

QUAKER PEACE AND SOCIAL WITNESS

**PROGRAMME IN
POST-YUGOSLAV COUNTRIES**

DEALING WITH THE PAST

IN

***BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA, CROATIA,
AND SERBIA & MONTENEGRO***

REGIONAL SYNTHESIS REPORT

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I. CONTEXTS: understanding diverse interpretations

Dealing with the Past

This report is a summary and synthesis of three research and consultation exercises into 'Dealing with the Past' carried out by Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) representatives and associates in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia & Montenegro, between September 2002 and July 2003. The wars of the Yugoslav succession focused the world's attention on the countries of former Yugoslavia between 1991 (the war in Slovenia and the beginning of the war in Croatia) and 1999 (the war in Kosovo and NATO air strikes in Serbia and Montenegro), framed in terms of 'ethnic cleansing', large-scale displacement of communities, rape and torture, as well as devastating destruction of infrastructure.

Each of the wars ended through formal peace agreements and, over time, there has been a process of 'normalisation from above' with the election of Governments more or less open to non-nationalist ideas and seeking membership in a wider European community. Whilst physical reconstruction and economic and social development is also continuing, there has been much less attention to the process of dealing honestly with the traumatic, horrific, difficult and contested events of the past decade, so important in building a lasting and sustainable peace in the region.

It has often been argued that, in fact, the failure to deal with the past in any meaningful way after the Second World War in Yugoslavia, created a legacy of mistrust and of conflicting histories passed on to subsequent generations, itself a factor in the wars of the 1990s. It is certainly the case that, in the recent wars, long-standing memories and felt injustices were able to be mobilised for nationalistic ends, allowing for notions of collective ethnicised histories to transplant those of respect for individuals and tolerance, even celebration, of difference and diversity, which had existed in Yugoslavia up to that point.

There is a need to reject stereotypes of the 'Balkan mentality' as underpinning the wars, given this legacy of peaceful co-existence in the region. In addition, throughout the war years, many individuals and groups, often those most active in peace, human rights, women's and other non-governmental organisations, continued to struggle and resist the logic of hatred. Indeed, it is these individuals and groups who are often most active, now, in calling for more effort to be made in terms of truth, justice and reconciliation. The question remains, however, how these calls are seen in the wider society.

In this study, the concept of 'dealing with the past' refers to the process of coming to terms with the roles that were played in the events of the past decade and their consequences. This process needs to occur on a number of different levels, from the micro-level of the individual in a small community, to the macro-level of national, regional and global political bodies. In between these two levels, the importance of a range of groups acknowledging their collective role, and maximising their potential to support the processes of dealing with the past in the future, will be crucial.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the war raged from April 1992, in some places earlier, until the Dayton peace agreement of December 1995, which established two relatively autonomous entities along ethnic lines, Republika Srpska, and the Federation of BiH,

itself further divided between Bosniak-and Croat-controlled areas. There remains a large-scale international presence with considerable influence over civil affairs, through the Office of the High Representative, and security affairs, through the NATO-led Stabilisation Force SFOR. Nationalist parties continue to dominate politically and economic and social development has been extremely slow, although some progress has been made in the return of refugees.

In Croatia, war in 1991 led to the establishment of two completely different territories, one controlled by the Croatian Government and the other by rebel Serbs, with the involvement of UN peacekeepers. In 1995, actions by the Croatian military and police returned three of the four autonomous territories to Croatian government control. In January 1998, the last area under Serbian control, which had been subject to a UN transitional authority, Eastern Slavonia, was reintegrated peacefully into Croatia. A large-scale exodus of ethnic Serbs occurred in 1995 and subsequently, so that Serbs now make up 4.5% of the population (2001 census) compared to 12% in 1991. Following the death of Franjo Tudjman in December 1999, elections in January 2000 saw a decisive victory for a coalition of parties which have continued to consolidate democracy and move Croatia closer to membership of the European Union. Regional imbalances continue, with economic and social inequalities more and more visible, and continued problems in terms of the return of refugees and, on occasions, in terms of co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia.

Serbia and Montenegro came into existence in 2002, replacing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The status of relations between the two republics remains complex, with Montenegro having its own monetary system. Throughout the 1990s, the grip on power of Slobodan Milosevic led to a thoroughgoing authoritarianism of all aspects of Serbian society. War in Kosov@ in 1998 and 1999, and the NATO-led bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, led to a situation where Kosov@ is now administered as a protectorate, with an international military presence, KFOR, and with its constitutional position unresolved. The defeat of Milosevic and his subsequent arrest and deportation to the Hague appeared to consolidate democracy, although the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in 2003 revealed the close linkages between political elites and organised crime.

There are a number of regional issues which remain unresolved, including the return of refugees, the settlement of property claims, as well as how to promote regional co-operation for economic development and to reduce organised crime and trafficking of people. In addition, the media in each country shows little interest in developing and promoting a positive image of neighbours so that, whatever democratic changes have occurred from above, these remain largely unconsolidated in terms of processes of dealing with the past from below.

Quaker Peace and Social Witness

Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) is a part of the Quaker organisation in the UK, formerly known as Quaker Peace and Service. It is a body which seeks to give concrete expression to Quaker principles in specific social action work in the UK and internationally. In 2002, it began an extensive review of the various programmes and projects it is engaged with (cf. www.quaker.org.uk).

