Yuri (Musa) Shanibov

Sultan Sosnaliev: The First Military Commander of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus

Sketches of Thoughts and Deeds in the Struggle to Save Abkhazia

Sukhum and Nalchik, 2011 to 2012.

Special to AbkhazWorld | Reflections on Abkhazia: 1992-2012

Contents

1. Sketches of the socio-political situation before the Georgian-Abkhaz war (in place of an introduction)
2. From the Assembly to the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus
3. The end of Georgia's three-year war in South Ossetia: a major military and political success for the CMPC
4. The appointment of Sultan Sosnaliev as chairman of the CMPC defence committee
5. My first visit to Abkhazia with Sultan Sosnaliev
6. Our first meeting with Vladislav Ardzinba
7. My trip and Ardzinba's visit to Turkey: the beginning of our disagreements
8. Our forecast proved correct: Georgia began the war to destroy the Abkhaz people
9. The personal fates of the architects of Abkhazia's victory in the Patriotic War: the price of errors and feats
10. Was Vladislav Ardzinba guilty of the grave consequences of Georgia's war against Abkhazia
11. Acting in the name of the CMPC: Sultan Sosnaliev
12. The "war council" of Circassian generals and parliamentarians in Istanbul
13. Anuar Sabaney: the Adyghe Nostradamus
14. They will not break the Confederation: my escape from arrest will show it
15. Dzhokhar Dudayev: the Confederation has done its work, the Confederation must go
16. Gudauta, Abkhazia's temporary capital, in flames: Sultan Sosnaliev's request to the CMPC for help
17. Contact with Sultan Sosnaliev through volunteers: Asker Dzagoev, Felix Bekaldiev
18. The Cossacks of southern Russia stand with the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus
19. Sultan Sosnaliev removed the last obstacle to victory in Abkhazia's war for its life and freedom

Sketches of the socio-political situation before the Georgian-Abkhaz war (in place of an introduction)

Russian history develops by the swing of a pendulum. At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth, the Russian political elite once again steered its long-suffering people toward another time of troubles, one that struck out all the economic, political and social gains of the preceding stage, that tragic and heroic building of a new civilisation never before seen in history. The total destruction of the ideological and political foundation of the Soviet order was bound to revive, and did revive, certain problems of the Russian imperial past, problems whose resolution had nonetheless been a clear achievement of the building of a disfigured, semi-feudal socialism. One of these revived old problems was plain to see. The power that rose on the wreckage of socialism threatened to restore the national question in all its complexity.

From the very start of Gorbachev's perestroika, the destruction of the social order was tied to the instigation and sharpening of national and ethnic confrontation. The epicentre of this globally destructive process was the new Russian government's proclamation of its own "state independence". Those who took that decision, and their ideologists, have never since explained what it was meant to signify. Why, and from what, had the new Russia freed itself? Having "freed" itself from the union republics of the USSR and from the world socialist system, the new Russian authorities radically altered the policy and practice, formed over the Soviet years, that governed their relations with the various forms of national autonomy. From letting them "absorb as much democracy as they could swallow", that policy and practice swiftly moved to abolishing the very nationality and ethnic belonging of members of national minorities, along with the formal marks of statehood of the smaller peoples in Russia and in some former union republics.

The deep turmoil created by a group of the Russian ruling elite, who clawed their way to supreme power "by the will of chance" through self-destructive acts unprecedented in world history, produced an unparalleled confusion in the thoughts and deeds of society. The limited public consciousness could not make sense of what was happening. The dialectic of social, group and individual thought and action had been broken. People who had come out of the vast Soviet social "incubator" genuinely did not understand what was going on. In a normal social situation a person thinks through everything he does, and much of what he thinks he does not act on, because the outside world and a little analysis of the situation will not allow it. In a time of troubles a person does what he has not thought through and does not understand.

And he fails to do what is obvious and clear, what he can and should think through, because the link between thought and action is paralysed. This paradoxical condition, common to the whole of Soviet and Russian society, weighed with particular severity on the societies of the North Caucasus, that country of mountains and of tongues. Here, earlier and faster than in other regions of post-Soviet Russia, national-democratic public movements took shape. They were formed by the foremost elites of the peoples, those able to think and able to act. And they were equally quick to grasp the nature of the destructive problems bearing down on them, and the direction those problems would take against them, the smaller peoples.

This anticipatory thinking, this intuitive sense of the coming upheavals, was the root reason why, in the referendum on preserving the Soviet Union, the North Caucasus more than any other region came out for keeping the union of peoples and republics. Ahead of others too, the peoples' movement in the region grasped the urgent need to unite the national movements into a single inter-ethnic body, as had happened more than once in the history of these peoples in earlier dangerous periods of their shared fate. So the central idea that the mountain peoples of the Caucasus set against the unfolding chaos was the idea of preserving the union of peoples that the Soviets had built at the cost of enormous sacrifice, and of uniting themselves to that end. This time too, as at the start of the twentieth century before and during the Great October Revolution, a fateful conclusion was drawn. Only a union of the mountain peoples could give a common answer to the looming challenges of the collapse of the socialist universe wrought by the new Russian political elite, and of the system that elite was creating, the system that George Soros called "robber capitalism".

From the Assembly to the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus

Having overcome stiff resistance from outside, as well as the contradictions within the Caucasian civic and democratic movement itself, the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus was created in Sukhum at the end of October 1991. It is worth recalling here that the idea and the initiative for convening a meeting of representatives of the national-democratic movements of the mountain peoples belonged to Abkhaz and Chechen activists. Out of that meeting of representatives and of delegations from the mountain peoples' public organisations, and thanks to the carrying through of a Kabardian idea, there came first, in 1989, the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, and then, in 1991, the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (CMPC), founded by changing the status of the Assembly and thoroughly rebuilding its structure and functions.

At the meeting of representatives of the mountain peoples' national public organisations, the Kabardian idea of transforming the Assembly into a Confederation was supported by only one of the seven groups, the Abazin one. And yet, after productive and heated argument, the idea was accepted by all. Despite some reproaches that the Confederation was inadmissible or, more gently, premature, it became a reality. Our "haste" in creating it was vividly justified at once. Founded on 1 November 1991, the Confederation, through its presidential council and parliament, threw itself only seven days later, on 8 November, into the problems created by Boris Yeltsin's declaration of a state of emergency in the Chechen-Ingush republic. The Confederation secured the repeal of Yeltsin's decree by the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. This was the Confederation's first major political victory.

An important element of that victory was the inclusion, among the committees of the parliament and the presidential council, of a committee for military self-defence and self-preservation. The first chairman appointed to this committee was Major General Kim Makedonovich Tsagolov, professor and doctor of philosophical sciences. After a serious incident with the military authorities that caught him up in Georgia, the Ossetian general resigned. From then on the duties of chairman of the self-defence committee were carried out by the president of the CMPC.

The end of Georgia's three-year war against South Ossetia: a major military and political success for the CMPC

Soon afterwards, in the spring of 1992, the CMPC intervened in the Georgian-South Ossetian military conflict as well. By a decision of the CMPC parliament and presidential council taken in Makhachkala, its president travelled to Vladikavkaz with a group of Abkhaz volunteers and presented Georgia with an ultimatum to halt the extermination of the South Ossetian people. Here too the CMPC met with extraordinary success. Under pressure from the Confederation, Georgia halted in the course of a single day its three-year war of extermination against the South Ossetians.

After Georgia's retreat in the war against the South Ossetians, part of the Confederation's active membership thought the Georgian threat to Abkhazia had receded, or even lifted altogether. But the Confederation's leadership rightly judged that Georgia might want to turn against Abkhazia the fratricidal forces it had prepared and the barbarous experience they had built up in South Ossetia. So we thought it necessary to find a replacement for General Tsagolov, and a candidate for the vacant post of chairman of the CMPC self-defence committee. Our search was soon crowned with success. The CMPC's business manager, Kh. Sheriev, put forward for the post the candidacy of Sultan Sosnaliev, the future lieutenant general, the first military commander of the mountain peoples of the Caucasus, creator of the victorious Abkhaz army and its minister, the supreme military director of the process of liberating Abkhazia.

The appointment of Sultan Sosnaliev as chairman of the CMPC defence committee

I asked Sheriev to invite Sosnaliev to the office of the Congress of the Kabardian People in Nalchik, which also housed the headquarters of the Confederation. Sultan and I met soon afterwards. I looked him over with the searching eye of a former prosecutor. Lawyers, as everyone knows, have long been followers of Cesare Lombroso, the great Italian forensic physician of the nineteenth century who built a whole theory for reading the essence of a person's character from the features of the face. Lawyers, myself among them, do not agree with the great Italian on every point. But it is plain even to non-lawyers that first impressions of a person's outward appearance, and the intuitive response of the subconscious to them, are very often borne out later by the logic of accumulated and specially gathered information, abundant and reliable.

His restrained military bearing made a favourable impression on me, and so above all did his classically Kabardian, Circassian features, filled with a proud, calm dignity. Psychologists hold that ninety per cent of the persuasive force of information is carried by a person's manner of speaking rather than by logic. Believing in this psychological tenet to a degree, I settled in to listen to Sultan. I noticed at once the qualities of his voice and his way of talking, calm and judicious, and, to my surprise, almost entirely free of the gesticulation common to southerners. I heard the quiet, steady voice that was the way of our exterminated nobility, a voice in which an iron firmness and a veiled strength of character and conduct were clearly felt. I had to repeat some of what seemed to me the important questions. Sultan, to my surprise and satisfaction, proved a man of few words. "Naurız psaлъэгъуей!", Naurz of few words, I thought, recalling the name of my favourite hero from the Adyghe Nart epic.

Answering my most important questions very tersely and with a certain reluctance, he set out the key points of his biography. As I clarified some matters and added the answers to what I already knew, the most important features of this candidate for a responsible CMPC post took shape.

So: Sosnaliev was a descendant of the Argudan princes of Kabarda. His parents, like his whole line, had been repressed by the Soviet authorities. He had grown up in exile, far from his homeland. He was a retired colonel of the Soviet Army, a Distinguished Pilot of the USSR, and held the post of deputy head of the large company Mineral Waters of Kabardino-Balkaria.

Without quite meaning to, I began to probe whether he and his line were connected with the Mamkhegovs, the well-known noble family of Argudan, that large and famous Kabardian village. Sultan answered that he had heard of the Mamkhegov line, but knew of no kinship between them and the Sosnalievs. Having put that question to Sultan, I understood, after his answer, why I had asked it. The village of my own line, Shchenybey (the village of Shaniba, which resettled in Turkey during the Russo-Caucasian war), lay next to the village of Argudan, which became famous across the whole Soviet Union in Khrushchev's day for its record maize harvests. And in the distant past the Shanibovs were kin to the Mamkhegovs, traditionally exchanging brides and grooms. So my question sprang from a vain feeling. It seems I was unconsciously searching for some possible kinship between the Shanibovs and the Sosnalievs, and therefore, to some degree, between us, between Sultan and me. In that brief meeting, with no blood kinship between us, a spiritual brotherhood took hold, one whose feelings and thoughts grip me even now, when Sultan has left us in body and has passed with dignity in spirit into the history of the peoples of the North Caucasus.

His answer to another question is worth recording. In my childhood and youth I dreamed of becoming a pilot. In my mature years too I felt a kindly envy toward pilots. And now here before me sat a Distinguished Pilot of the USSR. He answered my admiring questions very modestly. He admired neither himself nor his own achievements. I asked him to put in a single word the most important thing in the work of a jet pilot. "The ability to take the one correct decision in an instant", he said. "If that instant is missed, or the wrong decision is taken, the consequences will be irreparable." This deep thought, I reflected, captured with genius the particular nature of a jet pilot's actions in the air. At its core lies the link between thought, the analysis of a situation, and the pilot's choice of a course of action under acute time pressure, in the sharp scarcity of seconds. Such a thought, brilliantly compressed into a short phrase, said a great deal about its author. I thought to myself: our former chairman of the CMPC self-defence committee, the general-philosopher, was a man of deliberation. This new chairman would be a man of instant and uniquely correct action. I did not grasp the full measure of it then, but I already sensed how lucky we were that fate had sent precisely such a man to a post no one was taking seriously. In the Georgian-Abkhaz events Sultan showed how exactly he held to the truth forged in the sharply particular conditions of jet service, from cadet to air regiment commander and the high title of Distinguished Pilot of the USSR. Had he not followed his own rule in 1992, to act at once and act rightly, the fate of Abkhazia would without doubt have been wholly different, irreparably tragic rather than victorious and heroic.

