



SIXTH FRAMEWORK  
PROGRAMME

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*Specific report on the role of history for  
reconciliation*

My Truth, Your Truth – Our Truth?

The Role of Truth Commissions and History  
Teaching for Reconciliation

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Specific report on the role of history for reconciliation

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# 1. Introduction

In January 1994, in the midst of what most observers considered a cruel “ethnic” war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, British laureate historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote an article in the respected Austrian newspaper “Der Standard”, comparing historians’ studies with an IRA bomb factory. He further equated the potential danger of historians with that of nuclear physicists.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the wars in the former Yugoslavia have proven the fact that history – no, not history, but historians, and much more the (mis)use of history by politicians, the media and other actors, was an important factor in inflaming ethnic hatred.

Taking this record into consideration, it seems ridiculous and even nonsensical to pose the question of what role history can play in reconciliation in (ethnically divided) post-conflict societies such as Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. It is a Sisyphean task. But some examples undertaken by ambitious historians in the region give hope that history and historical education can have their role in reconciliation where the attempts to establish truth commissions have failed.

## 1.1. Definition of the Term “Reconciliation”

But what is reconciliation?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term “to reconcile” as follows: “to bring (a person) again into friendly relations ... after an estrangement. ... To bring back into concord, to reunite (persons or things) in harmony.”<sup>2</sup> Against the background of the mass atrocities committed between 1990 and 1995, however, the term “estrangement” seems almost cynical, whereas setting the goal of reuniting the former enemies of these wars in harmony seems an impossible mission.

Hence, Eric Stover and Harvey M. Weinstein, editors of a study on ethnic co-existence in the aftermath of mass atrocities with the meaningful title “My Neighbor, My Enemy”,<sup>3</sup> decided to drop the term “reconciliation”, which they deem too vague, for the term “social reconstruction” as “a process that reaffirms and develops a society and its institutions based on shared values and human rights.”<sup>4</sup>

The philosopher and President of the Croatian Helsinki Committee, Zarko Puhovski, even suggested a minimal concept by replacing the term “reconciliation” with “normalization”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Von der Macht des historischen Unsinn“, *Der Standard*, 5-6 January 1994, 25: „Ich war immer die Ansicht, daß Geschichtswissenschaftler im Gegensatz etwa zu Atomphysikern keinen Schaden anrichten könnten. Jetzt weiß ich, daß ich mich geirrt habe. Unsere Studien können sich ebenso in Bombenlager verwandeln wie jene Fabriken, in denen die IRA chemischen Dünger in Sprengstoff umgewandelt hat.“

<sup>2</sup> “Reconcile”: The Oxford English Dictionary, vol. XIII (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989) 352-353.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Stover and Harvey M. Weinstein (eds.), *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocities* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge et al., 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Harvey M. Weinstein and Eric Stover, “Introduction: conflict, justice and reclamation”, in Stover and Weinstein (eds.), *op.cit.* note 3, 1-26, at 5.

<sup>5</sup> Magarditsch Hatschikjan, Dušan Reljić and Nenad Sešek (eds.), *Disclosing hidden history: Lustration in the Western Balkans. A Project Documentation* (Center for Democracy and

For the purpose of this paper, both terms – Weinstein’s “social reconstruction,” as well as Puhovski’s “normalization” – seem to be most appropriate. Former belligerent groups and individuals have to find new ways of living together peacefully and promoting tolerance and inclusiveness. Thus, they have to return to a “normal” life by reconstructing their social lives, thereby achieving the “building of relationship”, according to Jean Paul Lederach’s<sup>6</sup> minimal definition of reconciliation. After living with genocide, mass atrocity and terror, how can relationships be established if there is no mutual trust?

Martha Minow, in a survey on the South African truth commission, concludes that:

[R]emembering and forgetting (is) not just about dealing with the past. The treatment of the past through remembering and forgetting crucially shapes the present and future for individuals and entire societies.”<sup>7</sup> The importance of the past for the future is also stressed by Lederach, who concludes that “[r]econciliation must find ways to address the past without getting locked into a vicious cycle of mutual exclusiveness inherent in the past.”<sup>8</sup>

Given the role the misuse of history has played in inflaming the conflict, we have to analyze how these societies remember the past,<sup>9</sup> especially when seriously considering the task of giving history a prominent role in the reconciliation process. The main decision any society has to make after violent conflicts and wars is between forgetting (amnesia, moratorium) and forgiving. This must be accompanied by an evaluation, a *travail de mémoire*, which would result in “mastering the past” or “coming to terms with the past” (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). In order to achieve this goal, a balance must be achieved between too much memory and too much forgetting.<sup>10</sup>

As we will see in the following, the concept, or better said, the conceptualisation of the term and notion of “truth” plays a crucial role.

## 2. Truth Commissions

Since the 1970s, truth commissions have been installed in a number of post-conflict states and societies, especially in South America (such as in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Uruguay), but also in Africa (South Africa, Sierra Leone, Philippines) and Asia (East Timor).

In her account of truth commissions (TC) all over the world, Priscilla B. Hayner defined five aims of a truth commission:

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Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, Thessaloniki, 2005),148, at >[http://www.lustration.net/lustration\\_documentation.pdf](http://www.lustration.net/lustration_documentation.pdf)<

<sup>6</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C., 2004), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1998), 119.

<sup>8</sup> Lederach, *op.cit.* note 6, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Warshauer Freedman *et.al.*, “Public education and social reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia“, in Stover and Weinstein (eds.), *op.cit.* note 3, 226-247, at 141.

<sup>10</sup> Minow, *op.cit.* note 7, 118.

[T]o discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to respond to specific needs of victims; to contribute to justice and accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past.<sup>11</sup>

Since the “success” of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which also has to be seen in a relative light,<sup>12</sup> truth commissions world-wide<sup>13</sup> have been recognized as a remedy for transitional societies and states, especially after gross human rights violations and wars after which prosecution is difficult or impossible. In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars of the 1990s and the horrible atrocities committed, truth commissions became a subject for the region.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the most prominent and widely discussed TC and was picked as a role model for both the Bosnian and the Yugoslav TC. The South African TC was institutionalized as a political compromise when the outgoing government insisted on an amnesty for politically motivated crimes committed between 1960 and 1994. The Commission was finally introduced by a Parliamentary Act in 1995, and appointed by a public selection and nomination process. The Commission was given the power to grant individualized amnesty in return for confessions. It also had the right to search premises and seize evidence, as well as to subpoena witnesses, which it rarely did. More than 21,000 victims and witnesses gave testimony, 2000 of whom appeared in public hearings. The commission had enormous media coverage, not only in the print media but also on TV and radio. More than 7000 people asked for amnesty. Whereas a full confession was a precondition for amnesty, neither an apology nor remorse were necessary. Many high-level political leaders and army officers of the apartheid system took the risk of not applying for amnesty because the risk of prosecution was not strong enough. Some victims also challenged the Commission’s amnesty-granting power, but these challenges were in vain. The South African Constitutional Court decided in favour of the Commission. In October 1998, the Commission concluded its task with a five-volume report.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, truth commissions must be considered as a rather imperfect substitute for accountability. They are victim-centered, giving victims and their families a chance to speak about their sufferings. TCs are also supposed to clarify the fate of unrecognized victims and their descendants. Therefore, the positive impact on the refurbishment and disclosure of recent history – the “truth” – of a number of truth commissions in various countries, such as Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and others must be noted.<sup>15</sup> But in most of these enumerated cases, such as Argentina and Chile, the division of roles – perpetrators/victims – was obvious, in contrast to the Balkans.

Since 1997, three attempts have been undertaken to establish such a truth commission in Bosnia. The first attempt, undertaken by the Citizens’ Association

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<sup>11</sup> Priscilla B. Hayner, “Unspeakable Truths confronting State Terror and Atrocity (Routledge, New York 2001), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Only to mention that former president P.W. Botha declined to appear before the commission. Additionally, there are complaints of partiality, as the commission granted a number of ANC-leaders collective amnesty. “Südafrikas unbewältigte Vergangenheit”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 18-19 August 2007, 3. For the >healing process< very often attributed to the truth commissions see below.

<sup>13</sup> For an evaluation of the accomplishments of truth commissions see Hayner, *op.cit.* note 11 and most recently Sheri P. Rosenberg (ed.), *Truth Commissions: Salient Factors*, unpubl. Paper prepared by the Human Rights and Genocide Clinic Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law (New York 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Hayner, *op.cit.* note 11, 40f, Minow, *op.cit.* note 7, Rosenberg, *op.cit.* note 11.