The organisation has had an extensive involvement in post-Yugoslav countries since 1991, forming close links with a wide range of individuals, groups and organisations active in anti-war campaigns, and in promoting justice and human rights. Its original aims were “to support reconciliation and understanding between individuals and groups and to encourage a non-violent approach to conflicts as well as human and civil rights”. In 1998, it established an office in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, employing two staff to support the work of a wide range of organisations and individuals striving for a vibrant civil society, through consultancies and small grants. Throughout its work, through volunteer placements, support offered by individual Quakers, and by representatives and their managers, considerable emphasis has been placed on the importance of building and sustaining relationships in terms of the transformative effects, for both parties, of their mutual engagement.

In 2002, QPSW decided to consolidate and build upon its work through increasing the number of its representatives in the region. Two staff in the Sarajevo office are now complemented by representatives for Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro. For the first time, all four representatives are themselves citizens of one of the post-Yugoslav countries, and have a long-standing commitment and track record in work in civil initiatives, including peace groups. The team, supported by managers and a Committee in the UK, focuses on a new programme whose main aim is “the development of a cohesive regional network of activists and groups committed to working on and advancing processes towards truth, reconciliation and dealing with the past at all levels of society”.

Recognising that supporting these processes must be long-term, QPSW is committed to its post-Yugoslav programme until at least 2005. The programme continues to be designed to be responsive to local conditions, needs and opportunities and to explore opportunities to enter into partnerships with a range of local groups and organisations. A range of activities to fulfil the programme aim is envisaged, subject to consultation processes, of course, including: networking opportunities through seminars, conferences, and round tables; publishing of on-going learning; small grants; and training, technical assistance and capacity building.

The Survey and Consultation Exercise

In order to inform its programme of work, QPSW undertook an extensive survey and consultation exercise, with the aim of exploring the diversity of meanings and understandings of ‘dealing with the past’ amongst a range of individuals and groups in some of the post-Yugoslav countries. The main purpose of the endeavour was to allow QPSW to make informed judgements, in consultation with others, about the feasibility of launching a project to address the issue of dealing with the past, to map existing work in this field, and to explore options for QPSW’s future role in this process.

The main methods used in the reports are semi-structured interviews with individuals or groups, mainly civil activists, but also other constituencies and stakeholders likely to have an interest in the topic. In general terms, questions were grouped according to four main themes:

1. Dealing With the Past: General Views, Factors which Impede and Impel; Attitudes towards dealing with the past;

2. Groups Involved In Dealing With the Past: General Overview and Plans for the Future;
3. Regional Approach and Cross-Border Work; and
4. Support Needed and the Potential Role of QPSW.

The interviews were undertaken and recorded by the QPSW representatives, and subsequently transcribed. In each case, the final report was written by an external consultant, usually an experienced activist/writer able to interpret the material and systematically structure the report in accordance with the specificities of the particular country context. Hence, whilst each of the reports exhibits certain common features in line with a joint approach to core questions, there are many differences in terms of the way the material is presented, and in terms of the kinds of arguments used.

This composite report is a summary of the most important elements of the country reports, written by an external consultant who was involved in some of the original development of the interview methodology and questions. The aim is to provide an overview which, whilst sensitive to country differences, and based on a thorough reading of drafts of country reports, presents a broad picture of value for a wider readership.

In all, a total of 266 people were interviewed during the survey, either individually or in groups (120 in Serbia; 70 in BiH; 42 in Croatia; and 34 in Montenegro). The interviewees were drawn from a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in dealing with the past, including: NGO and civil activists; human rights workers; members of women's groups; independent journalists; progressive church leaders; lawyers; artists and media and cultural workers; academics; politicians; students; as well as associations of refugees; associations of families of the missing; war veterans' groups; and those formerly detained in camps. The interviewees were a disparate group in terms of age, gender, and, in terms of their regional base, avoiding the danger of only interviewing those active in or near the capital city.

The writing up of the country and regional reports is not the end of the consultation process, and feedback will be sought on the findings and ideas contained in these reports, both informally and through formal sessions and conferences. This report addresses, in turn, some of the main findings of the country reports. Section Two focuses on the main findings regarding respondents' views on the concept of dealing with the past; its importance and key features; the obstacles to dealing with the past in post-Yugoslav countries; and views regarding who are the key stakeholders or publics to be involved in the process. Section Three focuses on the activities and interventions which have been developed in terms of dealing with the past. Section Four discusses respondents' views regarding a regional approach to the issue; and Section Five draws some conclusions and recommendations for the future.

II. PERSPECTIVES: listening to diverse voices

The Meanings of ‘Dealing with the Past’

Notwithstanding the fact that it covers a wide range of meanings, the phrase ‘Dealing with the Past’ was accepted by most of those interviewed as a useful way of understanding an important issue. There was some concern, particularly in Serbia, that the term connotes a narrowing down of the past to something negative. However, most respondents saw it as an expression of a process, connoting the active negotiation of the past, and therefore as necessary and relevant.

Many respondents distinguished, but also emphasised the links, between two levels of dealing with the past: the private, personal level and the public, collective, or societal level, with the ideological and political pressures of the latter spilling over into the former. In the Bosnia-Herzegovina report, the distinction made between being empowered to ‘tell one’s own story’ and ‘finding the truth’, also captures the difference between these two levels.

“Dealing with the past means being able to look each other in the eye. It means to tell your story and hear their story; to tell and hear the truth. It means to accept the facts, no matter how unpleasant they may be” (M. Leban quoted in BiH Country Report).

In addition, there was considerable discussion of the importance of a nuanced, and complex, understanding of the past, going beyond crude identification of perpetrators and victims, but also going beyond notion of ‘collective guilt’ and ‘collective responsibility’. Responses here varied, however, not only between countries but between different groups in countries depending on their social position, biography, professional and political stance, generationally, as well as in terms of ethnicity. Unless these differences are confronted actively, they can reproduce misunderstandings and even conflicts.