Soon Sultan and I travelled to Grozny, where the CMPC parliament was based. The Confederation's first vice-president, Gennady Alamia, was there at that moment too. The parliament's chairman, Yusup Soslambekov, and Gennady Alamia expressed their satisfaction with Sultan's candidacy, and the CMPC parliament and presidential council confirmed him as chairman of their self-defence committee.

Some time later, after our urgent trip to Abkhazia, of which more below, Sultan invited me to his home, to my deep gratification. He lived in the house of his younger brother Anatoly. There he paid me the highest honour he could allow himself toward a friend. He presented me to his mother. She lived, of course, with her sons. By that time I already knew Sultan's lineage in more detail. With this worthy and far from ordinary account of the origins of Sultan and his family, which I gathered from various sources, I did not try to verify or sift the accuracy of the facts and their connections. My close circle and I took Sultan as he came, in the light of the almost legendary history of his line and his family, which I set out below. Such an origin, such a pedigree, hands a person outstanding gifts by inheritance and gives him the means to use them to effect, if the historical moment demands it. This biographical truth of many outstanding men applied easily to Sultan. And such expectations Sultan entirely fulfilled.

On his mother's side Sultan was a direct descendant of Mukhametmirza Anzorov, a member of a well-known noble family of Kabarda. Anzorov was in his day one of the few Kabardian nobles to have graduated from the University of St Petersburg. He was said to be close to Count Vorontsov, the viceroy of the Caucasus. In 1851 the forces of Imam Shamil came up to Lesser Kabarda and halted on the bank of the Terek. Count Vorontsov was in Pyatigorsk at the time. Anzorov was his guest. When the count was told that Imam Shamil had appeared on the borders of Kabarda, Vorontsov and Anzorov were, by some accounts, sitting over a game of chess. The viceroy of the Caucasus charged Anzorov with going to the spot and clarifying the situation, with finding out Shamil's intentions.

Anzorov set out for the scene with his noble retinue. But instead of becoming the viceroy's scout, he and his retinue swam the turbulent Terek and joined Shamil. The viceroy's reprisals fell on the Anzorov line. Among the Anzorovs, however, were other officers and a general of the tsarist army. This saved them from complete destruction. Sadly, the Soviet authorities later repressed this line too, along with other famous names of the Kabardian nobility. Yet under the tsar and under Soviet power alike, this mighty line remained on the whole pro-Russian in orientation.

Anzorov, for his part, became one of the first companions of Imam Shamil, who appointed him senior naib of his military administration. Anzorov fell in one of the battles of Shamil's forces against the Russian army of conquest. On learning of it, Prince Baryatinsky, commander of the tsarist forces in the Caucasus, sent two generals with gifts to Anzorov's widow to convey his condolences. It is fair to suppose that the commander knew Anzorov personally, since Anzorov had belonged to the viceroy's close circle. In such cases worthy adversaries in military confrontations also acted by the rules of noble etiquette.

Later one of the richest men in North Ossetia, Prince Tuganov, married Anzorov's daughter. He built for his wife one of the most beautiful mosques in the Caucasus, the mosque on the bank of the Terek in Vladikavkaz. That mosque still stands, despite an attempt by some

enemy of Islam in the 1990s to blow it up. A crack opened in the mosque's wall, but it stood proudly firm. And Sultan's mother was the daughter of Tuganov and of Anzorov's daughter.

The fact that Sultan's mother received me was, for me, a sign. I had reason to believe that this could only have happened with her consent. I thought, too, that only with her blessing could Sultan have agreed to enter the leadership of the Confederation. I myself asked for, and received, my own mother's blessing for the first trip to Abkhazia. Here I recall another memorable occasion. During the second trip to Abkhazia after the founding of the CMPC, I was unexpectedly invited to the house of Vladislav Ardzinba's mother in Eshera. He was then chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia. He was not present at this reception himself, for a reason unknown to me. Whether or not the occasion was arranged with Vladislav's knowledge, it mattered greatly to me. The invitation, and the laden table set by Vladislav's mother and wife, were a high sign of their blessing on our organisation of the unity of the mountain peoples. These wise women surely sensed, by intuition, what a fateful role the Confederation would play in the recent history of Abkhazia.

Let me add a few more words about my impressions at the table in the house of the Sosnaliev brothers in Baksan. In the refined manner of Sultan's mother, in the way she held herself and spoke, in her gift for listening closely and smiling with restraint, I saw the very same features as Sultan's. In his mother's presence the ever-laconic Sultan all but stopped speaking. In that setting the central figure of the company at table was She. Friends who knew my own mother often tell me how much I resemble her. As far as I recall from my one meeting with Vladislav's mother, mother and son too repeated, in look and manner, strikingly similar shared features.

I made such observations then, and make them still, because in my childhood and youth I often heard Lombrosian predictions from Adyghe mothers. I heard them say many times, with conviction, that a son's resemblance to the mother rather than the father is a sign that such a son will have a fortunate, lofty fate. And my own examples bear this out. No worthy young man could fail to envy the fates of Sultan and Vladislav, who lived lives that were short by Caucasian measure, yet great in the human measure.

My first visit to Abkhazia with Sultan Sosnaliev

Soon after Sultan's appointment as chairman of the CMPC self-defence committee, a situation arose that tested how well his guiding principle held, the ability to take the right decision in an instant. Early in 1992, somewhere around April I think (if my memory does not name the date precisely, it is not hard to fix it from the events), Yuri Kalmykov, president of the International Circassian Association, and the CMPC received an alarming telegram from Vladislav Ardzinba. It reported that the forces of the State Council of Georgia had come up to the borders of Abkhazia on the river Ingur. A real threat had arisen that these forces would invade the territory of Abkhazia. The Association and the Confederation had to intervene.

We reached Yuri Kalmykov by telephone in Moscow. He dictated to us the text of a statement from the Circassian Association. In it, in the name of the international organisation of the Adyghe and Circassians, Shevardnadze was firmly warned to refrain from military action against Abkhazia, for otherwise the Circassians would not abandon a brother people in its hour of need. We sent that telegram to Tbilisi from Nalchik.

I decided that Kalmykov's telegram needed backing with concrete action, action that would show the unity of position and of possible response between the peoples of the Circassian Association and the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. I resolved to set out for Sukhum as fast as I could, in even the smallest party, in the name of the Confederation. I asked the Confederation's business manager, Kh. Sheriev, to find Sultan Sosnaliev at once. I had only just managed to find transport. Our activist Gumar Murzakanov agreed to drive us to Sukhum himself, in his own car. And at that very moment Sultan joined us. I was astonished at the speed of his arrival. Sheriev, in answer, told me the details of his search for Sultan. "After the working day I found Sultan at home", he said. "I explained the situation to him and asked how long he needed to get ready. Sultan answered, ten minutes. And it seems he came out ready to leave after five. I thought we would call for him later. But as you can see, he has called for you himself." This was Sultan's first demonstration of how he really followed the formula set out above, the need, in emergencies, to secure an instant link between thought, decision and action. In that same Sultan style, brisk and operational, my small group set off for Sukhum. From Nalchik we reached the capital of Abkhazia in ten hours. We covered that distance many times afterwards. But not once could we repeat the speed record of that journey to Sukhum with Sultan. I became convinced that in any other situation of the kind the CMPC "minister of defence" would act in just the same way. This was borne out four months later in the extreme danger that gathered over Abkhazia in August 1992. By then the forces of Shevardnadze's Georgia, honed for fratricidal war in the course of the three-year extermination of the population of South Ossetia and armed to the teeth by the Balkar general Beppaev, deputy commander of the Transcaucasian military district of Russia (on the instructions, naturally, of the new Russian leadership), treacherously attacked Abkhazia.

On our way to the building of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia we asked the people of Sukhum several times for directions to the centre. Some of them recognised us and greeted us with joy. And it seemed the townspeople had grasped the threat that had arisen to Abkhazia. Vladislav Ardzinba was not at the Supreme Soviet. But he was due back soon. We had to wait for him. We decided not to waste this time but to use it to clarify and assess the situation. That, we reckoned, would serve the cause and make our coming talks with Ardzinba more productive.

Sultan at once proposed that he needed to visit the place of the standoff. He drove with our group to the Abkhaz-Georgian border, where the forces of the State Council of Georgia stood. I, for my part, decided to go to Abkhaz television and address Shevardnadze, his troops and the Georgians. Ardzinba's aide spoke with the television management, and in the transport they provided I drove to the Sukhum broadcasting centre. Here I found, naturally, far more tension than we had seen in the city. That was only to be expected. The television people had fuller information about the situation that had developed and how it might unfold. I had no prepared text of a statement from the leadership of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. But on the way to Sukhum I had thought out in advance the main ideas I would use should the need arise. So I had no text of my statement, neither then nor afterwards. But I remember those chief ideas well.

First of all, I asked the television people to record my address for Tbilisi and the citizens of Georgia and to convey it to the Georgian leadership. Then I made a short preamble addressed to Shevardnadze. Among the peoples of the Caucasus, as in the whole civilised

world, his significant work as foreign minister of the USSR had built up an image of a wise democrat. Your return to Georgia, to the Caucasus, we took as a possible important factor for strengthening stability in the region. That hope had been borne out to a degree by the very fact that the war in South Ossetia had ended. But the recent events, the sending of the forces of the State Council of Georgia to the borders of Abkhazia, put us on our guard and provoke the sharp rejection of the peoples of the North Caucasus. We warn you against any further aggressive action toward Abkhazia. If you nevertheless take the risk and cross the Georgian-Abkhaz border on the river Ingur, then we shall consider that you have "crossed the Rubicon". And then you will come up against the united forces of the peoples of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. We hope you will show good sense and withdraw your forces from the Georgian-Abkhaz border.

On the way to the television studio and back I had an interesting conversation with the driver. His name, sadly, I do not remember. I knew from experience that the drivers of senior officials, in close contact with the men they serve, are well enough informed about their bosses' views on current problems. I also knew that the drivers' own opinions and judgements are formed mainly under the influence of their regular "passenger". This driver, the first new Sukhum acquaintance I made, said almost with certainty that a Georgian military attack on Abkhazia was impossible. Trying to make him think harder about the possible rise of the military threat from Georgia, I gave him the facts. I said Georgia had ruthlessly destroyed South Ossetia for three years. In reply I heard that Abkhazia was not South Ossetia. The Georgians know they have extensive kinship ties with the Abkhaz. Besides, your presence in Abkhazia shows that our brothers from the North Caucasus will help us in the event of war. I objected and said to him: we, your second and third cousins, are on the far side of the ridge. We need time to reach you in time, whereas the blood brothers of the South Ossetians, the North Ossetians, are right next to them. And yet Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze attacked the Ossetians of the south. The driver recalled how I had flown into Lykhny by helicopter with a group of Kabardians. I agreed with him that we had flown in then on purpose, to master that route and to show the Georgians what we could do. Once that subject was exhausted, he said suddenly: we Abkhaz are warriors. Even if they attack, they will never manage to take Sukhum. Two battle-worthy battalions are enough to defend our capital. If you guard the two bridges, the Red and the White, with battalions like that, the Georgians will not take the city and help can arrive in time. I asked him to tell me more about these bridges, since I knew nothing of them. His account was so convincing that I concluded my companion was a true warrior indeed. I have given this interesting conversation in detail because it mattered in what I did later.

When our whole group had gathered in the anteroom of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, I asked Sultan for his impressions of the trip to the Abkhaz border.

"Abkhazia is utterly unprepared for war", he said.

"Shevardnadze knows Abkhazia is unprepared for war. Why then, with such forces at his disposal, did he not force the Ingur? Is what he is doing a reconnaissance in force?" I asked.

"It has not come to fighting yet. I think what Shevardnadze is doing is a show of strength meant to frighten Abkhazia. That is the first thing. The second is that Shevardnadze will be

watching our actions closely. He has scouts enough inside Abkhazia itself", Sultan answered thoughtfully.

"So Abkhazia and we must prepare for war in order to avoid war?"

"One prepares for war in order to defend oneself. In this case our preparation is hardly likely to prevent this war that is ready to be unleashed. The Georgians are drunk on their easy victory in the destruction of South Ossetia. They expect the same victory in Abkhazia. The help reaching Georgia will be mightier than the help that may reach Abkhazia. The Transcaucasian military district of Russia is on the Georgians' side."

Our conversation was cut short by an invitation into the office of the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia, V. Ardzinba.

Our first meeting with Vladislav Ardzinba

After we had greeted one another, the conversation, as I recall, was begun by Vladislav. He thanked Yuri Kalmykov, president of the International Circassian Association, for the telegram of protest sent to Shevardnadze. He praised us for our prompt arrival in Sukhum. Then he told us at once that he had spoken with Shevardnadze by telephone. Shevardnadze had assured him that he had no intention whatever of carrying out any military action against Abkhazia. The impression formed that Vladislav was satisfied with his conversation with Shevardnadze, and that he had believed the assurances of the "white fox", as the Georgian leader was called in circles where he was well known.

