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personal qualities exert influence on the conducted research as well as its results. In any case, the researcher has to try and make a carefully considered ethical choice, and know how to explain both to him or her-self and his colleagues, the facts and problems on the basis of which his choice was made. I also bear in mind the fact that I will encounter ethical choice at all the stages of my work.

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Translated by Tiina Mällo

Free Lunches, or Why I Do Not Want to Go to the Caucasus Any More

Marika Mikkor

At the beginning of the year 2001, I was approached by the Stockholm-based *Eesti Päevaleht*, *Estniska Dagbladet* and the Caucasian Greeks who had migrated from Sukhum to Athens, requesting materials and consultations with regard to Caucasian Estonians and the Greeks.¹ I looked out yellowed newspaper clippings, copies of documents and other materials that I had tried to forget. In our cooperation, we completed a 15-part series of articles *Греки в Сухуме* ("The Greeks in Sukhum"), published in the Athens newspaper *Афины Плюс* (Grigoriadis 2001b) and a 5-part sequence of articles "About Estonians on the Coast of the Black Sea" in *Eesti Päevaleht*, *Estniska Dagbladet* in Stockholm (Mikkor 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 2001d; Rihvk 2001). In my current survey², I deal with several issues that emerged during the correspondence with the relevant interested persons from Stockholm and Athens, as, for instance, feedback with Caucasian Estonians, the impact of my work on actual life, and also the moral and material obligations of an ethnologist in front of the researched.

I introduce the problems that emerged during the thirteen trips to Caucasus and various ethical problems and aspirations to solve them. Relations between the "researcher" and the "researched" directly influence the outcomes of the fieldwork. Both the obtained oral tradition and the collection of objects depend immediately on what kind of contact the researcher achieves with the people. Is the ethnologist obliged to interfere with the course of life of the researched people or is it necessary to limit oneself only with concrete work tasks? Where is the boundary between science and life?

¹Georgios Grigoriadis from Athens got inspiration to research the history of Greeks in Sukhum from my virtual exhibition "Estonians in Sukhum" at the home page of the Estonian National Museum (ENM) on the Internet: http://www.erm.ee/naitus/suhhumi/i_index.html (Grigoriadis 2001a).

²The article is based on my report "Free Lunches, or about the Work Ethics of an Ethnologist, in Connection with my Caucasian Expedition" at the 42nd Annual Conference of the Estonian National Museum "Ethics of Cultural Research" (Tartu, April 9–10, 2001) (Mikkor 2001e; 2001f).

Student, wanderer and the trader of second-hand goods: 1984-1988

My trips to the Caucasus started as a student, when I went there nine times between the years 1984–1988 at my own expense and initiative. The aim was to get introduced to unfamiliar places and interesting people, but I also had a more concrete action plan and I thoroughly questioned people mainly with regard to family customs. Was I actually a “researcher” or an “ethnologist”? I certainly was not an ethnologist then, but from what point can somebody be called a “researcher”? At that time, I did not have any intentions to form the collected materials as research. Consequently, I was a student getting familiar with strange places and people, and I did not evaluate the encountered people with a professional eye, but primarily according to how open, friendly and forthcoming to contacts they were (Tali 1993; Koppel 1994; Maksimov 1994; Rihvk 2001).

The director of the Estonian National Museum, Aleksei Peterson, also recommended the collection of items in the Caucasus. Throughout these years, I gave 273 ethnographic objects and 833 old photographs to the collections of the Estonian National Museum. As I did not get paid for my work and similarly paid my travelling expenses all by myself, I totally depended on the hospitality of the Caucasian Estonians. Whether I was received in a friendly manner, and also offered some food, was of vital importance to me and directly influenced my collection work. It was namely the more hospitable people who donated various materials, this being directly reflected at my later exhibitions and researches. And the data used in the scientific articles (see, e.g. Mikkor 1992; 1994; 1996c; 1996d; 1997c; 1998a; 1998b; 1999a; 1999c; 2000a; 2000b; 2001g; 2001h), compiled on the basis of oral tradition, has also been received, first and foremost, from affable people.

Of Estonians, the more hospitable and open were usually the poorer persons. People were especially friendly in the Sulevi village, where they did not judge others according to how to make profit out of them. In some villages, for example, in Estonia village, rich Estonians sometimes did not even open their gates (Mikkor 1998b: 13; 2000a: 79). This was not valid with regard to people from other nationalities and among mixed families; once you were the guest; you were always treated generously. In Sukhum, I lived with Pentecostals of Ukrainian-Polish origin. Their tolerance and openness was at a level rare to encounter. The atmosphere ruling in the Caucasus during the 1980s was not in the least as atheistic and soviet as in Estonia (Mikkor 1993). I also became acquainted with wonderful Estonians there; for example,

in Sulevi, Sukhum, Alam-Linda and Ülem-Linda, who seemed as if they had stepped out of vagabond novels, they were so open. My later activities, aimed at a wider public, primarily exhibitions and the popularization of the topic in the media, are greatly induced by the memories of the past and indebtedness; partially, this is the later re-compensation for free lunches. In my activities, I have always considered the more kind people I came across in the Caucasus.

When in 1992, the Abkhazia-Georgia war broke out, I was expecting that some of those who had spent their holidays in Estonian villages in the Caucasus during the Soviet time would step out for help or protection of the southern fellow nationals. After becoming acquainted with Aarand Roos, the researcher of Turkish Estonians, in September 1992, I made an attempt, following his example, to at least do something for the benefit of Abkhazian Estonians. I turned to the journalist Anu Jõesaar, with an objective to inform the Estonian public about the history and problems of Caucasian Estonians, which resulted in the publication of an article “What do you think you know about the Estonians of the mountainous land?” (Jõesaar 1992). Due to the fact that after World War II, the attitude towards the so-called Eastern Estonians had been relatively unfavourable in Estonia, and such an attitude was still prevailing in the 1980s–1990s, the Caucasian Estonians who had arrived here (in Estonia) felt insecure. This situation is explainable with the policy of the Communist Party in the 1940s, when communist-orientated fellow nationals were brought to Estonia from the east, so as to teach “new life”. In addition, red historians had depicted the history of Caucasian Estonians as communistic to such an extent that several scientists asked from me, including the geographer Ott Kurs, whether the Caucasian Estonians were really as “red” as they were described by the historian Lembit Võime and the writer Kalju Saaber. In one TV programme, the historian Lembit Võime treated Caucasian Estonians as somewhat irresponsible persons who should be placed under quarantine before letting them into society. For balancing this standpoint, I revealed my personal vision (Mikkor 1993). According to my experience, however, diversity in both business and religious fields was prevailing in the Caucasus in the 1980s.

In order to more widely introduce the Caucasian Estonians and items and photos collected from them, I compiled an ethnographic exhibition “Caucasian Estonians”, which was opened in the Estonian National Museum on September 17, 1993, on the day when the Abkhazians launched an offensive on the Abkhazian capital, Sukhum.

Until the exhibition, I had a bad conscience about the collected objects, because despite the fact that, when donating things, people primarily proceed from their sympathy towards the concrete collector, their imagination regarding museum work is different from that of reality. People have no idea that in large museums, artefacts are accumulated in storage facilities and not displayed in a large hall to be observed by wide crowds of people. For instance, in Sulevi village, the man who gave me his *kannel* (Estonian zither) was thought to be out of his mind, as the *kannel* was widely known in the village as a family relic.

Remorse connected with collection work lasted until the outbreak of the Abkhazia-Georgia war. Then it became clear that the objects in villages would have still been at great risk of destruction, one way or another (see also Tali 1993).

