irritated as a result. There are many people who think that Abkhaz people will not understand this initiative and consider that we are weak in comparison to them. Many of them asked why only we are apologizing and question as if they also should apologize. I want to clarify one thing: this appeal was not written in the name of the entire Georgian nation. Those who are willing to sign the appeal will be the actual authors of the document. Besides that, when you are apologizing to somebody you cannot make him/her do the same. It is up to them to decide what to do. I think it was right on the part of Georgians to take the first step. We are greater in numbers and Abkhazia was part of Georgia and not vice versa. We had more a greater degree of responsibility and it will not do us any harm if we start living up to our mistakes.”

“I cannot see anything unacceptable if I apologize to an Abkhaz for not preventing the war that was directed against them. Many people understood the campaign as if we are apologizing to criminals, military offenders, or to Abkhazian de-facto authorities. That is not the case and is not right. We want to get in touch just with ordinary people. Today, Georgians are considered only as enemies for Abkhaz people who will return to their homeland and kill every member in their families. Until Abkhaz people believe that there can be another way, they will do everything to keep the bridge over the Enguri River blocked for Georgians. To tell the truth, their fear is real. Based on the reactions that followed the campaign, many Georgians still dream of the day of rushing into Abkhazia with guns. We are against this; we do not want to fall into the abyss of war. Such a hole we have already experienced and have not been able to escape its consequences for fifteen years and counting.

## POLITICIANS ON SORRY CAMPAIGN

**Pavle Kublashvili, representative of the Parliamentary Majority:** “I cannot see any reason to have such capitulating attitude to the problem. Just the opposite, we must think about the reasons of the conflict and speak about those people who were guilty in it. Our fault was not such a big in the conflict at all and we should think about the sources to resolve the problem. If somebody calls upon us to apologize, it is a great mistake and I am sorry they have similar attitude to the problem. I am sure that absolute majority of the population does not agree with the campaign. If anybody was guilty for the conflict, it was not Georgian side, trust me.”

**Levan Berdzenishvili, representative of the Republican Party:** “First of all, our government should apologize to our population at least for not having prevented the war. At the most they must apologize for having unleashed the war in Abkhazia. If our government does not have anything to apologize for, it does not mean that present government is not legal descendent of the previous authority. We must apologize to Georgian and Abkhaz people, to IDPs and those who stayed there, because the war was horrible for all of us. However it does not mean that only we have to apologize. The Abkhaz also must be sorry for their cruelty during the war.”

**Nino Kalandadze, former representative of the Parliamentary majority (now deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia):** “I have to admit that I do not remember the President made any statement regarding the appeal and neither have I known if any statement was made regarding this organization. However, anyway, if this organization aims to gain

grants and money and have idealist attitude to the situation, I think we must receive the apology from Abkhaz people. We are the nation who was kicked out from its territory and Abkhaz people took part in it. They have great fault in the war. This appeal insults the whole nation, the nation who believes that Abkhazia is a part of Georgia.”

**Nodar Grigalashvili, representative of the Parliamentary majority, the chairman of the Education and Science Committee(2004-2008):** “Poor them. This question does not need any further discussion, poor them.”

**Giorgi Tsagareishvili, representative of the Parliamentary opposition(2004-2008):** “I have read the text of the appeal. It is too difficult question. During the Abkhazian conflict many mistakes were made and we witnessed everything. I well remember how military conflict started in Abkhazia, how they provoked the situation with the support of Russia. I admit that we also made mistakes. We committed many military crimes too. There are dozens of volumes of investigated case at the Georgian Prosecutor General's office and it reveals the military crimes committed in Abkhazia and genocide of Georgian population there. We cannot get rid of these facts. I do not think we must blame ourselves. I do not advise any other nation to undergo similar tragedy our nation has to endure. I do not want our enemies to feel the same. I do not think Georgian people have to apologize. Simply we have to forget everything, nothing can obstruct reconciliation.”

**Giorgi Tsanava, a representative of the opposition:** “Georgian people have nothing to apolo-

gy for. However, the government should apologize because the Georgian state should not have attacked Abkhazia like that. The state had its responsibilities and it should not have reacted to the provocations of illegal armed formations in Abkhazia. The Georgian government had some other responsibilities and it was maintenance of territorial integrity. However, incorrect activities and genocide had tragic results. Consequently, present government should apologize for the past mistakes as it is the legal descendent of the previous authority. If any non-governmental organization thinks that he must apology, it can act according to its wish. I have noting against it.”

**Eldar Kvernadze, a representative of the Parliament Majority:** “I estimate the situation not only as a MP but as an ordinary citizen. Tolerance should be well considered and thought-over. Generally people do not realize how well they are treated and they demand to get more and more. We should not apology to them because they have to apology to us. Not only Abkhaz people but Russians and many other international organizations too, who think that they should not bother about Georgia's problem and keep good relationship with much bigger country, Russia instead, must apology to us. My position is that we have nothing to apology for. I agree with the president's statement. At last we have the president who cares about the Georgian dignity and he does not have to say sorry to anyone.”

**Guram Vakhtangashvili, MP from the Lia-khvi Gorge:** “I do not know that non-governmental organization. According to my information most NGOs are aimed to eat up the grants. They pretend

to do something for conflict zones but in fact they eat up the grants. Moreover, if they intend to apology to somebody, I have a question whether they have any employee in the organization who committed horrible things in the conflict zones. They might have tortured people there. My people do not have to apology to anybody and would never do it either. If somebody has acted sadistically, s/he can do whatever s/he wants. They can go and kneel down in front of them. It is done to gain some grants. They are grant-eaters. We have nothing to apology for.”

**Beso Jugeli, representative of the Parliamentary Majority, the chairman of the Fraction “Majorities”(2004-2008):** “I agree with the President's statement. Georgian people do not have to apology to anybody and particularly to Abkhaz people who launched genocide on Georgian people and killed ten thousands of people. Shall we apologize to them after all that? What do we have to be sorry for? Let the NGO, who launched the campaign, explain me that. It may aim to gain some grant. They are funded and in order to justify their existence, they have started that shameful campaign.”

**Manana Nachkebia, New Rights party:** “It depends whom we are apologizing to. Personally I have apologized to my Abkhaz friends several times and I am ready to do it again. I will apologize to those ordinary people who did not take part in those military activities and think that it was a great mistake. We might really have to apologize to such people. As for those people who ran the situation, we have nothing to apologize for.”



## TAKO KHUTSISHVILI

"Today, many people make slogans to restore territorial integrity. However, the main purpose is restoration human unity and relations. We do not need return of Abkhazia in square meters but first of all we should gain the trust of the people back. Unfortunately, the politicians do not see the human factor at all. They just see politics and certain schemes," said writer from Sokhumi Guram Odisharia in his interview with the humanrights.ge

Guram Odisharia finished both secondary and high school in Sokhumi. He has been writing poems from childhood. However, his paintings were published earlier than his poems. By profession he is historian and linguist. He was advisor of the Union of Writers in Abkhazia and was active journalist in Sokhumi. Since 1987 he was editor of the magazine Ritsa in Sokhumi which, as he said, was a bridge between Georgian and Abkhaz peoples. After the fall of Sokhumi, he fled to Tbilisi via Caucasian range. Nowadays he is busy with writing novels. His book "Return to Sokhumi" was published 5 times and has become one of the reasons to start negotiations between Georgian and Abkhaz peoples. The writer has a lot of Abkhaz friends and still continues his relationship with them. Guram Odisharia believes that doors are never closed for human relations.

**- Mr. Guram, you often visit Abkhazia. What kind of relation do you have with local people; have your relations changed?**

- Our relation is very sincere. I often receive Abkhaz friends. Even completely unknown Abkhaz people visit me. Many Georgian and Abkhaz people visit each other. They are not famous people; and Georgian-Abkhazian Commission assists them too. I have friends and acquaintances almost in every field. I started negotiations with Abkhaz people in 1997. First I met them in Sochi. We have met in Tbilisi and other countries of the Caucasus. I was in Sokhumi on January 10, 2004 for the first time after the war.

