



## 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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1. As a point of departure for my considerations I am going to pick up a popular opinion that any given process of reconciliation may develop on the ground of earlier experiences and that any attempt of this kind may be either compared with the other or transformed into a model applicable in other cases as well. As an example of best practices in this regard the case of the process of Franco-German reconciliation launched by the Elysée Treaty of 1963 is usually referred to. What is still seen as “a decisive milestone in the European history” gave rise to expectations that “many of the lessons learnt from the treaty could be applied to other conflict situations”. Unfortunately a simple, “one- size-fits-all” formula for effective communication, between states and societies does not exist. Communication enhanced by introduction of institutional framework is, indeed, a precondition for building bridges over troubled waters of historical sentiments, myths and stereotypes deeply rooted in political context and - of course – sometimes very tangible political interests. Due to specific conditions of historic, political, social and last but not least developmental nature each process of reconciliation has its own unique momentum, psychological, historical, cultural characteristics which altogether make its experience hardly applicable to other, however similar, cases. I am going to support this point emphasizing the specific character of Franco-German reconciliation, and particular political environment that facilitated joint reconciliation efforts of French and German governments since 1963 and, last but not least, underline the developmental argument. In 1963 both parties in question had already been - allies militarily and politically (NATO, European integration) but what’s even more important they shared strategic objectives, and for that reason public emotions rooted in history of past rivalry, were politically unwelcome.

2. Political pragmatism stemming from joint strategic interest provides strong stimulus setting in motion reconciliation process, at least in most successful cases. The example of relatively successful Polish-German reconciliation launched by Kohl-Mazowiecki agreement of 1989 may additionally support this point. Whether it is an indispensable ingredient of any effective reconciliation or not, is a good open question for the debate.
  
3. I refer to Polish-German case also in order to draw attention to the developmental aspects of reconciliation. Obviously, proper institutions were required (of different nature – joint commissions debating on historical controversies, working on joint publications, supporting cross border cooperation, people to people contacts, facilitating youth exchange, etc.), generally speaking... well shaped institutional framework has always been essential, which means that the level of development of parties engaged in the process matters a lot. In other words, reconciliation is hardly possible between peripheral or semi-peripheral actors and probably very difficult between actors at different stage of development unless the less advanced one is interested in using the process of reconciliation as a tool for institutional catching up, such as an introduction of more effective institutional culture, transparent legal and financial procedures. France and Germany in 1960s shared the same level of development and they were very well known of their long and advance institutional cultures based on the rule of law, democratic environment and public scrutiny. In the German-Polish case reconciliation process was associated with wider process of Polish accession to NATO and the EU. Within this wider framework harmonization of German and Polish administrative cultures developed spontaneously, facilitating enhanced communication between societies. As it came together with implementation of the *acquis communautaire* and Polish aspirations to move from the European periphery to the European core, which consists of the most developed European countries integrating themselves parallelly within NATO and the EU.
  
4. The case of Polish-Russian reconciliation, due to different institutional cultures, legal and political environment as well as lack of clear, obvious for the Russian and Polish public/ and elites alike, shared strategic objective, seems to be the most challenging of all. For that reason achievements of the Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Matters intelligently co-chaired by Prof. Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Academician Anatoly Torkunov are particularly remarkable. Institutionalization of the reconciliation process in that case has been shaped differently to previously mentioned examples. On the high political level the

agreement was reached that each side would develop its own institution supporting reconciliation process independently under its own national regulations and according to the rules of its own administrative culture. It was also agreed that both Centres would be granted the highest possible status within the institutional framework of Poland and Russia respectively. Therefore the Centre for Polish- Russian Dialogue and Understanding was established by the Act of Parliament and the Foundation for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding by the Act of President of Russian Federation. The Centres are obliged by law to cooperate with each other in the field of joint historical research, education, dissemination of knowledge of Poland (its history, culture and traditions) in Russia and Russia in Poland, as well as enhancing communication between Polish and Russian societies, facilitating the youth exchange and offering additional, official and unofficial platform for communication for “people in need of dialogue” in both countries.

5. While the implementation of agreed activities of both Centres is in progress, the most intriguing question concerns joint strategic objective, which should help both parties in question to keep on track of reconciliation for longer period of time, what might be the case if the only driver was of tactical not strategic character. What kind of strategic vision may provide a ground, solid enough, to provide necessary long term umbrella for Polish – Russian reconciliation? My own view is that both countries may share a strategic interest of pulling the whole Eastern Europe out of its developmental backwardness. Poland, which is integrating within the European Union and NATO, has been growing faster in recent years than its eastern neighbors. At the same time, Poland’s foreign policy over the past 20 years has been faithful to a doctrine holding that Europe’s security will not be lasting until the developmental model over the entire continent is fully harmonized. This goal can only be achieved through a gradual inclusion of the states of Eastern Europe into European integration process. Should Russia, therefore, decide to take a course for modernization and the task of “extinguishing external conflicts” were to accelerate this process, this could create a platform for a new kind of strategic Polish-Russian cooperation. Conducted in this manner, Russia’s modernization could not take place in isolation from or in competition with other countries of the region. Taking advantage of the European integration, the countries of Eastern Europe can extricate themselves from the developmental periphery only if they act together. This means that the process of Russia’s modernization would not collide with the modernization of Ukraine, Moldova or Belarus. On the contrary, it would be much quicker and more effective if it was correlated

with transformations taking place in those countries and with their integration with European structures. Poland could become Russia's natural ally, although obviously not the only one.