

The Scars of Nagorno Karabagh



1988, beginning of the war between Armenian people of Karabagh and Azerbaijan. In 1921, Karabagh has been given to Azerbaijan by Soviet Union, even if the majority of the population was Armenian. But Karabaghtsis want to belong to Armenia. 1994, cease-fire. The war has made 30 000 victims on both sides. 7000 Armenian soldiers passed away. And thousands of them were severely injured. 16 years after, they still have to deal with their disabilities.



Artsroun (Artiom) Vanyan

Before working as a soldier, Artiom used to be an acrobat in a circus in Yerevan. He has then served in the Soviet Army and has joined the Nagorno Karabagh army in 1991. He has been injured in January 1994 when an antitank mine exploded nearby. The mine snatched his right leg and severely damaged his left knee, which first was supposed to be amputated too. He has no prosthesis because the needed surgery is too dangerous. “In the beginning, I thought it was just one more wound. I took my leg with me to leave the battlefield. When I saw my knee, I just thought I didn’t know how white human bones were”. Artiom doesn’t regret to have served his country but has sometimes the feeling that this war was pointless, since Karabagh doesn’t have more freedom today. Artiom is now married and is the father of four children.





“It doesn’t hurt. It’s just that sometimes, I feel my leg, the one that is missing, and it tickles”

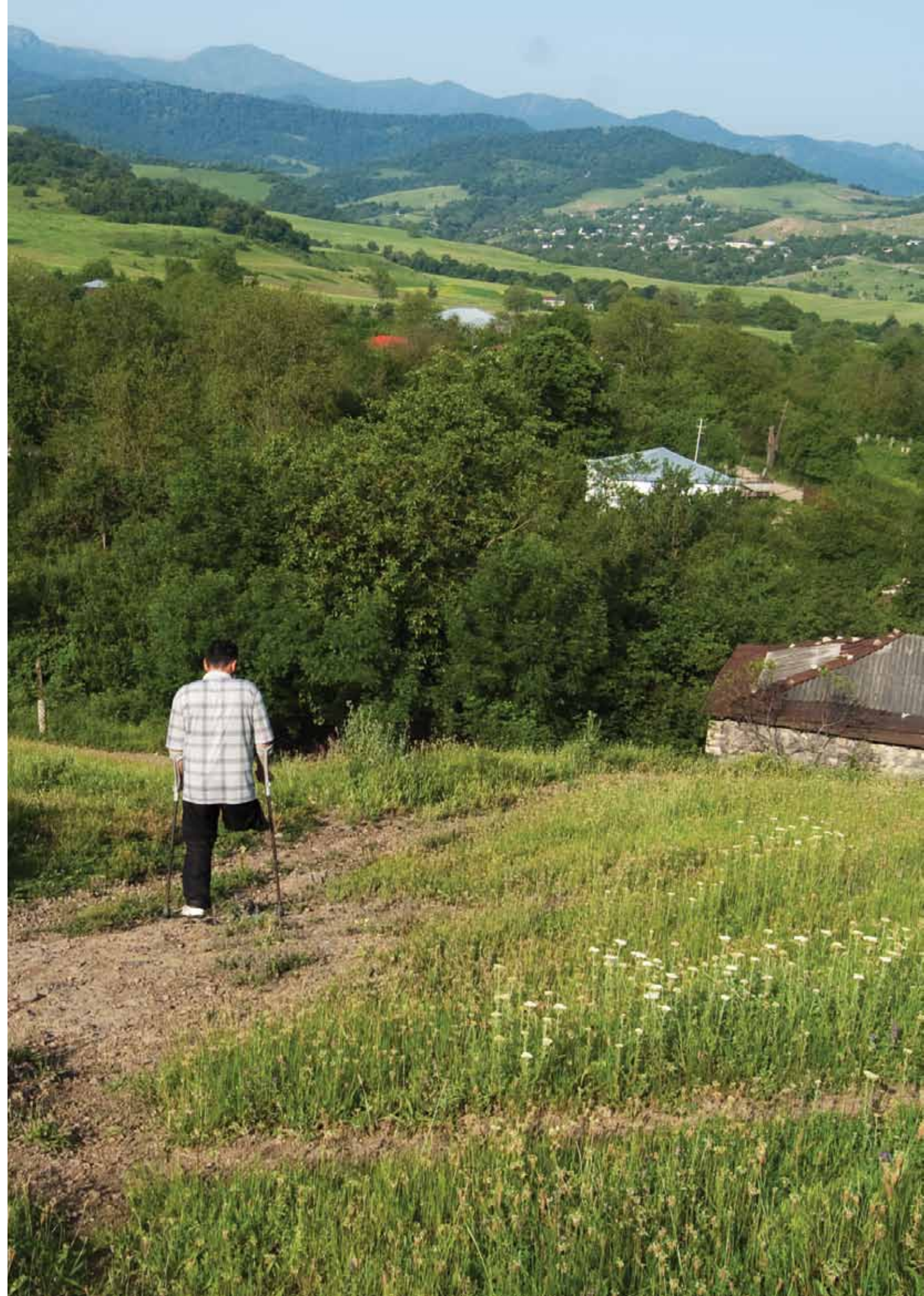
Left: As a former soldier with disability, Artsoun received an adapted car from the government, partially financed by the Armenian diaspora. He spends a lot of time taking care of this car, repairing, looking for spare parts and spends a lot of money in gas.