I began, in my usual way, to argue hotly against Shevardnadze's assurances. I called it suspicious that Shevardnadze had complied so hastily with the CMPC's demand to halt the war against South Ossetia. The three-year extermination of the population of South Ossetia had been stopped by the Georgian authorities at the demand of the CMPC, which had at its disposal no more than a single platoon of Abkhaz volunteers, sent by the leader of Abkhazia at the appeal of the Confederation's parliament and president. It seemed that Shevardnadze needed troops experienced in exterminating an unarmed population somewhere else. And he had shown where that somewhere was, by sending them to the borders of Abkhazia. Plainly a Georgian war against Abkhazia was not to be avoided. And we had to prepare for it. Because of our unpreparedness and the shortage of time, the central task in the opening stage of the inevitable war might well be the defence of Sukhum. While the capital lives, a wise man said, the country lives. I had heard (I did not name from whom) that our capital could be defended by two well-trained battalions holding positions on the Red and the White bridges. And the Confederation would urgently form one more battalion in Grozny, where that was possible. As for moving it quickly to Abkhazia should the need arise, we had shown how with the example of the Kabardian group's arrival by helicopter in Lykhny. And in the first instance this would give us the chance to gather our strength. We had to take urgent measures and not let slip the opportunity that still remained.

After me Sultan spoke. In his habit of being laconic, he said that the likelihood of a Georgian war against Abkhazia was extremely high. Abkhazia was not prepared for this war. The state of its border defences guaranteed no real defence at all. And every means had to be used to prepare for it.

In the course of the discussion that opened up around my proposal to create two Abkhaz battalions and one Confederation battalion, it was clear that Ardzinba did not believe a Georgian military action against Abkhazia was possible. And later, during the war, he confirmed this view in public. Yet in the end the leader of Abkhazia and the representatives of the CMPC took the decision to create two battalions in Abkhazia and one Confederation battalion in Grozny, from where it could be moved quickly into Abkhazia, as we noted, should the need arise.

Soon after these events Shevardnadze withdrew the forces of the State Council of Georgia from the border of Abkhazia. The leadership of the CMPC, like the leaders of Abkhazia, was gladdened by these moves of Shevardnadze's. But the CMPC did not believe in the Georgians' peaceful intentions and went on carrying out the plans laid down at the meeting of the leaders of Abkhazia and the CMPC in Sukhum. In this, sadly, the leader of Abkhazia gave the "white fox" the chance to lead him astray.

On our return to Nalchik, Sultan and I got in touch with Yusup Soslambekov, chairman of the Confederation's parliament. He approved the decisions we had taken to create three battalions. He promised to find a base in Grozny to house the battalion of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus and to settle the choice of a battalion commander. He quickly obtained Dzhokhar Dudayev's permission to station our battalion at an empty base near Grozny left behind by the Russian forces. Soslambekov also proposed appointing Shamil Basayev as commander of the battalion. Basayev was already widely known for his daring exploit of hijacking to Turkey a plane on a flight to Grozny. And Shamil, with the agreement of the chairman of the defence committee, was appointed commander of the Confederation battalion by decision of the chairman of the parliament and the president of the CMPC. Later, when on 19 October 1992 I flew by helicopter from Grozny to Gudauta, the temporary capital of an Abkhaz people fighting for its existence and freedom, and set up the Operational Headquarters of the CMPC military formations, Basayev was, in agreement with Sultan, confirmed in the post of commander of those formations. Sultan and I were very grateful to Yusup Soslambekov for his successful handling of the two crucial problems, set out above, of creating our Confederation battalion.

My trip and Ardzinba's visit to Turkey: the beginning of our disagreements

After these undertakings, at the start of August 1992, I left for Turkey to study the experience of the Turkish company KOZGB. This company, under the direction of the Turkish Kabardian Karekh Selahattin, was building systems of small enterprises attached to Turkey's universities, drawing on the experience of the Japanese company Toyota. Turkey's astonishing success in this had become for the country a revolution in the field of knowledge-intensive industrial technology. Sultan, meanwhile, was busy forming the Confederation battalion. By the time of the Georgian aggression against Abkhazia, the international battalion held about forty volunteers. When the Georgian-Abkhaz war broke out and he set off urgently for Abkhazia, Sultan informed Soslambekov of the situation and of the need to move Basayev's battalion to Abkhazia quickly. Hard on Sultan's heels, our battalion reached Abkhazia and played an important part in the Abkhaz people's struggle for freedom and for self-preservation against the Georgian aggressors' plans for total destruction.

My trip to Turkey was awaited by a great stroke of luck. It turned out that at that very time the Turkish government was running, on the basis of KOZGB, a three-week seminar to acquaint representatives of the former Central Asian republics of the USSR, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, represented at the level of their industry ministers, with the practical use of the Toyota experience. We were shown in detail the process of creating a working cooperative of small enterprises attached to the University of Istanbul, and the huge complex under construction for the future cooperative at the University of Ankara.

At this time a substantial delegation from Abkhazia arrived in Turkey, led by Vladislav Ardzinba, to meet the Abkhaz diaspora. Together with a group of Turkish Circassians, activists of the Circassian public organisations of Turkey, I attached myself to the Abkhaz delegation. And here my group noticed that Vladislav Ardzinba ignored us completely. He did not even greet me (?!). My suppositions about the reasons for Vladislav's behaviour proved correct. Vladislav had broken the agreement with the CMPC and had failed to keep his promise to create two Abkhaz battalions, and instead had given the Georgians the chance to station a regiment of Georgian troops at a sanatorium near Sukhum. I learned these facts in Turkey. Even now, twenty years on, I think it best not to name my sources. So I meant to ask Vladislav about the carrying out of our agreements reached at the meeting in Sukhum described above, the one Sultan and I had had with him. I had, in fact, prepared for Vladislav a question about the paradoxical situation that had arisen. *Can one regard it as normal that the Confederation has, to a degree, prepared to repel an aggression against Abkhazia, that it has created an armed and battle-worthy battalion and has readied North Caucasian opinion to give Abkhazia real support in the event of Georgian aggression, while Abkhazia itself takes no measures for its own defence? How was it possible, in such circumstances, to come to Turkey and accept the rapturous welcome of the diaspora, when the very existence of Abkhazia may be exposed to real danger?* I knew too, more or less, that he would be forced to repeat himself and answer that he did not believe in the possibility of a Georgian military attack on Abkhazia. He might, I thought, add to this that Abkhazia's preparation for war could provoke Shevardnadze, that he doubted the Confederation's ability to give Abkhazia real help, and so on. Vladislav knew all this, and so he pretended that I was not even there among the Circassians fêting him. I considered this view and this conduct of Vladislav's dangerous. He not only disbelieved in a possible military victory over the forces of Georgia, he refused to believe at all in the possibility of a Georgian military attack on his defenceless homeland. He was ready to throw himself on the mercy of the men who had exterminated the South Ossetian people. These questions, and others like them, were a serious cause for alarm. I felt this could end badly for Abkhazia and for us, the peoples of the Confederation, which was unwittingly becoming an accomplice in the extermination of a brother people. I wondered, too, whether it was worth sending the Confederation battalion there, in the event of a sudden aggression against Abkhazia, to its certain death. And *would the CMPC minister of defence, Sultan Sosnaliev, with no army and no weapons, be willing to set out for Abkhazia to a senseless death?*

I shared these tormenting thoughts about the situation in Abkhazia with my informants. I am sure that these fears of mine, which Vladislav considered groundless, were conveyed to him by my informants. Cut off from speaking with him, that was exactly what I counted on. My calculation proved correct, but harmful to our personal relations, between Vladislav and me. It may be that they presented some of my remarks to him in a different light. In any case,

from that moment Vladislav froze our relations. And, sadly, our friendship was not restored to the end of his life.

Our forecast proved correct: Georgia began the war to destroy the Abkhaz people

All these doubts of mine, which Sultan certainly shared, evaporated and vanished the moment the war began. Sultan and our Confederation battalion were in Abkhazia without hesitation.

And in the Abkhaz people the spirit of the warrior was reborn. Disbelieving Ardzinba's claim that a Georgian military attack on Abkhazia was impossible, some young members of parliament and their young friends prepared, as best they could, for this heroic defence of the homeland. Let me show it through the example of that same Red Bridge, whose defensibility was discussed above. From 14 August, the first day of the war, a spontaneous popular militia halted the Georgian forces, armed to the teeth and seasoned by three years of war in South Ossetia. The militiamen struck at the Georgians with hunting guns, with their great-grandfathers' flintlocks, with small-bore rifles. At last a Georgian tank broke through across the bridge. The militiamen stopped it by setting it alight. The crew abandoned it in panic and fled back across the bridge. The militiamen put out the fire, turned the tank around and shelled the Georgian forces with it. For three days the militiamen held the defence of Sukhum at the Red Bridge. At the end of the third day, forced to retreat, the Sukhum militiamen drove that tank through the whole city, past the Gumista bridge, and set it on a commanding height. From the tank the militiamen afterwards shelled the Georgian forces steadily and to effect. The Georgians tried to destroy it. They shelled it with long-range guns. They bombed it from the air. They never managed to silence this tank, the first trophy of the Abkhaz militiamen, before the war's end. How many such unrecorded heroic episodes there were in this war. The example raises our old question again. What if, on that bridge, as had been agreed, an armed and trained Abkhaz battalion had stood on the day the Georgians stormed Sukhum? The answer is obvious. Sukhum would not have been surrendered to Shevardnadze's forces. And the city would have gained time to prepare its defence.

The brother peoples rushed to help without delay.

And we won an unprecedented victory in this war, which by every measure we had a real chance of losing. The role of the Confederation in this victory was assessed objectively by Vladislav Ardzinba himself. In 1994, in an interview with a correspondent of the Russian Literaturnaya Gazeta, he declared:

"I believe that it was precisely the position of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus that saved the Abkhaz people from destruction."

Yuri Voronov included that interview in *The White Book of Abkhazia*. Our quotation appears on page 94 of the book.

We paid a high price for this victory. And Vladislav and Sultan paid for it with their lives. When I think of their swift, consuming illnesses, historical and biographical parallels come to mind.

The personal fates of the architects of Abkhazia's victory in the Patriotic War: the price of errors and feats

Civilisations, peoples and states, as history shows, have cracked, changed and fallen apart under the pressure of a challenge too great for the age to bear. Not long ago this happened to Soviet civilisation. Such too are the fates of social movements and social groups. The fates of individual historical figures obey this same regularity.

Here the fate of the great Vladimir Ilyich Lenin inevitably draws attention. After the victorious great revolution, after the civil war and the forced return to a primitive capitalism, the NEP, he saw that through his fault a "Russia in darkness" had been created in place of a socialist paradise. A lawyer himself, the foremost accuser, prosecutor and destroyer of a most powerful autocratic state, he could not fail to understand his own guilt in bringing about, under his leadership, the catastrophe of the Russian people and of the vast community of peoples bound up with it. And it may be argued that it was above all under the weight of self-accusation for what he had tragically done that at fifty-four he lost his reason and died, begging for poison to take his own life.

Or take what happened to Joseph Stalin at the start of the Great Patriotic War. He had believed Hitler's assurances that Germany would observe its non-aggression pact with the USSR. So he disbelieved the reports of many intelligence agents, even those giving the exact date of Germany's attack on the USSR. Some historians even argue that Stalin was not ready to defend because he himself was preparing to attack Germany, and so was readying his forces for an offensive rather than a defence. However that may be, the fact remains that Hitler insidiously outwitted him. And when the war began, it was so unexpected for Stalin that for several days he "lost the power of speech". Later still, it is written, he suffered a stroke, of which the country was not informed. So dearly did this man of iron will pay for his error. And he judged himself for his error. In his circle there was no one who could so much as hint at, let alone point to, his fatal mistake, which brought the country so many victims, so much suffering and ruin.

By analogy with the examples of Lenin and Stalin, there is reason to suppose that Vladislav's grave illness was in decisive measure bound up with what he saw from Gudauta with the eye of a major historian and the bearer of a powerful political potential. In that last refuge of hope for the self-preservation of the true Abkhaz and of the Abkhaz national spirit, he saw plainly and grasped what the proclamation of Abkhazia's freedom had cost his own people, and what an abyss it had brought them to. The awareness that a step fateful for his people had been taken, while he was unable to guarantee that freedom by the necessary means, and could meet it only with his disbelief in the possibility of a Georgian military attack on Abkhazia, might well have become an unbearable act of self-accusation. Such an extraordinarily heavy trial, as the historical examples show, a normal psyche and a person's responsible conscience cannot withstand.

