

# Circulation, Conditions, Claims:

## Examining the Politics of Historical Memory in Eastern Europe

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Across Eastern Europe how the past is remembered has become a crucial factor for understanding present-day political developments within and between states. In this introduction, we first present the articles that form part of this special section through a discussion of the various methods used by the authors to demonstrate the potential ways into studying collective memory. We then define the regional characteristics of Eastern Europe's mnemonic politics and the reasons for their oftentimes conflictual character. Thereafter we consider three thematic arenas that situate the individual contributions to this special section within the wider scholarly debate. First, we examine the institutional and structural conditions that shape the circulation of memory and lead to conflictive constellations of remembering; second, we discuss how different regime types and cultural rules influence the framing of historical episodes, paying attention to supranational integration and the role of technological change; third, we consider the different types of actors that shape the present recall of the past, including political elites, social movements, and society at large. We conclude by identifying several promising avenues for further research.

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Three decades after the Warsaw Pact crumbled, the transition away from communist rule no longer represents the dominant political paradigm in Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> By the mid-2000s, the states arrayed between Russia and Germany had already reconfigured their political realities, with the resulting regimes running the gamut from liberal democracy to neo-authoritarianism.<sup>2</sup> New ideological commitments, however, rarely proved stable or enduring. Attesting to this is the recent rise of illiberal nationalism and nativist populism in countries such as Hungary and Poland, once the undisputed success stories of post-communist democratization efforts.<sup>3</sup> This political instability in the post-communist space encompasses a growing backlash against the project of European integration, affecting even states that

previously appeared firmly anchored in the European Union. Given this context, a particularly striking feature of both the domestic and international politics of Eastern European countries is the framing of present-day political debates through recourse to contentious historical narratives.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the politics of historical memory appear “here to stay,” influencing not only the domestic sphere but also relations between states in a region where much of the past remains contested.

Both the content and dynamics of Eastern Europe’s memory politics are noteworthy, in that they frequently vary from what prevails in the former Soviet “core” states and those of Western Europe. Furthermore, these historical narratives increasingly circulate and are reproduced in new contexts because of factors such as migration and the growth of transnational media. This circulation of how the past is interpreted has important political implications, particularly as Eastern Europe is neither sealed off from the rest of the world nor unified in how the past is remembered. But while a homogenous mnemonic identity does not exist, the post-communist space nonetheless exhibits certain distinctive interpretive characteristics that relate to its shared experiences. Eastern Europe thus represents an intriguing region for analysis, as in key respects it differs from other geographic areas, while in others it mirrors the broader processes governing how historical memory and politics are coming to interact.

Effectively parsing this phenomenon involves taking notice of three interrelated arenas: (1) the circulation of memories, demonstrating the intrinsically entangled nature of recalling the past and the resulting movement of narratives between and within countries; (2) the factors that condition what is remembered (e.g., political and cultural context) and how remembering takes place (e.g., via new media technologies); (3) the actors involved, who range from political elites to ordinary citizens, and the historical claims they make. Taken together, these three arenas provide a heuristic that specifically aims at helping us to understand processes of remembering in Eastern Europe over time, but one that is not limited to only being applied to this region. Below, we discuss these arenas in greater detail to showcase their relevance to Eastern Europe.

First, there is the *circulation of memories and their conflictive constellations* to consider. This speaks to the centrality of understanding how and why historical narratives move across space and time, as well as the political and societal feedback processes that exist between countries and across regions. This arena is especially salient given the high level of cross-border mnemonic exchange in Eastern Europe, where political actors routinely formulate historical narratives in conscious contradiction to the ways in which these have been developed elsewhere. Meanwhile, politicians and other mnemonic actors in the region not only react to dissonant interpretations of the past circulating within their respective spheres of influence, but also spread localized narratives beyond their previous boundaries. Eastern Europe’s unsettled twentieth century, which witnessed the massive displacement of peoples and wholesale movement of borders,<sup>5</sup> renders it particularly well-suited for studying

the multiple levels on which the politics of the past play out, as well as their deeply intertwined character.

