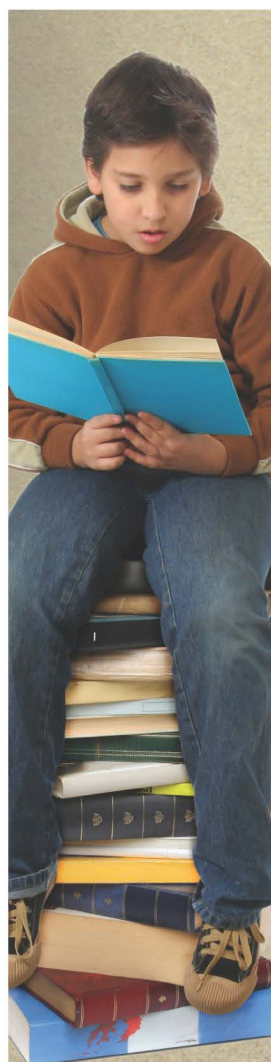


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**EUROPEAN  
HISTORICAL MEMORY:  
POLICIES, CHALLENGES  
AND PERSPECTIVES**

STUDY







DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT B:  
STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

# EUROPEAN HISTORICAL MEMORY: POLICIES, CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

STUDY

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT B:  
STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

# EUROPEAN HISTORICAL MEMORY: POLICIES, CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

STUDY

## Abstract

This note seeks to provide some reflections on the challenges, current policies and possible future prospects of 'historical memory' in a European context. Based on acknowledging the complex nature of collective memories in general and shared European historical remembrance in particular, including their susceptibility to political instrumentalisation, it is argued that a critical 'culture of remembering' needs to be developed. Such a culture requires increased efforts for nation states to come to terms with their own respective pasts in an unbiased way, yet at the same time embracing common European principles and values. In this context, the vital role of education as a tool to create an informed historical consciousness is emphasised, which provides the basis for dealing confidently not only with Europe's past, but also present and future.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This note seeks to provide some critical reflections on the challenges, current policies and possible future prospects of 'historical memory' in a European context, yet without laying claim to attempting to put forward an exhaustive examination of the issue. The text comprises the following constitutive parts:

- 1) an introduction, briefly outlining the characteristics and intricacies of the concepts of 'historical memory' and 'remembrance';
- 2) an outline of the particular challenges involved in establishing forms of pan-European historical memory, and a presentation of current European Union practices;
- 3) an exploration of how future European memory policies might be developed in view of existing shortcomings, with particular emphasis being given to educational measures; and
- 4) a series of concluding recommendations.

### 1. Introduction: Historical Memory and Remembrance – a Complex Concept

'Historical memory' is widely considered to be a specific form of collective memory in scholarly literature and as such to be distinguished from individual practices of remembering the past. In that it helps to capture and arrange the past, historical memory serves above all the function of community building, especially in the context of rapid changes in society, politics, economy and culture. Yet while it is being geared towards the past and providing a collective view as well as the 'sense' of the same is acknowledged to be a characteristic element, the concept proves to be elusive and suggests a number of challenges. Most importantly, historical memory is not necessarily about reflecting 'historical realities', but instead incorporates a distinct degree of subjectivity, given that the choice of how to remember the past necessarily involves value judgements. Accordingly, historical memory can potentially play a functional role, which exposes it not only to the politics of memory, but also to the danger of it becoming a tool for a deliberate misinterpretation or falsification of history.

### 2. European Historical Remembrance: Challenges and Current Practices

Traditionally, collective historical memory has developed in conjunction with individual state- or nation-building processes. Three elements have emerged as being characteristic in this regard:

- I) there is a largely positive correlation between historical memory and nation (building) in that certain moments in a nation's past are perceived as positive landmarks, or, less frequently, in that certain negative or even traumatic experiences of the past serve as a contrast to or justification for the present;
- II) historical memory is geared towards specific events in the past rather than 'history' as such, thus allowing for a better accessibility of historical developments for a wider public, but also 'essentialising' and simplifying the complexities of national histories; in connection with this,
- III) historical memory tends to elevate national history and create myths about it, thus turning a nation's past into a sacred object.

However, not even at national level is historical memory-building an easy task, given the persistence of manifold cultural, social or educational divisions that are often only covered by the language of 'one nation (state)'. In a supranational context, the perception of the

past proves all the more heterogeneous and problems for having a collective memory or even defining common historical landmarks are multiplied.

European policies have nevertheless made an effort to foster a 'European historical memory' in order to add legitimacy to the European project and foster European identity. While traditional reference points had been European 'heritage' in a broad sense of the word, the Second World War as the trigger for European integration, and the achievements of integration per se, a new and more concrete focus has powerfully emerged over recent years, which puts the remembrance of 20th-century totalitarianism – notably National Socialism and Stalinism – in its centre. Preceded by initiatives since the 1990s, especially of the European Parliament, to increase awareness for the Holocaust and – since the Eastern Enlargement – also Stalinist crimes, efforts to keep history alive are supported in particular by the Europe for Citizens Programme launched in 2006. The emphasis of European historical remembrance on totalitarianism is perpetuated in the on-going negotiations for a renewed Europe for Citizens Programme 2014-2020, in which the remembrance strand has taken on greater significance, reflected in the considerable increase of funds that have been earmarked for actions in this field.

### 3. Developing Future European Memory Policies

Upon closer inspection, what might appear to be one coherent EU Memory Policy proves to be far from uncontested. Rather, there is still a palpable competition between two partly competing memory frames: the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust', that has shaped Western European post-war culture, and the 'National Socialism and Stalinism as equally evil', that suits the needs of Eastern European nations to come to terms with their respective communist past. These differences are a reminder of the difficulties in settling diverging interpretations of the past, not only across the political spectrum but also between different Member States.

At the same time, concentrating European efforts for transnational historical remembrance on the Holocaust and National Socialism as well as Stalinism proves problematic in two respects. Firstly, such an approach fosters a biased black-and-white scheme of history that makes Europe's 'dark past' appear as the logical alternative to its 'bright present'. Such a teleological and at the same time simplistic view not only does injustice to the richness as well as complex nature of European history, and leaves out other crucial issues such as colonialism, but also hampers a better informed understanding of the European integration process. Secondly, narrowing historical memory to National Socialism and Stalinism, which are elevated to a negative foundation myth, reduces incentives at critically examining stereotypes and sacred cows of one's own national history.

Accordingly, a critical 'European culture of remembering' rather than an imposed singular 'remembrance culture', with standardised views on and reference points of Europe's past, is argued for. This requires capacities for a critical 'reworking the past' at national levels to be generated, based on common European principles and values. Key requirements of the envisaged 'culture of remembering' include:

- approaching Europe's past on the foundation of European core values, such as humanism, tolerance and democracy;
- creating an open sphere of discussion that provides for mutual understanding and reconciliation both within and between European nations;
- addressing uncomfortable segments of national histories;
- basing judgements of the past exclusively on the examination of historical facts, while renouncing the notion of 'historical truth'; and
- acknowledging the potential risks in legislating for a specific view on or memory of the past.

Such an approach would seem to do justice to the multiplicity of existing historical memories in Europe, while at the same time providing an incentive to scrutinise them through a shared transnational approach.

A particularly important role for such a 'culture of remembering' to develop is ascribed to education policies in Europe, which are required to:

- raise awareness for European diversity both in the past and present;
- entrust teachers and students with the means required to address their own countries' history objectively and in broader (trans-)European contexts; and thus
- encourage young Europeans to become actively involved in discussing history and contribute to an informed historical memory.

To achieve this aim, priority needs to be given to:

- I) adapting existing curricula and didactics by moving attention away from national to European and global approaches to history, and allowing young Europeans to form self-critical historical awareness through open and discursive teaching formats; and
- II) providing tailor-made (history) teacher training which fits with these needs.

While the European Union cannot do a 'reworking of the past' for the Member States, it is certainly in a position to actively promote and support national efforts in this regard. For that purpose, the European Union cannot only make use of 'soft power' to push Member States into taking action, but should also fall back on existing European programmes. These include the Europe for Citizens Programme, through which multinational history and remembrance projects can be funded, as well as the Erasmus Programme, which provides support for transnational exchange programmes and study visits both for students and staff. Nothing speaks against expanding these Programmes in the future, or perhaps complementing them with other European action.

## 4. Recommendations and Conclusions

The findings of this note are condensed in seven concrete suggestions:

- 1) Recognition of historical memory as an elusive concept;
- 2) Awareness-raising of the difficulties of trans-European historical memory;
- 3) Acknowledgement of the EU's achievements in raising awareness of the past;
- 4) Consideration of the shortcomings of current EU memory policies;
- 5) Development of a European 'culture of remembering';
- 6) Acknowledgement of the central role of education; and
- 7) Making utmost use of European means to support national policies.



## 1. INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL MEMORY AND REMEMBRANCE – A COMPLEX CONCEPT<sup>1</sup>

A European Collective Memory, is it Possible? was the provocative title of a short journal article from 1993,<sup>2</sup> and this question raised twenty years ago seems more central today than ever. Indeed, debate about collective forms of remembering the past is ubiquitous in contemporary academic, public, as well as political discourse. In Europe with its versatile and in many respects problematic history, issues of common historical memory prove particularly complex and contested: not only because settling pluralism is a difficult task per se, but also because the prerogative of interpreting the past touches upon fundamental questions of 'where do we come from?' and 'where do we go from here?', thus providing a potentially powerful instrument to (de-)legitimise the present and shape the future.

Before we take a more detailed look at current practices, potential opportunities and the challenges facing 'historical memory' in a European context, however, it is imperative to aim for a clearer understanding of the concept. As with other concepts in the social and cultural sciences, this is not an easy task. Two problems immediately arise from the very term itself: firstly, the difficulty of linking a basically individual ability to the public sphere and collectivising it, namely the act of remembering; secondly, bridging the gap between history as a discipline which purports to rest on the principle of objectivity and on the processing of facts, and memory as an intrinsically subjective process.<sup>3</sup>

The first problem has been addressed in involving the concept of 'collective memory' in academic discourse. In the broadest sense of the word, collective memory as an expression of collective identity is the shared pool of information stored in individual memories of a group; that is, the common memory of a group of people which may be passed down from one generation to the next, and which provides a basis from which the group can "derive an awareness of its unity or peculiarity".<sup>4</sup> Similarly, yet more specifically, historical memory has been defined as "the memory or the aggregate of memories, conscious or not, of an experience that was lived through and/or transformed into myth by a living collective body, of whose identity the sentiment of the past forms an integral part".<sup>5</sup>

One of the first to attribute memories directly to a collective entity was the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), who is widely seen as the pioneer in developing the concept of collective memory, and to whom the various approaches and premises in the field of 'memory studies' still commonly trace their scholarly roots. As early as in 1925, Halbwachs argued in his *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*<sup>6</sup> that individual memory developed in interaction with social networks and the larger community. Since it was the product of social change, memory was itself a process in the sense of a constantly changing representation of the past. In his influential *La*

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks for their support in drafting and reviewing this note go to my colleagues Ana Maria Nogueira, Filipa Azevedo and Jonathan Little.

