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Abstract

The latest wave of violent conflicts in the Balkans (1991-2001) as well as the ones that engulfed the other parts of the world has provided a fertile ground for new concepts that are equally embraced in the policy community and the academia around the globe. Among them, the post-conflict peace-building, transitional justice and reconciliation constitute a significant triad. The international environment has also dramatically changed so it seems that there is zero tolerance for mass violations of human rights and war crimes, while the responsibility to protect doctrine become a legitimate ground for international interventions in various parts of the world. The contemporary version of the just war theory has also been amended by adding one more dimension - in addition to the well-known ***jus ad bellum*** and ***jus in bello***, an strong emphasis is given to the ***jus post bellum*** principle. One way or another, the notion of reconciliation is central to the strategy of building sustainable peace in the post-authoritarian and the post-conflict societies. Nevertheless, in spite of all efforts to promote this new and wider approach to peace-building both on the policy agenda and the theoretical debate, the empirical evidence is still too inconclusive in order to confirm that peace is just an elusive goal without any form of dealing with the troublesome past, war crimes and victims. Namely, the conceptualization and use of the mechanisms of dealing with the past and transitional justice are relative new phenomena related to non-Western countries - or better, post-authoritarian and post-conflict societies. The retributive justice on international level appeared for the first time with the international tribunals after the Second World War, and it took a few decades to institutionalize a special International Criminal Court to deal with war crimes and heavy violations of human rights. Its reach

is, however, limited because not all countries ratified the Roma Statute (among them, the US is the most notable case) and because so far its work is focused on the criminal proceedings against some African leaders indicted for war crimes, while there is vast impunity for crimes committed by the Western military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance. The idea of restorative justice became popular much later with the establishment of the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa but also the ones in Chile and Argentina. Actually, the debate over the dealing with the past violence and human rights abuses has very short history, since 1990s - and it seems that everything that had happened before belongs to history and historians. The concepts of dealing with the past and transitional justice refer to recent past and traumas and intentionally avoid going further back in the past, i.e. the quest that may have display the roots of many of the contemporary conflicts. Looking from this perspective, one could conclude that the fashionable mechanisms of transitional justice and reconciliation are just some of the tools in the box of the contemporary state-builders that David Chandler (2006) rightly entitles as "empire in denial".

This paper deals with the past but has no ambition to contribute to history as an academic discipline. To the contrary, its argumentation comes from the ground of peace and conflict theory. The analysis has a two-fold objective: firstly to conceptualise reconciliation as an outcome of transitional justice, both of them being parts of the wider concept of dealing with the past; and secondly to analyse empirical aspects of so far undertaken initiatives for coming to terms with the violent past in the Balkans, with special emphasis on the Republic of Macedonia. Following Galtung's definition of positive peace, reconciliation here is understood as removal of lingering or new forms of structural and cultural violence in a post-conflict society/region. While the structural aspects of peace-building are usually focused on imposition of new political/institutional arrangements for the societies that have gone through violent experiences, the key goal of countering cultural violence is identified as 'reconciliation with history'. The latter entails building agreement through enabling engagement between opposing historical perspectives, as well as by acknowledging and including in the 'official narrative' individual 'little narratives' in the form of victims' and perpetrators' testimonies.

On the Past - from a Different Point of View

The past has never been an exclusive domain for research by historians. As a discipline, history has been a matter of dispute: some claim that it is all about identifying an objective truth about the past based on material and other evidence, while others emphasize the process of repeated construction and deconstruction of the past in a form of a narrative (Munslow 2006, 1). Hence, from one point of view, the historian is supposed to be an impartial observer who discovers and conveys the 'facts' from the past, while the other perspective insist on seeing history more as a literary undertaking. Yet today very few scholars would deny that the major task of history is no search for the exact truth but rather a quest for answers for today's issues from a long-term perspective. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (2007) rightly points out that all historians are prisoners of their own experience: "We bring to history the preconceptions of our personalities and of our age. We cannot seize on ultimate and absolute truths. So the historian is committed to a doomed enterprise — the quest for an unattainable objectivity." According to him, conceptions of the past are far from stable, which is just an echo of Benedetto Croce's maxim that all history is contemporary; or better, investigation of the past is determined by the interest in the life of the present. In sum, past facts must answer "to a present interest" (quoted by Zinn 1970). The concepts of the past are perennially revised by the urgencies of the present. When new urgencies arise in our own times and lives, the historian's spotlight shifts, probing at last into the darkness, throwing into sharp relief things that were always there but that earlier historians had carelessly excised from the collective memory. New voices ring out of the historical dark and demand to be heard.