**- Wasn't it difficult for you?**

- It had its own pre-conditions. They had already read my books in Abkhazia. "Return to Sokhumi" was translated in Russian and they accepted this book very well. In the book I described my memories about beautiful city of Sokhumi, which they also miss. After the war, cities rapidly changed. Sokhumi has changed too. Thus, they read the book with nostalgia. People are fed up with tension and controversy. My book is full of sympathy and pains of both sides. In 1997, when the first meeting of Georgian and Abkhaz public diplomacy was preparing, Abkhaz side wished to meet with me. I have my childhood friends in Abkhazia – they are Abkhaz, Greek, Armenian, Ukrainian and Jewish. We were very close to each other in the city. Current government of Abkhazia is also my generation. I avoid political meetings but they still invited me several times. I am not a politician or decision-maker. When elections are approaching, members of various parties call me and they request me to stand with them to show that they negotiate with Abkhaz people. But it is a temporary action. After elections are finished, they forget Georgian-Abkhazian relations. Abkhaz people know that I am

## GURAM ODISHARIA: "WE WILL HAVE PERMANENT PROBLEMS WITH ABKHAZ PEOPLE UNTIL OUR POLICY BECOMES MORE HUMAN"



an independent writer and painter and sincerely understand their grief. So, it makes my relation with them easier. I can tell them some bitter truth directly, though they will not accept it from other person. One Abkhaz woman told me: I am happy and proud that I am member of Sokhumi literature circle.

**- Do you think there is real resource for the reconciliation of Abkhaz and Georgian peoples? Maybe, you have thought of it quite often.**

- After each conflict, there always exists resource for reconciliation because politics are changed and everything can happen very suddenly. We lived in Sokhumi before the war and saw how situation was getting tenser. But neither we nor our Abkhaz friends believed similar war would break out. Unfortunately, neither party had leaders who could find a common language. It was a period of illusions. When time passed, these illusions disappeared. Everybody is aware of global politics. My friends and I think we will take a honorable place in global politics with the support of our wisdom, historical experience, love and sympathy. Even a child knows the aggressive

policy of Russia. They also feel Russian invasion on Abkhazian territory.

Today, many people make slogans that restoration of territorial integrity is very important. However, restoration of human unity and relations are most important. We do not need to return Abkhazia in square meters; but first of all we should gain back the trust of the people. Unfortunately, politicians do not see the human factor; they just see global politics and certain schemes. We cannot speak with the people with whom we co-existed and built churches during many centuries in accordance to these schemes. This genetic memory exists in people but many of them do not use it. We will have permanent problem with Abkhaz people until we make our policy human.

**- The Human Rights Center started Sorry Campaign in 2007. People say Georgian people do not have anything to apologize for. What do you think about this campaign?**

- I have information about this campaign and I appreciate it. Unfortunately, I do not know the reaction of Abkhaz people about it. Though, I know reaction of Georgian people – many of them get angry saying we have nothing to apologize for

and they should apologize, etc. We both had radical leaders. Unfortunately, the leaders have not reached an agreement yet. When a person, even if he/she is not guilty at all, apologizes to another; it warms relations. I am one of those people who think that we could avoid the war. We must speak about our mistakes. We cannot achieve the goal unless catharsis does not occur in our hearts.

**- The position of Abkhaz elderly people is very important for Abkhaz people. Reportedly, 20 years ago, at the so-called Likhni meeting, they had anti-Georgian position. What is their current position, how do they assess the reality?**

- Unfortunately, under the current situation the opinion of Abkhaz elderly people is not that important and significant. Abkhazian society is small and still controversial. They see problems in various ways. Many Abkhaz people want to settle the complicated situation and are ready for dialogue. They want to find a common starting point for communication that will be good for both Abkhaz and Georgian peoples. There are also radical opponents of this relation who do not wish to negotiate with Georgian people. However, the recent events in Abkhazia, recognition of their independence by Russia and violence of Russian soldiers changed their opinion. It is urgently necessary that decision-makers do their job. But it is bad that the political elite has not analyzed the period of two years ago. They have not studied the causes of tensions and military operations. Unfortunately, they have not considered the opinion of people who had relation with the opposite side.

**- Did you visit your house in Sokhumi?**

- I have not visited my house since the war and I am not going to before everybody returns there. Before arrival in Sokhumi I visited North and South Caucasus; I saw many impoverished IDPs and realized one thing – unless people find a common language, my house is a composition of just sand and bricks for me which was standing and will stand in future too. Many people lost properties during the war but cemeteries and memory are most important for me; they should not disappear. My Abkhaz friend looks after my father's grave; even the stone has not moved from the place. And it is the most precious thing for me.

We live in ultra-political space where there is small place left for human relations which was particularly important for us and the Abkhaz people before. Many people say that Abkhaz people hate us. This is not true. When you arrive there and get rid of newspapers and television, only ordinary relations remain. First lady of Abkhazia is Georgian – Shonia. It is a big resource. Doors are never closed for human relations. We have not only common cuisine but our songs and dances are also similar. Our world-view is also common; I mean, we equally honor bravery, love and faith. Abkhaz people have not changed their Apsuara – unwritten moral law.

## MIKHAIL SAAKASHVILI DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT INFORMATION ON THE SORRY CAMPAIGN

The Human Rights Centre began the Sorry Campaign in March, 2007. The aim of this campaign is to rehabilitate the relationships between Georgian and Abkhazian people. The campaign envisages confessing to mistakes made and mutual forgiveness.

The campaign is addressed to the civil society and ordinary people, including Georgians and Abkhazians. The main call of the campaign is "peaceful solution of the conflict."

In November 28, during a meeting with IDPs, Mikhail Saakashvili, the president of Georgia, stated that there are organizations in Georgia, which are trying to say sorry to Abkhazian people and take grants for it.

"They cut off the heads of Georgians, kicked them out of their houses, destroyed Georgian monuments, left Georgian children on the pass in winter from Abkhazia to Svaneti, and they crashed Georgian helicopters. After all these events, do you want us to apologize? Which international organizations do the people represent who are working on projects that envisage expressing repent towards Abkhazians? Who gives them grants for doing such stupid things?" stated Saakashvili.

As the Human Rights Centre is the only organization holding a campaign that aims to say sorry to Abkhazians, we think, that this statement was addressed to us.

It is necessary to say, that the Sorry Campaign does not mean that Georgians must apologize to criminals. The Sorry Campaign is the first step to rehabilitating relationships. We apologize because we could not stop the war; we could not resist the processes which developed in that period. We are all responsible for those hardships.

The Human Rights Center considered that it was necessary to start the Campaign as representatives of the government and society from both sides approach the situation very negatively. This means that Georgians blame Abkhazians for everything and vice versa. We think that the mistakes were made by both sides and the conflict

will not be solved if they do not acknowledge these mistakes. The position of our organization is as follows: it is necessary to start a dialogue, to put an end to the military hysteria and display of weapons.

It needs to be mentioned that the campaign is not financed. That is why the Human Rights Center will implement only those activities that do not require serious financial activities.

The statement of the current Georgian president can be considered as indirect pressure and a threat to our non-governmental organization that has been observing human rights violations in Georgia for years and has repeatedly demanded for an adequate response to

them.

Besides, it is an attempt to prevent any facts of non violent solution of conflict by incorrect interpretation of our campaign. The Criticism of the peaceful activities gives the impression that the government chooses military way of solving the conflict notwithstanding that Georgia must return not only the territory of Abkhazia but Abkhazian people as well.

Human Rights Center considers that any military attempt of solving the conflict or call for reinstatement of military activities cannot be justified and Georgian society must not support it.

**The Human Rights Centre**



# DISINFORMATION: STATE POLICY OR ARTIFICIAL ESCALATION OF ETHNIC DISCORD?



IRMA BERISHVILI

24. 09. 2009

*For a long time I was planning to prepare this article but having read the final report of the Secretary General of the UN I decided to offer my letter to the readers in this way. I hope I will receive some results from it and then I will not have to publish this information in the mass media.*

Ban Ki Moon wrote in his report about the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict and in that report he said that disinformation and incorrect interpretation of the facts aggravate the tense relationship between the parties. Accordingly, both parties should refrain from a policy of disinformation and incorrect interpretation of facts.

God will bless Ban Ki Moon because Georgian TV-Companies have broadcast so much false information about Abkhazia that somebody should have protested it. And the most important thing is that not me, an ordinary journalist, started to complain about it but that the Secretary General did. However, having considered my ten-year experience as a journalist when most of my articles were about the lives and problems of ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia, if I mention my three secret, illegal visits to Sukhumi, Gudauta, Tkvarcheli, Ochamchire and Akhali Atoni in 2001-2002 and my current visits in the villages of the Gali district, I can freely declare that I have even more right than Ban Ki Moon to speak about the disinformation promulgated about Abkhazia. I think people can trust me.

I will start with the disinformation about the situation in the conflict zone that was promulgated before and during elections.

## DISINFORMATION N 1

I think everybody remembers the information broadcast by national TV-stations in the middle of December, 2007. According to the information reported ethnic Georgians from the Gali district were prohibited from informing people about the elections; activists of the National Movement were oppressed and posters of Mikheil Saakashvili were torn off.