<sup>2</sup> See Namer 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Nora once put this gap into the slightly provocative formula: "Memory divides, history unifies." Nora 2001, p. 686.

<sup>4</sup> Assman 1995, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> "[...] le souvenir ou l'ensemble de souvenirs, conscients ou non, d'une expérience vécue et/ou mythifiée par une collectivité vivante de l'identité de laquelle le sentiment du passé fait partie intégrante." Nora 1978, p. 398.

<sup>6</sup> See Halbwachs 1925.

Mémoire Collective (English: The Collective Memory),<sup>7</sup> he later developed this theory and claimed that all memory depended on: a) the group in which one lived, and, b) the status one held within that group. In order to remember, it was impossible to remove oneself and one's own memories from prevailing collective thought. In other words, collective memory and individual remembering were considered to be inherently linked: while collective memory endured and drew strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it was individuals as group members who remembered.<sup>8</sup>

Pursuing the question of how we remember the past, how the past is depicted or portrayed in an individual's and society's consciousness, and in considering mechanisms involved in shaping memory, Halbwachs distinguished between collective and historical memory. While acknowledging historical memory to be a specific form of collective memory and defining the former as "sequence of events for which national history conserves the memory"<sup>9</sup>, Halbwachs nevertheless regarded these two forms of memory as being partly juxtaposed. He saw collective memory as: "a continuous stream of thought, of a continuity that does not have anything artificial, since it retains from the past nothing but that which is still living or capable of living in the consciousness of the group that maintains it".<sup>10</sup> Existing outside time and space, collective memory was not an elaborate construct and in a constant state of change. It was not one single unified whole, but an assortment of 'memories', adapted to various groups and interpretations and therefore fluid as well as essentially inward-looking in character. Historical memory, in contrast, he described as something beyond specific groups in society; something that 'moulds' memory and attempts to attain one single objective historical truth with a distinctive external perspective.

Personally opposed to the idea of the universality of history, Halbwachs considered the term "historical memory" to be somewhat unfortunate. Nevertheless, historical memory has become perhaps the best known of the wide range of meanings collective memory can assume, and the most successful of the cognate terms derived from this concept.<sup>11</sup> This development in approach is not least due to the structural changes history and other related disciplines have undergone since the Second World War; changes which can be summarised under the heading "cultural turn" and which may provide a solution to the second root problem outlined above: the juxtaposition between history and memory.<sup>12</sup>

Through acknowledging the causal and socially constitutive role of cultural processes, 'culture' in a broad sense of the word has become a central topic of study and debate. In this context, emphasis has shifted from 'facts' (political, social, economic) to 'communication' (be it of meanings, values, etc.), and from positivist epistemology toward 'meaning'. Approaches and objects of study have multiplied in recent decades, and closer ties with social sciences, language studies, psychology, etc., have been sought. Against this

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<sup>7</sup> See Halbwachs 1997. Deported to Buchenwald, the author died there in March 1945, and his work *Mémoire collective* was published only posthumously (1950). For an English edition, see Halbwachs 1980.

<sup>8</sup> The concepts of "collective identity" and "collective memory" are most frequently used in the context of studies on nation-building, but the group of people referred to may equally be represented by regions and cities or political parties, to name just a few alternatives.

<sup>9</sup> "[...] suite des événements dont l'histoire nationale conserve le souvenir." Halbwachs 1997, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> "[...] un courant de pensée continu, d'une continuité qui n'a rien d'artificiel, puisqu'elle ne retient du passé que ce qui est encore vivant ou capable de vivre dans la conscience du groupe qui l'entretient." Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>11</sup> A selection of cognate terms to collective memory is presented, e.g., under <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/CollectiveMemoryDefinitions.htm>. Examples include: "collected memory", "commemoration", "generational memory", "heritage", "historical consciousness" and "social" or "public memory".

<sup>12</sup> For a brief introduction into the field of "cultural history", see, e.g., Arcangeli 2011.

background, 'memory' has increasingly become an object of interest for historical research,<sup>13</sup> and the reciprocal relationship between history and memory can today be seen in terms of nexus and conditionality rather than natural opposition.<sup>14</sup> Some authors in the field of historical memory studies, the number of which has risen so steeply over the last few decades that criticism has been voiced over the "memory industry",<sup>15</sup> go even further and equate history and memory: is not history the end-product of memory anyway? And is what we call memory today perhaps simply (constructed) history? Pierre Nora, for example, best known for his work on French national identity and especially *Lieux de mémoire*, defines history as a means by which modern societies capture and arrange past events which would otherwise be forgotten due to processes of change.<sup>16</sup> This idea of capturing and arranging the past has become particularly important since the 19th century, with rapid changes in society, politics, the economy and culture driving people to attempt to grasp the past.

Yet remembering past and preventing it from disappearing from our memory is not necessarily a question of examining and studying 'historical reality', but may tempt us to reconstruct reality in a way that will satisfy certain needs or fulfil specific purposes. One may, therefore, argue that memory has been replaced to a greater or lesser degree by reconstructed history. One particular trait of such reconstructions of the past and memory are not least 'invented traditions': traditions invented in the present, but projected back to the past, and – as historical fiction – tailored to justify current social norms and structures and defend lines of action taken against both internal and external pressures.<sup>17</sup> Projection and justification are common features of all types of 'historical memory': consciously referring back to and commemorating the past in order to legitimise – or perhaps more neutrally: 'make sense of' – present conditions and in doing so make them fit for the future.

Without going into further details of contemporary scholarly debate on and interpretation of the concept of 'historical memory', a few conclusions can nevertheless be drawn:

- 1) it is widely agreed that historical memory is a form of collective memory and as such can be distinguished from what might be called individual, private or personal memory;
- 2) though generally acknowledged as directed towards the past and providing a common view of the same or parts thereof, historical memory eludes any uniform definition;

<sup>13</sup> Out of the vast amount of literature only two studies with a European focus may be mentioned: Müller 2002 and Eder/Spohn 2005.

<sup>14</sup> On this issue see, e.g., Vigne 2006, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Sharp criticism against what is perceived as the memory industry was raised as early as the turn of the Millennium. See, for example, Klein 2000. See also Winter 2000. The unbroken interest in and prominence of historical memory studies is not least reflected in the fact that specific academic journals are devoted to the field, among them *History & Memory*. *Studies in Representation of the Past*, published since 1998. An outlook to the future is offered by Rosenfeld 2009.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Nora 1989.

<sup>17</sup> On the concept "invention of tradition" see Hobsbawm/Ranger 1992. "Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past [...] However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely fictitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition." Ibid., p. 1f.

- 3) historical memory should not be seen as something objective and unbiased, but as incorporating a distinct degree of subjectivity, and is by necessity based on value judgements; accordingly:
- 4) historical memory can potentially play a functional role, which exposes it not only to politics of memory, but also to the danger of it becoming a tool for a deliberate misinterpretation or falsification of history.

These introductory comments take us to a critical assessment of the feasibility and challenges of a common 'European historical memory' and an overview of existing political initiatives in this regard.



## 2. EUROPEAN HISTORICAL REMEMBRANCE: CHALLENGES AND CURRENT PRACTICES

### 2.1. The Dilemma of a Pan-European Historical Memory

At the national level, historical remembrance actively practised and nurtured by corresponding policies is a widespread phenomenon with a long tradition all around the world. The actual forms of remembering and commemorating the past can vary a lot, as can the media employed to promote it: school and textbooks, academic literature, museums, historic monuments, national holidays, artistic expression (music, visual arts, plays), radio and film, etc.

Collective historical memory at a national level is characteristically dependent on the respective state- or nation-building process. While nation-building provides obvious historical landmarks for collective memory, historical memory can make an active contribution to constructing or (re)structuring national identity.<sup>18</sup> It can be argued, for example, that in the case of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, adopted in 1776, has contributed at least as much to the genesis of an 'American Nation' as the active commemoration of this historical event over the centuries, most prominently in the context of the annual Independence Day celebrated with great pomp and patriotism on 4 July.<sup>19</sup>

The commemoration of the Declaration of Independence in the US is a point in case for historical memory in general, notably in three respects:

- 1) The correlation between historical memory and nation (building) is typically a positive one in which certain moments in the past are to be perceived as successful, for example, victory over national enemies or overcoming perils both from within or without; such examples include the granting of the Magna Charta Libertatum and the Bill of Rights in England or the Soviet Union's 1945 victory over Germany, which is still commemorated in today's Russia every year. Alternatively, affirmative legitimacy for an existing political order can also arise indirectly, in that certain negative or even traumatic experiences of the past can serve as a contrast to or justification for the present, exempli gratia, the Polish memory of foreign occupation and domination both in the wake of the country's partitions in the second half of the 18th century and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, or German Vergangenheitsbewältigung ("coming to terms with the past") after National Socialism and the Holocaust.
- 2) Historical memory is geared towards specific moments and events in the past rather than 'history' as such. Such a process of specifying leads to a narrowing down, simplification and essentialisation of what might well be intricate historical developments, in order to make them palpable and accessible for a wider public audience or 'consumer'. At the same time, it assists the political class in determining the general 'essence' of a given community's history. The historical moments and events referred to are normally those with highly charged symbolic meaning, marking political and social upheavals that ruptured an existing system or state of events. Inherent in such an approach is providing a selective picture of a nation's

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<sup>18</sup> On the constructed nature of national identities, see Benedict Anderson's pathbreaking work *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1983).

<sup>19</sup> On the Declaration of Independence and its impact see, e.g., Gerber 2002, Armitage 2007, Dupont/Onuf 2008.

past, in which long-term historical structures are widely neglected in favour of events, and priority hence given to a *histoire événementielle* (“eventual history”) rather than a *longue durée* approach.<sup>20</sup>

- 3) Historical memory is not only in danger of oversimplifying the past, but also of elevating national history and creating myths about it, thus turning it into a sacred object. National narratives of the past tend to dismiss historical contingencies and inconsistencies as well as the fact that even events commonly associated as having been truly ‘national’ always have winners and losers. On the one hand, it is in the nature of the beast that a nation’s history – which by necessity forms a genuine part of the history of their individual citizens – is preferably perceived in terms of glory, progress or heroic resistance against injustice rather than infamy, regression or wrongfulness by its inheritors. On the other hand, reducing complexity and constructing national(ist) myths of one’s past allows historical experiences to become collective (see also Point 2 above). Historical memory is invariably about community building. Renouncing the notion of a ‘memory stock’ shared nationally would undermine not only the very concept of collective memory, but also the idea of the nation as a community of shared values and experiences.