As far as we know, the question of responsibility for the grave consequences of the Georgian aggression for Abkhazia was only raised. But no one seriously wished to take up its investigation and arrive at an objective answer. Even the most serious and responsible authors, in touching on this problem, made attempts to ease his "self-judgement", trying to smother the questions that were being raised in the society of a free Abkhazia. Thus the

Prosecutor General of Abkhazia, Z. Bartsits, wrote: "In recent times the media of Abkhazia have not infrequently seen polemic on the theme of which of the leaders then in office failed to take the measures that were possible to prevent the grave consequences of the Georgian aggression. I think there is no sense now in singling anyone out, in searching for who is more to blame and who less. All the leaders of that period are guilty of the failure to take proper measures, including the leaders of the People's Forum, who promised more than they did." Z. Bartsits did not belong to Ardzinba's close circle. Ardzinba plainly showed his disfavour toward Bartsits. This might have prompted greater candour from the author. But that does not happen. Four pages on, the prosecutor departs from the principle proclaimed above, of "not searching for the guilty", and in the same allusive style accuses all the leaders of state and society, shifting the emphasis somewhat toward the greater guilt of the Forum. "By the nature of my work I have not had occasion to check", he writes, "but I can surmise where the people's funds went, and considerable funds at that, collected over the years, and who is to blame for it. For it was through the fault of the leaders of the Forum, responsible for this area of work, that the people went into battle with hunting shotguns. They never did want to name the guilty. Let all this be on the conscience of the People's Forum and of the leaders of the republic." (Z. S. Bartsits, Life and the Law, Rostov-on-Don, 2006, pp. 301 and 305).

Both quotations are full of contradictions. Z. Bartsits, as noted above, calls for not searching out the guilty, yet himself, in a form unusual for a prosecutor, "surmises" the names of those guilty of the fact that the "considerable funds" gathered over years for an armed rebuff to the aggressor had "somehow gone missing". Why does the republic's prosecutor general surmise rather than check the facts? One might equally surmise that the prosecutor did not carry out the checks in the interests of certain of the presumed culprits. By his standing the prosecutor may carry out checks on his own initiative and against the wishes of the guilty. Another question arises. Why does the prosecutor do neither, neither raising the question of the leaders' guilt nor carrying out checks on his own initiative so as to name the guilty himself? For which area was the Forum responsible, for the collection and use of the people's considerable funds, or for the replacement of hunting shotguns with Kalashnikov rifles? The grave consequences of the Georgian aggression are bound up precisely with the fact that this replacement was not carried out. It is surely known to the prosecutor that a task such as forming the armed forces of a country for its defence is the function not of a public organisation but of the head of state and the organs of state.

The logic leads on to a further question. Which of these presumed culprits could rule out a prosecutor's investigation of the situation that had left the unarmed Abkhaz people under a real threat of complete physical destruction? The answer to this crucial question is utterly obvious. The prosecutor finds himself in this ambivalent position, where he wishes but is unable to name, even without a check, a truth known to him and to many, through the fault in turn of those persons and organisations that have the power to put him there. And that power is held, above all, by the person and the organisation that appoint him to any state post.

Besides, Z. Bartsits knows that after the victory in Abkhazia's Patriotic War, to accuse Vladislav Ardzinba, the chief author of that victory, of anything is tantamount to setting oneself against the people's love and gratitude toward him. But, like Bartsits, I understand that the question of the guilty, and of the chief culprit, has been raised by society and not withdrawn. It must be answered. And it must be truly resolved. Only then will later

generations not raise this question anew and answer it in their own way. We are obliged to do this ourselves. And it must be done not in order to name this or that person's role in the tragedy. This question must be answered for the sake of the future. So that in future the people, and those responsible for its fate, do not repeat such mistakes.

A little above I spoke of a mistake, and not by chance. Unlike the prosecutor Z. Bartsits, I do not presume a crime in this case.

(Here, in parentheses, I allow myself a small digression. I will say that Z. Bartsits did his pre-diploma practice under me in the town of Terek in Kabarda. Of that practice Zaur recalls with regret three times in the book quoted. "There was no one to teach me, to give me the necessary practical skills. What a school of self-reliance!" the former trainee exclaims (Z. S. Bartsits, op. cit., p. 86). Zaur writes that Shanibov came into the prosecutor's office from the Komsomol. He hints at, but does not openly write, a fact known to him: that Shanibov could obtain so high a post without proper preparation because he had been ideology secretary of the Kabardino-Balkar regional Komsomol committee. He also keeps silent about the fact that the supervisor of his pre-diploma practice, the prosecutor Shanibov, was himself at the time a fifth-year student in the correspondence department of the same Rostov University that Zaur was finishing. He knew too that by the time of his arrival in Terek, Shanibov had been a district prosecutor for only his second year. So Zaur saw that the prosecutor had passed through the very same "school of self-reliance" himself. In this school the prosecutor, as Zaur writes, was left alone without a staff. And he was obliged to bring the trainee into the prosecutor's checks, the support of the prosecution in court, the addresses to the public. And instead of condemning these tasks, forced on him by the circumstances, he ought to have counted them his first practical contact with prosecutorial work proper, in which he later excelled.

Let me mention one more circumstance I do not understand. Zaur, I am sure, remembers well how, at his request, I introduced him to my friend N. D. Pertsev, the prosecutor of Rostov Region. Only he could have helped Zaur with the problem he had raised of leaving his work at the prosecutor's office of the Pervomaisky district of Rostov-on-Don and going to Abkhazia. This acquaintance with N. Pertsev mattered greatly for Zaur's later career. While giving other detailed particulars of his biography, Zaur for some reason keeps silent about this important fact. Has Zaur's dissatisfaction with his pre-diploma practice in Terek perhaps spread to this fact too? That so unprepared a district prosecutor ought not to have had as a good acquaintance the prosecutor of Rostov Region, the largest in the south of Russia? Better to say that he was put in touch with the region's prosecutor by more substantial people? Much more could be surmised about the reasons for this fact I keep turning over. But it is plain that the reason does not lie in Zaur Bartsits's forgetfulness.

And yet Zaur gives a positive assessment of the worthless former prosecutor of the Terek district in his role as president of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus. He first assesses the activity of the president of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus during the war positively, in two brief sentences in the book (ibid., p. 82). Then he writes at greater length: "Here, in Gudauta, I again met Yu. M. Shanibov, who headed the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus and was doing a great deal of work. Several times, at his suggestion, I travelled with him to meetings with the population in various villages of Abkhazia. I was present too at two sessions of the Confederation's operational

headquarters, where questions of ensuring the safety of the population were discussed" (ibid., p. 310).

After the war, as the founder and first head of the chair of political science and sociology at the Abkhaz State University, I was received as a guest in five Sukhum families. Among the first to invite me to his home was Zaur. And our friendship continues to this day (as I write these lines in January 2012). We are colleagues now, both of us working at the Abkhaz university.)

Was Vladislav Ardzinba guilty of the grave consequences of Georgia's war against Abkhazia

But let us return to the interrupted narrative. I speak not of a crime but of a tragic mistake by Vladislav Ardzinba. And I make my case by carrying the problem out of the legal field into the global socio-political sphere I have worked in these last forty years. My position is easily illustrated by an example that has become part of the diplomatic and political history of Europe and the world.

The famous Frenchman Talleyrand, the genius of the theory and practice of diplomacy in the great age of Napoleon, said of a situation like this: "It is not a crime. It is worse than a crime. It is a mistake."

As follows from Bartsits's reasoning, and as I say outright, the chief culprit for the fact that Abkhazia could meet the tanks and artillery of Georgia, with their needle shells banned by the international community, only with hunting shotguns is Vladislav Ardzinba. But the prosecutor Bartsits judges this obvious fact a crime. Whereas Shanibov, lawyer, political scientist and sociologist, holds and argues it to be a mistake. What is more, the first leaves the blame for it on the conscience of Ardzinba and the leaders of the Forum and the republic. The second holds, and argues, that Ardzinba's conscience is clean.

Why do I do this? Too many participants in the events of that period know that it was Ardzinba personally who created for me and for the Confederation headquarters such conditions that we were forced to leave Abkhazia with the intention of never coming back. And I did indeed avoid any tie with it throughout the twelve years of Vladislav's presidency. Then his opposition invited me to Abkhazia and gave me back my second homeland, for which I personally paid a high price, in conviction, in morale, in body and in family. For a long time the hurt kept me from getting to the truth of why he treated me so. But I got there in the end. I do not, even so, insist on the absolute truth of my arguments.

As the reader will have noticed, above I described the opening stage of the dissonance in our relations, Vladislav's and mine. I must return once more, in more detail, to the process by which our relations were "spoiled". For brevity I will lay out my findings as a logical scheme. At the root of his mistake, the one under discussion, lies the fact that Vladislav Ardzinba had too high an opinion of himself. To this he had a certain right. But he overstated it, thinking himself incapable of so great and dangerous a mistake. Then, putting oneself in his place, one can and even must reason as follows. To project the qualities of his own Abkhaz people, the capacity for self-restraint, for mastering one's anger, for not coveting what belongs to others and not surrendering one's own, for committing no injustice against a long-standing

friendship and so on, onto modern Georgia and its leaders too. To fail to grasp the full meaning of the fact that the active mass of the Georgian people had been remade by Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, Kitovani, Ioseliani and their like. To ignore the fact that the leaders of the new Georgia and their ideologists had, for the first time in the history of the peoples of the Caucasus, given ideological grounds for, and carried out in practice, the military destruction by one Caucasian people of a whole neighbouring people, the South Ossetians. One might allow that the Georgian matrix of relations toward a weaker people, and the practice of putting it into effect in South Ossetia, could not be transferred to Abkhazia. The brotherhood of the Georgian and Abkhaz peoples was too plain. There could be no situation in which second and third cousins from the North Caucasus would have to save the Abkhaz from an attempt at destruction by their own blood brothers, the Georgians. Therefore a Georgian military attack on Abkhazia was impossible.

And from there: therefore the Confederation and the North Caucasian factor are needed only in case, or to reinforce the impossibility of Georgian aggression. To loosen that impossibility is dangerous. Before the war it was held obvious that Shanibov and the Confederation, in speaking of the need to prepare for a Georgian war against Abkhazia, were provoking this impossible war. Georgia must see that the leader of Abkhazia had no contact with the war-provoking Shanibov. (So thought Professor Zinaida Gabunia even after the war, who accused Shanibov of being the culprit of the Georgian-Abkhaz war?!) And after the war something else again was obvious. Shanibov was the first witness to the grave mistakes of the leader of Abkhazia, the man who had created the real conditions for preventing them. The leader of Abkhazia did not honour the agreements on those conditions. He committed an unforgivable mistake. In a state of deep mental and physical crisis, brought on by the awareness of the most dangerous position into which, through his fault, his beloved people had been brought, he was incapable even of hearing out a realistically possible accusation from Shanibov. His agitated conscience could not bear even the sight of his chief accuser. So it would be better if he and his Confederation now kept their distance from Abkhazia.

There are people who cannot withstand deep material, physical and spiritual suffering. There is also a special, rare category of people for whom the heaviest thing of all is the quiet voice of their own conscience. Vladislav Ardzinba plainly belonged, to some degree, to this rare category. And he, in my view, judged himself for the chief mistake of his life, which had all but cancelled the chief deed of his life, by the heightened and merciless judgement of his heightened conscience. And the verdict of that court of conscience, proving incompatible with life, wholly absolved Vladislav Ardzinba of the blame for the grave consequences of the Georgian invasion of Abkhazia, the blame that the prosecutor Bartsits had left on the conscience of the leaders of the republic. So the chief mistake committed by the supreme leader of Abkhazia in the Georgian-Abkhaz confrontations of the decisive period of Abkhazia's recent history (other mistakes of the leaders of the Forum and the republic we do not touch on) is not a crime but a mistake. And to the gravity of the mistake in this case there corresponds the highest price a person can pay.

In a somewhat different aspect, the Kabardian Sultan Sosnaliev and his closest aide, the Abkhaz general Sergei Dbar, found themselves in just as difficult a position. To smash the military machine of the regime of a five-million people with the limited forces of a hundred-thousand people demanded military genius and the full giving of the spiritual and physical strength of its military leaders. They found all these qualities in themselves and

secured the victory. But in doing so they spent their life force to the very limit. Having given their lives to Abkhazia's struggle for self-preservation and freedom, they entered, as the first victorious military commanders of the mountain peoples of the Caucasus, the ranks of the socially immortal makers of the history of our peoples.

