WHOSE HISTORY? WHOSE TRUTH?
Impact of history teaching on transitional justice processes – case study of reconciliation in former Yugoslavia

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ABSTRACT

1. After an economic and political crisis and the rise of nationalism in the 1980s throughout the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereafter SFRY), four of the constituent republics of the federal state (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”) proclaimed their independence in 1991-92, leading to a series of armed conflicts, which had serious and long-lasting consequences in the political, economic and social spheres. The Balkan region has still to recover from this havoc. However, the intellectual elites who masterminded the nationalist programmes are still influential, and tensions continue to exist among different ethnicities.

2. The establishment of the rule of law, which is one of the key prerequisites for reconciliation, is crucial for creating a lasting peace in post-conflict societies. Transitional justice processes are essential for societies burdened with conflictual past because they encompass a set of measures which should ensure that persons accountable for committed crimes are brought to justice and, consequently, make reconciliation and sustainable peace possible. These processes are complex, as they consist of a number of different measures, such as truth-seeking, vetting, institutional and security sector reforms, as well as reparations. They should be approached holistically, while the implemented measures must take into account the specificities of each society facing its difficult past.

3. Achieving reconciliation in conflict-ridden regions is one of the main goals of any transitional justice process. The first and necessary step in striking the balance between the rights and obligations of every society towards its current and former citizens is to identify the injustices committed in the past by emphasizing the importance of observing all human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. This is particularly relevant to conflicts such as the ones in the former Yugoslavia, where the citizens of what used to be one country ended up in conflicts that jeopardized the fundamental values guaranteed by the whole set of international and national legal instruments.

4. Depending on the way in which it is used, history can play a very important role in facilitating the establishment of a long-lasting and sustainable peace and the mitigation of conflicts among different communities and ethnic groups. On the other hand, the misuse of history by politicians and historians may lead to the exacerbation of existing ethnic tensions. As Pierre Nora said, the discipline of history should not celebrate the past as memory does, but
study the ways in which the past is celebrated.\footnote{A/698/296, para 5.}

5. In this context, cultural initiatives, such as exhibitions, film, music or theatre performances, have the capacity to affect broader populations. To provide solid grounds for long-lasting peace, it is important to explore the range of ways artistic and cultural initiatives are contributing to reconciliation and consider the conditions that would improve the level of trust between the state and the people and among individuals and communities.

6. Numerous obstacles to reconciliation in post-conflict societies cannot be fully analyzed in a paper of this scope. However, the research presented strongly indicates that education and history textbooks have a very important role to play in this process. They can generate and maintain conflicts, but also bring about reconciliation. The contents of history textbooks, much more than other textbooks, are subject not only to different interpretations, but also to political agenda. Given that the political abuse of history might be present, historical interpretations must be depoliticized and enough room must be made for new opinions and approaches in the textbooks used in post-conflict societies. Historical distance, used frequently as an excuse for delaying the implementation of new approaches, is basically a concept which does not mean much in the time of modern technology which provides ample opportunities for self-education and for collecting information. External factors transcend the formal school system and act as “alternative” educators, which can slow down and complicate the reconciliation process.

7. State monopoly on textbook publishing, i.e. on what is considered to be the official history, or the official version, is another important issue in all countries in the region. It took a lot of time before this market was democratized and liberalized. All ex-Yugoslav republics have abolished this monopoly, but this is still not enough, given that selection criteria and quality standards have not been clearly defined.

8. History textbooks, as guardians of the selective and collective memory, can often play a differing role, contributing to the division of societies. In that case, one of their long-term counter-effects might be self-victimization and reproduction of traumas, which may considerably hamper reconciliation. If traumatic memories are not dealt with, future generations may become members of the society ridden with unresolved issues. While history keeps on reminding us of tragedies we failed to prevent, it appears from the study of the situation in the Balkans, that we are still unable to learn from the past.
9. To overcome these difficulties and make room for new solutions, various activities, such as seminars and teacher training, should be organized. Additional teacher training is a particular prerequisite for a systemic solution of the problem.

10. Post-conflict cultural initiatives can be an important factor in the amortization of the pent-up traumas. Artistic interpretations of historical facts can open the path for new approaches through a universal and humanistic interpretation of the war. The frequency and quantity of these activities are directly linked to a stable and democratic political climate where opinions outside the dominant political discourse are possible.

11. Young and institutionally weak societies are the biggest obstacle in the process of reconciliation because they often lack commitment to democratic principles and human rights. Under such conditions, reconciliation becomes the victim of the dominant national and political agendas. Nevertheless, continued and targeted actions aimed at reconciliation and establishment of a lasting peace, coupled with effective international institutional support, are fundamental for its success. In addition, a systemic support of local communities, which includes strengthening of their institutions, then comprehensive educational reform and creating closer ties among the post-conflict regions through cultural and artistic activities, is crucial for securing the permanence of peaceful solutions. The biggest downside of the approaches applied so far is the limited length for their implementation and the insufficiently focused activities, which often ended prematurely, leaving in their trail a vacuum, which is quickly filled with still relatively unsuppressed or abandoned nationalisms. For this reason, the civil sector should be empowered because it will have to play an important role once the international actors have withdrawn.

12. As history teaches us, each conflict, despite recurring patterns, is a phenomenon *sui generis* and depends on a whole series of unpredictable factors. The conclusion that each nation in the post-Yugoslav region holds firmly to its version of “historical” truth in which it sees itself as a victim and the Other as a perpetrator, does not give too much hope for a genuine and meaningful reconciliation in the nearest future. However, the quest for sustainable solutions in the region must and will continue, and even though each and every reconciliation process is unique, its goal still remains the same: achieving the lasting peace.
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*Throughout this document, the reference to Kosovo shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.
I. INTRODUCTION

13. This research paper analyzes main measures in the field of education and culture implemented as part of the transitional justice process on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, after peace had been established over 20 years ago. Admittedly, it is not easy to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of what has been done in these two decades in this area and what results have been achieved because, *inter alia*, transitional justice processes are still under way. The post-Yugoslav space has not been stabilized yet, given that the end of the war operations did not mark the end of the conflicts.

14. Cultural rights and the right to education are universal human rights and as such are protected under many international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 (Articles 22-27) and, more importantly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from 1966. A whole system of mechanisms, guaranteeing the provision and protection of these rights, has been established for their effective implementation. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is the most important mechanism dealing with interpretation and monitoring of the implementation of obligations undertaken by the states parties to the 1966 Covenant. The specific nature of these rights is also reflected in the fact that, under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, each state party is obliged to protect the rights “to the maximum of its available resources”. By doing so, the system recognizes that the protection of the above mentioned rights is not, and cannot be the same in different states. Under the Covenant, *the rights are to be implemented gradually*, which means that their full realization can occur within different time frames. However, even subject to progressive realization, these rights also include immediate, core obligations such as those related to the obligation of non-discrimination.

15. These principles are particularly important in post-conflict societies which often lack institutional support and financial resources in this area. As economic, social and cultural rights also play an important role in the prevention and supression of future violations, strong institutional foundations should be established to support these endeavors.

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2 *ICESCR*, Art. 2(1).
4 *ICESCR*, Art 2 (2).
16. International and national institutions have established numerous mechanisms with the purpose of safeguarding the rule of law in post-conflict societies. The mechanisms include truth and reconciliation commissions, reparation systems, institutional reforms, as well as many legal measures undertaken at both international and national levels. However, their main downside is that they are temporary (e.g. reparation commissions) and that there is no political will to use such mechanisms and institutional reforms for addressing the difficult past, which is a prerequisite for their preventive function in the future.

17. In addition, insufficient financial and human resources, which could ensure the more lasting effects of each of these measures and mechanisms, limit the outreach of transitional justice and make its long-term effects less certain. The depth of the reforms that every post-conflict society can undertake depends on the day-to-day political will, while the implementation of the reforms, made usually only under strong international pressure, often increases national hostility towards the so-called “imposed solutions”, which in turn weakens their greatest potential.

18. The establishment and preservation of the lasting peace remains the foundation on which the entire international system is built. Searching for sustainable solutions, especially in the regions where the conflicts have just ended, is the “holy grail” of the international community and its institutions.

19. Bearing this in mind, the concept of the “guarantees of non-recurrence”, which includes implementation of numerous measures to limit the possibility of the recurrence of conflicts, is being recently developed in international law. The main purpose of such guarantees is to prevent new conflicts, while the guarantees themselves will give results only if the reforms identified at the level of state institutions, as well as in the cultural and economic spheres, are carried out. Pablo de Greiff, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence, wrote extensively on this issue. He defined the concept of transitional justice, its normative framework and the necessary mechanisms for its implementation. De Greiff holds that states should carry out constitutional and other legal reforms, ratify international conventions and act in conformity with obligations set forth in them. Applied to societies in transition, the concept of the guarantees of non-recurrence

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5 Ibid, p. 5.
7 Ibid, p. 21-23.
consider education as an instrument to achieve lasting reconciliation. By identifying the patterns which are conducive to conflicts, especially by analyzing the authoritarian methodological practices in education, a space for new solutions can be created. Such concept is particularly significant for mapping the problems that give rise to repeated conflicts and can thus contribute to the prevention of future ones. Therefore, the theoretic/academic models should be reconciled with country and region-specific situations which, in themselves, might have the potential to repeat the conflict.

20. Lasting peace as a form of inter-human relations is more an ideal that should be pursued, than a solution that can be realized by political measures and by nurturing peaceful relationships. Further, peace is rather the result of negotiation processes at political, economic and cultural levels, and it requires active and continuous participation. In addition, “it implies commitment and a long-term vision, and this entails a blend of traditional and contemporary ways of understanding the roots of conflicts, ways of mitigating violence, and paths towards reconciliation and healing”.

21. Given the limited scope of this paper and the complexity of transitional justice processes, their analysis does not include an in-depth evaluation of other core elements, which are of importance for their understanding and successful implementation. These are the processes related to the security sector reform, constitutional reform, ensuring participation of victims in the processes, as well as enabling free activities of civil society. These elements are developed and considered in detail in the annual reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence, to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

22. As far as reconciliation is concerned, this research acknowledges that the opinions about the real meaning of reconciliation differ, especially when it comes to deciding whether reconciliation implies only the end of active conflicts or acknowledgment and determination of facts, as well as establishing a dialogue between the sides in conflict. They also differ between post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies. In this context, there is also a question of apology, its scope and purpose, what makes it genuine and sincere, and to what extent it contributes to establishing sustainable and lasting peace.

