Guliciuc, Valeria Alina
("Babes-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania)

Solving conflicts in our nowadays society

> *"All wars are civil wars, because all men are brothers"*
> - Francois Fenelon[i]

The state of conflict is characteristic for all beings. But, only the human being can globalize a conflict at such a scale that could prejudice the entire human specie. What makes human specie to be so different from the others? Why is it that in our nowadays society, struggles degenerate into conflicts, and disputes into intractable conflicts? We will try to find the answer of these questions in the following lines.

One should not confuse the distinction between conflicts, competition and dispute. In order to understand these distinctions, we will try to define the notions involved. Conflict is usually defined as the situation "*when two or more parties, with perceived incompatible goals, seek to undermine each other's goal-seeking capability".* Conflicts usually are determined by a multitude of factors, the most notable being the interests, the struggle for power, the values and the actions leaded.

A clash of interests, values, actions or directions often sparks a conflict. Conflicts refer to the existence of that clash. Psychologically, a conflict exists when the reduction of one motivating stimulus involves an increase in another, so that a new adjustment is demanded. The word is applicable from the instant that the clash occurs. Even when we say that there is a potential conflict we are implying that there is already a conflict of direction even though a clash may not yet have occurred. [ii]

Competition refers also to a state of conflict, but a state that is legalized and taken as it is by its competitors. Each competitor knows that he and his adversaries have mutually inconsistent goals, so that when either party tries to reach their goal it will undermine the attempts of the other to reach theirs. Therefore, competitive situations will often, but not necessarily be the nature cause of a conflict.

Most people probably do not recognize a distinct difference between the terms "conflict" and "dispute." However, John Burton distinguished the two notions based on two criteria: time and issues in contention.[iii] Disputes, Burton suggests, are *"short-term disagreements that are relatively easy to resolve."* Long-term, deep-rooted problems that involve non-negotiable issues and are resistant to resolution are what Burton refers to as conflicts. Both types of disagreement can occur independently of one another, but they may also be connected.

Following Burton's distinction, disputes involve interests that are negotiable. That means it is possible to find a solution that at least partially meets the interests and needs of both sides. Long-term conflicts, on the other hand, usually involve non-negotiable issues.

They may involve deep-rooted moral or value differences, high-stakes distributional questions, or conflicts about who dominates whom. Fundamental human psychological needs for identity, security, and recognition are often at issue as well. None of these issues are negotiable. People will not compromise fundamental values. They will not give up their chance for a better life by submitting to continued injustice or domination, nor will they change or give up their self-identity. Deep-rooted conflicts over these types of issues tend to be drawn out and highly resistant to resolution, often escalating or evolving into intractable conflicts.[iv]

Costintino and Merchant[v] define conflict as the fundamental disagreement between two parties, of which a dispute is one possible outcome. This is similar to Douglas Yarn's observation that conflict is a state, rather than a process. People who have opposing interests, values, or needs are in a state of conflict, which may be latent or manifest, in which case it is brought forward in the form of a dispute or disputing process. In this sense, "*a conflict can exist without a dispute, but a dispute cannot exist without a conflict.*" [vi]

After having presented the main differences that exist between the notions: "conflict", "competition" and "dispute", we will focus on conflict outcome, development and resolution.

Conflict analysis is one of the most important steps in understanding the nature of a conflict. Studying the outcome of a conflict, may help us establish the strategy we have to adopt in order to solve it. Correctly diagnosing a conflict is the first stage of solving it. It is extremely important to understand in the substance of the conflict, not only to scratch the surface of it.

The outcome of the conflict refers to the factors/conditions that contributed to the existence of that particular conflict. In general terms, the conflict sources ca be divided into three categories. The first category refers to the internal sources of conflict that gather individual, social and cultural factors that induce the state of conflict. The external sources of the conflict can be divided into structural causes and cultural and institutional ones, like the degree of settlement, the degree of severity and the constancy and stability. Finally, the relational sources of conflict, like inequality and differentiation are the last factors that contribute to the outcome of a conflict.

Conflict can be divided into two categories: into protracted or intractable conflicts. Protracted conflicts are regarded as having an identity, religious or ethnic base, where communal groups fight each other. *Per-a-contraria*, intractable conflicts are deep-rooted, protracted, and resistant to resolution. Some people consider that intractable conflicts are impossible to resolve, others that there are long term conflict, that usually last more than one generation, but that are not unsolvable.

We consider that it is critical to properly identify the type of conflict, if we hope to manage the conflict through to resolution.

Only in this way, we can find alternative ways to solve a single conflict and choose the proper negotiation techniques. *The Russian front* negotiation technique refers to the situation when one part of the negotiation offers to the other one two alternative ways to solve the existing problem. The essence of this technique consists in the fact that one offer is impossible to accept because of its rough conditions. This technique, often transforms the other offer into something extremely attractive, although in reality, it is not. *The kamikaze technique* is not often recommended, because of its suicide approach. Usually this technique can the synthesized in the following words: "I prefer dying /disappearing that changing my offer." This is a very risking technique because it is based on forcing you adversary, in a situation when you do not have other viable alternatives. *The salami technique* refers to the step by step mentality, in other words, "slice by slice" mentality. This technique can be used in situations when time is not a problem and when the general conditions are expected to remain unchanged.

When choosing a one technique or another, we have to take into account two factors: the negotiator's personality, on one side, and the conflict characteristics, on the other side.

Conflict will always remain a source of dispute in real, as well as in theoretical terms. It is our duty to minimize the globalization of conflicts by understanding its true nature and by trying to isolate the effects of the most devastating state of the human being: the conflict.

ENDNOTES

i Francois de Salignac de la Monthe Fenelon (1651-1715)- teologist, french writer

ii information finded on www.vikipedia.org

iii John Burton, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 1990.

iv Heidi Burgess & Guy M. Burgess - *What Are Intractable Conflicts? on* www.beyondintractability.org

v Costintino, C.A. and Merchant C.S. Designing Conflict Management Systems: A Guide to Creating Productive and Healthy Organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996, pp 4-5

vi Douglas H. Yarn, ed. "Conflict" in Dictionary of Conflict Resolution, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1999. p.115.