Reconciliation and its impacts on peace in the Balkans: Success or Failure?
(Outline for presentation)

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1. Often, reconciliation is declared an important element of "normalization" in "post-conflict societies." However, this seemingly logical statement requires some explanation and clarification – possibly also rethinking of concepts, policies and strategies. We shall start by examining the very term and concept of reconciliation as well as related terms and concepts, thereby determining the basis for the description and evaluation of diverse reconciliation efforts in the Balkans.

2. Conceptualizing reconciliation is a complex task. Usually, reconciliation is observed in the context of conflict management and resolution, where it is interpreted as coming to terms with the past and past developments in a certain environment. It indicates a process in which key actors present their accounts and views of the past developments and their roles and responsibility in this context. Ideally, all involved sides reach a consensus or at least understanding regarding these issues. This understanding should be the basis for the future coexistence and cooperation: although the past is not and usually cannot be forgotten, it should be accepted and, ideally, individual responsibility for different actions and wrongdoings could be established thereby reducing the social trauma. It is hoped that the victims will be willing to forgive the perpetrators of wrongdoings because of their expressed remorse (often a result of requested procedure and requirements, rather than internalized recognition of individual's guilt).

3. The process of reconciliation is based on the acceptance of the past and the current actual situation with all present divisions and structural limits that exist in a certain environment – thereby to a large extent cementing the existing divisions and limits. The process (formal and informal procedural rules), content, temporal framework (exactly determined period that is included) and institutional framework (formal institutions and their roles) as well as the acceptance of the results should be established and agreed upon in advance. Traditionally, truth or peace committees or similar organizational forms are established – with a different degree of direct involvement of state authorities.

4. Although it is believed that successful reconciliation contributes to improvement of community relations and stability in an environment torn by a conflict, paradoxically, every attempt at successful reconciliation (as its preconditions) requires stable relations, recognition of all sides involved in the process and already existing (channels and rules of) communication, tolerance and coexistence. Portrayed as a two way process, reconciliation inherently presupposes certain missionary elements that derive from Christian theologies (considering all differences within Christian religions it is better to use plural in this context) and the concept of forgiveness (on behalf of victims). This is the reason that reconciliation is sometimes described and perceived as an institutional design that rewards the bad guys (perpetrators of wrongdoings).

5. In my view, every attempt at true reconciliation should be considered as the permanent ongoing process that should not be limited just to certain determined periods and specific historic events and contexts. These historic events (e.g. Holocaust) and contexts have their prehistory as well as their consequences in diverse spheres that might last for several generations; consequently, these events should not be forgotten, but should be considered important lessons that could contribute to the prevention of such and/or similar events in the future. As such, reconciliation that has to be agreed upon and accepted by all relevant actors in a certain society cannot be ended when the responsibility of perpetrators for specific events or wrongdoings is established, when they express their remorse and when the victims formally express their forgiveness, but should be perceived as a permanent process of screening and evaluating social relations that should point to undesired and problematic developments and actions in a certain environments. In this context the process should constantly re-examine and confirm also basic principles and values that are agreed upon in these environments as well as determine directions and strategies of future development.