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9 Pablo de Greiff, A/HRC/30/42, p. 8.
11 Ibid.
II. HISTORY TEXTBOOKS AND THE RIGHT TO TRUTH

23. In modern times, there has been a growing awareness that the manner in which states use historical narratives for political purposes can be not only the root cause of misunderstanding between states, communities and societies, but also an important factor in potential future conflicts among them. The right to truth, and the right to education, are crucial for understanding historical narratives. They must be viewed through the prism of human rights to fully understand their role and significance in transitional justice processes. Taking as a starting point the fact that there is no single historical truth that should be acknowledged, this research supports the position that a proper understanding of historical events requires comparative and multi-perspective analyses, the primary goal of which is to enhance a critical understanding of the past and the existence of multiple truths. Great differences in the interpretations of the same historical events, along with adherence to completely opposed narratives, represent an explosive material and a potential cause of conflicts. Teaching history in post-conflict societies may be used as a form of continuation of the war, this time with different means, given that history textbooks have a potential to create an image of the enemy and make it permanent.\(^{13}\)

24. The normative framework and guidance for history teaching is provided for in Article 15 (1)(a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which guarantees the right of all people to access cultural heritage and participate in cultural life, as well as Article 13 of the same Covenant, and articles 28 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child, guaranteeing the right of all persons, including children, to education.\(^{14}\) Moreover, the Council of Europe, in its Recommendation Rec (2001)15, on history teaching in twenty-first century Europe,\(^{15}\) stressed the importance of history teaching indicating that historical research must not promote or misuse history or distort facts and should play a vital role in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

\(^{13}\) Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed, A/68/296/ p. 9.
\(^{14}\) Ibid, p. 5-6.
\(^{15}\) https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805e2c31.
a. The correlation between social and political, global and national history

25. History as an academic discipline is under great pressure in post-conflict societies, which affects the content of history textbooks used in educational systems. The content of the textbooks is usually considered to be the main problem, whereas the significance of the way the textbooks are structured and the selection of topics are often overlooked. Official history is immanently inclined to promote “national memory”, the official version of the unique national myth, which constructs the national identity in the manner required by the political elites. The mechanism of remembering and forgetting is always selective and its purpose is the realization of national unity and national goals. Ignoring the existence of the Other is sometimes a larger problem than creating a negative image of others because it erases the Other from history: a sort of damnatio memoriae takes place. A decontextualized memory makes the study of national history virtually meaningless.

26. One of the key problems is the absence of comparativity in the history textbooks used in the post-Yugoslav countries. This recurring pattern in the analyzed textbooks is that they suffer from a unidimensional approach, coupled with the narrow ethno-nationalistic perspective that prevents a broader understanding of reality, which is of special relevance for post-conflict societies. On the other hand, not paying enough attention to regional history (history of the Balkans) directly affects the creation of a complete, generally understandable picture of both history and the current reality of Balkan societies. The lack of the comparative approach is best illustrated by the example of the Balkan Wars (1912-13). They can be viewed as liberation wars or acts of aggression, depending on different perspectives, given that all Balkan nations did not experience the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the same way. For Albanians, the replacement of the Ottoman by the Serbian rule meant only a new “slavery”. Serbian textbooks offer only the interpretation whereby the First Balkan War was a liberation war (for Serbs), while the Second Balkan War was simply unfair (for Serbs). There is neither analysis nor explanation of the relations among the Balkan nations before the wars, as well as of the problems related to ethnic delimitation and rivalries which sprang after the archenemies, the Turks, had disappeared from the scene. Without these analyses, the purpose of the war remains unclear. Another telling example is the interpretation of the causes of World

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16 A/68/296, para 29-30.
17 Niazì Kizilyrzêk, History Textbooks and Nationalism, Teaching the history of Southeastern Europe, (ed. C.Koulouri), Thessaloniki, 2001, p. 69.
War I, which has almost a mythical status in Serbia. This was the main reason why at the centenary of the World War I in Serbia the books written by Cristopher Clark and Margaret McMillan, which offered new views on the causes of the war, were perceived by the majority of Serbian public and historians as an attack on Serbian history and national identity.  

27. Confining oneself to narrow ethno-nationalistic perspective, emphasizing national history, or studying global history without understanding local circumstances, are among the easiest ways of creating stereotypes about the Other. In the analysed textbooks, the Other (most commonly a neighbour who is of different nationality) exists only when he/she has encounters with the Nation from whose perspective an event is reported, and almost exclusively in a crisis situation or war. This over-emphasizing of political and military history also prevents a comprehensive insight into the diversity of historical reality, resulting in a distorted view that the whole history amounts to a series of conflicts. This is a particularly important element which states use to generate hostility of their citizens towards people of a different faith, nationality or race. In this manner, history and studying history becomes a sort of military training for future conflicts. In all history textbooks in the Balkans, national history takes up over 50% of the content, in relation to the global and regional history. This means that the issue of national identity is over-emphasized, while the students are prevented from perceiving themselves, through studying history, as “a part of other social, non-national structures”.

28. The knowledge acquired from modern history textbooks is another important issue. The criticism of the new type of the curricula in Serbia (and other countries in the region) usually amounts to claims that it is superficial, not serious enough, and that, to a certain extent, decreases the level of education as it is less demanding.

29. However, the recurring requirement for traditional quality of textbooks actually masks the lack of social relevance of the content – social and cultural history, which is much closer to everyday life, and the comprehension abilities of an average student. The fact that these students might become the future actors in the reconciliation process is frequently overlooked.

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19 For more information see M. Bjelajac, 1914-2014, Zašto revizija?, Beograd 2014.
21 D. Stojanović, Učbenici istorije u Srbiji, Učbenici istorije u post-konfliktnim društvima: Obrazovanje za pomirenje, Beograd, 2015, p. 44.
22 C. Koulouri, Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe, p. 17.
while it is crucial that they should acquire a culture of tolerance and understanding of the Other. Insisting on “quality”, which, more often than not, is an excuse for endless lists of chronologically rather disconnected facts, hides the core issue, namely, that such “quality” of textbooks repels the younger generations from studying history more seriously. It also discourages them from critically evaluating what has been learnt, as the presented content is simply not sufficiently relevant and does not give an opportunity for discussion and different opinions, particularly not from the perspective of the Other.

30. Textbooks in which history comes down to chronologically sorted data taken out from the social context require the acquisition of knowledge without questioning and without understanding the content. Changing the approach to a selection of topics considered as historically relevant would not imply hiding, or even, falsifying historical facts, as the critics of the new approach claim, but rather shifting the focus on the areas of social activities that have been disregarded, due to nationalist political agenda, which played a crucial role in the textbook design.

31. Shifting the focus from political and military to social history would also contribute to a greater understanding and progress in the reconciliation process. Making the content of the textbooks more topical would help students understand the significance of learning history and that the knowledge acquired in class may be applicable in everyday life. Similarly, a comprehensive grasp of historical events, without selecting only politically approved ones, would lead to a better understanding and critically more balanced perception of separate historical events. Although the states no longer have the monopoly on history textbooks design and publishing, this in itself still does not mean that the quality of textbooks has been improved and that they contain varied topics and different views. It is therefore necessary to include multi-perspectivity, as an advanced methodological tool, in all history curricula. More attention should be given to the explanations and contextualization of events, and less to factography which students often find confusing. Post-Yugoslav societies are still in the process of adopting these modern methodological solutions which are necessary steps towards history learning as well as a path to true and lasting reconciliation.

26 A/68/296, para 57-58.
b. The significance of history in the reconciliation process

32. In many societies, history is one of the core subjects in education, treated with due attention by political elites because of its significance as a potentially useful tool in their hands. The analysis of history textbooks presented further in the paper envisages to illustrate all turbulences and influences inherent to a specific period. The changes of the curricula depend directly on the prevailing political climate at a given moment.

33. Despite political influence and manipulations, history, if approached appropriately, can indeed be a powerful tool in the process of building trust after armed conflicts have ended. Raimon Pinakkar, a Spanish philosopher, argues that cultural disarmament is far more important than military disarmament if a lasting peace is to be achieved. This argument can particularly be applied to history textbooks, which, might represent the continuation of military conflicts with different means. The international community puts great hopes in history, which is also evident from the Recommendation of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly 1880 (2009) on History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas, which specifies that teaching history in post-conflict societies can be a tool for keeping peace and achieving reconciliation, as well as tolerance and understanding.

34. There is also an issue of starting an epistemological argument not only on the nature of history, but also its purpose and objectives. This is the central issue in the process of understanding the purpose of history today. History revision is a phenomenon typical of young societies in search of a new identity. Consequently, history textbooks are perceived as the best tool for transferring an identity matrix, which should conform to new political trends and the needs of the ruling political powers. Predestination becomes an important component of learning history, which devalues a critical approach to historical facts, turning history into mythology. In the words of the former director of the Serbian School Textbook Agency (a state-run institution that had a long-time monopoly on textbook publishing): “In history, there

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28 Raimon Panikkar, Cultural disarmament, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995., see also P. Marcenaro, Reconciliation and political dialogue between the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Parliamentary Assembly, 2011, p. 16.
29 Ibid.
is only one truth, just as there is only one God”32. Therefore, efforts must be made to make history socially relevant again, and to remove it as far as possible from the state policy and its influence. This can be achieved only through a systematic work on changing the awareness of people regarding the significance and use of history and, if necessary, through supporting alternative educational programs.

35. As already mentioned, one common objection – which overlooks the importance of methodological adjustment of history study to the time in which students live – is that there is no historical distance in the approach to events from the recent past, which is considered as an obstacle to understanding the so-called historical truth. Though such criticism can be grounded in the desire to avoid the politization of the recent history, which happens frequently, the main weakness of this claim is that students are exposed on a daily basis to different interpretations. Owing to modern technologies, students can also hear certain interpretations of the recent past which have already been distorted through the prism of the ruling political elite, or other actors. This is exactly the reason why history textbooks must conform to the pace of modern times: historical distance, as an anachronous concept, should be abandoned, given that the study of history should occur rather through offering different historical perspectives, than by adopting one truth, which would in turn require historical distance. Every chronological distance gives room to a new reading and understanding and, as such, represents the one of the phases in interpretations and critical approaches, instead of an ideal time-frame necessary for the analysis of historical events. Fortunately, in recent times, requests for justice and reparations on one side, and request for holding to account perpetrators on the other, came almost at the same time.

36. The omnipresent discourse of exclusive victimization, the adoption of the “nation-state” tradition and integration of the discourse of traumatization in analyzing the past (which is present in most textbooks in the form of a selective presentation of the data on the numbers of victims), makes possible the interpretation of the past solely for political purposes33.

37. The paradigmatic example may be that of Serbia, which uses every opportunity to mention that in both World Wars it was on the side of the victors, whereas the fellow countrymen before the wars, and now its neighbours, were always on the losing side (as part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and later as allies of the Nazi Germany). In this manner, it is

32 Ibid, 228.
hinted that Croats and Bosniaks are predestined to experience the same fate again. History is thus perceived as a continuum in which the roles of good and bad guys were defined a long time ago. Further, as Serbs were the victims of the genocide in the World War II, this should give them a preventive historical absolution for the last wars (‘90s). Self-victimization is most present in the topics dealing with the wars of the ‘90s, where it is still impossible to reach a consensus on the causes of armed conflicts, key dates that marked the beginning of the conflicts, and, of course, on the degree of responsibility of all sides in the conflict. Similarly, all sides still exaggerate the number of their victims and diminish the numbers of the enemy’s victims, which serves to justify the role of one’s own nation in the war.