Everybody knew from the very beginning that it was impossible to open election HQs of the presidential candidates in the Gali district and that nobody could lead pre-election campaign there. Thus, nobody in the district tried to do the campaign and to start demonstrations in support of any candidates. So, the Abkhaz people could not have prohibited Georgians from doing what they did not do in any case.

Which incident was widely reported by national TV-stations that misled many people?

Let's tell the story in detail: Do you remember the old, rusty memorial from

which the posters of Saakashvili were torn off? Do you remember the empty building with large windows from which a stranger in military uniform tore off the posters? Do you remember a small wooden booth on which Saakashvili's poster was put up and a woman was kissing it passionately? Everybody was excited by these facts.

And do you think everything happened in the Gali district? If you do, I have to disappoint you and tell you that they were recorded in the village of Zedaetseri in the Zugdidi district. These scenes were staged on purpose. Zedaetseri is located between Zugdidi and Kvari (the same as between Zugdidi and Mestia (Svaneti region)) and has no connection with the Gali district. That rusty memorial has been in the center of Zedaetseri since the Soviet regime and is in honor of the soldiers who died during the Patriotic War. The building with large windows once was a culture house, a canteen for workers and a department store, altogether. As for the strange soldier, residents of Zedaetseri say this person was brought to their village specially dressed for the purpose. In addition to that, after the TVitem was released somebody told the film crew that the soldier was wearing a Georgian and not a Russian uniform. So, several days later, the same TVitem was a bit changed and then released. Instead of Georgian soldiers we saw Russian peacekeepers who removed posters from the wall. The rest was the same. They did not change anything about the woman kissing the photo of Saakashvili. That woman, Nanuli, really lived in the Gali district, though 15 years ago. After displacement she bought a house in Zedaetseri and only in particular cases does she manage to visit her native district.

As I found out, on that day she was pasturing her cow in the field when people with microphones and TVcameras met her and asked her to take part in the filming. Initially she refused but then she was convinced that it could not do any harm to anybody; they promised to speak only positive things and to show the village too. So, finally the woman agreed. Then she was asked to say in front of the camera that Abkhazian people prohibited her from crossing the Enguri Bridge and voting for Saakashvili; and she so said. Then she was asked to say that despite all these difficulties she would cross the administrative border and vote for Saakashvili. Mrs. Nanuli said what she was asked. Finally she was asked to kiss the poster on the wall and the woman did it too; then she went home. Afterwards, the film-crew recorded Tornike Kilanava, the Gali district governor, who confirmed that "Abkhaz people threatened the ethnic Georgians in the Gali district" as if he had witnessed it. It was not his first and final comment on a staged incident in the district. In most cases, TV companies provide false information about Abkhazia; how-

ever, the legitimate governor of the Gali district repeat the text dictated by the correspondent as exactly as Mrs. Nanuli did.

Let us admit that a journalist is not clever enough to realize what the outcome of disinformation can be for the state and ethnic Georgians who live in the conflict zone; however, governmental officials and the Gali district administration should realize it. We hope at least somebody will answer these questions.

Regarding the incident in Zedaetseri village, as a result of the TV Company and officials at least some of the people who had not been to Samegrelo, if not the entire Georgian population, were deceived.

After many people and the Parliament started complaining about the violations by the Abkhazian side, national TV channels stopped bothering us with disinformation. However, during the previous days of the presidential elections this topic was activated and a bit of updated information was reported from Zedaetseri. In this scene IDPs from Zedaetseri and Tsalenjikha took part. Among them was a person who works as a taxi-driver in Zugdidi and took the film crew to Zedaetseri by his car on January 3, 2008. His surname is Tsimintia. However, a "clever" correspondent changed his surname and introduced him as Jalaghonia. Tsimintia-Jalaghonia informed the Georgian people that the Abkhaz administration threatens him and his relatives and prohibits them from crossing the Enguri Bridge to take part in the elections and that the Abkhaz side prohibits him and his family from voting for Saakashvili. He said the roads were blocked but despite that people would go to the polling stations through roundabouts. On the next day we saw Georgian people going to the polling stations though those roundabouts.

## DISINFORMATION N 2

On June 4-5, 2008 several national TVchannels showed people with hats and scarves with the number 5 on them secretly going along "roundabouts" to vote for Saakashvili in a destroyed building in a way the Abkhaz side could not detect. We had to suppose that it was the "roundabout" mentioned by Tsimintia-Jalaghonia. However, the destroyed building had no connections with Abkhazia because it was a tea-factory in the past and it is a mound of ruins in the village center. The IDPs moving along the roundabouts are IDPs residing in the building of a kindergarten in Zedaetseri (who go to the Gali district for various events like wedding, funeral) and residents of the Sachitanao settlement.

## DISINFORMATION N 3

On the Election Day we saw a young man crossing the pure water of the Enguri River to take part in the elections. Journalists said that an ethnic Georgian from the Gali district had to sacrifice himself to vote. However, who knows that the Enguri River can never be pure in any season of the year and nobody can cross it without wetting the trousers. If people in other districts knew it, they could easily guess it. To tell the truth, I personally could not recognize the place but villagers told me it was an artificial channel between Zedaetseri and Rukhi and it is called "Rukhi Channel". There is one more important issue in the TVitem - Ethnic Georgians were prohibited from voting for Saakashvili in the Gali district and roads were blocked for this purpose. Hearing this information a person would have an impression that the Abkhazian people were supporting Georgians who were going to vote for other candidates.

The most important issue is that on January 5, the Election Day, and on the

previous days the Abkhazian people did not block the Enguri River or other part of the administrative border. On January 1 my relatives crossed the border and arrived in the Samegrelo region from the village of Pakhulani in the Tsalenjikha district without any problems; they took part in the elections and returned back on January 8 without any problems. On the Election Day, although Tornike Kilanava and Paata Shamugia, coordinator of the Gali district legitimate administration, claimed the border was closed, ethnic Georgian residents of the Gali district moved along the bridge very easily though very rarely. One of them explained to me that more people wanted to cross the border but having heard the information on TV they were afraid to leave the district. "Nobody prohibited us from crossing the border. However, Abkhaz border policemen warned us not to tell incorrect information to Georgian journalists; if we do, we will really face those problems in the district after going back," said a young man from the Gali district who crossed the Enguri Bridge on January 5. He added that regional correspondents of various national TV-channels used to meet people coming from the Gali district and requested them to say in front of the cameras what they correspondents had dictated. After that, the Gali district administration used to make comments on their statements. Long before, journalists started to interview people in some other place and not on the Enguri Bridge.

Apparently, ethnic Georgians from the Gali district understood they were damaging themselves by obeying the orders of journalists and now they do not repeat the dictations of the journalists. Consequently, journalists go to Zedaetseri to record people. In Zedaetseri there are destroyed buildings, a rusty memorial, half-dried palms and an empty shop-building with Russian inscriptions on it. Because of these circumstances our honorable colleagues think they will create an illusion of Abkhazia and of the Gali district. However, today, it is almost impossible for a Georgian journalist to go to the Gali district with camera and microphone because they have promulgated much disinformation about the district and damaged ethnic Georgians there.

According to my information, officials of the Abkhaz administration of the Gali district had a very sharp reaction to similar disinformation and punished ethnic Georgians in the district. Then they also got used to the activities of journalists and no longer get annoyed with them. However, they laugh at us.

I talked with a resident of a village in the Gali district. Initially I had to convince him that I was not one of those journalists who created problems for them. He started talking very rudely with me having heard my profession.

"Who orders you to promulgate so much false information; don't you understand that it complicates our lives here. Those who are still displaced and received 14 GEL as allowance were kicked out of their temporary shelters; and now you want to compel Abkhazians to evict us from here too" an ethnic Georgian told me, a Georgian journalist. He added that not a single house of Georgian people was burned in the Gali district as was reported by Georgian TV Channels.

"Abkhazian people did not burn any house lately and I do not know where journalists recorded that about those houses."

I do not want anybody to think I am protecting Abkhazian criminals. Just the opposite, since I am fully aware of the problem, I think much shall be written, said and loudly stated about the topic but we must not tell lies.

We should say that ethnic Georgian children are forced to learn subjects from Russian books in the schools of the Gali district; and if a pupil cannot understand maths or botany the teacher has to explain the lesson in Megrelian dialect. The Georgian language is a foreign language in this district. Georgian people are prohibited from speaking Georgian at various events; they have to speak in Russian, Abkhazian or Megrelian. Local people have to take Abkhazian passports instead of Georgian ones. Georgian young men are recruited in the Abkhazian army. The rights of ethnic Georgians are violated everyday; smuggling and other problems are rife in the Gali district. These are the issues that must be raised by our TV channels and authorities. It will not be a surprise for the international society that nobody would have allowed Georgian people to shout "Misha is cool" in the Gali district during the election campaign.