According to Napoleon's maxim, history is a fable agreed upon.

Another conventional wisdom claims that the winners/powerful write the history, i.e. they create narratives in accordance to their own willing and current needs. The recent years witnessed a raise of a new academic discipline, so-called memory studies that are supposed to address the interplay of past and present in various socio-cultural contexts. The memory studies are interested in the social shape of individual memory as well as in the collective generation of past, present, and future. Turning away from 'methodological nationalism' and national concepts of identity, territoriality and culture, this type of research addresses memory contents, media, and practices that travel across and beyond territorial, ethnic and social boundaries.

In the era of 'upsurge of memory' (Nora 2002) it goes without saying that the past attracts even more interest of scholars from various academic disciplines, and quite often simultaneously so. Bearing in mind that the following paper approaches the past/history from the perspective of peace and conflict research, the theoretical premises relate to the legacy of the 'father of peace studies', Johan Galtung and his life-long academic works (2013, 13). Having adopted the terminology of medicine, he developed a specific methodology of research of conflicts around the world though diagnosis (cause/source of suffering), prognosis (what is likely to happen without intervention) and therapy (what can be done to reduce further violence and suffering). Later on he added an interesting new step in the treatment of violent conflicts known as "therapy of the past". In his words, it refers to counterfactual history i.e. to giving an answer to the question: how could violence have been prevented if different courses of action had been taken at a given point in the past? The question is usually posed to the original participants (in a certain, usually intra-state conflict) who are ask to identify critical points in the past and then ask the question, what should, what could have been done. Counterfactual history is obviously an analytical process of deconstructing the past events, learning from the past mistakes and in seeking new alternatives for old/traditional questions that concern dealing with wars/conflicts. For instance, Galtung argues:

> *"that exercise for the Second World invariably brings up the Versailles treaty of 1919. Of course it is reversible. There could have been a second conference five years later, undoing this highly violent collective humiliation, exploitation, repression and marginalization of a country which like the others had engaged in a favourite European pastime (if history is a guide): killing each other. The reward might have been considerable: depriving Hitler of his major argument, avoiding the Second World War. Those who did not think such thoughts, or having thought them, but did not implement them, share responsibility with the Nazis; this always being the case responsibility is shared, in a collective karma". (Galtung 1996)*

Karl Marx (1852) rightly argued that men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. Martin Luther King rephrased the same idea: we are not makers of history; we are made by history. As already noted, the same is true for the researchers (including historians or peace researchers) and their worldviews, no matter how objective and neutral they claim to be. However, what is very important in Galtungs' idea of "therapy of the past" is the belief that people are active agents of history, i.e. they are able to learn from the past events and engage in building a better future (positive peace, in his own terms). Howard Zinn, one of the most famous representatives of the radical history, had a similar stand towards writing and understanding history. He argued for "value-laden historiography", bashed alleged disinterestedness, rationality and objectivity of the scholars' work, because "our values should determine the ***questions*** we ask in scholarly inquiry but not the answers" (Zinn 1971, 10). In his opinion, very close to Marx's understanding of the role of the philosophers (to change the world), "the historian cannot chose to be neutral; he writes on a moving

train" (ibid., p. 35). Nietzsche's famous stand on the use and abuse of history (2010) was not much different:

> *"we need history. But we need it in a manner different from the way in which the spoilt idler in the garden of knowledge uses it, no matter how elegantly he may look down on our coarse and graceless needs and distresses. That is, we need it for life and for action, not for a comfortable turning away from life and from action or for merely glossing over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act."*

Emotionalism, so condemned, by the most academic circles, in Zinn's and Galtung's terms has however a meaning of activism, mix of "brain and hearth", and building culture of compassion for the victims and the powerless in the world.

