

## **"Mshybzia" Inal!**

(A letter to the journalist Inal Khashig)

For a long time I thought whether to write this letter or not and answer you, the person who, besides the fact that does not respond to the greetings of the Georgian youth in a demonstrative way, also believes that the peaceful action “Mshybzia”, launched by young people in social networks, along with “other Georgian flash mobs, is a trap to lure Abkhazians within the Georgian state.”

Indeed, everyone has the right to express his opinion on any event. I think your reaction is a bit exaggerated, because this action aims to build a bridge between people, alienated by the war for many years. I want to emphasize that the action was started by the youth who was born after the war. They did not see it, but they know that once the Georgians and Abkhazians lived on the same land, under the same sky in peace and harmony. We loved and respected each other. I never came up with the idea that one day all of this would disappear like a mirage. 23 years, almost a quarter of a century has passed as we were forced to leave Abkhazia, but the desire to return to our homes exists to this day. Dear Inal, I want to say that it will always be so, as long as at least one IDP from Abkhazia lives on Earth.

I feel that I lost the topic. Let's go back to the main issue. It should be noted that the action “Mshybzia” was not initiated by the older generation that was born and grew up in Abkhazia and is familiar with the Abkhazian people. We know that the Abkhazians, by their nature, are honest and noble people. An Abkhazian cannot “play” and at the same time, he never forgets the offence or needs a long time to forget it. There are other nuances that I will not talk about here, because it is not the purpose of my letter. The only thing I want to note that the action initiated by young people, namely by the children, in fact, was not aimed at the irritation of the Abkhazian society. On the contrary, they wanted to warm the hearts of the people who are alienated by the war; set them to positive mood and gain their favor and smile. In other words, they wanted to defuse the situation. Their actions remind the plot of a wonderful Georgian film which shows the story of two neighbors who live in the village and because of unclear differences quarrel among themselves and their grandchildren try to reconcile the older generation with different tricks.

Another detail, despite the war and the suffering that we have experienced, I want to surprise you and say that we did not inspire hatred of the Abkhazian people to our children. We brought them in a spirit of respect and love towards the people with whom we share common past and friendship. We always tell them, that the war was a mistake, that there will come the time when the wounds heal and love and trust will revive in our relations. Perhaps, the action "Mshybzia", which caused irritation for you, was an echo of the love that exactly the older generation introduced to them. Although, once again, I understand your attitude.

This time, our young people, with such flash mob decided to bring positives and somehow draw together people separated by the war though received only resentment and irony personally from you (despite the fact that young people have organized this flash mob after the tragic events having occurred in the village of Khurcha. They wanted to defuse the tense situation). But, according to them, the backlash is also a response and sometimes even a sharp response is better than silence and controversy continued for many years. Even such a response as yours “All this Turkish delight addressed to the Abkhazians from Georgia, laced with flash mobs, has nothing to do with the respect of rights of the Abkhazians”. Then we read: “The Georgian fellow journalists ask: well, what is the reaction to the Georgian flash mob in Abkhazia? Who does not know, it's a video, in which 8000 people some of them alone and some with groups, holding in front of them a sign with the word “Mshybzia” (Good day) welcome the Abkhazians”.

“I confess that when I was first asked about this, I did not know anything about this action. Then, purposely searching in social networks, I found this video in one of the groups. Beautifully staged and fantastically edited picture will touch anyone. Unless, of course, if you don't know the context.”

“I’m not even talking about the Georgian-Abkhazian war taken place two decades ago. I think the Abkhazians are doomed to remember about it forever. Because for the ethnic group, four per cent of the population perished in this slaughter where mostly young people died, is like an amputated limb: whatever the prosthesis is set, anyway you feel your physical inferiority and accordingly, you remember about it.”

“I talk about the present. Yes, now Georgia does not kill us and even threaten to kill us. The stick inherited from Shevardnadze by Mikheil Saakashvili was transformed into the carrot by the Georgian dreamers of Ivanishvili.”

Everything is clear from this text. You are very angry at the Georgians whom you accuse of starting the war and annihilating the Abkhazians. Think about it, who was the most beneficial to start a war, stir up the Georgians and Abkhazians against each other, who offers the “carrot” after the tragic war and who threatens with the loss of the native language and assimilation. I won’t continue about the war because my purpose is not to discuss it, though, I have enough arguments to defend my opinion.