38. To overcome these problems, and to make the study of history relevant again, various forms of activities should be put in place. It is paradoxical that students travel mostly to other foreign countries, rather than within the region of the former Yugoslavia, which keeps the artificial distance, divisions and mistrust alive. Maintaining regular contacts, as well as organizing school trips and teaching staff visits which should enable more frequent and deeper connections among the former Yugoslav republics could, and should be among the first steps of reconciliation.

39. It is important to mention that good will is often not sufficient, in particular when the safety of school trips is jeopardized - when students are driven in buses with car plates from other states, incidents still happen (attacks on buses, stoning, and bullying), without any sanctioning of the perpetrators.

40. However, teachers and students are not the only ones concerned with the issue of history textbooks. This issue also involves “the commitment of political and intellectual elites to use history education to promote reconciliation, tolerance and respect of diversity.” Considering the still fragile political situation in the Balkans and the resurrected tensions between Croatia and Serbia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, substantial changes can hardly be expected in the short-term. The end of conflicts and building trust are not the top priority of the current political elites in the region. On the contrary, creating animosity and insisting on irreconcilable differences is the prevailing trend in the post-Yugoslav countries.

c. Peace or justice? To remember or to forget?

41. National states that emerged after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the ‘90s are still in transition from the post-conflict to peaceful and democratic societies. While military conflicts ended over 20 years ago, the tradition of nurturing ethnic/religious hostilities has not disappeared from the public and political scenes in the region. Quite the opposite: it seems that nationalist governments are on a new offensive, as unresolved, and briefly forgotten, issues from the past were raised again in the period 2015-2017 between Serbia and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Constant accusations at the top state level, the absence of good will to resolve some issues inherited from the time of wars (the last one, and the World Wars), and the re-emergence of nationalist rhetoric in the public and media space, indicate that post-Yugoslav societies are in the phase of active conflict in the post-conflict transitional period. Constant national tensions have been a good cover for political and economic failures in the region over the past two decades.

42. Ideally, reconciliation should result in a meaningful change from the perception which was dominant in the period of conflicts. A true reconciliation is achieved when “once and for all, the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict is eliminated. It consolidates peace, breaks the cycle of violence and strengthens newly established or reintroduced democratic institutions”\(^{37}\). However, the viability of such concept is uncertain in real life.

43. There are several important phases that must take place in a reconciliation process. In the first one, recent mistrust and fears have to be transformed into a new phase of non-conflict and peaceful coexistence. In the second, confidence and trust are restored and built, while in the last phase there is willingness to listen and understand the suffering of the “enemy” side\(^{38}\). The first phase is reached relatively easy, though this is not always the case, while the other two are more demanding tasks for all post-conflict societies. Trust building is probably the most difficult part, which, despite efforts, does not always yield desirable results. The establishment of the *ad hoc* International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, where Serbian, Croatian, Bosniak and Albanian political and military officials were tried for war crimes, was supposed to hold accountable perpetrators of violations and help build trust through personalization of crimes. The basic assumption was correct – individuals were put to trial, which was supposed to absolve the entire nations of responsibility. In reality, it turned out that political and military officials could not be perceived separately from their functions

\(^{37}\) *Reconciliation After Conflict*, p. 19.

(within the states), which had a negative impact on the image of the Tribunal that was then perceived as a political court trying entire nations through their individual representatives.  

44. The Tribunal especially gave rise to controversy after a series of acquittals, the most important one being the acquittal of Croatian generals charged for the military operation “Oluja” [“Storm”], to regain control over the region of Krajina and which resulted in the expulsion of more than 200,000 Serbs from Croatia between July and September 1995. The Serbian public treats “Oluja” as the biggest ethnic cleansing in Europe after World War II, whereas that day is celebrated in Croatia as a state holiday and a Liberation day. This trial was perceived by the majority of Serbs as the ultimate proof that the Hague Tribunal is biased against Serbs because perpetrators of crimes committed against Serbs were in most cases either not indicted or acquitted. The situation is not any better in other former republics, as they have their own perceptions of the political use by the Tribunal of the “indisputable facts”. The predominantly negative opinion of the Tribunal persists in Serbia and Croatia, while the public opinion in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo have more positive views on its activities, as a consequence of its rulings in favor of their initial positions. However, it should be mentioned that according to some surveys, the younger population (age 16-23) and more educated segments of population have a more positive opinion about the work of the ICTY than older or less educated population.

45. Marko Milanović, professor at the University of Nottingham School of Law, rightly considers that it is difficult to establish whether mistrust towards the Tribunal caused the rejection of its conclusions, or the unacceptance of the evidences contributed to the loss of the Tribunal’s credibility, or whether the two processes were intertwined.

46. Such negative reputation of the Tribunal, created, inter alia, with the aim to establish individual responsibilities for crimes committed, and thus contribute to reconciliation, questions the outreach of international courts. As the lasting peace and reconciliation process directly depend on the operations of international courts, it is questionable, quite justifiably, whether their work is beneficial or more detrimental. It seems that the ICTY, instead of opening new paths towards reconciliation, actually managed to cement the divisions and

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41 ibid.
42 ibid.p.241.
43 ibid, p. 254.
44 ibid, p. 253-259.
confirm the nationalist narratives, regardless of the ambitious claim of the Tribunal itself that its rulings, along with combating denial and preventing the attempts at revisionism, contributed to the creation of a historical perspective. Therefore, as the Tribunal argues, the rulings should be the basis of future transitional justice initiatives in the region.\footnote{Ibid. p. 235.}

47. One may ask an almost heretical question: can oblivion be more important in the reconciliation process than insisting on memory? Does a continual invocation of traumatic experiences really contribute to building understanding for the victims of the other side in conflict? Further in this paper, the analysis will show that a persistent reproduction of a trauma produces a counter-effect, both for the victims, making them unable to abandon the adopted victim-identity, and for the “enemy” side that perceives the victims’ insistence on personal experience as a negation of their own suffering. This does not mean that total oblivion or ignoring the suffering should be advocated, but there is a need for a new, redefined approach, which would take into consideration not the abstract theories, but the real situation on the ground to make a genuine reconciliation possible. The examples from the Balkans are illustrative of the fact that the concept of the “lessons learned” does not always function and that each new generation uses previous conflicts as a justification for its own nationalism and for initiating new conflicts or maintaining low-intensity hostilities.

48. This approach is important, because it recommends measures which emphasize the significance of differentiating the undertaken practices, depending on whether the society in question is a post-authoritarian or post-conflict one, as well as on the specificities of each society.

49. Politics, present in all spheres of life, are generally considered as the central problem in the Balkans. The lack of strong institutions and the predominance of executive power and day-to-day politics certainly encourage the development of the nationalist discourse. However, the absence of a clear and decisive political will is a problem when it comes to implementing the whole set of measures necessary for reconciliation. The liminality of the post-Yugoslav space is best reflected in the analysis of the situation in education and cultural activities aimed at reconciliation – the war is over, but a true peace is yet to come.
III. WHEN THE PAST IS MORE UNCERTAIN THAN THE FUTURE

50. During the decomposition of Yugoslavia and the bloody civil war\footnote{There is no consensus on the use of the term "civil war" either, because Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina treat the conflict as Serbian aggression, thus denying the possibility of Serbs also being victims.} waged in several ex-Yugoslav republics, the curricula of history, as a subject of special national interest in the school system, were among the first to undergo serious changes. Historical narratives had to be changed and adjusted to fit new political circumstances, while history textbooks had to provide a justification for the nationalistic concepts. In this sense, the biggest changes occurred in terms of interpretation of the role and significance of Yugoslavia in each individual former republic. Even older historical periods were not spared, from the medieval times onwards, where the roots of the modern conflicts or the reasons for today’s moral superiority of some of the warring sides were supposed to be found.

51. The revision of World War II narrative was especially important. The public controversy in the ‘90s about the role of the Partisans, Chetnicks and Ustashas was directly reflected on the textbook interpretations, where the roles of “good” and “bad” guys were reversed, and the number of teaching units dedicated to the liberation fight of the Partisans was drastically reduced. Different interpretations of what used to be common history in the ex-Yugoslavia necessarily entail different perceptions of the dissolution of the former state and the character of the wars that ensued, which greatly affects and hinders the reconciliation process.

52. Given the limited amount of information regarding history teaching and textbooks in Montenegro and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, analysis of the situation in these two former Yugoslav countries is not included in this research.

a. Serbia

53. In Serbia, the change of the ideological matrix in the textbooks occurred during the rule of Slobodan Milošević, when a new nationalist framework, which was supposed to justify the wars of the ‘90s, was adopted. National arrogance and self-victimization were the main characteristics of the textbooks\footnote{D. Stojanović, Slow Burning: History Textbooks in Serbia 1993-2008, p. 143.}. The change was reflected not only in the new interpretation, but primarily in the “\textit{distortion of facts, necessary for the establishment of the mythological narrative}”\footnote{Ibid.}. One of the most significant manipulations was a thesis that Serbian nation “\textit{has never been on the wrong side of history}”, put forward to underline the difference between “us”...
and “them” – constant victors and constant losers. This image was supposed to be reflected on
the then current wars and to give the Serbian side an additional, predestined legitimacy.
Though it could be expected that the reinterpretation of history was applied only to recent
history, the distant history (the Middle Ages) was also not spared distortions, as the new
ideological narrative had to be based in a distant past⁴⁹.

54. Another change occurred after overthrowing Milošević from power, when new textbooks
(2002) were introduced, but the trend of the politization of history continued. The new revision
included the rehabilitation of the anti-communist powers and putting the equation mark
between Partisans and Chetniks. Today, the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović (nationalists) are
presented as an anti-fascist movement, equal to the Partisans (communists), while their role in
the collaboration with the Nazi occupation powers, that earlier textbooks insisted on, is now
erased from newer Serbian textbooks. Even Milan Nedić, the Serbian prime minister during
the Nazi occupation, is represented as “the man who preserved the biological essence of
Serbian people”⁵⁰. Such representation of the collaborationist powers was meant to have a
direct influence on the legitimization of the ’90s wars as defensive wars, given that Chetniks
were perceived as the unifiers of the Serbian national corpus (unlike the Communists)⁵¹. One
particularly interesting justification for collaboration in new textbooks was the perception of
Italian occupation as relatively acceptable – “Italian occupation was the best war solution for
the preservation of the mere existence of Serbs, particularly in the regions of Lika, northern
Dalmatia and Herzegovina, and Italian soldiers the least of all evils that they had to deal
with”⁵².

