

## **IV. MAPPING COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING IN KOSOVO: KEY ISSUES<sup>1</sup>**

### **V. CONCLUSIONS: RETHINKING POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Reflecting upon the issues explored in this research paper, peacebuilding as a policy concept can legitimately be considered impractical and utopian - neither of which makes it irrelevant for the very real, gruesome processes of negotiating political choices about the future of war-ridden societies like Croatia and Kosovo. If peacebuilding is taken literally to mean constructing an entirely new, all-encompassing policy framework that would steer the generation of a myriad of innovative policies ensuring participatory democracy, social inclusion and economic justice, it can justly be viewed as by far too broad, pretentious and even ahistoric - for none of the post-conflict societies, no matter how damaged, ever start anew; nowhere is it possible to reach a full political consensus of the importance of peacebuilding and no foreign intervention is ever resourceful enough to decode and consider the nuances of political and cultural transactions, specific to the societies with layers of grievances and deprivations that eventually erupted in violent conflict.

On the other hand, if peacebuilding is sought as a lens, through which opportunities for substantial post-war recovery and development are more clearly spotted-out, it becomes a highly relevant policy-making strategy, especially useful for correcting the myopic focus on generation of heaps of particular strategies and measures that help meet international obligations and respond to very immediate problems. The peacebuilding policy approach can help the policymakers shift focus to the far more important question of the policies' interrelatedness and long-term impact on the most precious resource that gets broken in wars – the permeability and elasticity of social networks, the key channel through which knowledge and economic wealth are generated and through which social meanings are renegotiated. Indeed, the most important reason for choosing peacebuilding as a perspective for approaching post-conflict contexts is the need to think of those contexts primarily as of complex social spaces with more plentiful power potential than from what is visible on the surface of institutional arrangements and positioning of the social groups that resulted from the dynamics of violence. That perspective is in its essence long-sighted, as it enables the expansion of imagination of what the social relationships could be like, how much power and wealth could be accumulated, even if the current state of affairs may indicate static relations, political conditioning, inequality and scarcity of resources.

Hence, peacebuilding perspective enables us to view the policy framework relevant for the recovery and development of the post-conflict societies on a continuum of possibilities for destabilization of the social and political order created by the violent conflict, which tends to fix the majority of its protagonists and survivors in crudely defined social and political positions and identities. Policies conducive to peacebuilding, no matter to which specific policy area they may belong (refugee return, civil society development, economic growth, human rights, culture) are those that create opportunities for unusual alliances and partnerships among different social actors, exposing them to new and different ideas, perspectives and interpretations of the meaning of the violent past and imagination of previously unimaginable prospects of a resourceful, creative and inclusive future. The essential transformation that takes place through the peacebuilding process is the creation of new political subjects, both individuals and groups, who are capable of breaking through the war conditionality to create their own vision of the future, their own social affiliations and attain a social status of their own choice. No matter how utopian it may seem, this social alchemy is instrumental for the economic development of post-conflict societies, like Croatia and Kosovo that can no longer

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<sup>1</sup> The final version of the chapter on Kosovo will be available by the end of August 2003. The main points of the analysis are included in the final points in the V. Conclusions: Rethinking Policy and Practice, while the planned follow-up activities are described in the Final Activity report.

count on large industrial systems and are doomed to entrepreneurship. Similarly, it is the only way that the dominance of the nationalist political elites can be broken, if access to education, housing or social welfare is to be enabled to all and not only politically and/or ethnically suitable residents, in places like Vukovar or any side of Mitrovica.

In Croatia, a country with an elaborate institutional history, established policies on post-war issues, like refugee return, human rights protection and socio-economic development, and a clearly set long-term orientation towards European political, economic and cultural integrations, the promotion of a peacebuilding policy framework inevitably turns into the art of the possible in a consolidated democracy, where advocacy serves as the major tool for filling existent gaps and spaces with innovative solutions as well as for breathing a fresh life into institutional structures that are currently existent only in government acts. Guided by the key question – what needs to be modified and added to the existent policies so that they can more effectively stimulate the expansion and diversification of multi-level social networks and possibilities for communication of different interpretations of the war and post-war realities, the following are the proposals for advocacy focus on the improvement of the Croatian policies related to refugee return, socio-economic development of the post-war areas, civil society development, national security and human rights protection.