<sup>15</sup> Hayner, *op.cit.* note 11, 45f.

for Truth and Reconciliation,<sup>16</sup> was opposed by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The ICTY claimed that it was already establishing the historical truth. A second attempt undertaken in 2001 also failed. A third attempt was undertaken in 2006, mainly by the NGO association “Truth and Reconciliation”, with strong support from the United States Institute for Peace (USIP).

Five duties have been assigned to that commission by a draft law<sup>17</sup>: to establish (1) the number and identity of victims and missing persons, people who were tortured and raped, (2) the causes that led to “ethnic distrust and misunderstanding”, (3) “the role and moral responsibility of individuals, organisations, institutions with its acts, or lack of acts, helped or prevented, the breaking of human rights”, (4) the role of actors outside of Bosnia who supported the violence in one way or another and (5) “the existence and acts of individuals who refused to take part in persecution and torture [and] who tried to protect their neighbours”.

But the commission, as intended by this draft, has one decisive shortcoming: the naming the perpetrators, which has proved to be one of the most powerful instruments of truth commissions in South Africa and El Salvador, has been dropped. The names of individuals that committed atrocities and crimes will, according to this draft, not be made available to the courts, thus preventing any prosecution of these perpetrators. Another function that was decisive for the South African Truth Commission has also not been envisaged by this draft: to grant amnesty to perpetrators under certain conditions in compensation for the disclosure of their misdeeds. Thus, it remains questionable if perpetrators will confess to the truth commission. On how important such confessions are on the emotional level, a woman from Mostar says: “We all know what happened, but it is easier when you hear a criminal confessing his crimes. What happened has happened and it cannot be changed, but it means a lot to you when you hear a confession. This is something very important.”<sup>18</sup>

With three ethnically biased “truths” still prevailing, it remains questionable whether Bosnia, even 15 years after the war, is ready for such a commission. A study<sup>19</sup> (already completed in 2000) of three war-ravaged cities – Mostar, Vukovar and Prijedor – proves what has already been stated above several times: the self-perception of the three ethnic groups is that their own group was the sole victim of the war, thus the “other” is the exclusive perpetrator. Whereas all participants of that study agreed that war crimes had been committed by all ethnic groups, persons tended to qualify and downplay war crimes committed by members of their own ethnic group as “individual excesses”.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that Muslim victims from Srebrenica refused to testify at the ill-fated and short-lived Serbian truth commission when they heard that Serb victims from the region also would testify.<sup>21</sup> Another example of this ethnically biased alleged monopoly of “truth” is the Sarajevo truth commission. Originally, delegates from the Republika Srpska (RS) demanded that such a commission be set up to deal

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<sup>16</sup> Magarditsch Hatschikjan, “Regional Overview: Western Balkans” in Hatschikjan *et.al.*, *op.cit.* note 5, 23-33, at 30.

<sup>17</sup> Nerma Jelacic and Nidzara Ahmetasevic, “Truth Commission Divides Bosnia”, *Balkan Inside*, 31 March 2006, at [http://iwpr.net/?p=brn&s=f&o=260734&apc\\_state=henh](http://iwpr.net/?p=brn&s=f&o=260734&apc_state=henh)

<sup>18</sup> Dinka Corkalo *et.al.*, “Neighbors again? Intercommunity relations after ethnic cleansing”, in Stover and Weinstein (eds.), *op.cit.* note 3, 143-162, at 149.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-162.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>21</sup> David Bruce MacDonald and Marina Blagojević, „Living Together or Hating each Other?“, *The Scholars' Initiative: Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies*, 2005, 32, at <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/si/>.

exclusively with Serb victims during the war in Sarajevo. Finally, a compromise was reached, stating that “the suffering of Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, Jews and others” in Sarajevo would be investigated.<sup>22</sup>

As statements by various people and groups (such as victims’ associations) show, the question of whether the people of Bosnia want such a commission has not been decided yet. This varies from full support (“We need such a commission because to continue living with three of five truths is a catastrophe”) and the urgent wish to tell what happened (“There are masses of people who would like to say what happened to them... But they will never have a chance to be witnesses in a trial and for their story to see the daylight”) to accusations that the money spent on the commission is a waste and will only make certain people rich.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the question of whether a Bosnian Truth Commission could contribute to reconciliation among the three ethnic groups is (at best) still open, but even the very often acclaimed therapeutic effect for the individual victim must be questioned. In her assessment of the South African Truth Commission, Martha Minow concludes that the commission has proved that “[t]estifying publicly before an official body can transform the seemingly private experience into a public one.”<sup>24</sup> After telling one’s story, the trauma belongs to the past and the survivor can face and work for the future.<sup>25</sup> This seems to be a one-dimensional assessment of a complex psychological process. As a psychologist explains:

The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*. Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work ... Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.<sup>26</sup>

The assumption that talking leads to healing, a “cathartic” effect, surely does not hold for a truth commission which usually does not offer long-term therapy, and which does not hold this aim. On the contrary, there is a danger of re-traumatization as testimonies from the South African TC prove: “My life has deteriorated since the hearing. ... It’s made me think about these things again.”<sup>27</sup>

The question remains whether the therapeutic effect for the individual, which also must be questioned as argued above, can also work for the collective and the nation: whether a truth commission “can also help to reconcile groups that have been warring or otherwise engaged in deep animosities.”<sup>28</sup> Despite being held in such high esteem internationally, a national poll in South Africa shows that the “truth commission process had made South Africans angrier and led to a deterioration in relations between races.”<sup>29</sup>

The “success” of a TC, and especially a Bosnian TC for reconciliation, is based on overcoming the dichotomy of *acknowledgement* and *knowledge*. Everybody in Bosnia seems to know, but who is ready to acknowledge, especially when it comes to the acknowledgment of crimes committed by one’s own ethnic

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<sup>22</sup> Mirna Buljugic, “No Progress for Sarajevo Truth Commission”, 20 Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), (20 February 2007), at ><http://www.bim.ba/en/51/10/2327><

<sup>23</sup> Jelacic and Ahmetasevic, *op.cit.* note 17.

<sup>24</sup> Minow, *op.cit.* note 7, 67.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 67

<sup>26</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (Basic Books, New York, 1992), 1 cited in Hayner, *op.cit.* note 11, 135.

<sup>27</sup> Hayner, *op.cit.* note 11, 143f.

<sup>28</sup> Minow, *op.cit.* note 7, 79.

<sup>29</sup> Hayner, *op.cit.* note 11, 156.

group?<sup>30</sup> In 2002, Timothy Garton Ash therefore recommended that the “starting point of countries confronting difficult pasts should be that you concentrate on what your own people did, not what others did to you.”<sup>31</sup> But who in Bosnia, especially when it comes to the political elites, is ready for such a *mea culpa*? Particularly when it comes to points two to four of the draft law for such a TC, the elaboration of “the truth”, therefore seems to be very unlikely given the existing ethno-political cleavages. Nevertheless, a truth commission can collect documents, evidence, testimonies and all kinds of material that will prove human rights violations and abuses for further generations. Especially in the field of oral history – testimonies – the work of a truth commission would be of great value. But there is still the danger that a TC will not be able to prevent a perpetuation of three narratives and “three truths”. Thus, the unwanted effect of such a TC could be the perpetuation of parallel versions of facts that do not result in a shared truth, or as an ICTY indictee stated: “You have your facts. We have our facts. You have a complete right to choose between the two versions.”<sup>32</sup> Taking this petrification of the mental cleavages into consideration, it seems unlikely that the Bosnian reality consists of anything but “three truths,” which would therefore also be the outcome of such a TC.

Apart from the evidence collection work of a TC, which could be of long-lasting value, the draft law has assigned one task (point five) to the Bosnian TC that could serve as a starting point for a “positive history”: to disclose “the existence and acts of individuals who refused to take part in persecution and torture [who] tried to protect their neighbours.” “Positive history,” “a history of cooperation and tolerance that cuts across ethnic and religious divisions and stresses the communalities of people and their shared experiences of hardship”, as it has been defined by the “Scholars’ Initiative” (Research Team 11 in their paper “Living Together or Hating Each Other?”<sup>33</sup>) could serve as a key instrument for reconciliation and healing. Thus, examples of “positive history” could contribute to a “shared truth,” another precondition for reconciliation. Examples of inter-ethnic cooperation and aid therefore could promote reconciliation and prove that “the other” was not always exclusively an inhumane perpetrator and that “the other” very often proved to be a caring human being: “not all were killers”.<sup>34</sup> This approach could help to break the vicious circle of a “we/they,” “friend/foe” generalisation.

