

Wasatia: Opening a Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution

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WASATIA

OPENING A GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR
PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

EUROPA BOTTOM-UP NR. 27

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EUROPA BOTTOM-UP

Nr. 27/2022

ARBEITSPAPIERE ZUR EUROPÄISCHEN ZIVILGESELLSCHAFT
EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING PAPERS

WASATIA

OPENING A GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

By Ralf K. Wüstenberg / Zeina M. Barakat

The European Wasatia Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution is a trilateral PhD-Programme based at the Europa-University Flensburg and the Maecenata Foundation's MENA Study Centre in Berlin, in partnership with universities in Albania, Israel, Palestine, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and other parts of Europe. Its task is to address the relationship between reconciliation and conflict resolution, with reconciliation being understood as a driver of conflict resolution. Given that the legal, political, and religious dimensions of reconciliation necessarily include the acknowledgment of suffering, the development of interreligious tolerance, and the analysis of entrenched narratives, the purpose of the European Wasatia Graduate School is to serve as a forum for interdisciplinary scholarship.

Our approach is threefold:

- Without law and truthfulness, there can be no reconciliation based on principles of justice.
- Without a minimum standard of legal tools and without the implementation of such tools, there can be no reconciliation within a society or between nations.
- Without truthfulness in its historical, social, and moral dimensions there can be no new beginnings.

The keynote addresses included in this volume were delivered at the public launches of the Wasatia Graduate School in Flensburg on 4 November and in Berlin on 9 November, 2021. Both, albeit in different terms, reflect the overall

approaches of the Graduate School. Udo Steinbach, Director the MENA Study Centre and Co-Director of the Wasatia Graduate School and Wolfgang Huber, an influential voice within and former head of the Protestant Church in Germany, address the urgent need for a political reconciliation based on justice and truth.

Professor Huber introduces various notions of reconciliation and what can be realistically expected in the political realm. Forgiveness cannot be a precondition for reconciliation, regardless of how the notion is conceptualised within politics. Both concepts need to be distinguished clearly. Huber focuses on the ambivalent memory of events that took place on 9 November in Germany; 9 November 1989, a day remembered as the liberation from oppression in East Germany by the fall of the Berlin Wall and 9 November 1938, the night where synagogues burned across Germany under the Nazi regime.

Professor Steinbach focuses on the relationship between reconciliation and conflict resolution. He also addresses the question of the role of Europe concerning the education, history and practices of reconciliation as the conflict over Palestine/Israel remains arguably the most protracted, far-reaching, and destabilising one of our time. In his contribution, Udo Steinbach raises key questions, such as: How can reconciliation work out between people who have struggled over such a long period? How can reconciliation replace hatred and righteousness on both sides? What is Europe's role in this? Steinbach believes that Europe's attractiveness lies with its values - such as freedom of the people, their right to autonomy, the rule of law equally applied to every citizen, and the state taking care of those in need. Liberty, democracy, political stability, economic prosperity, and technological development are tremendous challenges for the future of the Middle East.

The European Wasatia Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution has a trilateral focus (Israel, Palestine, Germany), but the programme and its participants benefit from lessons learnt from conflicts in places such as Northern Ireland, Albania/Kosovo and different parts of Africa. These are the research areas of some of the programme's 12 PhD students. Whereas Germany, South Africa and others have completed their democratic transitions, in many African countries as well as in Balkans and in Northern Ireland, such a transition may still be underway. These countries may have signed historic agreements, but remain in permanent danger of conflict due to the fragility of their democratic systems.

In the cases of Palestine and Israel, however, notions of transitional justice remain highly contested. There is evidence that "Reconciliation" is the prerequisite for a new stable order in the Middle East, Europe's close neighbour. There, political, ethnic and religious conflicts of the last decades have shaken the political order and social structure in a way that makes reconciliation an essential part of returning to a prosperous political and human coexistence.

The mission of the European Wasatia Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution is to use academic research to complement peace processes, by means of research, education, and providing excursions and summer schools. The results of the research will be published in the Monograph Series „Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution“ (ReCo), Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (wbg). The series also disseminates reconciliation-oriented research on other pressing conflict areas around the globe.

GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN CHALLENGES OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

By Udo Steinbach

Flensburg, 4th November, 2021

We have come together this afternoon to bear witness to an extraordinary event. I am not only referring to the founding of the European Wasatia Graduate School Peace and Conflict Resolution at Europa Universität Flensburg; but also to a moment of unity whereby we make an albeit very small step towards a new era in European politics. In fact, this will be the leitmotiv of what I am going to say: yes, the Wasatia project aims to academically contribute towards brokering peace between Palestinians and Israelis, but it must become part of something larger. It must become part and parcel of a fundamental process of change within the Middle East as a whole, of Europe's capacity as a political actor and of change in the mindset of Europeans towards the Middle East as its neighbourhood, it's wasatiya. Failing to do so ensures this project may remain an academic exercise.

Out of all the conflicts which the world has inherited from the era of European imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, the conflict over Palestine has remained the most protracted, farreaching, and destabilising one. It has triggered numerous domestic revolutions and unrest mostly in the Arab world, it contributes towards questioning the legitimacy of many regimes in the Middle East; wars have been waged in the name of the struggle for Palestine; acts of terrorism have been perpetrated. On several occasions on the international stage, , it has

pitted the global powers against each other to the extent that the world feared they might go to war over the Middle East. In the name of legitimacy of the state of Israel or the claims of the Palestinians, human rights were disregarded, the principle of justice was overruled by militant action; international organisations such as the United Nations became involved; eventually, the various factions used religion as a pretence and justification for their actions.

, In the preface of his book *Der Judenstaat*, published in 1896, Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, stated: „*Der Judenstaat ist ein Weltbedürfnis, folglich wird er entstehen.*“ (The Jewish state is a global demand; that is why it is going to come into existence). More than twenty years later, the Balfour Declaration which became part of the British Mandate over Palestine attempted to be more balanced: While, on the one hand, it expressed support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, on the other hand, it “understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”. This second part of the declaration was largely disregarded by the British themselves during the mandate period, and after World War II by the international community, including some Arab states and Israel.

After a century of dispute and conflict over Palestine, the *Weltbedürfnis* (global demand), as formulated by Theodor Herzl, has changed: The state of Israel in the borders of 1949 is a fact, legitimized by numerous documents drawn up by the international community; but so are the rights of the Palestinians, for which they have been struggling since 1948. The *Weltbedürfnis* today is to see the two peoples living side by side: peacefully, with equal rights and recognised by the international community.

How can this happen? What will the overarching world order, within which this coexistence may come into being, look like? How can reconciliation

succeed between people who have struggled over such a long period of time? How can reconciliation replace hatred and righteousness on both sides? At which point shall the feeling of superiority and arrogance, on one hand, and inferiority and illusion on the other, meet in the name of citizenship, mutual empathy and brotherhood? What will be the contribution of the experts at Europa Universität in Flensburg who have been prepared to encourage and to lead both communities to be guided by the vision of a common future and convince them that peace based on reconciliation creates a win-win situation for both communities?

Raising these questions means addressing two utopias: the utopia of a new Middle East on the one hand; and the utopia of a European Community that has the vision, the resolve and the capacity to contribute to bringing about a new Middle East to the best of its own interests on the other. For one thing may be certain: The place of the European Community in the global order of the 21st century will be highly dependent on the quality of its relationship with its Mediterranean and Middle Eastern neighbourhood.

In fact, the global order that produced the Balfour Declaration marked the end of the era of European imperialism. The Ottoman era was about to collapse. Years before, in 1916, Great Britain, France, and (by that time) Russia, had already laid claim to its territories. With the Ottoman Empire, Germany and the Habsburg Empire being defeated and crumbling, European imperialist powers could materialise their interests at their meeting in Paris in 1919. By making the Balfour Declaration part of the Mandate allotted to Great Britain by the League of Nations in Sanremo in 1920, London wanted the emerging Jewish Community in Palestine to play the role of a watchdog for British interests between the Suez Canal and the Indian Subcontinent. This was the beginning of a complex process that, exacerbated by the genocide of the Jews perpetrated by the Nazi regime, eventually resulted in the proclamation of Israel in 1948. From the

perspective of the Palestinians, this event since then has been perceived as „the catastrophe“ (an-nakba).