Recently the second president of free Abkhazia, Sergei Bagapsh, also entered the ranks of the socially immortal treasures of our history. His father, Vasily Bagapsh, lived ninety-two years. Sergei spent himself in the struggle for Abkhazia's interests by sixty-two. Sergei Bagapsh valued at its true worth the military genius of Sultan Sosnaliev and his matchless experience in directing the creation and the historic victory of the young Abkhaz army and the military formations of the CMPC. After the victory, when Sosnaliev had retired, Bagapsh invited him back to the post of minister of defence of Abkhazia and used his brilliant gifts to raise the effectiveness of the republic's military development, now in conditions of peace.

But let us go on with the interrupted account of events in Turkey. During one of the ceremonial meetings of the Abkhaz delegation with the Abkhaz diaspora, I drew aside Gennady Alamia, the first vice-president of the Confederation, and had a conversation unpleasant for us both. I said to Gennady: Abkhazia stands on the threshold of war. Why, instead of preparing for this war, have you come here to Turkey and are wasting precious time on ceremonial speeches and lavish toasts? Our first vice-president tried to answer something. But it seemed that he too, one of the chief leaders of the CMPC, had fallen victim to the Shevardnadze disinformation that was lulling the top Abkhaz leadership. I told my first Abkhaz friend sharply that I did not intend to take part in these celebrations. And with my companions I broke off my participation in the events attending Vladislav during his impermissible visit to Turkey, somewhere about a week and a half before the start of the Georgian aggression. (In parentheses I will note that I am to hand this material to Gennady Alamia, the organiser and editor of the memorial book about Sultan. Will he want to include it in the book? I put that question into the text when I gave it to Gennady on 16 January 2012. Soon he telephoned and asked me to agree to a selection of sixteen pages out of my thirty-eight. He answered my question. And his answer I have put into the text after returning to Nalchik.)

As we in the Confederation had forecast, Shevardnadze, on receiving the glad news that he had successfully led the leadership of Abkhazia astray and that it had carried out no proper preparation to repel a possible attack, suddenly, abruptly began the war against Abkhazia. This suddenness was relative. Not only in the leadership of the Confederation but many in Abkhazia saw and understood that Georgia was preparing intensively for war with Abkhazia. Georgian academic scholarship and a boundlessly mendacious state propaganda had already carried out the "successful" preparation of Georgian society for the unleashing of a bloodbath in Abkhazia on the three-year South Ossetian model.

Into the consciousness of the Georgians the academicians had implanted, as historical truth, the lie that "the Abkhaz nation does not exist. That the real Abkhaz were a Georgian tribe. And that the barbarian Adyghe who came down from the mountains destroyed that Georgian tribe and appropriated its name and its homeland." With this perverted, barbaric idea the scholarly and political elite of Georgia justified the need to restore "justice" and take back from the Abkhaz both name and homeland. To this end the troops readied for plunder were moved by the State Council of Georgia from South Ossetia to the borders of Abkhazia. With

V. Ardzinba's permission a regiment of Georgian troops was stationed in the suburbs of Sukhum. From these and related facts the leadership of the Confederation proceeded in assessing the political and military situation that had taken shape between Georgia and Abkhazia. Given Abkhazia's lack of preparation for defence, Shevardnadze had good grounds for reckoning that a military action against Abkhazia would be a lightning, successful campaign for his forces. So for the chairman of the CMPC defence committee, Colonel Sultan Sosnaliev, as for the leadership of the Confederation as a whole, their entry into military action in Abkhazia, should the need arise, was a foregone conclusion.

Acting in the name of the CMPC: Sultan Sosnaliev

So, on learning of Georgia's attack on Abkhazia, Sultan, in keeping with his guiding principle of action in extreme conditions, took at once the one correct decision: to reach Abkhazia as fast as possible.

Sultan Sosnaliev and the CMPC's business manager, Khauti Sheriev, on 14 August 1992, on receiving word of Georgia's attack on Abkhazia, quickly assembled a small team. The question of transport too they settled in a moment. Sheriev's cousin ran a powerful Ikarus coach on routes to Turkey, Syria and Jordan, where numerous Circassian diasporas lived. The coach was brightly painted with Arabic and Latin lettering. Its owner understood the situation and offered his services. He drove it at full tilt. At the Russian-Abkhaz border Sultan's group learned that Georgian forces had just landed troops and seized Gagra. Any sensible military man would have stopped here and looked for other ways into a burning Abkhazia, skirting the city the Georgians had taken. Sultan held that there was no time to lose, for in the situation that had arisen "delay was as good as death". Abkhazia, unprepared for this war, needed immediate moral and organisational support from the Confederation, in whose prompt help it had no doubt.

Sultan again took, in an instant, the one correct but extremely risky decision. He laid his companions down in the coach so that only he and the driver could be seen, and headed into Gagra, toward the Georgian forces that had seized the town on 15 August. As a graduate of the Soviet military academy, he knew the rules of war that marauding troops follow in captured towns. They busied themselves with looting and plunder against the civilian population and kept little watch on things of no material interest. In Gagra, Georgian soldiers blocked the way of Sultan's Ikarus. Calculation and a happy chance both worked. Sultan shouted to the soldiers that he was hurrying to collect and evacuate children. From the lettering on the side of the coach the soldiers were meant to understand that this empty coach was setting out to take away foreign children. The soldiers let Sultan's coach through, and he raced for Gudauta. Had the Georgian soldiers known whom they were letting through!

As a guest of the Turkish government, I learn of Shevardnadze's Georgia attacking Abkhazia

On the evening of that same day, 14 August, I was at a reception given by the Turkish government. In the inner courtyard of the five-star hotel where we, the seminar participants, were staying, the industry ministers of four Central Asian states and Azerbaijan, with the president of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, were having a pleasant

conversation about our impressions of the fascinating seminar's materials. All the participants, representatives of the former union republics, knew Russian and used it among themselves. For the tamada, the representative of the Turkish government, we had an excellent interpreter, a Bulgarian woman with fluent Russian. She sat next to me and asked in detail about the peoples that made up the CMPC. To myself I decided she was an officer of the Turkish special services and of someone else besides, and I gave her only carefully considered information. To save us from the stifling weather, a beautiful fountain played in the centre of the courtyard. A chamber orchestra played Turkish and German melodies by turns. To my delight, the orchestra played the melody of the "Kabardinka" in an arrangement by the well-known Georgian composer Vano Muradeli.

I had witnessed Muradeli taking up the Kabardian melody back in 1957. In the days of preparation for the ten-day festival of the culture and art of Kabarda in Moscow, marking the four-hundredth anniversary of the military and political union between Russia and Kabarda, Vano came to Nalchik with the Leningrad composer Pritsker. I was then twenty-one and working as director of the largest district House of Culture in the republic, in Baksan. Among the republic's cultural workers I met Muradeli and Pritsker. At that meeting Muradeli told us of his own part in our festival. He had, it turned out, reworked the Kabardian dance melody into an original piece for many-voiced choir and orchestra. Performed by the choir of Moscow University students, the piece became very popular during the festival and after it. And now, it turned out, the orchestra of Ankara, the Turkish capital, performed it beautifully in a chamber-symphonic version. The orchestra's attention to this piece was bound up, as I understood it, with the fact that its conductor was presented to us as a Turk of Georgian descent.

A hotel attendant tore me from the pleasure of my native melody and the memories tied to it. He came up to the tamada and said something. The tamada conveyed, through the Bulgarian woman, that I was urgently wanted in my hotel room: there was a call from Nalchik. With the interpreter I went quickly to my room. With her help the Turkish operators put through a connection to Nalchik. The caller was my relative Beycan Shaniba, a former lecturer at the University of Istanbul who had returned to the homeland, to Kabarda, with his wife. His cousin, a colonel general of the Turkish army and commander of the İzmit military district of Turkey, Mehmet Şen (Shaniba), knew where I was. Through Mehmet, Beycan found the number of the Ankara hotel and called me. He reported that the Georgian army had attacked Abkhazia, that Sukhum was said to be taken, and that a great rally in support of Abkhazia had been held in Nalchik that day. I did not go back to the table.

I tried to get through to Sultan and to the CMPC vice-president from Kabarda, Valery Khatazhukov, on their home telephones. I did not succeed. For a long time I tried to reach Sukhum and Gudauta. There, it turned out, there was no connection at all. Then I telephoned Enver Kaplan, known to the Circassians as Anuar Sabaney, an important activist of the Ankara branch of the Circassian public movement in Turkey. Anuar had been overseeing my stay in Ankara and knew where I was. He confirmed that the Georgian-Abkhaz war had begun. He said he had not wanted to disturb me until then, so as not to spoil my mood at the government reception. A large group, thirteen of them, Circassians who were former deputies of the Turkish parliament and retired generals, had a standing permit to travel to the Russian Caucasus, to Kabarda, Cherkessia, Adygea and Shapsugia, and I knew of this. Anuar said that this group had brought its visit to Russia

forward and was flying out of Istanbul on 16 August. And tomorrow, 15 August, we were to be in Istanbul. The plane tickets, mine among them, to Mineralnye Vody had already been booked.

That night I slept badly. I turned over what the Confederation had urgently to do, what Sultan might undertake. At the same time I was glad to be returning to the Caucasus with so eminent a delegation of political and military figures well known in Turkey and beyond. I understood that this substantial group, having brought its visit to Russia forward to coincide with the start of Georgia's war against Abkhazia, would have a favourable effect on the shaping of public opinion in Turkey, in the Caucasus and in the Middle East in Abkhazia's interest. I recalled my conversation with Gennady Alamia about the ill-considered visit of the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia, V. Ardzinba, to Turkey. I thought of how rightly Sultan and I had judged the pre-war situation in the region. Our forebodings of an inevitable Georgian war against Abkhazia had proved true as well. Our common, and especially the Abkhaz, unpreparedness for this war appalled me. Knowing what the Georgian soldiers had done in South Ossetia, I imagined the horrors now being worked in Sukhum, in the occupied part of Abkhazia. The information that Sukhum had already been taken on 14 August was mistaken. But I did not know that then. In fact the Georgian tanks entered Sukhum on 18 August. Later I learned an incredible fact. For three days the Sukhum militiamen had, unfathomably, held the defence and kept the Georgians out of the city precisely at the Red Bridge. I described above how it was.

The "war council" of Circassian generals and parliamentarians in Istanbul

Before our flight to Mineralnye Vody, our eminent group, under the leadership of Enver-Anuar, laid on a breakfast at the Turkish Home for Retired Officers. Whether that is what the house is called in Turkish I do not know. That was how the name of the place where we gathered was explained to me. I had never seen anything like it. Across a vast estate, magnificent buildings were scattered, kept as trim as a museum. The grounds drowned in greenery and flowers. Pensioners of the Turkish army rested here with their families, with their children and grandchildren. Some twenty years have passed since, and still this earthly paradise stands before my eyes. Before the meal began, the generals laid out on the table the maps of the Caucasus they had brought with them. They began to discuss the situation in Abkhazia. They asked me for a full survey of the Confederation's possible lines of communication with Abkhazia. The pensioners' "staff session" was led by a Shapsug general. He did not look like a pensioner. Tall and stately, with the manly features of a fine Adyghe face that reminded me of Sultan, he made a deep impression. His name, sadly, I do not remember. But his appearance, his way of talking and of arguing with his comrades, stayed in my memory forever.

The Shapsug general ran his finger over the map and said something thoughtfully in Turkish. Those present kept up the conversation animatedly. Then he turned to me. Anuar Sabaney translated his words: "By every indicator the situation that has taken shape gives clear advantages to the Georgian forces. But you have your own advantages too. In war in mountain conditions, the fate of an operation is decided by close combat, by fighters meeting face to face. In such a war there are no fighters to match us. That is the first thing. The second is that, since you managed to create the Confederation in time, it must manage to

mobilise its forces in time to help Abkhazia. The Confederation must show speed. Then you will win. Had our peoples been united, our forebears would not have lost the hundred years' war for freedom, and we would not be here but at home." He paused and added: "We shall win. In thought and feeling we too are taking part in this war. May Allah help us."