Second, we emphasize the need to study the *factors that condition remembering*, particularly how mnemonic actors relate to various institutional and structural constraints. In this respect, we consider the effects of regime type, as well as differing cultural norms and expectations, to be particularly salient for understanding how the past is filtered through the lens of present-day politics. Conditioning factors stem from the national as well as the supranational arena, while technological developments contribute to the way in which they unfold. Examining the cadence of memory conflicts provides us with insight into the ways in which the development and subsequent evolution of political regimes links with the cultivation of historical narratives. However, achieving a nuanced understanding of the dynamics behind memory conflicts also requires that we consider the role of deep and subjacent cultural rules such as language,<sup>6</sup> which likewise contribute to framing historical narratives. This is important to take account of, as decision-making processes at both the individual and group level are ultimately embedded within wider systems of constructing meaning that define the parameters of how the past may be depicted and delineate appropriate behaviors relative to this.<sup>7</sup> As a result, political actors are sensitive to cultural context when undertaking the activation of historical interpretations. They may refer to the past in idiosyncratic ways, but these interpretations need to be at least minimally congruent with pre-existing cultural rules—meaning the socially shared and collectively negotiated guidance for action that forms the basis for consistent interpretation<sup>8</sup>—if they are to have any prospects of achieving long-term resonance within society.

Third, one needs to systematically assess who the relevant socio-political *actors are and what their mnemonic claims entail*. Which individuals or groups can legitimately speak about the past in an authoritative manner, and why do they assume their respective interpretive positions?<sup>9</sup> Tied to this are salient questions regarding the ways in which hegemonic narratives are established and challenged. How does public opinion, for instance, relate to top-down mnemonic initiatives that emanate from political, economic, or cultural elites in contrast to those promulgated by civil society or social movements? Likewise, how does the maintenance of transnational ties and these actors' engagement with epistemic communities affect agenda-setting behavior, especially across multiple levels?<sup>10</sup> Lastly, we cannot ignore the persistent echo of those who can no longer speak for themselves but who now have others claiming to speak on their behalf. This concerns primarily the Jews who perished in the Holocaust and whose deaths fundamentally reshaped the identity of Eastern Europe.

This special section brings together a group of contributors who study the contemporary political resonances of the past and their manifestations in a number of contexts. The articles contained herein all speak to multiple of the above arenas, but for the purpose of guiding the reader it is worth highlighting which of these the individual pieces specifically emphasize. Olga Davydova-Minguet looks at how Russian

mnemonic traditions and narratives traveled to Finland with Russian-speaking migrants, where today they challenge the dominant historical understandings of the titular nation through the re-creation of such commemorative practices as the Immortal Regiment march.<sup>11</sup> Further explicating the circulation of memory, Nikolay Koposov examines the emergence of conflicting memory laws in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine that nonetheless possess common conceptual and practical goals.<sup>12</sup> With a similar emphasis on mnemonic movement, Susan Divald examines the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and why it invokes certain historical tropes while downplaying others.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, George Soroka looks at how the 1940 Katyń massacre has factored into relations between post-Soviet Russia and Poland, examining why this incident remains highly politically charged while mnemonic controversies between Poland and Ukraine over the massacre of Polish civilians that took place in Volhynia and eastern Galicia between 1943 and 1945 have been far more muted.<sup>14</sup> The latter two authors' arguments also relate strongly to arena two and the role of conditioning factors such as regime type. Meanwhile, Félix Krawatzek's analysis of contemporary youth attitudes and knowledge regarding collaboration during the Second World War in Belarus and Latvia explicitly demonstrates the importance of the cultural-linguistic divide and thus the important conditioning factor of language and ensuing cultural belonging.<sup>15</sup>

Below we proceed by first discussing the various methods and approaches the authors have employed. In doing so, we also suggest how these can, either separately or jointly, advance the state of memory studies in the social sciences and humanities. We likewise discuss the contributions to this special section in relation to the broader literature on how representations of the past affect contemporary politics. A second section reviews the particulars of regional dynamics across Eastern Europe, after which we survey the three analytical arenas noted above. Specifically, we evaluate the circulation of memories, which can be accounted for by four distinct components. Next, we assess the factors that condition how remembering occurs, along with examining the identities of the relevant mnemonic actors and how they exert their influence. This introduction concludes by offering avenues for further research.

## **Methods for Understanding the Politics of Historical Memory**

The articles in this section showcase the diversity of approaches that exist for addressing memory and its political implications, in that they all proceed from slightly different ontological premises and consequently employ various methodologies. Examining how our authors study historical remembering therefore provides a comprehensive overview of the types of analytical approaches that have emerged from the field of memory studies.