Meanwhile, the Arab elites from Morocco to Iraq struggled for independence. When achieved after World War II, the search for a political identity began, starting with the revolution in Egypt and followed by regime changes in large parts of the Arab world over the next two decades. The new leaders, many of them officers, were ambitious, but lacking a realistic strategy and a rational idea of what they could achieve, given the specific traditions and circumstances of their people. Very soon, they were caught up in personal ambitions, contesting notions of Arab nationalism, unrealistic concepts of economic and social development, struggling for regional power and forming absurd alliances against each other. What had begun under the auspices of emerging from the era of colonialism and imperialism led to widespread corruption. The struggle against Israel and Palestinian rights hid the lack of legitimacy that Palestinian leaders were unable to gain from their people. Israel, for its part, started expanding beyond the borders negotiated in 1949 and, disregarding international law, annexed East Jerusalem as well as the Golan Heights. Domestically, while gaining economic strength, nationalist forces began to dominate the discourse concerning the rights of the Palestinians and to restrict the spaces for civil society.

European imperialism, indeed, had come to an end. This finally became clear in October 1956, when the British and French (plus the Israelis) were forced to withdraw from the Suez Canal and, after more than three quarters of a century of British rule, relinquish the sovereignty over the waterway to the Egyptians. This was brought about by pressure from the USA. It proved that a new era had begun: the era of super power rivalry. The USA and the Soviet Union were vying for global dominance. Part of their strategy was to look for regional support. There was a double divide in the Middle East: between Arab regimes and Israel on one hand, and between so called Arab revolutionary

regimes and Arab conservative regimes on the other. For the US, Israel increasingly turned out to be the most reliable and powerful ally to promote 'western' interests. In the 'Six-Day-War' in June 1967 it became crystal clear that, from now on, both Israel and the US would dictate the rules of the game in the Middle East. Israel had conquered the West Bank and East Jerusalem. While, in 1956, President Eisenhower had put pressure on Israel to withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula, in 1967 the regional and global situation had changed: Washington now left it to Jerusalem to deal with Arab leaders over the occupied territories according to its own interests. In fact, Israeli and American interests converged to a large extent. The place where this was proven again and again became the UN Security Council, where Washington would constantly vote in Israel's favor.

Nevertheless, there were moments of hope and windows of opportunity over the decades. All parties have to be blamed for failing to make use of them: Arab governments, the Palestinian movement organised under the PLO, Israel, and the international community including the European Union (EU). The Oslo Accords, concluded in 1993, were the last chance to solve the conflict under the conditions of the existing global order. Any hope that they would lead to a solution was dashed when on September 11, 2001, the Twin Towers in New York were struck by a terrorist attack, the complex origins of which were deeply rooted in the Middle East – or, to call it by name, - in Arab societies. The former 'world conflict' in the Middle East that had originally resulted from questions over the future of parts of Palestine and East Jerusalem, a tiny part of the Middle East, disappeared in the shadow of another 'world conflict:' the war on terrorism.

The most significant event – more so than the destruction of Iraq by the American invasion in 2003 and the ensuing appearance of a short lived 'Islamic State,' is the Arab uprising which started in Tunisia in December 2010. To call it an „Arab Spring“ from the beginning was misleading; for it

signalled that soon summer would come, and if it would not, the Arab societies would end up in autumn or even winter. In fact, from a historical perspective, the events of 2010- 2011 have to be understood as the third Arab revolt. The first was an Arab revolt against imperialistic schemes after World War I: In Palestine against the British and the Zionist movement, in Iraq against the British Mandate, in Syria against the French, in Libya against the Italians and in Morocco against the French and the Spanish, to name just a few. The first Arab revolt was quashed by European powers. The second Arab revolt started in Egypt in 1952, when a military putsch led by Gamal Abd-an Nasir overthrew the century old monarchical order, followed over the next two decades by Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. The second Arab revolt, too, failed, albeit for different reasons. Some of the reasons have been mentioned already. The quality of relations between these so called 'revolutionary' regimes and their people was illustrated when, at the beginning of the uprising in Libya, Qadhafi was shown hiding under an umbrella, calling the people "cockroaches".