55. The Chetniks are perceived as not only an anti-fascist movement, but as “the essence of
Serbian resistance” to the aggressor.⁵³ The way in which the leaders of two movements are
represented is also telling: while Draža Mihailović is described as a man “educated in France
and he loved French literature”, Josip Broz Tito is described as a locksmith and “a notorious
agent of Komintern”⁵⁴. The change of the ideological concept was so strong that Serbian
nation was presented as almost the loser in World War II, as this sentence clearly illustrates:
“Serbian citizenry was destroyed, the national movement shattered, and the inteligentsia

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 146-147.
⁵⁰ D. Stojanović, Slow Burning, p. 151.
⁵¹ D. Stojanović, Udžbenici istorije u Srbiji, p. 45.
⁵² D. Stojanović, Udžbenici istorije u Srbiji, p. 45.
⁵³ D. Stojanović, Slow Burning, p. 152.
⁵⁴ Ibid.
demolished”

56. The opening up of the textbook market in Serbia in 2009 gave room to the introduction of alternative reference books for the subject of history, which enabled a more nuanced opinions of its authors regarding the civil war in Yugoslavia. Yet, the basic divisions remained the same – “the deeply rooted pattern and the nationalist discourse did not change, in which Serbian people is a victim, a nation which never waged wars to conquer.”

56. The textbooks published later did not change the perception of the wars from the ‘90s concerning the “wartime textbooks”, which means that an opportunity was missed in terms of offering a new interpretative and critical framework from a slightly longer historical distance. The wars of the ’90s continued to be explained solely from the Serbian perspective, which implies that the separatisms of other republics are to be blamed for the crash of the state, while little is said about Serbian and Milošević’s responsibility.

b. Kosovo

57. The case of Kosovo and its status within Serbia after Yugoslavia dissolved is specific and requires a special analysis. At the time when the SFRY was falling apart, when one after another republic declared independence, Kosovo, which up until then had been the autonomous province within Serbia, unilaterally declared independence at the referendum held in the autumn of 1991. This was the reaction to the abolishment of its autonomy (gained under Constitution of the SFRY adopted in 1974) in 1990. Serbia, and other countries as well, did not accept the results of the referendum, but the Albanians refused to be reintegrated into Serbian political, judicial, education, and any other system. They started working on the creation of their own, parallel institutions, including education system. The main reason behind this was the decision of the Serbian government to abolish the education of Kosovo Albanians in their mother tongue, which resulted in the boycott of Serbian schools. Another serious problem was the segregation along ethnic lines in schools (the schools were separated on ethnic principle, or school shifts were organized to prevent that students of Albanian and Serbian ethnicity meet at school)

57. Consequently, the changes introduced in the history (and geography) textbooks were deep, irreconciable and served as generators of further divisions. Both sides viewed history only as a tool for securing political and national supremacy in the

56 D. Stojanović, Udžbenici istorije u Srbiji, p. 46.
57 D. Kostovicova, Albanian Parallel Education system and its Aftermath, 2015.
province. The differences included the status of Kosovo (whether as a part of Serbia or not) and geographical maps had to be altered accordingly. Even a distant past underwent a very thorough revision. The prevailing narrative introduced by the Albanians was that they were natives of the Balkans, who indisputably were there before the Slavs came. Furthermore, Albanians claimed that they are direct descendants of Ilirians (ancient inhabitants of the part of the Balkans at the time of the Roman Empire) who even had their own state, Dardania, deeply respected by the Roman conquerors. Clearly, connecting Albanians to Ilirians was supposed to secure the precedence of Albanian migrations relative to the Slavic migrations to this territory (the Slavic tribes inhabited the Balkans in the 6th century AD). Serbian textbooks deny any such connections.

58. Apart from the exact time period of migrations, another contentious issue is the number of Albanian or Serbian population on the territory of Kosovo in the past centuries. Both sides deny the numbers of the Other, as this is one of the central arguments for establishing political and national dominance over Kosovo today, given that such arguments legitimize a historical right over the territory. Interestingly, Albanian textbooks in Kosovo do not contain any mention of the Serbian rule over Kosovo throughout the Middle Ages, except for a single detail – the rule of Serbian Emperor Dušan is mentioned. That was indeed very hard to ignore, as the Serbian Empire under Emperor Dušan (the first half of the 14th century) did comprise almost the entire Balkan Peninsula. Serbian fight against the Ottoman Empire in the later centuries is not mentioned at all, while the Albanians are represented as the only victims of Turkish oppression.

59. In addition, the history textbooks in Kosovo place the roots of today’s Serbian-Albanian conflicts directly in the period of feudalism. The evidence that is offered serves to prove that the alleged Serbian project of colonization of Albanian territories spanned at least several centuries. However, the most striking differences in the Albanian perception of the events refer, naturally, to the 20th century. Albanian and Serbian history textbooks describe and interpret this period completely differently – the Balkan Wars of the early 20th century, which are viewed in Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Macedonia as liberation wars from the Ottoman rule, Albanian history textbooks describe as military occupation, and Serbian rule in

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58 Shkelzen Gashi, Istorija Kosova u školskim udžbenicima istorije Kosova, Albanije, Crne Gore i Makedonije, Priština, 2016, p.11.
60 Ibid. p.30.
Kosovo as the occupation force. The integration of the Kosovo territory in the Serbian state (1912) and later in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, which in 1929 became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, is presented in the textbooks just as a new form of slavery. On the other hand, Serbian history textbooks primarily put the blame on the Ottoman Empire for not having suppressed the looting, robberies and terror of Albanians over Serbian population in Kosovo, which directly influenced the change of the ethnic structure on this territory.

In history textbooks in Kosovo, even the period of SFRY is presented as hostile towards the Albanian population, despite the fact that in this period Albanians experienced an unprecedented political, social and economic emancipation. Along these lines, the textbooks allege that the communist regime oppressed the Albanians. All rights that Kosovo Albanians were granted during the socialist era, including the establishment of the University in Pristina, education in Albanian language, and the establishment of the Academy of Science and Arts of Kosovo, are disregarded, because the main goal of Albanian population, namely the independent Republic of Kosovo, was not realized.

The analysis of the textbook content related to the topic of the armed conflict in Kosovo (1998-1999) may serve as the best indicator of the essential differences in the perception of reality. Both sides, Albanian and Serbian, consider their perceptions as the ultimate truth, particularly when it comes to admitting that there were victims of the crimes committed by their respective (para)military units. This approach prevents both sides from taking the first necessary step towards better understanding of the Other: in fact, the war propaganda is still very much alive. The results of a survey conducted in Serbia are very indicative: three-fourths of the Serbs believe that Kosovo Albanians committed crimes against Serbian population in the ’90s, while almost the same percentage of the respondents have never heard of the crimes committed against Albanians by Serbian forces.

Unfortunately, both sides are focused on the history of conflict(s) between two nations, which is an additional justification for the current hostile situation. The historical episodes of cooperation between Serbian and Albanian population are carefully avoided (dynastic connections, joined rebellions, protection of monasteries, common Christian Orthodox religion, etc.), while the entire history of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo is presented as a

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61. Ibid. p.74.
62. Ibid. p.90.
63. Ibid. p.101-104.
vicious circle of evil, suffering and revenge.

c. Croatia

63. Similar trends can be identified in Croatia as well – the content of history textbooks was changed in 1992, in the middle of the war, which makes the prevalence of the ethnocentric approach quite expected65. Even the ongoing wars were included in the textbooks. The language used to describe the events was “politically charged, highly emotional, aimed at arousing specific emotions in the readers”66. Apart from including the lessons dealing with the ongoing wars, the textbook writers also changed the approach to the Yugoslav era, which was now defined as “anti-Croatian”67. Moreover, compared to the regional, European and world history, far more room was given to national history in order to impose the only “correct” viewpoint of historical events. Despite the fact that new changes were introduced into the Croatian curricula in 1995, the theses put forward in the earlier, wartime textbooks, were still present. But, as the atmosphere in the Croatian society slowly began to change in the second half of the “90s, a debate opened on the justification for insisting on “history education which is based on national exclusivity and xenophobia”68. Nevertheless, the main assumption remained the same – those who fight in a “patriotic war” cannot commit crimes69. This is the loci communes of the revisionist war discourse in all states analyzed in this paper.

64. Unlike Serbian textbooks, which rehabilitated the Chetniks, Croatian history textbooks still treat them as collaborationists and insist on their war crimes against Croatian and Muslim populations70. On the other hand, Croatian textbooks are now more lenient towards the Ustahs than before, but their role as collaborationists is not denied. As far as the terror of the Ustahs is concerned, the authors of the textbooks insist that among their victims were Croats as well, even to the point that, in some textbooks, the numbers of Croatian victims are the highest, even though the numbers of Serbian, Jewish and Roma victims were many times greater. Similarly, some textbooks insist that the Ustahs spread their terror among “Croatian

68 Ibid, p. 100.
69 Ibid, p. 123.
citizens”, without stating precisely their nationality\textsuperscript{71}, stripping the ethnically and religiously motivated crime of its essence. The concept which is devoid of its content confuses the students about the character of the conflicts, while “the repressive nature of the Ustasha regime” remains just a cynical euphemism for a genocidal policy of this movement. The perception of the Partisan movement is ambiguous: its anti-fascist character is not denied, but it is placed within the framework of the Croatian anti-fascist movement, and somehow taken out from a broader, Yugoslav context\textsuperscript{72}, which serves to establish the continuity of the fight of Croatian nationalists for Croatian statehood.

65. The use of alternative textbooks on the 20th century history has been allowed in Croatia only after the year 2000, which entailed the reduction of the “Tudjman factor” in the interpretation of history. Naturally, the new approach was fiercely resisted by those who claimed that the new textbooks are “an attempt at destroying the newly founded Croatian national state”\textsuperscript{73}. The sales of these textbooks amounted to only 10% on the textbook market, mostly because teachers were hesitant to accept this material as relevant. It was in 2007 that a new generation of history textbooks, which raised a heated debate, made a breakthrough in terms of a more realistic approach to the recent wartime past\textsuperscript{74}. The new, condensed textbooks, full of facts and without any depth in terms of understanding and explanations, tend to be perceived by the grieving party as indifferent towards their suffering. This pattern applies to all grieving parties in post-conflict societies.

66. The return of the right-wing powers in Croatia resulted in a renewed pressure on historians and history teachers to enlarge the scope and change the content of history lessons dealing with the “Patriotic War” as a part of “patriotic upbringing” (Karamarko, 2011)\textsuperscript{75}. This is indicative of the strength of the resistance to true change, and of the fact that the legacy of the ’90s continues to affect the current political situation in Croatia and in the region.

d. Bosnia and Herzegovina

67. Bosnia and Herzegovina is specific because of its complicated political structure and its

\textsuperscript{71} S. Koren, B. Baranović, History Education after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia, V&R Unipress, Gottingen, (2009), p. 121.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{73} S. Koren, B. Baranović, History Education after Eighteen Years of Democracy in Croatia, V&R Unipress, Gottingen, (2009), p. 108.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{75} S. Koren, Udžbenici povijesti u Hrvatskoj, Udžbenici istorije u post-konfliktnim društvima: Obrazovanje za pomirenje, p. 50.
division in two entities, ten cantons and the Brčko District. After the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, as many as 13 Ministries of Education were established, each of which having full autonomy regarding the curricula design and textbook selection. History textbooks were selected along the ethnic lines – the part of Bosnia with the majority of Croatian population, used the textbooks published in Croatia, the Serbian entity used the textbooks from Serbia, while the Bosniaks had their own textbooks. This trend was officially banned in 2000, but nothing changed much – textbooks with similar content were now published in Mostar or Banja Luka, instead of Zagreb or Belgrade. As quite a lot has already been said in this paper about the Croatian and Serbian textbooks, it is time to elaborate now on the Bosniak historical narrative after 1995 end of war. Nationalistic qualifications of the Other abound in Bosniak textbooks, including “Serbian-Chetnik aggressors” and “Serbian nationalistic hegemonism”. The purpose of these is to influence the students’ way of thinking and their conclusions. Interestingly, Bosniak textbooks contain hardly any mention of the conflicts in Slovenia and Croatia in the’90s. Instead, they focus entirely on the war in Bosnia, which is perhaps understandable, but also incomplete in terms of methodology and historical facts.

