



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

### Workshop “Towards a Strategy for Reconciliation in the OSCE Area” Vienna, 18 December

#### *Opening Session*

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#### **OSCE Reconciliation Strategy:**

#### **Notions, focal points and prospects for implementation**

##### **Reconciliation-rapprochement-distress/detente: synonymous notions.**

After thoughtful and substantial presentation of Prof. A. Rotfeld inducing the considerations about the concept and practices of reconciliation, I just want to bring your attention back to the meaning of the definition “reconciliation”. I agree with the authors of the “Food for Thought” paper that there is no general agreement among academics and practitioners on the precise meaning.

And in this context, I think that reconciliation is not a proper wording for what we are doing in Russian-Polish relations nowadays. I always stress, we (Russia and Poland) have nothing to reconcile about, since we’ve not waged war against each other, at least, in terms and scale of the WW II or Balkan conflicts. That is why, I prefer to use word *rapprochement* for the process where both of us, me and Prof. Rotfeld, have been involved since 2008. (Though, some practices of ‘reconciliation’ was borrowed by our Russian-Polish Group on difficult matters, as well as we could share our ‘*rapprochement practices*’ for those who are willing to reconcile).

Rapprochement is a perfectly fitting word when it comes to relations between Russia and, let us say, its neighbours from the Baltic shore or any other country where objective closeness is harmed by not linked to an immediate or direct conflict. Sure, it presupposes more trust, less emotions over dividing official attitudes towards history and current issues. Certainly, some could say, that I underestimate divisions (which I like to do, rather than to overestimate!), but we see that a mere political will may help to overcome these seemingly deep divisions just within months period.

I will give you one example from our experience. Some “reconciliation”-like trays were presented in our Group activities – they were linked to Katyn crime. We’ve found a way to

explain to the Russian public and elites not only the factual side of that Stalin's crime, but feeling of Poles towards it. And vice versa, we've managed to stop accusations of contemporary Russia in committing this crime, which often happened in Poland. And the greatest help was the political will from Vladimir Putin, who by his joint with Prime-Minister D.Tusk visit to memorial ceremony to Katyn put an end to speculations in the Russian (pluralistic in that specific case!) elites. Such a support was really a strong ease to us, while at the beginning of the process we confronted with stupid, non-motivated attempts to keep this point in the agenda of the Russian-Polish relations. So, the political leadership is one of the decisive features in the processes of rapprochement and reconciliation

A second notion which could be politically close, deciphering "reconciliation" is simply 'distress' or using its French version 'détente'. This notion describes our need for more harmonized relations through the European system, with fewer tensions in political, security fields and fairly competitive, but not hostile relations in the economy, and, in particular, in energy field. I mean, continent-wide tolerance towards countries' diversities, admitting differences for those who share the same institutions – whether OSCE or Council of Europe. We, European countries, are too numerous within our institutions, so, none could require, for instance, EC-12 level of solidarity. This notion is rather very general and describes strategic tasks of all European institutions.

I don't believe (*or I don't find proper the very term*) in "reconciliation" when it comes to simple differing or even confronting history interpretations, if they don't practically affect people and politics. Let us remember, whether, we quarreled about the First World War in early 1980-s? The same – seven decades after the end of world-wide tragedy! We did not! Why do we quarrel about WWII now after the same 70 years gone? Why we quarrel about it more than, say, in 1960-s when all European ruling elites still were war-time generation? "Reconciliation" recently often is used in connotations with pure history and its specific period of totalitarian/authoritarian regimes in the USSR, CEE countries and the WWII developments and events. We all refer to post-WWII reconciliation examples (Franco-German, Polish-German, Czech-German, Israeli-German, etc), but none of them contains a logic for reincarnation after two generations since the end of the war! It's not so much about the reconciliation, rather about already distant history interpretations provoked by current politics and even resulted in the creation of quasi-political institutions.

Certainly, differences in history interpretation should be managed when they are either glaring or disturbing, but this should be reserved for professional historians and their respective commissions. But there are different cases like the one we faced in our Russian-Polish Group on difficult matters. As far as you, probably, know our Group comprises of not only historians, but

people with different background – specialists on politics, international affairs, heads of archives, diplomats from the MFAs. The task of the Group was not to find out new facts or write a book (though we've written 2 and plan 2 more), but to move out history from current agenda by means of explanation and persuasion. To the greatest extent it was “academic diplomacy”, when both side's participants, co-chairmen with the help of their own authority and weight in intra-state and inter-state relations acted as ‘ambassador’ of good will and good intent for the best of bilateral relations. Here, by the way, was a very serious, though unconscious precondition – Groups must be not simply professional but influential within their own countries.