Over the past three years, the Government has managed to reform the legislative and administrative framework for refugee return, which used to heavily discriminate against ethnic Serbs. Equitable reconstruction and property return are eventually underway, with the objective of completing the process by the end of 2003, which is contingent on the provision of alternative housing for temporary occupants, mostly ethnic Croatian settlers. The international community is putting strong emphasis on the importance of finding a just resolution of all cases of lost tenancy rights, impeding the return of Serbs who have no other property in Croatia. Over the past year, the Ministry of Public Works, Reconstruction and Construction has made very first steps towards cooperation with local NGOs – the Ministry has sought services of human rights NGOs in respect to tracing property owners who have found refuge in Serbia and B-H and has included key NGOs representing interests of Serbian refugees and Croatian settlers in the implementation of the current reconstruction program.

Nevertheless, sustainable return and revitalization of post-war areas will not take place unless local communities are provided with more integrated support and opportunities for socio-economic development, by means of successful decentralization, local government reform and regional development that will be effective only if it takes into account the benefits of inter-sectoral partnerships and citizens' participation in all phases of policy-making and implementation. None of that is presently the case and requires strong advocacy on part of civil society, directed at the two key government agencies, the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Local and self-Government and Ministry of Public Works, Construction and Reconstruction. Considering the existent gap between the civil society and the two ministries, the catalyst role of the EC Delegation to Croatia, which partners both with the government and civil society, would be most valuable in the inclusion of the national and community-based civil society organizations in the articulation and implementation of the decentralization, local government reform and regional development policies, so that existent social networks and best practices devised at the community level are put to use.

As time passes and the war seems further away, Croatian society is more than ever at risk of imbalanced development, where prosperous regions, like Istria, Zagreb and Medjimurje would soon share no socio-economic indicators with the post-war regions of Lika, Dalmatian hinterland or rural parts of Eastern Slavonia. For that reason, it is even more important now than immediately after

the war, when the overall economic state of the society was depressing, to retain and amplify the special policy incentives segregated monitoring procedures that would ensure that adequate proportion of development resources reaches the post-war areas, through direct social and economic investments as well as through intensified exchanges between the post-war areas and more developed parts of the country.

Similarly, as the war becomes more remote, there is a need to ensure the integration of peacebuilding with community development concept, which is starting to prevail in the discourses of social service delivery oriented NGOs, international agencies and governmental actors. For that reason, the future national Strategy for Civil Society Development needs to be designed in the light of the lessons learned from the community peacebuilding practices over the past decade and interconnectedness of security, development and democracy at the level of communities, with special attention paid to the agency of civil society in the process of transformation of conflict-stricken social relationships and accumulation of social and economic capital. The future Public Foundation for Civil Society is the most promising leeway for the integration of the peacebuilding agenda into the future framework for the support of civil society's peacebuilding agency, for which introduction of criteria for peacebuilding into the program design and monitoring and evaluation system of the foundation is instrumental.

Regarding the opportunities presented by the current framework for human rights protection, featured by a surplus of structures and lack of their vertical and horizontal coordination, the priority focus should be out on ensuring the actual functioning of the county coordination bodies for human rights, that should serve as intersectoral focal points for identification and resolution of human rights violations at the regional level, hence ensuring that higher levels of protection are not burdened with cases, which can be resolved if subversions by local and regional institutions (state services, police, municipal and county courts and local government) are prevented. That important improvement can be achieved by direct advocacy on part of peace and human rights NGOs. As defined in the OSCE expert assessment of June 2003, report, the role of the Ombudsman's Office in Croatia needs to be strengthened by increased funds, which would enable the Office's greater field presence. Considering that the Ombudsman's Institution is still the most inclusive government body for human rights protection, especially regarding negative legacy of war, human rights organizations need to remain committed to intense communication with the Ombudsman, despite recent frustrations with the Ombudsman's position on the Roma issues and relative reduction of inter-sectoral contacts.