68. What is common to all three sides in Bosnia is that they hold the Other responsible for the dissolution of Yugoslavia, use inappropriate terminology, and embellish their own national history, without any critical approach. Finally, there is one phenomenon that Croatian and Serbian textbooks share – they focus on the history of Serbia and Croatia respectively, more than on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is in line with their respective territorial claims to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

c. Slovenia

69. Unlike Serbia and Croatia, Slovenia was not directly involved in the military conflicts after 1991, when it became an independent state. Consequently, the reform of its history textbooks was less turbulent. The curricula for primary education were reformed in 1994, and for secondary education in 1996. Although Slovenia immediately abolished the state monopoly over textbook publishing, all textbooks needed the approval of the state committee

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77 See the country visit report to Bosnia and Herzegovina by the former Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, Farida Shaheed (A/25/A9, Add 1), para 59-69).
78 Ibid, p.53.
79 Vera Katz, Analiza udžbenika historije u B-H, p. 57.
80 Ibid, str. 62.
designated specifically for this purpose\textsuperscript{81}. Apart from the attempts at redefining the ancient history and placing Slovenian territorial identity in the time frame from the Roman Empire up to modern times, the claim about “the rebirth of Slovenia in the 18th century”\textsuperscript{82} is particularly interesting, as it implies that Slovenian national identity had existed before that period, only to be reborn in the 18th century.

70. There was something strikingly missing from the Slovenian history textbooks: the material referring to the Balkan region, from the Middle Ages to the recent times, was almost entirely left out from the textbooks. For instance, the period of the Ottoman Empire deserved only a mention. The focus shifts from the local, neighbourly history to the connections with Western countries, which is clearly the consequence of the Slovenian political shift towards Western Europe in the process of political, economic and military integrations. In this respect, Slovenia is not an exception. Actually, one of the main characteristics of history textbooks in all post-Yugoslav countries is that history is perceived more as an isolated ethno-nationalistic perspective confined within the newly established borders, and less as a comparative science which requires a broader, regional perspective. The introduction of the new history textbooks in Slovenia in 2007-2008 met with resistance and criticism, just like in other states in the region – the main objection of the critics was that little attention was paid to national history\textsuperscript{83}.

f. Common problems and challenges

71. Many states use history for political purposes, particularly the ones burdened with a difficult political legacy and past conflicts, and the case of Yugoslavia is not specific in that respect: new interpretations are meant to justify the bloody wars which broke out in the process of the dissolution of the state. However, there is a specificity in the case of former Yugoslavia that makes it different from other similar cases – it is the existence of an earlier, common historical narrative, used in the period of the Yugoslav state, which was redefined after its dissolution.

72. The new narrative was a reflection of the new, ethno-nationalistic discourses in all states. History became a useful propaganda tool, which provided justification for the states’ own, unwavering political positions, as well as an instrument for influencing young generations and their timely preparation for potential new conflicts. History is thus reduced to a catalogue of

\textsuperscript{81} P. Vodopivec, Politics of History Education in Slovenia, \textit{Transition and the Politics of History Education in South East Europe}, (A. Dimou), Gottingen, 2009, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, p. 65.
perpetual conflicts which eventually turn into a legitimized vicious circle.

73. It is therefore safe to say that the frequent reinterpretations of history have made the past far more uncertain than the future.

74. The analysis of the history books published in the post-Yugoslav region has shown that, in all states, textbooks were changed while war operations were still in full swing. This is indicative of the fact that teaching and learning history is a priority public and political issue.

75. The new narratives were created, and the old ones redefined, in order to emphasize national differences and to legitimize the new nationalistic discourse. The recent, common history underwent the most significant changes. The example of former Yugoslavia illustrates how manipulating history may entail dire consequences. The unique Yugoslav discourse was deconstructed into many new narratives, which all additionally stressed the importance of the differences with regard to the Other. Some of the “continuities within discontinuity” include: anti-communism, nationalism, reiteration of medieval traditions, glorification of national myths (especially the 19th century and the liberation from the Turkish rule, or attempts at obtaining autonomy in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, etc.), with only one purpose – to emphasize the national uniqueness of each newly founded state. A dichotomous image of the “chosen people” and “historical victim” is the recurring pattern in the post-Yugoslav discourse which additionally distorts reality and prevents a critical perception of the former and current positions of each country.

76. State monopoly on textbook publishing, i.e. on what is considered to be the “official history”, is another important issue in all countries in the region. It took a lot of time before this market was democratized and liberalized. All ex-Yugoslav republics have abolished this monopoly, but this is still not enough, given that selection criteria and quality standards have not been clearly defined.

77. Post-Yugoslav societies lack the pluralistic understanding of society and of the concept of the Other, which is also a significant problem. This is evident in the recurring pattern of applying the ethnic lines of division on the history of Yugoslavia itself, as well as in presenting the history of statehood of a particular nation/republic. What is problematic is that the new Other, up until recently used to be a fellow countryman, the citizen of the same state, and now it is necessary to artificially create divisions and draw lines in the common historical heritage. In some post-Yugoslav states, the process of strengthening the national identity is still under way, creating a serious obstacle which must be taken into consideration in the reconciliation
process.

78. The mythologization of the past through anachronisms and an uncritical transfer of values from one period to another, and one environment to another, can also be viewed as problematic. One must not fall into the trap of believing that the past is a part of the present, which makes the past a key determinant of the present and the future, and keeps all societies in a frozen, post-conflict state\(^{84}\). Post-Yugoslav history textbooks are extensively oriented towards distinct nations, which is a deviation from the main function of history – namely, to enable critical thinking of each individual\(^{85}\). Monochrome historical narratives are detrimental to the critical evaluation of the past.

79. All these problems make the writing of new history textbooks in the post-Yugoslav region very sensitive and painful. Reconciliation process cannot be unilateral or uniform. Institutionally strong societies, with a developed civil sector and educated, economically independent intellectual elite, are a prerequisite for reconciliation. Young democracies, which in the majority of the post-Yugoslav states still have to face many challenges in the implementation of the basic democratic principles, and are not fully committed to resolving the problem. Therefore, non-institutional support to the development of modern historical concepts within the framework of the existing associations and organizations is a very important step towards further democratization of studying history, as well as general democratization, in the post-Yugoslav countries.

80. History textbooks should be a guidepost for tolerant co-existence in multiethnic and multicultural societies, not tools to draw artificial borders, as was the case in the ex-Yugoslav republics. The war ended over 20 years ago, but the political situation in this region is far from being ready to make a major shift towards better understanding and getting closer to creating joint, regional history textbooks.

81. Advocating alternative interpretations of history in the Balkans, as opposed to the predominant narrative, is not an easy job, as the cases of historians whose public statements outraged the experts in the field and the public clearly show. Dubravka Stojanović, professor of history at the University of Belgrade, is a Serbian historian and the most prominent representative of the group of historians who advocate a demythologization of the narrative in Serbian history textbooks. For her engagement with the Center for Democracy and


\(^{85}\) *Udžbenici istorije u post-konfliktnim društvima: Obrazovanje za pomirenje*, p. 25.
Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE) and work on common regional textbooks, she was criticized by many self-proclaimed guardians of “historical truth” and “national memory”. In Croatia, two professors at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy, Hrvoje Klasić and Tvrtko Jakovina are under constant media attacks. Prof. Klasić, is under great pressure for his public comments against the glorification of the Ustasha Movement and Croatian nationalism. Croatian media accuse him of “demonizing every expression of Croatian state policy”. Prof. Jakovina§ is labelled by the nationalists as “the shame for Croatian nation” because he denies that the Communists killed as many as 140 000 Croats, mainly Ustashas, in 1945 in Bleiburg, Austria, which is a gross exaggeration°. The number of historians who bravely oppose the spreading of nationalistic stereotypes is relatively small, but, luckily, their voices are heard further and further away.

82. The inclusion of additional materials in teaching history is one of the important elements in the transitional justice processes. Such materials provide an insight into new methodological solutions, which enable better understanding of the official history presented in the textbooks as the ultimate truth.

83. In this respect, one of the key projects was the establishment in 1999 of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe (CDRSEE) in Thessaloniki, Greece. The Center offered new solutions for research about the same historical events from the perspective of different nations in the Balkans. The main goal of the project was to inspire a debate, present different views on history in their entirety, acknowledge the opinions, but also the suffering, of the Other, and enable the development of teachers’ and students’ competencies and understandings which will be the basis for sustainable peace and a democratic future.

84. Six textbooks, covering the history of the Balkans from the Middle Ages up to the present, have been published as part of the project. The last two volumes, dealing with the most controversial period of 1945-2008, are particularly important. Published at the end of 2016, they are additional materials based on historical resources and offer different views of the

° Hrvatski list, 29 January 2016, p. 23.
°° See A/25/R9, Add.1, para 106.
recent controversial past.

85. The opportunity to view the events such as those that took place in Srebrenica or during Oluja (Operation “Storm”), from the perspective of the Other, is a significant didactic method which should make possible a critical approach to the past. It would also introduce to students a scientific and research-based approach to “historical truth”, instead of a mere reproduction of one and the same predominant paradigm. Motivated to overcome the aggressive and clashing models of national identification which prevailed in the earlier textbooks, these books were also meant to help make a shift from the use of history as “a training in conflicts” to “a training in reconciliation”90. In Serbia, there is still no reaction regarding the new additional material, the publication was greatly ignored by the relevant authorities and media. The voices of criticism were raised in Croatia concerning the case of Ovčara (killings of Croatian prisoners of war and civilians by Serbian paramilitary forces), presented in the textbooks, where the ethnicity of the Serb perpetrators is not mentioned, although the court ruling confirmed it91. However, when referring to killings of the Serb population in Croatia by Ustasha during the World War II, the nationality of victims was not mentioned as it referred only to “Croatian citizens”92. Then the fact that over 75% of Croats are not aware of crimes committed by their fellow country-men in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war in the ‘90s should not come as a surprise93.

