

ECPD International Symposium

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

Belgrade, 28-29 October 2005

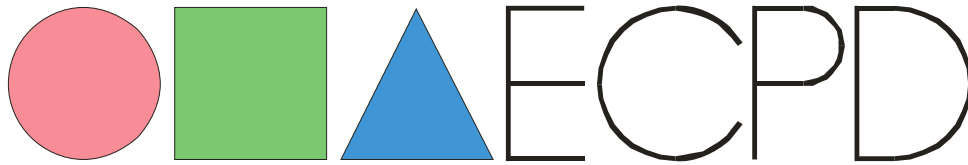
**Opening Address of the Chairman, Mr Takehiro Togo,
President of the ECPD Academic Council**

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues, allow me, first of all, to acquaint you with the fact that twenty years have already passed since the establishment of the European Center for Peace and Development (ECPD) of the United Nations University for Peace. It is an international educational and research organization, and the organizer of this international gathering.

I take this opportunity to congratulate our organizer — the European Center for Peace and Development on this important anniversary and wish it much success in its further efforts to promote peace, development and international cooperation.

Last year the Japanese Government convened a significant Ministerial Conference devoted to the **consolidation of peace and economic development in the Western Balkans**, which was attended by the ministers of foreign affairs and economy of all West Balkan countries, representatives of 39 other countries and 12 international organizations from Europe and other parts of the world.

One outcome was to support the ECPD through the Japan Fund and the Japanese Friendship Exchange Council for this event. As President of the Symposium and on behalf of the ECPD we express our gratitude to these organisations and to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Japan as well as to the Serbian authorities and the Municipality of Belgrade for their support of this very important project.



Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

We are holding this meeting at a crucial moment when a peaceful political solution for the Balkans is approaching its climax. At this very moment the UN is holding a meeting in New York with a view of finding a political solution to the most difficult and controversial problem – the future status of Kosovo.

Numerous national and international organisations have been engaged in finding a lasting solution for the Balkan “problem”. Hundreds of meetings, many high level international missions, well known political personalities have been involved in this work.

The UN has adopted a number of important resolutions. The European Union has started negotiations with several countries of the region on the preparatory steps for their accession to the European system. In other words, significant progress has already been made. But a lot still remains to be done.

Our work is not to duplicate the work of these international organisations and institutions. We may contribute to the settlement in the Western Balkans in a different way - by identifying major hurdles on the way of inter-ethnic reconciliation and religious tolerance on the ground, as well as specific measures aimed at overcoming these hurdles.

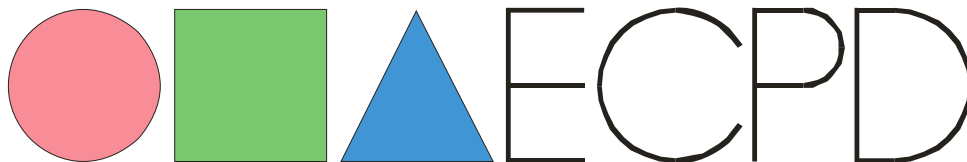
That is how I would define the main purpose of the Symposium.

Political decisions and inter-government agreements set the framework and direction. But treaties, to paraphrase a famous word by Winston Churchill, are not an end and not the beginning of an end but the end of a beginning.

Joining the European Union is a priority objective for all countries of the region. The solution of the Balkans issue is conceivable only within the framework of the European system. But to think that the accession to the Union will remove all outstanding issues on the ground and guarantee that no conflict at the local level would emerge in the future would be an illusion.

Conflicts in the life of human societies are natural and even inevitable. The whole problem is how to solve them peacefully. The advantage of entry in the European Union is that it provides security for all its members and creates a favourable climate for a peaceful solution of conflicts.

However, the real work must be done on the ground in every day's interaction between people concerned. In relations between former antagonists, now neighbours. If we could break the ground in this field, we would make a significant step forward.



To be able to do it we must bear in mind the following three parameters:

- 1) Local specifics;
- 2) World experience;
- 3) Balanced approach.

We are experts. Experts must be knowledgeable, objective and responsible.

This being said, I must confess, in all humility, that I cannot pretend to be an expert on the Balkans. I have a considerable knowledge of the subject. I read a lot. I travelled a good deal in the region and met a lot of people. I have my own vision of this part of the world, but I still do not consider myself as an expert on this particular issue. I count on your knowledge, wisdom and advice.