So, in cases, when history moves to politics, or backwards, as Polish-Ukrainian case (in the 1990-s), Polish-Lithuanian case (also in early 1990-s and...seemingly now), Russian-Latvian case – our Group-like mechanisms are desirable.

Unfortunately, the term ‘reconciliation’ is still a proper or even the only possible one, which describes willing and ought, must and unconditional strategic imperatives for such regions as the Western Balkans and South Caucasus. Conflicts sources are still reach and powerful there, hatred and belligerence are full-fledged, deep-rooted or sometimes cultivated by local political cultures. A reconciliation strategy there seems to be a must, but also a lack. The last explains why the conflicts within above mentioned areas, happen to come back in a few years, or even a decade after initial ceasefire, why state borders and nation sovereignty are considered there as something temporal. So, for these circumstances we have to apply notion, strategy and tactics of reconciliation in its strict understanding.

I fully agree with Dr. Gardner-Feldman's definition of "reconciliation" as the process of building long-term peace and cooperation between former enemies through better mutual transparency, bilateral institutions and relationship across governments and societies<sup>1</sup>. Reconciliation involves the development of trust and empathy, practical and material aspects. This concept presupposes framework for identifying and softening (certainly, not eliminating) divergence as a more realistic goal than perfect peace established at once.

Reconciliation is a long and difficult process, as German chancellor Willy Brandt noted when writing about German-Polish reconciliation in 1976: “The soil in which reconciliation could flourish required careful spadework.” In many respects, the dimensions of reconciliation evident in German-Polish, German-French, German-Czech, German-Israel/Jewish relations could be applied to the Balkans and the Caucasus. Very strange, but it is still not thought over process of natural reconciliation happened within Russian/Soviet-German relations. I guess, the

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of “reconciliation” has been developed by Dr. L. Gardner-Feldman in the articles: Gardner-Feldman, L. *The Principle and Practice of ‘reconciliation’ in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic / International Affairs*. – 75-2-1999. – P.333-356; Gardner-Feldman, L. *"German-Polish Reconciliation in Comparative Perspective: Lessons for Japan?" / The Asia-Pacific Journal*. - 16-1-10, April 19, 2010.

greatest role here played the very fact of “our”, “friendly”, “socialist” Germans – embodied by the GDR, a country which shared the same values as the Soviet Union. Then, this kind attitude has been automatically extended to a unified Germany. Though, I should stress that the Soviet leaders never provoked any anti-German stance even within the harshest period of the Cold War.

Measures and means should be thought out deriving from the very basic requirements of continuous reconciliation process. The last presupposes at the initial stage very simple steps:

- Better and more positive information about societies and elites when it comes to former belligerents: neighborhood should be transparent, interesting and eventually profitable to each other;
- Regular, rather informal, though mighty channels to verify mutual intentions and measure to social and political environment in neighboring countries in regard to their mutual relations;
- Distress of the war-time (conflict centered) narrative in national political life, in local and Europe-wide media;

Ideally, reconciliation need a symbolic start either from very high level or at a very unusual way (i.e. contacts of churches; joint sports or cultural events of good level, etc.).

Let me be a little more skeptical, than our Pre-Conference ‘Food for Thought’ paper – I don’t believe in a success of a “reconciliation frontal attack”, as well as an immediate results of regional economic projects. Process should start with the quiet and mild consultations of a sort of “wise people”.

But one more small remark in the connection. The only requirement to these groups of “wise people” – their indigenous character and influence within the ruling elites, whether we like these elites or not. So, Armenians should be from Yerevan, Azeri – from Baku, not from Brussels, Washington or Moscow. Seminars which embrace “internationalized” experts serve almost to nothing.

### **An OSCE role and strategy prospects.**

The OSCE to the greatest extent was born as a result of European reconciliation, which brings additional sense to nowadays efforts. What can we do as the Organization now? I don’t think OSCE provides immediate link between security and reconciliation, as we would, probably, wish.

But, politically, OSCE could insist upon reconciliation inscription to official documents for the countries recently involved in the conflicts. Pretexts are easy to find. Sometimes, it could be harmful for the elites, but very often helpful. We could quote many examples when nation-

wide changes were easier to explain (to the society, opposition, elites) by an outside pressure (exerted by EU, CE, etc).

Institutionally, OSCE could provide for or invest to a network of reconciliation dialogues. They should not be sporadic, once-upon-a-time, seminars, but persistent, logically clear and regularly functioning mechanism. Taking into account, that most of the countries we talk about doesn't belong to the richest countries of Europe. So, initial financing is a simple must.

Legally, OSCE could make very positive contribution by properly gathering and codifying the mosaics of reconciliation and rapprochement practices seeded all over Europe, and all over its history, as well as born within new eventual dialogues. Probably, history best practices report could be a good starting point for the reconciliation strategy development.