History as well as the memory studies is but a specific form of power in society. Those who want to learn something from them have to ask some basic questions, such as: whose history we are talking about? That of the state or people? Of the nation or that of the minority groups? Is it the dominant class's narrative exclusively? Etc. In that regard, Zinn's "People's History of the United States" remains a shining example because offers a new perspective, i.e. the history seen through the lenses of socially exploited and marginalized groups that have been active actors but remained voiceless and with no records and acknowledgment of their sufferings and efforts in building the American society. In that respect, one should keep in mind that history, and especially the history text books, are the right place to seek for the roots of the cultural violence. The concept of cultural violence is also related to Galtung's academic work (1990); it refers to any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form. He argues (ibid., 291) that "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel right- or at least not wrong."

If it is true that history is institutionalized memory of a state, and in the light of Tilly's notion (1975) that war made state and state made war, the indeed the key goal of countering cultural violence should be identified as 'reconciliation with history', mostly history of warfare. Still, even seen through this prism it is not always clear how far in the past should one go in order to come to terms with the violent history and its legacies.

The Gnawing Dilemma: Looking Forward or Looking Backward?

When it comes to the Balkans an intriguing puzzle is to be resolved before establishing any rational dialogue over the past, present and future, and about the relationship between war legacies and peace perspectives. On one hand, there is a conventional wisdom that the Balkans produces more history than it is able to consume; and in terms of the post-communist revision of history that engulfed literally all states in the region, it sounds quite accurate. The representatives of the so-called international community (i.e. the new state-builders) quite often suggest a remedy from the obsessive preoccupation with history: forget about the past, look forward in the better perspectives of your countries (meaning, the EU and NATO integration). Nevertheless, the recent history of intra- and inter-state violence has left such horrible scars and numberless individual and collective traumas that are impossible to ignore by both domestic and international actors. The logic of post-conflict peace-building calls for facing and dealing with the past violence for the sake of securing sustainable peace and preventing reoccurrence of violence in the future. Actually, if one takes Homer's words seriously, then there is no dilemma at all: „it is not true that history stands ahead of us, it is the past that stands before us because we can see it clearly, while the future is behind us as we cannot see it".

In other words, past experiences are the only secure orientation for ***de facto*** going to and designing the better future.

For the purpose of this paper, it is important to make a distinction between the concepts of "the political in memory" and "politics of memory". While the first concept challenges collective memory and the social frames of memory, the politics of memory refers to methods of dealing with the past and transitional justice. Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (2003, 1) rightly point out that

> *"to contest the past is also to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward."*

According to the same authors, the term politics of memory made its debut in North America after World War II, deriving from a social and political necessity to cope with the legacy of the Holocaust. It introduces some disturbances in the general line of understanding of common (national) historical narrative. It refers mostly to the inconvenient parts of the collective memory, or even "official history", i.e. the parts which have been intentionally selected or omitted altogether. To speak of politics of memory refers particularly to institutional modalities of dealing with a violent past, i.e. to methods of management or coming to terms with the past through acts of retributive and restorative justice, commemorative instaurations, etc. But it is usually the non-governmental institutional politics that makes a bottom-up influence, striving for the recognition and visibility of collective processes of underground remembrance, rarely perceived in the agenda of the state or the academy.