The need to deal with the past constructively was also considered, by those interviewed in Serbia, as different from an ‘obsession with the past’, or ‘a return to the past’, and hence represents a process of liberation and a return to modern forms of identity and existence. In Croatia, peace activists focused on the need to ‘confront our own bad past’, but were less focused on crimes committed against the majority of the population. In some sense, this was reversed amongst groups of war veterans. In Bosnia the absence of a ‘winner’ was commented upon so that there are now three histories or sets of truths enshrined within different institutions and communities.

In addition, an element of ‘dealing with the past’ stressed by many respondents is the documentation of crimes, and the quest for justice, as a *sine qua non* of the development of a legal state, democracy and the rule of law. This returned many respondents to complex questions of responsibility and guilt. Some made connections between ‘dealing with the past’ and peace-building, the rebuilding of trust, truth, co-existence, and forgiveness, with one respondent pointing out the importance of *“forgiving but not forgetting”* (Group Interview, Croatia report).

In a sense, a consensus emerged in the reports of the importance of ‘dealing with the past’ as a precondition for a shared political and social community. Notwithstanding differences based on emotional positioning and interest, ‘dealing with the past’

implies introducing a degree of rationality to the connection between politics and everyday life which was welcomed and seen as important by most of those interviewed, and as the only way of establishing a sound foundation for the future.

Is Dealing with the Past a Priority?

All those surveyed agreed that ‘Dealing with the Past’ is one of the priorities, with most activists seeing it as the most important priority for peace work in post-Yugoslav countries. Most respondents contrasted explicitly their views on its importance with the relative under-emphasis it has been given in mainstream politics, with the result that much valuable time has been lost. Without active attention to the issue, many respondents foresaw a danger that different interpretations of the past, and conflicting official accounts, would be the seeds of future tension or even of armed conflicts. Hence, dealing with the past is seen as vital for genuine sustainable peace, within each of the countries and between them.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, there was some fear expressed that as soon as international peace-keepers leave, conflicts will re-emerge:

“We have not dealt with the past, yet we have peace. But that peace is imposed and illusive. There is a lot of negative energy steaming up and around that is currently suppressed by the presence of international troops.” (S. Djulic quoted in BiH Country Report).

A large number of respondents focused on the cathartic or healing nature of dealing with the past, with many respondents emphasising the need to deal with personal and group traumas. Some stressed the importance of this not in the abstract but in actually documenting how people were killed, necessary for relatives but also for the wider society. However, in this process the danger of retraumatization for some was also mentioned.

There was a strong focus on the need to try to establish the truth, dispelling myths and prejudices and introducing a greater awareness of the problems caused by manipulations of history. Participants quoted in the BiH report expect that dealing with the past can improve communications and relationships amongst countries in the region that would in turn foster commerce and economic recovery. In the Croatia report, there was an emphasis on the importance of processes of ‘normalisation’ which would serve to limit the power of right-wing extremists in the future. Some wanted to delegitimise, or at least have a more balanced account of, what has been legitimised in dominant discourse as a Patriotic Homeland War (Domovinskog rata).

In the Serbia report, respondents also focus on facts and their interpretation, the establishment of truth in a sense, as crucial. There is also the tension, noted above, between ‘collective guilt’ and individual stories of Serbian victims, in the context of intense feelings of victimisation by large sections of the population, little understood by those outside Serbia. The Montenegro report emphasises the importance of coming to terms with the specific role of Montenegro and its peoples in the wars, precisely because it tends to be subsumed under that of Serbia. In Montenegro, many of the same people who were in power during the wars, remain in power, whilst now emphasising a pro-democracy stance. The fact that there was no direct war on Montenegrin territory is also relevant.

The idea of demystifying the past was seen as crucial in terms of rebuilding trust in institutions and in terms of relationships between groups with a different perception of the past. The complexities of ensuring that the majority population hear the stories of the minority population, as well as the importance of ordinary accounts of everyday life in war which undercut the notion of war as heroic, were also emphasised by some respondents. These processes could then facilitate new visions of co-existence in the region. In this way, many respondents felt that a coming to terms with the past would allow for the development of a new, nuanced, moral order, with a renewed ability to distinguish between good and evil and points in between.

The importance of uncovering events which have had less attention paid to them in the popular media is emphasised both in the Croatian and the Serbian reports. In addition, there is the possibility that the role of the ICTY could act as a kind of common denominator but it is also noted that the Tribunal is perceived differently in different countries and by different groups.

A range of complex answers were given by respondents as to whether this was the right time to focus more explicitly on dealing with the past. Some respondents, particularly in Bosnia, felt it was already late, as noted above, with others stressing the importance of a degree of distance from the most traumatic events. The Serbian report notes a wide range of views, between those who feel the majority of the public still does not want to know, and the fact that emerging from 13 years of authoritarianism, there is more of a desire to know, given impetus by the assassination of Zoran Djindjic.

There was a strong sense through the reports that efforts aimed at dealing with the past have to be broad, well-planned, well-organised and persistent, as an ongoing process interlinked with other issues of concern in post-war reconstruction, some explicitly mentioning the role of war profiteers and wider senses of injustices and of value dissensus. In order to succeed, the process has to be co-ordinated, with leadership roles being taken by public figures; with an emphasis on the personal and social gains which will accrue; and the importance of this for wider development in a European context. The importance of planning and preparation was stressed by many, especially where there might be an absence of a general readiness within the society as a whole. The readiness has, also, to be linked to the legitimisation of the process in formal politics, and to the pivotal role which could be played by the educational system and by the mass media.