ECPD asked you to prepare contributions on specific issues in the domain of your personal competence, and I would like to thank you very much indeed for the work done. Some of the papers which arrived earlier have already been distributed as the working documents of the symposium, others will be reproduced shortly for general circulation. But in addition to that, I would like to benefit from your presence at the meeting to “pick up your brains”, if you allow me this expression, i.e. to have your ideas on a few most acute and controversial issues of the reconciliation.

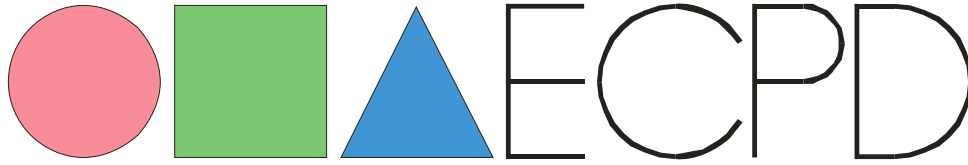
I would appreciate it very much, if you would focus on issues that I intend to introduce for discussion. You may certainly use the basic points of your findings so as to bring them nearer to the specific issues raised by the Chairmen of the panels. I think the best use of our time would be to benefit from your presence as renowned experts and have your personal views on specific issues proposed for discussion.

We expect panelists to speak approximately for ten minutes allowing the greatest possible number of people to take part in the open discussion. All other discussants are kindly requested to limit themselves to five minutes and, should need arise, to take the floor again for another five minutes. That will give us plenty of opportunity to hear everybody’s view.

Regarding the subject of the meeting I would like to propose the following working definition of reconciliation so as we could speak the same language.

A reconciliation process involves five interwoven and related strands. These are:

1. *Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society:* Although individuals may have different opinions or political beliefs, the articulation of a common vision of an interdependent, just, equitable, open and diverse society is a critical part of any reconciliation process.



2. *Acknowledging and dealing with the past:* Acknowledging the hurt, losses, truths and suffering of the past. Providing the mechanisms for justice, healing, restitution or reparation, and restoration
3. *Building positive relationships:* Addressing issues of trust, prejudice, intolerance. Accepting commonalities and differences. Embracing and engaging with those who are different to us.
4. *Significant cultural and attitudinal change:* People must learn to hear and be heard. A culture of respect for human rights and human difference will create a context in which each citizen becomes an active participant in society and feels a sense of belonging.
5. *Substantial social, economic and political change:* The social, economic and political structures which gave rise to the conflict and estrangement are identified, reconstructed or addressed, and transformed.

This definition that belongs to Brandon Hamber and Grainne Kelly will enable us to identify the issues we are going to discuss.

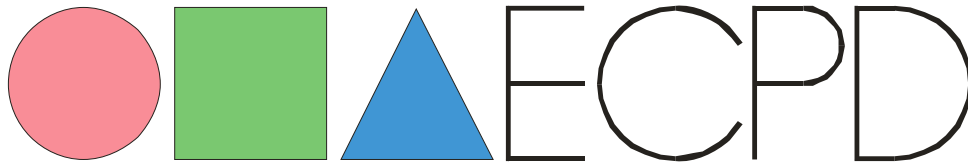
A distinctive feature of the Balkans, as I see it, is that national identity in this part of the world is determined not so much by citizenship but rather by ethnicity and by religious and confessional affiliation. Religion throughout the centuries has been a powerful, if not the only constituent feature of national identity in the region: Orthodoxy for the Serbs, Islam for the Bosniaks and Albanians, Catholicism for the Croats.

What complicates the picture is that people of different beliefs have often lived not only in compact distinctive settlements but in scattered and mixed settlements.

The only region that has some similarity with the complexity of the Balkans is the Northern Caucasus where close to sixty different ethnic and religious groups live on a relatively small territory. Many of them speak the same language, as is also the case in the Balkans where Serbo-Croatian language is a common vernacular. But culturally they are different, and so are the peoples in the Balkans.

The Serbs, the Croats, the Bosniaks may speak one language but culturally they are different. What is particularly important is that they define their national identity primarily through religious affiliation and much less so through their ethnic roots.

This is the reason, why religion is the important factor on which we should focus our attention when we deal with obstacles to reconciliation and ways of overcoming them.



Religion played a key role both at times of war and at times of peace. But wars have been first and foremost the continuation of politics by different means (Clausewitz). Religions, contrary to some assertions, did not cause wars, though the religious fanaticism was often used as a means of exacerbating animosity, fears, and hatred.

Today we have every reason to try and use the power of religion as an anchor of peace, as a strong ally in the Balkan settlement.

We must do our utmost to instil religious tolerance. We must do everything to see this opportunity being realised. How to do it best, is for you to suggest. But it is a priority. I would say that it is also an opportunity.