I too repeated the general's appeal to the Almighty. The whole group echoed it loudly, an eminent, distinguished group of remarkable beauty in its manly and highly intelligent features, the merits of every one of them highly valued by the Turkish state. I congratulated and thanked them for assembling so promptly for the journey of so eminent a delegation of Turkish Circassians to the homeland at so grave a time. I was happy to scatter a little their anxieties and worries about how events might unfold in Abkhazia. I spoke briefly about the Confederation. I mentioned the Confederation's international battalion. I named its commander, Shamil Basayev. They commented on the name at once. It was familiar to them from his hijacking of a plane to Istanbul. They approved his candidacy. For some reason I said that in this war this young born warrior would become Shamil the Second. The venerable generals and members of parliament backed my forecast with applause. And the Shapsug general put an astonishing phrase into the lively conversation: "Imam Shamil, Shamil the First, lost his war for freedom. Shamil the Second, the Confederation, Abkhazia, must win." And then I declared with confidence that the Confederation would show speed. It had a worthy chairman of the defence committee, the albay (Turkish for colonel) Sultan Sosnaliev. He was the great-grandson of Imam Shamil's former senior naib, the Kabardian prince Anzorov. He was a man of swift action. He would soon be in Abkhazia and begin to act with success. The astonishing thing is that, while I was confidently giving this matchless, magnificent group my forecasts that Sultan and, after him, the Confederation would soon be in Abkhazia, at that very moment, in step with my talk, he was already doing all of it in practice. Sultan Sosnaliev, at that very same time (!!!) when I was speaking of him to the famous group, had himself, as related above, broken through the Georgian landing force at Gagra, and the Distinguished Pilot of the USSR had "flown" into Gudauta aboard the Ikarus. And from that moment he became the first victorious military commander of the mountain peoples of the Caucasus.

The most venerable representatives of the six-million Circassian diaspora of Turkey enthusiastically approved our taking of certain timely measures to repel the Georgian aggression. An impressionable man, I was ready to weep at the shared gratitude of these vivid representatives of my people, whose forebears had lost their war for freedom and had themselves grown up in exile. They had served their new homeland with honour. They, and my compatriots who give rise to such men, had brought it about that I often heard from Turks in Turkey: "The best Turks are the Circassians." And in Turkey all representatives of the North Caucasian peoples are called Circassians. Having achieved the creation first of the Assembly and then of the Confederation, I was glad that I could say to this group of famous elderly Circassians of Turkey: we managed to organise a body of unity for the mountain peoples from Makhachkala to Sukhum. We took to heart the sad experience of our forebears, who failed to unite not only the peoples but even the Circassian tribes. That was the cause of our defeat in the hundred years' war for our land and freedom. We have removed that cause, and so we shall not lose. And what a misfortune it would have been if, instead, through my fault, our unusual gathering had had to record the fact that Abkhazia had no means of resisting the Georgian invasion. How could one go on living, had we found

ourselves in a position where, burning with anger and shame, we could only look on at the destruction of the Abkhaz people!

Anuar Sabaney: the Adyghe Nostradamus

On the plane Enver Kaplan, also known as Anuar Sabaney, took the seat next to me. The Sabanovs and the Sabaneys are lines living in the Baksan, my own native, and the Zolsky districts of Kabarda. Of the wide circle of respected and famous representatives of the Adyghe and Circassian diaspora in Turkey whom fate brought my way, the closest to me in spirit was Anuar. And he shared these feelings. We met often afterwards in Ankara and Nalchik. We were devoted friends until his sad death, with his wife, in 2007 in a car crash on the way from Ankara to his native village. The village lay in the Uzunyayla region of Turkey, where the eighty Kabardian villages driven from the homeland had been settled, exactly as many as there were Kabardian villages in Kabarda itself at the time. Among these villages was Shchanibey, the village of the Shanibov line, which had stood not far from present-day Stary Cherek in Kabarda. There, to this day, on the site of the vanished settlement in a steppe long abandoned by people, stands the medieval Shaniba Barrow, marked on the maps of the republic, lone and left behind to its hero by the line that raised it for him, an eternal witness to the war of extermination, the Russo-Caucasian war.

Our conversation on the plane stayed in my memory forever. Let me give some extracts from it.

"In the years I worked in the Komsomol", I said, "the youth organisation of the Soviet Union, I handled ideology at the regional committee. Once, reading reports from abroad, I noticed and remembered a small item. It said that the Circassian Enver Kaplan had started yet another brawl in the Turkish parliament. Was that you?"

"That was in the fine years of youth. At the start of my political career. Others started brawls in parliament too. But for some reason mine came out noisier. In our parliament back then, the truth often had to be proved with fists. It happens less now, but it happens. So I was not original in that line."

"Why did the Kabardian Sabaney become the European Kaplan?"

"When Turkey required the Circassians to take Turkish surnames, everyone took a name as he saw fit, so long as it sounded Turkish. Our Atatürk was a friend of your Lenin. And we, even some schoolchildren, knew that it was Kaplan who shot at Lenin. Our choice of this surname did not fall on Kaplan for that reason. In Kabardian, Kaplan, that is къаплъэн, means tiger. The Turkish clerks knew nothing of this, or did not notice, and so we got this surname. Because of it I was later taken for a European or an Israeli. That was sometimes useful and sometimes harmful."

"In that same item I mentioned, they wrote that Enver Kaplan is never held to account for hooliganism in parliament because the president of Turkey is his close friend."

"Possibly that counted for something in my case. But in general, if deputies were held to account for brawls like that, half the Turkish parliament would have to be tried. You have a hooligan in your Russian parliament now too. He is not held to account either, even when he

drags women by the hair. Perhaps he too is someone's friend? With the president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, we really were inseparable friends from childhood. We grew up in the same yard. Sadly, he spent himself quickly."

"Was Turgut Özal the father of the Turkish economic miracle?" I asked.

"Yes. He worked that miracle. He gave his whole life to it. A man who lifts such a weight is stripped of all his life force. By the way, among the ten specialists, economists, who drew up Turgut's programme of economic reform for Turkey was a young Kabardian too."

"Yes, I know him", I said, to Enver's pleasure. "This Kabardian is a graduate of Harvard, the leading university in the world, Duman Saadi. He lives in Nalchik now. I spoke of him to our president Kokov and to the president of Chechnya, Dudayev, with whom I even met as a threesome. I told Dudayev too that Saadi's mother is a Chechen. Both presidents promised to meet Saadi. But neither of them did so. Turgut Özal had need of the knowledge of the Harvard graduate Saadi. Valery Kokov and Dzhokhar Dudayev have no need of his knowledge and his experience of working an economic miracle. They know everything themselves. The president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, did not know everything. That is why the economic miracle happened in Turkey. And in Kabarda and Chechnya, it seems, there will be nothing of the kind. Or perhaps such a thing will happen in Abkhazia, when she is free?"

"An important part of Özal's programme of economic reform is the creation of a broad system of knowledge-intensive small business at all the universities of Turkey", said Enver suddenly. "Saatadin told me of your active part in the recent seminar in Ankara and Istanbul on small business. Özal overturned the ways of life of Turkey by drawing trained, educated young people into modern, advanced production. Turgut told me he wanted to solve several of Turkey's most important and interconnected problems at once and for the long term. He wanted to tie education directly to life, to secure employment for educated youth, and through these two factors to secure an economy founded on self-developing advanced technology with an eye to the distant future. Perhaps for centuries. He carried out these and the related complex tasks. True, it cost him his life. And can Abkhazia have a leader like my friend Turgut Özal? Do you see him now, that future leader of the Abkhaz, among the Abkhaz elite? At first such Abkhaz too will resemble Kokov and Dudayev. Will they, or circumstances independent of them, allow such a supreme leader of Abkhazia to appear? The answers to my questions are the answer to yours."

"Indeed, where Abkhazia is concerned we have only questions as yet. I am sure that when the chief question is decided, to be or not to be for Abkhazia, our questions will find their answers. If Abkhazia is to exist, and she surely will, a leader of the Özal type will appear too. Yes, I took part in a matchless seminar. Saatadin said that Turkey paid two billion dollars to buy the foreign technology on which the cooperatives of small enterprises at the universities are built. And even so, Turkey is ready to give these materials to the seminar participants free of charge, if they are ready to make use of them. I kept detailed notes during the seminar. I want to draw them together and pass them to Kokov and Dudayev. But will they want to make use of this Turkish experience too? Perhaps the president of Adygea, Aslan Dzharimov, will make use of it? Or, at last, my analytical materials may be of use to Abkhazia, to her new leader of the Özal type? I shall offer this miracle to all of them!"

Then my lively companion fell unusually silent for a long while. I wondered at the reason. Suddenly he looked at me very gravely. It seemed that my last phrase had led him to some serious thoughts.

"Enver, you want to say something and cannot bring yourself to?" I said.

"Yes. Do you think you will manage to draw your notes together?"

"Of course. Even with the war begun, I will manage it."

"I think you will have a great deal of free time for the drawing together. But will you make use of such work of yours?"

"I do not understand what you are hinting at."

"You told me that the war of Georgia against South Ossetia was halted at the demand of the Confederation, with Yeltsin taking part. I think the war against Abkhazia too began not without the part of that same Yeltsin. So your Confederation now faces not only Shevardnadze but Yeltsin. Yeltsin will not forgive you for creating the Confederation. Besides, when people want to liquidate an organisation, they first of all behead it. Forgive me. I will be frank: I am sure that right now you are flying to a Russian prison, and I am seeing you off."

"You are saying incredible things! One cannot even think such a thing!"

"One must think it. Such a possibility is real. The logic of the action of the highest political circles I know well. And I have experience enough to understand the situation you have got yourself into by your own will. And by your own will you can still, for now, get out of it."

"Why 'for now'? And how can I do that?" I asked, thoroughly upset by now.

"Very simply. 'For now' because you have time. That time will be gone once the Confederation really intervenes in Georgia's war against Abkhazia, the war Yeltsin supports. As soon as the confederates show themselves, show their effectiveness, they will come for you in earnest. I am sure the question of your isolation has already been decided, and decided yes, by the leadership of Russia. We have thought, too, about your way out of this situation. We will take upon ourselves the purchase of a flat for you and your family in Ankara or Istanbul. You will have a Mercedes. We will provide you with a dacha on the shore of the Black Sea or the White Sea too. You will have no trouble pursuing politics and scholarship."

"And the war that has begun in Abkhazia?!"

"From Turkey you can help Abkhazia better than from prison."

"If I do end up in a Russian prison, then one day I will come out of it. But you, I see, will never come out of your Turkish prison. And you are inviting me into it too. Thank you for your concern, but this way out is not for me!" I exclaimed.

And at once I understood that I had been unforgivably sharp. I had not thought that my jibe about a Turkish prison would hurt my friend. For he and his famous group (thirteen Circassians, retired generals and former deputies of the Turkish parliament) had flown out with me, if only for a short time, from that long and tragic confinement.

"Do not lose your temper, do not rush your decision, Musa. Think calmly over my proposal", Enver answered, sad and thoughtful.

After that, as far as Mineralnye Vody, Enver and I exchanged only the odd phrase. Each of us was thinking about the end of our conversation. To this day I think of how perceptive and experienced Enver Kaplan was. I understand now why he was a friend and adviser of the president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, the reformer and moderniser of his country at the cost of his own life. The astonishing thing is that all the forecasts and predictions of Enver Kaplan about future events, set out above, came fully true. What is more, when Enver, on the plane to Mineralnye Vody, predicted the inevitability of my being sent to a Russian prison, that process had already been set in motion. Carrying out this instruction of Yeltsin's was already the business of an investigative and operational group headed by the assistant prosecutor general of Russia, Savvin, paired with that office's investigator for especially important cases, Colonel of Justice Rodionov. They detained me and then arrested me a month after my return from Turkey. When the period of detention had run out, before the charge was brought and the arrest made, Rodionov said to me, in the presence of Savvin and the head of the city police department of Nevinnomyssk in the Stavropol region: "Yuri Mukhamedovich, I do not know what I am arresting you for. I am committing a breach of duty in saying so: here, look at the order for your detention in custody, signed by the prosecutor general of the Russian Federation, Stepankov. I have only to fill in the missing date here. I received it more than two months ago. I am obliged to enter today's date in it."

I, a lawyer, a former prosecutor, a political scientist, a sociologist, a philosopher, could not even have imagined anything of the kind. But how could Enver Kaplan have worked all this out and predicted it to me? The Adyghe had a modern Nostradamus! And no one even suspected it. No one gathered the sayings and forecasts of Anuar Sabaney about future events in the Adyghe World. And now few know whom we lost in that car crash.

