



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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

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Panel 3: Breaking the vicious circle – Reconciliation and conflicts in the OSCE area

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Reconciliation

How to break the “vicious circle”? Important issue, important for my OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Draw on Mission experience in BiH.

A previous speaker, Sonja Licht, represents a towering figure in the work of reconciliation and an embodiment of many themes of this workshop.

How to break the vicious circle? The answer is manifold, my presentation will be fourfold: international, institutional, operational and scientific.

First, break the circle through an **international** approach -- by building a bigger box. That means integration of BiH into larger structures, which support reconciliation.

Main theme of the Nobel Prize speeches last week in Oslo. All three – Chair of the Prize Committee, the President of the European Council, President of the European Commission – made this link between reconciliation and integration. The one reinforces the other. Call it the “Oslo Thesis.”

Mission supports reconciliation through integration. In BiH, public opinion research shows that citizens – regardless of age, ethnicity or religion – share the same aspiration for a future within the EU.

For the Mission, several “integration agendas” – EU to be sure, but also economic, regional, and trans-atlantic. Sonja Licht emphasized the importance of a regional approach for Balkan reconciliation, exactly right. The Mission undergirds regional cooperation in its work – for example, in the Regional Housing Program, which the Secretary General, in his April 2012 visit to Sarajevo, helped support.

OSCE, itself, is a structure that integrates BiH, a long-standing member. OSCE is hemispheric in its integrating scope. For BiH, the history of 1990’s shows importance of larger, supportive structures.

Second, break the circle through an **institutional** approach -- by strengthening civic architecture. The Mission is active in many programs especially in the Court-room, Class-room and Committee-room. In other words, in the sectors of justice, education and parliament – key public sectors at the heart of civic architecture.

Court-room: Mission focuses on war crimes and hate crimes. Recent visit by CPC Director in Sarajevo helped launch a Mission initiative on combatting hate crimes. A legal framework is important to settle issues – and take them out of the “vicious circle.”

Class-room: Mission focus on ending discrimination and intolerance – in order to get a head start on reconciliation. Youth is an important force in promoting reconciliation. Mission has worked for years on improving history textbooks, making them more factual in content and less biased in narrative.

Committee-room: Mission focus on parliaments, making them more professional and efficient. Particular attention paid to Committee oversight of the security sector to bolster democratic control and public confidence.

Reconciliation needs an institutional framework, requires institutions that are effective and that enjoy public confidence, particularly in civic architecture.

Third, break the circle through an **operational** approach -- by working in the conflict-cycle framework. As a priority established by the Vilnius Ministerial and embraced by the Irish CiO, OSCE committed to strengthening its capacities in all phases of the conflict cycle.

In response, Mission implemented pilot projects in Srebrenica, Brcko and Mostar in BiH. The pilot projects led to the development of early warning and conflict prevention plans and now provide the framework for our thinking on reconciliation.

- The significance of Srebrenica is obvious. This summer, in the run up to the local elections, a campaign was launched to encourage people who had left Srebrenica to re-register as residents.
- Throughout the summer, the Mission worked to prevent escalation of conflict, primarily by keeping lines of communication open between the various parties. Our assistance took 2 forms: (1) our programmatic work in developing democratic institutions and civil society, and (2) direct intervention through negotiation and mediation.

Key lessons regarding reconciliation and confidence-building:

Be realistic -- Confidence-building and reconciliation are long- term endeavours. Not a linear progression. There will be set backs. Reconciliation cannot be imposed, although it can be assisted.

Be creative -- Reconciliation is a not matter of selecting from a menu of interventions. Conventional transitional justice approaches are necessary but not sufficient. Much of our work has re-prioritised existing activities, designing interventions to meet particular challenges. Flexibility called for.

Be principled -- Intervention is rarely regarded as ‘neutral’, especially by parties to the conflict. Maintaining a principled, consistent and even-handed approach is critical. In Srebrenica it meant that the Mission worked hard to maintain the trust of all parties. We were thus able to build bridges between them.

Fourth, break the circle through a **scientific** approach -- by establishing a baseline and setting the stage for coming to terms with the past.

The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) is based in Sarajevo and Tuzla. It uses scientific methods – DNA-based – to identify missing persons. ICMP and its BiH partners are undertaking admirable work in locating, exhuming and identifying missing persons – a key element in enabling families to come to terms with the past.

It ensures that BiH searches for persons regardless of ethnic, religious or national origin. It works with civil society and, above all, survivor groups. It has helped forge unity among the 120 family associations of the missing that operate in the area of the former Yugoslavia. They “reconcile” their differences to achieve a broader common objective in their search.

In the former Yugoslavia, an estimated 40,000 persons disappeared. With ICMP’s help – 70 percent have been accounted for, 70% of 40,000, of which the vast majority were identified by science, by DNA. An unprecedented achievement compared to any other region in the world that has struggled to deal with this issue. Srebrenica: of about 8,100 killed and missing from 1995, ICMP has helped identify 6,700.

This scientific approach is of broader significance for OSCE, since the issue of missing persons affects almost one-quarter of OSCE participating states. The ICMP stands ready to help these countries.

In conclusion, we can break the vicious circle:

Internationally, by building a bigger box, through integration of a society into larger, supportive structures;

Institutionally, by strengthening the civic architecture of courtroom, classroom and committee-room;

Operationally, by promoting of conflict-cycle management, with feedback from pilot projects; and

Scientifically, by establishing a baseline, done with accurate results, to help come to terms with a defined past.

Mission stands ready to take results of this Conference and embody them in order to offer lessons learned, as we did with the conflict-cycle.