For more than ten years, groups and people in Bosnia (to name only Jakob Finci) have been fighting to establish such a truth commission. But the first TC to be established in Europe was the Yugoslav Truth Commission, which can be taken as a role model of how not to establish a truth commission that is intended to function properly. From its starting point in March 2001, when it was convened by

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<sup>30</sup> Only to give one anecdotal evidence of a young Serbian woman who had left Banja Luka during the war with her parents and had emigrated to a EU country, where she is fully integrated and finally also became citizen of that state. A student of law she cannot be perceived as Serbian nationalist at all. Nevertheless, when looking at the map of Sarajevo during the war, showing the Serbian military positions around Sarajevo, she asked “Are these our positions”. Asked whether she identifies with the Serbian nationalist and military politics during the war, she simply answered: but it’s our people.”

<sup>31</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, “A nation in denial”, *The Guardian*, 7 March 2002, at ><http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,663017,00.html><

<sup>32</sup> Statement by Simo Drljača. Motto of the Scholars’ Initiative, at: ><http://www.salzburgseminar.org/ihjr/si/si/scholarsprospectus.htm><

<sup>33</sup> MacDonald and Blagojević, *op.cit.* note 21, 5.

<sup>34</sup> „Nicht alle waren Mörder“ [Not all were killers], title of the biography of the German actor Michael Degen, who survived the Nazi era as a Jewish boy with the help of a number of Germans.

presidential decree of then President Kostunica, the Commission was perceived negatively. Thus, there were claims that only strong pressure from the West, as well as efforts to avoid responsibility for war crimes<sup>35</sup> had been its *raison d'être*. Although the commission included representatives of the whole political spectrum and the arts and academia, it lacked a prerequisite that has been seen as crucial for the success of most TCs: the consultation and engagement of civil society as well as victims' groups.<sup>36</sup> Further shortcomings were that from the religious sphere, only (two) representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church were appointed.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, no members from Montenegro or minority representatives were appointed, thus creating a purely Serb body. Established by name and decree as a national truth commission, its mandate far exceeded the Yugoslav/Serb borders and thus must be considered its weakest point: according to its mandate the commission was supposed to do research "on the uncovering of evidence on the social, inter-ethnic and political conflicts which led to war and to shed light on the causal links among these events."<sup>38</sup>

After two prominent members (Vojin Dimitrijević and Latinka Perovic) resigned from the commission and a number of infrastructural problems arose (such as insufficient funding), the TC vegetated for several months before it was finally abolished in 2003. After his resignation, Vojin Dimitrijević enumerated a number of the Commission's weaknesses (which led to his resignation), such as attempts to rectify "a completely distorted picture of Serbia and the Serbs" and "to establish a self-victimising position. By this means, the series of crimes during the last decade actually were blurred and seemed less significant compared to some other crimes from other periods of the past."<sup>39</sup> Thus, Serbia's wartime violations and their effects on the victims were obviously not the focus of the TC.

Given the agenda before the commission, one can only question which "truth" they intended to find. Polls prove that Serbs know about atrocities committed (against non-Serbs) but do not believe it. Thus, a kind of mental closure makes people blind to facts.<sup>40</sup> Since the Yugoslav truth commission was founded in this atmosphere of "national phantasm" (Ilic)<sup>41</sup>, its stated goal of establishing truth and therefore fostering reconciliation was doomed to fail from the beginning. The dichotomy of knowledge and acknowledgement that has already been elaborated as one of the greatest obstacles facing "truth" for Bosnia and a Bosnian truth commission also proves true for Serbia, not to mention the national uproar after the broadcast of the Srebrenica documentary.

But can "truth," or in order to use a more technical and less complex and philosophical term, can a record of past abuses, compiled with utmost accuracy, establish or at least support reconciliation? Obviously, a truth commission cannot overcome a society's division, as Michael Ignatieff stated in 1996. In the Bosnian and Serbian context, in contrast to South America, it is unlikely that the TC would be able to reduce the number of lies that circulated unchallenged in the public

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<sup>35</sup> MacDonald and Blagojević, *op.cit.* note 21, 31.

<sup>36</sup> See Rosenberg, *op.cit.* note 13, 9f.

<sup>37</sup> Later a representative of the Islamic community and a Catholic theologian were appointed. See, MacDonald and Blagojević, *op.cit.* note 21, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Freeman, "Serbia and Montenegro: Selected Developments in its Transitional Justice", International Center for Transitional Justice, October 2004, at ><http://www.icty.org/images/content/1/1/117.pdf><

<sup>39</sup> Hatschikjan, *op.cit.* note 4, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Dejan Ilic, "The Yugoslav truth and reconciliation commission", Eurozine 2004, 4, at ><http://eurozine.com/pdf/2004-04-23-ilic-en.pdf><

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

discourse<sup>42</sup> as long as the respective societies, as a whole as well as the political elites, are not ready to acknowledge the abuses.

Perhaps it is not the search for “truth,” a term so absolutely, philosophically and morally perceived that should be in the centre of any reconciliation effort. Perhaps the first steps towards reconciliation should be of a smaller scale. A workable approach could therefore be task five, as assigned to the Bosnian draft law on the truth commission, which intends to search for examples of positive history. As Vojin Dimitrijević stated:

I am mostly interested, as it is to be expected, in brutalities of our wars. I am afraid of big truths and explanations: in the name of these truths severe violence was done. The reconciliation might start with more modest aims and goals. It is not the matter of who was right and who was wrong, but who behaved as a human being and who did not.<sup>43</sup>

“Truth” has been assessed as being crucial for reconciliation. But at the same time, at least in the context of the Former Yugoslavia, the claim for “truth” seems to be an insurmountable obstacle to reconciliation, as every group claims to possess the “only absolute truth.” This has been or even still is the case in many history textbooks.

### 3. Textbooks

Reconciliation is a question of generations. The foundation for reconciliation therefore has to be elaborated in schools. History education in schools is one of the most crucial “instruments” to either prolong and renew old stereotypes, myths and hatreds, or to “come to terms with the past” and thus support the reconciliation process. It is the dichotomy of remembering and forgetting that each transitional society has to decide between after violent conflicts.

Post-Franco Spain chose to forget about the past and start from scratch. After Franco’s death, the Spanish elite decided on a “pact of oblivion”<sup>44</sup> in order not to endanger the transformation process of the young, unstable democracy. And it seems that this collective amnesia worked. Amnesia seems to be a human desire after traumatic experiences – one wishes to leave all the bad experiences behind and start a new life. This was also the case in post-World War II Austria, where the moratorium on teaching the history of the then-recent past, the Nazi era and the Holocaust, was an unofficial compromise between the political elite and the average citizen. The school curricula very soon reflected the teaching of this era, and most Austrian teachers, sometimes until as late as the 1970s, only taught history up to the year 1918, the end of World War I.<sup>45</sup> The war and its effects had been hard. Everyone was longing and working for better times and everyone deemed himself a victim, very often by ignoring the real victims of the Nazi regime, who were painful witnesses of a time everyone tried to forget. The myth of Austria having been Hitler’s first victim supported this refusal to face the truth.

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “Articles of Faith” (abridged from the article published in Index on Censorship 5/96), 2 at ><http://www.niza.nl/uk/publications/001/ignatieff.htm><

<sup>43</sup> Ilić, *op.cit.* note 40, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Rigby, “Three contrasting approaches for ‘Dealing with the Past’: collective amnesia, retributive justice and prioritising truth”, Committee for Conflict Transformation Support (CCTS) Newsletter 18, 5 at ><http://www.c-r.org/ccts18/3apprch.htm><

<sup>45</sup> The teachers usually pretended that they had run out of time and therefore could not proceed in the curriculum.

Thus, a kind of pact of silence had been sealed in the ordinary Austrians' daily life.<sup>46</sup>

It took a new generation of history teachers who did not consider teaching the time of the Nazi regime to be dangerous or heroic. Thanks to the "*Gnade der späten Geburt*" (the mercy of being born late), they were neither personally nor ideologically involved in the Nazi regime and *Weltanschauung*. Therefore, generations of Austrian pupils never learned about the Nazi regime and the Holocaust at school. Whatever they knew about that time came from their parents (who very often refused to talk about these dark times) or from other sources (among these the American TV miniseries *Holocaust* must be emphasised).

So, is collective amnesia a prerequisite for "normalisation" in terms of securing a new start with political stability?