A similar complexity emerged in terms of responses as to how far back into the past it is necessary to go. The majority of respondents emphasised the wars and subsequent events of the 1990s as the key periods to be addressed. However, in many cases there was a desire to connect this with the origins of the wars prior to this period, in the 1980s, with the fall of communism, and the rise of nationalist movements throughout former Yugoslavia.

There were some respondents who felt it important to go back further – to the early 1980s and the first unrest in Kosov@ and the subsequent rise to power of Slobodan Milosevic, for example. A minority wished to probe further into the legacy of the Second World War and, even further back, the creation of the first Yugoslavia in 1918.

The division between those who wanted to focus on the immediate past and those who wished to go back further was most evident in the Croatia report. Whilst some respondents felt it would be counterproductive to go too far back, deflecting attention from the immediate past and compounding a ‘fixation with the past’, others felt strongly that ‘unfinished business’ from understandings of the Second World War and, in particular, the Fascist NDH (Nezavisna drzava Hrvatska – the Independent State of Croatia) period, is immensely important in contemporary Croatia.

A significant minority stressed the importance of a through revisiting of the period from 1945 to 1990, and addressing elements of the suppression of the past under communism. This would enable the dealing with, and placing into perspective, of events and locations which have been mistreated by all sides for ideological purposes, including Bleiburg, Goli Otok, and Jasenovac.

Another concern expressed by some respondents was the need to try to fix exactly when the wars started and to focus on their complex causes. A related issue, noted by one respondent in the Croatia report, concerns whether war was really necessary for Croatian independence, alongside questions about the nature of the war itself, the role of the leading party, and the role of the Croatian army in Bosnia.

Many respondents acknowledged that dealing with the past was not a priority in the wider society or amongst dominant political elites. The Croatia report emphasises the difference between those allowed to speak about the past and those forbidden from entering the public discourse. The ideologization of the war by all sides, was emphasised by some in the Croatia report, with the need to counter the effects of different truths being stated in different settings:

“I think the worse thing that can happen to me is that I say one thing when I'm with the representatives of the national minority, and another, when it's a mixed group of people, and thirdly, when I'm with the group of the national majority” (B. Mijakovic quoted in Croatia Country Report).

Overall, most respondents felt that there is a real need now to open up all aspects of dealing with the past, to increase its visibility in wider society, and to address limitations and obstacles which stand in the way of dealing with the past.

The Obstacles to Dealing with the Past

All the reports stress the links between obstacles to dealing with the past at the macro-level and at the subjective level, with many respondents noting the strong links between these two levels. In terms of which groups pose obstacles to dealing with the past, the main group mentioned were politicians. In BiH and in Montenegro, and to an extent in Croatia and Serbia, many of the key players during the wars are still in office, or wield considerable influence over those who are, and have a vested interest in preventing the truth from being known, in terms of a fear of being exposed as direct or indirect perpetrators of atrocities. The role of elites is particularly important in Serbia given the noted connections between some of these and organized criminals implicated in war profiteering and in ‘wild privatisation’.

More generally, the interest of nationalist parties and their ideologues to maintain a kind of ‘monopoly on the past’ was also noted by a number of respondents. In BiH,

still, on all sides, nationalist politicians derive power and votes from their manipulation of the past, and their stereotypical understandings of the nature of 'others'. Amongst the ideologues of nationalism with a similar interest, many respondents felt the media, despite some progress, still continue to be framed in terms of a one-sided understanding of the past. Others mentioned church leaders; academics; the legal system; the amount of discretion of officials at local level, particularly in Croatia, and the negative role of sections of the educational system. One respondent in Croatia mentioned the international community:

“When we are talking about the possible influence of the international community, it seems to me that it is not in their interest, it is not a priority. They are turned towards building a new kind of future, knowing that not much can be corrected in the past. And then rather, out of practical reasons, they invest so that the economic situation softens a bit the trauma and unhappiness.” (M. Galo in Croatia Country Report).

In Croatia, some respondents pointed to a lack of political will, either specifically in terms of the failure of the new Government elected in 2000 to go beyond broad declaratory statements, or more generally in terms of the continued hegemony of a nationalist-oriented political culture. Some suggested that governance in all the countries was still about ruling over people rather than serving the citizens and that this represented an obstacle to dealing with the past. In societies which lack order, social cohesion, common values and coherent identities, there are strong structural obstacles to dealing with the past, and a general tendency to avoid active participation in the public sphere – rather a tendency to withdraw into oneself and mind one's own business.

Interestingly, the wish of the oppressed minority to stay quiet in Croatia was also mentioned by some respondents, so as not to risk losing even more. One group noted in both the BiH and Croatia reports were young people who are not interested in the past or too preoccupied with the difficulties of their current realities to explore the past in any depth.

A number of respondents mentioned subjective or personal obstacles to dealing with the past, with emotions and unresolved traumas leading to reluctance or a closure towards the past. If someone is blocked in dealing with their own trauma as a victim, then there is no space for empathy towards other victims and, above all, no interpretative framework within which these processes of victimisation can be understood. More generally, the majority of the public, beginning to lead a more normal life in post-Yugoslav countries, do not see what is to be gained from delving into the past in any depth. The Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro reports emphasised significant regional differences, related to the role of different regions in these, and earlier, wars.

Overall, whilst the obstacles were felt to be real and deep-rooted, there was also optimism that they could be overcome, not least because of the efforts which are being made by some individuals and groups to focus on dealing with the past.