As regards aspects and factors that could be considered in this connection as hurdles on the way to reconciliation I would point out the following:

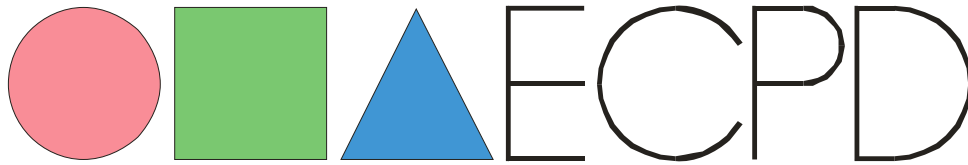
- Hatred, inherited from older generations, a deep rooted feeling of animosity towards those who were different and, therefore, enemies in the past conflicts;
- Fresh unhealed wounds from the atrocities of the 1991-1999 war;
- Drastic deterioration of personal situation of those who lost their kin;
- Unfulfilled expectations of compensation for the damage incurred in the last war;
- Unequal access to public and community services;
- Heavy unemployment
- Widespread poverty;
- Corruption
- Organised crime.

This is not an exhaustive list of hurdles on the way to reconciliation but just the most important ones that come to mind.

None of these hurdles is insurmountable. All are manageable. But it would require time and efforts to overcome them.

The task of our meeting is to suggest the best ways for doing it, having in mind that we work for the younger generations, for the future of the region, for a place that was once a cradle of the European civilisation. If we chose the right track and set the proper goals our work will positively affect the life of millions of people today.

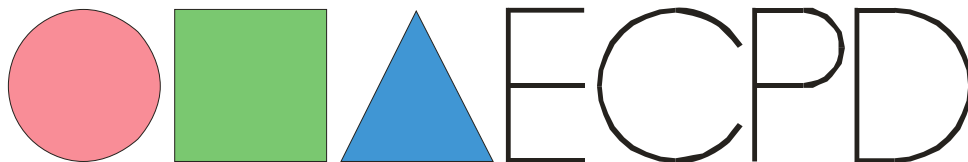
Without precluding our discussion, I would like to suggest the following steps for promoting reconciliation and tolerance to which I hope you will add more proposals as experts familiar with conditions on the ground:



- Recognition of mistakes, wrongdoings and crimes committed during the 1991-1999 war and public presentation of excuses by all parties concerned;
- Punishment of the presumed war criminals but not a witch hunt that leads nowhere;
- Mutual forgiveness as a fundamental basis for the reconciliation;
- Compensation for the damage suffered by individuals. That would require considerable resources. They may come from the European Union's structural fund as a way of humanitarian aid and also as an instrument for enhancing cohesion of the region;
- Increased role of spiritual leaders of all confessions and their cooperation as a powerful means of cultivating tolerance, new attitudes, common values and rapprochement between different communities;
- Joint efforts on the ground in tackling specific issues of everyday life of local communities as the key instrument of actual reconciliation. This is the most efficient way of improving human relations, creating a civil society and developing democracy;
- A special role of mass media, particularly television networks, in analysing the past and developing new attitudes of civilised behaviour;
- Careful revision of school textbooks with a view to present an objective and concerted view of recent history. This is a critical step in bringing up the young generation in the spirit of tolerance, understanding and mutual assistance;
- Development of special groups of competent people at the local and regional level that would elaborate long term projects improving the actual life of all communities in the region. In particular these groups may address issues of employment, health care and education development.

Most of these suggestions are drawn from the experience gained outside the Balkans,

- the post-World War II settlement in Europe and Asia, particularly Franco-German reconciliation on the initiative of General De Gaulle and Conrad Adenauer,
- the normalising relations between Japan and its neighbours in the Pacific;
- the experience of South Africa that benefited from the political and spiritual guidance of Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu;
- post-conflict settlements in South East Asia, Latin America and other parts of the world.



Let me say it again that this is not an exhaustive list. It is just a few suggestions to stimulate discussion with a view of elaborating a more comprehensive set of measures that may be used for practical purposes by local communities throughout the region.

We obviously won't be able to finish this work in one and a half day, but if we manage to identify a few steps that would help to move things further, I would think that our meeting has fulfilled its purpose.

However, this Symposium is not an end in itself. The European Center for Peace and Development will establish a **Standing International Study Group** that will systematically meet study inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the Western Balkans laying emphasis on regional reconciliation and religious tolerance in the region.

A broader national and international support to the organizer of such a significant event would be desirable and especially valuable. In that sense, the Japanese Government sets an example.

Thank you for your attention.