On of the reverberations of the exhibition was titled strikingly: "Caucasian prisoner Marika Mikkor created an exhibition about Caucasian Estonians: "This is my debt on behalf of these people" (Tali 1993). The journalist changed my word in the article claiming that I owed gratitude for my self-discovery to Caucasian Estonians (Tali 1993). In reality, I owed gratitude for my self-discovery to Pentecostals of Ukrainian-Polish origin. I lived with them in Sukhum in 1986 and 1987 several times and made my first photographs about Abkhazian living with their camera. I met very nice people of various nationalities in Abkhazia. I communicated with Abkhazian-Georgian, Russian-Abkhazian, Estonian-Armenian, Estonian-Georgian and other families. Abkhazia, this was my "promised land". Sukhum, the once Ancient Greece colony Dioscuria³, became a sacred city for me. Abkhazia and Sukhum, these are parts of my territory, which I definitely idealize in hindsight.

My message at the first half of the 1990s was simple – the Caucasian Estonians are nice, hard-working and cultural Estonian people, and for these reasons, we should have a benevolent attitude towards them.

³In the *Homnikune Postimees* in 1920, the original Greek name Dioscuria of one of the oldest cities in the world, Sukhum, was translated into the Estonian language as "the spring of the God" (Frisch 1920). The former inhabitant of Sukhum, Georgios Grigoriadis from Athens, drew my attention to the fact that the Greek colony Dioscuria actually means the God's son or Zeus' son in the Greek language, and that probably, the Estonian author transferred the inaccurate translation from relevant literature in the Russian language.

Migration official of the Estonian State and the Red Cross Executive: 1996–1997

I happened to be at the Caucasian coast of the Black Sea again during the second part of the 1990s; in 1996–1997, I went to Estonian villages in Abkhazia and in 1999–2000, I stayed in Russia, with the Estonians living in Sochi. I had to raise travelling and daily allowances and other means myself. This time, the foundations⁴ acted as financiers. The goal was to collect material for the photographic album regarding Caucasian Estonians; however, parts of the incentive for the expeditions were the memories about the wonderful people met during the 1980s.

The former subtropical resort Abkhazia had changed into a crisis area, as during the first half of the 1990s, it was ravaged by the war with Georgia, followed by a total blockade against the not acknowledged Republic of Abkhazia (see Borisov 1997; Jürgenson 1997a). Many of my good long-term acquaintances had undergone life in a difficult situation. Marauders had beaten and raped the elderly women in villages and some suffered from food deficiency. It was least unthinkable to peacefully carry out any ethnological research in Abkhazia, closing, at the same time, the eyes and ears to the anxieties of the people there. In 1996–1997, I tried to solve the problems of the Caucasian Estonians living on the Abkhazian side. If, during the 1980s, I acted as a vagabond/wanderer in the Caucasus and depended on the goodness of people, then now, I was seen as the migration official of the Estonian State and the executive of the Red Cross. All annoyance with regard to the indifference of the Estonian State and requests for help was put on my shoulders (Jõesaar 1997a).

After returning from the 1996 expedition, I appealed to the media to publicize the difficult situation of the Caucasian Estonians, but the topic was not a good selling point at that time and only one article was published in *Sõnumileht* (Kalamees 1996), which summarily dealt with all the concerns encountered during the expedition, the solving of which I considered to be in the competence of the numerous agencies of

⁴The expeditions of 1996–1997 and 1999 were financed by the Estonian Science Foundation, in connection with the project "The identity of the Caucasian Estonians – traditional and innovative in the worldview of the Estonians of the settlements" 1996–1999. Mare Kõiva provided her assistance in the compilation of the project and later participated as a consultant and a supervisor. (See also Püttsepp 1997.) The expeditions of the years 2000 and partially that of 1999 were financed by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia.

the Estonian State.

Simultaneously, I turned to the Red Cross in Estonia, informing them of the grievous situation of elderly Abkhazian Estonians. The officials of the Red Cross in Estonia explained that their task was not to help anyone, they only had to observe the situation and search for missing relatives. Hence, I asked them to provide assistance in ascertaining the destiny of my acquaintance, Helmi Torohvei, who, according to her neighbours, had been beaten into a handicapped condition by marauders. I wrote an application to the Red Cross Tracing Service, in which I defined myself as the grandchild of Helmi Torohvei, upon the recommendation of a Red Cross official, as the organization is only looking for relatives (Mikkor 1996a).⁵

After six months had passed, I received false information from the Red Cross in Estonia, according to which the searched person was supposed to live peacefully and safely in her home in Sukhum. As a consequence of material getting into the possession of the media, it turned out that while the Red Cross car went to her home yard in Sukhum, my friendly old lady had already died in the Ülem-Linda village (Jõesaar 1996a; 1996b). However, even if she had been found, she would not have been offered any assistance. But now, Red Cross rendered help in bringing a bed-sick person to my home Estonia, to be taken care of by myself: "As becomes evident from the newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht* (02.12.1996), that Helmi Torohvei is not your relative, we could not pass on any information about her to you. /—/ Helmi Torohvei left her place of residence, Sukhum, Tshanba 17, to take care of her brother Julius Ruusalepp, 4 years ago (in the application filed to us, both the date of departure – according to your information, 1.5 years ago, and the name of the brother – in your application Martin Ruusalepp, were incorrect). /—/ Having returned to her brother in Verkhnyaya Kelasur, Helmi Torohvei died on 20.10.1996 at her brother's and was buried according to the wish of her brother. (Sic! Helmi Torohvei was an old person, – born in 1910). Due to the fact that Helmi Torohvei's brother is a lonely, old and sick man, IRC offers its assistance in bringing Julius Ruusalepp to Estonia, to be taken care of by you as a close relative, this being facilitated by the programme "Family reunions" of the International Committee of the Red Cross. As a

⁵ Marika Mikkor's application to the Red Cross Tracing Service of Estonia 17.07.1996.

matter of fact, the majority of Estonia-based Estonians have brought their relatives to live with themselves in Estonia.⁶ Naturally, this can happen only in the situation when you as the grandchild of the deceased, assume the responsibilities of caregiver" (Kabi 1996).

Since I live, together with my children, in a 2-room flat in a tenement-housing block, I could not accept this. I also explained this to Riina Kabi, the Secretary General of the Red Cross of Estonia (Mikkor 1996b).

During the next, 1997 expedition to Abkhazia, seekers for help, from among my earlier acquaintances and new ones, turned to me. During this expedition, I had the head of the ethnology sector of the Institute of History, Aivar Jürgenson with me as a cameraman and he also recorded several topical interviews, in addition to the everyday life covering of Estonians. I also made an attempt to ascertain the destiny of Helmi Torohvei. Her neighbours in Sukhum alleged that the executive of the International Red Cross questioned them, for the first time, only after her death, consequently, after the involvement of the media. And, in her city home in Sukhum, she had not been seen for as long as two and a half years. As all the problems had remained unsolved, I commenced with writing concrete applications to various Estonian agencies, in addition to research, which this time meant a filling in of a questionnaire regarding identity issues, and the collection of oral tradition.

I helped Caucasian Estonians in solving problems concerning documents, and other issues (Mikkor 1997a). Must ethnologists perform this function and should they deal with such matters? This question is fully justified. Some colleagues have told me that the Estonian Science Foundation did not give me finance for this cause.