## I WILL TELL YOU ONE MORE DISINFORMATION

About three months ago, one of the national TV-stations reported that Abkhaz frontier policemen insulted a Georgian man who was crossing the Enguri Bridge and died of heart attack there. Tornike Kilanava confirmed this information. The next day I learned that the dead man was an IDP from the Gali district a famous and respected person named Roland Shonia whom I knew very well. He was the director of the Industrial College in Achigvara (Abkhazia) for many years and half of Abkhazia knew him. He had a perfect relationship with Abkhaz people so he had never faced problems when crossing the administrative border. He had heart problems and on that day, he was going to Gali from Zugdidi for some business even though he had felt bad since the morning. As soon as he got off the bus on the bridge, he said he was feeling bad. Abkhaz policemen made him lie on the bench and asked other people to help him. They called an ambulance but Roland Shonia died before doctors came. Journalists and legitimate authorities of the Gali district created a sensation and blamed Abkhaz frontier police for his death. I am asking again, will similar activities lead us to the reconciliation and trust-building or will Georgian journalism benefit from similar disinformation? Today, people in Samegrelo and Abkhazia consider that journalists are liars and people who can do anything if paid money.

## I DO NOT WANT IT TO BE LIKE THAT, I AM ASHAMED OF IT

Journalists assume serious civil and state responsibilities during their activities. So today nobody should need to doubt about our professionalism and competence, about our cleverness and self-esteem.

For this purpose I have written this letter. I want you to know that I can say even more but this time I do not want to bother you. I just ask one thing of you:

If you think that I am mistaken and the abovementioned facts are not part of state policy, please believe me I will not complain about similar misdoings in future and will suggest that my colleagues do the same.

If you agree that my story has nothing to do with state policy and it is dirty disinformation, then let's condemn similar facts together and fight for the establishment of such professional standards that will support the reconciliation of the Georgian and Abkhaz people.

But if you neither agree nor disagree with me, there is only one way out. I will have to publish this letter in many media sources and please don't blame me for anti-state thinking and treason.



## In memory of Zaliko Kikodze

BY LELA GAPRINDASHVILI

A certain philosopher joked, “What an odd creature the human being is: providence granted him the right to think; yet, he is killing himself over the right of speech.”

Actually, if it weren't for this strange yearning for expressing one's thoughts and sharing them with others, I might have never had the desire to write this article; I would never have related to you the story of the “war-peace” opposition experienced by me and would never have counted on your sympathy.

The desire to write was strengthened by public discussions during the process of the war: some stated that the government was in cahoots with Russia; others said that the West staged everything that happened. It's not hard to recognize the seal of the Soviet mentality in these speculations: the reason for everything lies without, somewhere else and in someone else; political processes are planned behind the scenes, hidden from public; we'll never understand and, above all, change the course of history.

Also, a psychosis caused by ethnocentrism was added to it: the West is acting poorly, i.e. it did not put on the armor, did not gird itself with a sword, did not cover its head with a helmet and did not charge the infidels and enemies of Georgia – the country which is a lot of **Mother of God** (as Georgian's traditionally believe).

Shame on the one who still thinks this way about what happened and what will happen. Aren't we to realize one day that we cannot always look for the reason of all our calamities somewhere far away from us, in some unreachable depths? Cannot we at least learn the lesson of modern history that teaches us that it is we who are the reason of our today's reality? We have lost peace because we lent our ear to preparations for war and never realized that our friends called us for peace not only because they have their own interests in this region, but also because this confrontation would have hurt and damaged Georgia.

Do not believe that it was our government that introduced Russia to Europe! Call to mind World War II, the Caucasian wars, the tragedy of Chechnya, Beslan, the Nord-Ost siege, and fathom the absurdity of these ideas.

Realize that you will never win a war against our big neighbor; instead, you will definitely lose peace and lose it for a long time.

### CALM AND PEACEFUL

I first met Abkhazians and Ossetians in 2000, at the seminar organized by the International organization “International Alert”. I was a bit scared to speak with them because nothing emotional ties me with war. I heard a lot of harsh and critical opinions but I also saw that it's impossible to distance one's self from the experienced tragedy without aggressively letting it all out. People want to let you know about their troubles, accumulated and unuttered thoughts to gain your sympathy. Only after evaluating what has happened, we can start the process of reevaluation and building the future.

That's exactly how it happened. Evaluation of the past bore the desire to collaborate. Female representatives of every Caucasian ethnicity participated in our union; that's why we called it Caucasus Women's League.

In September, 2003, we, the members of the League (Ana Chochieva, Aza Khachirova, Aishat Magomedova, Natela Akaba, Irina Grigorian, Valentina Cherevatenko) gathered in Tskhinvali. Ana chose an exceptionally hospitable host for us; therefore, none of us felt tense or fear.

Every meeting started with remembering misfortunes experienced during the years of the war and ended with the best examples of the Georgian-Ossetian relationship.

I'll never forget a woman sheltered in the refugee camp, which came into the hall to meet us and began to relate her disturbing story: how she carried her wounded daughter through the forest and how that poor soul gave up. My jaw nearly dropped when I was listening to her and tears involuntarily ran down my cheeks. I was dumbfounded at the misery of that woman on the verge of insanity and I couldn't calm down.

Politicians and representatives of the civil sector were interested more in the upcoming parliament elections; therefore, their way of communication smelled of political correctness and diplomacy: even their ideas and emotions seemed to be placed on the



# THE “FANDARASTIAN” WAR AND THE LOST PEACE

pharmacy scales, keeping balance.

At the end of one of the discussions, my attention was drawn by an alpinist's picture on the wall. A young man who was standing nearby decided that I was a fan of alpinism and told me:

“I love this activity very much. I've been to Svaneti, Khevsureti, Racha, everywhere.”

“Unfortunately, I cannot impress you in this field. It's just that this man looks like Zaliko to me; that's why I paid attention to it.”

As soon as I said that, the young man's eyes lit like Christmas lights. I thought he was about to pick me up and whirl around.

“You know Kikodze? He's my friend. He's the one I love like a brother. He's the calm and peaceful one. Don't forget to say hello to him from me!” (Zaliko – Georgian who was openly opposing war propaganda against Abkhazia and South Ossetia and was well known and respected person not only among Georgians but also among Abkhazian and Ossetian communities).

If it hadn't been for the host's car arriving, I would have never escaped that young man. Everyone around us thought that we were long-lost relatives who found each other.

The Karabakhian Irina Grigorian and I returned together from Tskhinvali to Tbilisi. When we bid farewell, she told me:

“I wish I understood the conflict between you and Ossetians. You come and go to each other without asking anybody. If an Azerbaijani comes to our town, he has to have bodyguards, while you walked around without anyone even asking you to present your passport. They all sell their goods in that big marketplace together, too.”

Back then, I couldn't even imagine that the situation was about to change cardinally: Ergneti (Ergneti was a trading place at the border of the Georgia-Ossetia conflict zone which was established spontaneously after the conflict of 1992. At this market Georgians and Ossetians communicated and making business together and forgetting by and by about the conflict) was closed and in the summer of 2004, a war nearly broke out. Yet, everyone who dared raising his voice was short of being taken to the gallows.

The parliamentarian Iviane Khaindrava accused the government of not having a strategic plan of the conflict's regulation, and of its being involved in hidden military “games”:

“...Peace negotiations during the day, war at night. One gets the impression that Georgia has two governments: one for the day and the other for the night. To be more correct, it has an open, formal and official government, which is limited in its actions for some reason; and parallel to it, there is a shady, informal, unofficial group which controls the processes using illegal strings that exist beyond the Constitution and legislation, and on top of it all, it controls them poorly; instead, the group does it all without any responsibility on its part. To be more correct, without being responsible for anything...”

For some reason, issues brought up by Iviane Khaindrava reminded the versifier of praises for the government and its minion Giorgi Arveladze of Baburin's and Zhirinovski's pompousness. The reason for his irritation was clear: who would dare to call to account the taciturn and “wise” Irakli Okruashvili who brought a sword and fire upon the

right and the wrong? In the post-revolution Georgia nobody remembered the notion of responsibility. However, there were people in the government who would never let war to break out.

Ana's husband, Alan Parastaev, nearly became a victim of this semi-military “humanitarian assault”. On December 30, he was severely beaten by the Tskhinvali law enforcement officers because he was inquiring why the humanitarian aid for Georgian villages was halted in Tskhinvali. Marina Paghava and I visited him in the hospital. We were in the middle of a conversation when Zaliko walked in.