The Role of Diverse Stakeholders

Most respondents agreed that dealing with the past had to encompass all stakeholders in society. The role of the state and governmental institutions was seen as contentious,

with a concern that politicians would manipulate the process for their own ends as against the legitimising effect which state concern and ownership might have. In addition, the role of scientists, the media, the church and educational institutions was also seen as crucial.

At the moment, the leading role in dealing with the past is taken by NGOs and groups often put together under the concept of 'civil society'. There was a broad agreement that these groups were playing a positive role although there was some concern about their high degree of exclusivity and the danger of them rushing to judgements without facts being noted by some. Respondents also disagreed about whether the starting point for dealing with the past should be at the national or local level, and whether it should be focussed on social structures or on individual attitudes and behaviours, although most tended to see a combination of the two as most important. There was relatively little discussion of the role of veterans groups in the process.

Overall, then, the surveys show considerable interest in dealing with the past and a wide range of views, all demonstrating a deep thinking about the concept. When we move from the discourse of dealing with the past to the actual practice we find a similar depth of experience and of potential upon which to build.

III. ACTIVITIES: Ongoing Interventions and Initiatives

Models and Approaches to Dealing with the Past

The Country reports address a very wide range of initiatives and approaches to Dealing with the Past, focusing primarily on those from within the civil sector. In this section, we focus more specifically on the models, approaches, methods and techniques used, which are often implicit other than explicit.

The Serbia report introduces what appears to be a useful distinction between a ‘hard’ and a ‘soft’ approach to dealing with the past. The former, at times absolutist and moralistic, insists on focusing attention on Serbia and Serbs as the guilty party and on the need for a thorough and intense rooting out of nationalistic elements within Serbian society. Within the ‘hard approach’ there is a kind of advocacy of ‘shock therapy’, particularly through the mass media, in which the population is suddenly and intensively exposed to issues and themes which had been completely taboo previously. As the Serbian report notes, however, a state of shock, whilst it may have an immediate symbolic effect, may not be the most conducive to sustainable change, at whatever level.

The ‘soft’ approach seeks to be more nuanced and to address the problem from the micro-perspective of individuals actually involved, and the complexities of their actions and motives. The ‘soft’ approach sees the potential for transformation, learning, and flexibility amongst all human beings providing the right support, at the right time, is offered, in the right way, by the right people. The approach seeks to win friends, allies and ‘accomplices’ amongst those who were once counted as some of Milosevic’s staunchest supporters. Many of those interviewed in all countries pointed to the importance of a pragmatic approach, as well as one which responds to ordinary people and, in particular, is sensitive to the lived experience of groups such as war veterans. In reality, of course, most approaches to ‘dealing with the past’ fall between these two ideal typical ends of a continuum.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, considerable emphasis was placed by respondents on the importance of the work opening up a space for dialogue which can then be fostered and promoted. In this way, individual contacts between activists and other individuals, workshops led by NGOs, and discussions on the mass media, can all be seen as operating in this way, albeit at different levels. In a way which resonates with the ‘soft’ approach noted above, there was a particular emphasis placed by some respondents on the importance of hearing and telling stories and on the value of an ‘indirect’ approach to ‘dealing with the past’ through theatre and role play, for example.

“We work more on creating a space for dialogue, to talk about the ‘injury’, to open the communication channels among ordinary people across the line of division which this war has created, so they can be in the same room with each other and slowly start opening up and putting some questions. It seems like a direct dealing with the past is not yet on the menu.” (K. Kruhonja in Croatia Country Report).

Another linked emphasis was on ‘instrumental peace-making’ in which people who do not normally come into contact with each other work on a common issue, problem or project. The attempt to connect dealing with the past with people’s real interests,

rather than relying on altruism, was also stressed by some respondents. Some felt that this could only be valuable if the approach was as critical, dynamic and challenging as possible, requiring clear aims and good supervision within a long-term approach.

In a sense, the view of some respondents that the most important people to work with are “those who do not want to be worked with” (I. Matulic in Croatia Country Report) is particularly incisive. Many of the respondents stated that there was a lack of discussion about the real effects of different initiatives and what the criteria for measuring and accounting for these effects should be, which leads directly into a discussion of the kinds of initiatives currently being implemented and by whom.

Key Actors and Initiatives

Bosnia-Herzegovina

BiH has an Initiative for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 1997, which is a coalition of several NGOs including Circle 99, The Citizens’ Alternative Parliament, The Forum of Tuzla Citizens, and The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sarajevo, F BiH and Bijelina, RS. It has worked on raising awareness of the need for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in BiH, leading to the drafting of a Parliamentary Bill which appears to have little hope of becoming law, as a result of the disinterest of Parliamentarians. The Initiative is not widely known, frequently misrepresented, and also seen by some of those interviewed as ‘exclusivist’ and ‘purist’, although it has established good links with related initiatives in Croatia and Serbia and represents the most serious attempt to formalise Dealing with the Past in BiH thus far.

A number of names of individuals and organisations were repeatedly mentioned by respondents in BiH as directly involved in work on Dealing with the Past. These included the organisations who founded the Initiative noted above, but also the Centre for Non-Violent Action (CNA) in Sarajevo; women’s groups including Zene zenama (Women to Women) in Sarajevo, and Udružene zene (Women’s Association) in Banja Luka; OKC (Youth Communication Centre) in Banja Luka; the Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs (DISS); and the International Multi-Religious Intercultural Centre.