Subsequent to the expedition, I endeavoured to make the Estonian public and the government aware of the problems related with Caucasian Estonians; in cooperation with Viktor Niitsoo, a member of the Parliament, we compiled two inquiries regarding Caucasian Estonians

⁶As a matter of fact, even those people in need, whose children have wanted to bring them to Estonia, have not always succeeded in this; an example of the Estonians of the Salme village in 1997: "Liidia, so as to bring back her mother, Milvi Kisselyova, has continuously applied for a repatriation certificate for her mother from the Citizenship and Migration Board and also from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but she has not yet received the document permitting repatriation. "It seems as if nobody wants to deal with our problems", Liidia added with embitterment" (Seaver 1997d).

and these were given to Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia. Estonian officials refused to issue an entry visa for Estonia into a so-called Abkhazian passport of a Caucasian Estonian who wanted to go to Estonia for a daughter's funeral, claiming this to be illegal. In another case, an entry visa to Estonia had been put into an Abkhazian passport and this document, however, was not acknowledged by the Russian border guards, and the diplomatic agencies of Estonia in Russia did not help the person in this matter (Passport...). In both cases, the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs recommended the persons, in need of assistance, to apply for a Georgian passport, this meant that in order to go to Estonia for funerals or to go home, one had to gain Georgian citizenship. At the same time, the officials, who had completed the reply for the Foreign Minister, had been so incompetent as to not notice the circumstance that, in the first instance, the person was refused a visa in a passport stamped with an Abkhazian seal and in the second case, there were indeed both the Estonian visa and a residence permit already existing in a passport with an Abkhazian seal (Passport...). This topic was later widely covered by the media.⁷ The reply of the Foreign Minister Ilves is available by way of shorthand notes (see Appendix 1). To me, the contact with the irrational and unethical world of politicians was like entering another dimension.

This was a time-consuming and nerve-cracking period, an occasion where an ethnologist was forced to deal with tasks unresolved by officials. Aivar Jürgenson, too, wrote both about the blockade against Abkhazia and the situation of the Abkhazian Estonians (Jürgenson 1997a; 1997b). The material filmed by him was used in two Estonian Television programmes. One of these also broadcast the applications compiled by me during the expedition and the materials researched from archives.⁸

As the issue became very topical in the media I decided, pursuant to Viktor Niitsoo's suggestion, that we should immediately, after the 1997

⁷ See, for instance, "Ema ei lasta lihase tütre hauale. Abhaasia eestlased ei pääse Eestisse" ("Mother not allowed to the grave of her own daughter. Abkhazian Estonians cannot enter Estonia") (Taal 1997a); "Abhaasia eestlased on Eestis pettunud" ("Abkhazian Estonians disappointed in Estonia") (Jõesaar 1997a); "Eesti soost tulnukad ja olnukad" ("Aliens and stayers of Estonian origin") (Jõgeda 1997a); "Abhaasiast sõja: kku" ("From Abkhazia to war salvage") (Jõgeda 1997b); "Raske kojutulek" ("Difficult homecoming") (Raske... 1997).

spring expedition, put into operation "The Appeal of the Inhabitants of Sulevi and Salme Villages to the Republic of Estonia Ministry of Education", compiled by myself (Mikkor 1997b). Among other matters, I wrote in this document: "Now, for the first time during the 113 years long history of the villages, a situation has occurred where our children have no possibility to learn the Estonian language at school even during their mother tongue lessons. /—/ However, it is probable that in five, ten or twenty years, we will still be forced to re-settle in Estonia, but by then, our children will be Russian-speaking or entirely uneducated. The Republic of Abkhazia, due to its economic difficulties (war destruction, economic, informational and political blockade), is currently totally incapable of paying salaries to teachers, not to mention the supporting of Estonian language as a means of instruction, which is actually not its task after all. Would it be affordable for the Republic of Estonia to help our children by sending textbooks in the mother tongue, paying salaries for 2–3 teachers or even by dispatching a young teacher?" (Mikkor 1997b). The appeal was faxed, upon my request, from the ENM, together with the fax numbers of Estonian dailies, to Ugo Reiljan, the leader of Estonians in Sochi; he, in his turn, sent it back to the Estonian newspapers. The village people had no idea of such application, as a long time ago, they had abandoned all hope to get any aid at all and they were not in the least capable of showing initiative. Some journalists were informed about the matter prior to it happening. But, first and foremost, it was the more uninformed ones that took the bait. Reaction to the application was animated. On June 3rd, an article "Abkhazian Estonians request teaching aid" was published in *Postimees* (Mattson 1997a) and another one, "In Abkhazia, Estonian-language education stopped", in *Eesti Päevaleht* (Jõesaar 1997b). The text of the appeal was published in *Sõnumileht* (Sulevi... 1997). Allegedly, the Ministry of Education did actually not receive the fax and read the appeal in the press. After this, a "boom of Abkhazia" broke out in the

⁸ In the Estonian Television programme "*Suures plaanis*" ("Close-up") not a word was mentioned about the filmmaker and the origin of the documents, let alone the connection with the Estonian National Museum and the fact that the material was the work shot by A. Jürgenson and the documents originated from M. Mikkor. In the Estonian media, it is a relatively ordinary, although deplorable custom to use the material of researchers, without referring to sources.

media.⁹

On June 12, 1997, Viktor Niitsoo once more drew the attention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Abkhazian Estonians, adding preventatively: "And please do not suggest these people take out a Georgian passport, because for persons living in Abkhazia, the Georgian passport would mean the same as, for example, walking in the Afro-American part of the city in New York, wearing a Ku Klux Klan uniform" (Riigikogu b). The reply by the Foreign Minister earned the attention of the press.¹⁰

⁹ During one month, the following articles were published: "Abhaasia eestlased ei palu Eestilt leiba" ("Abkhazian Estonians do not ask bread from Estonia") (Mattson 1997b); "Haridusministeerium on valmis Kaukaasia eestlasi toetama" ("Ministry of Education ready to support Caucasian Estonians") (Alatalu 1997); "Tallinna vabadussammas ja Abhaasia kool" ("Tallinn statue of liberty and the Abkhazian school") (Tallinna... 1997); "Ametkonnad kaaluvad eksperdi Abhaasiasse saatmist. Eestlane saab Eesti kodanikuks läbi iiheteistaastase kadalipu" ("Agencies consider sending an expert to Abkhazia. An Estonian gains Estonian citizenship after eleven years of running the gauntlet") (Mattson 1997c); "Vabaduse ausammas ja vana vim" ("Statue of liberty and old pique") (Vahtre 1997); "Ilvesele on vaja sõda" ("Ilves needs war") (Alaküla 1997); "Kolme sorti eestlased" ("Three categories of Estonians") (Soosaar 1997). "Haridusministeerium saatis Abhaasia eestlastele aabitsaid" ("Ministry of Education sent ABC books to Abkhazian Estonians") (Seaver 1997a); "Abhaasia eestlased andsid haridusministeeriumile vastuse" ("Abkhazian Estonians gave an answer to the Ministry of Education") (Seaver 1997b).

¹⁰ An article "Ilvesele on vaja sõda" ("Ilves needs war") was published in the newspaper *Postimees*: "Toomas Hendrik Ilves explained that first of all, they themselves [Abkhazian Estonians] have to somehow obtain a passport where our state could enter a visa. Only when a war will break out there (what Ilves does not believe), it would be a proper time for Estonia alone or together with other states (which exactly, he did not say) to think of the evacuation of the fellow nationals or of something else. /—/ The high-ranking delegation of the Georgian Parliament arriving in Tallinn on Sunday, may, no doubt, with their Caucasian sincerity, assure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that they would take Estonians into their citizenship with open arms. Set aside the technical difficulties, it is obvious that the Abkhazian Estonians, as well as the majority of the population of the resort coast there, are not very enthusiastic about the current Georgian State. However, considering the attitude so far, there is a threat that official foreign policy of Estonia, referring to the need of maintaining Estonian and Georgian relations, may actually start to support such a cynical offer. In the style: let them take Georgian passports, see how Georgia itself is offering this opportunity. /—/ Yet for the documentation of Estonian Russians, an enormous amount of internal and foreign political capital and real money has been spent. Estonians living in the West have, in large amounts, received even double citizenship. But in order to help Abkhazian kin people, a war should break out in this location. Maybe the definition of Estonians could also be determined without a war and it would be possible to start following the Constitution, regarding the mentioned paragraph, five years after its adoption?" (Alaküla 1997).