6. Before addressing reconciliation and its successes and failures in the Balkans in the past two decades there is a need to comment also on the concepts of "normalization" and "post-conflict societies." Frequently, "normalization" is understood as restoration of pre-conflict conditions and arrangements or as absence of conflicts. Both interpretations are rather problematic. Namely, in most cases it is impossible to restore pre-conflict conditions in environments that were destroyed by violent conflict; the very process of rebuilding (that refers mostly to economic and social rebuilding) takes a long time, while violent conflicts often destroy relations and structures in a society beyond repair. Consequently, "normalization" should be understood as the process of creating conditions of mutual recognition and acceptance, tolerance, coexistence and (hopefully equal) cooperation in a certain diverse environment that should be the basis for determination and realization of common interests. We should be aware of the fact that conflicts are normal phenomena in plural societies as they are consequences of diverse interests that exist objectively. Logically, "normalization" should therefore encompass development of adequate procedures and mechanisms – based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination deriving from human rights, of which integral, necessary and important constituent elements are minority rights – for peaceful and democratic management and resolution crises and conflicts. Considering these conclusions one should be aware of the fact that the concept of "post-conflict society" is also very problematic. If it refers to societies where violent conflicts have just been stopped or at least interrupted it would be more appropriate to speak of "post-violent-conflict societies" – thereby indicating that diverse conflicts still exist and might escalate (if they are not managed successfully) in the future. If the escalation of conflicts takes place and conflict management and resolution prove unsuccessful these conflicts might transform into violent conflicts – thereby transforming "post-violent-conflict society" into a society where violent conflict(s) exist(s). In this case we could say that a "post-conflict society" might be just a pre-conflict phase of future escalated conflicts in a certain plural/diverse environment.

7. These conceptual discussions are setting the framework for the analysis of efforts for and practices of reconciliation in the Balkans. The initial consideration is that there is no consensus regarding reconciliation in the region. Although it is often being listed as the necessary precondition for "normalization" and for providing long-term peace and stability in the region, nobody has defined precisely what reconciliation in the Balkans

and in every individual state in the region should be and how it should be realized. Aside from general political statements of international and national leaders there are no substantive and/or institutional conditions, arrangements and agreements that – as was presented above – are necessary for a successful process of reconciliation. There is not even a consensus about the historic developments, events, issues, actors and periods that should be addressed by such a process. Consequently, we could question the very existence of the basic precondition – the willingness and readiness of all relevant factors to engage in the process of reconciliation. There is neither adequate legislation nor informal agreements on procedure, institutions and criteria for the evaluation and reconciliation. Additionally, general and specific goals and expected outcomes (consequences) of reconciliation are not adequately determined.

8. Considering specific historic and current developments and situations, it is necessary to study reconciliation in every Balkan country. I am aware that any generalization of research findings might be very problematic, however, considering my findings (especially within the *6th Framework Project MIRICO: Human and Minority Rights in the Life Cycle of Ethnic Conflicts*) that indicated certain common characteristics and similarities I would suggest (as the basis for the future discussions) the following:
    - political will and readiness to start the process of reconciliation in most countries of the region do not exist or are very limited. Consequently, one should consider also some statements of politicians calling for reconciliation rather a lip-service and attempts to please the international community (that continues to promote the idea) than the actual desire to start with the reconciliation;
    - there are no serious attempts to determine and agree upon the content(s), procedures and institutions for the process of reconciliation, which would be necessary to start the process;
    - frequently there is a dispute regarding the actors that should be involved in the process of reconciliation and their roles. This is to a large extent conditioned by diverse perceptions and evaluations of historic events and their consequences, as well as by the lack of recognition of responsibility of diverse actions for their actions and their outcomes;
    - there is no consensus regarding the desired outcomes and long-term goals of reconciliation, which should be understood as the basis for the future cooperation of all actors; etc.

9. Consequently, I would conclude that – practically – reconciliation in the region does not exist; it is not even spelled out and accepted as a realistic goal. Much less is it understood as a permanent process that requires acceptance and participation of all relevant actors and that could provide the basis for their power-sharing and cooperation in determining and realizing their common interests. The international community that continues to promote reconciliation in the region has not spelled out clearly how it understands it; surely, reconciliation has not been promoted as the permanent process that would go on for generations and of which results could be beneficial for the decrease of tensions and conflicts in individual environments as well as the basis for coexistence and cooperation. Therefore it should not be surprising that I consider reconciliation in the Balkans a failure (rather than a missed opportunity since the necessary preconditions have not existed and still do not exist) and would argue that other adequate concepts and approaches that would address problems of the region and needs of its future development need to be developed.