It was these "cockroaches" that challenged the regimes in this third Arab revolt. And, indeed, it was an pan-Arab phenomenon - there was not a single place between Morocco, the Sudan and Yemen up to Iraq, left untouched. Some of the regimes were swept away: in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Others managed to save themselves either through granting political and economic concessions or by force. The central notion of what the masses on the streets were calling for were "dignity", and constitutionalism, democracy, and elections. Nothing was heard about an Islamic order or Califate.

So, we consider 2011/2012 as the beginning of long search for a new order by the entire Arab World. The era of European imperialism, which, after World War I, shaped the geopolitical landscape to a large extent (from here the „Palestinian Question“ arose ended over half a century ago; so today is

the era of the East-West conflict, which forced the political actors in the entire Middle East to assemble in a camp led by one or global power or the other (and promoted Israel to the position of a dominant actor). The very first steps towards building a new order had been successful. But as soon as the process stalled, elements of the old regimes took over again and intervention from external regional powers let the Middle East fall into violence and disarray. Syria is not the only case in point, but the most tragic and far reaching one.

It is our firm conviction that this is not the last word in the history of the Middle East. Moreover, as with every crisis, it brings hope for a new beginning. The enormous energy of mostly young people which we saw during the mass demonstrations in 2011/12 is not like a genie, that may be pushed back into the bottle; it has escaped from it and is there to make changes in the outside world.

Of course, at the moment it seems like utopia. But, after the European disaster of World War II and the amount of hatred all over the continent, the groundwork was laid to build a European Community and opt for reconciliation.

The case of Germany and its relations with France, Poland, and, - two decades after the Germans had annihilated millions of Jews - with Israel, is just one case in point. Utopia (non-topos) had developed into a Topia: from something that didn't merely exist but into a European community that flourished. The politicians were the architects; the civil society the workers who brought into fruition what the architects had planned. Let me use the example of youth exchanges and city partnerships.

We, here in Flensburg this afternoon, see ourselves as civil society preparing what architects hope to design for the future of the Middle East.

What are key elements of a new order in the Middle East?

- 1) The people must freely rule themselves. Democratic principals will replace despotism. The way this will be organised has to be left to the people themselves according to their historical and cultural traditions.
- 2) The rule of law is guaranteed. In many states, the ruling elites are currently writing the rules of the game. There exists a monstrous misuse of the word 'terrorism.' If one objects to the rules of the game, one is called a 'terrorist.' The notion of citizenship has to replace submission.
- 3) Decentralisation of power and administration. The high degree of centralisation in many states does not correspond to the diversity of ethnic, religious and cultural realities in the states, with many states having been artificially constructed in the wake of World War I.
- 4) Protection of minorities. With the nation state as a paradigm on which the post World War I political landscape was based, ethnic, religious or cultural minorities were left as second class citizens.
- 5) The relationship between religion and the public space has to be redefined in a way to allow all people to equally participate in the political and social life of their countries'.
- 6) Interference in the domestic affairs of other countries and occupation of another people's territory is out of the question.

This is the agenda of change in the Middle East. But the Middle East cannot be thought of as an isolated entity. For centuries it has been closely linked to Europe, and Europe to the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire had been recognised as part of the European system of power. Its modernisation (and the modernisation of non-Ottoman countries in the Middle East) was inspired by European models and institutions. The political order of the region after the fall of the Ottoman Empire was dictated by European powers – and, finally, the two biggest conflicts in the region, the Palestinian and the Kurdish conflict, are part of the European legacy. It was only after 1945 that Europe had to step back into the shadow of the global conflict between the

USA and the Soviet Union. But even in those days, when six European states assembled in the framework of a European Community, the Mediterranean had become the first theatre of a common foreign policy by the beginning of the 1970s. In 1995 this continued under the name of the Barcelona process.