I watched Alan's reaction in amazement: he jumped up as if he weren't hurting at all and hugged the guest. I was pleased at seeing this, my mind became clear and I remembered an Ossetian boy with his eyes full of honest, noble gladness. Most importantly, I realized that to deserve such love, you have to be calm and peaceful like Zaliko. Many Ossetians and Georgians remember what the Nazis of the Parliament of the first convocation put them through in 1991, when they started talking about the absurdity of abolishment of the Ossetian Autonomous Region.

### SHAME AND CONSCIENCE

Soon the situation in Abkhazia became tense, too. Georgian heavy armament was gathered even near the Enguri Bridge. On June 1, an action dedicated to the International Children's Day was organized there. About 200 children, dressed in military uniforms and armed with toy automatic guns, marched in ranks.

In anticipation of a new confrontation, concerned Abkhazian women wrote a letter to us, several Georgians: Naira Gelashvili, Ana Tzvinaria-Abramishvili, Marina Elbakidze, Iulia Kharashvili, Marina Paghava, Lela Gaprindashvili, Davit Darchiashvili, Ala Gamakharia, Tinatin Khidasheli, Gia Anchabadze, Nodar Sarjeladze, Paata Zakareishvili. In this letter they spoke about incongruity between peaceful statements of the Georgian leaders and their actions; also, about the hope of Abkhazian society that someone among the politicians that were united under the banner of peace would have enough courage to evaluate the events of 1992-1993.

“...Dear colleagues, we hope that you share our concern. We are convinced that we must do everything to prevent populist statements and irresponsible actions of the new Georgian government from undermining peace processes. In this connection, we suggest a number of joint measures:

1. To declare a temporary moratorium on any kind of one-sided actions: unauthorized visits from one side, also mass rallies, marches and manifestations (among them, those with peace slogans) directly near safety zones. We must realize that any kind of destabilization in safety zones may cause a provocation and escalate violence.

2. To organize a satellite link-up Sokhumi-Tbilisi to give society an opportunity to discuss the developed situation and seek ways to relieve tension.

We are obligated to do everything possible to retain the accomplishment of the recent years: the beginning of mutual respect and understanding, which would help us in building a peaceful future.”

To answer this letter, we found and published in the newspaper “24 saati” an analytical article, writ-

ten by a member of the Republican Party, an immigrant living in Germany, and printed under the pseudonym “Friend” in 1931. The author points at three mistakes that Georgians made in connection with Abkhazians: 1. Abkhazians were declared Georgians and thus their national honor was insulted; 2. The Menshevik government carried out an irresponsible economic policy with regard to these people; and 3. General Jugheli's army entered Abkhazia, organizing vandalism and violence.

“Friend” hoped in vain that Georgians would never repeat these mistakes. In the beginning of the 90s, history repeated itself with even heavier and more devastating results.

During these days, when I was reading the letter from Abkhazia, I came across a note on the back of it. It turned out that I chose the title “Shame and Conscience” for a response that I never finished and postponed its sending for the future.

Yes, if someone reprimands me for my silence after the events of 2004, I can come up with a thousand justifications. If nothing else, I may say that I couldn't change a thing or convince anyone.

But what about conscience?! You cannot hold anything back from this unveiling mind and escape it forces you to self-reflect and admit your mistakes. It's only thanks to it that I can say that my silence caused marginalization of “peace” and cultivation of militarism.

### “LOVE” OR “FUCK”

Starting from 2005, patriotic propaganda and militaristic disposition were picking up. Videos after videos were being shot, and there was an impression that it was enough to sing to regain the lost territories right away.

Part of Georgian society joked to the hilt about this virtual, musical “war games”, but no one criticized its essence fittingly. For example, no one asked pop singer Zumba (winner of the patriotic musical contest - “Patri-Note” organized by the Government) why he changed Galaktion's lyrics and chose the phrase “the sea that is ours” over the original “the sea that is far away”. In the same manner, no one inquired where this boy was intending to send his friends and refugees while Russians held the Enguri Bridge. (According to the video-clip of the song, refugees from Abkhazia and Zumba's friends together are returning to freed Abkhazia)

The apex of militaristic hymnography, “Psous Tzkali” (“The Waters of Psou”), makes military preparations clear; it rejoices at the romanticism of battle and self-sacrifice.

Starting from the beginning of the Abkhazian conflict, the waters of Psou (a small river at the Georgian-Russian State border which was controlled by Abkhaz forces) have become a sacral symbol of Georgian statehood and unity. You might remember the great passion with which Karkarashvili, commander of the Georgian armed forces in 1992, imbibed it when his warriors reached Psou river. That's probably why the singer, in this propaganda video, is begging Georgian soldiers to partake of this immortalizing liquid that runs on the border of the fatherland.

One might understand at least something in the visual part of the video, but the lyrics are full of wannabe combination of words and artificial, sickening bombast.

As it turns out, not Georgian and Abkhazian societies but simply time is responsible for both the past and the present, blood, tears and mourning garments. To be short, we'll just drink the water of Psou and immediately find ourselves on the Black Sea shore. And on top of it all, we are guaranteed immortality and gratitude of the posterity.

The song “Kokoiti Fandarast” by pop-singer Leks-Seni irritated many. Not because of its content, but because of the Ossetian term “Fandarast” (“Fandarast” in Ossetian means “get off”, but sounds like “pederast”) was used in it; it caused insulting sayings and comments. And in the end, stars of Georgian show business, jesters “distinguished for their wit and farsightedness” made an embarrassing version of this song, and kept yelling for months, “Kokoiti is not a man, he's fandarast.” Commenting this ignorance is beyond my abilities.

Nothing can surprise anymore. Neither was I surprised at one of the Georgian intellectuals' apologia on the war that started toward the end of July 2008. To expand his reasoning, he used the slogan of the American countercultural and anti-Vietnam War slogan of the 60s, “Make Love, Not War!” In his translation of the first part of the phrase he used the term “Fuck” instead of “Love”.

You probably understand that I'm not criticizing this intellectual's English. I'm only irritated by his linguistic-ethic choice: when you cannot see love and peace in this unique saying, then war and hatred are inevitable.



## SAAKASHVILI PROMISES RETURN OF ABKHAZ IDPS IN MONTHS

Mikheil Saakashvili, who is seeking reelection as President on January 5, said Georgia, along with the international community, would create the conditions in the next few months that would secure the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Abkhazia.

Saakashvili was speaking at a meeting with a group of Abkhaz IDPs as part of his election campaign. The meeting was held in the Tbilisi Municipality building.

"I promise you – and this is not a promise made as part of a pre-election campaign – if the January 5 elections are held normally, we will spend next winter in a warmer climate; we will be back in our homes. I promise this to you and I guarantee this. I have never before said anything more concrete," Saakashvili said.

"I want to promise you that in the nearest future – I was thinking of doing that in my first presidential term, but because of well known reasons, I have cut that term – so in the nearest future, I mean in the next few months, I am not saying years, we, along with the international community, will create conditions for your return to Abkhazia in safety and dignity."

He then criticized "some international organizations" for advocating the IDP integration into local communities where they currently reside.

"Some international organizations call on us to convince internally displaced persons that there is no longer a need to return. I have a very blunt response to this: I do not know whom you are going to convince, but I know that I have a house in Sokhumi and you won't be able to convince me of the contrary," Saakashvili said.

He also said that some non-governmental organizations were advocating that Georgians acknowledge alleged mistakes that led to the armed conflict in Abkhazia in the early 90s.

"Why should we apologize? Say sorry for what? Because our heads were cut and because we were forced out of our homes; or maybe because our churches [in Abkhazia] were raided and our children frozen on mountain passes [when displaced persons tried to flee Abkhazia]? Should we say sorry? For what? I can not understand why they got a grant from international organizations [to advocate this stance]... I know there are some international groups, not state ones, which pay money for this type of foolishness. This is more than just saying sorry; it means creating a legal groundwork for depriving you of the right to return [to Abkhazia]."

**Civil Georgia,  
Tbilisi / 28 Nov.'07**

# QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE KHURCHA INCIDENT



*On election day, 21st May 2008, Russian peacekeepers in the village of Khurcha, inside the de-militarized zone on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict line, reported of shootings at around 14:00. Georgian TV reported that buses carrying voters travelling from the Abkhaz side of the Enguri river to Khurcha had been hit by grenades and gunfire, and Georgian television showed dramatic images of exchange of fire, burning buses and people running in panic. Later the same day, President Mikheil Saakashvili traveled to Zugdidi and met with one of the wounded at the local hospital. The incident was widely televised in Georgia and abroad. The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement blaming the Abkhaz side, with Russian support, for the incident.*

The team reached Khurcha at 11:00 the following day, 22nd May 2008. Speaking to locals, officials and international military personnel, the observers learned the following:

The buses did travel from the Abkhaz side of the Enguri to Khurcha, carrying voters. The buses did not, however, go directly to the polling station in the village, but instead drove the voters to a soccer field

nearby, situated close to the border between Georgian and Abkhaz controlled territory. A large group of journalists and TV-reporters had been brought there, to interview and film the voters from the Abkhaz side. Eye-witnesses report that shooting broke out and that people threw themselves to the ground. There were then three or four grenades fired at the buses, hitting both buses directly. Following this, heavy gunfire broke out, as Georgian soldiers and security services personnel started firing towards the Abkhaz side of the border.

