

### **International Summer School: Societies in Transition. Former Soviet Union and East Central Europe between Conflict and Reconciliation**

**Veranstalter:** Martin Leiner / Maria Palme, Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies, Faculty of Theology, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena; Ina Alber, Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Institute of the Leibniz Association

**Datum, Ort:** 22.08.2014–28.08.2014, Jena

**Bericht von:** Raisa Barash, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow; Samuel Goda, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica

The international summer school organized by the Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies (JCSR) and the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe dealt with conflicts and reconciliation in the geographical region of East (Central) Europe from an interdisciplinary perspective. The central question was the possibility of reconciliation processes for and in transitional societies that had recently experienced collapse or any destruction of the internal communication. The summer school combined different discussion forms like keynote lectures from theologians, historians, political scientists and sociologists, participants' presentations of ongoing PhD research projects, and also three parallel workshops to deepen some of the topics of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> Another important factor was the personal experience of the participants, almost all of them were originally from Eastern European or post-Soviet states, so issues like the historical past, reconciliation and transitional justice in this region were always analyzed through the introspective perspective of personal or family experience of living in this region, full of the historical dramas and personal tragedies.

The conference was opened with a keynote lecture by the director of JCSR, MARTIN LEINER (Jena) noting the important aspects of the study of reconciliation politics in transitional states. The epistemological aspect of his lecture concerned the problem of a definition and a name of any actor of reconciliation. Talking about the category „East Central Europe“, he argued, it is not sufficient to think

of a geographical entity, but also and especially a cultural or civilizational concept. The strong need for reconciliation politics/policy for Eastern Europe states is determined by its historical profile of being on the crossroads of the „great interests“. As Martin Leiner noted, the idea to „forget about Germany and Russia“ is very understandable, but they always had and have influence on East (Central) Europe.

Building on the idea of the state subjectivity and responsibility for reconciliation process, LILY GARDNER FELDMAN (Washington) presented during her lecture the main achievements and ideas of the reconciliation politics between West Germany and Poland as well as between Russia and Poland. Comparing these two seemingly similar processes she stated that they differ very much from each other. While the West German-Polish reconciliation process is based on the move to a close partnership of the two states, especially after 1990, the Polish-Russian relationship is often formed by enmity rather than by steps toward amity.

Discussing the individual level of reconciliation and the research field of emotions ALENA MINCHENIA (Vilnius) argued that a key feature of the actor who can initiate reconciliation is shame. Alena Minchenia used as an empirical base the emotional intensities of political protests in Belarus interpreting shame as a feeling of negation, a sign of failure and of the dialectics of exposure.

MIMOZA TELAKU (Beer-Sheva) analyzed the problem of post-conflict reconciliation focusing on the collective memories and narrations of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. The similar theme of dealing with a common violent past stood at the center of the lecture by JÖRG LÜER (Berlin) from the Roman-Catholic NGO „Justitia et Pax“. He argued that it is important to identify the actors of conflict: perpetrators, victims and bystanders, and to understand the different ways in which they remember and interpret their past.

A question closely linked to interpreting the past and post-conflict communication was raised by KERSTIN TOMIAK (Cardiff).

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<sup>1</sup> In many occasions it seemed that the ideas and knowledge spread within these workshops deserved an individual report.

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She asked if media can change the discommunication and make persons more tolerant. Using data from a sociological survey she stated a correlation between the use of social media and intercultural tolerance – not all kinds of media promote tolerance, but there is the idea that social media could help to create intercultural understanding also in post-conflict societies.

Despite the important role of the media and civil society that was mentioned during the Summer School, not only in the keynote lecture by INA ALBER (Marburg), but also in several discussions, the main role in the reconciliation process is still being played by political authorities. OLGA KONKKA (Bordeaux) demonstrated how the contemporary Russian history textbooks are often based on the idea of „we“ and the „other“, which can be seen as a legacy of Soviet ideology. This Soviet tradition of the state feeling as the „besieged fortress“ was enforced in the 2000-ies by V. Surkov’s concept of the „sovereign democracy“<sup>2</sup>, that implies almost hostile attitude towards foreign, especially Western states.

Continuing the theme of the subjects of the reconciliation process SAMUEL GODA (Banská Bystrica) in his presentation tried to answer the question, how the involvement of third-party actors can help to create a basis for reconciliation using the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as an example.

ANNAMÁRIA KISS (Budapest) was mostly oriented towards the geopolitical perspectives of the South Caucasian states. Focusing on the national security strategies of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia located at the crossroads of three regional powers (Russia, Turkey, Iran) she noted that the three countries are very much influenced by the geopolitical interests of the regional powers. AGNE CEPINSKYTE (London) also discussed geopolitical issues and the difficult position as „buffer states“. She compared the geopolitical strategies of the Weimar Republic after World War I with the post-Soviet situation arguing that both examples are „defeated“ empires that lost significant proportions of their populations and territories as well as their military power and great power status in the world affairs.