Against this backdrop, it goes without saying that, as the past was common, the future will be common again. With the United States withdrawing from the Middle East, the EU faces the challenge of redefining its relationship with the Middle East as its age old neighbour. It definitely cannot fall back on paradigms of its imperialistic past. At the beginning of the 21st century, it cannot teach the people from an arrogant position of superiority. As partnership on equal footing is a precondition of EU membership, partnership will have to be the precondition for establishing a new order around the Mediterranean and beyond in the Middle East.

But at this point we see another utopia disturbing our vision and grand design. Is Europe really capable of acting politically and economically effectively and, at some point, even prudently using military force? Is it at all willing to do so? Overlooking the last two decades, the EU has hardly been visible when it comes to resolving conflicts, to supporting people striving for freedom and democracy, and opposing autocratic rulers. Have Europeans become doubtful about their own values? Have they become afraid that these values may be an aqis to be 'exported?' To encourage themselves they should relisten to the slogans shouted by the masses and look at the graffitti in Tunis, Cairo, San'a, Bahrain, and in public places in Syria and Libya. Here they can learn how the people really want their future to be. People in the Middle East are still placing their hope for a brighter future of the positive aspects of Europe's legacy in the region.

There is not very much left that Europe can count on. Economically, it is bypassed by successful economies in Asia; and there are regimes outside of

Europe which seem to suggest that economic progress, social cohesion and political stability may be better achieved in an authoritarian system. Europe's attractiveness lies with its values, such as freedom of the people, their autonomy, the rule of law equally applied to every citizen, and the state taking care of those in need. These values would constitute the basis of partnership between Europe and its Mediterranean/Middle Eastern neighbourhood. Europe, at the moment, does not lack attractive values, but rather the will to subsequently stick to them in its policies; it, therefore, lacks credibility.

To turn, finally, utopia into prophecy: One prophecy concerns the future of Europe and the Middle East at large: The place both areas will have in the future global order depends on the quality of their relationship with each other and whether it is inclusive or exclusive. If it is exclusive in the sense that they build up walls and fences in order to shield themselves against each other – the Europeans against “Islam” and “refugees” etc.; the Middle Easterners against “secularism,” „heresy” or “human rights” as part of a strategy to restore “European imperialism” – there will be no winners.

If it is inclusive, we may draw on the tremendous heritage of living close to one another, of tolerance, of cultural achievements, and of mutual enrichment, to shape a future. This will not just be a spiritual community. Given the enormous raw materials and human resources that Europe and the Middle East have, and by offering large spaces where human genius can flourish – whether one has a Muslim, Jewish or Christian background on the basis of values outlined above - this new entity will successfully generate tools with which to face the tremendous challenges of the future.

The vision of real peace in Palestine is part of this notion of an overarching new order. Every society and state will have to decide by itself whether it will join or not, whether in Europe, or in the Middle East, and whether one

belongs to the Palestinian or the Israeli elites. Recent developments in Israel concerning Arab human rights organisations and settlements demonstrate how urgent it is for the Jewish State to critically question whether or not its policy conforms to the political order, essentially based on justice, which a vast majority of the people in Europe and the Middle East wish to live with. And it has to decide whether or not it wants to integrate into an emerging new order or militarily rely on a distant power which has decided to withdraw from the Middle East, and has shown in Afghanistan how dangerous it is in the long run to base one's security upon it.

What do we tell the students who are with us today and who, with all their enthusiasm, want to commit themselves to turn a vision of Jewish – Arab coexistence into a reality? I end with what the late Amos Oz, a famous Israeli writer, wrote when the Israeli and Palestinian leaders shook hands on the lawn in front of the White House in 1993: “Old foes handed over their hatred of history; a hundred years of loneliness in the land of Israel come to an end. We have to defuse the emotional mines in the hearts of both people. I do not know what the life of our grandchildren will be like; but this week, both people for the first time in a century of blindness looked at each other's eyes and said: you, too, are a people; both people are here.”