Yet despite its prevalence and all efforts made in politics, education and culture to foster it, historical memory-building is not an easy task even at national level. A closer look reveals that most societies – including those in the Western world – are much less homogenous than they might appear at first sight, with a series of potential divisions making common historical memory a challenge:

- Differences with regard to social class, education, etc., reflected in varying perceptions of the past;
- Regional discrepancies (for instance, Northern and Southern states in the US, Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England in the UK);
- Minorities or immigrant groups perpetuating their own home-grown traditions, including language, rather than being acculturated.

Divisions of this kind within a given political entity cannot easily be overcome and manifest themselves in the difficulty of finding commonly accepted landmarks in the past on which to build a universal ‘national memory’.

Even more problematic than any national historical memory is a collective remembrance of the past at a supra-national level, particularly within Europe. When talking about Europe, it is even harder to envisage a homogenous political body than in one particular nation state, despite all the undeniably significant achievements of the European integration process over the last few decades. Even more than in national histories, the often violent and war-ridden history between states knows winners and losers, whose perception of the past is often diametrically opposed. For this reason alone, a simple transposition of one or more specific national historical memories to a European level is impossible.

Three alternatives would seem conceivable: 1) to simply accept the diversity and parallelism of historical memories in Europe with all ensuing problems; 2) to base a common European historical memory on broadly defined topoi, for example ‘European

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<sup>20</sup> The expression *longue durée* as coined by the French Annales School describes an approach to the study of history that focuses on slowly evolving structures and mentalities rather than “historical events” and the deeds of “great men”.

liberty', that are sufficiently abstract to avoid potential conflicts, but might for the same reason be at risk of no longer serving as a shared reference point due to them being too vague and hence open to arbitrary interpretation; 3) to construct a genuinely new European collective memory working with clearly defined historical landmarks. The latter appears to be a key challenge for current European political initiatives.

## 2.2. Initiatives for European Historical Remembrance

Attempts to add a transnational layer to existing national collective identities and memories have been made by European political elites ever since the beginnings of European integration. Traditionally, three reference points proved important:

- 1) generic notions of 'European heritage' that stress the role of a common culture as the crucial element of European identity, while abstaining from focusing on one particular element or any specific historical period;<sup>21</sup>
- 2) the two World Wars, the horrors of which gave momentum to set up 'Europe' as a supranational peace project designed to avoid similar culminations of radical nationalism in the future;<sup>22</sup>
- 3) European integration itself, the historical achievements of which function as a source of self-legitimacy for the Union and are corroborated by its official symbols (European flag, European anthem and Europe Day).<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, it was essentially not before the turn of the 21st century that the potential to promote not only European citizenship, but also European identity and a collective historical memory as a crucial element in strengthening and safeguarding the process of European integration was fully recognised. In particular, the failure of the ambitious "Constitution for Europe" project, the deathblow to which was dealt by the rejection of the draft text in France and the Netherlands in the 2005 referenda, and which was to be seen as an expression of growing public disenchantment with European (Union) high politics,<sup>24</sup> proved the need for decisive political action going beyond what had mainly been symbolic politics.

In its wake and preceded, among other things, by a detailed qualitative study funded by the European Commission on The Europeans, Culture and Cultural Values, encompassing 27 European countries,<sup>25</sup> a new citizenship programme was launched in December 2006 by Decision 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament (EP) and of the Council. The Europe for

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., the Declaration on European Identity, which had been adopted by European Heads of State at the Copenhagen Summit in October 1973 (Council 1973). More recent European action in this regard includes the European Heritage Label. On the establishment of a European Union Action for the European Heritage Label in November 2011 (EP/Council 2011). The European Capital of Culture initiative also takes up the central idea of the existence of a common, although diverse, European heritage. For a brief history of the initiative see [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc443\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc443_en.htm).

<sup>22</sup> The Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 can be read as an expression of such reasoning. It itself followed in the wake of a long tradition of thought going back to the 19th century that argued for a European (con-)federation as a means to overcome nationalism in Europe. Cf., e.g., Winston Churchill's famous call for "United States of Europe" in a speech at the University of Zurich on 19 September 1946.

<sup>23</sup> Those symbols, which had been used by the Council of Europe even in the 1950s and 1960s, were formally approved by the European Council in June 1985, which in so doing followed corresponding suggestions of the ad hoc committee A People's Europe, established in 1984 and composed of representatives of the Member States (known also as "Adonnino Committee" after its chairman, Pietro Adonnino). For the Committee's reports, see Council 1985.

<sup>24</sup> On the struggle for a "Constitution for Europe" and its failure in the French and Dutch referenda see, e.g., O'Neill 2009 and Pusca 2009. See also Crum 2012.

<sup>25</sup> See Commission 2006.

Citizens Programme, established for the period 2007 to 2013,<sup>26</sup> put in place the legal framework to support a wide range of activities and organisations promoting “active European citizenship”, meaning the involvement of citizens and Civil Society Organisations in the process of European integration. The overall objectives pursued in the Programme<sup>27</sup> include: “developing a sense of European identity among European citizens based on recognised common values, history and culture”.<sup>28</sup> More specifically, in this regard the Programme aims to:

- “bring together people from local communities across Europe to [...] learn from history and to build for the future”, and
- “making the idea of Europe more tangible for its citizens by promoting and celebrating Europe’s values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past”.<sup>29</sup>

Given the importance ascribed to historical memory, one of the Programme’s four action lines is explicitly devoted to “Active European Remembrance”.<sup>30</sup> This action line is aimed to promote and preserve active European remembrance, specifically by sponsoring projects designed to maintain former concentration camps as well as main sites and archives associated with mass deportations, and to commemorate the victims of mass extermination and deportation that took place during National Socialism and Stalinism. This specific historical focus is based on the assumption that: 1) in order to fully appreciate the meaning of fundamental European (Union) principles such as freedom, democracy and respect for human rights, it is vital that breaches of those very principles by 20th-century totalitarianism be remembered; 2) only by raising awareness for Europe’s violent past and the Second World War in particular can citizens meaningfully engage in reflecting on the origins of the EU, the history of European integration as a civilising project preserving peace among its members, and finally on today’s Europe, thereby moving beyond the past and building the future.

Nevertheless, the actual role historical memory plays in the Programme is qualified by the fact that while formally being on equal terms with the other types of action, only 4% of the overall financial envelope of EUR 215 million<sup>31</sup> is being spent for “Active European Remembrance”, far less than on any of the other action lines. This was also one of the main shortcomings cited in the 2010 intermediary evaluation of the Programme, which highlighted that the available budget did clearly not match the continuing high number of actual applications, with a considerable level of unmet demand especially for Action 4 Active European Remembrance.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See EP/Council 2006. Two years later, the decision was slightly amended by Decision 1358/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (see EP/Council 2008).

<sup>27</sup> For a summary of the programme’s main objective, see also the following websites: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/objectives\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/objectives_en.php) and [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/justice\\_freedom\\_security/citizenship\\_of\\_the\\_union/l29015\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/citizenship_of_the_union/l29015_en.htm).

<sup>28</sup> EP/Council 2006, Article 1 (2) (b).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Article 2 (a) and 2 (c).

<sup>30</sup> The three other action lines are: “Active Citizens for Europe” (Action 1), “Active Civil Society in Europe” (Action 2), and “Together for Europe” (Action 3). Historical remembrance is also partly covered by Action 3, which supports – among other things – high-visibility events such as commemorations of historical events. For a detailed description of the programme, including submission and selection procedures, see the Programme Guide (EACEA 2011a).

<sup>31</sup> Within the annual budgets, the budgetary authority allocated supplementary funds in 2009 (EUR 3 million) and 2010 (EUR 1.775 million), thus increasing the total budget of the programme to EUR 219.775 million (as of 2010).

<sup>32</sup> For the full evaluation report, see Ecorys 2010. For the official report on the mid-term evaluation provided for the Council, the EP, the EESC and CoR on 1 March 2011, see Commission 2011a. See also the final report on the impact of the Europe for Citizens Programme, published in July 2013 (Commission 2013).

Against this background, the European Commission was prompted to raise the image and financial means for the Remembrance strand within the next generation of the Europe for Citizens Programme (2014-2020), which was presented in December 2011 (COM(2011) 884 final)<sup>33</sup> and is currently approaching the end of the legislative process in the Council and the European Parliament.<sup>34</sup> The increased importance of historical memory results from the fact alone that “Remembrance and European Citizenship” is now only one of two envisaged programmatic strands, the other one being “Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation”. In line with this streamlining of actions, the financial envelope suggested for the Remembrance strand was considerably augmented too, now amounting to around 18.6% of the global budget of EUR 229 million compared to 4% of the global budget of the Programme in the period 2007-2013. Still, the distribution of the operational appropriations reserved for the action lines to be financed, amounting to EUR 206 million, would thus remain largely uneven.<sup>35</sup>

This made the responsible Committee for Culture and Education (CULT) in the European Parliament suggest a further increase of funds available for Remembrance by requesting around 25% (EUR 57.25 million) of the total budget be allocated to this strand, both at the expense of Strand 2 dealing with democratic engagement and civic participation (60% or EUR 137.4 million as compared to EUR 139.45 million in the Commission’s proposal) and particularly the Horizontal Action for dissemination and multiplication of results (5% or EUR 11.45 million as compared to EUR 23.95 million in the Commission’s proposal).<sup>36</sup> In an amendment to the preamble, the Committee argued that: “A balanced distribution of financial resources between the two strands of the programme is both desirable and appropriate, knowing that working on legacies common to Europeans and sharing collective memories of both suffering and success may no less contribute to the genesis of a European civic culture than actions directly aimed at encouraging civic participation.”<sup>37</sup>

In other respects, too, the CULT Committee made an effort to further augment the role of (historical) remembrance in the new Europe for Citizens Programme, notably by:

- 1) Stressing the “importance of keeping the memories of the past alive as a means of moving beyond the past and building the future”, accordingly arguing for the relevance of “historical, cultural and intercultural aspects” as well as the “existing links between remembrance and European identity”;<sup>38</sup>
- 2) Highlighting the remembrance part of the programme even in the general objectives, where “contributing to citizens’ understanding about the Union, and fostering their sense of belonging to a Europe united in its diversity, through remembrance, with a view to developing a sense of a common history” is explicitly defined as one of the two key aims;<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See Commission 2011b. For an assessment of the new Europe for Citizens Programme, see the EP’s publication *Europe for Citizens* (EP 2012).

<sup>34</sup> For more information on the current state of the legislative process, see <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2011/0436%28APP%29&l=en#tab-0>.

<sup>35</sup> The difference of EUR 23 million between operational appropriations and the global budget – slightly more than 10% of the latter – are reserved for “appropriations of an administrative nature”.