On arriving in Nalchik I threw myself into active work to mobilise the peoples of the Confederation to help Abkhazia. This time I could not meet the famous delegation of Turkish Circassians again. And after the Georgian-Abkhaz war Enver and I met often. But, to my surprise, he never once resumed our conversation on the plane. He could have reminded me of how events in my life might unfold by his scenario. Had I accepted Enver's proposal then: I would not have been wounded in Abkhazia and become an invalid for life at fifty-five; my three families would not have been robbed of nine million roubles; my wife would not have suffered a stroke and become a second-category invalid; my only son would not have been killed in Abkhazia in revenge against me, and so on. In such cases people usually ask whether one regrets the actions that brought on such consequences. I have answered that question too. In political history there is a regularity: the more important the political goal attained, the higher too the price that has to be paid for it. And the salvation of the Abkhaz people from complete physical destruction, the securing of the freedom and statehood of Abkhazia, which the highest world experts had considered impossible, could be achieved

only by correspondingly great sacrifices. And we, all the active participants in this heroic struggle, made those sacrifices.

They will not break the Confederation: my escape from arrest will show it

After my arrest my jailers held me for two nights in the punishment cell of the Pyatigorsk police and in a solitary cell of the Yessentuki police. Then, for the third night, they put me in Nevinnomyssk in the cell of a criminal sentenced to death who had escaped. As a former prosecutor I knew how such criminals behave when a defenceless former prosecutor is put before them. I stood a chance of being strangled that night. My cellmate had nothing to lose. He had been convicted of murder, then killed a guard in the camp and escaped. Killing me added nothing to what he already faced. There was also a juvenile pickpocket in the cell with us. I mustered all my knowledge and skill and managed to earn from the condemned man the nickname "Batya", father. This, I believe, spared me a reckoning with him. The next day they took me to my native Rostov-on-Don. The Rostov security men refused to take me in. My jailers, using their habitual methods, believed I had been broken and that anything their superiors had programmed could be done with me. I, however, had concluded, judging by my investigator's words, that my case had no judicial prospect and that in time they would have to release me. But I was not to wait out this planned term of my confinement. I had to prove to Yeltsin, to Stepankov and to Shevardnadze, at whose request I had been arrested, facts unwelcome to all of them. Since you all fear us so much, you have already lost your war. They had failed to break me, and so they would fail to break the Confederation too. To prove these facts I had to escape from the control of my jailers. That chance was given me by the Rostov security men, who refused to put me in their punishment cell. They told the Yeltsin team that they would not allow relations between Rostov and the peoples of the Caucasus to be inflamed. And in my native Rostov-on-Don I made that escape, with every chance of being shot or killed outright.

Dzhokhar Dudayev: the Confederation has done its work, the Confederation must go

Under the pressure of protest from the whole Adyghe-Abkhaz, Caucasian world, I was freed after the escape and travelled to Nalchik in the transport of the Congress of the Kabardian People. There, after I had spoken at a rally many thousands strong, the CMPC's first vice-president Gennady Alamia took me out to Grozny that same evening, deep in the night. He feared the Russian special services might abduct me a second time.

Here it is fitting to make some departure from the chronology of the events described and set out certain facts that round off, in their own logic, the relations between Dzhokhar Dudayev and the Confederation.

By this time the CMPC had carried out its original mission in Chechnya. Under its pressure, and through the work of its delegation under my leadership in the parliament of the Russian Federation, Yeltsin had been forced to repeal his decree imposing a state of emergency in Chechnya. Chechnya gained its freedom for three years then. After that, Dzhokhar Dudayev already considered that he no longer needed the Confederation. This mistaken and ungrateful stance of the young general's I had by then been obliged to condemn in an

interview with the newspaper Severny Kavkaz. In it I said that the young general thought he had won all the battles of his struggle, that he did not understand the hardest battles still lay ahead of him, and that he would have need of the Confederation yet. Dzhokhar and his circle took serious offence at me. They condemned me and my forecast. Dzhokhar broke off our contacts.

And when, after the bombing of apartment blocks in Moscow, to which the Chechens had no relation whatever, the second "Putin campaign" of the Russo-Chechen war was beginning, three generals met with me. Generals of state security, of the prosecutor's office and of the police, in the end put to me the question for whose sake the meeting had been arranged: what would the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus do if the war in Chechnya resumed? I warned them against starting this second campaign of war in Chechnya. I said too that the Confederation would, it seemed, not intervene officially. This state had become a stepmother to the people of the Caucasus, and yet it is our state, and the Confederation will not go to war against it. It had to be borne in mind, though, that more than three thousand North Caucasian volunteers had come through the Georgian-Abkhaz war alongside the Chechens. Their conduct no one can govern. The generals were on the whole satisfied with the position of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus. And when the second campaign of war began, two battalions of volunteers got in touch with me, wishing to set off for Chechnya quickly and in organised fashion. Through intermediaries I reached Dzhokhar Dudayev and reported the readiness of two battalions to help Chechnya. Dudayev answered proudly: "We have men enough. If you want to help us, start military action against Russia yourselves across the whole North Caucasus." The Confederation rejected outright such a path of struggle for democracy against one's own state. Not satisfied with this answer of Dzhokhar's, a former member of the Confederation leadership from Kabarda crossed the front line with a group of volunteers and met Dudayev. He confirmed his position, refused the volunteers' help and sent back to Kabarda the fighters who had come to him with one of the former members of the leadership of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus.

After this I drew up for myself the balance of the Caucasian Confederation's work over eight years. It had prevented a realistically possible first war in Chechnya, halted Georgia's three-year destruction of the South Ossetian people, saved the Abkhaz people from complete destruction by Shevardnadze's forces, and managed to resolve peacefully many particular conflicts across the whole North Caucasian region. It was clear that the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus had carried out its main tasks. I could not remain a useless president of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus with the second military campaign in Chechnya now beginning. I tendered my resignation. After my resignation statement was published, my Baksan elders sent a delegation to me and condemned what I had done. A Kabardian, the elders told me, has no right to leave the game with yet another war in Chechnya now begun. But I did not change my decision. I could not be a president who looked on at a war of extermination unleashed against a brother people.

But let us return to the interrupted narrative. Dudayev let me know insistently that the headquarters of the Confederation could no longer be based in Grozny. Sadly, there were clear signs too that the chairman of the CMPC parliament, the Chechen Yusup Soslambekov, had also become a supporter of Dudayev on this question. In such a situation the Confederation, and its president, could concentrate all their attention on Abkhazia. And

on 19 October 1992, at my request, Gennady Alamia, who in Grozny was handling the supply of arms to the fighting Abkhazia, sent me off to Abkhazia in a helicopter packed with weapons and ammunition.

Gudauta, Abkhazia's temporary capital, in flames: Sultan Sosnaliev's request to the CMPC for help

On arriving in Gudauta, I had a brief meeting with Sultan Sosnaliev. I saw how busy he was. To talk with him alone was impossible. A fuller conversation with him I decided to put off. Let me say at once that such a conversation never took place. I was wounded soon afterwards. This time I decided to say the main thing.

"Sultan, in the name of the presidential council of the CMPC I express my admiration and gratitude for your swift action. I was told that on the second day of the war you broke through the Georgian landing force at Gagra with a group!" And I went on to tell him of my meeting at that same time in Istanbul with the group of Circassians, retired generals and former members of parliament. I had voiced to them my confidence in what you might do, and so on. And, as described above, I told him of the memorable Istanbul meeting. As I spoke I watched Sultan. I understood that he was listening to me but thinking of his own concerns, of the matters that urgently occupied him. I broke off my account and asked:

"What is the situation in the Abkhaz forces, the Abkhaz army and Abkhazia itself?"

"There are as yet neither Abkhaz forces nor an Abkhaz army. There are militia detachments and volunteer detachments sent by the Confederation. They need time to become armed and battle-worthy. The work is going on, and they will become so. Here we must first of all settle the question of military discipline. But the most important thing is the situation, or rather the public mood, of the population of a still free Abkhazia, and of the refugees too. It is, naturally, predominantly one of despondency. This mood of disbelief in the struggle and in victory, found in certain well-known leaders and in the greater mass of the population, passes to the Abkhaz detachments holding positions at the front. And that same mood in turn passes, to a degree, to the volunteer detachments", Sultan reasoned aloud.

"Sultan, I think I understand how I can help improve the situation. We must work with the population. Someone is surely doing this already?" I asked.

"As far as I know, no one is doing it. And without the people's faith in victory, neither to struggle nor to win is possible", he concluded, voicing what seemed long and painfully wrought-out thoughts.

That same day, after my meeting with Sultan, by some unfathomably lucky turn I met Igor Marykhuba, the well-known historian and leader of the People's Party of Abkhazia. He became the chronicler of the CMPC's actions in Abkhazia and published these priceless materials after the war. Into the work that Igor and I carried out I drew, as noted above, my old friend Zaur Bartsits.

Let me now take the liberty of giving a long extract from Igor's book, where he describes how the promise made to Sultan was carried out by us. "On 20 October there took place a meeting and press conference of M. Shanibov and the People's Party of Abkhazia, as well

as meetings with the population of the Gudauta district and with refugees from the Ochamchira district and Tkvarchal. Under the slogan 'Abkhazia's victory is the Caucasus's victory!' Musa Shanibov launched in Abkhazia a tireless, energetic and fruitful activity. In the shortest of time he created the Operational Headquarters (OH) of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus in Abkhazia, drew up its statute, structure, aims and tasks, having first met, on 24 and 25 October, the volunteer fighters from the North Caucasian republics stationed in Gudauta, Gagra and Pitsunda. In everything I gave him my assistance and help. I was entrusted with the direction of the press service of the OH of the Confederation and with the analysis of the mass media. A schedule was drawn up of meetings of the OH of the Confederation with the population of Abkhazia, mainly of the Gudauta district, approved by the head of the administration of that district. From 19 October to 11 November 1992, M. Shanibov, together with the leaders of the councils of elders, met and talked with the inhabitants of the villages of Otkhara, Lykhny, Duripsh, Blabyrkhua, Barmysh, Dzhirkhua, Zvandripsh, Aatsy, Mtsara, Anukhua, Tsvkuara (Primorskoye), Kulanyrkhua and Psyrtskha (New Athon), with the Abkhaz scholarly and creative intelligentsia and with the public of our republic" (I. R. Marykhuba, Georgia's War against Abkhazia (1992-1993), in Abkhaz and Russian, Sukhum, 2006, pp. 198-199). At these meetings with the population and the fighters we raised deeply the problems of mood, of faith in victory, and also of discipline, of the carrying out of military duty in exact accordance with the commander's order, Sultan's basic theses and concerns.

Contact with Sultan Sosnaliev through volunteers: Asker Dzagoev, Felix Bekaldiev

After my wounding, having been discharged from the military hospital, I completed my recovery at the famous Samshitovaya Roshcha sanatorium. One day I was visited at the sanatorium by the well-known volunteer officer Asker Dzagoev, a fighter of the Confederation's military formations close to me. He conveyed Sultan's apologies that he could not come to see me, that he could not leave his command post. The fighters know, said Sultan's messenger, that for a fourth month now Sultan has not left the command post. He has been unable to leave it even to bathe. On the spot, at the command post, he rubs himself down with spirit. Asker said that Sultan had asked him to pass on to me one single sentence: "After your activities, the situation has changed sharply in the right direction!" Asker asked what the sentence meant. I told him this was a coded message about a secret between Sultan and me, and for me an important medicine. What the message really means, I will tell you after the war. But, to my deep sorrow, Asker perished in a Red Cross helicopter shot down by the Georgians.

The second time, Sultan got in touch with me through Felix Bekaldiev. After my wounding I appointed Felix head of the CMPC Operational Headquarters in my place. He stood out among our volunteers for his organisational gifts and his authority. He became a worthy successor to me and handled the affairs of the Headquarters diligently and ably. By the middle of December 1992, as noted above, I was at the Samshitka sanatorium. Felix and I met regularly and took counsel together about our affairs. Around 11 or 12 December Felix came to me unscheduled. He said that, at Sultan's request, he was flying to Tkvarchal to organise the evacuation of women, old people and children from there to Gudauta. He was in good spirits. But suddenly he said, unexpectedly, that he had come to bid me farewell, just in case. Felix's possible foreboding about what this flight into a city encircled by Georgian

forces might mean for his fate passed to me. But I hid it and said, as cheerfully as I could, that we were not saying farewell, that he was going away only for a time, and that we would soon be busy with Confederation affairs together again. Sadly, though, my prediction was mistaken and Felix's foreboding true. He organised that evacuation, of part of the most vulnerable population, on 14 December from the besieged city. In the Red Cross helicopter with Felix were more than eighty children, women and old people. The Georgians knew who was in it. They set the helicopter alight and all who were in it perished.

Earlier, when Felix did indeed bid me farewell, he passed on Sultan's greetings. And he said that a noticeable softening of Sultan's deep sadness and severity could be seen. Many who dealt with him noticed it. Felix even asked him the reason. "We are all beginning to believe in the victory to come", Sultan answered Felix. I thought at once that my coming here and my wounding were not in vain, if by my activities I had contributed to forming a fighting spirit in the population, the fighters, and even the organiser of our military resistance to the invasion. Felix went on and said that Sultan asked for certain work to be carried out among the Russian-speaking population. I told him we had already planned such activities.