But the case of Tito's post-1945 Yugoslavia proves just the opposite: amnesia does not heal. Tito's policy of declaring that the ethnic question be settled by the victory of the partisans and Communism and the declaration of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (Brotherhood and Unity) without any attempt at reconciliation of the (formerly ?) hostile nations and nationalities was a fatal failure. To use medical vocabulary, the diagnosis is obvious: in the case of Yugoslavia, the wounds suppurated under the surface and waited to break through. The collapse of Yugoslavia was like a pressure bandage being removed. Time does not heal all wounds. "If society does not address the origins of the conflict effectively, they tend to be the bases of future instability and conflict."<sup>47</sup> Via "trans-generational transmission", a catastrophe suffered is carried psychologically from one generation to the next.<sup>48</sup> Volkan describes this "chosen trauma", as he calls this phenomenon, as a "shared mental representation of the event, which included realistic information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings, and defenses against unacceptable thoughts."<sup>49</sup> In a kind of "time collapse", people believe that the same realities that applied in the past apply today.<sup>50</sup> As conflict transformation shows, the wrong type of history perpetuates itself, when "the pain occasioned by the divisions and conflicts of the past never dies", hurt and resentment is "produced from generation to generation onto the future - a future that is overdetermined by the remembered past."<sup>51</sup>

This theory is proven true in the Yugoslav case, as the unresolved trauma was passed on from the WWII generation to the generation of the 1980s: the past resurged from the depths.<sup>52</sup> The tormenting past was left to the "collective memory," whereas the topic was suppressed in the official memory, in the historic

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<sup>46</sup> This pact of silence easily worked as only few victims who had survived the Holocaust returned to Austria or Germany. But this does not mean that historic research did not tackle this topic. Especially in Germany, but also in Austria, historiography has focussed on the Nazi time and regime at least since the Nazi trials in the early 1960s.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth A. Cole and Judy Barsalou, "Unite or Divide ? The Challenges of Teaching History in Societies Emerging from Violent Conflict", in United States Institute of Peace, Special report No.163, June 2006, at ><http://www.usip.org/specialreports/sr163.htm><

<sup>48</sup> Vamik Volkan, *Bloodlines* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1997), 44.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 48

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*. 48

<sup>51</sup> Rigby, *op.cit.* note 44, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Amor Masovic, who is in charge of the Bosnian state commission that excavates mass graves, stated in 2003: "In 1946 in Yugoslavia we decided to close mass graves and caves [where the dead bodies had been dumped] and to cement them over. The goal was 'What happened, happened. Forget it, let's go forward.' But that 'forward' brought us to 1992. The families of the victims cemented in caves started to take revenge. They remembered their fathers and mothers in mass graves so they decided to pay back the suffering of the last fifty years by killing others." Quoted in: Tim Judah, "The Fog of Justice", 15 New York Book Review (January 2004), 23-25, at 25.

research, and much more importantly, in the schools. Thus, the role of history teaching in the reconciliation process must be seen as a dichotomy of “collective memory” versus “history.” According to Halbwachs’<sup>53</sup> concept, “collective memory” tends to simplify. It tends to present the history of a group as a continuity, and resists the idea that the group has changed over time. Collective memory at the same time implies only one perspective, whereas history is multi-perspective and gives a record of changes.

Seen from this perspective, the question must be raised: What is the main motif of teaching history? A very traditional and common answer for all societies would be “to inspire patriotism”. Applying this traditional approach to teaching and learning history immediately after these violent ethnic conflicts would have fed new conflicts. During the wars in the former Yugoslavia, an “ethnization” of memories took place<sup>54</sup> that can hardly be changed. It is therefore a question of the historical narratives that are taught in schools and also disseminated via the media. The historical narratives are not static; they can be refined gradually. New myths can be invented, so why not develop a historical narrative that is “purged of mutual resentment, mutual recrimination, and mutual blame”<sup>55</sup>?

History education after violent conflicts, especially internal ethnic conflicts and wars, is heavily burdened. It is not only a question of revised schoolbooks, new unbiased curricula, and new teaching materials, which, as will be shown, cause and have caused enormous problems in the former Yugoslavia. Unbiased history education is also a question of teachers’ attitudes and skills. Considering the “human factor” and teachers’ attitudes and skills, in 2004 a prominent English historian, Belgrade born Steven K. Pavlowitch, raised the question of whether it might be better for schools to forget history altogether for a while.<sup>56</sup>

But is there no alternative? Training history teachers and preparing alternative teaching materials that combat ethnocentric school history by avoiding ethno-centric stereotypes has been the aim of the Thessaloniki based Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southern Europe. In 1999, the Centre had already initiated the “Joint History Project” (JHP), bringing together historians, teachers, pedagogues and students of the region “... to work together towards the emergence of democratic and peaceful societies in the region, through multi-perspective history education.”<sup>57</sup> The project is aimed at revising ethnocentric education through history teaching by promoting the idea of multiple interpretations and thus offering a basis for democracy, reconciliation and tolerance in the region. In the long term, the Centre and the JHP hoped to assist the new generation of Southeast Europe to “reconcile with the past and move forwards to a self-determined and democratic future that can solve its own problems, cooperate and uphold rights and liberties.”<sup>58</sup> After the identification of deficiencies in historical education, collaborators from 11 countries selected documentation and images for four thematic workbooks: The Ottoman Empire, Nations and States, Balkan Wars, and World War II. In December 2002, an English version of these four books was published. Greek and Serbian versions also exist and further versions in the Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian and Macedonian languages are scheduled to be published by autumn 2007.

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<sup>53</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis* (Ferdinand Enke Verlag, Stuttgart, 1967).

<sup>54</sup> Corkalo, *op.cit.* note 18, 149.

<sup>55</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, “The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Competing Narratives of Resentment and Blame”, in 55 (1) *Südost Europa* (2007), 26-70, at 30.

<sup>56</sup> Stevan K. Pavlowitch, “History education in the Balkans ? How bad is it ?”, in 6 (1) *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* (2004), 63-68, at 68.

<sup>57</sup> ><http://www.cdsee.org/jhp/index.html><

<sup>58</sup> ><http://www.cdsee.org/jhp/aims.html><

Dubravka Stojanovic, a prominent JHP collaborator, stated optimistically in a publication of the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southern Europe in 2001 that “history textbooks are among the most important means for shaping national identity and historical awareness. (...) as well as the images of other, notably neighbouring peoples.”<sup>59</sup> In an interview with the author in January 2007, she was far less optimistic on the prospect of history teaching, especially teaching recent history for the reconciliation process, as a great number of academics of the region still insist on the existence of a “single truth”, equating this with “our truth” being the >only truth”.

Taking this into consideration, it is almost an impossible mission for the average schoolteacher in transitional societies such as the former Yugoslavia to teach recent history, even those who have participated in special teacher training. The “Scholars’ Initiative”<sup>60</sup> has been examining the contentious historical narratives of the region since the wars in the 1990s. The members of that Initiative believe that a consistent academic historical narrative must be available before recent history can be taught in schools.

According to Wolfgang Höpken, former director of the Georg-Eckart-Institute of Textbook Research in Braunschweig, the importance of textbooks and history teaching to the reconciliation process is vastly overestimated, especially in the former Yugoslavia: “[Textbooks] hardly can initiate or even replace a general policy of détente and reconciliation, but have to be part of it. If reduced to isolated initiatives, they usually have little impact on the society.”<sup>61</sup>

The limited influence of history teaching and textbooks on children’s attitudes seems to be proved by the experience of Northern Ireland. Children do not come to school as “empty vessels”<sup>62</sup>; they have been “taught” by their families, friends, and their social surroundings. Thus teachers from Northern Ireland even doubt “the capacity of their teaching to displace narratives students have picked up in home and community settings ...”.<sup>63</sup> The Northern Ireland experience has shown that “... pupils separate the facts they learn in the classroom and the political uses of history outside.”<sup>64</sup> Under the impression of this “smokescreen problem” (Smith), three-quarters of teachers from Northern Ireland who participated in a survey uttered the opinion that history teaching cannot alter ideas pupils have acquired at home. Another study from Northern Ireland showed that pupils from the age of thirteen onward begin strongly to identify with their community. Thus, history teaching can have much more influence on younger pupils, especially around the age of eleven.<sup>65</sup>

In comparison to post-World War II Germany and Austria, the case of teaching recent history in the former Yugoslavia is much more complicated. In Austria and Germany (Federal Republic), people construed a simple reality: the

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<sup>59</sup> Dubravka Stojanovic, “History Textbooks and the Creation of National Identity”, in Christina Koulouri (ed.), *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe* (Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, Thessaloniki, 2001), 27-32, at 27.

