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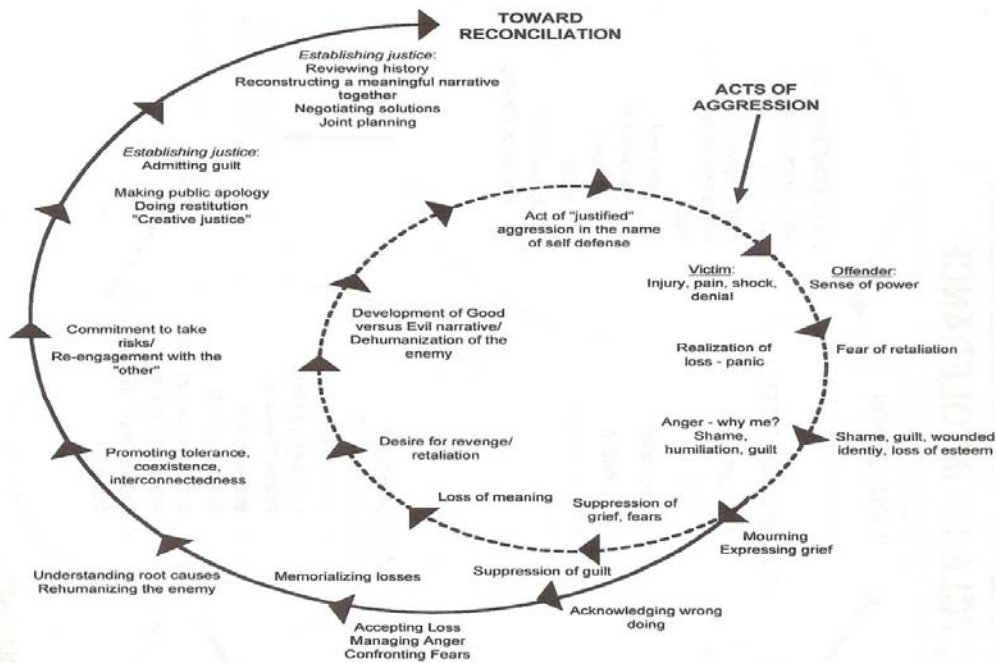
Session IV - Towards Reconciliation: a new vision for the OSCE?

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Reconciliation is hard. Do I want to be reconciled to someone who has done me harm? I may want an apology, compensation, an eye for an eye, but why would I want to be reconciled to something I regard as wrong, harmful, and even evil?

At the personal level, I may be able to escape the need for reconciliation. I can harbor continuing resentment, I can emigrate, I can join a veterans' organization and continue to dislike my enemy. I can hope that my enemy is prosecuted for his crimes and is sent away for a long time. I don't really have to accept his behavior. Many don't.

But at the societal level lack of reconciliation has consequences. It is a formula for more violence. If we remain trapped in the inner circle of this classic diagram, we end up in a cycle of violence. Victims, feeling loss and the desire for revenge, end up committing aggression against those they believe to be perpetrators, who eventually react with violence:



Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Revenge

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 adapted from EMU, Conflict Transformation Program; based on model by Olga Botcharova

What takes us out of the cycle of violence and retaliation? The critical step is acknowledging wrong doing, a step full of risk for perpetrators and meaning for victims. But once wrong doing is acknowledged, victims can begin to accept loss, manage anger and confront fears. This initiates a virtuous cycle of mutual understanding, re-engagement, admission of guilt, steps toward justice and writing a common history.

What has all this got to do with OSCE? It seems to me that in at least some parts of the OSCE area, we are still stuck in the inner cycle of violence, despite a good deal of dialogue. The vital step of acknowledging wrong doing has either been skipped entirely or given short shrift.

I know the situation in the Balkans best. We aren't really past the step of acknowledging wrongdoing in Bosnia and Kosovo, and I fear even in Greece and Macedonia we are far from breaking out of a cycle that could become violent. At the societal level, the situation seems less than fully reconciled in Turkey, the Caucasus, Moldova and I imagine other places that I know less well.

So can, and should, reconciliation be a new vision for the OSCE? That question is for the leadership of the organization and the member states to decide, but here are a few questions I would ask if I were entertaining the proposition:

1. How pervasive is the need for reconciliation in the OSCE?
2. Would it make a real difference if reconciliation could be established as a norm?
3. If it did become a new norm, how would we know when it is achieved?
4. What would we do differently from what we do today?

I was in Kosovo earlier this month. There is little sign there of reconciliation: it is difficult for both the Kosovar and the Serbian political leaderships to meet and talk with each other, they have reached agreements under pressure from the EU and US that are largely unimplemented, OSCE and other international organizations feel they have to maintain substantial operations there because of the risk of future violence. There is little acknowledgement of wrong doing. The memorials are all one-sided—I drove past many well-marked KLA graveyards—we have definitely not reached the outer circle yet.

Would it make a difference if there *were* acknowledgement of wrong doing? Yes, it would. It would have to be mutual, since a good deal of harm has been done on both sides, even if the magnitude of the harm differs. Self-sustaining security in Kosovo will not be possible until that step has been taken. I would say the same thing about Bosnia, Kyrgystan, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Turkey and Armenia. I also think that your North African partners might benefit from focus on reconciliation.

Dialogue is good. Reconciliation is better. Maybe OSCE should take the next difficult but logical step.