Due to the scarce empirical experiences and the conceptual novelty of dealing with the past process it is of utmost importance

to access why and how helpful is it to turn to the past violence. Or in other words, does oblivion or facing the painful past provide ground for a more peaceful future? Quest for the right balance between looking forward and backward is probably one of the hardest questions to answer because it tackles and creates a tension between forgetting and remembering our past. Surely, this debate is not just about whether we should forget or remember, but far more about how the past is interpreted. Especially, post-conflict period is time of competing interpretations of the causes and consequences of the violent conflict, about who was right and who was wrong, which de facto ends up with the question of the legitimacy of use of violent methods. Some observers point out the US as a state that suffers collective amnesia, "societal Alzheimer's disease", not only with regard to the committed war crimes and unlawful interventions all over the world but also in terms of their national istory. Many years ago Nietzsche claimed that the state never has any use for truth as such but only for truth which is useful to it (1997, 190). On the other hand he argued that it would be necessary to explore how great the ***plastic force*** of a person, a people, or a culture is, because it is a prerequisite in determining the borderline at which the past must be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present.

The beginning of the 21st century witnesses two proposals of how we should attend to history. Highlighting new dimensions of cosmopolitanism, Jason Hill (2000, p. 5) argues for individuals' ***right to forget*** where they came from in order to construct new identities, while- contrary to him- Elazar Barkan (2000) points out that nations must apologize and/or offer compensation for historical injustices if there is to be atonement and reconciliation. Interestingly, even the scholars and analysts that advocate dealing with the past approach sometimes recognize the legitimate wish of the victims to forget horrible experiences and sufferings they went through. For instance, Kimberly Theideon (2012) shares some testimonies of victims in Peru who said to her: „Memories are suffocating me. The most needed medicines today are those who would bring us oblivion; whenever I manage to forget, I feel good. Even now, memories make get out of my mind." Theidon's conclusion is that oblivion is

not by default strategy of domination of powerful over week ones; instead, it could be a state of mind that is desired by those who suffer because of pains that memories bring back and those who seek relief from the heavy burden of the painful past. Similar voices can be often heard from the victims of the wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia, some of them notified in the magazine ***!Glas*** of the RECOM Initiative.[1]

If individual victims may have legitimate right (and medical need) to forget, does it apply to societies that went through horrible experiences of mass atrocities? The answer, based on historical experiences, is not straightforward too: for instance, Holocaust is not only remembered but it is such a historical experience that is forbidden to deny. The Armenian genocide's remembrance is treated in a different way in different states: in Turkey it is a criminal act to even mention its occurrence, while in some other Western countries it is exactly the opposite. For instance, Switzerland criminalized denial of the Armenian genocide, but on 17 December 2013 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) made a decision that the law against genocide denial violated the principle of freedom of expression. Similarly, in 2012 the French Constitutional Council struck down a law enacted by then President Sarkozy's government as "an unconstitutional violation of the right to freedom of speech and communication". However, ECHR drew a distinction between the Armenian case and the denial of Holocaust because in the second case the plaintiffs had denied sometimes very concrete historical facts, such as gas chambers and other facts that had been clearly been established by an international (Nurnberg) tribunal (***Reuters*** 2013). And finally, there are some completely forgotten (erased and burried) historical episodes that involve today's democratic nations, such as the atrocities in Congo committed by the King Leopold of Belgium. For instance, historian and advocate of international human rights Adam Hochschild heard for the first time about massacres in Congo by chance as late as in 90s, and then he made a research in order to reconstruct the largely untold history of the Congolese genocide and retrieve the buried history of Belgian colonialism. His book "King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa" raised some interest and criticism but no sign of an organized way of dealing with the past on the side of the Belgian society. In the words of Hochschild, Americans and Europeans are accustomed to thinking of fascism and communism as the twin evils of this century. But the century has really been home to three great totalitarian systems - fascism, communism and colonialism - the latter practiced at its most deadly in Africa: "In the West we don't want to recognize this because we were complicit in it." (Straus 2000). Robert Fisk, the famous journalist of ***The Independent***, and author of several books, also refers to the crimes committed in the Middle East and Asia by the British Empire. But they are all just a part of 'ordinary history' because few believe that it is necessary to go through the painful path of facing the truth, reconciliation or even apology to the subjugated nations in the past. In his book about the Armenian genocide, and the U.S. response to it in particular ("The Burning Tigris"), Peter Balakian says that "memory is a moral act." To remember, to recall history is an act of affirmation. Zinn agrees that remembering is indeed a moral act especially when it comes to innocent victims of systematic killings because without remembering, individuals become subjects to somebody else's remembering or somebody else's forgetting. Without remembering, one can easily be subject to the immorality of those (people, states, powerful ones) who control information and who control history. And so memory, then, when you insist on your own memory rather than the memory of the people in power, then it becomes a moral act (Zinn in Barsamian 2006,111). According to Florence Hartman, driving the past into the past, while preserving memory of it, is the main motive of any process of reconciliation. The main concern of reconciliation is to shed light on systemic violence and to restore dignity of victims through public recognition of the atrocities they have suffered:

> *Hence, the imperative necessity of overcome the past - that is, to arrest its effects as so as to break the endless*

1 Glas is available at the web-site of RECOM Initiative at www.zarekom.org.

mutual concatenation of collective ***acting-out***[2] *reactions. Reconciliation is certainly a story about the memories that would need to be reconciled - a story, therefore, of pages that ought to be turned, provided that we have indeed read them. We should read them as to remember them, so that no one could forget them, because only this kind of reading helps us to understand the specific dynamics of the violence and to penetrate into its mechanisms in order to discourage their recurrence. (Hartman 2013, p. 24-25).*

When it comes to the Balkans, a theatre of many wars and conflicts, there are not only many historical narratives but also too many - unknown and unrecognized - victims and memories about them. Up to the Second World War's aftermath, wars were treated as legitimate acts, especially if interpreted in the light of just war theory. The records of massacres and other atrocities were mostly left to be acknowledged by the states concerned. There were norms of customary military and humanitarian law but no efficient mechanisms for their observance and enforcement. Apart from the journalists' and other witnesses' reports (such as, for instance, Trotsky's "War Correspondence" from the Balkan Wars 1912-1913), which is well-advised to be taken with a dose of skepticism in terms of the authenticity of the personal testimonies (Todorova 2013), the Carnegie Report remains the most comprehensive document that lists war crimes against civilian population and destructions during the Balkan Wars committed by all parties involved (Despot 2012,191). It noted that "there is no clause in international law applicable to land war and to the treatment of the wounded, which was not violated, to a greater or less extent, by all the belligerents" (Carnegie Endowment 1914, 208). The Commission did not have any judicial prerogatives but its presence on the ground - as noted - often had preventive function. The respective governments

2 Acting-out is a technical term from psychiatry that designates regressive behaviour and inappropriate relational responses. It is a form of aggressive behaviour in which a subject reacts appropriately to some past life situations, but quite inadequately to his present situation.

denounced its objectivity and fairness (***The New York Times***, 8 June 1914) or argued that its work violated rights of sovereign states (Carnegie Endowment ibid). Unfortunately, the International Commission's fact-finding mission was soon overshadowed by the First World War - and the recollection of its original work appeared in early 90s with Yugoslavia's dissolution. After the Balkan Wars the states started with harsh policies of nation-building, which rested on forceful assimilation, exchange of populations and fabrication of history that should have proved states' continuity from ancient times to modernity. Many people got new identities while the memories of atrocities were banned and forcefully erased from the official historiography. No Balkan state had ever thought of any form of reconciliation - spoils of war should have been made legitimate and righteous no matter of the number of civilian victims and war crimes.

Yugoslavia's experience is somewhat illustrative and deserves special attention in this regard: at first, it (i.e. First Yugoslavia) was a state built upon a basic misunderstanding among its constituencies, while in the case of Second Yugoslavia the politics of brotherhood and unity and selective oblivion of war crimes and elements of civil war were the factors that prepared a fertile ground for the bloody turmoil in 90s. According to professor and human rights activist, ***Žarko*** Puhovski, in order to alleviate the consequences of the conflicts that happened, modern societies live on an established series of so-called positive lies, which makes them unconscious that lies do not lead towards reconciliation but rather to escalation of new round of violent conflicts (***Radio Slobodna Evropa*** 2012). In the view of some analysts, a part of the explanation of why and what truly happened in the wars 1991-2001 on the territory of former Yugoslavia lies in the fact that the period of 1945-1991 was but a ceasefire and not genuine peace.