<sup>60</sup> 280 academic historians and social scientists from the region are collaborating in 11 research teams over historical controversies in the Yugoslav conflict. At ><http://www.cla.purdue.edu/si/><

<sup>61</sup> Wolfgang Höpken, “History Textbooks and Reconciliation - Preconditions and Experiences in a Comparative Perspective”. Draft. World Bank Meeting, November 11th [2001], Washington DC., at ><http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCEERD/Resources/EDUwolfganghoepken.pdf><

<sup>62</sup> Chris Husbands, *What is History Teaching ?* (Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1999), 80

<sup>63</sup> Margaret E. Smith, *Reckoning with the Past: Teaching History in Northern Ireland* (Lexington Books, Lanham, 2005), 143.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 150f.

“bad Nazi” had disappeared or had been hanged in Nuremberg. All the other millions of members of the NSDAP, the “innocent” Germans and Austrians who had been “forced” to become members of the NSDAP, deemed themselves “ordinary people” who shared the average German’s or Austrian’s daily struggle for survival. Things are much more complicated in former Yugoslavia. In Bosnia, Kosovo and in Croatia, where there is no clear distinction between perpetrator and victim, everyone deems himself exclusively the victim and the “other,” who was sometimes even their neighbour, exclusively the perpetrator.

Faced with the frustrating peace negotiations in Yugoslavia, Portuguese Foreign Minister João de Deus Pinheiro exclaimed: “Forbid history teaching in schools for the next fifty years !”<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, the peace settlement brokered by the UN for Croatia’s reintegration of former Serb occupied territories in Eastern Slavonia, the so-called Erdut Agreement, implemented a moratorium on teaching recent history, even if not for 50 years. In the course of the military operations “Oluja” and “Blijesak” and the re-integration of the occupied territories into Croatia, a great number of Serbs fled their homes in Slavonia and the Krajina. Nevertheless, Serbs still constituted a national minority in Eastern Slavonia. History, or rather the misuse of history, had done so much harm that teaching the history of the conflict seemed too dangerous for this region shaken by violent ethnic conflict. The UN enacted the moratorium on teaching history from the school year 1997/98 to 2002/03.

After the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia into Croatia, the division of the roles of perpetrator (exclusively Serbs) and victim (exclusively Croats) seemed obvious (for Croats): “we” are exclusively the victims, “they” are exclusively the perpetrators. Psychologically understandable, the victims deny any effort to forget, whereas the “others”, those who are exclusively regarded as perpetrators, try to forget. Two statements of teachers from Vukovar, one a Serb, the other a Croat, document this attitude: “The truth and nothing but the truth. [The Serbs] should learn what it was. They should learn that Croatia was a victim that suffered and lost most ....”<sup>67</sup> The statement of the Serb teacher recalls the attitude of many Austrians after World War II: “The best thing to do, if only possible, would be to erase [everything about the past] so that all people, from the youngest to the oldest ones, can forget all about it. Grant God that we start living a normal life again.”<sup>68</sup> Past things “should be forgotten as soon as possible.”<sup>69</sup>

Another survey undertaken in Vukovar gives the same picture: Serbs think that there are “historical themes that should not be discussed in schools because they can contribute to worsening of relations between majority population and national minorities”. At the same time, Croats hold the view that “good knowledge of history of bad relations and conflicts between majority population and national minorities is very important for every contemporary Man”.<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, in deeply divided societies such as Eastern Slavonia, in which both groups foster their “truth”, one must combat a multitude of obstacles when attempting to take an unbiased approach to history teaching, or when teaching

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted in: Carmel Gallagher, *History Teaching and the Promotion of Democratic Values and Tolerance: A Handbook for Teachers* (Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1996), 19.

<sup>67</sup> Warshauer, *op.cit.* note 9, 239.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>70</sup> Gordana Bujšić, “Interethnic Relations in Eastern Slavonia - A Balance ten Years after the Erdut Agreement”, in Predrag Jurekovic and Frederic Labarre (eds.), *International Peace Plans for the Balkans - A Success*, at <http://www.bmlv.gv.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/beitrag.php?id=1438>, 19-26, at 24.

diversity and multiperspectivity<sup>71</sup>. But how can this belief in the “only truth” be deconstructed? Teachers who were used to teaching “fixed knowledge” in their history lessons are now supposed to give conflicting interpretations and enhance the critical thinking of their pupils. They are supposed to teach their pupils how to pose historical questions, to question the validity of historical sources, etc. What an endeavour for teachers and pupils! But this approach to teaching history does not only require willing teachers. These teachers need adequate teaching materials and educational (or school) authorities who at least allow such new teaching materials. By providing pupils with these skills, teachers and authors of history textbooks need open-mindedness, tolerance of others and empathy.<sup>72</sup> In a 1996 recommendation, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe demanded that history teaching should support the development of pupils’ critical minds in order to achieve democratic, tolerant and responsible citizens. “The teaching of history should enable pupils to acquire critical thinking skills to analyze and interpret information effectively and responsibly, to recognise the complexity of issues and to appreciate cultural diversity.”<sup>73</sup>

This approach was bravely undertaken by three Croatian historians: Snježana Koren, Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Tvrtko Jakovina. After the end of the Erdut moratorium, they presented a special history textbook supplement for East Slavonia (“Dodatak udžbenicima za najnoviju povijest”), covering the time span from the 1980s to 1995. Their small booklet caused a tremendous public uproar in Croatia. The authors were accused of “sacrificing” the hardships and sufferings of the *Domovinski Rat* (Homeland War) for the sake of reconciliation. In the summer of 2005 a vast number of articles in different newspapers such as Veržerni List, Jutarnji List, Novi List and Nacional, partly using inaccurate citations of the book, rallied the Croatian “public” against this supplement. But it was not only the newspapers and the “public” who condemned the supplement. Distinguished scholars were led the fight against this new textbook, which was finally withdrawn. What were the “failures” or “errors” of this supplement? Basically, the authors simply wrote a modern history textbook according to European standards, such as Recommendation 1283 of the Council of Europe. This meant that they followed the multi-perspectivity method, and thus deconstructed the “only” (Croatian) truth. In the preface, the authors explained the problems and complexity of history and history teaching, and even mentioned the opportunities for the misuse of history by politicians, media, etc. By applying this approach, Snježana Koren and her co-authors bravely disarmed the history of that region. They did not “sacrifice” the Croatian victims of that war, or the sufferings, pains and losses that were caused by war. But the “fault” of the book in the eyes of many Croats who considered “their truth” to be the only one allowed, was to also present the hardships and sufferings of the “other”, namely the Serbs after the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia into Croatia and operation “Oluja”. Just to give an example, there are two pictures, one showing smiling Croatian soldiers sitting on a tank and being applauded by bystanders in Zagreb, and the other showing a column of trucks and buses of Serbs leaving their homes in Eastern Slavonia. The book calls on the pupils to examine both pictures carefully: “Each picture tells its story. (...) one of victory, the other of tragedy and loss. (...) By using only the one picture and neglecting the

<sup>71</sup> For the term “multiperspectivity” and the development of this approach since the 1970s see the overview in: Robert Stradling, *Multiperspectivity in history teaching: a guide for teachers*, at >[www.coe.int/t/e/cultural\\_co%2Doperation/education/history-teaching/european\\_dimension/Multiperspectivity-E.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co%2Doperation/education/history-teaching/european_dimension/Multiperspectivity-E.pdf)<

<sup>72</sup> Stéphane Lévesque, “Historical Consciousness or Citizenship Education”, in: 35 (4) *Canadian Social Studies* (2001), 1, at >[www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css/Css\\_35\\_4/NThistorical\\_consciousness.htm](http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css/Css_35_4/NThistorical_consciousness.htm)<

<sup>73</sup> Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Recommendation 1283 (1996).

other, we only learn about one incidence. Together these two sources describe the complexity of all narratives.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, the authors of this textbook perfectly applied the multi-perspectivity approach. The approach of the supplement is obvious. By using the multi-perspectivity approach it clearly refrained from a biased friend/foe, victim/perpetrator scheme. They supported “the development of moral judgment, (...) the understanding that historical events (have) human consequences, and were experienced by people different from ourselves, but nonetheless people,” as Chris Husbands states.<sup>75</sup>

One commentary may be mentioned as an example of the historical understanding of (parts of) Croatian society at that time. The author of the article simply accuses the book of falsifying history.<sup>76</sup> The multi-perspectivity approach infuriates the journalist, who denounces this approach as an equalization of guilt!<sup>77</sup> He further asks whether the flowery phrase of (multi-ethnic) living together can be based on a falsification of history.<sup>78</sup>

The supplement was finally withdrawn by the authors. Parts of Croatian society were not ready to come to terms with their past. The public discussion also yields evidence that Croatian society and the political establishment were not ready then for reconciliation with the “other”, the former enemy – people who were nevertheless Croatian citizens. If “[s]chools and textbooks are important vehicles through which contemporary societies transmit ideas of citizenship and both the idealized past and the promised future of the community”<sup>79</sup>, Croatia at that time was lagging way behind.