Photograph 1. Sulevi village hall drowned in greenery. Photograph by Marika Mikkor 1996.



Photograph 2. Russian City Adler, further away the Abkhazian mountains, on the foot of which are situated Salme and Sulevi villages. Photograph by Marika Mikkor 1997.

Photograph 3. Free lunches? Marika together with Vaska. Photograph by Pille Runnel 2000.

Photograph 4. Sulevi children in the school yard. Photograph by Leeni Langebraun 1996.

During the tumult generated in the press, Estonian State officials and politicians were repeatedly asked to report on what was going to be done for the enhancement of the situation of Caucasian Estonians. Promises were made to send experts to Abkhazia (see, e.g. Mattson 1997c; Seaver 1997c) aimed at investigating the circumstances, however, I think that actually they were just waiting for the journalistic clamour to die down. Nevertheless, the situation altered to such an extent that when later some Abkhazian Estonians managed to illegally arrive at the Estonian consulate in Russia, either in St. Petersburg or in Moscow, they were not bundled out of the door as earlier, but instead, were provided with temporary travel documents in order to get to Estonia.

Until today, I have a Sukhum-based family with children on my conscience, who turned to me, saying I was the only one on whose assistance they could rely regarding their re-settlement to Estonia. I helped them in the compilation of a written appeal to the Citizenship and Migration Board of the Republic of Estonia, and I also consigned the letter to Estonia (Koobake 1997). The Citizenship and Migration Board, in their reply, told the family to obtain either a Georgian¹¹ or Russian Federation passport and, if they managed to somehow escape illegally through Russia to Estonia with the children, the Board would help them (Rebane 1997).

The main recommendation of both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was to take Georgian citizenship for coming to Estonia. First of all, it is very risky to illegally cross the Russian-Abkhazian border and to travel, having invalid documents and small children, so as to venture in Moscow¹², with an

¹¹It was also possible to secretly obtain the Georgian passport in Abkhazia, from the "black market", its price was 45 US dollars in 1999. However, the possession of Georgian documents in Abkhazia is not recommended (Päärt 1999). See also Seaver 1997d: "*Abhaasias ei ole sõjajärgne tõttu võimalik omada Gruusia kodakondsust*" ("It is not possible to have Georgian citizenship in Abkhazia, due to the enmity of war").

¹²See also another example from 1997: "Liidia did not also think it possible to go to Moscow, due to scarcity of money and her mother's poor health. You don't receive the passport right away, you have to wait there for a while", she said, "but Moscow is a very expensive city and it takes a totally absurd sum of money to live there. It seems there is no way out". (Seaver 1997d). It was not mentioned, that Abkhazian documents are also not valid in Russia and that at any moment, any passport check, massively carried out in trains, streets, railway stations and elsewhere, can simply result in the arrest of the person.

objective to obtain a Georgian passport. Secondly, it is totally nonsensical, as this country does not appear on the route. And after all, Georgian citizenship is not a travelling ticket that you buy and through away immediately after arrival. And even if it is possible to discard the expensively purchased Georgian passport, cherishingly called by Estonian public servants, "the internationally recognized travel document", the citizenship remains.

The encounter with the problems of Caucasian Estonians, regarding documents and re-settlement, caused a totally perplexed and powerless feeling in a scientist of humanities. So that it would be possible for the Estonian state officials to place a visa into the what they called the exclusively right document – the Georgian passport – Abkhazian Estonians were earnestly suggested to apply for Georgian citizenship, risking their lives.¹³ Consequently, my attempt to help the Koobake family had no outcome and my heart sinks at the thought that they are still counting on me, whereas I have distanced myself from the problems of Abkhazian Estonians.

The press supported the Caucasian Estonian only while the topic sold well, unfortunately, the issue ran out before the solving of the problems commenced. Yet, in October 1997, the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that they were considering the possibility of opening a temporary representation in Sochi, so as to resolve the document problems of the Abkhazian Estonians (Seaver 1997c; 1997d). This has not been done so far, Estonians are still recommended to travel

¹³ What would be the duties of these "fresh" citizens of Georgia, in front of the Georgian state (tax, military, etc. obligations) were not being explained. In Estonia, there is no diplomatic representation of Georgia that would stand for the interests of these citizens. Who would help the fellow Estonians in getting rid of the Georgian citizenship, forced upon them by the Republic of Estonia? How long and how costly is this procedure; it is not excluded that for this reason, every person who wants to abdicate his/her citizenship has to personally go to Tbilisi. In this situation, young men are in the danger of being sent to the front, elderly people may experience health problems, and how do refugees find money to travel to Tbilisi? These are the questions, presented to me by the Caucasian Estonians, in addition to the statement that in Abkhazia, it is extremely not recommended and even dangerous to have Georgian citizenship and documents. The last time, I raised the issue publicly in 1998: "A passport is not the same as a train ticket. Estonians, including elderly people and families with children, collect money in Abkhazia, which is in the state of war, so as to illegally obtain a Georgian passport, as it is obviously not possible in legal ways. But they have not been warned that afterwards, they have to collect money to get rid of the passport. Will the Republic of Estonia later help them in disposing of the unwanted Georgian citizenship?" (Mikkor 1998c).

to Moscow and become citizens of Georgia, in order to return to the homeland of their ancestors. Document problems and other concerns of Abkhazian Estonians have not yet been resolved (see also Päärt & Mattson 1997; Päärt 1998; Raid 1999).

Manipulation with the press gave a positive outcome in connection with the Ministry of Education. The situation was finally settled, satisfying all the involved parties. The Ministry of Education sent school textbooks and a teacher to Abkhazia (see Peensoo 1997a; 1997b; Värs 2000: 43–50) and, in addition, pays a salary of another local teacher. The teaching of Estonian language was restored in Salme, and the Sulevi primary school, closed down in the meantime, was re-opened (see also Reiljan 1997). The schoolteacher dispatched there is an Estonian, originating from the Salme village, who, besides teaching activities, also provides help for her elderly parents. However, in October 2000, Ugo Reiljan, the leader of the Estonians in Sochi, told me that the finances of the Ministry of Education were actually also used for buying bread for a couple of starving old people. Consequently, the taking care of several elderly people was also organized with the assistance of the Ministry of Education. Accordingly, by way of the Ministry of Education, it has been possible to also at least bit solve the tasks belonging within the domain of the Red Cross. Positive changes in school life only concern Salme and Sulevi villages. There are also Estonian-speaking children living in, for example, Sukhum.

During the 1990s, numerous people were brought from Abkhazia to Estonia as refugees, but many of especially elderly people were left behind. Namely, these were genuine Estonians whose parents took Estonian citizenship at the beginning of the 1920s. Due to civil war in Russia, they were deprived of opportunities to travel to Estonia, but they themselves and their grandchildren should keep the citizenship. Documents concerning their citizenship exist in the State Archives. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia has been repeatedly informed about this and they have, indeed, promised to deal with the matter, but actually they are avoiding this problem. Historians have been asked for a standpoint, whether the citizenship of Caucasian Estonians has been preserved or not, but they do not have an opinion in this regard (see also Jõesaar 1997c; Seaver 1997c).