Ethnographic methods such as those employed by Davydova-Minguet entail fieldwork and participant observation. These allow her to observe how the

transnational circulation of commemorative practices among Russian-speakers in Finland, coupled with the resonance of event framing, does not require them to make a clear-cut choice between embracing loyalty to their place of origin or place of residence. They likewise permit the author to illustrate how disparate mnemonic elements may travel beyond their original contexts of creation and be juxtaposed in unexpected ways, as when marchers commemorated those who perished in World War II while also demonstrating their support for the self-styled “Donetsk People’s Republic” in the Donbas, thereby overtly linking events from far different time periods and geopolitical contexts. Ethnographic approaches are moreover helpful in assessing the significance of symbols and the evolution of their meanings over time, whether these be physical objects like the orange-and-black St. George’s Ribbon or such cultural artifacts as Soviet songs from the World War II era. This approach allows Davydova-Minguet to fruitfully explore the spatial conundrums frequently raised by the expression of memory politics in transnational contexts. For many participants in the Immortal Regiment commemorations outside of Russia, a very practical problem is where to lay flowers, parade, or sing traditional songs when the host society is not attuned to the contextualizing narratives that form the background for such practices, or may even overtly oppose them.<sup>16</sup>

Another main method involves conducting interviews with political leaders and others capable of shaping policy relative to historical remembering. Many of these interviews will take place at the level of political elites, but they may also encompass members of civil society and social movements. Among our authors, Divald most directly relies on interviews to unpack the fraught term “autonomy” and why it is studiously avoided by Hungarians in Slovakia. She likewise draws on discussions with representatives of this community to expand on the mnemonic relationship that exists between it and the “kin-state” (Hungary proper), and to examine how this relationship impacts the functioning of political parties identified with the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.<sup>17</sup>

A different but no less important method consists of content analysis, which can be performed on various types of documents, including newspaper accounts, position papers, political speeches, press releases, and records of legislative debates. Most of the pieces in this volume employ a qualitative version of content analysis, but memory can also be studied via quantitative means.<sup>18</sup> The primary analytic power of content analysis lies in its ability to elucidate not only the ways in which semantic constructs encode culturally and politically conditioned historical interpretations, but also how they project the past into present-day political relevance. In addition, content analysis may likewise be employed to code other, nontextual sources of data, as Divald does with commemorative events.<sup>19</sup>

Along similar lines, survey research and public-opinion polling is proving invaluable for ascertaining how people conceive of the past, what political functions the past performs, and how successful attempts to politically activate it may be. In the current collection, Krawatzek uses these tools to push for a more systematic

understanding of the mnemonic narratives that the broader population holds. In his case, this involves examining the recall among youth in Belarus and Latvia of a particularly conflictual aspect of World War II, namely the issue of collaboration.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, there is process tracing, which need not be a stand-alone method as it can complement the above-noted approaches. Attesting to this, it is employed to various degrees by all the authors surveyed here, but is perhaps most evident in the articles by Kopusov and Soroka. Careful process tracing is especially appropriate if the researcher's goal is to make a credible causal argument through the use of predominantly qualitative data and how it is situated in time.<sup>21</sup> This is because process tracing can assist in clarifying the complex chains of events that are critical to comprehending the stepwise unfolding of diachronic effects. The collapse of the Soviet Union illustrates the challenges that exist with respect to establishing causal directionality. This event indelibly changed the region's mnemonic landscape, and it was simultaneously brought about by the nationally oriented conversations—which often centered on alternate ways of remembering the recent past—that become prominent in the mid-to-late 1980s. The ability to have these conversations was the result of underlying political developments, most notably the introduction of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms. However, they also had their origins in other phenomena, prominent among them the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident. Without a nuanced appreciation for the entangled processes that brought about these results, it would be very difficult to make any systematic claims regarding their temporal sequencing.

If the goal is to achieve a more rigorous analysis of the mechanisms through which mnemonic politics operate and the outcomes they bring about,<sup>22</sup> social scientists will ultimately have to embrace all of these methods, as each provides a different point of entry into the complex dynamics of how memory matters for understanding political outcomes and the events leading up to them. But in making this claim, we should not ignore their epistemological foundations and the disparate ways in which these can be operationalized. Moreover, as the field advances, scholars will undoubtedly move from predominantly emphasizing interpretive means of causal argumentation to searching for other explanatory patterns. In studying a phenomenon as complex and overdetermined as the politics of historical recall there will remain ample room for multiple approaches, as well as for normative theorizing concerning the motivations for interjecting the past into the present.