In 2007, after an amendment of the curriculum, five new history textbooks were published in Croatia for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They dealt, in some degree of depth, with the time of the “Homeland War,” and the ethnic cleansing and crimes committed against the Serb population.<sup>80</sup> A further textbook, edited by Stjepan Behavac, does not mention the crimes committed in the Homeland War; he states

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<sup>74</sup> P. 29 Translated by the author.

<sup>75</sup> Husbands, *op.cit.* note 62, 65.

<sup>76</sup> Zvonimir Despot, “Povijest koju piše politika”, *Verčernji List*, 28 July 2005.

“Do daljnjega bolje i ništa jer ovaj je uradak, kako svjedoče povjesničari koji se bave tom problematikom, ništa drugo nego niz krivotvorina, tendencioznih tumačenja i citata, ... Svjedoci smo kako se u hravatskoj već godinama iz pojedinih krugova, domaćih i inozemnih, pokušava krivotvoriti povijest, posebice kad je riječ o Domovinskome ratu.” [... because this supplement, as argued by experts in this field, is nothing then a forgery, tendentious clarifications and quotations, ... We are witnessing attempts of certain domestic and foreign circles of influence to forge the Croatian history, especially concerning the Homeland War.]

<sup>77</sup> “...” multiperspektivno”, iza čega se zapravo krije najbezočnija krivotvorina... Ali naš je problem kad se u ovome uratku ide na izjednačavanje krivnje u ratu i kad se srpska agresija zeli prikazati kao gardanski rat.” [ ...“multi-perspectivity”, a term used to hide the most scrupulous forgery... But it is our problem that this supplement tries to equalize the war guilt as well as to portray the Serbian aggression as civil war.] Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> “...pa maker se vrtilo floskula o potrebi zajedničkoga suživota, kojemu bi valjda trebao pridonijeti i ovaj dodatak, kako je moguće: zajednički život temeljiti na krivotvorenju povijestnih činjenica ?” [ ... and although the flowery phrase about the necessity of cohabitation is often repeated, supposable the supplement is intended to facilitate, how can such a cohabitation be possible based on forged historical facts ?] Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Laura Hein and Mark Selden, “The Lessons of War, Global Power, and Social Change”, in: Laura Hein and Mark Selden (eds.), *Censoring History. Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (M.E.Sharpe, New York and London, 2000), 3-53, at 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ivana Kalogjera-Brkić, “Profesorima na odabir: udžbenik koji prešućuje ili navodi srpske žrtve u Oluji”, *Jutarnji List*, 5 April 2007, 2f. [Teachers can choose: Textbooks that suppress or talk about the Serb victims].

“Zločni počinjeni nakon operacije Oluja prvi će se put naići u školskim udžbenicima povijesti.” (Atrocities committed after operation Oluja for the first time will be mentioned in the textbooks of history.)

that the children should not be bothered with this, as long as scientists have not come to a final conclusion on the subject.<sup>81</sup> The media uproar that had accompanied the East Slavonia Supplement of Snježana Koren and colleagues was dampened. Nevertheless, the Commission, consisting of a number of historians from the University who had been appointed by the ministry and had furiously condemned the Eastern Slavonia supplement of Snježana Koren, again criticized the textbooks for mentioning the crimes committed by Croatian forces against Serb civilians. Nevertheless, depending on the national-political standpoint of the respective newspaper, the new textbooks were more or less positively assessed. Thus the paper *Magazin* clearly articulated the “new” position of a large part of Croatian society, realizing that the teaching the dark sides of the Homeland War, the crimes committed against parts of the Serb population during the military re-integration in the course of operations *Oluja* and *Blijesak*, was a necessary step towards the “normalisation” and democratisation of the Croatian society.<sup>82</sup> The article pleads with the readers not to be afraid of the truth. It further stresses the fact that the reference to Croatian war crimes does not equate guilt – an argument that very often has been used in order to prevent multi-perspectivity, especially when it comes to the guilt of one’s own nation or group.

Eastern Slavonia was not the only case in former Yugoslavia in which a moratorium on history teaching was considered. Whereas the Eastern Slavonia moratorium was established through a UN-brokered peace treaty, in Bosnia it was only recommended by various actors. In November 1997, an initiative of intellectuals (such as “Circle 99”, the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals, as well as members of the national cultural societies of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks based in Sarajevo) recommended such a moratorium “because there does not exist sufficient historical distance to enable an objective scientific approach to their interpretation”.<sup>83</sup> In 2000, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also recommended such a moratorium. In 1999, however, (then) member of the joint presidency Alija Izetbegovic definitively rejected any such moratorium as an “attack on truth”<sup>84</sup>. Nevertheless, in reality, an unofficial moratorium on teaching

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>82</sup> „Nema nikakve sumnje da će „uvođenje“ hrvatskih ratnih zločina u hrvatske školske knjige izazvati snažne reakcije javnosti.“...

„Ako želimo da Hrvatska bude „normalna“ i pravedna država, utemeljena na vladavini zakona i na načelima liberalne demokracije, me ne možemo i ne smijemo poricati bitne činjenice iz naše povijesti, a osobito ne iz recentnog odsječka povijesti u kojem se ova zemlja formirala.

Među nespornim i bitnim činjenicama jest i ona o hrvatskim ratnim zločinima u razdoblju od 1991. do 1995.“

(If we want Croatia to be a „normal“ and righteous state, based on the rule of law and principles of liberal democracy, we can not and must not deny the important facts of our history, especially of the recent history when our country was founded.

There is no doubt that “introducing” the Croatian war crimes into the Croatian textbooks will provoke a strong reaction from the public. ...

Among the undisputed (sic!) and important facts are those concerning the Croatian war crimes in the period 1991 to 1995. ...)

Davor Butković, “Protiv Krivnje”, *Magazin*, 19 April 2007, 35.

<sup>83</sup> Robert J. Donia, “The Quest for Tolerance in Sarajevo’s Textbooks”, in 1 Human Rights Review (2000), 38-55, 47.

<sup>84</sup> Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Doc. 8863, 14 March 2000, 6.

the history of 1992-1995 is being executed by the teachers.<sup>85</sup> Practically, the teaching of history ends at the year 1991.<sup>86</sup>

But it was not Bosnian intellectuals alone who perceived (teaching) recent history as too dangerous for Bosnia so soon after the war. In 1999, when Ambassador Robert Perry, the OSCE Head of Mission, chaired the opening session of the first post-war municipal council meeting in Srebrenica, he did not mention the massacre committed against thousands of Muslims in this town. "His omission made it clear that the OSCE was hoping to achieve reconciliation in Srebrenica without confronting the hard realities of recent history."<sup>87</sup>

But the problem of ethnically biased descriptions does not extend to recent history alone. Since the end of the war, the "de-ethnicisation" of all history textbooks has been a high priority on the agenda of the OSCE, EU and OHR. Though they began by blackening ethnically biased passages in old textbooks immediately after the war, most history textbooks are still biased, especially with regard to relations with neighbouring countries.<sup>88</sup> The approach of teaching biased history has been supported by the political compromise of creating a "national group of subjects" (history, geography, literature and religion), which in reality entails a further segregation of education.<sup>89</sup> With regard to the complicated constitutional and institutional organisation of BiH, with 2 entities and the Federation of BiH subdivided into 10 cantons, and given that education lies within the competencies of the cantons, so far no common curriculum has been developed. After at least three textbook commissions had failed, a Commission for the Development of Guidelines on Textbook Writing for the Subjects History and Geography was established in 2004. In 2005, this Commission published "Guidelines for Writing and Evaluation of History Textbooks for Primary and Secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina", where the "principle of multi-perspectivity in order to enable pupils to learn tolerance" was demanded.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the guidelines demanded that pupils be encouraged to think critically. Therefore, "[s]ensitive issues/controversial themes should be stated in the textbooks, in order to be opened up for discussion."<sup>91</sup> *Expressis verbis*, the guidelines gave clear directives for the presentation of the period 1945-1992, whereas the hot potato of the wartime period was only touched indirectly: "The Ministers of Education acknowledge the necessity for teaching of historical processes concluding with the end of the twentieth century, as to teach these processes in accordance with these Guidelines"<sup>92</sup> (sic!). Since then, some seminars on textbook writing have been or are being organised by the Council of Europe and the Georg Eckert Institute. These also focus on methods and concepts for the presentation of controversial issues in history textbooks, such as the Ottoman period, socialist Yugoslavia, and the Dayton period.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Information given to the author by Daria Duilovic, Senior Education Advisor of the OHR, 16 May 2007.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Valery Perry, Deputy Director of the OSCE Education Department in Sarajevo, 16 May 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Donia, *op.cit.* note 83, 40.