Another historical perspective was introduced by ALIAKSANDR PIAHANAU (Minsk / Paris) using the example of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian diplomatic reconciliation in 1923-1924. He devoted his study to the challenges of any third party as a mediator in reconciliation politics focusing on the role of France in this process. As other victorious Great Powers after the First World War, France closely followed the ‘frozen conflicts’ between the newly emerging states of Central Europe.

The current situation of Ukraine was discussed by ANDRÉ HÄRTEL (Jena) in his lecture „Ukraina ne Rossija“. He described and explained his perception of the current conflict in Ukraine emphasizing deeper historical developments of the current Ukrainian territory, before the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. He pointed also to the challenges that emerged after 1991 to the Ukrainian statehood and nation-building processes. Besides the historical overview, he introduced three levels of analysis – domestic, regional and international. From this point of view it is evident that various actors with different interests meet in this country and thus the process of identity-formation is also complicated. The main concern, however, remains unresolved – what does it take for reconciliation in this conflict?

JOLANTA JASINA (New Haven) discussed how the massacre of Katyń has been remembered in Poland and acknowledged in Russia. During the communist regime in Poland, Katyń fell into the category of ‚anti-memory‘ built upon opposition to the official discourse. Katyń is understood as an assault on the Polish intelligentsia which embodied the Polish nation – therefore, Katyń came to be understood as a targeted attack with premeditation on the Polish nation as a whole. An interesting point made by Jolanta Jasina was related to the challenge of how to transform such an event into a successful „memory policy“ and an example for reconciliation.

Coming from Georgia, ZAZA BZISHVILI (Frankfurt/Oder), focused on sustainable de-

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<sup>2</sup>V. Iu. Surkov, Nationalization of the Future: Paragraphs PRO Sovereign Democracy (Nacionalizacija Budushhego. Paragrafy PRO Suverenuju Demokratiju), in: Russian Studies in Philosophy. 2009. No 47 (4). pp. 8-21.

velopment strategies for peace in Georgia. Many examples in the world demonstrate how economic development and recovery contributed to the stability in a fragile transition period. To show how it works in practice Ergneti market was chosen as a place where „enemies“ meet to trade. Zaza Bzishvili argued that entrepreneurship can be a remedy for the conflict in Georgia, considering the current political and social context – it may not necessarily lead to conflict resolution itself, but rather it creates a background so that everyone might enjoy the general collateral result of economic progress.

Economy, identity and ethnicity were key features of the debate that came up in many contexts. A keynote lecture based on up-to-date research was delivered by RAISA BARASH (Moscow) on the divided ethno-national groups in Russia. The central research questions addressed dealt with Russian identity and the discourse of divided people. After the dissolution of the USSR many Russians became minorities in newly independent states, and this fact has serious consequences today with the situation in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine and potentially in other countries. However, the reality also is that there is no exact definition of the essence of Russian identity. The term used is rather „compatriots“ and not „Russians“. According to Raisa Barash the government prefers this term because „compatriots“ do not claim ethnic but civil identity. Furthermore, this research can be applied to other geographic regions with the same „problems“ of divided people and identity. Nonetheless, a question arises – what is the potential of individuals with „shared identities“ as mediators in ethnic reconciliation?

The world has always been diverse in ethnicity as well as religion. How do the people of different religious denominations within limits of a region want to arrange their place, what do they aspire to, what do they want to express, and by what means? ELENA GOLOVNEVA (Yekaterinburg) tried to find the answers in her lecture on how reconciliation is possible in the case of religious movements in Western Siberia. The case study of the Siberian village Okunevo has been chosen as a good example of how people of at least

four confessions can live together in peaceful and friendly ways, respecting mutual sacred places. Opposing the mainstream media demonising of religion, the lecturer showed the potential of religion in peaceful coexistence.

For many theorists, reconciliation is also very much interconnected with the Abrahamic religions and traditions. ANDRÉ ZEMPELBURG (Jena) presented his points on inter-personal reconciliation in the Jewish tradition. He focused on the „day of atonement“ – Jom Kippur, which is still the chronological and cultic frame for reconciliation within Rabbinic Judaism.

WALA MAAITAH (Jena) addressed the topic of peace building education in Palestine. The project in general aims at determining urgent psychological needs of Palestinian students living in the context of ongoing violence and paving the way for a structured psychological education curriculum to be introduced in the Palestinian educational system as an indispensable step towards peace building between Palestinians and Israelis.

The last day of the ISS had the „cachet“ of summarization and evaluation. MATTHIAS GOCKEL (Jena) had chosen a critical view on reconciliation, democracy and human rights, pointing to selected examples of Western wars and interventions in several regions of the world (Chile, Congo, Greece, Iran, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). He looked at the use and misuse of the term ‘reconciliation’ as well as the relation between reconciliation and social justice as mutually interconnected processes.