86. As expected, the publishing of the first four volumes gave rise to a great controversy. Resistance was particularly strong in Serbia, where experts complained that due attention had not been given to the Ustasha concentration camp Jasenovac (where nearly 100 000 Serbs, Jews and the Roma were killed during the World War II)94. “It seems that the creators of these so-called history readers or additional materials intended to present the Serbs as the only war-mongering nation on the Balkans, while all other nations are innocent, good and respectful” – claimed Prof. Radoš Ljušić. Prof. Dubravka Stojanović95 has a different opinion - “we can hope that at least it would be possible to hear all sides, which already would mean that we

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90 D. Stojanović, Slow Burning, p. 156.
91 http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/u-citanci-koju-preporucuje-europska-unija-nema-krivca-ni-za-ovcaru-1132397
have matured in our treatment of the past. The two opposing views are indicative of the divisions that are still very much alive. The question was also raised whether the sensitive topics of the ‘90s should be covered at all in textbooks, “but children ask questions anyway and look for additional data,” according to Snježana Koren. In Croatia, the textbooks met with similar criticism, and claims were expressed that they “attempt to legalize the proven falsifications, the positions of the proven perpetrator and aggressor.” In order to facilitate the application of the new solutions, seminars and trainings were organized for history teachers. This is very important as the first step in the entire process, and it is potentially even more important than the textbooks and additional materials. The problem often lies with the teaching staff, not the ministries and the curricula. Teachers, even when they have the freedom of choice, often hesitate or refuse to use new, additional educational material.

87. This form of self-censorship is the most powerful obstacle to introducing a new discourse in education. A good quality teacher training is a prerequisite for the full implementation of the new solutions in the educational system. As many teachers, subconsciously or out of fear, reproduce the predominant narrative, it is essential that they should be familiarized with new approaches and solutions, as well as supported in learning how to apply them. This is the area in which financial resources and efforts should be most invested, if history textbooks are to be an effective instrument for reaching reconciliation faster and in a more substantial way. The focus should be on investing in structural changes in reconciliation process, particularly in teacher’s trainings as one of its most important segments. Another important segment is the dissemination of possible solutions. Higher numbers of fully trained teachers who are ready to use alternative textbooks and additional materials in their classes might secure greater capacities for the reconciliation.

IV. CULTURAL INITIATIVES

88. Cultural initiatives, in the broadest sense, are all activities undertaken in various forms of artistic expression such as film, music, or theatre, as well as the activities of all cultural...
institutions and the civil sector aimed at building peace and trust in post-conflict societies\textsuperscript{100}. A full analysis of all such initiatives in the post-Yugoslav region in the past two decades would require years of research. For the purposes of this research, it is important to identify the main trends and phenomena in this area in order to identify the scope and relevance of this form of engagement.

\textbf{a. Relevance}

89. Cultural initiatives and exchanges can play an important role in establishing cooperation and normalization of relations among societies which were in conflict. The initiatives are very significant within regions torn by civil wars, as was the case with the former Yugoslavia. They are also important in terms of the lasting effects of the reached political solutions, which often lack the true understanding and perspective on reality.

90. Cultural initiatives have two important roles in reconciliation – they can be the factors of both cohesion and catharsis. Cohesion is made possible through cultural exchanges and cooperation of persons involved in different forms of culture (most often artists and professionals working in cultural institutions). These activities enable closer relations and direct communication, which in turn makes possible the exchange of different views, essential for any kind of understanding and possibly reconciliation.

91. The catharsic function of cultural initiatives arises from the first one – the opposing views on the same reality can now be “confronted” in the cultural field, resulting in a new level of understanding of both one’s own and the Other’s suffering. This is a typical situation with two parties in conflict. However, the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates that there are conflicts with more warring factions. This is yet another complex case where multiple “Others” exist and their “truths” are often impossible to reconcile. The introspective character of art enables the overcoming of traumatic experiences and gives room for empathy, which is a prerequisite for accepting the Other and their truth. The viewpoint of the Other is usually left out, and that gives rise to the perpetual relapse of the conflict which often remains in a frozen state. The empowerment of people at the local level through various cultural initiatives can indeed be a significant factor in the reconciliation process, as it includes cultural, political, ethnic, and religious identities. By default, wars feed on deep and irreconcilable divisions, as this is the only way for political elites to realize the goals of war. The success and permanence

\textsuperscript{100} See also report on memorialization processes by the former Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, Farida Shaheed, A/HRC/25/49, para 66-73.
of political solutions greatly depend on the reconstruction of these identities.

92. Besides the critical role of cultural initiatives in reconciliation processes, their contribution to any prevention policy is equally important. Although this aspect of cultural initiatives in that context will not be considered in detail in this paper, it must be underlined that prevention policies, if they are to have any impact, must not be reduced to institutional reforms only. An effective prevention policy requires transformations at many levels – institutional, social and personal- which can be achieved only through sustained support to processes of social integration101.

b. Impact

93. The frequent adage at the panels organized to discuss reconciliatory cultural initiatives is that it is impossible to expect that art and culture can contribute to reconciliation. However, if the actors and peace activists themselves do not believe in the relevance of their own work, how can one expect that these activities can influence wider social groups which they do in practice? Cultural workers should therefore be strongly encouraged to believe that their work and engagement have a purpose together with those who participate in artistic activities, as various projects will demonstrate.

94. The financial aspect is very important and consequently must not be neglected. Limited, or non-existant funds, provided by international institutions, donors or local institutions, can be detrimental for cultural initiatives. This fact especially applies to local decision makers who often lack political will to finance such “non-national” events. On the other hand, if the activities are funded exclusively by foreign organizations, we have another problem – the cultural content is then perceived as something imposed from the “outside”, which inevitably gives it a stigma of hostile and subversive action. This type of paranoia is often fuelled by the local media, and the whole concept of reconciliation is undermined. The persisting stereotype is that “great powers” and “international community” always finance the “Other side”, in wartime and in peace, so that any funding of cultural activities is viewed as a continuation of war by using different, more subtle means. A balanced approach and support of local institutions is crucial for deeper and more lasting effects of cultural activities in local communities. Many international mechanisms can be used to increase influence on local governments to allot funds for cultural activities, as this is crucial for reconciliation.

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95. Limited outreach and the impossibility of influencing the audience which is not interested in the specific content is another problem. Two aspects should be distinguished here – the impact on the group with a different ethnic and/or religious background, and the impact within the same ethnic and religious group on the segments of community that are traditionally inclined to accept the official, nationalistic discourse.

96. In the first case, still fresh post-war wounds and the lack of will to understand the Other in any other context than as an enemy, prevents the acceptance of the “foreign” cultural content in any form, as it is *a priori* seen as invasive and hegemonistic. In the second case, the elitist concept that is common in these activities requires the organization of cultural events in spaces strictly intended for the specific type of audience, or the type of cultural intervention is focused on the limited circle of the potential audience.

97. In both cases, the audience consists mostly of people with a deeper understanding of political events and who use this form of their own activism, primarily to express a specific political attitude. Their “consumption” of culture is occasionally more a demonstration of the acclamative acceptance of the offered concept, than a true wish to participate in a unique and genuine cultural exchange. Therefore, they remain trapped in their identity roles, and stick to their general assessments (especially on “good” and “bad” guys or sides), without becoming new participants in the process, ready to accept nuances of a complex picture. In addition, such behaviour repels potential new participants, as the homogenous whole within a microcultural space is viewed as “sectarianism”, which in turn increases the need for distancing oneself from it. The two discourses are thus growing even further apart and a new line of division is created, but now in peaceful times. An invisible border is formed between two cultural spaces (or patterns), without any meeting points.

98. Such development enables the nurturing of the inherited ethno-nationalistic discourse in the majority group which is antagonized with the cultural *avant-garde* with which it has no similarities. This is the most dangerous consequence of organizing cultural activities aimed at small and elitist groups that are self-satisfied with their cultural involvement, which as they believe, nurtures the only correct ethical narrative. The lack of comprehension by the “ignorant masses” does not produce any desire for self-reflection; on the contrary, as in the case of the first group, it additionally excludes them and strengthens the insistence on the morally unquestionable narrative. Finding the way out of this deadlock is not easy, because it entails in-depth psychological analyses of identity policies. The post-conflict, post-Yugoslav countries simply do not have the capacities needed for such endeavour.
99. It also remains unclear how the scope and outreach of cultural initiatives can be measured. The number of events, frequency and financial support are *not per se* definitive indicators of the depth of their impact. For instance, if one theatre play is on the repertoire for a long time, it can mean that it managed to attract the attention of the majority of the like-minded people, but also that it managed to go beyond the narrow elitist circle and reach the wider segments of the society.

100. Politics is crucial in both creating conflicts and achieving reconciliation. The lack of political will can be a serious obstacle to the development of cultural initiatives and contacts, even in post-conflict times. One of the ways to achieve this is to blame and stigmatize the participants in a cultural process (through media, social networks, etc.). The stigmatization may take the form of persecution by labeling the artists who are willing to extend their hand to the Other as “traitors”, which jeopardizes their right to freedom of thought and expression, and frequently puts their personal safety at risk.

101. Cultural initiatives are generally time-limited and not focused on the specific period of time, which affects their impact and significance. They are usually carried out in the short period after the conflicts, not more than a few years, and then they lose their edge and die away. A continual, systemic cultural action is very important for more lasting effects. Similarly, the inadequate timing for such initiatives, usually soon after the armed conflicts have ended and the warring sides are still very vulnerable and unwilling to accept the viewpoint of the Other, is also an important problem. The initiatives lose their edge and their initial strength comes back as a boomerang – the greater the wishes and efforts to present the opinions of the other side are, the stronger the resentment of that other side becomes. This phenomenon is detrimental not only for cultural initiatives, but also, in the long-run, for the entire reconciliation process.

102. The third problem concerns the understanding of the work of art and the “truth” it tries to convey. Frequently, a work of art is perceived as a scientific or documentary-historical approach to reality, giving rise to confusions and controversy, especially concerning sensitive topics. When artistic logic is applied to facts, the result is the specific, “aesthetic truth, not the factual truth”[102]. “An aesthetic object, which, in a way, is no longer truthful, is thus created.

because that truth is not verifiable, but it is convincing” (3). This fact is probably the greatest obstacle to understanding artistic works and their role in post-conflict societies and reconciliation processes.

V. CIVIL SOCIETY

103. Civil wars often leave deeper and crueler consequences on their societies than international conflicts. The devastation of the state and its institutions, divisions in the society and families are the real result of such conflicts. The established peace does not automatically diminish the devastating effects of the civil war, not even when the institutions which should guarantee peace are re-established. It is therefore necessary to rebuild the citizens’ confidence in these institutions. However, this is a very long process and may take decades. For this reason, the civil sector is very important as it can act faster and more efficiently, and it can help monitor and rectify the actions of the government bodies.

104. Positive aspects of the civil sector activities can be ignored, as was the case with the ex-Yugoslav countries, if rebuilding institutions and establishing a legal and regulated state is not in the interest of the new ruling elites. Another problem with the civil sector is that it is mainly financed from foreign donations or international organizations, which the nationalists use to delegitimize its work.

a. Case study - REKOM

105. One of the most significant initiatives in this area in post-Yugoslav region, was the initiative proposed in 2011 for the formation of REKOM, a regional commission for establishing the facts about the war crimes and other serious violations of human rights committed on the territory of the SFRY from 1 January 1991 to 31 December 2001. From 2011 until 2015, REKOM organized several important panels where the issue of the achievements in transitional justice were discussed, as well as the promotion of artistic works, and the need to hear the victims’ feelings and opinions. Civil society representatives, artists, writers, researchers and others actively engaged in the research of transitional justice were present at the forums (held in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro).