## **Eastern Europe as a Region of Memory**

Regional legacies create dynamics that shape distinctive contours of remembering over time. This is especially true in Eastern Europe, where mnemonic understandings differ from those exhibited elsewhere in Europe.<sup>23</sup> The key to parsing how the past is interpreted here requires recognizing that states in this region share a number of formative meta-experiences. It is likewise necessary to consider what has

been made of these experiences, meaning how they have been recognized or ignored within—as well as beyond—the immediate geographic space. Consequently, the powerful significance of the five regionwide factors detailed below must be taken seriously if one hopes to comprehend the frequently conflictive nature of mnemonic politics in this part of Europe.

## **Collapse of Multinational Empires**

First, we should consider the collapse of the multinational empires that existed throughout this region prior to World War I. The imperial experience is important to this day, as these empires frequently fostered either the conspicuous reification of emergent ethno-national and linguistic identities<sup>24</sup> or else endeavored to actively thwart them.<sup>25</sup> These actions were intended to maintain control over the populations in question, as well as to quash the ambitions of competing imperial powers eager to extend their geopolitical influence.<sup>26</sup>

Within their respective purviews, the Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires provided a common, overarching political identity for the diverse cultural and religious groups of the territories they controlled.<sup>27</sup> Their disintegration had numerous implications, including augmenting overlapping territorial claims and creating new states wherein minority-group identities became more politically salient.<sup>28</sup> For example, after the break-up of Austria-Hungary following World War I, the terms of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon left sizable enclaves of Hungarian speakers in neighboring countries such as Slovakia and Romania.<sup>29</sup> This imposition of new geopolitical borders, coupled with their subsequent shifts, further enabled national identities to burgeon throughout the region, although considerably later than throughout most of Western Europe.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it was the West that provided a template for the consolidation of these politicized identities across Eastern Europe after World War I, in an emulative process remarkably akin to the ways in which Western political and economic standards were uncritically adopted following the Soviet Union's breakdown.<sup>31</sup>

## **Impact of World War II**

Next, the impact of World War II and its aftermath continues to be felt with keen acuity throughout Eastern Europe. As Timothy Snyder and others have observed, in this region wartime violence was experienced much more intensely than in Western Europe, and directly affected civilians in far greater numbers.<sup>32</sup> This was particularly true in Poland and what were then the Soviet dominions of the Baltics, Belarus, and Ukraine. Within these locales, virtually all families harbor an account of having close relatives murdered and experiencing severe privation during the war. Attesting to this, Poland lost nearly 20 percent of its prewar population between 1939 and 1945, compared with population losses of less than 2 percent in France and 1 percent



in the United Kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Specific acts of violence were also more targeted in Eastern Europe. In particular, the genocide of the Jews and other ethnically motivated atrocities, along with the magnitude of forced population transfers, imprinted themselves deeply on the region.

### **Building Communism**

The transformative project of building communism in Eastern Europe that followed in the wake of World War II continues to affect the attitudes of citizens.<sup>34</sup> Examining the legacy of communism and Soviet domination therefore remains crucial for any analysis of Eastern Europe,<sup>35</sup> as for much of the twentieth century the USSR formed a hegemonic interpretive backdrop for this region.<sup>36</sup> During this period the writing of history was subordinated to politics, leading to ideologically conditioned lies, distortions, and enforced silences concerning the past, particularly as these related to the Second World War and the ensuing imposition of communist rule. Marxist legacies, however, are remembered in diverse ways because they were experienced differently. The “goulash communism” of János Kádár in post-1956 Hungary differed markedly from the megalomaniacal repression that characterized Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania or the beleaguered state-led socialism of Poland under Wojciech Jaruzelski. It is therefore unsurprising that communism’s legacies are today understood variously throughout these societies. Nonetheless, we also observe regionwide changes in how the communist period has been perceived. Whereas the dominant storyline undergirding the commemorations of the twentieth anniversary of communism’s collapse in 2009 was still one of ushering in democracy and a market economy, the thirtieth anniversary in 2019 gave rise to a much more critical discourse, with commemorative debates featuring prominent discussions of the transition’s negative aspects, including economic crises, demographic deficits, and the perceived loss of communal purpose and meaning.