The Red Cross of Estonia and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia have left the Abkhazian Estonians in need of support, to die without any help – no persons, no problems. Changes in educational life have taken place upon the

pressure by the media. Estonian public servants and government officials have been denounced time and again in the press, as a rule, the officials have adjusted their behaviour a little, but at the state level, principally nothing has changed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has often promised to "examine the matter", but in reality, they have just waited for the tumult in the press to die down.

Popularization and research

In my quest to comprehensively familiarize the general public with the problems of Abkhazian Estonians and the results of my expedition, I compiled several photographic exhibitions regarding the 1996 and 1997 expeditions: "Estonians in Sukhum" and "Estonian villages on the Shore of the Black Sea". These have been displayed both in Tartu and Tallinn.

In addition to intensive popularization activities, I compiled and published a book *Eestlased Musta mere rannikul* ("Estonians on the Shore of the Black Sea") (Mikkor 1998b). The compilation of the photo album was also related to ethics, the selection of photographs is both intentionally and unintentionally subjective. When putting the book together, I was definitely influenced by the more open and hospitable people met in Caucasus; the book is, indeed, an aggregate portrait of the more sympathetic Caucasian Estonians. My book may also be considered a wanderer's novel. Everything revolves around the people and frames of mind familiar to me, and each picture and text has a certain symbolic meaning, not perceived by the majority of the readers. In the villages, I mostly communicated there with the more elderly people; during the 1980s; it was customary that humanitarians collected material primarily from the elderly. This generation, born since 1898, had obtained a Tsarist village school education; at that time, the Estonian cultural life in the settlements was effervescent. Old people recall this period as especially luminous, similarly, the photographic material covering this period is the best. Thus, I have beheld the Estonians living there, being myself affected by the views of the Tsarist generation. By the 1990s, under the circumstances of war, these kind people, introduced in my book, did indeed become indigent, impoverished, sometimes even starving disabled persons. By now, the majority of them are dead.

The 1999 and 2000 expeditions to Estonians living in the Sochi region in Russia

During these two years, I became convinced that the hands of an ethnologist museum employee are too short to help the people suffering in the region of crisis, at the same time, I also experienced the power of the media. In order to somehow pass on the burden of grief from my shoulders and responsibility to the television employee, I asked the TV journalist Riho Västriik to come along on the 1999 expedition. As prior to this, *Eesti Ekspress* had published a libellous article about Russian border guards in the Russian-Abkhazian border station, the border remained closed in front of us at the last moment, the Russian side did not allow us to leave the country for Abkhazia (see Mikkor 1999b). Thus, the ineptness of one journalist ruined the entire thoroughly planned aid project and my last attempt, to do something for the benefit of the Abkhazian Estonians, failed. To make sure the trip would not be a total disaster, we headed towards the Eesti-Aiake located in the Sochi region in Russia.

Eesti-Aiake in the Sochi region remained untouched by the war and it is a venue of a mountain resort. Hotels are rapidly sprouting; the village people earn quite well. However, this was the village where the Estonians were already quite Russified by the 1980s and a local Estonian once even scolded me for speaking in the Estonian language. But now, they have also become interested in the Estonian language. As well, they are trying to resuscitate a brass band. Though, people are of the opinion that being an Estonian and blowing the bugle should be economically profitable, that Estonian identity should be gainful. We heard that some Estonians would like to have a Lutheran church in the village. For some reason or other, this is being considered especially important in the more Russified village of Eesti-Aiake, the Lutheran church would be of relevance for them also from the standpoint of ethnic identity as their actual religious convictions have not much in common with Lutheranism. In Abkhazia, where the Estonian language and mentality was still dominant in the 1980s, people did not feel the necessity for a Lutheran church.

The problems of the Estonians of Eesti-Aiake are of intellectual character, crisis of identity, etc. Other nationalities, the Armenians and Georgians in the area have their own cultural associations, they learn to know their language and culture. Likewise, Estonians have their

association on paper and it seems things are somewhat developing.

Now, Västriik is planning to make a documentary film "To Remain an Estonian", in which he intends to introduce the identity problems of the Estonians there. He is also planning to organize an Internet connection to the Estonians in the village. This way, the people who were in real need remained behind the border in a clear blockade circle, and attention is given to the ones who are easier to be reached. The Estonians of Eesti-Aiake, economically relatively well off, are of the opinion that somebody, for instance, the Estonian state could pay them for learning and playing the musical pieces in the brass band. I had an impression that the village people themselves were actually not conspicuously interested in the Estonian social life. However, this judgement is subjective and is based on the comparison with the Abkhazian Estonians. Being Estonian is actually forced on them by the leader of Sochi Estonians Ugo Reiljan, who himself lives in Adler. Reiljan originates from the Abkhazia, Sulevi village, where Estonian cultural life was still functioning during the 1980s. Now, induced by nostalgia and his personal identity problems, he is trying to revive something in the Russian side, the brass band is also his *idée fixe*.¹⁴

Compared with Abkhazian Estonians and also with Siberian Estonians, the people in Eesti-Aiake seem to be over-materially minded, as they were constantly talking about in what hotel somebody worked and how much he/she earned. If a child leads a horse for a tourist for 50 metres, this would cost 50 roubles, an enormous sum in Russia. These people should be counselled in some way, but they definitely do not need material help. We were told that in a more or less clean home we could get lodging, provided we paid 10 dollars per night. This is an unusual attitude for "Eastern Estonians". However, even in this village, there are also very affable Estonian people.

Using the photographs of the 1999 expedition, I held an exhibition in the *Riigikogu* (Estonian Parliament) – "Caucasian Estonians – Still Alive?!", which had to remind *Riigikogu* members of the fellow nationals living in crisis regions.

Two regions can be differentiated on the shore of Black Sea in

¹⁴ In Reiljan's home village, Sulevi, a brass band was created in 1910; the orchestra instruments were bought for golden roubles from Germany, with the mediation of Otto Wirkhaus. As a matter of fact, the brass band has never been operating in Eesti-Aiake for a long period, during Tsarist time and the 1920s; the Estonians of the village had their string orchestra.

Caucasus: in Abkhazia, misery and want are prevailing, children's school education is insufficient, elderly people are starving, contacts with Estonia are minimal and the homeland of ancestors provides support merely in educational issues. In Sochi region of Russia, Estonians are well off, but they do not know what is the ethnicity of their children. The leader of the Sochi Estonian community, proceeding from the fact that he himself originates from an extremely Estonian-orientated family, is striving to forcefully persuade the ethnic Estonians in Russia to be the Estonians, promising all kinds of material benefits for their doing so. He has distanced himself from Abkhazian Estonians, similarly to me, because the problems there seem unable to be resolvable and are hurting.

In conclusion

During my Caucasian trips in the 1980s, I was at times, in the role of a wanderer, at times, that of a trader of second hand goods, in 1996 and 1997, people yearned to see me as an official of the Estonian Migration Board or an executive of the Red Cross. In 1999 and 2000, during the expeditions to the developing tourism area Eesti-Aiake, my status remained unsettled, I did not quite keep in the bounds of an always welcomed tourist.

Does an ethnologist have obligations in front of the researched and may he/she at all interfere in the local life? In a situation where we are under-financed in expeditions, totally depending on the generosity of the researched people, not only in the mental, but also in material sense, it seems that we do not actually have a right to remain neutral observers, as, for instance, the well-financed International Red Cross. And even in the case when the money is not at stake, the collection of materials still depends on good relationships with the researched, which, in my mind, self-evidently entails moral duties.

In a crisis region, I consider it my duty to inform the general public about the actual problems of the area. For a long time already, I do not think that something would move in a positive direction, but there are still other Estonians living in the Caucasus, who are counting on me. It would be unethical, to only scientifically study these people or to give publicity to ourselves by way of them, without even trying to do something for them.

