



Berlin Process
Western Balkans Summit
Poznań 2019

Western Balkans Panel Conclusions:

Session: #18: “Dealing with the legacy of the past in the Western Balkans”

The Poznan Summit provided a unique opportunity to take stock and explore reconciliation in the Western Balkans. The participants welcomed the inclusion of reconciliation on the Summit’s agenda urging that the topic continues to be included in future Berlin Process fora to stimulate continuation of the dialogue on this topic and further highlight the critical importance of reconciliation as a prerequisite of the European perspective of the region.

Recalling and endorsing the political declarations made at the London Summit of the Berlin Process in 2018, the participants noted with regret that the process of reconciliation throughout the Western Balkans has stalled and the modest gains over the past years are rolling back increasingly overshadowed by mounting intolerance, ethnic divisions and historical revisionism. The glorification of war criminals and attempts to rehabilitate persons involved in war crimes has become common place in public and political discourse undermining the rule of law and inter-ethnic tolerance.

The key four take-aways from the panel refer to: i) the need to establish the facts about the about the conflicts and its victims; ii) revisit and holistically relaunch the instruments of transitional justice, iii) empower youth and foster opportunities for dealing with the legacy of the past; iv) and, critically important, to urgently end hate speech.

There is a dire need in the region to recognize the victims and establish the facts about the conflicts. As a critical component of the transitional justice and peace-building processes, more must be done at all levels to counter the denial of crimes and human rights violations committed by all sides and break the transference of ethnic division and intolerance to younger generations. Fact-finding initiatives and research by competent and independent actors are particularly important. One should not forget that behind all these facts there is protracted human suffering. Grassroots initiatives such as RECOM continue to have an important role in fostering a culture of memory and reconciliation. The discussants stressed that, while vision and determination by political leadership remains essential and a decisive factor in lasting peace and reconciliation, civil society organisations should not wait for political engagement and redouble their efforts to establish and publicise the facts.

There is an urgent need to move away from existing one-sided history-teaching practices and divisive narratives in schools. In particular, elementary and secondary education. In this regard, Council of Europe standards and recommendations on multiperspective history researching, teaching and learning should be promoted by all stakeholders.

Discussants were in agreement about the necessary steps. The region's governments with the support of the international community need to effectively support transitional justice strategies and co-ordinate action through an agreed plan of action. Moreover, the existing commitments made at the London Summit and elsewhere must be followed up and honoured.

These steps are essential elements in the process of reconciliation but are not sufficient to bridge existing divides. Participants underlined the importance of a positive forward-looking agenda, with a focus on youth and disrupting trans-generational trauma, people to people contacts and building cultural links.

In this regard, obstacles to reconciliation were identified and proposals for jumpstarting the process contrasted with best practices of the Polish-German reconciliation process. The need to address the lack of political will across the region to dedicate genuine efforts to confront legacies, give up instrumentalizing fear and guilt for short term political gains and create a space conducive to establishing the truth in full have been identified as the heart of the problem.

Bullet points from Session:

- **Transitional justice** strategies and commitments (London summit 2018) should be fully endorsed and implemented including full cooperation in the processing of war crimes and other serious Human Rights violations. Moreover, court rulings should not be challenged. Convicted **war criminals** should not be celebrated as heroes;
- **Missing persons:** commitments from London summit 2018 should be implemented with a high sense of priority;
- **EU engagement** regarding reconciliation should be enhanced through the EU Flagship initiatives and bi-lateral communication with political leadership at all levels;
- **Cultural exchange and heritage:** should be strongly promoted, with preference given to multi-cultural projects and events, including activities to promote multiperspective memory work in line with the standards developed based on the European Cultural Convention;
- **RYCO:** functioning should not be subject to political disputes and influence. Youth members should have a greater say in the management and direction of activities;
- **Political rhetoric and hate speech:** national and local leaders should refrain from hate speech and non-responsible statements and actions (including re-writing history, denial of verdicts, glorification of war criminals, portraying the 'others' as enemies and 'us' as victims. The culture of hate and revictimization must be abandoned.

History and Religion:

- **Work of academic and independent historians, research networks and grass-roots memory work initiatives** should be continued with a view to develop new, multiperspective history books, teaching manuals and other educational materials, include audio-visual, for non-formal learning, formal primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as information structured for the general public. Regular public dissemination through the media and conferences should be organised to present and discuss findings and good common learning and exchange practice;
- **Establishing the facts and addressing victims:** The Coalition for RECOM should enhance its research with State support wherever possible. A mapping of all initiatives in the region should be undertaken, with a view to ensuring a strong coordination and avoiding overlapping and duplication. Research should be made public at regular intervals.
- **Joint (regional) commemorations** by religious leaders and CSO's and general public should be promoted.

New ways of cooperation for a wider inclusion and outreach:

- CSOs in the WB should create strong networks to share information and research, to avoid duplication and to facilitate speaking with one voice, thereby increasing their chance to be heard by the political leaders;
- Restructure regional and national networks and communication. Themes should be defined and allocated; each country being made responsible for particular segments: a lead CSO would be responsible for the regional network on a particular theme;
- Municipalities should be encouraged to contribute to the above reconciliation elements. Core CSOs should also seek partnerships with the parliaments on reconciliation and promote annual debates on progress and needs;
- A similar group should be formed and made responsible to monitor, analyse and denounce hate speech in the Western Balkans.

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Conclusions and recommendations reflect the presentations and views of the discussants.