

316.647.5:37(049.32)

BOOK REVIEW „FORSONING – SKILT LANGS VEIEN“ by author Enver Djuliman

Prof. dr Lars Petter Soltvedt*

Enver Djuliman came to Norway in 1993, as a refugee from the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Employed by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, for the past 20 years he has been teaching human rights and reconciliation in the Western Balkans, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia. Based largely on his own background and experience, he has now published his book *Reconciliation – signs along the way*. His objective is that the book may be a resource to understand the complicated path towards peace and reconciliation in former traumatized societies.

Reconciliation is, as Enver Djuliman reminds us, indeed a complicated process, involving perhaps most importantly *the will* to reconcile. It may take place at different levels of society, between individuals, in local communities, among politicians and religious leaders. The individual, according to Enver Djuliman, must emancipate himself or herself from the collectivity and take responsibility for the reconstitution of trust and a viable peace, together with likeminded representatives with different religious or cultural background. Such *peace facilitators* should include academics, artists, politicians, journalists, war veterans, human rights activists, persons living in diaspora - or just the ordinary person living across the street, who does not want the children to inherit the hatred of a traumatic past.

The will to reconcile and live in peace may find its most important source and energy through the educational system. Enver Djuliman's own view after twenty years as an educator is that education is quite simply peace building by another name. Unfortunately, formal education in most of the countries where he has worked, is preoccupied more with what the state at different times and intervals may decide what is most useful and not what is most needed in terms of societal peace, inclusion and freedom of the individual to think and do what he or she values most. Until this change, education for peace may very well better rest in the hands of non-governmental organizations or even private educational institutions, freed from ethnocentric political solidarity.

* Associate professor in Political Science and Human Rights, University College of Southeast-Norway, e-mail: Lars.P.Soltvedt@hbv.no.

In the view of Enver Djuliman, the wars in the Western Balkans in the 1990s started at schools and Universities or in the shelves of libraries where subjective and ethnocentric recollections of the past are stored. To those of us who at times work and meet students and members of faculties at universities in the Western Balkans, this view is understandable given the present context of selective historical interpretations and political nepotism. Today, Enver Djuliman relates to us, students in Kosovo learn that the Balkan wars of 1912-1913 was the most unjust period in the history of the Albanian people. In Serbia, on the other hand, the same wars reflect positively current national sentiments, since at the time after that war, Kosovo reunited with Serbia.

This may serve as an example of the need to establish what Enver Djuliman terms “critical memory” in the teaching of history in schools and universities in the region. Rather than accepting official interpretations of the past, critical memory rests on individual and independent reflections of the recent and perhaps not so recent past. Critical memory may pave the path away from subjective ethnicism to human rights *with freedom for all everywhere*, as the former US president Franklin D. Roosevelt once put it.

Enver Djuliman’s book *Forsoning – skilt langs veien*, Oslo: Pax forlag, 2016 (260 pages) is an important reminder of the responsibility that we all should share, not only on how to relate and interpret history, but most importantly on how to relate to our fellow human beings. To our neighbor next door as well as to the one across the road. The book conveys specifically a message to such caretakers of societal peace as politicians, religious leaders, artists, journalists, war veterans, human rights activists, academics and teachers, of their responsibilities in terms of reconciliation and, one may hope – *perpetual peace!*

Carl von Clausewitz argued that war is the continuation of politics by other means. Certainly, in the countries of the Western Balkans, peace may be considered the continuation of war by other means. The French philosopher Antoine de Saint-Exupery writing on “matters of consequence” in his book *Le petit Prince*, tells us that it is only with the heart that one may see truly. Certainly, this poetic tale of a young extraterrestrial wanderer who appears in the desert and befriends a marooned pilot may convey a message to us all. The challenge, however, as Enver Djuliman puts it, is to bridge the gap between the mind and the heart. If the will to reconcile is strong enough, the heart will follow.

Enver Djuliman’s book is a challenging one. An important book that needs to be translated to perhaps a more worthwhile audience than the Norwegian. Anders Behring Breivik managed to traumatize us all in Norway by his mass killings of 77 mostly young people on the 22nd of July, 2011. The Norwegian state has traumatized many by its mishandling for many years of our own indigenous people and national minorities. The real value of Enver Djuliman’s book, however, will only become apparent when translated into the languages of countries where he will continue to work, hopefully for many years.