I wish our students may experience this moment, too. And that they can simply hear that both groups are represented. This will be the beginning of reconciliation, seemingly a simple word, but, in reality so difficult to practice that it needs a Graduate School at Europa Universität Flensburg to learn about it.

HOPE FOR RECONCILIATION

By Wolfgang Huber

Berlin, 9th November, 2021

I warmly congratulate the founders of the European Wasatia Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution on the significant success they have achieved in opening this international and interdisciplinary programme. To the fellows whose studies are enabled and advanced by this Graduate School, I wish good experiences, creative research, and many opportunities to put into practice what they explore in this framework. I am impressed by the diverse experiences you bring to this programme as doctoral students: from Israel and Palestine, from Ireland and Albania, and from Germany. I am equally impressed that the Albanian partner institution, EPOKA University in Tirana is represented by such a large and high-level delegation. The Catholic Academic Service for Foreigners and the Maecenata Foundation are also closely associated with this project - all this shows the extensive network that this unusual trilateral project can rely on. It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to be able to contribute to the second part of this opening - after the first part last week in Flensburg - with a formal address. I would like to express my sincere thanks for the invitation to do so.

We are celebrating this grand opening on the 9th of November. For the history of Germany in the 20th century, the 9th of November is considered a fateful day. Both happy and tragic, liberating and murderous events are connected with this day. Here in Berlin in particular, many people insist that the most important event on this day was the opening of the Berlin Wall on the 9th of

November, 1989. For 29 years, since the 13th of August, 1961, it had divided Berlin, made the relationship between East and West difficult, even impossible for many over the course of the years. The Wall, played down by some as a "socialist protective wall," criticised by others as a symbol of lack of freedom under the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party and integrated into the Soviet system of rule, lost its divisive power overnight. All those who witnessed those days in Berlin in November 1989 retain a clear picture in their hearts of what reconciliation means: it means the restoration of broken ties and their consolidation, especially in critical times. The 9th of November is thus associated with a spirit of confidence that does not resign itself to division but believes that the restoration of broken ties is possible.

At the same time, however, the date of 9th November is associated in German history with a completely different image: the image of burning synagogues on the 9th of November, 1938. That night, at the behest of the National Socialist leadership, the stores and homes of Jewish citizens throughout Germany were looted and destroyed; synagogues were set on fire; Jews were mocked and murdered in public. The violent persecution of Jews had already become unmistakable in the years before through systematic legal and social disenfranchisement. Now the Night of Pogroms of 9th November 1938, which was cynically called "Reichskristallnacht" – Night of Broken Glass – by its authors, was a dramatic and frightening stage on the way to the Holocaust, the Shoah, the annihilation of European Jewry in its cultural significance for 1700 years, to speak only of Jewish history in Germany.

This historical date brings a special aspect of reconciliation into view: the task of remembering the victims of historical acts of violence, of snatching them from historical oblivion and learning lessons from their fate. Critical historical remembrance, the willingness to look historical truth in the eye, to give back the names of the victims of political violence who have been

rendered nameless – all this is an indispensable dimension of reconciliation. Truth and reconciliation belong undisputedly together in this respect.

The look into the past does not end with the two examples of 9th November 1989 – the opening of the Berlin Wall – and 9th November 1938 – the Pogrom Night in the German 'Reich'. Let us go further back in time, to one Sunday morning on 9th November 1923, when Adolf Hitler as leader of the fledgling National Socialist German Workers' Party, the NSDAP, signaled his determination to seize political power in Germany. Along with other nationalist and militarist groups, Hitler marched to the Feldherrnhalle in Munich together with the infamous General Erich Ludendorff. In this way, they demonstrated their determination to establish a national dictatorship. The project was stopped, the NSDAP was banned, and Adolf Hitler was sentenced to five years of imprisonment. But the danger had not passed, it had only been postponed. Barely ten years later, Hitler, appointed Reich Chancellor by President Paul von Hindenburg, came to power in an seemingly legal manner; he soon used his legislative powers to replace democracy with a Führer state.