While the Strategy of National Security's partial compatibility with the concept of peacebuilding is ensured by the consideration of human security, engagement of civil actors and importance of international and regional cooperation, its main shortcoming is lack of specification of the role of civil institutions and organizations as well as inadequately elaborated area of internal security, aimed at building the internal capacity of the Croatian society to protect human rights, achieve sustainable development and prevent violent conflicts. At the same time, there are two clear opportunities for strengthening the role of civil actors in the internal security system – transformation of civil service into volunteer service and involvement of civil society organizations into the Community Policing project, recently launched by the Ministry of Interior. As professionalization of the military is entering the public debate, there is opportunity to transform civil service into an optional national program of volunteer service, with special focus on volunteering for community-based peacebuilding programs. That would enable young women and men to enhance their professional development, social mobility and awareness of social issues of vulnerable communities, and at the same time contribute to internal security of Croatia.

The Community Policing project of the Ministry of Interior envisages a completely new role for police personnel in local communities, where their main task would be to create trust and collaboration with citizens, formal and informal community leaders in particular that would contribute to crime prevention and greater respect of human rights on part of the police. Since the project is still in its formative phase, there is opportunity to explore ways of involving civil society organizations in the training for community policing, as well as in the actual implementation of the community-policing program in specific local communities.

International development programs that are currently instrumental sources of support for community peacebuilding (USAID-ECRA; USAID-AED, OSCE) are entering a final exit phase. On top of potential gap in funding of local community-based peacebuilding programs, there is a risk of an even more important gap in knowledge accumulated about effective support of such activities. It is crucial that the methodology used in these programs be transferred to the Croatian Government and domestic and international private foundations, including the lessons learned about the approaches that have not been effective in the Croatian context. In particular it is important to reflect upon the challenges of aligning the divergent timeframes and specificity of activity plans appropriate for community-peacebuilding programs, which meaningless unless they are allow for a flexible multi-year approach, often considered insufficiently cost-effective and results-focused by donors that need to justify their investments by quantifiable indicators within annual fiscal cycles. The increasing influx of CARDS funds represents a new opportunity for a more effective linking of government- and civil society-focused support, which would require greater communication between governmental and NGO CARDS fund recipients and its facilitation by the EC Delegation to Croatia and the Ministry of European Integrations.

Considering that most direct external support to community-based peacebuilding initiatives is provided by national nongovernmental organizations, that have themselves grown out of grassroots organizing during the war years, their responsibility to the post-war communities in Croatia is even greater than that of other actors. As demonstrated by the case studies, effective external support presumes long-term commitment to the creation of opportunities for local actors to access resources – information, skills, knowledge social contacts, political influence and funds – more easily and more directly, as well as to the strengthening of the local actors' confidence and ability to articulate their own vision, methods and pace of their communities' integration and development. Being present in the community peacebuilding process as a partial outsider means being capable of noticing those unique critical moments, when resources, political will and personal openness converge to create space for a new opening in dialogue and collaboration among unusual suspects, the community actors divided by their interpretations and experiences of the violent conflict. In community peacebuilding, shifts in communication happen – while they cannot be forced or directly induced, conditions can be nurtured for their easier appearance.

An important aspect of facilitating conflict transformation at the community level, also attempted by this research project, is enhancing the visibility of their occurrence. Greater visibility is both important for access to resources for the actual community initiatives, as well as their impact on the potential peacebuilding practices in other locales. Croatian peace organizations need to revisit their relatively weak media outreach, burdened by the memory of HDZ times, when their access to the mainstream media was close to impossible. The current phase of completion of the return process and Croatia's application for the EU membership represent a critical moment at the national level, for ensuring that the issue of social integration and development of post-war settings will not put be check marked as a un unpleasant task that the Government is just done with, once and for all. Such outcome would be equal to failure, similar to the communist regime's ignorance of the

untangled memories of the Second World War, which were easily put to use in the process of reconfiguration of the political relations in of the late eighties' Yugoslavia.