Reconciliation in the Balkans: Mission (Im) Possible

In a historically burdened and complex region such as the Balkans, the issues related to the violent past and primitive and belligerent people come at mind by default, especially if the region is seen through the biased lenses of 'Balkanization', as Maria Todorova has rightly pointed out in her famous book "Imagining the Balkans". The region has been living under the burden of the bad reputation given by the Western powers which were heavily involved in the historical currents for the sake of their own national interests, especially at the time of rapid decline of the Ottoman Empire. The thesis of ancient hatreds as the root cause of the bloody conflicts among the Balkan people is still alive. For instance, the German president Glauck has echoed it while referring to the centennial of the World War I (***Spiegel*** 2014): "Europe is too peaceful for me to consider the possibility of wartime scenarios once again. Nevertheless, we saw in the Balkans that archaic mechanisms of hate can take hold once again in the middle of a peaceful decade".

The competing Balkan national historiographies, and especially history text-books are basically focused on being "right or wrong" as a warring side and/or a liberation movement, while by default they downplay the factual aspects of war consequences such as crimes, massacres, destructions and sufferings. The human side of the narrative is by default marginalized, except if the victims were/are "Ours" and thus symbolize national righteousness and victimization. All nations consider themselves victims of historical injustices committed by more powerful nations or alliances but there have never been a consistent and meaningful attempt to develop a culture of solidarity and empathy for the Other. Having no credible statistics of casualties be they from the Balkan Wars 1912-1913 or those that followed, there is a vast maneuvering space for the "numbers game" that allows politicians and historians to downplay or exaggerate while telling the historical narrative. It has been said that history is a story about the past that is significant and true; that it seeks to convey the things of the past that are important while eliminating or ignoring those of little or no importance. But the question is, who is it that decides significance and truth, importance and non-importance? The history text-books are full of stories of glorious battles and military leaders (with the image of the enemy portrayed as vividly as possible) but devoid of any social context. The critical historian Dubravka Stojanovic rightly argues that history (in the school system) serves more as manual for pre-military training rather than its scientific dimension. In general, more popular the historical debates are in the public, the weaker is the knowledge of what and why happened in the past. For instance, according to the researchers, the results of a 2010 survey conducted in Serbia could have been reduced to Ernest Renan's thought that the national being is based on a wrong understanding of one's own history. The other conclusion referred to so-called engaged ignorance or intentional ignorance/denial of historical facts: it was the strongest with regard to the wars which took place during the nineties (Stojanovic 2010). The respondents would simply apply their today's attitudes and political perceptions about friends and enemies to their understanding of the history, from which they would take arbitrarily when they liked or disregard the facts they disliked.

Amidst the "upsurge of memory" and increased significance of history (or better, quasi-history), so far there have been two concrete approaches towards dealing with the past and reconciliation in the Balkans. (The work of the International Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia is intentionally omitted for many of its founders, officials and analysts have argued that reconciliation was never its true mission. The effects of its verdicts prove that in a very bizarre way: those who were prosecuted for horrible war crimes, upon their release from prison and return home, were welcomed as heroes. The reasons for this phenomenon overarch the ambitions and the size of this paper.)

