



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Workshop “Towards a Strategy for Reconciliation in the OSCE Area”

Vienna, 18 December

Panel 2: Historical Reconciliation – Lessons Learned and Best Practices

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Extended version

INTRODUCTION

1. I will try to do 2 things in the time allotted: define what I mean by reconciliation; and set out what I call the ten principles of successful reconciliation with concrete examples from Franco-German, German-Polish and German-Czech relations.
2. By "reconciliation" I mean the process of building long-term peace between former enemies through bilateral institutions across governments and societies. Reconciliation involves the development of friendship, trust, empathy and magnanimity (not necessarily forgiveness). Reconciliation is not an easily-approached terminal condition, but rather an ongoing, lengthy, non-linear process. This is a maximal definition of reconciliation that is different from the minimal definition of peaceful coexistence, or the absence of war. It assumes “security community” embraces both soft power and hard power elements.

THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF RECONCILIATION

- **1.** Reconciliation does not suggest harmony, but rather contains and manages disagreement, conflict and contestation in a cooperative framework. In the Franco-German, German-Polish and German-Czech cases, German unification in 1989-90 presented a political crisis in relations that was overcome by dialogue and deliberation through one of two means: well-established bureaucratic channels (the Franco-German case); leadership connections (Franco-German, German-Czech and German-Polish examples).
- **2.** Reconciliation is driven by both moral and pragmatic motivations. Morality expressed itself in Germany's relations with France through a sense of responsibility to build peace as an antidote to an embedded history of war; with Poland and Czechoslovakia, it was a moral obligation to make up for what they had lost first through WWII and later through communism. Pragmatically, with France, Germany stood to be rehabilitated and returned most of its sovereignty; with Poland and the Czech Republic, Germany earned stability to its East. A combination of morality and pragmatism is necessary in reconciliation.
- **3.** Reconciliation hinges on the mutual recognition of the grievances at the heart of past conflict. In all three cases, this happened early on through international or bilateral treaties. Mutual acknowledgement is a less demanding requirement than a formal apology. While an early signal was given in treaties (1970; 1972), the complete processes were not straightforward in the two Eastern European cases: it took 5 years to negotiate the 1997 German-Czech declaration (finally concluded because of the intense

spadework between leading politicians and societal luminaries) and a difficult road for Germany to recognize the German-Polish border de jure in 1990 (encouraged by the US). Monetary compensation to individuals was an important part of the acknowledgement, starting early in the French case, occurring in the medium term in the Polish case, and only much later in the Czech case (1998). Slave and forced labor payments did not occur until 2000.

- **4.** Reconciliation involves multiple levels and multiple actors, not only governments but also societies and Non-Governmental Actors (NGOs), not only central governments but also regional and local entities. Democracy and open, porous societies speed up the process of reconciliation, as demonstrated in the German-Czech and German-Polish cases, with the latter being quicker because of some existing connections before 1989.
- **5.** Non-governmental actors, often in the victim country, usually take the first step, ahead of governments, for example the initiatives of French Catholics and Protestants with their German brethren after 1945; the overture of the Polish Catholic bishops to the German Catholic bishops in 1965; Vaclav Havel's 1989-1990 apology to the Germans for the excesses of the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia after World War II.
- **6.** Reconciliation entails the building of governmental and societal institutions that confer equality of both rights and responsibilities, even if structural equality is absent. The Franco-German case has the highest level of governmental institutionalization. In all three cases, bilateral entities dealing with defense and economics were created early on, but have also involved

bilateral institutions for the environment, science, culture, cross-border affairs. These institutions' daily work behind the scenes can be essential shock absorbers, preventing the relationship from being derailed when there are political conflicts, such as between Germany and Poland from 2005 until 2007 and between 2001 and 2004 in the German-Czech case, in both instances over historical issues of compensation claims and expulsion. Joint cabinet consultations, as in the German-French and German-Polish cases, are the height of institutionalization.

Institutionalized civil society connections are essential, again as shock absorbers, and range across all aspects of society: religion, culture, economics, trade unions, education, science. One example from all three cases is the work of the Goethe Institute, including its language programs.

- 7. History, and especially difficult history, cannot be a mere footnote in the relationship, but rather must act as a constant companion to structure a fundamentally different relationship from the past. This takes place in bilateral textbook commissions, and their recommendations regarding textbook content (all 3 cases); in joint textbooks (already achieved in the Franco-German case, underway in the German-Polish case; in German Historical Institutes (Paris and Warsaw); and in the German-Czech Joint Historians' Commission. The process of dialogue and interaction is as important as the outcome. Even though the German-Polish first recommendations of 1976 were not popular in either country, the fact of the commission led to other bilateral institutions in the 1970s and to a highly fruitful exchange on history issues after 1989. The

purpose is not a unified or common history, but rather the minimization of differences and parallel histories.

Symbolic events that commemorate history or affirm a new relationship are crucial: the June 2004 involvement of Chancellor Schroeder in the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day; the November 1989 joint mass celebrated by Chancellor Kohl and Prime Minister Mazowiecki; President Roman Herzog's April 1997 address to the Czech parliament.

- **8.** Reconciliation requires political leadership and vision that can negotiate the inevitable opposition to a new framework for interaction and partnership. Key is the development of personal relations between leaders: de Gaulle-Adenauer, Schroeder-Chirac; Schmidt-Gierek, Merkel-Tusk; Dienstbier-Genscher, Havel-von Weizsaecker.
- **9.** Reconciliation needs a regional organization to buttress bilateral partnerships. A regional organization provides a forum for dialogue, prevents the two sides from ignoring one another, allows both sides to be involved in rule-making, and, through the equality of membership, can reduce asymmetries between the parties. The European Community/Union provided this function for Franco-German relations from the early 1950s and for German-Polish and German-Czech relations since 2004. During the Cold War, the CSCE was an important venue for exchange in German-Polish and German-Czech relations.
- **10.** Young people need to be drawn into relations of reconciliation, so that reconciliation can be perpetuated with generational change. Youth exchange

and school partnerships and university exchanges have been mechanisms in all three cases, as has Action Reconciliation for German youth to confront the past in partner countries through volunteer work. Youth parliaments or for a can also be useful to engage and empower young people. As with history textbooks, the purpose is not homogenization of views, but understanding differences.

CONCLUSION

1. World War II and the Holocaust were unique events, but one can still learn lessons from the mechanisms Germany devised after 1949 to confront its past.
2. Some of these mechanisms may exist in infant form in OSCE regions in need of reconciliation. We should nurture them. Where they don't exist, we should promote them.