Simply, I had a desire to write this letter to you in order to explain easily and clearly that no matter how much barbed wire and barriers would be erected along the Enguri river, how many observation posts would be set on the administrative line, the desire of ordinary people to each other will not be stopped. We cannot able to convince them that being in a vicious circle is better than an open dialogue and communication.

Inal, you write that “Yes, now Georgia does not kill us and even threats to kill us. Yes, now Georgia does not kill us and even threaten to kill us. The stick inherited from Shevardnadze by Mikheil Saakashvili was transformed into the carrot by the Georgian dreamers of Ivanishvili.”

“Now, some of our citizens are treated free of charge in Tbilisi clinics, even without forcing them to take the Georgian or the so-called “neutral” passport (by the way, the Megrelians of Gali district are deprived of such a possibility). This is perhaps the most effective project.”

“Of course, if your close relative is ill and you are short of money for an expensive operation, you may ask for help even to the devil.”

I want to say that I partially agree with you that the current leadership of Georgia wants to gain the favor of the Abkhazians and it is ready to do everything in order to neutralize the results of the war that was imposed by external forces and to restore the trust and respect between people. But this is not the carrot you mean. This is an attempt to ensure that every Abkhazian could feel that despite everything he is very close and dear to us even on the genetic basis. The experience of living together for centuries and the number of mixed marriages (about 45%) that affect our genetics allows me to conduct this kind of a conversation. Therefore, I personally believe that some proportion of the Abkhazian blood flows in me. You also have many such “mixed” people whom, no matter what barriers are put, you cannot change the blood, make to become the other person who has forgotten his past and transform into a stranger.

We talked about the treatment of Abkhazians in Tbilisi. Despite the fact that you call this project a “carrot”, there are already many people in Abkhazia who are extremely grateful to Georgian doctors who saved their lives. Recently, in the Internet I found one letter which stated that “it is not difficult to find Abkhazian patients in Tbilisi, although those who will openly talk about it with the media are very few. Among them is the patient G. K. who was made a complicated operation on the skull on June 18, in Tbilisi. A 54 year-old G. K. together with her sister arrived from Sokhumi to Tbilisi a few days before the operation. In a conversation with “Netgazeti”, she noted that she took the final decision to be operated in Tbilisi after the medical personnel insisted on it. “In the last period my health condition worsened day by day. I could not walk. In Sokhumi, I went to my doctor. They made scans and didn’t like the result. At that time I did not know the exact diagnosis, but heard what the doctors said, supposedly about the swelling. Time was short. We even met with the Minister of Healthcare for consultations. Despite the fact that there would be money allocated from the budget of Abkhazia for the treatment in Moscow, collecting

documents and settlement of all bureaucratic nuances would take a long time. I thought let it be as it is. I am not going anywhere. But in the end, after consultations, we decided to go to Tbilisi. Moscow is far away, but here it's only 4 hours drive to Tbilisi," - says the patient. On June 13, patient G. K. was taken on a special vehicle from Enguri bridge to the "Todua Clinic" in Tbilisi.

Patient's sister V.K. noted that upon their arrival there were many Abkhazians at the "Todua Clinic". "We always knew that many Abkhazians came for treatment to Tbilisi and they were all satisfied but what we saw in the corridors of the "Todua Clinic" has surpassed all our expectations. Many were holding Abkhazian magnetic resonance research. So, we realized that they were Abkhazians. We in Abkhazia also have good doctors but there is no appropriate equipment. It is impossible to hold such operations there."

The research conducted at the "Todua Clinic" showed that the patient did not have cancer, but only a type of hydrocephalus and she needed to have an urgent operation on her head.

The relevant surgeon was found at the "Ingorokva Clinic" (Center for Medical Technology - University Hospital). On 18 June, a long complex operation was made to the patient. We met her at this clinic.

"I have good conditions. Excellent personnel. Three meals a day. Simply golden people. We felt the warmth and care from all sides. I haven't seen such a thing. I am struck by kindness and professionalism of the doctors. Our surgeon is a young guy and he is already conducting such complex operations. I am grateful to everyone who helped us, especially your Minister Ketevan Bakaradze (Minister of Health and Social Protection of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia). It will be difficult for Abkhazia without the support. Georgia helps in the field of medicine and Russia in finances."

The sisters refused to discuss politics and the Georgian-Abkhazian relations in the future: "I do not interfere in politics. Not necessary. Everything is fine on the human level. I am in Tbilisi for the first time and it feels like we are at home. We met with relatives and even did not want to leave", - says the patient's sister who lived in a residential complex for the relatives of the patients coming from Abkhazia.