The first approach is focused on the education, or better the way history is taught in the Balkan region. The ***Joint History Project*** (JHP) brings together a group of critical historians from across the region in an attempt to change the way the past is taught in southeast Europe – from Croatia to Turkey.[3] The project's goal is an effort to encourage reconciliation rather than division, which germ is deeply embedded in the history teaching. Under the guidance of the Thessaloniki-based Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation, and after a long process of consultations since 1999, the history experts from the region produced a new series of history books that tackle some of the most controversial historical periods, which are perceived in completely different ways by the states in the region. The books, translated into eight regional languages, present history from various perspectives and excerpt historical documents to challenge interpretations of key events. For the creators of the project, it was not just a matter of putting better teaching materials but also a matter of inducing a teaching in an entirely new way. Namely, throughout the region, history is taught largely as a series of facts that students are expected to memorize and regurgitate. The Joint History Project intends to provoke students to analyze the past from variety of sources and to make conclusions for them. With its focus on cultural and social history, the project tries to humanize groups who may have often been thought of as enemies. Few would argue that this idea is not excellent but in terms of implementation it faces great difficulties: first, it depends on the good will of the governments that in most instances promote nationalist and exclusivist policies; in fact, these policies are the very foundation of their way of governing weak states. After the first positive responses to the new text-books, some governments (such as Serbian one) withdrew their support for use of the Joint History Project books in their educational systems, while others remained on lip-service (publicly supported it but the materials are not used in classrooms). A regional agreement is still out of reach so all states stick to their "historical truths". Also some of the respective societies and deeply segregated internally i.e. they operate on the ground on parallel educational systems where historical facts are a matter

3 See more on the project's official site: http://www.cdsee.org/projects/jhp

of negotiation between the ethnic elites (such as in Macedonia). Furthermore, some of the authors and editors of JHP books belong to the circles of historians/intellectuals that are tiny minority in their own societies, despite their high academic esteem elsewhere. Thus the reach of these books is quite limited, let alone the slowness of the process of reconciliation ***per se.***

The second significant attempt to achieve factual truth on the more recent conflict history is related to the RECOM Initiative.[4] The moving force of the initiative is the Coalition for RECOM is a non-political regional gathering of civil society organizations. It consists of an impressive network of non-governmental organizations, associations, and individuals who represent and promote the intiative for establishment of a Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia in the period from 1991-2001 (RECOM). It obviously belongs to one of the numerous attempts to achieve reconciliation through formation of Truth Commission. The founders and advocates of the Initiative actually do not operate with the term "truth" although the events in focus are only 15-20 years old. The basic idea that brings together various NGOs and human right activists from all over ex-Yugoslavia is that well-established facts about the victims, and in general about the casualties of the wars 1991-2001, summarized by a credible international body established by all seven successor states, will remain as undisputable evidence for the future generations. Eventual final report of the RECOM would leave no space for manipulation with figures of casualties, which would be respectful achievement after such a series of bloody developments and so many casualties. The Initiative is ongoing so it is early to make any prognosis but for many it is already a unique endeavor not matter what would be the final result if any. The process may be an important goal with its own merits. However, it has also some concrete achievements such as two editions (for now) - ***The Book of Remembrance*** (for the Kosovo victims) and ***The book of death*** (from the Bosnian one). The Coalition for RECOM

4 See more at Initiative's website: www.zarekom.org

made a significant shift in 2013 - it moved the initiative from the level of civil society up to the inter-state level of consultations. It may be a dead-end or, looking more optimistically, if all seven states (including the three entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina) agree, and if the international actors support the process in a principled way (by agreeing that looking to the past is a process of healing and not by insisting on looking exclusively forward), the Balkans may well witness its first Truth Commission ever. The obstacles are easy to identify: the territory of former Yugoslavia has ceased to be a region, the differences among the newly independent states grow deeper despite the chorus of pro-EU political voices. The conflict experiences and societal (un)awareness of the necessity to deal with war crimes and gross violations of human rights differ a lot, between Slovenia and Macedonia on one hand, and Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo, from the other. In some states the political leaders, elites or groups that incited the wars at first places are still in power - or have gone down in history books as martyrs and heroes. The civil society cannot substitute the state authorities and has limited potential to implement the fundamental idea without a political commitment. Furthermore, the public advocates that promote RECOM in traumatized societies are not always highly appreciated among the majority citizens that call for revenge instead of forgiveness, or for oblivion instead of facing the ugly facts about murderous policies.