<sup>88</sup> Adin Sadic, "Education in BiH: Toward a Multi-Perspective Approach", 5 December 2006, at ><http://www.oscebih.org/public/default.asp?d=6&article=show&id=1955><.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Valery Perry, Deputy Director of the OSCE Education Department in Sarajevo, 16 May 2007.

<sup>90</sup> Commission for the Development of Guidelines for Conceptualizing New History Textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, at: <http://www.oscebih.org/documents/8988-eng.pdg>

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> This is the agenda of a seminar to be held at the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig in August 2007.

Even the European Parliament, in its recommendation to the European Council of March 15, 2007 on Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>94</sup>, stressed the importance of education as the primary vehicle for reconciliation. In her report, Doris Pack pointed out “that the young generation in BiH should come to grips with the past and learn from it, as did young people in Europe after World War II, ...”.<sup>95</sup>

Politicians’ reluctance to enact a common curriculum does not reflect the readiness of large segments of the population for such a step. Polls undertaken in BiH in 2006<sup>96</sup> show that almost three-quarters of the Bosnian population (91 % of Bosniaks, 64 % of Croats and 53 % of Serbs) would agree to a common curriculum. The same ratio could be found for the statement that all children should learn the history of all peoples on the territory of BiH (75 % of Bosniaks, 64 % of Croats and 60 % of Serbs). Roughly a third (30 % of Bosniaks, 34 % of Croats and 43 % of Serbs) supported the idea that it would be best for students from each ethnic group to learn their histories separately, regardless of cost. Concerning the last question, another poll undertaken in 2004<sup>97</sup> gives a different picture: 20 % of Bosniaks, 56 % of Croats and 32 % of Serbs supported the idea that students should learn about their history separately. This deviation is astonishing. One reason for this deviation might be the second part of the question “regardless of the costs it will produce”. Is it possible that Bosnian citizens are much more practical and rational than their politicians who are playing the ethnic card regardless of the costs? But this poll is contradicted by the fact that returnees very often leave their children in a region where they are educated according to “their ethnic” curriculum.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, in 2002 an “Implementation Plan for the Interim agreement on accommodation of specific needs and rights of returnee children” was signed by the respective Education Ministers of the Federation, promising to establish the possibility of teaching these returnee children the national group of subjects according to a curriculum of their choice. The implementation Plan also promised to hire teachers for the national group of subjects for returnee children.<sup>99</sup>

An interesting deviation concerning the attitude of the Bosnian population toward multiethnic education can be seen in Brčko, which was the scene of incredible violence during the war.<sup>100</sup> Due to its strategic importance for both the RS and the Federation, it was awarded a special status.<sup>101</sup> Since then, it has been administered by a Special Supervisor, who has not refrained from using his special powers extensively. Thus, until 2004, local elections were suspended in Brčko, giving local politicians no chance for ethnic mobilization. Whereas in the whole of Bosnia, politicians have not been able to agree on a common curriculum and separated schools (“two schools under one roof”) still exist in the Federation, in Brčko the Supervisor imposed a harmonized curriculum in 2001. As polls prove, multiethnic education was fairly accepted by the three ethnic groups in Brčko. Thus in 2002, Bosniaks (around 90 %) and Croats (around 80%) in Brčko agreed to the common curriculum, but Serbs were not as enthusiastic about (around 40% approved). Another poll taken in 2004 gives a good picture of the different attitude

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<sup>94</sup> P6-TA-PROV(2007)0077.

<sup>95</sup> 2 March, 2007. A6-0030/3007 RR\382515EN.doc PE 382.515v03-00.

<sup>96</sup> OHR, Education Department, Internal Paper.

<sup>97</sup> Polling data from surveys conducted by Prism Research in May 2004. Quoted in: Valery Perry, “Democratic Ends, (Un)Democratic Means? Reflections on democratization strategies in Brčko and in Bosnia-Herzegovina”, in: Michael A. Innes (ed.), *Bosnian Security After Dayton. New Perspectives* (Routledge, London and New York, 2006), 51-70, at 62.

<sup>98</sup> Information given by Dino Abazovic in May 2007.

<sup>99</sup> ><http://www.oscebih.org/documents/29-eng.pdf><

<sup>100</sup> The first High Representative of Bosnia, Carl Bildt, described the town as a place that seemed as if “the world has come to an end”. Quoted in Perry, *op.cit.* note 97, 55.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

in Brčko and in Bosnia as a whole concerning multiethnic education. Although the special question on a common curriculum was not specifically asked in this poll, the results show that all three groups support the idea of multi-ethnic education to a much higher degree.<sup>102</sup>

Macedonia can be seen as another case study of where a moratorium on teaching recent history is practically applied. The common attitude of the Ministry of Education, as well as of most historians, is that not enough time has passed to teach recent history, especially the history of the armed conflict in 2001.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, Violeta Petroska-Beska and Mirjana Najcevska (co-directors of the Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution in Skopje) started a project in 2002 titled “Understanding Current History”. By organising a number of workshops for teachers, students and trainee teachers, they tried to “combat the divisive effect of the (segregated) educational system and ... encourage ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians to develop a shared understanding of the 2001 conflict.”<sup>104</sup> In these workshops, participants worked together for the first time to “develop a fact-based history lecture that would present disputed events in a way acceptable to both sides.”<sup>105</sup> By doing so, the participants finally learned to accept that perceptions are subjective and that there is no single truth. As a result of these workshops, in 2005, the two authors edited a small booklet (Konflikti i armatosur në teritorin e republiës së Maqedonisë në vitin 2001/ Вооружениот конфликт на територијата на република Македонија во 2001 година) in Macedonian as well as in Albanian about the armed conflict of 2001. The booklet, which was published by the Helsinki Committee, methodologically presents the respective contrasting radical Albanian and Macedonian versions of the incidents with a concluding common, synthetic version acceptable for both ethnic groups. By presenting the facts of the conflict, the pupils should be able to come to their own conclusions. This methodology was furiously rejected by a number of Macedonian historians from both ethnic groups, such as the head of the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts, who denied the idea of a common history through compromises and agreements. The director of the National History Institute rejected the project for “prettifying history” by using the term “armed conflict” instead of “war”. He stated that there cannot be “a radical or non-radical version” of history. Above all, many scientists and politicians criticised the booklet because not enough time had passed since the incident. They argued that “it was not possible to be objective about such recent events because ‘we were all direct or indirect participants.’”<sup>106</sup>

In 2006, the two authors published another textbook with the title “Narratives in Our History”, where they presented the Macedonian and Albanian historical narratives on “Religions in the Ottoman Empire”, “Division of the Macedonian Ethnic / Respective Albanian Ethnic Territory (1878-1919)” and finally “Macedonians Respective Albanians in the Second World War”. The textbook is accompanied by a teachers’ manual giving accurate instructions on how to handle the textbook in order to help students come to their own conclusions after reading both narratives. Thus, with this textbook, the authors and editors refrained from the questionable methodology of presenting a common, synthetic version of past events. The goal of the textbook, as the editors write in the introduction, is to break the:

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<sup>102</sup> Polling data from surveys conducted by Prism Research in May 2004. *Ibid.*, 61f.

<sup>103</sup> Information by Violeta Peroska-Beska to the author in February 2007.

<sup>104</sup> United States Institute of Peace. Special Report 115, February 2004, 1 at ><http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr.115.html><

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>106</sup> Ivan Blazevski, “Macedonia: Reworked History Lessons Cause Storm”, in Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), *Balkan Insight*, 9 February 2006, at ><http://www.birn.eu.com/en/20/10/1149/><

[L]ong tradition of mistrust between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, ... (which) stems from the lack of knowledge about each other, ignorance of the history and development of 'the others', as well as from the complete absence of shared experiences about events in the past that were of significance to each of the ethnic communities individually or to both of them together.<sup>107</sup>

Although the Macedonian education system is marked by total ethnic distance and separation, at least these alternative teaching materials represent initial efforts to overcome this split. The Kosovo educational system,<sup>108</sup> especially concerning the teaching of history, can be strikingly characterized by the title of a study "You, Me, and Never the Twain Shall Meet".<sup>109</sup> Although recent history is not included in the curriculum, the recent history is omnipresent. On the one hand, most research participants, Serbs as well as Albanians, agreed that it would be best for children to forget about everything in order to return to a normal life.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, the "majority of answers demand[ed] that the recent history be taught in schools with a special emphasis on the truth".<sup>111</sup> Both for Kosovan Albanians, as well as Serbians, history is not a subject of academic inquiry. History is what is "true; a reality; a science. ...The truth is in the evidence, the evidence in the experience, the experience known along ethnic lines."<sup>112</sup> Thus, the notion of "truth" becomes indivisible from "our history" and "the war".<sup>113</sup> A Serbian teacher even stated, "Nobody is going to tell something ugly about his own people, no matter what happened."<sup>114</sup> As the Kosovo status is not yet settled, history (and history teaching) in Kosovo will therefore not be a tool for reconciliation. On the contrary, it will remain "...war by other means"<sup>115</sup> as Tim Judah titled the first chapter of his book.