<sup>36</sup> See the Draft European Parliament Legislative Resolution on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme “Europe for Citizens”. In: EP 2013, pp. 5-46.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Amendment 8b.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Amendment 8a.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Amendment 26. The second general objective suggested is “fostering European citizenship and improving conditions for civic and democratic participation and for intercultural dialogue at Union level, through a better understanding of the Union’s institutions, policies and politics”. The Commission’s proposal had originally defined in a less committal way “Strengthen remembrance and enhance capacity for civic

- 3) Redefining the focus of the first strand of the Programme towards historical memory, for example by renaming it “Fostering Remembrance of European History and Developing a Sense of European Identity and of Belonging to the Union” (rather than “European Remembrance and Citizenship”),<sup>40</sup> and actually introducing the term into the text, which had not been the case before.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, the European Parliament essentially followed the Commission’s proposal of potentially widening the focus of the Remembrance strand to also encompass “activities concerning other reference points in recent European history”,<sup>42</sup> while remaining predominantly concerned with 20th-century totalitarianism. Accordingly, the funds within this strand are mainly reserved for “initiatives reflecting on causes of totalitarian regimes in Europe’s modern history (especially but not exclusively Nazism and Stalinism) and to commemorate their victims”.<sup>43</sup>

The European Parliament’s defining National Socialism, particularly the Holocaust, and Stalinism as the main objects of European historical memory is in line with earlier political initiatives in this regard. Following previous resolutions on racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism,<sup>44</sup> and in the wake of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on

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participation at the Union level” as the general objective of the new Europe for Citizens Programme. Concerning the specific objectives, the Parliament’s draft resolution also works out the role of history – and culture in general – in a more explicit way than the Commission’s proposal: See Amendment 29, “1. raising awareness of remembrance, common history, cultural heritage, identity, and the Union’s aim of promoting peace, tolerance, mutual understanding, its values, its cultural and linguistic diversity and the well-being of its peoples, by stimulating debate, actions, reflection and the development of networks and by bringing together people from local communities and associations across Europe to share and exchange experiences and to learn from history”, replacing the original “1. raise awareness on remembrance, the Union’s history, identity and aim by stimulating debate, reflection and networking”.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Amendment 57.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ibid., Amendment 59: “[The Strand] will give preference to actions which encourage tolerance, mutual understanding through intercultural dialogue, reconciliation and historical memory, as well as a sense of belonging to the Union, as a means of moving beyond the past and building the future, in particular with a view to reaching the younger generation, and at the same time combating racism and intolerance.” Originally it had been formulated as follows: “[The Strand] will give preference to actions which encourage tolerance and reconciliation with a view to reaching the younger generation.”

<sup>42</sup> See Annex Part 1 Section 1 Paragraph 2 of the Commission Proposal. The CULT Committee opted for a slightly different and longer wording: “activities concerning other defining moments in recent European history and important milestones in European integration”. Draft European Parliament Legislative Resolution on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme “Europe for Citizens”. In: EP 2013, pp. 5-46, here Amendment 59.

<sup>43</sup> See Annex Part 1 Section 1 Paragraph 2 of the Commission Proposal. The draft resolution of the European Parliament further specifies: “[...] initiatives prompting reflection and debate on causes of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes in Europe’s modern history (especially but not exclusively Nazism that led to the Holocaust and totalitarian communist regimes, including Stalinism) and commemorating the victims of their crimes.” Draft European Parliament Legislative Resolution on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing for the period 2014-2020 the programme “Europe for Citizens”. In: EP 2013, pp. 5-46, here Amendment 59. “Nazism” and “Stalinism” themselves are anything but unproblematic terms and reflect still on-going debates about finding a proper terminology for 20th-century totalitarianisms. Questions that can be raised include: Does the term “Nazism” serve as a meta-terminology, also covering Italian Fascism or perhaps even Franco’s rule in Spain? Should “Fascism” perhaps be given preference over “Nazism”? Does “Stalinism” only refer to the regime established and led by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, or is it a synonym for all kinds of totalitarian communist regimes? Would “Bolshevism” perhaps be an alternative term? In the current text, “Stalinism” is mainly referring to Stalin’s totalitarian communism in the Soviet Union, “National Socialism” – rather than “Nazism”, which is not commonly used in scholarly writing – to Hitler’s rule in Germany between 1933 and 1945. This does not question, however, the existence of potential other forms of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century.

<sup>44</sup> See especially EP 1994, EP 1995a, EP 1995b, EP 1997 and EP 2000.



the Holocaust (26-28 January 2000),<sup>45</sup> the European Parliament issued a Declaration on the Remembrance of the Holocaust (OJ C 121, 24.4.2001, p. 503)<sup>46</sup> in July 2000, in which the latter was declared a historical singularity that “fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation and must be forever seared in the collective memory of all peoples”.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, the declaration called on the Commission and the Council:

“1. [...] to strengthen the efforts to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust, both in those countries that have already done much and those that choose to join this effort;”

“2. [...] to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions;” and also

“3. [...] to encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual European Day of Holocaust Remembrance”.<sup>48</sup>

In 2005, the European Parliament’s Resolution on Remembrance of the Holocaust, Anti-Semitism and Racism<sup>49</sup> reiterated the unique importance of the Holocaust as a historical reference point. Stressing that “Europe must not forget its own history”, the resolution declared the “concentration and extermination camps built by the Nazis” to be “among the most shameful and painful pages of the history of our continent”, and that the “crimes committed at Auschwitz must live on in the memory of future generations, as a warning against genocide of this kind, rooted in contempt for other human beings, hatred, anti-Semitism, racism and totalitarianism”.<sup>50</sup> The European Parliament therefore urged Council, Commission and Member States to: “promoting awareness, especially among young people, of the history and lessons of the Holocaust”. Suggestions included “making Holocaust education and European citizenship standard elements in school curricula throughout the EU”, “ensuring that school programmes in the 25 EU countries address the teaching of the Second World War with the utmost historical rigour”, and “making 27 January European Holocaust Memorial Day”.<sup>51</sup> The latter was de-facto realised at an international level by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/7 on 1 November 2005, establishing a special commemoration day for the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>52</sup>

In 2008/2009, the European Parliament actively worked towards supplementing the Holocaust Remembrance Day with a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism. Preceded by the Council of Europe Resolution 1481 (Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes, 25 January

<sup>45</sup> A joint declaration was unanimously adopted at the high-level Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which served as the founding document of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF) – since January 2013 the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) – as an Intergovernmental Organisation. The declaration emphasized the importance of upholding the “terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it” (Art. 3) and of preserving the memory of the Holocaust as a “touchstone in our understanding of the human capacity for good and evil” (Art. 2). The declaration called for increased education on the Holocaust (Art. 5) while expressing its signatories’ commitment to “commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who stood against it” and to “encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance, in our countries” (Art. 6). The declaration is available on the website of the IHRA: <http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration>.

<sup>46</sup> See EP 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Recital A.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Art. 1-3.

<sup>49</sup> See EP 2005a.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Recital B.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Art. 5.

<sup>52</sup> See UNO 2005. The resolution on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorated each year on 27 January in remembrance of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet Army in 1945, urged every member nation of the United Nations to honour the memory of the Holocaust and encouraged the development of tailored educational programs about its history.

2006),<sup>53</sup> the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes, organised by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission in April 2008,<sup>54</sup> and the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, signed by prominent European politicians and intellectuals on 3 June 2008, the European Parliament's Resolution of 2 April 2009 on European Conscience and Totalitarianism<sup>55</sup> called for the proclamation of 23 August – the day of the 1939 signature of the Molotov-Rippentrop Pact – as “a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes”.<sup>56</sup>

The Resolution, which represents the European Parliament's most explicit positioning towards the issue of a European historical memory so far, acknowledges the impossibility of achieving “fully objective interpretations of historical facts” and that “no political body or political party” should have a “monopoly on interpreting history”, dismissing the possibility of “official political interpretations of historical facts” being “imposed by means of majority decisions of parliaments”.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, however, the European Parliament stresses that “the memories of Europe's tragic past must be kept alive in order to honour the victims, condemn the perpetrators and lay the foundations for reconciliation based on truth and remembrance”,<sup>58</sup> declaring “Nazism” to be the “dominant historical experience of Western Europe”, while Central and Eastern European countries “experienced both Communism and Nazism”.<sup>59</sup> The achievements of European post-war integration are described as a direct response and a real alternative to “the suffering inflicted by two world wars and the Nazi tyranny that led to the Holocaust and to the expansion of totalitarian and undemocratic Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe”.<sup>60</sup> It is maintained, however, that “Europe will not be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognises Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy and brings about an honest and thorough debate on their crimes in the past century”.<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, the Resolution underlines the “importance of keeping the memories of the past alive, because there can be no reconciliation without truth and remembrance”,<sup>62</sup> and urges “further efforts to strengthen the teaching of European history and to underline the historic achievement of European integration and the stark contrast between the tragic past and the peaceful and democratic social order in today's European Union”.<sup>63</sup> This is in the belief that “appropriate preservation of historical memory, a comprehensive reassessment of European history and Europe-wide recognition of all historical aspects of modern Europe will strengthen European integration”.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Council of Europe 2006.

<sup>54</sup> For the detailed report of the hearing, see Jambrek 2008.

<sup>55</sup> EP 2009, Art. 15. The Resolution was passed in the EP by a vote of 533-44 with 33 abstentions.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Art. 15. This particular call of the 2009 Resolution had been preceded by the Declaration of the European Parliament on the Proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (23 September 2008), signed by 409 Members of the European Parliament. See EP 2008.

<sup>57</sup> EP 2009, Recitals A-C.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Recital F.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Recital H.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Recital I.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Recital K.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Art. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Art. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Art. 10.



Thus, in 2009 the present cornerstones of the European Parliament's view on the (political) role and main contents of European historical remembrance were finally set; a view which is largely in line with that of the European Commission<sup>65</sup> and the Council. Expression of the inter-institutional convergence of interests towards the actual objectives of European historical memory is the absence of strong disagreement regarding the design of the Remembrance strand in the new Europe for Citizens Programme for 2014-2020 (see above). This enables us to talk about a European Union remembrance policy, complemented by additional measures aimed at strengthening citizens' consciousness of a common European past and legacy such as the European Parliament's pushing for a House of European History in Brussels.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, is the EU's remembrance policy really as conflict and tension free as it would seem to be? More fundamentally, how can this policy be assessed and potentially amended in the future?

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example, the Commission's 2010 Report to the EP and the Council on the Memory of the Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes in Europe (Commission 2010). The Report provides not only a clear view on the Commission's agenda for promoting historical memory, but also an overview of financial instruments potentially available for the remembrance of totalitarian regimes in Europe, including not only the Europe for Citizens Programme, but also others.

<sup>66</sup> The project of a House of European History in Brussels has been pushed and actively supported by the EP ever since the idea had been launched in 2007. The official opening is expected for autumn 2015. For more information, see <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/visits/historyhouse.html>).