106. However, Nataša Kandić, the Coordinator of for REKOM, claims that the process has been at a standstill for the last two years. On behalf of the REKOM, she wrote to the Council

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of Europe, the pan-European human rights organization, in March 2017, warning about the shifting of the focus away from the post-conflict states, which jeopardizes the transitional justice process. This example shows that political support outside the region and by international institutions is still an important factor in the reconciliation process on the Balkans. It also shows that a meaningful progress has not been made in terms of empowering local actors who are supposed to carry out the process in the future, and the process is at standstill.

b. Declaration on the common language

107. One of the latest Balkan reconciliation projects include the Declaration on Joint Language, according to which the people who spoke the Serbo-Croat (or Croato-Serbian) language in the ex-Yugoslav territory would accept to share one language of a polycentric type, i.e. to use the language spoken by a number of nations in a number of different states (like German, English or Spanish). Nowadays, four ex-Yugoslav republics use four names (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and recently Montenegrin) for the same language. The four names do not make these languages genuinely different, and the introduction of a whole series of new words in order to make an unnatural separation and deliberate differentiation is just a means for further segregation of a space that used to be a unified political, economic and cultural space.\(^{104}\)

108. In late 2016, the initiative was launched online by linguists, philologists and activists with the aim of gathering as many intelectuals, prominent personalities, workers and students as possible to support this idea. The division of the same language across ethnic lines is one of the more visible consequences of the involvement of politics in all social spheres. The demands stated in the Declaration include the elimination of the segregation and language discrimination in education and public institutions, abolition of rigid definitions of the standard language variants, the avoidance of the unnecessary, pointless and expensive “translations” from a language that is easily understandable without translation, etc.\(^{105}\)

109. As expected, the first reactions in the region are divided. While some claim that the Declaration is an attack on their national identity, others think that it is a step forward towards reconciliation, overcoming of conflicts and establishing further contacts in the post-Yugoslav region. Interestingly, those who criticize the Declaration in Croatia and Serbia use basically


\(^{105}\) [Jezici i Nacionalizmi | Deklaracija.](http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/deklaracija/)
the same arguments – in Croatia, the Declaration is considered as an attack on the 1967 Declaration on the Croatian Language, while in Serbia the critics claim that it is aimed at negating the historical grounds and the current status of the Serbian language.\footnote{SKZ Ne Podržava Deklaraciju O Zajedničkom Jeziku.” B92.net. Accessed May 9, 2017. http://www.b92.net/kultura/vesti.php?nav_category=1087&yyyy=2017&mm=04&dd=13&nav_id=1250192.}

It is unclear how a consensus can be reached on more complex issues, if an obvious fact about the same language, even with two scripts and several dialects, cannot be accepted, despite the fact that the communication between two or three nations runs smoothly and without the need for translation. Miroslav Krleža, a great Croatian and Yugoslav writer, once defined it as “a language that Serbs call Serbian and Croats call it Croatian”. The issue of what will emerge from the former Serbo-Croatian (or Croato-Serbian) language is still open, and the solution is not in sight. Still, the fact that such declaration has been launched at all indicates that the region might be moving in the right direction, but very slowly.

VI. ARTS AND RECONCILIATION

Art can be a mobilizing factor both in wartime and in the post-war society, because artists are often willing to go beyond their profession and become activists in their society that is still suffering from the conflict. In this manner, their role gets a new dimension and they can be very influential, especially if they are respected writers, actors, directors, musicians, painters, etc. Artists have the privilege to be accepted by a considerable part of the population on a more emotional level, which gives them more room for action and a unique opportunity to spread their influence outside the narrow artistic circles. By investing their artistic authority and popularity, they can influence change and raise the awareness of ordinary people who are the easiest target for political propaganda.

In the post-Yugoslav region, while the war was still raging, artists were very active, but not always necessarily with the intention to ease tensions. Some artists used the war and the post-war situation as an opportunity to promote hardcore nationalistic views and deepen the divisions. The other type of artists, who did not condescend to the ruling powers, saw art as an opportunity to criticize and oppose the predominant discourses. These artists spoke against nationalistic policies of the governments and struggled to preserve humanistic values at the
time when these values were seriously threatened.

a. Theatre

113. Theatre directors and playwrights in the post-Yugoslav territory dealt a lot with war-related themes (Oliver Frljić\textsuperscript{107}, Selma Spahić\textsuperscript{108}, Borut Šeparović\textsuperscript{109}, Stefan Bodroža\textsuperscript{110}, Dino Mustafić\textsuperscript{111}, and others). Although theatre has the smallest influence on a wider public, it could make the strongest impression on its audience. Another advantage of the theatre is that it can easily go beyond formal artistic framework and directly influence the audience (e.g. by inviting the audience to participate in the play). This postmodern performative approach, which has the strongest emotional and personal appeal on the audience, was used in many plays.

114. The most striking example is the play staged by the Croatian director Oliver Frljić “25671”, which deals with the topic of the citizens “erased” from the newly established Slovenian state in 1991. At the beginning of the play, actors invite the audience to give them their (real) ID cards that will be destroyed during the performance – this was perhaps the most radical artistic action ever seen in the post-Yugoslav theatre. The audience is not only requested to give up the most important personal document, but it leaves the theatre under a strong impression and with a slight feeling of discomfort, which means that the effect of prolonged duration has been achieved: people keep thinking about the play even after several days have passed, which is roughly the time needed to get the new ID card. This form of artistic action has a very sobering effect on the process of reconciliation because the audience is directly exposed to the topic of the play and very realistically affected.

115. There is another type of theatre play which does not directly involve the audience, but confronts it with difficult facts. An important example of this kind of play is “Potočari Party”, directed by Stevan Bodroža, director from Belgrade, and written by Bosnian playwright Almir Bašović. It was performed in the Vienna Chamber Theatre 55 and tackles one of the most sensitive topics of Yugoslav wars, the genocide in Srebrenica committed in 1995. Although the text deals with a universal topic and does not mention names, the director opted for a different


\textsuperscript{110} http://fbi.ba/stevan-bodroza-umjetnost-moze-pruziti-utjehu/.

artistic solution and included the ethnicity of the perpetrators and victims in the play. The goal of the documentary theatre is to present the facts without any embellishment and with a minimum artistic intervention.

116. Theatre plays sending a universal message of suffering are the third type of plays. The impact and outreach of these plays is much bigger, as they easily overcome the narrow ethnic framework and are more readily accepted in the closed national communities. The play “Hipermnesija”, staged by Selma Spahić, director from Sarajevo, and in co-production with the Heartefact Fund and BITEF Theatre from Belgrade, is an excellent example of such a play. It analyzes all that remained unspoken in the process of growing up of eight young people, born in the same state, but now living in three different states, and it also addresses their deepest suffering. The universality of suffering expressed in artistic language is a form of engaged theatre which has the greatest potential to survive and keep spreading the messages common to all humanity. Although the audience is inclined to accept such plays more readily than other, it is questionable that they can play a more substantial role in reconciliation, except for the fact that they remind the audience of the futility of wars and conflicts, a value which is generally always accepted.

117. The artists participating in the engaged theatre projects in the post-Yugoslav territory all agree that this form of engagement is necessary for achieving full reconciliation and securing a lasting peace. This is extremely difficult, but necessary. As Albert Camus says in his “Myth of Sisyphus”, “the alternative is suicide”112. These artists believe that the plays have a therapeutic effect on people and alleviate the suffering because they tackle the issues and use the words that the society at large might not be ready to hear yet.

b. Film

118. Film is also one of the key forms of cultural engagement in post-conflict societies. Their impact is greater than that of the theatre and reaches a much wider audience as, owing to modern technologies, films can be watched once or re-run endlessly. The language of films is often simpler and catches the viewer’s attention quickly, and the message that a film tries to convey is understood more easily. In addition, film is literally a more available form of art – as indicated, it can be watched for free as well, whereas paying for a theatre ticket is unfortunately still a luxury for many people in post-conflict societies.

There are two types of feature films that deal with war topics: films that use war topics as propaganda and such creations are a part of a wider political context. The films in the second group focus on victims and personal tragedies.

The focus and motives in the first group of films are clear – they confirm the prevailing paradigm of “us” as victims and “them” as aggressors. They are easily seen as part of the low-level propaganda and continuation of war by other means. The other type of war films raises controversy and debates because it tackles the sensitive issue of victimization and suffering of the Other, which is the most denied war phenomenon by all sides. The ability to understand the fate of each victim from a purely humanistic standpoint is often prevented by insisting on the antagonization along ethnic lines, which produces a counter-effect. This fact is best illustrated by the film “Grbavica”, directed by Jasmila Žbanić, which deals with the sensitive topic of the rape of Bosnian women by Serb soldiers during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The attempt to approach the topic in an artistic way, but with the reliance on the facts determined in advance, met with harsh criticism and started a large-scale media war that lasted for months.

It turned out once again that any insisting on the victim’s ethnicity diminishes the “exclusivity” of suffering which none of the sides in the war wants to give up. As such attitudes dig even deeper trenches among different sides, it is unclear whether the films and theatre plays structured in this manner can contribute to reconciliation, and not open new wounds. Another controversial example is the film “The Land of Blood and Honey”, directed by the actress Angelina Jolie, which divided the region more than any other film before and after it was shot. A slew of round tables, TV shows, and media debates did not contribute to the artistic validation of this film, nor did they make the Serbs and Bosniaks understand better the Other. On the contrary – the film, partly due to its superficiality, only strengthened the ethnic and nationalistic attitudes on both sides. As a result, the public lost any interest and the media became closed for similar topics for quite a while. The question is whether such cultural initiatives can produce a retrograde effect – instead of accelerating the process of reconciliation and increasing the understanding among different communities, can they actually slow down the process?

When it comes to documentaries, many produced by national TV networks promote the discourse of the official state policy. However, there are others that try to deal with the past, and are financed by independent and non-governmental institutions. The latter are best
illustrated by the films of Lazar Stojanović\(^\text{113}\), Serbian director, who explored the topics related to Ratko Mladić (“The Rise and Fall of General Mladić”), Radovan Karadžić (“Life and Deeds of Radovan Karadžić”), and particularly the shooting of the war prisoners in Bosnia in his film “Scorpios – A Scrapbook”\(^\text{114}\). The release of each of these films raised controversy in Serbian society, which was not ready to accept the crimes committed allegedly for its sake. It is therefore not surprising that only 10% of Serbs in Serbia accept the facts determined by ICTY about Srebrenica, a stark contrast with nearly 85% of Bosniaks in Serbia. Similarly, almost 77% of Croats in Croatia have never heard, or refuse to believe, that Croatian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina built prisoner camps in which they tortured and killed civilians\(^\text{115}\). The intention of documentaries, unlike feature films, is to deal with facts, although the line between factual and fictional can be very fluid if they rely on the true, but very sensitive events.