Have my activities also been beneficial for the Caucasian Estonians? Caucasian Estonians, who stand in good positions and have also

made a career in Estonia, have come and thanked me at the exhibitions, with tears in their eyes. All Eastern Estonians have been regarded as people of the second class¹⁵, but at least with regard to Caucasian Estonians, the attitude has improved, and their own attitude towards their origin has changed. Nevertheless, it still happens that the Caucasian Estonians in reputable positions hide their origin and have never in the least endeavoured to make anything for the benefit of their elderly relatives and neighbours who remained in Caucasus. They have intentionally distanced themselves from the issue. This is why they only come to thank me. Consequently, I have helped the ones whose problems are of mental character, and the ones in real need have been left without any help at all, those people who so kindly welcomed me in the past. My aim was to help the Estonians living there, but everything turned out so that it is primarily beneficial for the Caucasian Estonians living in Estonia, for their self-esteem and with regard to society's attitude towards them.

Shall I ever go to the Caucasus again? The actual situation today on the shore of the Black Sea does not attract me, in reality, neither to Abkhazia nor to Sochi, which the top resort in the Russian sense. But I do communicate by way of Internet with the Greek¹⁶ and Ukrainian Diaspora, originating from Abkhazia. I could go to Abkhazia, where many of my good acquaintances are still living today, out of the sense of duty, but it is not possible to reach there. The situation in the area is too tense for merely scientific research, and I also consider such approach towards people, taking advantage of them, to be unethical.

Abkhazia and Sukhum are always sacred in my heart. There are sympathetic Estonians living in Abkhazia, who would be interested in contacts with the homeland of their ancestors and their fellow nationals. In 2001, I made an attempt to introduce the Estonians of the Black Sea coast, and their problems, also among American Estonians

¹⁵Or even as persons of the third class, see article by Enn Soosaar (1997) "Kolme sorti eestlased" ("Three categories of Estonians"), see also Taal 1997b.

¹⁶Currently, a research is being carried out in Athens, "The Greeks in Sukhum". Intermittently, the Greeks have stayed in Sukhum during 25 centuries, all the more beautiful houses in Sukhum have been built around 1910, with the finances of the Greeks and by their orders, including the theatre building, which was the venue of the song festival of the Caucasian Estonians during the 1914 Pentecost.

(Kalmann 2001a; 2001b; Kiive 2001).

But what did all the Caucasus-related activities mean to me personally? In the 1980s in Mordva, a village woman told me that during 40 days after death, the spirit of a human being goes to all these places where the person had been during his/her lifetime, saying that I would definitely also go to Mordva after my death. Thus, all the places, where we have been, constitute "our territory". This way, the consequences of my activities connected with the Caucasus may also be observed as particular traces in my territory.

With reference to expeditions to the Caucasus, I would like to thank the kind people there, especially Elviina Jakobson and Lilli Angelstok the deceased Anette Angelstok (Reiljan) and Helmi Torohvei. I am grateful to proficient consultants Mare Kõiva, Aarand Roos, Viktor Niitsoo, Ugo Reiljan, and others. I am also obliged to the Estonian Science Foundation and the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, who financed the expeditions of the 1990s, supported the accomplishment of photographic exhibitions and the publication of the photo album. I am grateful to my expedition associates Leeni Langebraun, Üllas Ehrlich, Aivar Jürgenson, Ivi Tammaru, Veiko Taluste, Riho Västriik and Pille Runnel.



Figure 1. Russian and Abkhazian Border Stamps and Abkhazian Visa in Marika Mikkor's Passport. The Republic of Abkhazia exists *de facto*.

4000 г. Сочи ул. Пастунская 47-а
 факс/тел. (8622) 98-65-01
 98-44-60

1997 г. №
 на № 14/2 от 31.03.97

Первому заместителю Главной
 Администрации г. Сочи
 гос-ну Латышеву В.В.

Уважаемый Валерий Викторович!

Шибеской!
Разрешить
увеличить
информацию
31.03.97

Ураамбу В.И.
В.В. Латышеву
по 10.04.97
В.В. Латышеву

Для исследования традиционной культуры Кавказских эстонцев, из Эстонии, по приглашению Министра Иностранных Дел Республики Абхазия с 0.03.97 г. по 20.04.97 г., приглашены сотрудники Эстонского национального музея Марика Миккор 1963 г.р., паспорт серии КО № 767095, и Айвар Юрген-эн 1969 г.р., паспорт серии КО № 181901 Визы Таллинни - Адлер соответ-ственно К-111 № 625065 и К-111 № 625067.

Прошу Вас разрешить пройти через границу в Абхазию 31.03.97 г. и братно 10.04.97 г.

С уважением

Заместитель начальника Краснодарского краевого
 управления инкассации по Южному региону -
 Начальник Сочинского участка инкассации

У.А. Рейльян

У.А. Рейльян

Figure 2. The document that helped me in crossing the Russian-Abkhazian (Georgian) border in 1997 and what I was asked "to swallow" after border-crossing.



РЕСПУБЛИКА АПСНЫ
 АХЪААНЫРЦЪТЪИ АУСКУА РМИНИСТРРА

Сухум, Лакоба 21. Тел: 2-70-69, 2-34-45
 Факс: (88122) 2-57-92, (095) 187-49-87

№ 2!
2 апреля 1997 г.

Министерство иностранных дел Республики Абхазия, по согласованию с соответствующими службами, даёт разрешение на производство видовых съёмок на территории Республики Абхазия сотрудникам Эстонского Национального музея Марике Миккор и Айвару Юргенсу, находящимся в Абхазии по приглашению Министерства иностранных дел.



НАЧАЛЬНИК
 КОНСУЛЬСКОЙ СЛУЖБЫ

З.В. Авидзба

З.В. АВИДЗБА

Figure 3. We were the honourable guests the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Abkhazia. The Document that allows filming.



RIIGIKOGU LIIGE

14. aprill 1997

Eesti Vabariigi välisminister Toomas Hendrik Ilvesele

ARUPÄRIMINE

Lp. hr. välisminister

Eesti riigi esmane kohus on kaitsta oma kodanike huve. Rahvusriigina on Eesti ka kohustatud hoolitsema kõigi eestlaste eest ükskõik kus maailma nurgas nad ka ei asuks.

Paraku ei ole Eesti riik oma selles osas erilist innukust üles näidanud. Konkreetse näitena olgu ära toodud Abhaasias Salme külas eluneva pensionär Elfriede Toomassoni juhtum. 1996. aasta augustis suri tema Tallinnas elav tütar Veida. Koduküla rahvas pani raha kokku, et Elfriede Toomasson saaks sõita Eestisse tütar matma. Moskvasse jõudnud ootas pr. Toomassoni ees ebameeldiv üllatus. Eesti saatkond keeldus pr. Toomassonile viisat andmast ettekaändel, et sellist riiki nagu Abhaasia riiki pole olemas. Alaliselt Abhaasias elaval pr. Toomassonil ei olnud saatkonnaametnikele ette näidata muud dokumenti kui Abhaasia templiga Vene välispass.

Laskumata siinkohal arutlusse Abhaasia riikluse olemise või olematuse üle, juhiksin tähelepanu Eesti põhiseaduse § 36-le, mis ühemõtteliselt annab igale eestlasele õiguse Eestisse asumiseks. Sellest järeldub, et Eesti Moskva saatkond rikkus pr. Toomassoni põhiseaduslikke õigusi.