### 3. DEVELOPING FUTURE EUROPEAN MEMORY POLICIES

#### 3.1. The Contested Nature of European Remembrance Policies

It can reasonably be argued that over time and particularly during the last couple of years (historical) memory has moved centre stage in EU discourse and become a powerful vehicle for shaping identity policies.<sup>67</sup> What has been increasingly acknowledged by political decision-makers is the possibility of constructing a pan-Europe historical narrative, which could act as an identification-marker for all European citizens. Yet by instrumentalising it for political purposes, historical memory has necessarily become exposed to ideological struggles over 'right' and 'wrong' interpretations of history, too. Against this background, the impression of a tension- and conflict-free European remembrance policy, as might be suggested by the resolutions of the European Parliament or the Europe for Citizens Programme portrayed above, is deceptive.

Early attempts at European identity-building via historical reference that had focused on notions of European heritage, the World Wars as the founding event for the European 'peace project', and the history of European Integration, had proved to be insufficient as vectors for identification to the EU, not least since those reference points did not resonate particularly well with existing memory cultures at national level. A new memory framework was hence needed and eventually found, notably in the form of Holocaust remembrance. Reference to National Socialism and particularly the Holocaust as the 'ultimate evil' against which European civilisation<sup>68</sup> had to be defined, became central to EU discourse as from the 1990s onwards. Both the Stockholm Declaration of 2000 and the EP's striving for the establishment of a European Holocaust Remembrance Day can be seen in this context.

However, while interpreting Nazism as a never-to-happen-again historical period and stressing the uniqueness of the Shoah echoes for domestic memory cultures in Western Europe, thus suggesting a promising cornerstone for a common European identity, this is far less the case in Eastern Europe with its Communist past. Accordingly, the Eastern enlargement of the EU introduced a new element of discourse into the European institutions' memory policies; one which put Stalinist crimes and Communist terror on an equal level with the horrors of National Socialism. With the European Parliament's 2005 resolution on The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War, the torment and anguish endured by Eastern European peoples under Communist rule powerfully entered the EU's agenda, when recognition was given to the "magnitude of the suffering, injustice and long-term social, political and economic degradation endured by the captive nations located on the eastern side of what was to become the Iron Curtain".<sup>69</sup> Since then, the "united stand against all totalitarian rule of whatever ideological persuasion"<sup>70</sup> has become a common element of all European Parliament dealings with the European past. A similar shift of focus has also taken place within the European Commission, where previous emphasis on the Holocaust as the sole historical 'contra-part' of the European Project has been replaced by acknowledging National Socialism and Stalinism as equally evil, most evidently in the remembrance strand of the current Europe for Citizens Programme.

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<sup>67</sup> On this development see, e.g., Littoz-Monnet 2012.

<sup>68</sup> The idea and possible elements of a specific European civilisation have for long been theorised and debated. Among the most important contributions is, e.g., Eisenstadt 1987.

<sup>69</sup> EP 2005b, Recital H.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Art. 4.

However, the change of perspective discernible after the Eastern enlargement towards Europeanising the remembrance of both the crimes of National Socialism and Stalinism has not gone uncontested. Certain groups have blamed the European Union for undermining the status of the Shoah as a unique case of genocide,<sup>71</sup> while political divergences based on national affiliations and traditional ideological divisions on the left-right spectrum<sup>72</sup> have been a characteristic companion of EU remembrance debates over the last 10 years, with the European Parliament assuming the role of the central arena for discussions of competing portrayals of the past.

The agenda for condemning equally crimes committed by National Socialism and Stalinism had been pushed in the wake of Eastern Enlargement, which in turn provoked resistance.<sup>73</sup> Even in the debates preceding the adoption of the 2005 Resolution *The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War*, equating the two totalitarian regimes of the 20th century was criticised by left-wing Members of the European Parliament as a means to discredit communism altogether and rewrite history by belittling the role communists played in the fight against National Socialism and Fascism.<sup>74</sup> The same line of argument has been put forward in the Minority Opinion of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) Group Members on the recent European Parliament Draft Report on Europe for Citizens. The signatories of the Minority Opinion contest “that future generations should be told the historical lie that seeks to put Communists on a par with Nazis, nor should they be encouraged to forget both the Fascist dictatorships that once held sway in southern Europe and the colonial past”. To do so would “insult the memory of all the Communists and other democrats who fought against those regimes and paid with their lives” and be a “biased view of history”.<sup>75</sup> In more general terms, the Minority Opinion criticises “memory of European history” as an “ambiguous term” that would go beyond the “‘duty of remembrance’ in respect of the victims of totalitarian regimes”, and justifies the GUE/NGL’s rejection of the draft report by referring to the necessary “separation between politics and the work of historians and researchers”.<sup>76</sup>

Diverging assessments of widening the focus of a European historical memory to explicitly include Stalinism and Communism are not only discernible along the political left-right spectrum, but also between Western and Eastern EU member states. Unlike in Western Europe, the widespread – and EU-endorsed – view of the Second World War as an essentially ‘good war’ fought against Fascism and National Socialism under the banner of liberty and democracy cannot easily be shared by Eastern European nations. For them, the period between 1939 and 1945 may well mark the liberation from National Socialism, yet at the same time also the beginning of foreign Soviet domination and the establishment of dictatorial Communist regimes. Against this background and considering the persistence of the Eastern bloc for almost half a century, Stalinism and Communism are of more immediate relevance to present politics and society in Eastern than in Western European states. The new democratic systems which emerged in Eastern Europe after 1989 are first and foremost counter projects to the Communist past; a past which thus represents the

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<sup>71</sup> See Littoz-Monnet 2012, p. 1191.

<sup>72</sup> An interesting case study on how far politics of memory influences the political action of Eastern European Members of the European Parliament, notably Polish, is Killingsworth/Klatt/Auer 2010.

<sup>73</sup> The classical left-right separation of the political spectrum proves ever more challenging in modern politics due to processes of de-ideologisation of policies and the appearance of new players and parties that cannot easily be assigned to the “left” or “right”. Nevertheless, the differentiation may be used here since it continues to be one of the most pervasive approaches to situate political actors.

<sup>74</sup> See Littoz-Monnet 2012, p. 1191f.

<sup>75</sup> Minority Opinion pursuant to Rule 52(3) of the Rules of Procedure. Marie-Christine Vergiat, Lothar Bisky, Inês Cristina Zuber on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. In: EP 2013, p. 49.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

main source of legitimacy for any new political order. To position oneself as a victim of Stalinist terror actually allows to be set aside, or at least be made less urgent, other problematic issues of national history.<sup>77</sup>

Given the absence of a similar experience with Communism in the old EU member states, National Socialism and the Holocaust remain central to their memory cultures and the “rationale upon which the EU itself found its legitimating narrative”.<sup>78</sup> The process of critically coping with the Second World War has a long tradition in Western Europe, actively advocated and pursued since the late 1960s, most vigorously in (Western) Germany. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“coming to terms with the past”) allowed the traumatic National Socialist past to become integrated into civic culture, and the Holocaust – acknowledged as the ultimate evil not only in German but in all of human history – to become the founding pillar of a post-war society gathered around common values and principles, including the rejection of militarism, anti-Semitism and racism. With collective guilt becoming integrated into the official version of German post-war national identity, any attempt to question the paradigm of the uniqueness of the Holocaust meant challenging not only that identity, but also the comforting self-conception of (Western) Europe that had eagerly accepted Germany’s assuming collective responsibility for the horrors of World War II, not least as a convenient means to distract attention away from wartime collaboration and the often far less glorious history of national resistance than official accounts tend to portray.<sup>79</sup>

Public debate during the *Historikerstreit* (“historians’ quarrel”) in the second half of the 1980s were thus highly charged with emotion, after German right-wing historians had raised the issue of the comparability of Nazi Germany crimes with those of the Soviet Union. At the heart of what developed into a bitter controversy with intrinsic political dimensions was the question of the singularity of Auschwitz: while a group of conservative historians, most prominently Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber, essentially argued that the Holocaust was not fundamentally different to other experiences of state terror and mass extermination in the 20th century, this view was vehemently repudiated by mainstream left-wing intellectuals who insisted on the uniqueness of the “Final Solution” and denounced the historians’ writings as politically charged and revisionist.<sup>80</sup> Debates revolving around issues similar to those of the *Historikerstreit* in West Germany took place in other Western European countries too, especially after the fall of Communism. In France, for example, following the publication of *Le livre noir du communisme* (English: *The Black Book of Communism*) in 1997,<sup>81</sup> a debate no less emotional than the one ten years earlier in Germany occurred over the authors’ critique of blindness among both intellectual and political elites towards Communist crimes due to focusing entirely on the Holocaust; a critique that was immediately rebuffed by a broad front of not only left-wing French writers and politicians who rejected outright any direct comparison between National Socialism and Communism.

<sup>77</sup> With regard to the Second World War and the Holocaust, it is worth noting that different coping strategies have been developed in Eastern European countries, ranging from eager repudiation of any complicity to critical acknowledgement of joint guilt.

<sup>78</sup> Littoz-Monnet 2012, p. 1194. On divergences between Eastern and Western Europe collective memory see also Cornelißen 2012.

<sup>79</sup> On the issue of collaboration in German-occupied Europe during the Second World War in general see, e.g., Röhr 1994. For a national case study on the parallelism of both collaboration and resistance see, e.g., Kedward 1991.

<sup>80</sup> On the topic see, e.g., Kershaw 1989 and Baldwin 1990.

<sup>81</sup> See Courtois 1997. The book turned into an almost immediate success and has become translated into various languages, including German (1998) and English (1999).

Remembrance debates at the EU level over the last ten years can hence be seen as the replication of previous domestic struggles over how best to deal with the past. Unlike in Western European Member States, where the notion of the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust still takes centre stage as an identification-marker due to the lack of other viable founding narratives for European integration, at the more generalised European level the idea of 'National Socialism and Stalinism as equally damnable' has gained comparable acceptance to that of the 'distinctiveness of the Shoah' in the wake of the Eastern enlargement and the introduction of distinctively different cultures of remembrance.

How useful, however, are either of these two memory frameworks dominating official EU discourses for the creation of a common European historical memory?

### 3.2. The Issue of the Holocaust and 20th-Century Totalitarianism

The prime concern of current European historical memory discourse with the Holocaust and – more recently – 20th-century totalitarianism in general (embodied especially, though not exclusively, by National Socialism and Stalinism) is understandable. The overarching experience of World War II, the extermination of the European Jews and the millions of victims and fatalities of Stalinist policies are widely accepted as being the major and indeed most formative historical catastrophe of the 20th century, if not of human history altogether. Keeping memories alive is therefore not only a question of respect owed to the victims of these totalitarian regimes, but also wise for the fact that knowledge and awareness about this tragic past can serve as a powerful tool to learn for and develop the future. The choice of Nazism and Stalinism as main reference points for a European collective memory is also consistent in that these two regimes and their policies embody an absolute contrast to the immanent ideals embraced in the 'European project': peace, freedom and democracy, the rule of law, human rights and civil liberties, the right to individual self-determination and pluralism.

