



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Conflict Prevention Centre
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Food for Thought Paper

Towards a Strategy for Reconciliation in the OSCE Area

Introduction

During discussions at the OSCE Security Days 2012, reconciliation was identified as a building block for working towards a security community in the OSCE area. While lack of trust was identified as a key challenge in achieving this goal, reconciliation was mentioned as a response that could help to overcome the divisive memories which continue to feed mistrust and suspicion. With the debates during the Security Days in mind, the Secretary General in his Report to the Permanent Council on the Conflict Cycle (SEC.GAL/137/12) on 16 July also highlighted the importance of reconciliation for post-conflict rehabilitation as well as conflict prevention and conflict resolution. During the Security Days, successful reconciliation, including the establishment of transitional justice, was identified as being key for durable peace.

Reconciliation as Concept

Reconciliation as a concept is associated with different meanings and processes; hence there is no general agreement among academics and practitioners on its precise meaning. In its most frequent use, reconciliation relates to dealing with the past, and therefore centres primarily on issues related to acknowledgement of perpetrating acts and transitional justice. Reconciliation also stresses the pivotal roles of remembrance and memory as well as overcoming historical myths and legacies.

A working definition may describe reconciliation as a process that aims to overcome conflicts by breaking the vicious cycle of mutual misperceptions and divisive memories, often resulting in violence, through the transformation of political and societal relationships. These should be based on notions of trust, equality, acceptance of differences, positive perceptions of each other, partnership, active friendship and mutual or joint interests. In this respect, reconciliation does not only have a political, and thus pragmatic side, but also a cognitive dimension to the process in which patterns of historically rooted animosities are to be broken and transformed into constructive relations by changing perceptions.

Reconciliation as Process

Reconciliation should be viewed as an on-going and continuous process that allows for the creation of structures and procedures for establishing constructive and peaceful relations.

Reconciliation can proceed on inter- and intra-state levels or the linkage thereof, as conflict among communities in a state frequently affect relations between states. It can and actually should take place on various levels: official, societal and local. In other words, reconciliation processes allow and ideally should strive for the connection between a variety of actors, be it on inter- and/or intra-state levels.

Reconciliation can serve as an instrument for conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation as well as a confidence-building tool in situations, where conflicts are not imminent, but relations are still strained due to previous conflicts. The explicit aim here is to change perceptions of each other to overcome mistrust and divisive historical memories and legacies.

Reconciliation – Lessons Learned and Best Practices

In its final report ‘Toward a Euro-Atlantic Security Community’ in February 2012, the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative (EASI) emphasized that historical reconciliation will be key for the establishment of a genuine security community. Unresolved protracted conflicts, however, will remain a stumbling block to such process. It is therefore crucial that already existing efforts toward historical reconciliation are further explored.

Among OSCE participating States there is already a wealth of experiences on reconciliation processes on inter- and intra-state levels. The Irish OSCE Chairmanship has shared the experience of reconciliation in Northern Ireland with participating States in a seminar this year. Other examples of historical reconciliation in the OSCE area include the experience of Germany and France, Germany and Poland or Poland and Russia, to name just a few. Also the European integration process serves as a good example demonstrating how reconciliation works in practice. The OSCE has been involved in a number of concrete confidence-building and reconciliation efforts through its field operations and institutions stretching from South Eastern Europe to Central Asia. Efforts in this regard are on-going, and the Workshop will provide an opportunity to explore these cases in more detail.

As to lessons learned and best practices in past and present reconciliation experiences, the following core processes can be identified:

- (1) Humanizing relations between leaders and their respective societies;
- (2) Accepting each other’s vital interests and needs (e.g., need for security);
- (3) Creating co-operative linkages, either on the procedural or structural levels or a combination thereof (e.g., cultural exchange programmes; bilateral and/or regional economic co-operation or development);
- (4) Building a domestic environment conducive to transforming relationships and achieving peace, especially through the facilitation of people-to-people contacts;
- (5) Respecting and recognizing the heritage, history and culture of each other (e.g., through educational reforms; cultural interaction);
- (6) Facilitating historical discourse and the development of new and shared narratives as well as shared visions for the future (e.g., historical commissions; textbook revisions);
- (7) Respecting the need for historical memory and remembrance (e.g., through commemorations; memorials; other symbolic acts and gestures).

Elements of the OSCE Reconciliation ‘Strategy’

Based on the above, the following elements could be used to build a possible OSCE reconciliation ‘strategy’:

- (1) *Encourage comprehensive patterns of interaction*: Reconciliation processes should be as comprehensive as possible, taking all levels, (i.e. inter- and intra-state) as well as various tracks (i.e. official/non-official; formal/informal) into account.
- (2) *Identify the core processes*: Reconciliation rests on a variety of core processes which should form part of a reconciliation strategy. An extensive list of such fundamental processes should be collected from successful cases of reconciliation.
- (3) *Make use of varied instruments*: The widest possible use should be made of the various instruments that reconciliation processes have to offer: from symbolic gestures and acts to declaratory measures to other procedural methods, such as enhancing people-to-people contacts, to more structural frameworks that facilitate bilateral and regional linkages relating to common areas of interest.
- (4) *Muster support of the OSCE community*: Reconciliation processes should have the support of other actors in the region or other actors, such as international, regional, and or sub-regional actors. Such actors could not only provide an impetus for a reconciliation process to begin, but also incentives for it to continue.
- (5) *Promote institutionalization*: Reconciliation must become institutionalized over time and not remain a process that is linked or dependent on particular political elites in office. The creation of institutionalized frameworks, for example, by means of a treaty, can be considered (e.g., Franco-German Elysee Treaty)

Prospects and Challenges: A Wider OSCE Discussion

It is crucial that there is a wider and comprehensive discussion on the prospects and challenges that reconciliation holds in the work towards a security community in the OSCE. The following questions may guide such deliberations and inform the debate:

- (1) How do participating States see the process of reconciliation as a mean toward creating a genuine security community in the OSCE area? What are the challenges that need to be addressed and overcome?
- (2) What accounts for successful reconciliation? What are some core fundamental processes that can increase the prospects of successful reconciliation? What are the main obstacles to overcome to engage in a successful reconciliation process?
- (3) What particular instruments and mechanisms can participating States propose that assist in facilitating reconciliation in the OSCE area?
- (4) What projects and activities are participating States already sponsoring in promoting reconciliation in the OSCE area? How do they evaluate progress achieved? What hinders the reconciliation process?

- (5) What pilot projects can participating States propose to move reconciliation forward in the OSCE area? How could the OSCE framework and OSCE executive structures be used to advance reconciliation processes in the OSCE area?