The observers examined the site assisted by UN-OMIG Military Expert Anders Tegnberg, who noted that the smaller of the two buses had been hit with what is likely to be an Under-slung grenade launcher. This weapon has a very short range, and requires special training to use with precision. The larger of the two buses was probably also hit with an RPG as it was damaged more extensively. One of the grenades missed and hit the ground approximately thirty meters from the buses, indicating the direction from which the grenades were fired. The grenades were in all likelihood fired from the far side of the soccer field, in a direct arch towards the buses, at a distance of about 100 meters. At the spot where the grenades were fired from, large amounts of cartridges of three different kinds were found. The cartridges are from AKM, AK74 and PKM (more unlikely, SVD) of Soviet make, calibers used by both the Abkhaz and the Georgian side.

The governor of Khurcha declined to comment on

the incident, but said that he did not organize the transportation of the voters. It is unclear who organized the bussing of the voters, but according to the governor, local officials and the local DEC's were not involved.

### QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE INCIDENT:

Local eye-witnesses explained that security forces in civilian clothing were either already present when the shooting started, or present shortly after, and returned fire. They were joined very quickly by Georgian Interior Ministry personnel. Khurcha lies inside the de-militarized zone, which means that Georgian military is not present there. The closest Georgian military post lies some 15 minutes driving on very bad roads away from the where the incident took place, not allowing for the time it would take to react to the sound of gunfire.

The rare and dramatic event occurred at the very moment when numerous TV-reporters had been brought to the village for a pre-arranged media show, effectively taking media interest away from numerous reports of electoral irregularities and violent incidents coming in from all parts of the country.

Local eye-witnesses all stated that they believe this incident was staged by the Georgian (that is, their own) side, noting in particular the fact that the passengers were brought not to the voting station in the center of town, but to the soccer field, that so many journalists had been brought there in advance, that it was unclear who organized the busing, and the rapidness with which Georgian military arrived at the scene.

That the grenades were fired from within the Georgian side of the conflict zone, at a very short distance. That the incident took place during a staged media-show, playing into the recent focus of the Georgian government on the Abkhaz conflict, and that it involved further screen time for president Saakashvili on Election Day. The fact that the buses were not organized by local officials tasked with arraying the electoral procedures.

Georgian authorities should launch a serious, independent investigation of the incident to find out the circumstances of the attack and to identify the persons responsible for what is a criminal act. If indeed staged by Georgian authorities themselves, the incident is a disturbing example of cynicism, playing on the tragedy that befell the victims of the Abkhaz conflict, risking the lives and health of innocent civilians for political gain.

### Observers:

**Ivar Dale, Aage Borchgrevink,  
Norwegian Helsinki Committee/  
Human Rights Centre of Georgia**



**IA ANTADZE,**

*Radio Liberty*

*I know that everybody is fed up with the statements about the simulated reportage of the TV Company Imedi released on March 13. Only the word "simulated" remained in our memories from the reportage which is actively used in ordinary speech of Tbilisi dwellers. For example, "don't you feel a bit simulated?"*

However, I will say that we have not received any convincing replies to any of the questions raised after the reportage yet. We do not know the motive, the customer of the reportage, the goal and the result of it. And I want to write about the result. Besides that, since I will have to speak about the president, whose connection with the reportage was documented, I will clarify that the article was written based on my personal assumptions.

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I do not think that the authors and people working on the reportage could predict the real results of

# FINALLY, WE HAVE LOST THE WAR

**"Darkness Around Means End of the Night"**

**Kote Kubaneishvili**

their work which they received later. The real war launched on August 8, 2008 against Russia finished by the simulated war of March 13, 2010. After the shock of the day, we, the entire country, realized everything what we did not believe after the real war. The government of Georgia lost the war and they should be responsible for it.

Many people paid attention to the fact that both Georgian and foreign societies started to evaluate the real war though it had to be done after the August war. Black clouds started to gather over the loser commander-in-chief only now, though it had to happen 18 months ago. In addition to that, understanding of the reality, which disappeared after the real war, has started to appear only after the imitated war. After the shock the focus corrected and we understood – we have endured the last disaster. The burden, which was torturing us for the last one year and half and did not allow us to live peacefully, has a name now: paying with the war is craziness. At last, it finished and we started to discuss responsibility issues.

On the one hand, embassies of the US, GB and France spread protest statements; on the other hand European and American newspapers and telecasts speak about the responsibilities for the war which is beyond the competence of journalists. Many media sources said that the TV-Company Imedi is

run by the person close to the President Saakashvili. Foreigners called the reportage not only "unpleasant" as the president of Georgia did, but they said it was "irresponsible."

The most important is the Georgian society who divided in two parts after the reportage. One part thinks that the audience is guilty because they did not tell the truth and false from each other and got panicked; the second part thinks the president does not have healthy psychic. Statements and behaviors of the president have been assessed in different ways, but nobody has ever made public diagnosis about his health as it was done after the simulated Chronicle. And first in the last year, we see that the number of supporters of the president is much less than the number of people who are shocked by him.

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Nobody could dare to make similar evaluations about fabricated reportage if not the five-day war which we lost. Nobody was going to punish the offender for the real war if the president had not launched it. Real and virtual stories are fatally connected with each other in order to finish what has started and then wait for the verdict.

I do not know when and how the end will be formulated. Two weeks ago I wrote an article about wasted time when people, having lost reality, are hurrying to get changes and think that Saakashvili's

government will finish in two or three days. I do not think so, but I am fully aware that Georgia finally finished the war on March 14 which was lost in 2008.

Nevertheless, we all remember Mikheil Saakashvili looking strong after the August war. After the first shock, he started propagandist war strongly and persuaded part of the society that we have not lost the war. In addition to that, foreign countries supported us which was expressed in the transfer of the 4,5 billion USD to Georgia. Opposition parties started protest rallies in the spring of 2009 and the government opposed it very cleverly. In the shameful end of this wave, the government had its role as well. The failure of the opposition reinforced the president and his team even more.

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Mikheil Saakashvili maintained such a high spirit before the simulated Chronicle of March 13 which destroyed all his efforts for a year and half to finish the war. That meant, we should not have confessed that we have lost the war. Even before the New Year the president called upon us to take guns in hands and fight. Now, finally, we have put full stop at the end of the war. That means that we have gained the right to put the guns down and look after our country – if it is possible.

Thus, after March 13, it has become quite clear.



# RECONCILIATION WITH ABKHAZ AND OSSETIAN PEOPLE; OR WHEN TIME CANNOT CURE

VASIL MAGHLAPERIDZE

2010 has started and one more year separates us from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. If it continues like that, in 20-25 years, those Abkhaz and Georgian people, who still remember that once Abkhazia was part of Georgia, will be over 50. For that time, nobody will care who will recognize their independence and who will not. Everybody will put up with reality.

20-25 years is not a long time, time will run fast. According to the current understanding of conflicts in Georgia it is not clear when or how the country will be unified. Unfortunately, process of adaptation to disintegration of the country goes on alongside loud rhetoric.

Let us view the attempts of our government to resolve the problem:

a) The government clarifies to European states and international organizations that Russia is an undemocratic and aggressor country and it is necessary to carry out stricter and more stubborn policy towards them. Allied states call upon Russia to be less aggressive and from time to time they make statements that they support territorial integrity of Georgia.

b) The government, in fact, declines all kind of relationship with current authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia until they integrate with Georgia. They call upon other states to blockade the break-away regions; the authority has adopted the law which envisages liability of people who will enter occupied regions bypass Georgia.

c) The government, in fact, refuses to start dialogue with Putin authority, until our territories are occupied by Russia.

That is all; unfortunately we cannot add anything more, if we do not consider TV advertisements about reorganization and rearmament of Georgian Army. However, we should not argue that it is impossible to reintegrate our state by military ways.

Let us discuss which of these attempts can bring us closer to unification of the country?

a) International support is very important, but as it seems now, even in future it will be only on the level of declaration and we should not expect any effective steps take by western countries. Although a part of Georgian politicians and experts often joke that Abkhazia and Ossetia is recognized only by Russia, Venezuela and Nauru, it is not funny topic for our allied states. Apparently, they need not explanations what kind of state Russia is. Number of countries, which will recognize independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, has only symbolic meaning for separatists and it will only rise their ambition; the most important issue is that Russia recognized them and deployed its forces there.