9th November was a fateful day for democracy even before that. On 9th November 1918, the monarch, Kaiser Wilhelm II, abdicated, a few hours into the new day, and shortly thereafter the republic was proclaimed. The fact that the first German republic was born out of a wartime defeat was considered to be a birth defect by many Germans at the time; the cognitive dissonance of many citizens towards the newly founded republic represented a risk for the democratic state in Germany from the very beginning.

Hence, the 9th of November marks a fateful date in German history, painting an often confusing and painful picture. The struggle for democratic constitutional reforms, the horror of anti-Semitism and the pogroms it

inflicted, the memory of a socialist dictatorship that deprived an entire generation of freedom through constructing a wall surrounded by barbed wire – all of this is associated with this calendar day. In other regions of the world, the struggle for freedom and recognition, the fight for equal human rights for all and the attempts at reconciliation are linked to other historical commemoration dates. Such historical memories act as a barrier to reconciliation. For truth and reconciliation belong together.

According to reconciliation studies, reconciliation is "the establishment or restoration of relationships between states, groups, organisations and individuals in the face of serious incidents such as genocides, wars, civil wars, colonialism, apartheid and other serious human rights violations" (Martin Leiner). Such processes take a long time; sometimes one has the impression that they never come to an end. Even when the wounds of the past heal, the pain never completely goes away, but is passed on in the memory of generations. Therefore, it is misleading to equate reconciliation with forgiveness. Forgiveness can be expressed between individuals; it may be hoped for from God. In political reconciliation processes, forgiveness can take place between individuals; however, this does not apply to collective actors.

Reconciliation scholars also point out that reconciliation is a long-term project that could last more than a century. And it may even take longer than that. In such a time span, individuals' relationship to historical guilt varies from generation to generation. Those born later do not bear guilt for the offences and crimes of their ancestors in an immediate sense. But they share the responsibility for ensuring that the guilt is not suppressed and forgotten, that the dignity of the victims is respected and that their suffering is remembered. At the same time, the descendants enter into a community of liability to ensure that the consequences of past injustices are rectified as much as possible. There is not a fixed temporal distance beyond which the

misdeeds of the past become irrelevant from the point of view of reconciliation. Under exceptional circumstances, even events that occurred far back in time can take on a new relevance. In Germany, we are currently experiencing this in a newly emerging discussion about atrocities and expropriations in the era of colonialism. Examples from Tanzania and Namibia are currently being discussed at length.

As there is in many cases no clear end point for a process of reconciliation, it is also difficult to determine once and for all whether a reconciliation process has been successful. The work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, led by Desmond Tutu, received a particularly strong international response. At the same time, South Africa shows that the work of such a commission by no means brings the task of reconciliation to an end. The wounds of injustice continue to reopen, and the structural distortions in the country show the continuing consequences of the apartheid regime. The structural inequality that dates back to the apartheid era is particularly evident in the unequal distribution of the land among the various ethnic groups that live in it. Geographical justice research has coined the term "spatial injustice" for this.

A comparable phenomenon may be observed in the relationship between Jews and Israelis in Palestine. Such long-term consequences are evident in areas such as education, health, or income disparity. The recognition of the equal dignity of all people and the willingness to acknowledge the equal validity of fundamental rights for all does not exclude such persistent structural injustices rooted in past injustices. But they must be taken into account to make progress on the path towards reconciliation.

For those who look at processes of reconciliation from the perspective of the Christian faith, it is also true that reconciliation between individuals and groups takes place between the former. It belongs to the realm in which

people, through processes of trial and error, strive to live together successfully. In this context, it is part of the freedom of religion not to make it a prerequisite for the possibility of reconciliation between people. Processes of reconciliation are open to people of different experiences and beliefs.