### **Fall of Multinational States**

More proximate events likewise shape the mnemonic dynamics exhibited in the region. Especially relevant in this regard is the USSR’s dissolution and its aftermath, which permitted previously suppressed counter-memories to gain traction and public visibility. The Soviet Union’s collapse was not just a cause of historical contestation in Eastern Europe but also, in part, a result of the nationalized contestation of the past that began to emerge immediately after Mikhail Gorbachev’s policy of *glasnost*’ went into effect in the mid-1980s.<sup>37</sup>

Most striking in this respect are national stories of opposition and suffering that could not be openly discussed for much of the Soviet era. At the political level, this has led to governmental attempts to codify revised interpretations of history, as Kaposov illustrates with regard to Poland and Ukraine.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, in the Baltics a



corollary reshaping of how national history is interpreted has occurred, a phenomenon discussed by Krawatzek.<sup>39</sup> However, these mnemonic shifts were not just confined to states that were previously subalterns in a Soviet-dominated system. In the immediate aftermath of the USSR's fall, Russia was also quite self-critical when assessing its recent history, especially the Stalinist period. In fact, during the early 1990s such an approach was seen as a core component of Russia's attempt to democratize.

Combined, these formative experiences left an indelible mark on the political culture of Eastern Europe, embedding it in a shifting and entangled field of memory.<sup>40</sup> The dynamics evinced across the Western Balkans are particularly relevant for illustrating the complex interactions between these experiences; there it was older memories of interethnic violence that stood in the way of the "brotherhood and unity" stressed in communist Yugoslavia's founding narrative.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, however, the region's complicated World War II legacy did not allow easy distinctions to be drawn between victims and perpetrators, or which groups were legitimate members of the opposition during the Nazi occupation.

## European Integration

Eastern Europe's desire to integrate into, or at the very least seek closer association with, the institutional infrastructure of the EU was paralleled by its desire to elevate regional experiences of World War II to the level of pan-European memory.<sup>42</sup> However, interpretations of the past that were uncontroversial and widely accepted in post-communist Europe, particularly the idea that the violence of World War II primarily affected dominant nationalities such as the Poles, Ukrainians or Belarusians rather than the Jews, challenged the narrative of World War II that had been cultivated in the EU, particularly by France and Germany. Moreover, in large part because national identity was poorly developed or its expression stunted in many Eastern European states, political leaders as well as societies have tended to search for affirmative episodes and interpretations that depict important historical figures and events in a heroic light, while downplaying or whitewashing those that question this script. One pernicious consequence of this is that blame for negative historical episodes is often attributed to convenient scapegoats, whether these be neighboring polities or national minorities. Indeed, the emphasis on universal suffering, which is central to the concept of cosmopolitan memory as defined by Levy and Sznajder, has always been reluctantly received in Eastern Europe, where the suffering of the titular nationality tends to be foregrounded, along with its opposition to the Nazi and Soviet occupiers.<sup>43</sup>

## Circulation of Memories and Conflictive Constellations

Having established the main historical-political parameters of this mnemonic region, we now turn to the first arena for understanding the processes that regulate

remembering. Falling within the category of the circulation of memory are four components: (a) the diffusion and contestation of memories; (b) historical minorities and the movement of borders; (c) legacies of past populations; (d) the continuing proximity evinced between perpetrators and victims. These factors are certainly not unique to Eastern Europe, but the level of their political relevance in this region is pronounced.

## Diffusion and Contestation of Memories

The *diffusion and contestation* of memories has been enabled and exacerbated by the waves of migration that followed the breakdown of multinational states such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, as well as by the project of European integration.<sup>44</sup> However, these processes are not just confined to cross-border interactions; they may also occur within states, notably because of the surfacing of previously suppressed interpretations of the past. Consequently, we understand mnemonic diffusion and the contestation that frequently results from it to be an outcome of iterative cycles of communication such as occur, for example, between migrants and their friends and families in the country of origin or subgroups within a given society. At the same time, we acknowledge that the trajectory of historical narratives is oftentimes heavily influenced by the strategic considerations of political and other elites.

In particular, the diffusion of contentious memories through migration has created the potential to change national rules of remembering, as exemplified by the Immortal Regiment marches in Finland. Davydova-Minguet contrasts Finnish remembrance prior to 1991, when emphasis was placed on recalling the sacrifice that Finns made for national independence in the back-to-back wars they fought against the USSR (1939–1940, 1941–1944), with today's celebrations by Russian immigrants to Finland of the Soviet victory in World War II. Such a translocation of a decidedly Russo-centric interpretation speaks to extensive mnemonic diffusion. This is crucial to take note of, as in Finland Russian-speakers now make up the largest foreign-language group: as of late 2017, seventy-seven thousand individuals declared their mother tongue to be Russian out of a total population of 5.5 million. Additionally, many of them maintain affective ties to Russia and engage primarily with Russian-language media.<sup>45</sup>