After that, theoretically, Russia might cede those territories only for two reasons: if it is under strong military or economical oppression. Theory remains theory; in fact nobody is going to discuss similar possibility. Nobody thinks to isolate Russia or impose sanctions on it. Just the opposite, they speak about overloading relations with Russia, about intensification of their military and economical cooperation with Russia, etc.

International support is important, but, we should be more realistic; only declarations about their support will not bring more results in 2110 or in 2015 and in 2025 than we had in 2008-2009. Hoping that one nice day Europe and America will seize our territories from Russia and give them back to us is complete nonsense. Besides that, until we have their support and the topic is not closed, Georgia has a chance for unification and instead of stupid rhetoric it is necessary to take effective measures to use current possibilities.

b) It is clear that Georgia's strategic interest is to reduce Russian control over secessionist regions; thus, the aim of lasting blockade is unclear. In fact, with this blockade, Georgia pushes Abkhazia and South Ossetia to cooperate with the rest of the world only through Russia and assists their integration with Russia. Besides that, this blockade supports the opinion of separatists that Georgia is their enemy and Russia is their friend. It is high time for the authority to inform Georgian population on the results of their blockade and what we should expect from it? Does it strengthen or weaken Russian influence?

There are many questions about declining the co-



operation and dialogue with separatist authorities because they are illegal formations. It is not an attractive reality, but nobody is afraid of strict TV rhetoric of Georgian officials or their voyages to Brussels and Strasbourg.

What is the result from declaring that they are criminal regimes and we will not start dialogue with them until they do not recognize integrity of Georgia? Does it make them strong or weak? Would not it better to make Georgian factor more considerable and necessary for them or make them finally accustomed to living without Georgia? Does our refusal on dialogue and cooperation result into unification of our country? Or how long are we going to refuse it and wait for secessionist authorities to beg us to join Georgia? It is clear that it will never happen, but if we completely split all kind of relations with them, the process of reconciliation will finally fade away. Time is running out...

c) Nobody argues today, that at least 15 years from now the entire world will have to cooperate with Putin's Russia. The Georgian authority has a stubborn position and refuses to converse with Putin's authority until Georgian territories are occupied by them. Alongside it, there is no sign that Russian authorities are going to change their decision and they also refuse to cooperate with the Georgian authorities.

And who benefits from mutual refusal? Of course, only Russia does. Time will go by and everyone will get accustomed to the situation and in several years the entire world will consider the current reality.

The later the conversation will start the better starting position Russia will have. Consequently, although it is quite clear why Russia refuses to dialogue, we cannot understand the refusal of Georgian authority on dialogue. Instead taking advantage of international support in this direction, Georgia prefers to be stubbornly silent. In parallel to it, it is not clear what they expect and what might happen to make them change their position.

It is within Georgian interests to start dialogue and if our authority continues to refuse dialogue because Russia has occupied our territories, it means we have put up with the losing of these two regions.

It means we are also waiting for the fine day when somebody else will talk with Russia instead of us; we are waiting that the miracle will happen and somebody will convince Russia to return our territories back to us or Russia will fall apart and become so weak that we will easily revenge them or one day Putin will wake up in a good mood and will be sorry for his actions and etc.

Georgian authority should explain clearly and distinctly what results they expect from refusing to dialogue and when the dialogue will start in 2010, 2015 or 2030? Or do they plan to resolve this problem after Putin resigns?

Dialogue with Russia will be very difficult of course, particularly for this authority. However, state interests require the authority to take these measures. Relationship between states never relied on moral and justice and it does not rely today either. This is the reality and we should put up with it.

That's why historical leaders of Georgia, who were famous for their courage, never refused to negotiate with Muslim leaders of invaders to protect the country from disaster. (Dimitri Tavdadebuli could refuse to go to Urdo because Argun Kaen was the aggressor and enemy of his country; he could take advice of Georgian Nobel men and migrate to Mtiule-

ti or start negotiations with duke of Venice to establish commercial-economical relations, but state interests were most important for him)

Unlike the best examples of our history, today it is obvious that the refusal to engage in dialogue by Georgian authority originates from personal discomfort and not from state interests.

In addition to that, there is nothing new in post-war policy for conflict-resolution; it is only premature echo of the strategic approach which aims to compel Abkhaz and South Ossetian people with every possible means to return to Georgia. August war and follow-up situation faded these illusions like soap-bubble. Today nobody believes or fears this direction. That's why returning to pre-war rhetoric, boasting, revenging clips, making fists and looking with glaring eyes from TV screens is complete anachronism and opposes the state interests and serves only personal positions of certain people.

Current situation and challenges for Georgia requires working out completely new approaches in conflict resolution and their implementation in life. First of all, it is necessary to be liberated from the illusion that one fine day we will have a miracle and by successful military operation, or by UN resolution or other single act or activity we will reintegrate our country. It will not happen and living with this hope means to put up with disintegration of the country.

Since compulsion is excluded, there is only one way for unification of country and it depends on desire of Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples. The current reality was created because of mistakes made by Georgian authority at various points in time and another inconvenient situation is the following: if Abkhaz and Ossetian people do not want, we will not be able to compel them to return by force! They must be sure that living in Georgia is guarantee of their welfare and cultural-economical development, independence and security. Without that, unification of Georgia is an illusion. This is a difficult but solvable problem. Ossetian, Abkhaz and Georgian peoples do not have much time to decide, within 10-15 years we should see such possibility. That's why it is necessary to work every day in this direction and not to brick up and petrify the current conflict.

If current policy continues and Abkhaz, Ossetian and Georgian peoples go on living separately, in 10-15 years unification of Georgia will become unreal dream. Georgia has a serious challenge - to reduce Russian control in the region and increase its own influence; it can be achieved only by one way - Georgia must become most necessary and attractive partner for its break-away regions. Georgia should direct all its external and internal resources in this direction. We should also realize that it is impossible to fight against Russia for the control in the region.

There is no alternative for changing the aggressive policy into voluntarily and consent policy; in this direction brave and courageous steps shall be taken. I would like to repeat once more that agreement means the activities for destroying the current controversy between Ossetian, Georgian and Abkhaz peoples. Confidence-building is the only source, but this feeling shall be established in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and they should believe that Georgia is the state which is the first supporter, ally and protector for them. They should believe that integration with Georgia will be basis for maintaining their nationality and welfare.

Choosing this way by Georgia would mean giving

security guarantees to currently secessionist populations without any conditions and requirements. We should remember that giving this guarantee is not dangerous but isolation is the real threat. It is urgently important for Georgia to integrate South Ossetia and Abkhazia into the economical world system instead of the continuation of the economical blockade. Thus, Georgian side should do its best to draw maxim attention of leading states towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Population of Abkhazia and SO should see that Georgia assists them into establishing economical-cultural links with the world in free movement without any additional political bargains and conditions.

Today we should not call upon the foreign states not to establish economical and other connections with secessionist regions and we should not enact laws which restrict their cooperation with other countries; in this way we encourage Russia to invest their capital in break-away regions which reinforces their influence over them. Just the opposite we should support their integration.

The more western companies enter and carry out investments in these regions, the more local politicians will envisage European rules of politics. Georgia receives only declarations on the support of territorial integrity and it has only very concrete economical and political contest. Planning the economical projects profitable for all parties and their implementation, involvement European capital and experience in them will increase the role of western states in the conflict resolution.

Not only removal of all forms of blockade is urgently necessary but restoration of railway road and support of similar integrations are very important - creation particular conditions for the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which will enable their free transportation in Georgia and participation in economic activities. For this purpose it is necessary to work out legislative basis which will be oriented on protecting a person instead formalities - for example, what kind of documents will a person hold and what is the number of his car.

We should think, maybe it will be nice to announce a moratorium on the discussion of the political problems for several years (5-10 years). It is not excluded to discuss temporary economical status for Abkhazia and South Ossetia which could encourage development of high-level relationship.

World experience demonstrates that postponing political issues and focusing on economical activities have real results in conflict-resolution and Ergneti market was good example for it. Ergneti market had a higher importance in the peacebuilding process than any high-level political negotiations and discussions.

Similar activities shall be urgently started in order to hinder and subdue the separation of Abkhaz and Georgian peoples, Ossetian and Georgian peoples - it is the most dangerous factor. We should create conditions for restoration of cultural and every-day life connections; it will result into confidence-building.

However, it will remain ordinary words and a still-born project, if the government of Georgia does not find enough resources in itself to start dialogue with Russia and the secessionist regions. It is a second-level question whether we like de-facto authorities or not because today they are the real governors and waiting for some miracle is equal to crime.