One important instance in German history may be used as an example of a process of reconciliation. It also illustrates the amount of time potentially needed for such a process. For two hundred years, from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century, Germany's relationship with its neighbour Poland was characterised by annexation plans and actions. After Germany's defeat in the Second World War and the liberation of Europe, many Germans were not ready to recognise the new border between Germany and Poland along the Oder and Neisse rivers. It took a long time before they were willing to see the political situation through the eyes of others as well. It was not until October 1965, twenty years after the end of the Second World War, that the Protestant Church in Germany started to repair Germany's relationship with its eastern neighbours. With its so-called East Memorandum, it made an unforgettable contribution to changing the political atmosphere in Germany, and, in this way, made a significant contribution to the preparation of the peace and détente policy after 1969. This impetus was complemented by a letter from the Polish Catholic bishops to their German counterparts on 18 November 1965, which contained the famous sentence: "We grant forgiveness and ask for forgiveness." This sentence, problematic as it may seem in retrospect, was the most important response from the Polish side to the attempt to break the taboo that stood in the way of German-Polish reconciliation.

It took another five years for German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, to come to Warsaw for the signing of the Warsaw Treaty on the foundations of normalisation of mutual relations. His decision to kneel in front of the Warsaw Ghetto memorial was interpreted by

some as a plea for forgiveness. Willy Brandt himself explained his action differently. His interpretation was: "On the abyss of German history and under the burden of the millions murdered, I did what people do when language fails." It took another twenty years before the German-Polish border treaty was signed in 1990 and the neighbourhood agreement supplementing it the following year.

Today's articles on German-Polish relations often omit the reconciliation efforts made in previous decades. . Even the moving moment on the 1st of May, 2004, when we celebrated the removal of the border between Germany and Poland on the bridges between the neighboring cities of Frankfurt an der Oder and Slubice, Guben and Gubin, Görlitz and Zgorzelec is left out. The 1st of May 2004 was the day when Poland and other Central and Eastern European states joined the European Union. This was not only an important contribution towards economic prosperity in these countries. It was just as much a contribution to the reconciliation of former wartime enemies, comparable to the founding of the first (Western) European institutions in the 1950s that was not only a step toward a European economic community but also an act of reconciliation. Europe, so often divided in earlier times, was able to reinvent and develop itself as a community of peace.

Nevertheless, such achievements are not foregone conclusions. Even the fact that the European Union is a peace project does not change the fact that the member states also pursue their own interests, have their own constitutional traditions and are characterised by their particular cultural identities.

At present, this debate is growing ever more critical regarding Germany's relationship with Poland, governed by the conservative-nationalist PiS party. The political situation has become so difficult that even the experiences of reconciliation and political unification are taking a back seat to the memories of war and division, conquest and mass murder. Initiatives such as

the Weimar Triangle between France, Poland and Germany seem a thing of the past. From the point of view of politics and the rule of law, Poland and Hungary are regarded by many as the problem children of the European Union.

Precisely for this reason, it is important to note the following: Today more than ever, striving for understanding and restoring broken and frayed ties between Poland and Germany are priorities for government policy, and for civil society engagement. In Germany, even in such a delicate political situation, we must not forget the reasons why we must persist in our efforts for reconciliation with our neighbours and seek new ways to achieve it. I see encounters between the young generation in both countries as particularly important for this.

Anyone who wants to promote reconciliation needs to be in it for the long haul, and must learn not to give up in the face of setbacks. This is demonstrated by the many crisis regions of our time, not least the Middle East. It is impossible to describe the potential for conflict there succinctly. At the same time, it shows particularly vividly how important it is to deal with the differences between the monotheistic religions in a unified manner, in an effort to achieve reconciliation.

"Reconciliation is the journey out of a broken world into a shared future." John Witcombe, who directs the Reconciliation Center at Coventry Cathedral in the United Kingdom, summed up the task at hand with these words. "Reconciliation is the journey from a broken world to a shared future." May the European Wasatia Graduate School for Peace and Conflict Resolution make its own distinctive contribution to that journey. That is my heartfelt wish.

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