INA ALBER (Marburg) in the second closing lecture tried to summarize the outcomes of the summer school, focusing mainly on the framework of reconciliation. She decided to face this challenging task based on the outputs of the participants’ presentations and keynote lectures discussed during the event. Actors and power interacting in social structure; emotions vs. rationalism; idealism vs. pragmatism; horizontal and vertical aspects of reconciliation as well as time-perspective of reconciliation – these are just some of issues concerned with when researching and doing reconciliation. As the discussions showed, relations and communication (dialogue) should be the cornerstones of (successful) reconcilia-

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tion.

One of the metaphysically significant and sombre elements of the school was the visit to the Buchenwald Memorial Site – a concentration camp during the time of German Fascism, a Soviet Special Camp after the end of World War II and a national memorial site during GDR times. It was a deep personal experience for participants that allowed them to try to imagine the pain and tragedy of this place. The politics of reconciliation in Europe – especially in the ‘Bloodlands’<sup>3</sup> of Eastern Europe – remains the burden and challenge for many generations. It requires not only the „right words“ but also a long work with the involved on all sides of a bloody drama.

The Summer School provided a communicative platform for the discussion of the heirs of the Bloodlands historical memory, who are already ready to judge upon the reconciliation politics in their states. Apart from the academic experience of the participants of the Summer school and the intensity of the debates, which were inspired by the personal perception of the discussed themes, one should stress the merits of the event. Despite their personal emotions participants were successful in discussing analytically the perspectives of the reconciliation process among the successors of the East-European Bloodlands which included the states who inherited the load of the guilt as well as the successors of the victims’ memory.

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Keynote:*

Martin Leiner (Jena), Conflict and Reconciliation in East Central Europe and former Soviet Union

##### *Panel 1:*

Alena Minchenia (Vilnius), The Meaning of Shame in the Accounts on state Violence in Belarus

Mimoza Telaku (Beer-Sheva), Collective Narratives in Post-Conflict Context. The Case of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo

Kerstin Tomiak (Cardiff), Social Capital in Conflict Management and Post-War Reconciliation: Do media channels matter

Yuji Endo (Jena), Remembering Practices in

the Hebrew Bible, Christianity and Judaism

##### *Keynote:*

Jörg Lüer (Berlin), Dealing with a violent past. Lessons from Central and Eastern Europe. Challenges and Perspectives

##### *3 Parallel Workshops:*

Christo Thesnaar (Stellenbosch), Reconciliation, collective trauma and memory – A Trans-disciplinary Approach

Phillip Tolliday (Hindmarsh), The Croker Island Exodus: Displacement as an interdisciplinary challenge for Reconciliation Practices

Jörg Lüer / Maria Palme (Berlin / Jena), East Central Europe: Dealing with multiperspectivity. Memories between Conflict and Reconciliation. Experiences from the work of the Maximilian-Kolbe-Foundation in Oswiecim/Auschwitz/ Political Reconciliation and Transitional Justice in East Central Europe from a trans-disciplinary perspective

##### *Keynote:*

Lily Gardner Feldman (Washington), German-Polish and Polish-Russian Reconciliation: Achievements, Challenges and Limits

##### *Panel 2:*

Aliaksandr Piahanaŭ (Minsk / Paris), Great Powers and Local Conflicts: France and the Czechoslovak-Hungarian Reconciliation during the Interwar (1918-1939)

Agne Cepinskyte (London), Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany and Post-Soviet Russia

Olga Konkka (Bordeaux), Idea of Enemy in Contemporary Russian School History Textbooks

##### *Panel 3:*

Annamária Kiss (Budapest), Regional Security in the South Caucasus

Samuel Goda (Banská Bystrica), The perspectives of the OSCE in the process towards reconciliation

##### *Keynote:*

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<sup>3</sup>Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin, New York 2010.

Ina Alber (Marburg), Civil Society and its Role in Reconciliation processes in East Central Europe

*Keynote:*

André Härtel (Jena), Soviet Paradigm and Ukraine Change towards West European integration?

*Panel 4:*

Jolanta Jasina (New Haven), Reconciliation of memories? Katyń murder and how it has been remembered in Poland and forgotten in Russia

Zaza Bzishvili (Frankfurt/Oder), Sustainable development strategies for peace in Georgia: Special focus on entrepreneur development

*Panel 5:*

Elena Golovneva (Yekaterinburg), How reconciliation is possible? The Case of Religious Movements in Western Siberia

André Zempelburg (Jena), Inter-personal Reconciliation in Jewish Tradition

Wala Maaitah (Jena), Peace Building Education in Palestine. Overcoming emotional barriers of Adult Students to Reconciliation

*Keynote:*

Raisa Barash (Moscow), The Divided ethno-national Groups in Russian: The Variety of Identity forms and the State Politics

Matthias Gockel (Jena), Closing Lecture I

Ina Alber (Marburg), Closing Lecture II

Tagungsbericht *International Summer School: Societies in Transition. Former Soviet Union and East Central Europe between Conflict and Reconciliation*. 22.08.2014–28.08.2014, Jena, in: H-Soz-Kult 08.11.2014.