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**Hope keeps up the relatives.**

Not long ago a Sukhumian Guli Kichba felt a fresh ray of hope, which seemed to be gone forever. She found and buried her son this year, who went to war 20 years ago and didn’t return. Arzamat was studying at the university when the Georgian Abkhazian war started. Together with his younger brother, he took to arms.

“I, as a mother, did not let them go, - Guli recalls. – I am telling them, “without you I cannot live!” - “But we cannot live without our motherland,” - they answered. “These were not really loud words for them, you may imagine!”

Arzamat died during a March attack on Sokhumi, in 1993. Then the Abkhaz military did not manage to take the city under its control. Hundreds of soldiers died from both sides. The body of Arzamat could not be taken out of the town then.

“Everybody was saying they saw how he was killed. We somehow reconciled to that fact. But we could not reconcile to the fact that we could not find his body. That we have no place to cry over, where we can go to and where my poor husband and my poor brother can smoke a cigarette” says Gulli.

The body of Arzamat had not been found even after the military action was over. Since then Gulli and her family lost piece of mind.

“During remembrance days, me and people like me… we feel… uncomfortable. Everyone goes to his place, to lay a flower… psychologically it is a very strong trauma”.

After 20 years almost 2000 persons have no info about the missing. 114 out of whom are from the Abkhazian side.

During all these years the representatives of Sukhumi and Tbilisi have tried to solve this problem a number of times. Though the results were varying, they had never managed to deliver the remains of the dead to the families. They only swapped info on graveyards.

“All the contacts were severed 10 years ago. The process came to be very much inclined towards policy,” says Leonid Lakerbaya, the head of the government of the de facto republic of Abkhazia. “From the both sides,” he continues, “there were people, who tried to ‘score’ on the successes and failures of negotiations on those lost without a trace.”

“It so happened that the war started,” remembers Lakerbaya. “And in the middle of this mess, nobody cared in Gudauta, that there existed a concept of ‘dead’, who had to be sent over. There have been those who had been buried on the site, but there had also been the first volunteers from Piter and Prednestrovje. I had to take up this work then”.

After the end of war he organized excavation of the biggest graveyard in Sukhumi – not far from the republican hospital. They found the remains of 168 men there.

Relatives were able to identify the majority of them. Among them, says Lakerbaia, there had been quite a number of his acquaintances and their children. But 43 corpses were not identified. They were buried in the very center of Sukhumi in the common grave. This place is now called the “Park of Glory”.

“It’s been a 20 year-long dream, that the people appear. I have been haunted by this horror for a very long time, I have had nightmares for a long time, though I do not generally have dreams… these guys had been alive in my dreams. Then all of this disappeared, but the condition remained. This is my duty, I do not have any other duty”. – says Lakebaya.

Becoming the head of the government in 2011, he go involved in the negotiation process with the Georgian party. International Red Cross was the intermediary. During two and a half years the representatives of the parties had met in four capitals of the world. They managed to agree on renewing the process of searching for the lost without a trace.

The first serious achievement was exhumation of the bodies in the center of Sukhumi. Besides of the dead during the March operation of 1993 they found the remains of 21 persons, military and civilians.

“These are the skeletons under the numbers 40, 39, 38…”- Patricia Bernandi, an Argentine specialist invited by the Red Cross shows me the row of cardboard boxes with exhumated bodies in the Sukhumi morgue.

She had been working with the remains for almost two months together with seven other foreign specialists. The samples of bones are sent to the laboratory, situated in Croatia. The relatives of lost without a trace have already provided the samples of DNA. The firs results are awaited at the end of this year.

The next meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian parties will be held in December. Tbilisi hopes, that the next step, which can be negotiated, will be the exhumation of Babushera graveyard. There, not far from the Abkhazian airport, are the remains of 35 people. All of the them died during the last days of war – September of 1993, when a plane outbound from Georgia was downed.

Bella Zaldastanishvili, lost all of her family at that time. Two of her sons and two of her twin brothers died there. All of them were the students of the higher education institutions of the capital city. Soon after the beginning of war they were sent to reconnaissance detachment of the Georgian Security Forces.

“When I used to ask them: “What are you doing there? Are you killing people?” – they answered me: “we are not shooting anyone, we are doing something else”. I was telling them: “Aren’t you afraid when they are shooting? When will this be over?! They would answer me: “Oh, common, we are resting with the girls on the beach, what kind of war?! What are you talking about?!” You could not make them come clean, even if you tried”. – recalls Bella.

A day before their death they visited their mother, she laid the table, the guests came but the situation was not really festive. The sons had been insisting that Bella play mournful songs on the piano.

“I expostulated then: “What music are making me play!”. One of them started to cry. It turned out that the next day they had to take a flight, tells Bella. – I was sitting here the whole day, waiting for their call, I thought they might yet call. It was 11 o’clock in the evening when the announcer of the news said that they blew up the plane, and that the group of information intelligence was inside it”

Bella had not left home for five years, and she still wears the mourning clothes. After the war the parties have agreed three times on the transfer of the remains of the dead in the plane. All the three times the unfortunate mother had been there to identify, but she did not see her boys there.

During all the years after the war the parents of Georgian military, lost during the military action in Abkhazia, have been gathering all kinds of information bit by bit. They created the fund “Molodini” (Awaiting)

Younger son of the deputy head of the fund, Nineli Andriadze – Konstantin – went to evacuate the citizens of Gagra in the fall of 1992. After that no one has heard about him, but Nineli is still not believing that he is not alive. If this is so, she says, then she must be transferred the remains of Konsatntin.

“From the political point of view, this may not mean anything. But we have the feelings of the parents, who bore these children and who want to have their remains. From both sides, is that not enough?”