

The Last Telephone Conversation with Zhiuli Shartava...

How I wish that the pen would be good and work well, when I am writing this letter, to nullify somehow the assessment of a great patriot, an incomparable organizer, an outstanding personality, a Georgian man born for heroism adorned with all dignity, to somehow come close to a worthy word for Mr. Zhiuli. ... "Happy is the one who gives his talent for the welfare of his homeland without regret, his name will remain in eternity", wrote Chabua Amirejibi. Mr. Zhiuli was the continuer of the gene of those worthy Georgians who knew well that the Word is the Lord and worship and service to Him is a divine deed. Today, many speak of Mr. Zhiuli's great contribution to the world. I know from the Gospel of Matthew: At the Last Supper, Christ told Peter (his closest apostle), "Before the rooster crows three times, you will deny me three times." Peter did not believe his teacher: "This will not happen, even if the whole world betrays you, I will not betray you." Peter failed to keep his promise. He denied Christ three times before the rooster crowed three times. Unfortunately, many of his friends betrayed Zhiuli, and when I recall his works, I can doubt the truth of the Gospel. I only wanted to say a few words about one aspect - his loyal friendship and unshakable humanity. I also want to emphasize: that I am proud to have been a comrade-in-arms of Zhiuli Shartava. I did not lose touch with him while working in the Internal Affairs Agency. He often used to call me. Three calls were especially noteworthy for me, which took place in October 1975, August 1977, and September 1993. I will never forget the last telephone conversation with Zhiuli Shartava. I remember it was September 18th, 1993, it would have been about noon. At that time, I worked as the head of the Gali District Criminal Police and was in the territory of the village of Achigvari with my friends. Zhiuli called and greeted me, encouraged us once again, and gave a piece of advice, and finally said one word to me: "Vechqara" - a Megrelian word, which in Georgian means not to rush. He had the right to say that. I admit that sometimes I was in a hurry when making decisions. This happened when I confronted the then Minister of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia, Klimov, and as a sign of protest, I put on the table the warrant card he had given me and left work. The reason was that I had fulfilled his assignment and solved a notably serious crime. Instead of gratitude, I received a reprimand from him. I later learned that their goal was not to solve the crime but to extort money from the exposed individuals. I was unemployed for almost a year. In June 1977, a district party conference was held, attended by the Deputy Chairman of the Government, Mr. Nodar Chitanava. Several speakers focused on the issue of my departure from the internal organs and it was said that a person who fought corruption was dismissed from the internal affairs body. On the advice of one of the speakers, namely Ale Gvakharia, deputy editor of the newspaper "Lenineli", I addressed the President of the country, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, and met with him.

My statement was written to Mr. N. Sajaia for a response. The issue was studied and submitted to the Bureau of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Party for consideration. I proved my truthfulness. They restored me to my old place. At that time, Zhiuli was next to me. I could not imagine the telephone conversation of September 18th,

1993, which took place on Zhiuli's initiative, would be the last. How many years would fly by like a flash of lightning. And on September 27th, 1993, the patriot man, immensely in love with his homeland heroically met death. It hurts more when thinking I was not with him in those moments... Zhiuli Shartava belongs to the Georgian ancestors who unhesitatingly sacrificed their lives, all their strength and talent to save their native country. It must be said that Zhiuli made a huge contribution to the construction of the immortal temple of his nation. He was not only a leader of the youth but also their true supporter. On the Central Committee bureau or at plenums, he often had to fight to defend his position.

The young people knew very well what supporter and shield this man was, and they fearlessly said what they wanted. Mr. Zhiuli took the blow upon himself - it was this joint dedication, sometimes even self-sacrifice, that was probably the reason for Mr. Zhiuli's amazing popularity and universal love. On his initiative, I was assigned to inspect the Gudauta Komsomol regional organization and prepare the relevant material. I did not refuse consciously. I made an objective conclusion. No one cut off my arm in the organizational department of the Komsomol Central Committee but they rejected me with disapproval, saying –“We were wrong to let you handle that matter. If you had asked for someone else, nothing would have worked out for you, because a negative assessment of the deeds done by Mr. Alexander Ankhab would have been fabricated, not real, I answered”.

