

Security Council Open Debate on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security: War, its lessons, and the search for a permanent peace, 29th January 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ms. Lucas, Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations

Thank you, Mr. President, for having taken the initiative to organize today's open debate, which comes at a timely moment, at the dawn of the year in which we commemorate the outbreak of the First World War. I would also like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his briefing. I also endorse the statement that Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting will make on behalf of the European Union.

When in the aftermath of conflict guns fall silent, it does not mean that peace has been restored. The end of physical violence or even the conclusion of a peace agreement does not erase in a simple stroke the memory of pain and suffering that has been experienced. The question we ask ourselves is, what do we do with this history of conflict? Expressed in another way, how can we demobilize not only combatants but also minds?

Following a conflict, the memory of the atrocities experienced exercises a constraint on the process of rebuilding a society. There is a risk that the memory could be manipulated to serve a logic of opposition. In contrast, there are also examples where revisiting the past has gone hand in hand with efforts to bring people together. That is the case of Europe in the second half of the twentieth century.

European integration is certainly one of the best examples of reconciliation. Countries that had made war for generations, which were responsible for two world wars, worked together to build a common economic area that has become a political union. Today, the European Union is a sui generis model, where disputes between States are regulated exclusively by law.

European integration seems to provide us with useful lessons for today's open debate. The first of those lessons is that neither historical fatalism nor determinism exists, that people who once saw in the Other an age-old enemy have since chosen the path of cooperation and reconciliation, which proves that the course of history is not set once and for all and that political will, used advisedly, remains an extraordinary engine of progress.

The second lesson, which stems from the first, concerns the way the past is interpreted. While the wounds of the Second World War were still open, Europeans rejected calls for revenge and stigmatization. Although at no time was it a question of forgetting what happened or of creating forced amnesia, today, when they look at their history, Europeans do so in the light of the cooperation that they have enjoyed for more than 60 years.

A third lesson deals with the pragmatism that guided the building of Europe, which began by specific achievements that created first a de facto solidarity, to quote Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of Europe. The first of those concrete achievements was the pooling of coal and steel production in 1951 by six countries, including my country, Luxembourg.

Despite the weight of the past, those six countries chose to look forward towards a common future. That approach was probably motivated as well by economic interests, but it began a process of interdependence that fostered reconciliation. The European model of reconciliation is certainly the product of a historical context that is unique to it. But it gives us a formula that is still valid, as can be seen in the ongoing process of the expansion of the European Union.

Let me turn now to the proposal contained in the stimulating concept paper that was submitted to establish the terms of our debate (S/2014/30, annex). It is suggested that, at the end of a conflict, the Security Council could consider assigning a team of historical consultants the task of assisting the authorities of the affected country or countries to recover or protect the documents necessary to establishing a shared interpretation of the history of the conflict.

That suggestion seems quite relevant to some of the crisis situations that the Council is currently dealing with, for example, the Central African Republic. Knowing that discussions are under way for the possible establishment of a United Nations mission to help the Central African authorities to restore State institutions and the rule of law, dispatching a team of historical consultants could be considered in that framework. The work of that team could also be useful to the international commission of inquiry that, under resolution 2127 (2013), the Secretary-General is requested to rapidly establish in order to, inter alia, investigate reports of violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and abuses of human rights in Central African Republic.

Collecting sources and documents could also prove to be valuable to commence proceedings in national and international criminal courts. We are firmly convinced that the fight against impunity is an integral part of transitional justice and that it is essential to post-conflict peacebuilding. Prosecuting those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law will help to prevent such crimes from being committed again in the future.

We would therefore call for such a team to provide a voice for those without voices, namely, victims, and collect testimony from the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children and minorities. In so doing, we will avoid the pitfall of an official uniform narrative of the past that would be out of kilter with the conflict in fact experienced by the people. For post-conflict societies to reconcile themselves with their past, light — all the light — must be shed on events. It is in that way that hope for the future is born.