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Session III - Towards Reconciliation: addressing the protracted conflicts and revitalising dialogue.

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Reconciliation has become an important part of our political vocabulary. As a concept it covers a vast array of activities. Chancellor Willy Brandt's silent apology in 1970 in front of the monument of the Warsaw Ghetto was a spectacular act of reconciliation. At the other end of the scale are the many invisible initiatives to bring young people together in the Balkans and to overcome the scars of war. The growing emphasis on reconciliation reflects the fact that often durable peace cannot be achieved with military means or even by political agreements only, but requires efforts at so many levels, along so many dimensions and with so many participants.

That is certainly the case in Afghanistan. And hopefully, we can learn from the Afghan experience. In particular, we can draw lessons with regard to the need to understand the society in which we operate. There is a gap between the level of engagement and the level of understanding of the Afghan society. The costs of this gap, in terms of human suffering and financial costs and loss of time, have been tremendous.

The title "Dealing with protracted conflict and revitalizing the dialogue" is quite suitable for describing the challenges in Afghanistan. It is a protracted conflict, with disagreements inside the Afghan political establishment, inside the insurgency and the international community concerning the merits of a peace process. There is no lack of potential spoilers. The longer the conflict has lasted, the deeper lines of division have become and the more difficult it seems to move a reconciliation process forward. It is a process that will have to cover several partly overlapping phases, where the international community will have to calibrate its involvement carefully. I will not recommend any specific role for the OSCE, but leave it to you to compare the agenda with OSCE's experience and consider if there are areas where the organisation could be useful in a complementary way.

First, confidence-building; effort to establish a level of confidence has been made for some time – but none of the parties have yet convinced the others that "talking" takes priority over "fighting" and that the search for a political solution is sincere. Let me add; we are not only suffering from a lack of trust, but also from misperceptions with regard to the intentions and interests of the "other side" – who they are and what drives them. Such misconceptions led us to ignore the complexity of the relationship between the Taliban and Al Qaeda and their conflicting interests.

Nevertheless, over the last four years, very serious efforts have also been made. Taliban have been delisted from the 1267 sanctions list and detainees have been released. The Taliban has facilitated the implementation of some humanitarian projects, such as polio vaccination programmes. In September 2008, the level of hostilities was reduced by 70% - albeit only for one day - following a UN initiative and positive responses from president Karzai, the ISAF commander and Mullah Omar.

Further confidence-building measures are required to demonstrate readiness to de-escalate the military confrontation. In this context local ceasefire arrangements, even of a limited duration, could be considered. The Taliban should undertake measures to convince a skeptical international and Afghan audience that it will not seek to reverse progress that has been made since 2002.

Second; a sufficient level of national consensus that includes different parts of the Afghan society is required. Disagreements within the Afghan political establishment have – as I mentioned - deepened. Without such consensus, negotiations could easily be derailed or the outcome would not be respected. Greater international attention has to be given to the potential spoilers and reluctant leaders from various parts of the Afghan society, including representatives of different ethnic groups. A continued international military presence will also help to establish and maintain the national consensus required.

Third; there will have to be a process of direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the insurgency. The Taliban continues to insist that it will not negotiate with what it sees as a puppet government. Unfortunately, the international community has often reinforced this impression, by ignoring the advice of the government and imposing its own strategies and decisions. The negotiations for a political settlement can only take place between Afghans, facilitated to the extent required by a trusted international representative. The agenda will also have to be set by the Afghans, but will include the future distribution of power and political order, the role of Islam and the need to respect the progress made in the Afghan society since 2002. And it will have to lay down the provisions for the reintegration of insurgency fighters. Any agreement imposed from outside will be unsustainable. What I find most disturbing is a tendency among some in the West to design solutions from far away; decentralisation or – even more extreme – division of the country, which would mean along ethnic lines. This has to be an Afghan process.

Fourth; a negotiated solution must lead to the reintegration of former fighters into the community, including how to meet social and economic requirements at the local level, in villages and local communities. Such reintegration will require confidence that a peaceful settlement will be broadly respected and that victims and perpetrators can be prevented from pursuing policies of revenge. This process of reintegration of fighters will also basically have to be an Afghan affair. But it will require financial means provided by the international community. The reintegration fund that was established in 2010 will be a valuable tool as an instrument to underpin the outcome of a political agreement.

And fifth, any negotiation and reconciliation process will take place in a complicated regional context, where neighbours can be spoilers as well as facilitators. Their legitimate interests will

have to be addressed on the basis of respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and where Afghanistan's international status is accepted by countries in the region. A framework has been established to discuss these regional challenges. Let me add that a peaceful Afghanistan opens up for unprecedented regional economic growth.

Reconciliation in Afghanistan is more multi-faceted and complex than any other such process I am familiar with. It becomes even more complex with the withdrawal of international forces now accelerating. Hopefully, all parties will conclude that as the international forces prepare to leave, the alternative to a political settlement could be a resumption of a wider civil war and that they have more to gain through a political process than by continuing the armed struggle. Limited time remains before presidential and provincial elections process will absorb most of the political oxygen in Afghanistan. However, these elections also offer an opportunity for the insurgency to engage in a national, political process – provided it is ready for a political settlement.

Finally, reconciliation will require readiness by the Afghan government to embrace reform in a way that addresses the legitimate grievances of an alienated part of the population. And it will require a discussion on how to address the crimes of the past. Many Afghans see the need for accountability as critical to any reconciliation process. Different societies have addressed this question in different ways. It cannot be ignored, but will also have to be debated among Afghans.