At the same time, however, the present focus of European memory politics is problematic in at least two respects:

- 1) Basing the legitimacy of any political project primarily on a negative foundation myth is daring per se, and historically the exception rather than the rule. In the concrete case of what we might call the 'European Project', one can reasonably ask whether present-day Europe and its values should be defined predominantly vis-à-vis past experiences of mass violence, genocide, or population displacement. If so, one is at risk of falling into an overly simplistic 'black-and-white' scheme, which turns the history of European integration and the EU quasi automatically into the obverse of Europe's 'dark past', and portrays today's Europe as a version of accomplished 'historical reason': a continent of noble traditions, institutions and principles; in short: as the embodiment of Western civilisation. In its wake, such simplification fosters an uncritical and one-dimensional historical understanding, which is detrimental to the creation of a critical (in the best sense of the word) European public and does not do justice to the unmistakable achievements of the European integration process since the late 1940s either. Not by idealising this process, but only by allowing open discussion on the far-from-streamlined history of the EU and challenging widespread topoi of an 'ever closer Union' or a 'perpetuated success story' can fruitful debate on development and improvements be effectively encouraged.

The present focus on 20th-century National Socialism and Stalinism is problematic in yet another respect, since it reduces European history to a matter of the post-First-World-War period. Historical complexity is hence unduly reduced, obscuring broader

(inter-)relations essential in the understanding of contemporary Europe. The problem of radical nationalism with all its consequences (wars fought and crimes committed in the name of the nation etc.), for example, can be argued as being less a child of the 20th century than already the late 18th and 19th century. And if we think of common memories shared across the continent, would not the memories of Colonialism and Imperialism – in a wide sense of the meaning – be no less ‘European’ than the Holocaust?<sup>82</sup> Essentially all European countries and nations have histories that have been shaped by and are closely interconnected through Colonialism and Imperialism: be it that at certain moments in history they exercised the role of colonial and/or imperial power, either inside or outside of Europe, or that they themselves were under hegemonic foreign rule by another (European) power.<sup>83</sup>

- 2) Reducing the problem of ‘reworking the past’ to National Socialism and Stalinism runs the risk of evading the issue of shared European accountability for the past. When talking about European historical memory, one also needs to address the question whether responsibility for atrocities and injustice committed might not also partly be ‘European’. For obvious reasons it is easier to find a transgressing European memory dimension when references are made to the positive sides of an argued European heritage, for example the Enlightenment. Yet when we assume the Enlightenment to be not so much a specifically French, English or German but a European legacy, are then not the World Wars, the Shoah or the Gulags also European in a sense? Until now, the extermination of the European Jews and National Socialism has largely been dealt with as a German problem, the Gulags and Stalinism as a Soviet one. This is not particularly astonishing if the ‘logic’ of post-war Europe is kept in mind, when (Western) European nations quickly needed to assert themselves and to find a legitimate role in the emerging global confrontation between East and West. With 1945 depicted as an Hour Zero and point of departure for a ‘New Europe’, the dark side could easily be associated with the loser of the War, Nazi Germany, and – to a lesser extent – Fascist Italy. The light side was hence all the rest of Europe, and through reference to a heroic resistance movement also Italy. Due to the same connection with resistance against National Socialism, Communism too, which otherwise faced growing scepticism due to the association with the Soviet system, largely remained accepted in Western Europe. However, while guilt can and should certainly never be apportioned equally, a more critical approach towards, for instance, national legends of resistance, and a more inclusive understanding of responsibility for the past would seem called for. In research and scholarly study, much has already been achieved in providing a more complete picture of shared transnational European responsibility both for historical achievements and failures. Still, at the level of politics and public discourse, the appeal of having a clear-cut historical point of contrast that allows the circumvention of critical questions about one’s own past as much as it allows naming a culprit and promises advantages for present political aims, is too tempting to lose importance any time soon. In the context of the EU, for instance, keeping the legacy of National

<sup>82</sup> The arguments currently brought forward in EU debates against widening the focus of European historical memory are not quite convincing. In the Impact Assessment Report of the current Europe for Citizens Programme, for example, it is argued that a more comprehensive approach “beyond Nazism/Stalinism” might result in a “nationalisation” of the issues addressed” (Commission 2011c, p. 29). This, however, seems elusive, since the same risk of “nationalisation” applies equally – if not even more – to National Socialism and Stalinism as to any other historical experience.

<sup>83</sup> In addition, it could be argued that the repercussions of the colonial past are still widely felt today, manifest in manifold ways, e.g., in the struggles of former colonial powers to deal with the issue of immigration from their former colonies.



Socialism alive preserves not least a moral cloud hanging over Germany, whose present economic and political strength is acknowledged and feared alike.<sup>84</sup>

This is just one example for how memory can potentially serve tangible political interests, and how public attention and political discourse may be led away from the level of rational argument to that of morality. From a logical perspective and in line with established principles of law, it is not clear why beyond the honest acknowledgement of historical responsibility any nation, and even more so their individual citizens, should be the bearer of any 'original' or 'ineradicable sin' that perpetuates constraints of political stance and action ad infinitum. Or to put it another, slightly pointed and thought-provoking way: why does a German teenager have to feel more accountable for Nazi crimes committed half a century before he/she was born than his/her peers in Greece, Poland or Israel? And why should a present-day Spaniard or Portuguese be more culpable for his/her colonial ancestors' misconduct in Latin America than a Columbian, a Chilean or Brazilian? Would it not seem that all of us, no matter from where we come from, have an obligation to care about historical injustices of all kinds, and make a common effort to ensure that the horrors of the past are not forgotten?

Clearly, intertwining historical memory and moral categorisation proves to be a dangerous undertaking, which serves more as a cause and hotbed for new conflict than a means for a durable settling of the past. Nationalisation and political instrumentalisation of memory hamper not only critical involvement with one's own history, but also present and future.

But is hence any attempt for transnational European historical memory doomed to fail from the outset? Not necessarily, if a softer concept of collective remembrance is targeted than is currently the case.

### 3.3. Perspectives of a Trans-European 'Culture of Remembering'

Let us recapitulate: with historical memory as such representing an elusive concept, fostering any form of collective remembrance of the past at a European level is a highly challenging endeavour. Present EU memory policies can be described as ambitious, yet characterised by a narrow focus of historical remembrance and following a hardly disguised political rationale of self-legitimation and European identity building. As any attempt to universalise historical memory, European efforts, too, face obvious limits because experience of any past event differs considerably not only from country to country, but also region to region. Social and political affiliation or gender are additional determining factors in the way the past is perceived, which cannot easily be levelled even in the context of a prescribed (cultural) collective memory. What is more, aspects of generational issues

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<sup>84</sup> A recent example for the susceptibility of history to get moralised are utterances in Greek media and politics during the current public debt crisis, invoking Germany's past and implicitly denouncing any right of the country – seen as the pacemaker of the Troika's austerity policies – to make demands towards Greece by reference to National Socialism and the sufferings endured by Greece during German occupation in the Second World War in particular. On the contrary, Germany is presented as morally owing unconditional (financial) support to the Greek people given historical culpability, and it is also not by chance that long-standing Greek demands for reparations from Germany arising from World War II have been revived precisely at the time of the current crisis. See, e.g., the article "Greece Wants Germany to Pay War Reparations" published in the Wall Street Journal, 24 April 2013 (Stamouli/Pangalos 2013).

At the same time, proving the complicated and sometimes paradoxical nature of mixing up memory and morality, National Socialism has served as a subtle excuse for German politics not to take a more active role in European affairs and the settling of the current crisis in particular. On this note, and in a quite remarkable move, even the Polish foreign minister Radosław Sikorski argued in a speech delivered in Berlin on 28 November 2011: "I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear German inactivity." Sikorski 2011. See also Peel/Ciński/Cohen 2011.



complicate the matter further: time does not stand still, and together with the change from one generation to another, historical awareness and priorities in remembrance change as well.

Almost 70 years after the end of the Second World War, the question as to which memories of totalitarian rule and the Holocaust could – rather than should – become part of a politico-historical European remembrance culture is a real one, which does not seem to be given sufficient attention in political discourse. For children that have grown up with images of the War in Yugoslavia, the Kosovo Conflict or the Rwandan Genocide, not to mention those who personally suffered oppression and hardships, the Second World War is no longer necessarily the determining and natural historical reference point, which it might have been for the War and post-World-War-II generation. Rather, it might be only one among other historic events of a distant past. Against this background, attempts to quasi ‘decree’ a static, crystallised historical memory appear to be both futile and condemned to ultimate failure. For one thing seems to be certain: a remembrance culture based on a deep rift between the individual experience of citizens on the one hand and an official interpretation by politics on the other, cannot endure. What then is the solution?

Assuming that the ultimate aim of remembrance policies is both an informed and self-critical European historical memory, there then seems to be one particularly feasible approach: notably active commitment on the part of each individual European country to ‘come to terms with their own past’, or rather ‘work through the past’, a notion that might prove effective in describing an open-ended process of societal and political work on rather than a final mastery of the past.<sup>85</sup> This should clearly be done with shared European principles and universalised practices as a basis, yet acknowledging the multiplicity of different national pasts at the same time. In other words, it would not be a “Europeanisation – or, less politely put, homogenisation – of the contents of different collective memories, but rather a Europeanisation of moral-political attitudes and practices in dealing with profoundly different pasts”.<sup>86</sup>

European common values that could serve as a firm foundation for such an endeavour include: human dignity, tolerance, freedom and equality, solidarity and democracy; that is the already existing repertoire of principles that has emerged as the core of European integration.<sup>87</sup> In line with these principles, the envisaged ‘culture of remembering’ would abstain from any attempt to rank guilt and suffering or try to offset one crime against another, but rather aim for an open sphere of discussion and developing mutual understanding that allows for bi- and multilateral reconciliation deserving this name. Inherent in such an approach is the readiness to address difficult moments of national histories unreservedly. Promising steps in this direction have already been taken, manifest, for example, in the rise of what can be called ‘politics of regret’ both in Europe and beyond, with national leaders assuming responsibility for their country’s past misdeeds and

<sup>85</sup> The notion “working through the past” (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*) had been coined by the German sociologist and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno as early as in the 1950s, namely in the context of debates about residual National Socialist attitudes among the recently democratized Germans. See especially his 1959 essay *The Meaning of Working through the Past* (printed, e.g., in Adorno 1998, pp. 89-103). Preference to “working through the past” over “coming to terms with the past” is also given by other authors working on collective historical memory. See, e.g., Pakier/Sträth 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Müller 2010, p. 27.