As already stated above, amnesia or a moratorium on history teaching is not an appropriate remedy for ethnic hatred. Indeed, it is the fault of the methodology applied. History as taught before, can and will inflame ethnic distance and even hatred. The multi-perspectivity approach, however, can contribute to reconciliation.

In a report on the Carnegie Council project "History and the Politics of Reconciliation" (2000-2005)<sup>116</sup> for post-conflict societies, Elizabeth Cole and Judy Barsalou focused on the generational change. They elaborated a time frame, stating that in the first five years, the wounds are too fresh. Children, parents and teachers have direct experience of the conflict. After ten years, students have vague memories of the conflict, while their parents and teachers were involved. After fifteen years, students "may find the conflict practically irrelevant to their own lives."<sup>117</sup> However, in the case of Southeast Europe, the generational change

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<sup>107</sup> Violeta Petroska-Beška and Mirjana Najčevska, *Narratives in our Histories* (Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Skopje 2006).

<sup>108</sup> Latest for the Kosovo education systems see: Denisa Kostovicova, *Kosovo: The politics of identity and Space* (Routledge, London and New York 2005).

<sup>109</sup> Holly Hughson, *You, Me, And Never The Twain Shall Meet: Perceptions of Education, History, Justice and ethnicity in Kosovo* (ADRA Denmark with assistance of the Human Rights Center University of California at Berkeley, 2003), at

><http://www.hrcberkeley.org/download/PostConflict/EducationinKosovo.pdf><

The study was conducted in 2003.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>115</sup> Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (Yale Nota Bene, New Haven and London, 2nd. ed. 2002), 1-32.

<sup>116</sup> ><http://www.cceia.org/programs/archive/68/index.html><

<sup>117</sup> Cole and Barsalou, *op.cit.* note 47, 6.

within 15 years that might foster a readiness for reconciliation must be questioned. In Croatia (Eastern Slavonia), as well as Bosnia (see surveys above), it is particularly the younger generation that is riddled with biases, as they have never experienced anything but ethnic hatred or at least ethnic distance. On the other hand, middle-aged and elderly people have a positive memory of the peaceful post-World War II experience (“We did not even know who was who”<sup>118</sup>) and therefore stress the need for studying the history of good relations.

## 4. Conclusions

Thus, the enforcement of “positive history”, as recommended by the “Scholars’ Initiative”<sup>119</sup> could be a first step towards reconciliation. Prejudices are always based on generalisations. The dichotomy of “we” / “they”, “friend” / “foe” has to be deconstructed. A “positive history” seems to be an appropriate tool to achieve this goal. But “reconciliation,” as understood in this paper, must not be equated with the utopian concept of harmony. A “normalisation” of individual and inter-ethnic-relations is the goal to be achieved. Thus, reconciliation is understood as normalization.

The claim of possessing the “truth” and ignoring other possible “truths,” has been the greatest obstacle towards reconciliation in the region. With “three truths” still prevailing in Bosnia, the prospects for a Bosnian Truth Commission to establish “the truth” about the war of the 1990s are very bleak. As every group deems himself exclusively the victim and the “other” exclusively the perpetrator, reconciliation seems questionable. It is always “our truth” versus “your truth.” Nevertheless, by collecting evidence of acts of humanity during the brutal war, a Bosnian TC could prove that the “other” was very often also a human being and thus could contribute examples of “positive history”.

Reconciliation, therefore, needs to overcome the dichotomy of knowledge and acknowledgment. Both the Serbian and Croat presidents made a first step in this acknowledgment process by issuing an official apology and plea for forgiveness for crimes committed during the war.<sup>120</sup> But there is little hope that the political leaders of the region, very often the same people who started the war,<sup>121</sup> will act as prototypes and “give their societies permission to say the unsayable, to think the unthinkable, to rise to gestures of reconciliation that people, individually, cannot imagine.”<sup>122</sup>

Several times it has been stated that reconciliation is a question of generations. But as long as “the past continues to torment because it is not the past, ... in which the past and present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths and lies”(Ignatieff)<sup>123</sup>, as was the case in Ex-Yugoslavia,<sup>124</sup> reconciliation seems unlikely. It is the “intergenerational vengeance”

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<sup>118</sup> Corkalo, *op.cit.* note 18, 145.

<sup>119</sup> MacDonald and Blagojević, *op.cit.* note 21, 5.

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2003/s944064.htm>

<sup>121</sup> Edith Marko-Stöckl, „The Making of Ethnic Insecurity: A Case Study of the Krajina Serbs”, 1(2) Human Security Perspectives (2004), 24-33, at ><http://www.-hs-perspectives.etc-grat.at><

<sup>122</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor. Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (Chatto&Windus, London, 1998), 49.

<sup>123</sup> Ignatieff, *op.cit.* note 42, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Edith Marko-Stöckl, “Identity Formation, State- and Nation-Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo: On Historical Continuities and Discontinuities of Minority Conflicts

that has to be broken: “sons are not guilty for their fathers’ crimes and no peace will come until they stop feeling responsible for avenging the wrongs their fathers suffered”.<sup>125</sup>

History and history education are at the centre of any approach to reconciliation, although the Northern Ireland experience has shown that older pupils tend to separate the facts they learn in the classroom and the political uses of history outside. Nevertheless, the importance of schools and textbooks cannot be underestimated as they “are important vehicles through which contemporary societies transmit ideas of citizenship and both the idealized past and the promised future of the community.”<sup>126</sup> As long as negative national stereotypes, myths of victimhood and simple hate are being taught in schools, nothing will change. One approach to fighting the biased narratives, as undertaken in the Erdut Agreement for Eastern Slavonia, was the institutionalization of a moratorium on teaching recent history. It is nevertheless questionable whether historic amnesia can contribute to reconciliation, as the case of Former Yugoslavia has shown. Relegating the painful, unchallenged past of ethnic conflicts to the personal sphere, to emotions like hate, fear and resentment,<sup>127</sup> disseminated by families, friends and the media, will one day give unscrupulous political elites the chance to instrumentalize these sentiments for their own ends. Coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), as the post Nazi-era in Germany and Austria has proved, requires new approaches to history teaching, including addressing unpleasant accounts about one’s own people.

As shown above, several positive attempts have been made to introduce new approaches to history teaching in the region. This began with the Joint History Project of the Thessaloniki based “Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southern Europe”, but has also taken place in Croatia and in Macedonia. By applying a multi-perspectivity approach, these projects and new history textbooks can create empathy for the “other”, as well as equip pupils with critical tools, enabling them to challenge both the biased official historiography and political statements of their own ethnic group as well as those of the “others”. There are high hopes that this new approach towards history teaching will help the region return to Ignatieff’s citation, that “the past one day will be the past and crimes of the past will not any longer cry out for retribution.”<sup>128</sup> But the above mentioned new approaches and textbooks are mostly non-governmental efforts, whereas the official education policy in Macedonia, Bosnia and Kosovo more or less still foster ethnically separated or even nationally biased curricula and textbooks. Only Croatia, trying very hard to meet the standards set by the European Union, has recently begun to change its curriculum and textbook policy, as the new history textbooks prove.

All hopes, therefore, rest with the children and the younger generation. To fulfil these hopes it will take a radical change in the curricula, with history playing a decisive role in this process. With a modern, multi-perspective approach to history teaching there is hope that the past will not destroy the future.

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in South East Europe”, in Joseph Marko (ed.), *European Integration and its Effects on Minority Protection in South-Eastern Europe* (Nomos, Baden-Baden 2008), forthcoming.

<sup>125</sup> Ignatieff, *op.cit.*, note 122, 50.

<sup>126</sup> Hein and Selden, *op.cit.*, note 79, at 3.

<sup>127</sup> Roger D. Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 2002).

<sup>128</sup> Ignatieff, *op.cit.*, note 42, 4.

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