A number of individuals were also mentioned by several respondents, including Svetlana Broz, author of ‘Good People, Bad Times’; Jezdimir Milosevic, author of ‘The Light at the End of the Tunnel’; and former RS President Biljana Plavsic currently serving a prison sentence after admitting guilt, and offering an apology, regarding war crimes during her trial at the ICTY. Respondents also noted a number of initiatives which, whilst not concerned directly with ‘Dealing with the Past’, were involved in wider peace-building and democratisation efforts and, therefore, had a close relationship to the theme being discussed. Crucially, most respondents felt that the range of efforts remained very disparate one from another and, with some exceptions, were not co-ordinated or linked in any way.

Croatia

The Croatia report refers to four broad groups and individuals who were noted by respondents as most active in ‘Dealing with the Past’. The first included a range of Non-Governmental Organisations and individuals active in them, including the Osijek Centre for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights (in particular Katarina Kruhonja); the Zagreb-based Centre for Peace Studies (in particular, Vesna Terselic); and the

Croatian Helsinki Committee (in particular, Zarko Puhovski). The second group are journalists, media personalities, and/or specific media projects and organisations, including the production company Factum (Nenad Puhovski); the TV show Latinica (Denis Latin); and the weekly journal Feral Tribune (Viktor Ivancic). The third group were individual intellectuals and authors including Ivo Goldstein (author of Holocaust in Zagreb), Sanja Ivekovic (author of the documentary Women in Socialism), the Split-based Professor Nikola Viskovic, and Catholic intellectual Don Ivan Grubisic. A fourth group included two politicians, the sociologist and leader of HNS, Vesna Pusic, and the current Croatian President Stjepan Mesic.

In a parallel to the Bosnia study, the Croatia report also notes that many activists remained largely ignorant of the work of others, with little real co-ordination. Indeed, older projects such as Volunteer project, Pakrac, working in a divided town in Croatia from 1993, and a fore-runner to the Centre for Peace Studies, were hardly mentioned at all. There is no formal organisation in Croatia working on the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission although the Centre for Peace Studies did organise a number of round-tables and workshops on this theme, with guests from other countries.

The most coherent approach to dealing with the past as a part of peace-building in Croatia comes from the Osijek Centre for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights. In particular its work since 1998 on 'Empowering Local Communities for Peace-building' through the use of peace teams and an active listening project in parts of Eastern Slavonia, appears to be the most sophisticated attempt to combine dealing with the past, peace building and community development. They have worked consistently with veterans' groups seeking to open up previously taboo issues. In the village of Berak, for example, support to one individual has, in fact, made a huge difference in terms of dealing with the past and envisaging a future amongst groups previously in conflict with each other.

The project's basic peacebuilding tool was the "Listening Project" with its multiple purpose of facilitating peace teams' entry into the community; identifying community needs and divergent perceptions of war; identifying peace constituencies; creating a basis for community mobilisation around visible development projects; and providing a mechanism for community members to express frustrations and devise conflict transformation approaches following violent incidents. Pairs of trained listeners visited the majority of households in a given community and listened to local residents' concerns, experiences, perceptions of war, and suggestions for the future (cf www.policy.hu/skrabalo).

Marina Skrabalo's recent study of peace-building practice in the Republic of Croatia (www.policy.hu/skrabalo) also notes the work of the Youth Group Danube in Vukovar; the Zagreb-based Centre for Education and Counselling of Women (CESI), collaborating with local women's' initiatives in Dvor, Gvozd and Vojnic; and zaMirnet's pioneering use of new technology as a peace building tool in a number of local community centres. None of these initiatives were explicitly mentioned by respondents in the Croatia survey, however, suggesting that respondents either are not aware of them or, more likely, do not make the link between them and 'dealing with the past'.

Serbia and Montenegro

The leading groups working on 'Dealing with the Past' in Serbia are predominantly Human Rights NGOs with a history of opposition to the Milosevic regime. They are involved in specific direct action campaigns regarding particular crimes and also in the writing of draft laws for dealing with the past, notably a law on lustration, already passed by Parliament, which will forbid those who misused their office during the Milosevic era from holding public office in the future. In addition, the Serbian authorities established a Truth Commission but this was boycotted by many activists because of the narrowness of its terms of reference.

One of the groups most often mentioned by respondents in Serbia was Women in Black which, since 1998, has created a network of women's NGOs in 15 towns and cities. The group holds workshops on issues such as peace, antimilitarism, conscientious objection, and responsibility for war crimes. They have focused on dealing with the past both in Serbia and in the wider region.

Other groups in Serbia work on issues related to 'Dealing with the Past' in terms of psycho-social work; conferences; art; research; alternative education; campaigns; and oral histories. In the mid-1990s, a multi-disciplinary research project 'The Serbian Side of the War' was an early attempt to address the realities of Serbian involvement in the wars and to trace the origins of this to events in the late 1980s.

The report also charts the involvement of some Government Ministries in work relating to 'Dealing with the Past', with the Ministry of Education strongly supporting work on conflict resolution in schools, and the Ministry of Minorities and Human Rights collaborating with the NGO the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy on a project with youth in the Sandzak region. In addition, some political parties, notably the Civic Alliance of Serbia; the Social Democratic Union; and the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina have a long-standing concern with peace issues.

In Montenegro, the major anti-war block throughout the 1990s consisted of two political parties, the Liberal Unity Party and the Social Democratic Party, and the weekly journal Monitor. Activities in terms of Dealing with the Past, as with broader human rights questions, is on a much smaller scale compared to that of Serbia. In many ways the leading organisation is itself modelled on the experience of Women in Black, the Women's Peace Network of Montenegro.