Hr. välisminister, Milline on Teie seisukoht Eesti Moskva saatkonna Eesti põhiseadust eirava tegevuse suhtes? Mida Teie arvates tuleks teha, et kõik eesti rahvusest isikud, sõltumata sellest, missuguseid dokumente nad taskus kannavad, saaksid kasutada oma põhiseaduslikku õigust - asuda takistamatult Eestisse.

Lugupidamisega

Viktor Niitsoo
/Victor Niitsoo/ *VIKTOR NIITSOO*

Lisa: Artikkel Truden putj v stranu po imeni Estonia. Estonija, 5. september 1996.

Lossi plats 1-a
EI:0100 Tallinn

Riigikogu kantsel
14.04.1997

Figure 4. Viktor Niitsoo's inquiry to Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, with regard to Elfriede Toomasson's matter.

Eesti Vabariigi suursaadikule Moskvas

Otto Sahkar
Praguse aadress: Abhaasia
Vabariik, Gulripõis raj.,
Aquadzera, maja 108, krt. 38

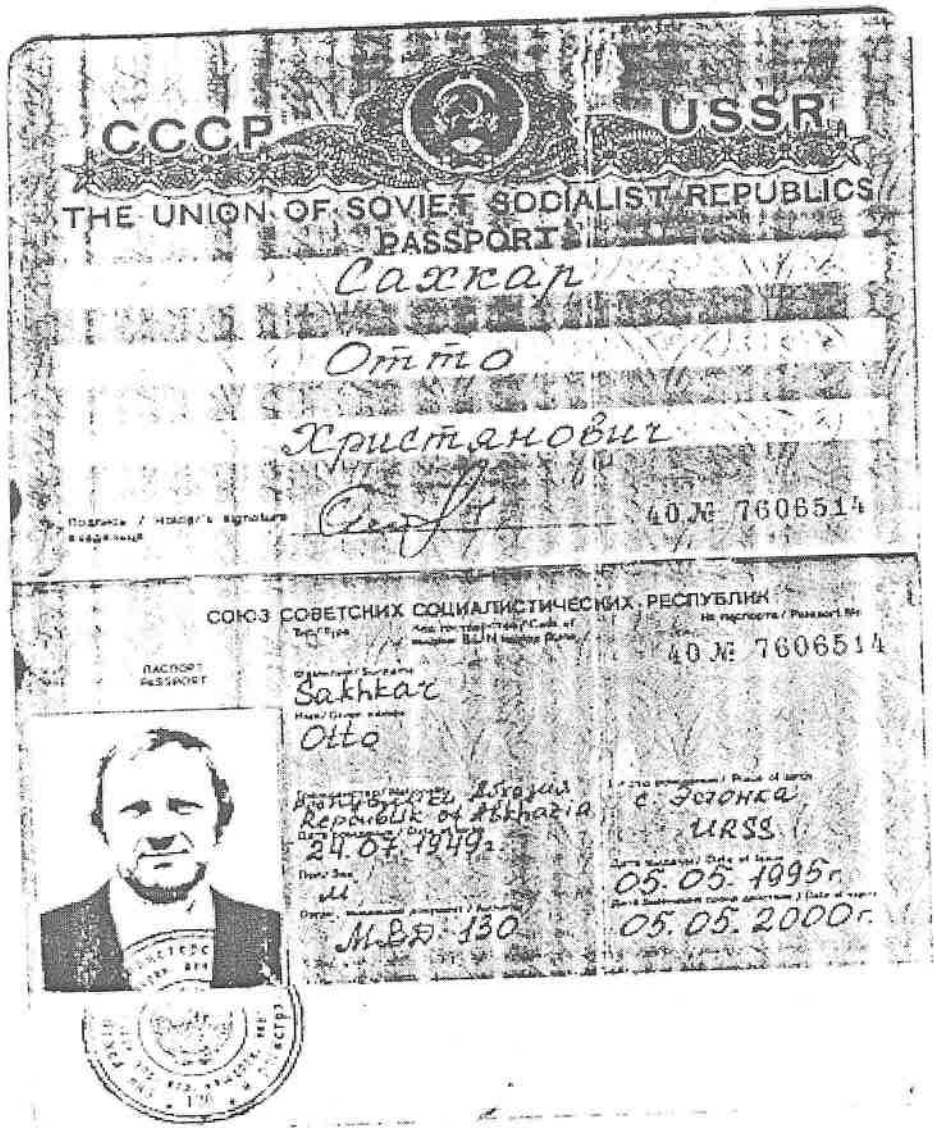
Avaldus

Palun osutada mulle ari Vene-Eesti piiri ületamisel. Oka pärit Abhaasiast Estonia tütart, den eestlane. Oumaria - Abhaasia sõja tõttu reemigreerunud Eestisse, kuul oli faktapärane elamisloa Eesti elamiseks 10.08.1995 - 12.06.1996 mis miselõputus kadunud kaagralu. Het on 12.4-12. Soovin arutiselt Abhaasiast oma maa - pidamist ja dokumente keraaldama, Eestisse tapasõistumise omatus aga vormatute, kuna Vene järelevalve ei lase mind Venemaalt Eesti muuras sõita. Het on 1) Abhaasia välispas o.o. Vene välispas Abhaasia eritempliga, misid selle seeria on Venemaal kehtetud kuulutatud mis Venemaal si tunnusta Abhaasia templit (pass nr. a. 7606514) 2) Vene visapass Abhaasia Vabariigi templiga, misid tunnusti ei tunnusta Vene järelevalve. Kuna mul si olemasolevad elumisel aartal vabakaudu korduvatele katsetele Eestisse sõita, mis loptes mul Eesti elamisloa. Mõeldud ari võib mulle osutada Eesti suursaadikule Moskvas?

inua Abhaasiast praagi reemigreerunud soot ei teosta, palun varda. ja mulle kahel Eesti aadressil:
Hagomati, Het on 12.4-12, Rehate Sothkari *Quifz*
Tarku, Vesti 32, ERM, M. Nikken

4.10.1997 Aquadzera.

Figure 5. Otto Sahkar's application to the Estonian Ambassador in Moscow. Compiled and effected by Marika Mikkor.



Figures 6–7. Copy of Otto Sahkar's foreign passport.

Appendix 1.

Replies by Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, to the inquiry submitted by Viktor Niitsoo and Marika Mikkor, regarding the denial of admitting Elfriide Toomasson and Otto Sahkar into Estonia

Estonian consulate in Moscow refused the issuance of an Estonian visa to Elfriede Toomasson, for her to travel to Estonia to her daughter's funeral, as the Republic of Estonia does not acknowledge the documents of Abkhazia, i.e. the former passport of the Soviet Union stamped with an Abkhazian seal.

T. H. Ilves: /—/ *The obligation of Estonia as an ethnic state to take care of all Estonians, at wherever end of the world they might be, mentioned in the inquiry, cannot in any way be observed as a legal responsibility.*

More likely, it is to do with a moral obligation to maintain ethnic cohesion. Indeed, settling in Estonia is a constitutional right of Estonians. The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia is valid in the territory of the Republic of Estonia. The state border limits the territory. The guaranteeing of the right stipulated in the § 36 of the Constitution can only belong within the competence of the Border Guard Administration. Foreign mission is located in the territory of a foreign country and may not guarantee the physical arrival of an Estonian to the territory of Estonia.¹⁷ In its activities, a foreign mission proceeds from the § 13 of the Constitution, which stipulates that the Estonian State also protects its citizens abroad. Elfriide Toomasson is not an Estonian citizen. As a Minister of Foreign Affairs, I regret what has happened, but I do affirm that the Embassy in Moscow acted in accordance with the law. State Borders Act, § 11, paragraph 2, and the Regulation of the Government of the Republic No 157 from May 25, 1992, clause 14 stipulate that a visa

¹⁷At this point, the Minister of Foreign Affairs apparently wanted to claim that if the person had come, instead of the Embassy in Moscow, to the border of the state, saying, I am an Estonian, please let me in, she would have been allowed into Estonia to the funerals. This is not true, without an Estonian visa, the Russian border guard would not even have let her there, and it is hardly believable that the Estonian border guard would have allowed the village woman to cross the border, even if she asked politely.

shall be formalized into a valid travel document. I emphasize, into a valid travel document.

