



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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

Vienna, 18 December

Opening Session

*Opening Speech by Ambassador Lamberto Zannier
Secretary General of the OSCE*

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am glad to welcome you to this Workshop on reconciliation in the OSCE area. In particular, I would like to warmly welcome and thank today’s keynote speakers, panellists and moderators. I look forward to hearing your insights and your many practical, and in some cases, very personal, experiences. I, myself, witnessed the merits of reconciliation efforts in the context of divided societies when I served as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Kosovo.

The importance of promoting reconciliation in the OSCE area has emerged on several occasions, including during the first “Security Days,” held last June just prior to the Annual Security Review Conference. “Security Days” is a process the purpose of which is to strengthen interaction between the OSCE and relevant Track II initiatives on Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security. The goal is to provide a platform for the discussion of fresh ideas and approaches to security, and to link the contributions that traditional diplomacy and civil society can make to our endeavour to consolidate peace and security.

At our gathering in June some themes on the topic of reconciliation emerged of which I will just mention a few:

It was stressed that reconciliation is key to maintain durable peace; that dialogue is an essential tool to achieve reconciliation, but it alone is not sufficient. Key phrases in conflict resolution and reconciliation processes cited were: inclusiveness, ownership, truth, justice, and forgiveness. It was noted that reconciliation is not a spontaneous process - on the contrary, it is normally a very painful one and one which in many cases begins by “acknowledging the wrong doings” and hopefully helps to breaking the "cycle of violence". The importance of dealing with the past, including through the establishment of transitional justice systems, was also highlighted. The role of civil society and grass roots organizations was thought to be essential to the sustainability of any process of reconciliation.

The Final Reports of two initiatives, the ‘Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative’ (EASI), and the ‘Initiative for the Development of a Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community’, the so-called “IDEAS”, come to similar conclusions: reconciliation is imperative for overcoming the deficits of trust that exist in the OSCE area. Unless this deficit of trust is dealt with constructively, the OSCE as a genuine security community is likely to remain for the time a ‘vision rather than a reality.’

The Irish Chairmanship have also placed emphasis on reconciliation - in a landmark conference in April 2012, Ireland shared with participating States its own experiences with the peace process in the Northern Ireland.

The task of advancing reconciliation processes in the OSCE area is a long-term one; it is also a challenging one.

It forces societies to deal with deep-rooted grievances, misperceptions and distrust, as well as the power that historical legacies and divisive memories have in fuelling and sustaining tensions and ‘protracted’ animosity, even over generations. On the other hand, it holds the prospect of breaking the cycle of enmity by creating or “re-creating” constructive political and societal relationships and making it possible to move forward.

The OSCE institutions, field operations and units of the Secretariat facilitate reconciliation activities on regional, national and local levels in the OSCE area, – and across all the three dimensions of security. Allow me to outline a few:

- From assisting in the creation of a multi-ethnic police service, to building confidence between police and ethnic communities;
- From bringing civil society groups and local government institutions in ethnically-divided societies together, to creating cross-border linkages to encourage trade and co-operation on water management and energy security;
- From promoting contacts between diverse groups through cultural events, to assisting states with multi-ethnic populations in managing integration processes.

I look forward to a lively discussion on some of the questions posed for this Workshop, including:

1. In what ways can reconciliation serve as a foundation in advancing our work towards an enduring security community?
2. What efforts and activities already exist, regionally and globally, from which lessons and best practices can be drawn?
3. How might reconciliation efforts in the OSCE area be further advanced – at present, and in the future?

In conclusion, I leave you with a few considerations for our debate:

- The OSCE might consider further stepping up its efforts to promote reconciliation processes. One way to do so would be to incorporate more reconciliation efforts into its programmatic activities, whenever possible and doable, in particular on national, local and grass-root levels, but also within regions.
- Best practices from the OSCE area could be collected, including those reconciliation initiatives that national governments are engaged in.
- The open-ended informal working group to be established in line with the Dublin Ministerial Council Decision on the Helsinki + 40 process might produce further

discussions on this theme. In particular, thought should be given for drawing more concrete linkages between reconciliation and conflict prevention.

For instance, would it be possible for reconciliation processes to take place parallel to negotiations on the settlement of conflicts, in particular by aiming at local and communal levels, in order to prevent renewed outbreak of tensions and violence.

Ultimately, sustainable reconciliation is conflict prevention.

A brief summary paper, outlining key issues and recommendations from this Workshop, will be made available to participants after the Christmas recess. I hope that recommendations identified today will also feed into those debates on the wider security community anticipated for 2013.

I look forward to our discussions here today, and thank all of you for your participation.