123. The artists involved in film production in the post-Yugoslav region claim that films are important for the reconciliation, and that they are an important instrument in “fighting for the space in the media” to present a different perspective on wartime events. Films can also be an important “research instrument” in the reconciliation process and serve for the identification of facts the official media refuse to present\(^\text{116}\). Some authors believe that films should be a sort of “shock therapy” in the healing process of post-war societies\(^\text{117}\), while the majority agrees that films should be the reminders of the past which must not be repeated\(^\text{118}\).

c. Media

124. The media played a very important role in the entire post-Yugoslav territory, before, during, and after the war. The ruling political parties’ control over the media is still present and it was particularly strong during the war. Alternative media, which tried to ease the tensions, were few. For example, the “Radio Boat” was sailing in the international waters of the Adriatic


\(^{114}\) The movie is based on a true story of the killing of six young Bosnian by the paramilitary unit “Scorpions” who recorded themselves the killings.


Sea in 1993-1994, broadcasting anti-war program on the greater part of the war-torn territories. The program was aired 24/7 and it played a significant role in connecting families separated during the war. After the war, there were many regional online portals, newspapers and TV channels involved in the reconciliation process, but their range was very limited.

125. One of the most significant reconciliation projects was a TV news serial “Vicinities” ("Okruženja"), that was broadcasted simultaneously on ten TV stations in all ex-Yugoslav countries (and Albania) and launched by the CDRSEE and the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB). At the time when this paper was written, the fifth season of this unique show was aired. It informs the viewers from these countries about the situation in the neighbouring states, showing that the problems are almost the same in all of them. The advantage of using the same language among four states is obvious and it should be used as a basis for further actions in the reconciliation process. Sharing the same cultural and linguistic space is conducive to building connections, which was a guiding principle behind the project; along with overcoming conflicts and enabling healing processes to take place. The limited range is the main downside – the show is usually aired on one regional channel and in one time slot. Increasing the time slots for this (or similar) serial would increase the dissemination of its content.

126. The launch of the N1 TV Channel may be considered the most important media project in the region. This is the first TV channel which encompasses most of the previous political space and broadcasts mostly the same or regionally adapted program. It is broadcast in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. N1 is the regional CNN International's local partner and it mainly covers current political issues, focusing on the common regional problems, but spending also significant time on ways for overcoming the difficult wartime past.

127. I believe that a continued funding of the media offering this type of content would accelerate the reconciliation process more than any other endeavour. When the viewers get to know more about the political, economic and cultural issues of their neighbouring states, with which they used to live in the same state, hostilities and tensions will definitely decrease. The same, inherited, political and institutional problems, such as corruption and other problems affecting the rule of law, a difficult economic situation, systemic failures in the way their societies function – all these similarities should draw different nations closer together, instead of being pushed further apart by ethnic and religious differences on which their political elites insist. The independent status of these media gives them advantage over local TV networks, which are often under the government pressure, including some private TV stations.
d. Exhibition “Who is Reihl Kir to you? ("Ko je tebi Reihl Kir")"

128. The exhibition “Who is Reihl Kir to you?” ("Ko je tebi Reihl Kir"), staged by Tanja Simić-Berclaz, is one of the most significant projects organized in cooperation of three countries in the region (Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia). The idea was to put the exhibition on display throughout the ex-Yugoslav space and demonstrate the extent of the war tragedy through one and personal, but paradigmatic story. Josip Reihl-Kir, who was in 1991 the Head of the Police in Osijek, Croatia, is treated as a symbol of a transideological humanism and of personal suffering caused by resisting the nationalistic madness. Reihl Kir’s fate is a universal human fate in all conflicts – as the Head of police in Osijek, he tried to make peace between his Croat and Serb neighbours, but he fell victim to his pacifism and tolerance. His story proves again that common sense is the first victim of war. The symbolical selection of the story such as that of Reihl-Kir’s should show that wars are meaningless – he was not killed for his ethnicity, religion or beliefs, but because he was against killing people exactly because of their nationality, religion or beliefs. His sacrifice transcends the motives for armed conflicts and makes them essentially pointless.

129. The exhibition was on display in many towns in the region, including his Osijek, the town where he lived and worked. On the opening night, it was the first time that his life and work were discussed publicly in Croatia, and the exhibition was opened by Stjepan Mesić, the former Croatian president. Some participants said that Reihl-Kir had been murdered because he wanted peace. President Mesić asserted that a full reconstruction of the incident would lead to those who ordered the assassination (the killer was sentenced to 20 years in prison). “That would be good for Osijek, for our history”, Mesić added. It should be noted that the exhibition was staged under the patronage of Ivo Josipović, Croatian president at the time, which is yet another indicator of the importance of political will for reconciliation. Without it, the impact of such actions remains relatively small.

e. Project “Four faces of Omarska („Četiri lica Omarske“)

130. The process of memorialization of crimes is one of the most sensitive topics in the post-conflict period. It is difficult to reach an agreement within a community of how the place of a
war crime should be marked and how to keep the memory of the victims in a respectful way, without putting the burden of guilt on the descendants of the perpetrators, and thus making possible for both sides in the conflict to accept the past together. Milica Tomic's art project "Four faces of Omarska" ("Četiri lica Omarske"), the theme of which was the case of Omarska camp for war prisoners, is an important regional project that tackles this issue. The aim of the project is to draw attention of the public to this case through various forms of activism and art performances, while the title indicates how the use of space depends on time, circumstances and people living in it. In socialist Yugoslavia, Omarska was a mining complex with thousands of employees. During the war, it was turned into a war prisoner camp where thousands of people were kept imprisoned, and several hundred were killed. After the war, Omarska became a mining complex again, but owned by a multinational company Arcelor Mittal (world's biggest steel manufacturer). But the circle does not close here, because the space is also used for commercial purposes, such as shooting high-budget films (by way of example, the most expensive Serbian film "St George Kills the Dragon" was shot on this location in 2008). The families of the victims and the survivors had a long battle with Arcelor Mittal to get access to the camp site for commemorations, and to get the permission to raise a memorial as a reminder of the war crimes. After overcoming a number of obstacles, they were finally granted permission to visit the site, but once a year and only for a few hours.

131. The refusal of the company and the local officials to allow the commemoration resulted in alternative solutions. People adapt to new circumstances and do not allow anyone to erase their memory. The media reported about an old lady who had put a memorial plate on the wall of her house and turned one room into a sort of a private museum in memory of her son who had died in the war camp. This example illustrates how difficult it can be to reach an agreement about the memorialization of the scene of war crimes, but also the creativity of those who try to remember.

132. However, nowadays it is easier to break the media blockade by using the Internet, which can connect people in the region and elsewhere quickly and easily. New initiatives can be launched with the help of technology, which also enables people to stay in touch and exchange experiences.

133. Croatian author Viktor Ivančić offered an interesting perspective on the difficulties of reconciliation: "It is no longer about the transition of the criminal society into a better, more decent one. Now it is about the transition of the crime itself which is now leaving the phase of its physical form and entering the phase of symbolic reproduction. Monuments in memory of
murderers are being raised all the time – like the one in Prijedor – waiting for a new crime to grow out of that “humus”\textsuperscript{122}. The problem of memorialization includes the problem of preserving the memory of the crimes and perpetrators, as well as their potential positive memorialization, turning perpetrators into heroes. Without genuine political will, local initiatives are often not implemented\textsuperscript{123}.

134. There are those who question if the ethnicity and religion of the victims should be marked, and whether commemorations should begin with religious service or not. The critics of these practices claim that adherents to other religions are kept away in this manner, especially bearing in mind the still fresh memories of the war which had elements of a religious conflict\textsuperscript{124}. All these issues indicate that much more effort should be put into creating initiatives for reconciliation. Single-mindedness and partiality are traps into which many initiatives, though launched with good intentions, inevitably fall.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

135. The aim of this research is to analyze the content of history textbooks in former Yugoslav republics with a view to assessing the way and the extent to which history teaching and history textbooks have contributed to the achievement of a long lasting peace and to the mitigation of ethnic tensions in the region. Given that the recent developments clearly indicate that economic, social and cultural rights have a crucial role to play in transitional justice processes, this research also considers the range of ways in which artistic and cultural initiatives contribute to reconciliation and the prevention of further human rights abuses in the aftermath of large-scale violence and in divided societies.

136. Shedding light on the impact of economic, social and cultural rights on transitional justice processes in post-conflict societies by using the concrete example of the situation in the former Yugoslav countries, should contribute to the conceptual clarity of such processes and provide indications on how to strengthen the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as the UN as a whole, in promoting the rule of law in general, and transitional justice measures in particular in conflict and post-conflict situations.


\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
137. Ensuring sustainable peace in post-conflict societies is one of the key goals of any transitional justice process. However, politics and the heavy burden of the past make these already complex processes even more difficult to implement. While history keeps on reminding us of tragedies we failed to prevent, it appears from the study of the situation in the Balkans, that we are still unable to learn from the past.

138. Often guided by nationalistic political agendas, education policies and history teaching do not recognize cultural diversity and different historical narratives concerning past events, thus making them problematic from a human rights point of view. Given that there is no single historical truth, a proper understanding of historical facts requires comparative and multi-perspective analysis to enhance critical understanding of the past, and existence of multiple truths. Hence the importance of stressing the role of history textbooks in educating new generations about tolerance and understanding, in eliminating prejudice and thus creating the necessary conditions for a long lasting peace. History textbooks should be a guidepost for tolerant co-existence in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies.

139. History teaching can be a powerful tool in building trust and establishing peace after an armed conflict has ended, and all the above-mentioned elements are constitutive parts of a process that can take years. Meanwhile, history textbooks will affect the generations for whom the conflicts are only a distant past, shaping their perception of who they are, which can seriously impact both their present and future.

1. History teaching and history textbooks, being essential for achieving long lasting peace in post-conflict societies and indispensable in the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, should be included in all transitional justice processes and strategies;

2. In the context of transitional justice processes, the role of cultural initiatives in prevention policies should be recognized and actively strengthened;

3. Encourage critical thinking and provide space for comparative and multi-perspective analysis of opposed or conflicting narratives, including marginalized viewpoints, thus preventing mythologization of the past;

4. Develop and strengthen the pluralistic understanding of society and of the concept of the “Other”, with a particular emphasis on their existence, perspectives, suffering and aspirations;

5. In teaching curricula, shift the focus from military and political history to social history, in order to contribute to a greater understanding of the parties which were in conflict;
6. History teachers in post-conflict societies should be trained to develop competencies conducive to establishment of tolerance and understanding between communities;

7. Maintain regular contacts, as well as organize school trips and teaching staff visits which should enable more frequent and deeper links among the former Yugoslav republics could, and should be among the first steps of reconciliation;

8. Encourage cultural initiatives and art projects as an indispensable tool to establish cooperation between groups that were in conflict with a view to normalize relations among societies which have experienced conflict;

9. Invest in artistic creativity and visibility, as artists can trigger change in perceptions, encourage debate, reflect and raise awareness of ordinary people about past sufferings and the humanity of others.