In the Consular Department of the Moscow Embassy of the Republic of Estonia, all Estonians and persons of Estonian origin have been issued multi-entry visas with one-year validity, provided they were submitted as valid travel documents. As nobody has written down the legal definition of Estonians, the Consular Department proceeds from language skills and/or a document proving the nationality. Answering the questions presented in the inquiry, I reply that for settling in Estonia, people of Estonian nationality have to apply for a visa in a foreign mission of Estonia, or to come to the border of Estonia.

Jüri Adams: *Thank you, Mister chairman! Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, this current inquiry, as will be the next one, was compiled by the colleague of mine, Viktor Niitsoo, I signed it because one never knows when the reply would come and it really happened this way that he has to be away today and I should present you questions. I have to admit that your reply, the reply that was written for you and what you read out, grieved me a lot. First of all, I as if understood that the right of an Estonian to return to their homeland was, by your assistant advisers, not observable as a legal right, maybe you would like to comment on this?*

THI: *It means, this is the right, which is dealt with by the Border Guard.*

JA: *Thank you! In this case, I have such a question, the world is probably a little bit more diversified and changes more rapidly than this list which is currently issued to our foreign missions or the border guard, in the sense that in the future, there will probably be recurrent situations that Estonia, an Estonian turns to the foreign mission with a document that is valid to his/her mind, but due to one or another reason this document is not in the list which is the basis of the work of these agencies. Would you like to claim that principally, such people should all be rejected?*

THI: *We can put visas only in valid documents. I believe this is the idea which, with what the majority of people in Estonia would agree, that we have internationally recognized documents or a list of these documents that we accept. Otherwise, we would be in a situation where a person just presents a document, however, at the present moment, we are dealing with a citizen of a foreign country and there is nothing else for us to do, if this person has not proved that she is an Estonian citizen, and comes to us with an invalid passport of a foreign country, it is relatively difficult for us, if not impossible, to put an Estonian visa in there.*

Maybe something should be done with regard to the law, but considering the current legislation, we cannot do this. I believe that we can all imagine when people start to turn up in embassies with any documents and a person would apply for an Estonian visa who cannot prove his/her Estonian citizenship and I believe there would be plenty of those people who can say that they are not Estonian citizens, that they are ethnic Estonians, having learnt a sufficient amount of the Estonian language, I believe that from the standpoint of the security of the state, this is relatively necessary for us to only deal with valid documents.¹⁸

JA: Mister Minister of Foreign Affairs, your reply was totally cynical. A 60-year-old elderly lady from a Caucasian village will probably be of no threat to Estonian State. But my question now is about the fact that, your reply was also not competent in the sense that, the person turned up with such a document which is totally valid in her place of residence, irrespective of how this was viewed by the Moscow Embassy. But if you and your officials see that there is a particular problem in the legislation valid in Estonia, don't you consider it the task of your Ministry to initiate a relevant amendment, so as to also smoothly guarantee the rights of such persons?

THI: I am not able to answer a question whether my reply was cynical or incompetent. But maybe I should say that we have to proceed from legislation. So that when a person turns up there and the situation is that we cannot issue it according to Estonian legislation, or else I have to fire my consular officials and bring them to justice (Riigikogu a).

With this, the Toomasson case was exhausted. The next inquiry, with regard to Otto Sahkar, was a case where the person was given an Estonian visa into an exactly similar document as that of Elfriede Toomasson. This was also shown in black and white in the Otto Sahkar's application to the Estonian Ambassador in Moscow, enclosed with the inquiry. Both the reporter and the inquirer either did not notice this or did not want to do so.

The following facts were presented in the inquiry: "Russian border guard does not let Mister Sahkar to Estonia, as there is an Abkhazian stamp in his Russian foreign passport. As is known, Russia does not acknowledge the statehood of Abkhazia. Mister Foreign

¹⁸Only recently, the Minister claimed that it is sufficient for Estonians to reach the state border.

Minister, what kind of measures could you take for solving the problems of Mister Sahkar's and of those who share his fate? Foreign missions of the Republic of Estonia, in their activities, proceed from valid laws and other legislative texts. § 36 of the Constitution stipulates that every Estonian has the right to settle in Estonia" (Niitsoo 1997).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs replied to the inquiry: *An Estonian may be an Estonian citizen and also an alien. There exists no data regarding the Estonian citizenship of the Estonian Otto Sahkar. Pursuant to the Aliens Act, an alien is a person who is a citizen of a foreign state or proved to be a stateless person. As an alien, it is necessary for an Estonian to either obtain a visa or a residence permit for travelling to Estonia. As becomes evident from Otto Sahkar's application, enclosed with the inquiry, he did have a residence permit in Estonia. When Otto Sahkar, in order to arrange his matters, left Estonia for Abkhazia, last year, he was not allowed to return any more. It is possible to conclude from Otto Sahkar's letter that he has the Soviet Union's foreign passport, with the former symbolism of the Soviet Union, which is approved by Abkhazian authorities with their seals and stamps.*

In the inquiry, it has been stated that Russia does not acknowledge the statehood of Abkhazia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can also confirm that Estonia does not acknowledge the statehood of Abkhazia, as the Government of the Republic of Estonia, pursuant to the Foreign Relations Act § 7, paragraph 1, clause 4, acknowledges other states and governments. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have any data whether any other state in the world would acknowledge the statehood of Abkhazia. The Republic of Estonia has acknowledged the Republic of Georgia as an entirety. In the Republic of Georgia, sovereign power is executed by the Government of Georgia, which also issues travel documents. Estonia acknowledges Georgian passports and issues visas for them. In the inquiry, the following is being stated, I quote "Russian border guard did not let Mister Sahkar into Estonia, because there is an Abkhazian stamp in his Russian foreign passport" end of quote. The actual problem is that Russia would not let Otto Sahkar enter Russia, I am certain that Estonian border guard proceeds from the Constitution and allows Estonians into Estonia. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I can suggest Otto Sahkar and other Abkhazian Estonians take the Georgian passport, which is acknowledged as a travel document, both by Russia, Estonia and other states. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does

all it can to maintain and develop good contacts with Georgia, under whose jurisdiction also live Abkhazian Estonians. /—/

But he does have, as becomes evident here, a permanent residence permit in Estonia, so when to come back here, it is the best to come with a Georgian passport, as this would not cause problems for him with the Russian border guard.

JA: *Thank you, I have a feeling that our dialogue in this inquiry is a little more constructive than in the previous one, might you would still repeat, what would be the suggestion for this person who is left in the lurch, how should he organize his weaving through the bureaucracy jungles of three different states, so as to get back to Estonia.*

THI: *Well in case of Estonia, since he allegedly has a permanent residence permit, then in Estonia, there will not be any bureaucracy, but it is recommendable to obtain a Georgian passport, as then, he would not encounter problems with the Russian border guard (Riigikogu a).*

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¹⁹The application was compiled and effected by Marika Mikkor, signed by Otto Sahkar.

²⁰The inquiries were compiled and affected by Viktor Niitsoo, and also signed by Jüri Adams.

²¹This document is the foreign passport of the Soviet Union, in which there is note regarding citizenship "Republic of Abkhazia".

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