We should also consider the fact that steps taken towards kind will and cooperation inside the country and reasonable policy with regard to Russia will enable our western partners to act more efficiently. They will be able to use their huge potential only in this way because they feel themselves comfortable only in similar field instead of confronting Russia. International support in this field will always remain on the level of declarations; though we can turn it into a strong political-economical tool.

After the cooperation and the confidence-building measures will reach high level, we will have a chance to think on resolving the political problems too; we will be able to find a constitutional form of coexistence which will be acceptable for everyone. It is not a huge problem in our time when decentralization is actively going on within many states as well as integrations between states.

With our current policy we have turned our back to Abkhazia and South Ossetia and we are parting from them day-by-day. Time not always cures old pains and very often it makes people to forget each other. That's why it is urgently necessary to take steps towards Abkhaz and Ossetian people.

**"Resonance", 12.01.2010**



# MEMORIAL "AINAALARA": ONE STEP TOWARDS RECONCILIATION



NONA SUVARIANI, TBILISI

*Abkhazian language has been taught at one of the public schools in Rustavi for a year. College and school "Lampari" is different from other public schools because pupils have been able to learn Abkhazian language since 2007. On May 15 a memorial to Georgian and Abkhazian people who died in the war was opened in the school yard. The name of the memorial is "Reconciliation."*

Davit Menafire, the director of the Rustavi Independent School "Lampari" after Zviad Gamsakhurdia, initiated a course of Abkhazian language in September of 2007. He said Georgian children should learn Abkhazian language because Georgian and Abkhazian people should personally communicate and

not through a third person.

Irma Osia is the only teacher of Abkhazian language in the school; she is Abkhaz. Irma Osia said that initially her attitude to the initiative was very skeptical. "Very often similar things are initiated because of PR campaigns. When I met children and

school personnel I understood that they really wanted it. Teachers learn Abkhazian language together with their pupils. The school administration thinks of organizing a trip of Georgian and Abkhazian children in a third country and they should speak in Georgian and Abkhazian language."

Lika Bitsadze is in tenth form and has been learning Abkhazian language since it was opened. She is sure everybody will need to learn a second state language.

"When we meet each other, we will use Abkhazian language. I am sure I will keep relationship with them and I must learn the language."

Nestan Sulughia has Abkhazian mother and she is parent of school pupil. She said we would not have had similar problems if lessons of Abkhazian language had started long time ago.

"When teacher tells them that there is a beautiful side of Georgia where our brothers and sisters are growing up, our children will start to think in another way."

Dimitri Gulia – The course of Abkhazian language demonstrates the importance of the course besides its name. Abkhazian alphabet, sceneries, quotations and everything that is connected with Abkhazia have been decorating the cabinet of the Abkhazian language since it was opened.

Natia Mosidze, a teacher of Georgian language and literature: "The cabinet was founded in 2007. Since then we try to collect Abkhazian literature."

Irma Osia said that people in Abkhazia know Georgian people learn their language. They have prepared various TV programs about it.

"They look at it a bit ironically but I think the final assessments will be positive because we do not have any political motives. We want Abkhazian and Georgian children to introduce each other. Abkhaz and Georgian people do not know each other; our children must not be brought up as enemies."

On May 15 a memorial "Reconciliation" was

opened in the yard of the school. The memorial is set up to the honor of Georgian and Abkhazian people who died in the war. Davit Menafire and Irma Osia were initiators of the memorial. Father Paata blessed the memorial.

Irma Osia: "Opening of this memorial was a precedent. There is no similar memorial in Georgia so far. We are brothers and we must take first steps of reconciliation. We remember both Georgian and Abkhazian soldiers."

Esma Kokoskeria, editor of the Abkhazian News program on Public Broadcasting, stated that it is a first occasion when we try to confess both sides have victims.

"Innocent people who were involved in this provocative war died. I understand that not everybody will appreciate our initiative but I think it is not important. Important are those people who live on the other side of the River Enguri and they will receive warm, kind impulses from us. It is important to let the other side hear that we are not their enemies. We are also human beings who are ready to confess, understand and take the first step. I am sure the children who will get educated in similar schools will create a new generation. And it will lead us to peace, though not in nearest future."

Lasha Todua, a resident of Sokhumi, attended the opening of the memorial. He said similar activities will have better consequences than diplomatic negotiations.

"On September 27, 2006, the day of loosing Sukhumi, there was a meeting on "Heroes Square". Lots of friends made a speech there. One of the journalists asked me to assess the mentioned event. I told that it was very good to have so many patriots, but the memorial has just one fault. There should not be the names of Georgians only, but Abkhazian ones as well. They are also our brothers."

Abkhazian language classes are funded by the school budget itself.

## GEORGIAN WAR FOOTING TAKES CONCRETE FORM – LITERALLY

IAN CARVER, JONI SIMONISHVILI

"Tank Station" is what locals are calling a large concrete platform that has recently been constructed along a line of freshly laid railroad tracks near the Georgian conflict zone of Abkhazia. It has certainly been a "War of Words" in the run-up to contested parliamentary elections scheduled for May 21, 2008.

Georgian TV is talking of provocations by Akhaz and Georgian forces on a daily basis – and how well-laid plans are being laid for a shooting war that will destabilize the fledgling democracy in this small pro-Western country. Especially worrying is how it was recently reported on Georgian Public TV and Rustavi2, how there had been a crackdown on the free moment of returned IDPs in the Gali region of the breakaway and frozen conflict zone of Abkhazia, and that a curfew had been imposed in the Gali region (which is mostly inhabited by ethnic Georgians).

Two foreign journalists went to check it out, making it into the Gali region by a footbridge and found the curfew story to have been fabricated – and just another page in the media PR move book of the government of elected president Mikhail Saakashvili. However, that is not the meat of the story, as in the process they stumbled onto what was really going on in West Georgia, which further discounts which side of the conflict is the real war monger (one who urging or attempting to stir up a shooting war). However, in spite of making it to Gali and back without much fanfare, checking out Russian peacekeeper movements and border security, developments on the Georgian

side of the de-facto Abkhaz border proved to be far more interesting and real "breaking news."

Friday, May 9, 2008 5:20 AM – After getting off the night train at a small village in West Georgia, two foreign journalists, one being a former US army 19D Scout, trained in Amour and reconnaissance at Fort Knox Kentucky, and a Men-grilian IDP from Sukhumi, who has family living on both sides of the de-facto Georgian-Abkhazian border, walked down the rail tracks in a light rain towards the border with Abkhazia. They did not find any soldiers on the Georgian side of the border, only a few block posts

of Russian Peacekeepers. However, they discovered what they had only heard about and suspected of being in place: a newly constructed railway spur leading into a destroyed industrial area.

Earlier they had been provided a tip that large boulders and rocks had been placed along a newly laid railway spur for the purpose of unloading tanks in a rapid fashion. However, following an on-the-ground investigation, it became obvious that the alleged military preparations had taken a much more advanced and concrete form. The boulders had disappeared into a wide, 100 meter long sloped and reinforced platform shaped in a way

to unload large vehicles simultaneously.

Talking to the locals, before crossing over into Gali, they learned that the work had not been completed with local labor but instead by professional expertise and imported labor, which had especially brought in from outside the region. They used modern equipment so as to achieve a higher than Georgian standard of quality. It was clear when inspecting the spur and what appeared to be a tank unloading dock, that the site selection took advanced planning; it was intentionally laid to run alongside an already existing portion of foundation, the edge of which had been reinforced with a freshly painted

steel fascia.

It seems that Georgia is more active in planning for war than what some pundits are claiming while the media is preoccupied with Russian provocations, Georgian spin doctors play the shooting down of paper airplanes, and the comparison can be made to an endless supply of Number 5 campaign posters that get ripped up as quickly as they can be pasted back in a never-ending war of words. Is this about geopolitics, or is it all about stacking the Parliament with only members of the ruling National Party?

The EU and the US is backing Georgia in its stance of considering that the decisions made by Russia to increase the number of peacekeepers in the conflict zone and establish diplomatic ties are considered as provocative steps. Moreover, Georgian officials claim that unlike Russia, Georgia is not beefing up its military presence and that the recent moves by Russia are part of the annexation of the breakaway regions. The main justification by the Russians is that Georgia has established a large concentration of troops in the Georgian controlled territory of Kodori gorge and that it was necessary to increase the number of peacekeepers to prevent further bloodshed in the region.

Whatever the larger geopolitical games and their consequences may be, the decision to increase the number of peacekeepers in Abkhazia may not be totally unjustified. The presence of on-going or near complete military infrastructure being professionally constructed in close proximity to the border demonstrates that Georgia is actually preparing for war against the Abkhaz.



# APOLOGY INSTAD OF BULLETS!