While memories are fragmented and conflicted in every society,<sup>46</sup> this fragmentation is even more pronounced in the presence of migrant communities. Mnemonic integration often proves difficult due to the competing historical experiences emphasized by these groups. Researchers have found, for instance, that it is hard for Turkish migrants in Germany to achieve an emotional engagement with the Holocaust,<sup>47</sup> which has implications for, among other things, how history is taught in German schools. Moreover, affective ties that span borders can amplify these distinctions, as demonstrated by the current Russian government's efforts to shape the

cultural values and, by extension, historical recall, of Russian-speaking communities around the globe.<sup>48</sup> However, while in this context the emergence of a distinctively Russophone memory could be seen as emancipating a previously marginalized minority memory, the degree of its politicization seriously challenges established national frames of remembrance. Davydova-Minguet, for example, suggests that not only does the commemoration of the Immortal Regiment in Finland unite Russian speakers and reproduce a movement closely tied to the Russian state, but that it also erects an effective barrier to their integration into Finnish society.<sup>49</sup> More broadly, the grassroots character of the Immortal Regiment creates mnemonic bridges between Russian speakers across the globe and provides them with a feeling of unity, albeit one that is insular in its insistence that the Western European narrative, in ignoring the Soviet experience, is at best incomplete and at worst duplicitous.

Meanwhile, the competitive replication of memories across the region illustrates a different type of state-sponsored diffusion. This phenomenon is particularly evident today in the relations Poland and Ukraine exhibit with Russia, although comparable dynamics are evinced between the Baltic states and Russia as well. In these cases, we witness how much mnemonic disagreements depend on the relative geopolitical strength of the states involved and the degree to which one side or the other can effectively control the narrative beyond its immediate borders.<sup>50</sup> This observation explains why a contentious historical narrative promulgated by Russia has far more reach and resonance than a similar narrative being promoted by a weaker state, as Soroka discusses.<sup>51</sup>

Whereas memory was of less relevance in the relations between these countries in the 1990s, when regime transitions were ongoing and political rhetoric was more future-oriented, this changed once the economic and social hardships engendered by the transition began to foment the insertion of ethnonationalist claims into politics, which served to radically alter historical perceptions. To that effect, politicians within Eastern Europe have developed a habit of using legislation to reshape the past for purposes of nation-building, despite the presence of similar mnemonic phenomena in other regional contexts, notably East Asia and Latin America.<sup>52</sup> This legal institutionalization of history has resulted in, among other outcomes, a cascade of memory laws.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the political impetus for “juridifying” the past frequently derives from the interpretive stances adopted in neighboring countries. This cross-border dynamic dates to the 1990s, when keeping a close watch on how surrounding states interpreted history was driven by the fear of having one’s own post-communist perspective challenged or discredited. Initially, this process did not take place in a self-exculpatory or aggressive way. However, memory laws of the second generation, which date from the 2000s, frequently comprise direct responses to perceived mnemonic hostility on the part of other states.<sup>54</sup>

Mnemonic rules also diffuse across borders, with their reception dependent on the regime types of the countries in question. This phenomenon is taken up by Koposov, who focuses on the rise of national populism and memory laws that enshrine

particularistic meanings of the past in ways that are calculated to extoll the virtue of the state and/or nation rather than to remember and commemorate the memory of their victims. As he points out, what Pierre Nora once termed a “purely French legislative sport”<sup>55</sup> has become ever more prominent across Eastern Europe. However, highlighting the role cultural framing, regime type, and societal context play, in Eastern Europe these laws have tended to be very different in their intent than the legislation that was passed in Western Europe beginning in the mid-1980s.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, as Koposov and Soroka note in their respective discussions of the “mnemonic triangle” of Poland–Russia–Ukraine, the politics of memory engaged in by one state often have cross-border effects.<sup>57</sup> The changing mnemonic relations evinced between post-communist Poland and Ukraine illustrate this nicely. The two states had largely been able to put the past behind them until more overtly ethno-nationalist leaders assumed power in Kyiv in 2014 and Warsaw in 2015. At this point, their shared history became much more problematic in relations between them. For example, in 2015 Ukraine passed a quartet of so-called de-communication laws, the most controversial of which made it illegal to publicly denigrate the memory of any twentieth-century organization that fought for national independence, including the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which collaborated for a time with the Nazis and was responsible for the ethnic cleansing of Polish civilians in Volhynia and eastern Galicia during the 1940s. This caused a cascade of confrontation over historical legacies, the end result of which was that Poland in 2018 passed legislation specifically singling out the crimes of Ukrainian nationalists and groups such as the UPA (it was voided by the Constitutional Tribunal the following year).