The toughest and the most unpredictable dimension of community peacebuilding - the opening of a dialogue on war atrocities committed by all sides, experiences of survival and divergent interpretations of the causes and consequences – addresses that very risk in a manner that is irreplaceable by any other mechanism, for state-driven truth and reconciliation initiatives in the Croatian and the post-Yugoslav context have so far proved impractical, due to lack of broad consensus on the need for such a process, their potential clash with the Hague Tribunal's approach, as well as potential political manipulations. In the long-run, a bottom-up quest for well researched facts about war crimes, complemented by legitimating of multifaceted, particularized experiences of the war and its meaning, is the only truly sustainable and effective approach to the deconstruction of the hegemonies of war histories, currently told separately, to different audiences, from the winners' and losers' perspectives, as it is not imposed, but chosen. As Igballe Rugova, a feminist peacebuilder from Kosovo said about the difficult initial steps of creating trust between the Albanians and the Serbs, in the Kosovo context where multiethnicity has become a commodity in demand: "We should just be allowed to do it at our own pace, in our own style, and we will do it."

Her words are a reminder that both the principal prerequisite and ultimate impact of community-based peacebuilding, if it were to be authentic and sustained, is freedom of thought, action and association, or in other words, power to construct and transform reality. That issue is at present the most burning concern of the Kosovo community peacebuilders, who are at present exposed to the parallel conditionality of their own personal experiences of decades of crude inter-ethnic conflict; their ethnic peers' gatekeeping, or more accurately, bridge-watching for trespassing the rules of non-collaborative co-existence between the Serbs and the Albanians (to be stretched to other minorities, depending on their affiliations with the two major ethnic power centers); and the international community's financial and political incentives for fast and effective production of multiethnicity.

At the same time, what makes sense to the people in the Kosovo communities, when peacebuilding is mentioned and concrete self-initiated practices are observed, are opportunities to step out of the constant demonstration of mutually conflicting political loyalties and just feel safe, resourceful and inspired. Supporting community peacebuilding in Kosovo at this moment should primarily focus on contributing to the creation of autonomous sources of funding, such as regional or community foundations steered by the local peace builders themselves, so that authentic needs for a different social order more easily translate into social experiments and innovations. Considering the claustrophobia of fragmented spaces and internal cultural zones affecting all ethnic groups in Kosovo, all measures supportive of mobility within and outside Kosovo, ranging from safe public transport, reliable escort for people living in enclaves, generic license plates, accessible travel documents, to support for independent media, cultural events and regional and international exchanges continue to be instrumental for counteracting the logic of reduction that has turned into a dominant principle for organizing all spheres of life, from personal friendships, places and spaces to be, to time to read and bathe one's child.

Finally, the concept and practice community-based peacebuilding is at the same time inseparable of and irreducible to the concept of community development. The case studies examined have demonstrated the necessity of responding to the burning needs expressed by the broad circle of community members, such as the need for environmental safety in Dvor, Croatia or the construction of a multipurpose playground in Vojnić, the addressing of which provides evidence that no matter how hard to imagine, improvements in the quality of life can take place. The additional

layer of ambition attained by peacebuilding initiatives, relates to the effects of any community transactions on the transformation of power relations and creation of new opportunities for more community members to step out of their war-determined social and political positions, self-perceptions and communication patterns and take courage to expose themselves to the uncertainties of interactive reinterpretation of their complex and dissonant realities. In addition to their practical relevance, policy frameworks conducive to community-peacebuilding have the value as they represent as acts of public respect for these, often very private, interpersonal acts of courage.