There is no running water in the village. People go to the spring to get water for shower, cooking... Like thousands of people in Karabagh, Artsroun has received a house. But it's too far away from his wife's work. The whole family lives then in one single room, lended by a friend. As a first degree disabled veteran Artiom gets 70 000 drams (150€) from the government. This pension is the only salary he can get, disabled people of the first degree are not

allowed to work. But even if he doesn't have the right to work, Artsroun is busy days and nights trying to find some money to help his family. His disability doesn't prevent him to be very active. This summer, Artstroun is going to work as a guide and a taxi driver for a group of tourists, even if he is not allowed to make business from his car. During two weeks, he will make enough money to offer gifts, clothes, better food... to his family.



Sassoun Alexanian

Sassoun was hit by a shell that exploded on the ground in 1993. He was barely 20. Today, he has psychological problems because of this, and struggles with them daily. “There is no place to go, nothing to do here”. The only way to avoid having to sit on the painful wounds due to pressure points is by spending almost all his time lying in bed, on his stomach - . But even if he could stay longer in his wheelchair, he doesn’t really want to. “What for?” he asks. Some parts of the shell are still in his spinal cord, which makes surgery much too dangerous. The most difficult part of his condition is idleness. In Shushi, where he lives, there is no possible activity for him. Once or twice a year, he goes to Crimeean Peninsula in Ukraine, for a treatment in a sanatorium. There, he meets people with the same kind of disabilities, talks, plays cards, which is a real breath of fresh air in his everyday life. “I’m ashamed. I know how I used to be and how I am now”, he says.





Six persons live in the little flat: Sassoun, his sister, and the family of his brother, his wife and two kids. The life of the family is organised around Sassoun's bed. Television, meals, games... everything takes place in the living room. The atmosphere of the room is oppressive and Sassoun smokes a least thirty cigarettes a day. Television is always switched on. In and out of

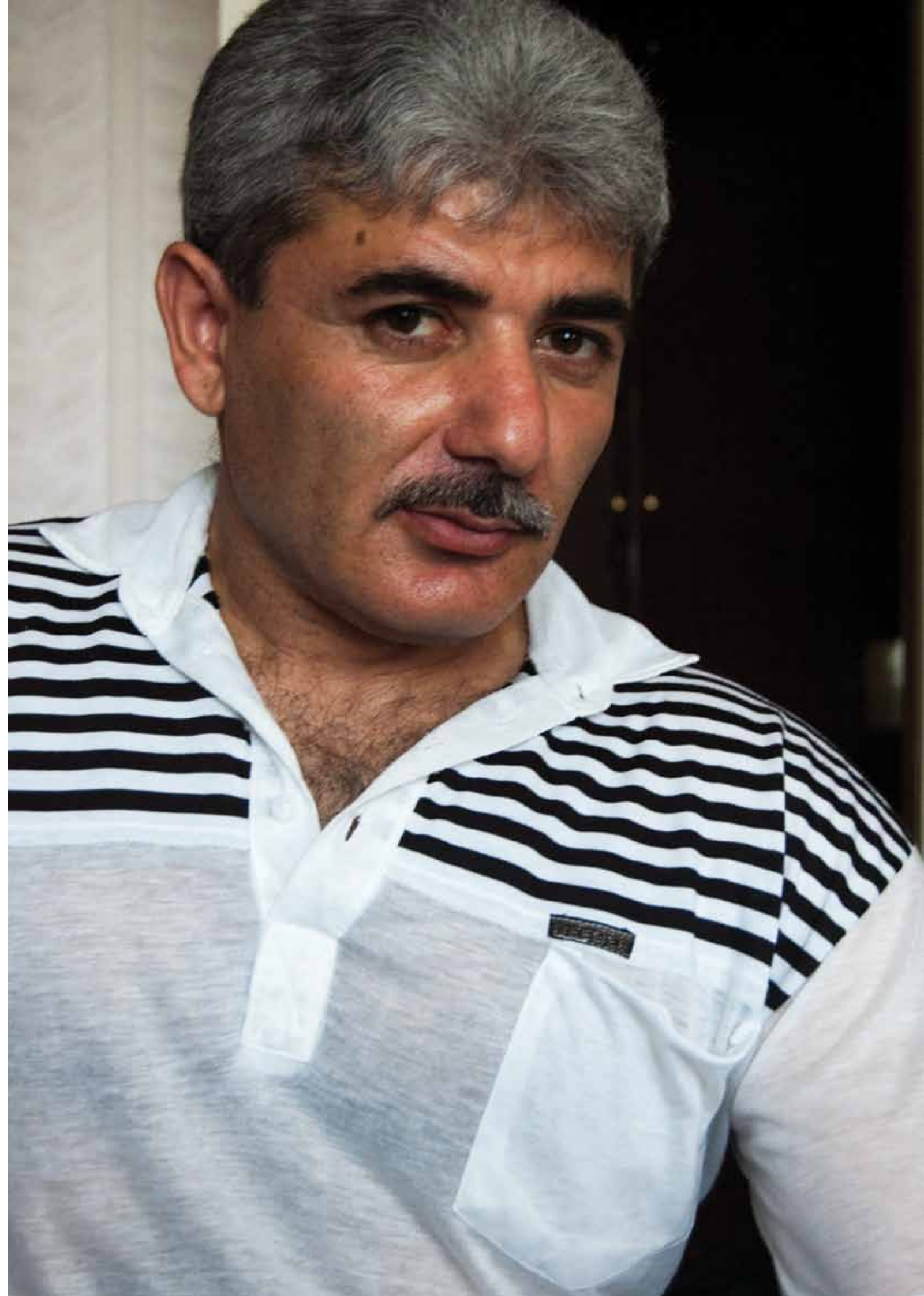
the building, nothing is adapted for wheelchairs. Most of the roads of Shushi, his little town, aren't tarmaced. And Sassoun's flat is on the third floor. He has been offered a room on the ground floor but in Stepanakert, (12 kilometers away from Shushi) but it is not possible for him to move there as he is not able to live alone.