Instead of Conclusion

The centennial of the Balkan wars 1912-1913 as well as the centennial of the First World War seems to be appropriate occasions to address war legacies and potential of reconciliation in the Balkan region but also in Europe as such. Especially, the Balkan Wars were just a prelude to a number of cycles of violent inter-state and intra-state conflicts; and not a single one of them has ended with a just peace, denunciation of violence and acknowledgment of the sufferings and human losses. At least, the grave experiences from long ago are not evaluated from the perspective of reconciliation and forgiveness among the states/nations. They are more issues to deal with historical research, remembrance and perceptions. For the European nations, as reported by ***Spiegel*** in early 2014, World War I will become a mega issue in the public culture of commemoration. It is expected that the international book market will present about 150 book titles in Germany alone, and twice as many in France, which is probably a world record for a historic subject, and the story of a generation that has long passed on will be retold and new debates will unfold. But while British Prime Minister makes plans to enable all school children to visit the battlefields of the Western Front, the German commemoration of World War is going to be merely a sign of respect for the suffering of those we were fighting at the time. However, the memory of the horrors of the Great War do not just reconcile former enemies but may also tear open wounds that had become scarred over. The centenary of World War I comes at an unfavourable time, as many European countries are seeing a surge of nationalist movements and of anti-German sentiment in the light of the ongoing EU crisis.

However, the successor states of former Yugoslavia will again mark a war anniversary with mixed feelings and attitudes, while the most urgent task of dealing with the consequences from the most recent conflicts will be treated as something that should be seen in a larger international framework rather than through lenses that would show societies' lack of culture of empathy with the victims regardless their origin. The politicians will attend all European events of commemoration and will continue speaking of EU integration as a desired goal. Also the dominant public opinion goes along the line of the option of looking forward towards integration of the whole region into the EU as a concrete way of reconciling the states and nations in the so-called Western Balkans. Up to now it has become a routine to organize various round tables and other public events in which the titles implicate that EU integration is a precondition for reconciliation, and not the other way around.

Coming to terms with one's own past is not something

that is exclusively related to the Balkans. Many nations had to go through the same painful process, beginning from the Scandinavian countries to post-Franco Spain and de-nazification of Germany, to name a few European instances. Yet, the most popular one (that reaches a level of an urban myth although not a most adequate one) refers to the story of reconciliation of former enemies - Germany and France - within the European context and creation of EU as a zone of peace. Few take into account how slow and hard have been all known processes of coming to terms with crimes and violent past. The centennial 2012-2013 proved that the Balkan nations learned nothing from the past. For instance, for Serbia the Balkan Wars 1912-1913 are convenient historical events for constructing a mythic national and historical awareness. They were the most popular wars in modern Serbian history, since they achieved their "constructive potential" due to the great victory over the mythical, "age-old enemy," and because, as their result, Serbia doubled in size. On the other hand, not only the general opinion among the Macedonians but also among the members of the academy still is that Macedonia/Macedonians were the greatest victim of the Balkan wars 1912-1913; it was articulated by the president of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Art at the occasion of a conference devoted to the centennial of the Balkan wars. At the same time, while claiming victimhood, the historians insisted on the alleged significant military participation of the Macedonian soldiers who fought in several armies and got no acknowledgment for their heroic deeds but there is no mention of any possible involvement in the war atrocities at the time.

The Balkans is still a region where past, present and future mingle in many (often bizarre) ways. The line between selective oblivion and selective remembrance is also uncertain, most often determined by the political needs of the day. In the last twenty years the newly independent states in the Balkans have experiences horrible war experiences but also have gone certain way towards post-conflict peace-building with a strong guidance of the so-called international community. Desmond Tutu's words ring true for this region as well: "There is no handy roadmap for reconciliation. There is no shortcut or simple prescription for healing the wounds and divisions of a society in the aftermath of sustained violence… Examining the painful past, acknowledging it and understanding it, and above all transcending it together, is the best way to guarantee that it does not - and cannot - happen again." (quoted from Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse 2003, p. 3). There is no universally applicable, perfect reconciliation method or model, but whatever model is selected it has to be home-grown and not imposed from the top by decree.

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