The above highlights how conflictual memory politics may constitute a significant factor in altering relations between states. Additionally, the media frequently affect these cross-border dynamics. As Krawatzek highlights, support for Vladimir Putin is exceptionally robust not only among Russian-language media consumers in Latvia but also those in Estonia and Finland, despite (or perhaps because of) their detachment from the political and economic realities in Russia.<sup>58</sup>

## Historical Minorities and the Movement of Borders

The presence of historical minority groups often contributes to the existence of subversive memories, forming a vital component for understanding the circulation of mnemonic narratives provided that these groups have not lost their distinctive identities.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, particularistic interpretations of the past serve to establish and uphold the cohesion of these groups,<sup>60</sup> making the integration of persistently visible minorities a major challenge for states attempting to construct unitary national narratives.

The Hungarian minority in Slovakia illustrates this phenomenon clearly, as it mobilizes historical references not so much to challenge the Slovakian national narrative as to prevent itself from falling into oblivion in the face of steadily declining population numbers. References to past Hungarian leaders and select historical

events serve to self-referentially construct a minority identity and give meaning to its cultural reproduction over long spans of time. For this reason, Hungarians in Slovakia are disproportionately concerned with their mnemonic links to the Hapsburg dynasty and nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary. That nobody currently alive has any personal memories of this period only contributes to the high degree of nostalgia inherent in its recall. At the same time, the threats to the community that were present in these earlier periods (such as during the 1848 Uprising) are rhetorically transposed onto the present, amplifying the risk scenario for Hungarians residing in Slovakia today. Commemorations of past events in this context are also seen as a subtler way of expressing identity, one distanced from outright calls for autonomy, which is a highly sensitive subject in Slovakia as it invokes the successful Slovak strategy that used “autonomy” in 1938 as a stepping-stone for later independence from Czechoslovakia in 1939. For this reason, Hungarian elites in Slovakia eschew this semantically charged term and instead retreat to local and regional development narratives and claims to “self-governance” as a means through which to strive for *de facto* autonomy.<sup>61</sup>

A rather different minority group is analyzed in Krawatzek’s study of Russian speakers living in Latvia.<sup>62</sup> Here, the minority is not concerned about its cultural survival, especially as it has the backing of a strong regional power in its immediate neighborhood. Rather, the narratives about the past that the Russian community in Latvia mobilizes directly challenge the Latvian national narrative. As a survey on attitudes toward collaboration during World War II demonstrates, views on history differ profoundly between young Russian and Latvian speakers. Indicative of this, whereas the Latvian speakers’ responses convey a need to defend a nationalized version of history that emphasizes resistance to the Nazi occupiers, Russian speakers accept the existence of Latvian collaboration at a much higher rate.

However, it is worth emphasizing that subversive narratives about the past, though frequently propounded by minorities, may also occur when broader societal understandings of history do not match up with those being promulgated by elite actors. Along these lines, Soroka demonstrates how the official coverup of who the true perpetrators of the Katyn massacre were during the Soviet era produced powerful counter-narratives in Poland, where it was long suspected by many that the killings were engineered by the Soviet NKVD rather than the occupying Germans.

## Legacies of Past Populations

It is not only extant minorities that may challenge the legitimacy of unified national narratives. Across Eastern Europe, the groups that were killed or displaced during World War II continue to matter, as their stories are not easily reconciled with sanitized depictions of the past. Foremost among them are the Jews, who suffered extreme violence during World War II and whose mnemonic shadow continues to linger despite their physical absence. Such a dynamic is observable, for

example, in the case of the Hungarian Holocaust museum, which the political elite in Hungary criticized for not paying adequate attention to the Hungarian rescuers of the Jews. This resulted in the creation of an officially “correct” museum that sidelined the fact that the Hungarian state collaborated with the Germans in the murder of Jews.<sup>63</sup>

The memory of the Holocaust is particularly vexing for states that were allied with the Nazis (i.e., Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia), especially as within some of them revisionist national accounts have developed stressing that they were the victims of German aggression. In such narratives, Jewish suffering is often perceived as standing in a zero-sum relationship with one’s own suffering. Indeed, the Holocaust is frequently treated as competing with both the nationalized recall of World War II and the Soviet war myth.<sup>64</sup> As Kaposov observes in stressing the interpretive malleability involved in these processes, “anti-fascism has paradoxically merged in Russia and Poland with their national traditions of near-fascism.” Moreover, as Krawatzek’s piece suggests, given the present-day absence of Jewish communities in this region, there are hardly any vocal actors left to challenge the heroic national-partisan myth, which conveniently ignores the existence of widespread anti-Semitism among the partisan movement.<sup>65</sup>