The Cossacks of southern Russia stand with the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus

These important activities were prepared by Konstantin Ozgan. He played an outstanding part in the Abkhaz people's struggle for its freedom. For a long time, as first secretary of the Gudauta district of Abkhazia, he had built up such an economy and such social relations in the district he led that they became a decisive factor in the saving of Abkhazia. His district proved able to receive, house and provide with the necessary minimum the many refugees from the Georgian genocide across the vast territory east of the Gumista, including the country's capital, and from the side of occupied Gagra too.

The people of Gudauta also received, housed and fed the many volunteer detachments of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus. Konstantin Konstantinovich took an active part in the work of the Confederation as well.

He showed a particular talent in building the ties of Abkhazia and the Confederation with the Cossacks of southern Russia. Thanks to his efforts, the atamans of the Don, Kuban, Kalmyk, Stavropol and Terek Cossack hosts gathered at that same Samshitovaya Roshcha sanatorium, at the invitation of the Confederation. Moving about on two crutches, I received the high guests as president of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus and chaired the meeting of representatives of the five Cossack hosts of southern Russia and of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus. A particular part in reaching consensus among the participants was played by the ataman of the Don Cossacks, Vasily Ivanovich Kaledin. The participants took an important decision on preventing any clash and on strengthening the friendship between the Cossacks and the peoples of the Confederation, and on supporting the Abkhaz people's struggle against the Georgian aggression. These decisions mattered greatly for the shaping of public opinion among the Russian-speaking population of Abkhazia and of southern Russia in support of the Abkhaz people's struggle. To Konstantin Ozgan, the chief organiser of this meeting, we then gave the high unofficial title of "ataman of atamans". And Sultan could well be, and was, satisfied with this event, for the Cossacks of

Abkhazia and of southern Russia took a direct part in the military action in defence of Abkhazia and became important factors in its victory.

Sultan Sosnaliev removed the last obstacle to victory in Abkhazia's war for its life and freedom

I think it necessary to touch in this account on one more event, which became the crown of the Abkhaz people's struggle for freedom and of all the forces that helped it. I mean the liberation of Sukhum and of the whole eastern territory of Abkhazia seized by the Georgians. This event has, naturally, been covered from many angles, in many accounts of the sectors of the victorious advance of the Abkhaz army, by journalists and by historians. But in these publications, as far as I know, the role of Sultan Sosnaliev in the taking of the most important decision, the decision to liberate Sukhum and the rest of the territory of Abkhazia, has not been fully reflected. And if such materials do turn up after the publication of mine, it will not be difficult to make the necessary corrections to my account.

In touching on this neglected theme, I am aware that I have few sources for an objective and full account of the matter. I have only what Sultan himself related, very briefly and in his usual sparing way, and the fuller account of his devoted wife, Lyuba. To her, naturally, Sultan told more about this very important moment of the whole Georgian-Abkhaz war and of Sultan's own fate. And not only Sultan's, but that of all Abkhazia and of the people bound up with it, and of generations to come. From these sources of mine, at the moment of the decision on the fate of Sukhum itself, an incredibly complex and contradictory situation takes shape.

The leaders of the State Committee of Defence of Abkhazia and the country's military command, with the participation of Russian expert generals, discuss the question of whether Sukhum and the territory beyond it can be liberated. After a hard and lengthy discussion, under the pressure of the expert generals' irrefutable arguments, the meeting takes a tragic decision: Abkhazia does not have the forces to liberate Sukhum.

Satisfied with the decision of this responsible meeting, the expert generals leave quickly. Perhaps they did not wish to witness the natural, tragic reaction of a still free Abkhazia to this decision. By a secret plan, Sultan and his general staff bide their time for a while. They know Shevardnadze will quickly learn of the decision. But it turns out that while the expert generals had been studying the means available to the Abkhaz army for an offensive, Sultan and his general staff had been drawing up, in complete secrecy, a strategic plan for the liberation of Sukhum and of the territory of Abkhazia seized by the Georgians. Yet of this plan not even the supreme commander-in-chief of the Abkhaz army, the head of the country, knows. Now the head of the country's agreement must be obtained quickly and the secret plan carried out. For this, Sultan must talk round the supreme leader, who has agreed with the meeting's decision that Sukhum cannot be liberated. Sultan must obtain his permission and then carry out his secret plan himself.

To Sultan and his team, it seems, it appeared easier to draw up the strategic and tactical plan of the operation to liberate Sukhum than to explain to Vladislav Ardzinba the reasons for the situation that had arisen and to win his approval for the operation. A whole set of reasons gave rise to these fears. But the chief of them, as those who knew the chairman

well had good grounds for thinking, was personal in nature. This, the main trait of his character, made it practically impossible to talk Ardzinba round on anything once he had formed a definite opinion on it. This impossible task, that of obtaining his consent to the operation already prepared, fell to Sultan to resolve. And it had to be done as quickly as possible. So, choosing a more suitable time, Sultan met with Vladislav.

One can clear the historic dialogue that took place between these two men, deciding the fate of a single, whole Abkhazia at so decisive a moment, of the emotional outbursts that inevitably accompanied it. It then looks roughly like this.

"Vladislav Grigoryevich, you and I must settle one very important question. I ask you to hear me out, showing the utmost flexibility and patience."

"Sultan, why do you make such a preamble? With the utmost flexibility and patience we took a terrible decision at the meeting of the State Committee of Defence and the military experts. Is it not clear after that that we are capable of any flexibility and patience? Speak, I am listening."

"You and I must here and now reverse the decision of that meeting and take a new decision on the storming and liberation of Sukhum."

"This is an unseemly joke. Let us not waste time uselessly talking about it." Vladislav rises abruptly and paces the office.

"You promised that we would be capable of any patience. It must now be enough for you to be ready to hear me out, and for me to go on with this important conversation."

"Speak."

"We have the means necessary to liberate Sukhum. The whole operation is worked out in detail. Our army is in a position to carry out this operation successfully, and for that only your consent is needed."

"You set up a military tribunal. It must be out of work. You and your aides have evidently decided to give it something to do."

"Since you can joke, we are showing the utmost restraint."

"I am not joking at all. The minister of defence, having the chance to free the country from occupation, agrees to a decision to forgo military action. What is that called?!"

"It is called different things in different situations. In some it is treachery. In others it is a tactic that guarantees victory."

"Treachery? Victory? Speak. I am listening closely." Vladislav sat down.

"We know that Shevardnadze took Sukhum easily with the help of surprise. The leadership of Abkhazia did not expect Georgia to go to war against Abkhazia. And we had to arrange things so that now he, Shevardnadze and his team, would not expect the possibility of the Abkhaz storming Sukhum. And we did that. Shevardnadze, while giving assurances of

peaceful intentions, was preparing for war. We answered him in kind. By declaring our inability to liberate Sukhum, we have successfully prepared to do just that."

"And does Shevardnadze already know of our meeting's decision?"

"Without a doubt the Georgians learned of it within a few hours of our meeting's end. And they are celebrating their final victory. Our calculation was founded on this. I was convinced that Shevardnadze had a direct line to one of the experts. I could name him. But that could not be done. He was working for us, proving better than the other experts that we could not storm Sukhum. He was the chief factor in leading Shevardnadze astray. Besides, Shevardnadze has eyes and ears among us. You remember how the naval minister reported in plain text over the radio to the Eastern Front about the dispatch of Ibragim Yaganov's detachment to them. By chance or on purpose the Georgians intercepted that message, and two Georgian helicopters attacked the barge carrying Yaganov's landing party in order to destroy it. At my request the Russian pilots saved the landing party then. But the operation was wrecked by our minister. This time we could not make such a mistake. The risk is too great. A storming of Sukhum that takes the Georgians by surprise is the chief guarantee of the operation's success."

"All this is logical. You say our army is able to liberate Sukhum."

"I do not merely speak of such an ability in our army, I testify to it on my responsibility. We have built up combat experience. Real benefit has been drawn from the failure of the last storming of Sukhum. Napoleon said that the art of winning is learned from defeats. The taking of Gagra by three of our battalions, those of Kilba, Basayev and Yaganov, which routed the six-thousand-strong corps of the Georgian army under the command of the younger brother of Georgia's defence minister, Karkarashvili, was a successful rehearsal for the coming storming of Sukhum.

Our army already possesses the chief quality of a military formation capable of victory. It has become a single organism, it has taken shape as a system. A trained corps of commanders and officers has formed. This corps knows the chief law of how a system works: a system cannot work better than its worst element. It was through ignoring this law that we lost the last storming. Now we have a sufficient reserve, able to deal quickly with the failure of a 'worst element' or of a unit of ours that finds itself in unexpected danger. I am sure this reserve insurance will not be needed. Each of our units is able to carry out its task. For the mood that prevails in them is the spirit of victory."

"Dear Sultan! Everything you say is so fine that it is hard to believe. But after our meeting I hold that we must not take the risk again."

"If we agree with the decision of that meeting, then we have agreed to the partition of Abkhazia between Shevardnadze and Yeltsin. And if we let slip now our chance to hold the unity of the territory and people of Abkhazia, then for centuries to come it will be impossible to change this. And in doing so we betray the struggle of the Eastern Front. We leave our people in its districts to total destruction by Shevardnadze's forces. Future generations will not forgive us this. They will curse us."

"You have touched, Sultan, on the thing that fills me with horror. But still, perhaps it is better to keep part of Abkhazia than to lose it entirely. A storming of Sukhum is probably impossible. What if, with a failed storming, we destroy many people? We Abkhaz are few as it is. There will be losses among the volunteers serving in the army of Abkhazia too."

"Vladislav, the storming is not only possible but categorically necessary!" Sultan retorts hotly, and now he rises. "If the storming of Sukhum fails and we destroy people, then I can bear the responsibility for it. Give us permission to storm Sukhum and liberate Abkhazia, and leave Abkhazia yourself on some pretext. The failure of the operation in your absence removes the responsibility from you. The military tribunal and the peoples of the Confederation will try me. At that trial, I give you my word as a Kabardian noble, I will not say that you gave us permission for this storming of Sukhum. I will insist that I alone bear responsibility for the decision to storm and for its failure."

"Such a way out is unacceptable to me." Vladislav rises too. "You yourself allow the possibility that the storming may fail. It seems this storming is impossible, dangerous, reckless."

"Vladislav, you understand perfectly well that I speak of the possibility of the storming's failure only by way of repeating your words. What I argue and insist on is that the storming and the liberation of Abkhazia from the invaders is possible and necessary. And for victory in this storming I answer with my life. If the storming fails, I will shoot myself."

"Sultan! What are you saying?!" Vladislav, moved, embraces Sultan and says: "The failure of the storming would be a catastrophe. What we are risking! How many lives we shall lose! Adding your one life to those losses will change nothing. If it comes to shooting ourselves, we shall both do it. But your last argument has scattered the remnants of my doubts. Such confidence in victory cannot be mistaken. We must act. When and how?"

"They assured me it would be impossible to talk you round. You have conquered yourself and removed the last obstacle to the army's victory. We act at once. Here is the text of an address to the people and the army, drawn up by our political department. Make the necessary changes to it quickly and address the army, Abkhazia, the peoples of the Confederation, Georgia and the world without delay. At the same moment as your words, the blows of the victorious Abkhaz army will fall upon the invaders."

So the chairman of the defence committee of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, Sultan Sosnaliev, and the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhaz republic, Vladislav Ardzinba, decided at that crucial moment the fate of the whole military campaign begun by the State Council of Georgia for the total destruction of the Abkhaz people. The blows of the liberators of Sukhum and of all the occupied Abkhaz territory were swift and victorious. The Georgian army was utterly routed in an astonishingly short time. Shevardnadze's forces fled from Abkhazia so fast that they left untouched the tables laden with abundant food and drink, the cauldrons in which meat was boiling, and the rest. The Georgian troops and the Georgian population of the occupied territory had no time to sit down at the festive tables laid for the news that Abkhazia had renounced the liberation of Sukhum. Those tables, abandoned by the Georgians under the blows of the lightning-fast advancing Abkhaz army, fell to the victors. But they could not sit down at these laden tables. Shevardnadze's men were fleeing Abkhazia so fast that there was no keeping up with them.

15 December 2011 to 16 January 2012, Sukhum.
24 January to 14 February 2012, Nalchik.

Султан Сусналиев - первый полководец горских народов Кавказа

REFLECTIONS ON ABKHAZIA: 1992-2012

ABKHAZWORLD.COM