TO CONDEMN AND (OR) TO ACCEPT

Adnan Hasanbegović

Recent events in Banja Luka and Trebinje, regarding the violent obstruction of rebuilding the destroyed mosques while people were stoned, were not at all unexpected, but on the contrary, gave an overall picture of the situation in BiH. Human rights violation of all kinds is dominant over the past several years in post-Dayton BiH. Minority groups and people with different political opinion are exposed to direct violence, like throwing grenades at returnees, setting explosive in cars, etc. It happens often enough, so it's no surprise to the public and it makes no headlines in media. It's enough to watch the news and look at the local papers that resemble to war bulletins and still use the language of hatred. The list of single cases of violence and discrimination with political background would certainly be very long, in case someone cares to make one. It doesn't seem to be very productive to treat each end every one of them, for the sake of public reaction or the appeal.

The Dayton Agreement, which represents some sort of constitution of BiH, as someone has already said, did stop the war, but nevertheless did not bring the peace. The absence of war is additionally complicated with the dual understanding of The Agreement from different political factors and inconsistency when it comes to implementation of single decisions. Victims of war and post-war violence are being manipulated for the sake of politics, in many regions, authorities secretly support radical nationalistic violent groups, different political views of situation in BiH are being ignored, and decisions agreed on legal and executive organs are being obstructed. These are just some of many consequences of unclear articulation and shallowness in the approach to establishment of sustainable peace and building of stable and democratic society.

Responsible for these difficulties, however, are not only local actors, but also the international community. It seems that international community, despite its presence in BiH with many instruments to act, does not manage (except for imposing some laws and occasionally arrest war criminals), to set some long-term directives and create a system that is fair and represents a precondition for development of civil society in BiH.

General cause for this situation, in my opinion, is the wrong approach from the very beginning, to the peace building, civil society, reconciliation, and, if I may say so, facing of the truth about the violence in this region. Before all, there is an absence of an analysis and reconsidering factors that led to violent resolving of social conflicts after disintegration of Yugoslavia. This was never completed thoroughly. Moreover, although we did to a certain point, analyse social systems created after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, like those of Milosevic and Tudjman and labelled them as totalitarian and responsible for violence, we never defined what were their historical, political or economic causes. On the other hand, when it comes to responsibility for war, ethnic communities have each their own media enrooted images. Even today, although these regimes are gone, political turmoil, discrimination and violence continue, especially in BiH.

One of the big mistakes in BiH, is also the lack of strategy to build NGO sector, a core of civil society. There was an attempt to establish NGO sector after the war, with a lot of money for their registration, without their previously articulated goals derived from relevant social demands. Consequently, today there is a huge number of organisations with a frequent changes of their mission, with no prior need analysis, in search for money, or just disappearing because there's no money.

If the end of the war had to be imposed, that should never be a principle of civil society. On the contrary, it has to be built slowly and thoroughly, while insisting on development of civil and political activism among local people, in order to create the basis for self-reexamination and local initiatives for changes and reconciliation.

All of that, indicates that the end of the war in Bosnia, unfortunately, is still a result of heavy military presence of SFOR and international community, but not the result of reconciliation and actual confronting with violence that has happened and is still happening. One might say that for many people, intimately, war has not yet ended, because of the unsettled political situation or transformation of present social conflicts of all kinds, especially ethnical.

Local individuals, political and civil groups and organisations have primary responsibility to deal with these problems. First of all, responsibility means, to condemn and inflict penalty upon actors of violence from one's own national collective. Right now, that is the jurisdiction of The Hague Tribunal - role of The Tribunal in this particular context requires separate analysis, still however worthwhile it may be, we will leave it for some other occasion. Responsibility also means to re-question one's political visions and needs. It is especially important to try and look at the facts about the enormous victims of war and accept responsibility for that, whether or not we were active or passive participants of the war and violence. It's only then that we open some actual possibilities for constructive reconciliation and transformation of conflicts that caused the violence. Institutional changes, such as an introduction of the state of law and protection of minority rights should accompany and enable this process, but cannot alone accomplish the goal of reconciliation.

In order to make such a thing possible, a lot has to be done on empowering and education, and also de-traumatization of people from this region. The important thing is to popularise different types of peace education, through both NGO activities and institutions and structures within the system, and to offer space for individuals from different social groups to reconsider their own and other's views of the problem.

One should certainly put emphasis on education in nonviolent conflict transformation and nonviolence in general, because it's flexible and multi-purposed, and represents a good method to create critical mass of groups and individuals capable to deal with difficulties of reconciliation. It is important to offer programs for work on refining mutual communication, sensitising toward structural and other kinds of violence, popularise nonviolence and philanthropy, and empower people to take more responsibility for social issues in general. Making education on peace and civil society a part of educational system on each level can be very important.

Also, lot more should be done on organising as many conferences and lectures, with the subject of reconciliation, forming multiethnic expert teams to work on analysis of historical elements of the present conflicts, and analysis and reconsidering of the Balkan history, because it's been manipulated a lot. Our experience tells us it is necessary to have a regional approach to work on these problems, including countries of former Yugoslavia.

It is recommended to analyse possibilities to start political and civil lobbying for total demilitarisation of Balkans and to begin working toward that goal, and create preconditions for it.

At the end, although there are many problems, there is also optimism to face all the difficulties, because there is an increasing number of mostly young people from all around of former Yugoslavia. They have the capacities and capabilities to deal with the situation through social activism and promotion for their own values and society they live in.