In all of the country reports, it is clear that there is a major disjunction between the priorities of civil initiatives and those of groups of war veterans and their families. Whilst some of these remain close to nationalist projects, in the focus groups it was clear that their major preoccupations were those of economic survival, employment, and ensuring that they were not forgotten by the wider society. In addition, whilst the range of activities led by groups in civil society is impressive and, indeed, a continuation of the civic courage shown by peace groups during the wars, there was a real sense of the problems of initiatives proceeding in isolation, on short-term agendas, and covering only a small section of the general public.

The Need for Support

All of the country reports noted the need for new kinds of support to overcome some of the difficulties faced in implementing activities related to dealing with the past.

Initiatives needed financial support and technical assistance as well as help in finding ways of generating greater involvement from a wider range of social actors. Above all, the need to work on issues of trust between different actors, and potential beneficiaries of their programmes, was particularly emphasised.

The Serbia and Montenegro report, in particular, noted high levels of tiredness, burn-out, and illness of activists. In the estimate of the representative, approximately one third of those interviewed, chosen precisely because of their interest and involvement in *Dealing with the Past*, stated that they no longer had an interest to work on this theme in the future. Many others were thinking of leaving the field after a final chronicling of their efforts. Few had the energy or motivation to go deeper.

The Bosnia report notes that potential funders, in the country and internationally, rarely acknowledge the importance of the issue and, with a few exceptions, do not commit resources to it longer term. Groups tend to receive motivational support from their beneficiaries, and financial support from affiliated and solidaristic organisations, particularly in Europe. Above all, groups noted the importance of support in being able to make longer-term relationships with local government. Better co-ordination, and the adoption of a broad strategy of campaigning, was also seen as important. Many respondents in Bosnia saw the need for an emphasis on education, in order to ensure that future generations learnt about the past in a more progressive and even-handed way.

In the Croatia report, respondents also noted all of the issues above. In addition, the importance of front-line activists having time to reflect, read, and de-brief was also mentioned, alongside the importance of external supervision and evaluation in making sense of what worked and learning lessons for the future. In a sense, what was being called for in all reports was a structured, longer-term, approach which can make sense of rich experiences.

TOWARDS A REGIONAL APPROACH?: problems and possibilities

Existing Regional Links

It is evident from all the country reports that there was far more intensive networking and linkages between groups and initiatives across the post-Yugoslav countries during the height of the wars, between 1992 and 1995, than now. Often these links were supported and encouraged by external facilitators and donors. Whilst contacts and meetings continue, and friendships and shared understandings have endured, over time there has been much more attention to in-country projects.

Of course, many meetings and conferences with a regional theme continue to be held but have not yet led to any specific major initiatives. Conferences mentioned by respondents included the Sarajevo conference on Reconciliation in 2000 and the Thessaloniki conference on 'Reconciling for the Future' in April 2003, hosted by the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE, cf. www.reconcilingforthefuture.org).

There have been a number of cross-border initiatives with a wider remit than 'Dealing with the Past', many of which have been funded through the Stability Pact or the European Union, both of which see cross-border projects as a priority. The MIRamiDA trainings were mentioned by a number of respondents as drawing together participants from throughout the region. It was also clear from each country report that key activists do have an understanding and knowledge of initiatives in other countries, and have maintained contacts so that, in theory at least, the potential base for more attention to a regional approach exists. A recent project, mentioned by a number of respondents, was the series of round tables organised by CNA and involving Adnan Hasanbegovic of CNA and Gordan Bodog of CMS, both interviewed in the surveys.

In recent years, there has been an expansion of what might be called small-scale, integrated, regional projects linking towns, cities and villages in a small geographical area but across borders. Again, this has often been prompted by sections of the international community but has, in some instances, been initiated by local civil society. Initiatives from Vojvodina in Northern Serbia, for example, usually link with organisations and groups in the Slavonia region of Eastern Croatia and with Hungary. There have also been links in the triangle of Vojvodina, Tuzla (BiH) and Osijek (Croatia). Other projects link Dubrovnik and Cavtat in the South of Croatia with Herceg Novi in Montenegro and Trebinje in RS, BiH. Many of these projects focus on trade and economic links and few have an explicit component regarding Dealing with the Past. The Osijek Centre for Peace has also initiated cross-border projects in Eastern Slavonia.

There are also a range of networks, more or less fluid, and more or less active, which include people from more than one post-Yugoslav country, including those of professionals; trainers; peace activists; politicians; women's groups; and church groups. There is also considerable work on regional networking amongst youth groups. A number of external actors promote regional co-operation including the German Foundations; the Soros Foundation; CARE International; C.S. Mott Foundation; and others.

Views on a Regional Approach

The majority of respondents tended to believe that now was not the right time for an expansion of a regional approach to dealing with the past. The reasons for this were varied although most suggested that the current period was one of coming to terms with the existence of separate states. Hence, whilst regional projects were important in the past, during the wars, and would be important in the future, with closer integration into Europe, there was a need to concentrate on national and local issues currently. Occasionally this was linked with a strong emphasis on the distinctive nature of the different countries. It was also associated, for some respondents, with a view that ‘putting one’s own house in order’ had to be the starting point for dealing with the past, before a more extensive regional and comparative approach could be developed.

In contrast, a minority of respondents did see the extension of a regional approach as important, necessary, and timely. Recognising the existence of the post-Yugoslav countries as separate states, these respondents still felt the need to address a common history, the inter-twining role of key players up to and during the wars, and the importance of a strengthening of a regional understanding to prevent wars in the future. The view that there needs to be parallel processes at the national levels of all countries in the region, through similar Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, for example, was most strongly expressed by one respondent in BiH.

