

ECPD International Symposium

**NATIONAL AND INTER-ETHNIC RECONCILIATION
AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

Belgrade, 28-29 October 2005

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Symposium Chairman, Mr. Takehiro Togo,
President of the ECPD Academic Council

Allow me to conclude this Symposium by presenting to you the summary of what was achieved and what lay ahead. With your permission I would like to introduce the following four provisions as an outcome of this event.

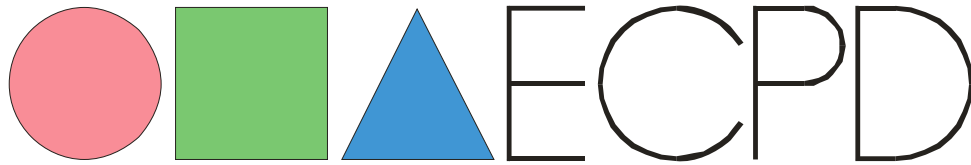
Firstly, ECPD will continue its activities in the area of inter-ethnic relations in the Balkans.

Secondly, the Symposium is to become a regular event held in various Balkan states.

Thirdly, ECPD will promote and coordinate the setting-up of a standing panel of international experts which would provide its analyses, assessment and views to the governments in the region upon their request.

Last but not least, ECPD would closely cooperate with the Japanese governmental and non-governmental organizations and foundations, which have been instrumental in sponsoring this activity for its support to the Symposium and dears to hope for its continued assistance in the future. ECPD would also like to call for support from other entities so as to make this a truly international endeavor.

If you allow me, I would now proceed to share with you a few ideas that have emerged as a result of our deliberations during these one and a half days.



Our discussion has been both complex and vitally important for the present and the future of the Balkans. Many ideas, many interesting suggestions have been made at the meeting but you must appreciate that the main work, the real work must be done on the ground. Reconciliation is a long process, a few decades, perhaps one or two generations and it is far from being a straight forward process.

What impressed me most in the discussion was the general support of the idea that it must come from the heart rather from rational analysis.

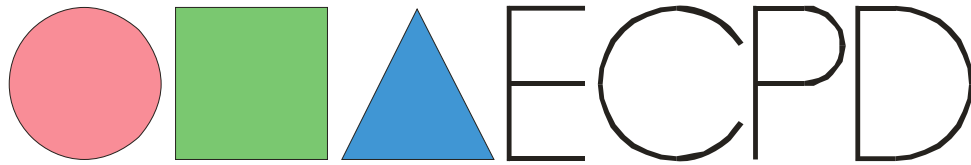
Another major point that was shared by all speakers is that if one wants to bring people together, one has first to heal their wounds and meet their basic needs. One has to address the issue of injustice. One has to resettle refugees. One has to pay reparations. One has to compensate the damage. One has to address the issue of internally displaced persons. One has to set conditions for the resumption of normal life. One has to create a climate favorable to economic development. Without economic development one can not raise people's income. And last but not least one has to insure human security in order to dissipate people's fears.

As many speakers pointed out, the best way to achieve reconciliation is by joining efforts of different communities in implementing priority projects. Common projects create common interest. Common interests create mutual trust. Trust helps to focus people's energies on what needs to be done. If this is done, people's life will gradually improve.

In my introduction I asked if we can break new ground in the fields under discussion and I think that together we have taken a significant step in that direction. We have looked at local specifics, world experiences and I feel that we have obtained a balanced approach. It was sometimes intense and emotional and quite rightly so. As experts you have presented yours views on important issues and I thank you for that.

First of all we have built the foundations of positive relationships that now must be sustained.

Reconciliation and a culture for peace and human dignity can not be achieved without addressing past wrongs. A culture of peace is embedded in the respect



for human rights and a deep knowledge of the “truths of harm”. It requires recognition of mistakes, mutual forgiveness and catharsis. Reconciliation has to be fair.

Peace is the responsibility of country leaders, while reconciliation is a matter, which has to be accepted by the people.

We have to accept commonalities and differences and recognize that reconciliation is a voluntary act following conflict and can not be imposed.

It is necessary to have unbiased insights into the causes of conflict. We can not turn back the clock but we can approach the future with greater knowledge and understanding and try both to set free the “slaves of hate” and “dry up the water in which hatred swims”. Hatred leads to fanaticism and disaster. We have to reduce the psychological fears of human beings and address the equal rights of women and the need for a society of all ages.

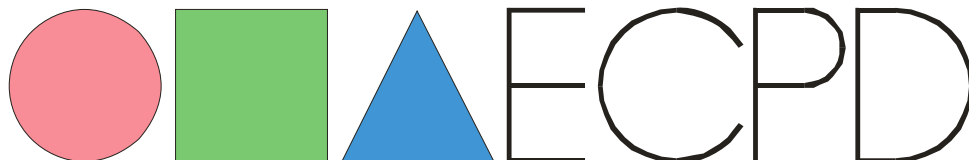
Bringing out adversarial evidence leads nowhere. This is a lesson that can be drawn from all successful instances of reconciliation in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Many speakers emphasized that out of two sets of policy instruments available for the post conflict reconciliation – punitive and constructive – the latter is by far the most important. But people who have committed atrocities and human rights abuses must be held to account. It must be done to prevent past horrors from happening again.

Tribunals can not provide reconciliation. Their function is to send a message that misbehavior and violation of human rights are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

To achieve reconciliation one has to focus on improving conditions on the ground. Conditions for all and not for just a few, first and foremost for those who suffered, the victims. This is a real challenge.

Meeting this challenge requires political will, perseverance and years of relentless work. Above all it requires letting the heart speak. We must focus on tolerance and forgiveness, not on guilt and punishment. We must work on the future, not on the past. That will change hearts and minds.



Health is a basic condition for economic development and access to health services is a common denominator to reduce population vulnerability, aid democratic governance and give peace a chance. Neither angry hearts no hungry mouths are positive for reconciliation.

Development policy in the Balkans should be checked to ensure that it encourages reconciliation.

There have been suggestions for research activities that address the complexity of the problem space, conducting of multidimensional analysis and using metaphor to explore more deeply the subject matter of this meeting.

Further points underscored include the role of religious leaders; special role of mass media; education; health care; sports; implementation of principled and moral values to be shared by all people; need for a dialogue and open communication as a prelude to reconciliation; need for education as a prerequisite to cultural changes.

I think we agree that the European Center for Peace and Development should continue to study inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the Western Balkans.

We are hopeful that this event for which the Japanese Government has made one important contribution is the end, of a new beginning, for the future activities of the ECPD.

Thank you for your attention.

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