<sup>87</sup> Among other places, these basic principles of the EU are outlined in the Preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. See Charter 2012 [2000].

engaging in public acts of atonement.<sup>88</sup> The importance of political representatives publically acknowledging the failings of national histories should not be underestimated and can be seen as a crucial contribution to the unprejudiced coming-to-terms and acceptance of one's own past both at home and internationally.

Such an unprejudiced approach to history postulates yet another thing: renouncing the idea of 'historical truth' as an absolute category. Truth remains above all an ideal, and it is commonly acknowledged that even in the sciences one can only aim for an "ever-increasing approximation to the truth".<sup>89</sup> This goes even more for the humanities. There might be historical facts, but there is no singular or static historical truth. As Michel Foucault has argued, truth always remains embedded in, and at the same time forms part of, given power structures, and shifts throughout history.<sup>90</sup> What might be considered 'truth' today may well be seen as 'falsehood' in the future. Similarly, one person's truth is not necessarily someone else's. Given that different cultures, but also individuals within a culture, emphasise different aspects of truth, there is a multiplicity of 'truths' even at any given historical moment. The best that one can hope for is that increasing interaction between cultures and individuals allows us to at least partially reconcile and integrate those differences with a view to coming closer to 'the truth'. Against this background, imposing any 'historical truth' would seem not only to be a vain exercise, but even a dangerous one, since any such attempt is intrinsically divisive and creates more problems than it could possibly resolve.

Correspondingly difficult is any attempt to legislate on the past and its remembrance: even if formalised memory law regimes might be driven by the noblest of motives, in the end they seem likely to do more harm than good. By no means, however, should this be taken as a plea for 'whateverism' in dealing with history, or even as an argument for simply accepting historical revisionism that neglects historical facts. However, for politics there appears to be a more promising alternative to legally enforcing a certain view on the past or individual historical events, and sanctioning non-compliance: providing a firm auxiliary framework for the establishment of a critical public. Of particular importance in this regard are education policies corresponding to the 'culture of remembering' delineated above; a culture which cannot be forced on European citizens, but needs to emanate from personal insight and understanding.

### 3.4. Education as Key Broker, and the Role of the EU

Education plays a fundamental role in our gaining information about history and promoting historical consciousness, thus making it a key broker for any memory policy. For the envisaged 'critical culture of remembering' to be successfully promoted, educational policies would need to be aimed at securing a critical and open-minded approach to conveying the past, i.e. history teaching that:

- 1) increases awareness of the diversity of cultures, histories and memories in Europe, and promotes mutual respect;
- 2) provides students with the necessary knowledge and skills to assess their own local and national past unbiasedly in comparison and relation with other European as well as global realities; and thus

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<sup>88</sup> On this issue see, e.g., Brooks 1999, Barkan 2000, Olick/ Coughlin 2000. Exemplary for "politics of regret", not least for its immanent symbolism, had been the Warsaw Genuflection of German Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1970 as a gesture of humility and penance towards the victims of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

<sup>89</sup> Fromm 1999 [1947], p. 239.

<sup>90</sup> See Foucault 1970.

- 3) encourages young Europeans to become active critical thinkers and participants of 'historical remembrance'.

For these objectives to be reached, two interconnected issues appear central:

- I. Adapting existing curricula and teaching methodologies;
- II. Providing state-of-the-art, high-quality teacher training.

Ad I.): Traditionally, and in line with still powerful paradigms of nationalism, history teaching at nation-state level has been predominantly if not almost exclusively concerned with one's own national history, which is often portrayed as quasi-cohesive and self-explanatory. What would hence be crucial is widening the content focus of history teaching, to convey an understanding of national history as being embedded in wider contexts, both European and global. In other words: historical events should be studied not in isolation, but bearing in mind their transnational dimensions and repercussions. In widening existing curricula along these lines, the voice of 'others' should be allowed to speak and be heard, which allows for grasping the prismatic complexities of history and differences in perception of one and the same event among different people and nations. What has proved to be a promising initiative in this regard are pilot projects for the drafting of bi- and multilateral history textbooks, for example the Joint German-Polish Textbook Commission.<sup>91</sup> Since they are to be used in two or more different national contexts, not only do the respective national sensitivities have to be considered, but respective national myths also need to be qualified.

Rethinking existing national curricula needs to be complemented by allowing for new teaching styles, too. This involves turning away from 'fact learning' to understanding structures and interconnections, and from wholly teacher-centred teaching to a more discursive and interactive format that puts emphasis on discussion and personal discernment. In this context, the potential of new media could also be exploited to a larger degree than is currently the case. Directly linked to the required refocusing of teaching content and practices is the need for a suitable teacher-training programme.

Ad II.): The mainstay role of teachers for any education system to function successfully is commonly recognized. In line with the above objectives for historical remembrance, future (history) teacher training should hence put emphasis on European and global rather than national histories, impart state-of-the-art principles and methodologies of teaching, and be guided by the ultimate goal of forming a self-reflexive next generation, rather than inculcating pre-defined and unquestioned knowledge. Yet considering the time needed to actually train new teachers along these principles, and that changing the attitudes and practices of current teachers who have been socialised and educated in considerably different contexts requires significant efforts,<sup>92</sup> any structural change taking place in the field of teacher training will take time before it is actually felt in the classroom.

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<sup>91</sup> On the history of the Textbook Commission and its activities see <http://deutsch-polnische.schulbuchkommission.de/home.html> (available in German and Polish). On the most recent project of a German-Polish history textbook in particular, see <http://deutsch-polnische.schulbuchkommission.de/en/deutsch-polnisches-geschichtsbuch.html>. On the even more ambitious issue of a future common textbook for Europe see, e.g., Leeuw-Roord 2008.

<sup>92</sup> One obvious example are teachers in the EU's New Member States, who might have been educated during the communist rule following a clear state-prescribed and teleological historical awareness.

The always-present generational gap in school but also higher education between teachers on the one hand, and students on the other, poses a constant challenge for historical remembrance: profoundly different interpretations of past and present might clash,<sup>93</sup> or in any case there is likely to be a difference in perception of what are the most central issues. In an education system focused on contemplation and dialogue, however, potential effects of such generational gaps might be attenuated or even turned into an asset, namely if different horizons of experience and expectation are not seen as a problem but a strength.

Meritorious work in the conceptualisation of responsible and innovative history education has already been done, among others by the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO), which over the last 20 years has sought to enhance the quality of history education both through capacity building for educators and producing innovative teaching tools, notably with a view towards forming and deepening democratic societies.<sup>94</sup> It is not least because of this that the on-the-ground implementation of education policies in EU Member States towards an informed 'European culture of remembering' can and indeed should be most actively pursued by the European Institutions. Possible action includes, but is surely not limited to, raising awareness through available legislative instruments and the commissioning of additional research on the topic. However, the role of the EU is not limited to that of a mere admonisher and booster in view of the lack of direct access possibilities to national education systems.

The envisaged 'culture of remembering' can also be effectively bolstered by existing European policies, and the new citizenship (Europe for Citizens) and education (Erasmus+) programmes for the upcoming period 2014-2020 in particular. Through the latter, in a more encompassing way than before, cross-border exchange of students and teachers can be fostered, which substantiates and enriches the objective of intercultural dialogue and transnational encounters with history through personal experience. The Europe for Citizens Programme allows transnational historical research projects as well as the promotion of results of historical research and archiving or digitisation of important history (re)sources to be funded. These capabilities should be exploited to the full, likewise by not restricting transnational cooperation and knowledge exchange as well as trans-border networking to the EU, but also including other parts of Europe and the world. Among other things, a more globalised approach to history and historical memory has the advantage of preventing from the outset any danger of traditional nationalism(s) being replaced by mere Eurocentrism.

All in all, evidence suggests an increasing consciousness among the European political class about the relevance of underpinning EU memory policies at the educational level. A growing number of EU-funded projects that have taken up issues such as "Developing Competence-Orientated Teaching of Historical Memories" and "Sharing European Memories at School"<sup>95</sup> can be taken as one example. Undoubtedly, however, there is still a long and strenuous way to go before a critical teaching of European history as sketched out above might be effectively implemented at EU Member States level. This circumstance has less to do with the EU's lacking political competences in the field of culture and education, but more to do

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<sup>93</sup> The 1968 movement is a case in point, with ideas mainly represented by the youth entering in distinct and partly militant conflict with those of their parents' generation on fundamental issues of how to deal with past, present and future.

<sup>94</sup> EUROCLIO was established in 1992 on the request of the Council of Europe to build bridges between history education professionals from all parts of the then recently reunited Europe and has in the meanwhile grown into a large network encompassing members from more than 50 countries. For detailed information, including publications and teaching materials available online, see <http://www.euroclio.eu/new/>.

<sup>95</sup> See the progress reports for those two projects funded by the EU's Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency: EACEA 2011b, EACEA 2011c. See also <http://blogs.epb.uni-hamburg.de/teacmem/> and <http://memoriesatschool.aranzadi-zientziak.org/lang/en/acerca-de/>.

with the fact that any such teaching agenda will require a radical departure from the predominantly national(ised) history currently taught across Europe, and an abandoning – or in any case questioning – of much-loved preconceptions of the past that have hitherto been presented as quasi-canonised historical ‘truths’.

But no matter how painstaking the path to a common European remembrance culture via the Europeanisation of memory practices and history learning at national level might appear, it is difficult to identify any true alternative. No matter how appealing the idea of a genuinely European memory with practices and content shared by the continent’s citizens might appear, it seems neither practicable nor even desirable for the reasons outlined above. At a time when the nation is still the overriding reference point of collective identities, coming to terms with the past remains first and foremost a task to be performed at the level of the nation state; something which ‘Europe’ cannot do for or instead of them.



## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In view of the above observations, the following recommendations and conclusions may be drawn with regard to the issue of a European historical memory and future political action at EU level in particular:

### 1) Recognition of historical memory as an elusive concept:

Historical memory as a specific form of collective memory – and as such to be distinguished from individual forms of remembering – has become an established concept in the social sciences. This is reflected in a steep increase of studies and publications over the last few decades dealing with the issue both at the level of theory (building) and various ‘practices’ of historical memory. At the same time, however, the concept is widely regarded to be elusive, not least since ‘historical memory’ suggests a degree of inherent bias: between ‘history’ as something perceived as objective and concrete on the one hand, and ‘memory’ as an essentially subjective process based on value judgements on the other. Consequently, one is well advised to avoid any essentialist view on historical memory and defining it as some kind of shared property by a social group. Historical memory is by its very nature highly constructivist: a discourse about past events and how to order and interpret them, and hence open to be instrumentalised for political ends and purposes. Acknowledging the complexities and intricacies of the concept and abandoning the idea of ‘impartial remembrance’ also guards against unrealistic expectations when it comes to European historical memory.