“There is a need for a regional approach, provided we have the same conditions for the work of the Commissions. You cannot have 15 highly moral, independent individuals here (in Bosnia) and a group hand-picked and appointed by Kostunica in Serbia.” (M. Malic quoted in BiH Country Report)

In Croatia, some respondents pointed out the costs of regional non-co-operation in terms of witnesses from other states being reluctant to testify in war crime trials in Croatia. There was also concern about the lack of interest of the media in general reporting of cross-border co-operation, much less of everyday events in neighbouring countries, and of the need for historians and other scientists to collaborate more actively. One respondent suggested that there are civic leaders who are ready to take a step forward to ask questions of, and in turn be asked questions by, those ‘on the other side’, and that this is crucial to open up a new dimension of work on dealing with the past.

In a sense, whilst there was knowledge of, contact with, and interest in, events, people and initiatives outside people’s own countries, this did not lead to a strong view that a regional approach was fundamental, at this point in time, to dealing with the past.

Priorities for the Future

Given this, it is logical that there was no major emphasis placed by respondents on developing a regional approach as a priority in the near future. However, there were a number of suggestions made which could be built upon in delineating the contours of a future regional approach to dealing with the past.

The BiH Country report is strongest in its call for the development of a co-ordinated campaigning network across the region to effectively address the issue of dealing with the past, although it also notes that “none of those interviewed offered a clear foresight of what steps need to be taken to bring the region closer to effectively

dealing with the past.” (BiH Country Report p. 35). The report suggests that, once serious co-ordinated activities get underway at the national level, then regional co-operation will follow suit, given existing levels of communication and shared understandings between activists in the region, and their track-record of co-operation on previous projects. The report also suggests the possibility of a snowballing effect whereby positive work in one country could lead to greater attention to the issue in neighbouring countries. Respondents recognised the need for support to ensure that the sufferings of those in neighbouring countries were recognised.

The Serbia and Montenegro report is more sober on this point, believing that calls for more regional co-operation miss the point of the current realities in Serbia and Montenegro, and are more a product of the interests of donors and international agencies. In addition, a number of respondents noted that a true regional approach would need to cover all the post-Yugoslav countries and territories, including Macedonia and Kosov@, and even Slovenia where the Peace Institute in Ljubljana has made many attempts to promote a regional approach (cf. www.mirovni-institut.si).

V. FACING THE FUTURE: recommendations, next steps and conclusions

The Survey and QPSW's Role

All of the reports comment on the flawed nature of the survey exercise, the lack of consistency in approach between the individual studies, and the biased nature of the sample. Nevertheless, as a snapshot of those most involved and committed to dealing with the past, combined with a brief glimpse into the attitudes of some other key groups, it does provide a starting point for more work and give pause for thought. The reports chronicle the depth of past activities and provide valuable information about the prospects for future work. They also serve the purpose both of validating the work of these courageous activists and cementing their links with the proposed QPSW programme for which their partnership and involvement is crucial. This is, in the end, more important than any methodological rigour and empirical validity.

The most positive message regarding QPSW's work in this area can be found in the Bosnia report which suggests that respondents felt that the organisation has the resources, experience, credibility and reputation likely to add value to the work of national and regional initiatives in this field. The welcome for QPSW's intentions was almost unanimous although the precise nature of its role was still vague, other than the importance of a supportive role through providing capacity building and facilitating communication amongst local, national, and regional groups. Two specific options presented by respondents were that QPSW should sponsor one specific organisation to work on this issue or, on the other hand, that QPSW should act as a co-ordinating agency or clearing house. Respondents praised the fact that the survey and consultation exercise had been undertaken and suggested that it should lead to clear recommendations based on their feedback.

A number of respondents also noted a possible role in facilitating work with political leaders and local authorities. Helping local organizations build partnerships with honourable and credible local leaders and gaining endorsement from the local authorities seems to be yet another potentially relevant role for QPSW in this process.

The Croatia report notes the views of some respondents that support in terms of the spiritual dimension to those active in dealing with the past is needed and that QPSW can offer this alongside wider supervision and mentoring. The ability of QPSW to bring experiences and contacts from other parts of the world was also mentioned. The report concludes that QPSW could also provide advanced level education, support to prevent burn-out, financial support, and a public valuation and validation of the work. Related points were made by respondents in Serbia and Montenegro. In line with the Bosnia report, the suggestion is that QPSW's work must be clear, consistent, stable, systematic, long-term and based on the involvement of local people at all levels, including as advisors and supporters.

Conclusions and Next Steps

All the reports have sought to summarise the state of the art of Dealing with the Past in their respective countries and regionally. Some of the important points which, perhaps, need greater attention paid to them, are the following:

- the gap between the role of NGOs and civil initiatives and war-related organisations of veterans, and between both of these and the general public, creates a real obstacle to dealing with the past at a societal level;
- there is a need to gauge the current views of politicians and the general public regarding the topic of dealing with the past;
- work with returnees, war veterans, victims of war, and local communities, should be priorities in the future;
- art and artists have a considerable, and underestimated, contribution to make in dealing with the past;
- advanced education should concern itself with theoretical approaches, dissemination of literature, and with the values and ethics of peace work;
- the personal and the structural levels need to be connected, with experienced peace activists paying more attention to the political level;
- work on convincing the general public of the gains to be had from dealing with the past is needed;
- academia and the mass media need to be involved more extensively;
- commitment from external agencies must be consistent and long-term.

The next steps are for QPSW to disseminate widely the country reports and this synthesis report, and to obtain feedback. Following this, a consultation process will produce a clear agenda for the future work on supporting the process of dealing with the past in the post-Yugoslav countries. The survey convinces us of the solid base from which to start, and the need for more to be done in the future.

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