This is Ankhab who was there when ours entered Sukhumi, he did not have time to leave Sukhumi, he met Karkarashvili, and on his orders, our people saw him off... they allowed him to go over to the opposing side, and then when Gocha Karkarashvili died in Gagra (this happened two months later), Ankhab did everything to reburial the body. Ankhab personally brought the corpse to our guys. When Zhiuli read the report I prepared, I saw that he liked it, smiled, and praised me even more. The author of these lines has witnessed many terrible stories over the past 40 years. The cities and villages of Abkhazia were burning before my eyes. Many of my relatives and friends died. The flourishing villages built by the hands of hundreds of Georgians were lost. The graves of my ancestors were left unattended, I became an exile and had to start life anew, but I have never had such a hard time as I am having now, when writing these lines I recall the brave and noble man of the past, the unmistakable Colchis, Zhiuli Shartava.

Life brought us together in the 70s in the building of the Komsomol Central Committee. I was summoned to an interview regarding the election of the dismissed secretary of the Komsomol Committee of the Transport Faculty of the Georgian Polytechnic Institute. The first meeting left a great impression on me. Zhiuli questioned me in detail about everything,

even the small things. He also asked me what was happening at the faculty, whether students were involved in various activities, what kind of support was from the administration, and if they needed anything. After graduating from the institute, in September 1975, I took students to the construction of a porcelain factory. It was Sunday. I still remember well when the first secretary of the Zugdidi city party committee, Gramiton Kvaratskhelia, and the first secretary of the Gali district party committee, Bakur Gulua, came to inspect the construction. They toured the construction site, met with the students, asked if they had any problems, and left.

That same day, Zhuli Shartava called me on the phone, and said, that the Gali district committee secretary, Bakur Gulua, was waiting for me and maybe I would see him. The next day, I went to Gulua, and he offered me a job at the Gali district committee. I still remember one word from what he said, "This is your district," which was enough for me to agree. Zhuli Shartava called me again and asked me what decision I had made. I explained everything, and he liked my decision. For a while, I worked as the head of the organizational department at the Gali district committee and after as the second secretary of the district committee. In September 1977, one fine day, I was summoned to the party district committee bureau and told that I had to transfer to work as the deputy chief of the district police. Of course, I was surprised at where the graduates of the Faculty of Transport and where the police were. This first irritated Konstantine Zakaria, the third secretary of the party's regional committee. He said the party ordered it and the decision would not be changed.

The matter had been agreed with Zhiuli Shartava. I contacted Zhiuli again and explained everything, and he told me that he had made a different decision, but it was up to me. I also agreed and went to work at the Gali police station. I remember another meeting. It was May 1980, then I worked as the deputy head of the Gali MIA department. I had many friends in Abkhazia, among whom were Abkhazians. Zhiuli called me and said that he and his boys were coming to Abkhazia in the next few days. Due to the current situation, they had planned a meeting with the Komsomol activists. At that time, my friend Sergey Bagafshi worked as the secretary of the Komsomol regional committee. He expressed his desire to attend this meeting, and I agreed with pleasure.

I also remember well that when he arrived in Sukhumi. The situation had changed so much that the text of the speech he had prepared earlier had to be changed. I saw how he dictated his speech to the typist. This meeting was held in a very tense atmosphere in the session hall of the party's district committee. This was a period when the symptoms of the hidden confrontation between Georgian and Abkhazian youth were obvious. Instead of giving a

speech, Zhiuli conducted a dialogue in the question-and-answer mode. It can be said that his answers to all questions were convincing. The usual caution was felt in the answers, although he emphasized that Abkhazia is an inseparable part of Georgia.

He also emphasized that there is a lot to be done for a person to leave his modest mark. The problem of Abkhazia will not be solved in a month, but we must think about what we are leaving for future generations. He always drew attention to the need for an objective assessment of the past, and the special role of the residents of the Gali region in resolving conflicts. After the conflicts, I would like to end my letter with the words of the national hero, Zhiuli Shartava: There is Georgia on both sides of the barricades, these two Georgias are not two horses or two chairs, this is one whole Georgia, with its pains, sorrows, sayings, monoliths, and bells, and with its past.

Jemal Gabelia