### 2) Awareness-raising of difficulties of trans-European historical memory:

Developing historical memory is a challenging task even at the level of nation states, where this is most frequently practised. The difficulties a collective remembering of the past comes up against in any one nation are multiplied at European level: social and regional differences, a wide range of educational backgrounds, potential conflicts between mainstream thinking and minority views, all make the designation of universally recognised and acceptable historical landmarks problematic. Given the fact that national historical memories are typically linked to the respective nations’ state-building process, and that a good part of the historical myths on which national remembrance is largely based date back to the age of militant nationalism, it is not surprising that fairly clear friend-or-foe distinctions are a common element, too. It is by providing an antagonistic ‘other’ that identity of any kind tends to be constructed, and one nation’s ‘historical moment’ can easily be another one’s tragic destiny. With European memories not just divided, but also divisive, any policy aimed at homogenising existing memories and commemoration practices at a European level must therefore be faced with considerable obstacles; in particular, if a European collective memory is oriented towards specific historical moments and events rather than broader notions of European legacy and culture.

### 3) Acknowledgement of the EU’s achievements in raising awareness of the past:

Identity building through reference to the past has long been a concern of European politics, finding its expression in the generic language of ‘European heritage’ as well as references to both the EU as a post-war supranational peace project and the historical achievements of the European integration process. Even so, the potential and need of an active historical memory policy was only fully acknowledged after the failure of the Constitution for Europe, which revealed a broad feeling of disenchantment with the European Project and a widening gap between high politics and public opinion. In its wake, among other things the Europe for Citizens Programme was launched, directed at fostering



active European citizenship at different levels and containing also a strand explicitly dedicated to historical remembrance. Given its success, a new generation of the Europe for Citizens Programme is foreseen for the period 2014-2020, with the budget of the particularly popular remembrance strand set to increase in the European Commission's legislative proposal, and the European Parliament demanding even further appreciation. At the same time, the new Programme shows continuity with its predecessor in focusing on 20th-century totalitarianisms and the Holocaust as main elements of European historical remembrance. This is in line with attempts since the 1990s, especially of the European Parliament, to keep the memory particularly of National Socialism and Stalinism alive, which are serving the function of a negative foundation myth.

All in all, the establishing of a European remembrance policy over the last 20 years can be read as growing awareness for the indispensable cultural-historical underpinning of what had for long been reduced to be an economic project essentially based in the present; a shift in focus which deserves to be recognised despite the fact that the EU's 'move to history' was not lacking political calculation: history per se is appreciated in value, and an incentive given to deal with Europe's past in the classical logic of history as a potential lesson to the future (*historia magistra vitae*). This provides a strong stance against the traumata of the 20th century vanishing into oblivion or becoming subject to historical revisionism.

#### 4) Consideration of shortcomings of current EU memory policies:

Despite the fact that EU memory policies have gained momentum, they remain problematic in two respects. Firstly, intrinsic to the EU's seemingly coherent memory policies is a hidden conflict between two competing memory frames: on the one hand, the traditionally held 'uniqueness of the Holocaust', that has gone towards shaping Western European post-war thought and legitimacy; and, on the other, the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equal evils', which forcefully entered European political discourse after the Union's Eastern Enlargement and serves as a powerful vehicle for all Eastern European nations to reckon with their Communist past. Although these differences are not irreconcilable, they prove evidence for the problems of successfully conciliating even at EU level still existing divergences in the interpretation of the past between the political left and right as well as between different Member States. Secondly, exclusively concentrating on the Holocaust and National Socialism as well as Stalinism, though plausible in the desire of the EU to create a stark contrast to its self-image and understandable due to the (relative) proximity in time, has proved to be short-sighted.

Firstly, such an approach fosters a highly schematic and teleological view of history: it juxtaposes Europe's 'dark past', which is 20th-century totalitarianism, with its 'bright present', and thus makes contemporary Europe appear as a version of the 'end of history' claims made especially after the fall of Communism.<sup>96</sup> Such a view not only lacks critical depth towards contemporary history as well as current political problems, but also neglects the richness and complexities of European history before the 20th century, crucial issues of which – including colonialism and imperialism – are of comparable long-term importance for today's Europe as National Socialism and Stalinism. Expanding the focus of historical memory both backwards and forward would allow for a more comprehensive and indeed

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<sup>96</sup> See especially the contributions by Francis Fukuyama (e.g., Fukuyama 1989, Fukuyama 1992). Fukuyama's concept of 'end of history' essentially claims that the end of the Cold War does not only mark the end of a historical epoch, but history itself, characterised by the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government. Fukuyama's theories soon provoked sharp intellectual dissent, famously represented, e.g., by Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1997).



more sensitive understanding not only of European history and its intricacies, but also the European integration process.

Secondly, putting a complete 'totalitarian face' to the past which is perceived as a radical contrast to the present, and thus elevating it to a negative foundation myth, if not dogma, hampers rather than facilitates debate about shared European accountability for history. It opens the door for ideological instrumentalisation and moralisation of the past, and reduces incentives to critically examine stereotypes and sacred cows of one's own national history. Since memory is at risk of turning primarily into a nostalgic trip to the past, even if it is an exceedingly tragic one, debate about present and future gets almost inevitably compromised, too.

#### 5) Development of a European 'culture of remembering':

In line with international scholarly literature, it can be argued that common European patterns of historical remembrance are possible, while European historical memory in the sense of a standardised view on Europe's past is not. The most promising alternative for developing historical remembrance in Europe would hence seem to be a decentralised rather than homogenising approach; one in which emphasis is not on any politically pre-defined understanding of history or individual events thereof, but developing capacities for a critical 'reworking the past' at national levels, based on common European principles and values. In short: what is required is a European culture of remembering rather than a European remembrance culture. Such a 'culture of remembering' implies:

- approaching Europe's past on the foundation of European core values such as humanism, tolerance and democracy;
- refraining from any (pre)judgmental evaluation of the past or idea of 'collective guilt' in favour of creating an open sphere of discussion that assists the overall objective of mutual understanding and reconciliation both within and between European nations;
- consciously and self-confidently addressing also uncomfortable segments of national histories rather than ousting them;
- strictly basing judgements of the past on the examination of historical facts, while renouncing the notion of 'historical truth' that raises unrealistic expectations and is inherently contentious; and
- acknowledging the potential risks in legislating for a specific view on or memory of the past.

An approach like this would reflect and do justice to the multiplicity of existing historical memories – and indeed histories – in Europe, while providing an incentive to critically scrutinise them under the premises of a clear supra- and transnational framework. Ideally, such a discerning 'historical self-reflection' would: a) go beyond contemplating national pasts and also provide perspectives for the future; b) lay the foundations for a better informed European discourse on history that allows for mutual opening, but also the confrontation of national collective memories in a civilised and non-agitated, yet at the same time realistic, way.

#### 6) Acknowledgement of the central role of education:

Considering its centrality in the shaping of collective memories in general, education assumes a key role in the establishment of the envisaged European 'culture of remembering', too. Correspondingly, the focus of future European remembrance policies should be put even more explicitly than is already the case on promoting educational measures in the widest sense of the meaning at national levels, with particular attention to

be paid to school education.<sup>97</sup> Above all, these measures should provide for high-quality history teaching that is geared towards:

- raising awareness for cultural diversity in Europe and the complexities of historical memory;
- entrusting teachers and students with the means required to scrutinise their own countries' history objectively and in broader (trans-)European contexts; and thus
- encouraging young Europeans to become actively involved in discussing history and contribute to an informed historical memory, rather than being degraded to mere consumers of pre-defined 'historical knowledge'.

Particular effort needs to be made in two respects:

- I) Revising existing curricula and teaching methodologies, with a view to shift focus from national towards European and global history, and allow for more emphasis to be given to the challenges of supranational historical remembrance, for instance by allowing for multiple interpretations of one and the same historical period and event to be heard. One promising starting point in this regard seems to be bi- and multilateral history textbook projects, some of which are currently in the conceptual stage. Corresponding teaching styles would be required too, guided by the overall objective of making students learn 'how to think' rather than 'what to think', and thus favouring reflection and discussion over knowledge transfer.
- II) Providing tailor-made (history) teacher training fitting these needs; i.e., training that enables teachers to grasp transnational aspects of history, imparts adequate didactics and principles of modern teaching, and is primarily concerned with forming a self-reflexive youth;

## 7) Making utmost use of European means to support national policies

Supporting a critical 'reworking the past' at national level through the words and deeds of the European Institutions would seem both desirable and expedient. On the one hand, despite the lack of immediate competences, the EU can vigorously promote a 'European culture of remembering' and corresponding (education) policies to be implemented in the Member States. On the other, existing EU programmes in the fields of citizenship and education can be actively exploited for the benefit of an informed European dealing with history. Concrete action that can already be supported under current EU policies includes, but is not limited to:

- initiation and funding of multinational history projects, the legislative basis for which is provided by the Europe for Citizens Programme;
- support for transnational exchange programmes and study visits for teachers and students through the means provided in the (new) ERASMUS+ Programme.

In as much as possible, means available for transnational cooperation and (knowledge) exchange should also be made accessible for participants from countries and world regions outside of Europe, in order to engage in a truly global 'reworking the past'.

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<sup>97</sup> Facilitated by the intrinsically more international character of higher education and academic research, the level of critically dealing with the past and addressing transnational issues appears comparatively well developed in post-secondary education. This, together with the fact that schools are usually the first place outside of family young people learn about history, seems to argue for putting priority of European political efforts on school education.

On the basis of critical self-reflection about history and historical responsibility at national level may a truly European reflexive discourse on the continent's past be able to emerge in the long run. In such a scenario, national collective memories would be contributing to and merging in a European public sphere, with national remembrance cultures complementing each other rather than being in competition, and historical memory becoming an issue of civic rather than political action. Eventually, certain aspects of history might then turn out less 'bright' and others less 'dark' than before. However, one should not be afraid of that: only an approach open to the intricacies and contradictions of European history corresponds to the critical public that needs to be at the heart of a European civil society. Normative concepts of European collective identity, on which the European Project is still largely reliant,<sup>98</sup> could thus beneficially be complemented with a cultural-historical component; a 'culture of remembering' based on shared European values and practices in approaching the past, yet at the same time avoiding any undue levelling or simplification of history.

As for now, Europe is still largely concerned with narrating a story about itself *ex negativo*, with the horrors of the past serving as an adverse origin myth that, while providing a strong sense of purpose for the 'European Project', might also invite political passiveness in the present. A self-confident dealing with the past, however, which knows to honour historical achievements and positive developments in an unbiased and open manner as it acknowledges past mistakes and assumes responsibility for them, will allow European society to turn more consciously towards the future. With nations having truly come to terms with their own histories and that of Europe in general, there is reason to hope that less need will be felt to sentimentalise the past either in a positive or negative manner.

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<sup>98</sup> Among the most influential intellectual proponents of normative European identity is Jürgen Habermas, whose concept of "constitutional patriotism" conceives the creation of a new supranational political culture based on democracy, the rule of law, and separation of powers.



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