Edouard (Edik) Andryan

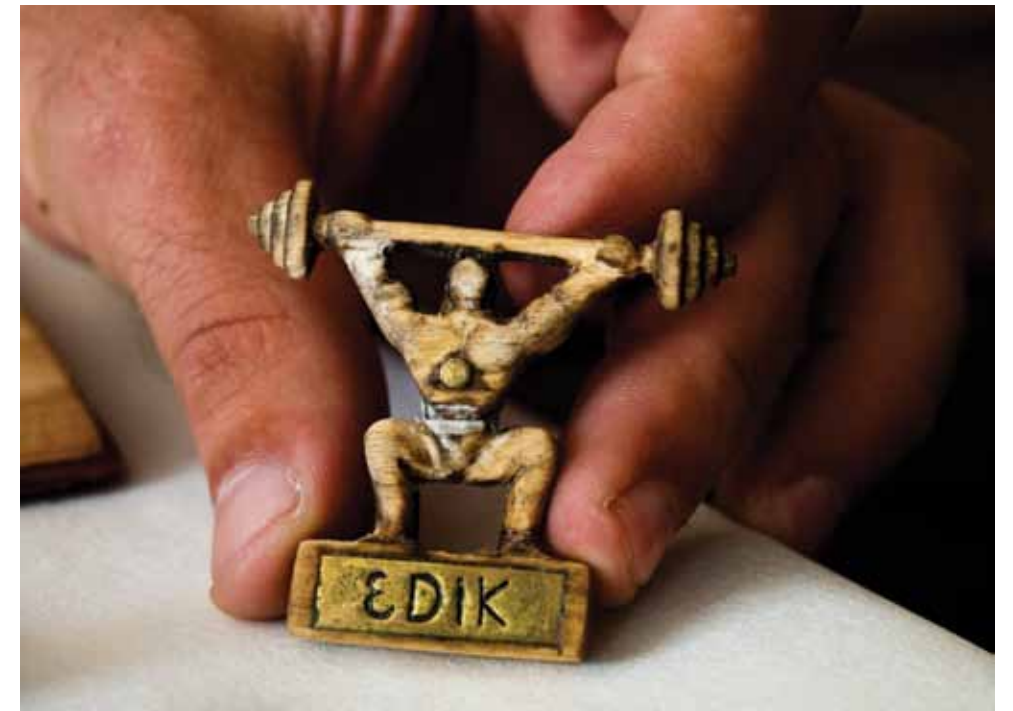
Born in 1968, Edik has been injured in 1993. He remembers: “I was put together with dead people and then a doctor noticed that I was still alive. It’s true that I was worse than some of the dead”. Edik doesn’t regret to have served in the army and says he’s ready to work again for the army if the conflict starts again. “I still have two hands and a head, I can be useful”. Both of Edik’s legs are entirely paralyzed. He considers himself happy to be still alive, while all the other guys as badly injured as him are dead. It’s his will that gave him the possibility to maintain a good shape.

Former champion of body-building, he keeps doing weightlifting and take part in competitions. It is his way to not be discouraged about his condition and keep his morals high.





“The best medal I got, it was in 2008, it’s my car. Thanks to it, I have been able to beat my disability”.



Left up: Edik goes to the rehabilitation centre in Stepanakert at least twice a week to train. This centre, first entirely financed by a British donor, the baroness Caroline Cox, is today also subsidized by the Health Ministry of Karabagh.

Right up: after his accident, Edik was sent to Yerevan for the health care. There he learned woodcarving and used to practice during ten years.

Right middle: Edik’s mother used to be a nurse. After her son’s accident, she stopped working to take care of him. She has to be at home almost all the time for him.