According to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, the number of patients who come from Abkhazia to Tbilisi for treatment is growing. Respectively to the official data, for example in 2014, 450 ethnic Abkhazians came to Tbilisi for treatment, in 2015 it was 550, and as of May 2016, the number of patients exceeded 550 people.

I needed to bring such an example just to show you the sincere gratitude felt by the Abkhazian patients towards the Georgian doctors who saved them from death. These patients, thanks to the professionalism and responsiveness of the doctors, returned back to their families being recovered. There are lots of such people and in the future they will be even more. This is the project that works as you specify. But, as it turned out, there are people who are annoyed and disturbed by this project. For example, here is an excerpt from an article by K. Zatulin, a former deputy of the State Duma of Russian Federation: "As for Russia, we are not satisfied with the division of Abkhazia. We need Abkhazia to develop. But we see serious obstacles on this way. It is time for Russia to draw own conclusions, too. We do not notice today a growing challenge from neighboring Georgia that has moved to different tactics concerning Abkhazia: if earlier Tbilisi threatened and organized sabotage, now they treat citizens of Abkhazia on their territory (unlike the Georgians themselves the Abkhazians have free use of the modern medical center, built on the Western money on the border with Abkhazia, on the Georgian territory)," - says Zatulin and points out that "transferring serious financial support to Abkhazia, Russia doesn't bring this money to each person."

"In our clinics and hospitals there are no instructions of free treatment for the citizens of Abkhazia. Unfortunately, the previous agreements about this ended, and no new ones appeared. There is no funding for free treatment of Abkhazians at health institutions in Sochi or, let's say, in Krasnodar. There are claims about the border because everyone is annoyed by the queues and the very fact of its existence."

According to Zatulin, on this background the bloggers develop their activities with the support of the West, “that does not intend to recognize Abkhazia's independence, but plays some kind of a game with it, supports the ambitions of the local political elite and sows distrust towards the Russian policy as if it protects them from the aspirations of imperial Russia to drag Abkhazia into the Russian Federation.”

According to him “this powders the brains of several people who are nurtured by Soros money and other organizations that have appeared in the Abkhazian society. The activities of these organizations is to impose their position that it is necessary to be friends and be careful with Russia at the same time, because it is a very large country, it is near and keeps Abkhazia completely dependent. But if they want to get rid of this dependence (i.e. the grants, security assistance etc.), then, in that case, it is necessary to conduct sound economic policies, which we do not see in Abkhazia, it is paralyzed by discord at the Parliament and the political part of society,” - said the politician.

Inal, see what's it all about. Here, the Russian policy towards the Abkhazians is totally clear. Zatulin is worried that Georgia has exceeded Russia in the implementation of the project on the free treatment of Abkhazians and that Russia missed this chance because there are no programs of free treatment of the Abkhazians at Russian medical institutions. The question arises, why Russia vies with Georgia? Why is Russia so worried about the free treatment of the Abkhazians by Georgia? Why does it bother the fact that their policies, i.e. policy of integration of Abkhazia into Russia, were exposed by the West? Why does it painfully perceive the issue of finding a common language between the Abkhazians and Georgians? Haven't you ever thought about it? There is only one answer. Russia considers Abkhazia as its part, its achievement, its territory, from where it managed to expel the Georgians, but for formal integration of this territory to Russian Federation Georgia is an obstacle with its social projects, trying to win the favor of the Abkhazians. I hope you see what the matter is.

Now, you will say that Zatulin did not mean it and that Russia has no such plans. This is self-deception on your part. And you say you do not like the carrot. It is very suspicious.

Let's stop this unpleasant conversation and get back to where we started. Despite the fact that you are categorically against flash mobs like “Mshybzia”, in which I really was not involved, I want to assure you that today, the greeting addressed to you does not contain any political implications. I just wanted to say that let's not look in simple, vital human relations for something suspicious and aggravating the situation. It is not useful to our people.

In conclusion, I wish to add that there is a word “atynchra” in the Abkhazian language. “tinchi” means calm in the Megrelian language. In the Georgian language similar word for the Abkhazian and Megrelian words “tinchi” is the word “dinji”, which means balanced. I wish the whole Abkhazian people, including you, “atynchra”. Now, this is important, the time will show us the rest.

Abziaraz Inal!  
Goodbye.

M. Gulia