### **Proximity of Victims and Perpetrators**

Those who committed crimes against humanity and those that suffered them in Eastern Europe have frequently continued to reside side-by-side after World War II ended and communism collapsed. This coexistence has generated a particularly conflictual setting, especially because the sort of victim-centered historical interpretation that evolved in Germany, France or the United States over the course of the 1970s and 1980s remains notably absent in the region. Consequently, these societies do not represent their history primarily as one centered on the victims of World War II; instead, there exists a far-reaching emphasis on collective resistance to the Nazi occupation.

But such narratives are rarely entirely successful. The case of Yugoslavia is particularly instructive in this regard. An inclusive founding myth could not take hold despite being actively propounded by the government, as Yugoslavia was a country where victims and perpetrators continued to live in close proximity after the war, often even in the same village. Obviously, the experience of violence cannot simply be erased from a local population’s memory.<sup>66</sup> Just as it was erroneous to think about the post-communist transitions as a *tabula rasa*,<sup>67</sup> it was likewise not possible for the Yugoslav population to effortlessly leave behind the bloody interethnic conflict it experienced during World War II in order to build a new society. The presence of the memory of that violence, and the conflictive interpretations accorded it within local communities, made it extremely difficult for elite-led narratives stressing national unity to resonate, as these threatened to wipe out personal experiences of the war.

The impact of contested interpretations of history existing in close proximity to one another is likewise attested by the Latvian case, where divergent assessments of the Red Army's role in the War—as representing liberation or a renewed occupation—continue to divide different ethnic communities.<sup>68</sup>

The experience of violence in the region and the proximity of perpetrators and victims also plays out at the interstate level. As previous scholarship has demonstrated, recognizing the commission of crimes against humanity by the state and apologizing for them can serve as an important factor in international relations.<sup>69</sup> Soroka illustrates this through the competing historical narratives adopted by Polish and Russian elites relative to the Katyn massacre and how these have varied over time.<sup>70</sup> The Polish side has long expected greater Russian contrition and cooperation in investigating this crime. Consequently, when Moscow's shifting politics of history selectively rehabilitated the Soviet past beginning in the mid-2000s, this not only altered Russian perceptions about Katyn, but also strained diplomatic relations between the two neighboring states.

## Conditioning Factors of Remembrance

Memory is conditioned by its constantly evolving contextual embeddedness and circumscribed by socio-cultural norms. As a result, historical narratives that violate what are regarded as acceptable boundaries will be viewed as illegitimate, transgressive, or simply not meaningful.<sup>71</sup> How the past is politically recalled, therefore, depends on the interaction of culturally conditioned rules concerning *what* is appropriate to discuss, *how* it is to be discussed, and *who* the mnemonic entrepreneurs are that construct historical narratives. To this end, we consider three specific conditioning factors: (a) the relationship of memory to regime type; (b) the relationship of memory to supranational projects such as that of European integration; (c) the societal platforms on which, and media through which, the past is discussed.

### Regime Type

With respect to institutional factors, regime type is particularly consequential. Authoritarian regimes, and to a more limited extent electoral democracies that lean toward populism or ethno-nationalism, are less accommodating of pluralistic historical narratives than are liberal democracies, which are expected to “agree to disagree” more readily when it comes to how the past should be understood. Moreover, the former frequently feature officially sanctioned interpretations of the past, with narratives that differ relegated to a subversive status or banned outright. As Krawatzek argues, in the Belarusian context, where there exists an enforced official view of World War II, narratives that question the selflessness and moral uprightness of the partisans or admit the existence of collaboration would hardly find a larger discursive



space.<sup>72</sup> However, even if the political situation allowed these to be interjected into broader discourse, they very likely would not resonate due to the societal emphasis placed on the partisan contribution to the victory in World War II.<sup>73</sup>

But this phenomenon is not just confined to the domestic sphere. As Soroka argues, there are cross-border effects related to regime type that directly impinge on how disputes over the past progress in relations between states.<sup>74</sup> A commitment to liberal norms, for instance, helps to explain why Poland and Russia were able to successfully defuse long-standing political tensions surrounding the Katyń massacre in the early 1990s. It also suggests why relations over Katyń, along with other elements of their mutually shared past, rapidly deteriorated when Russian president Vladimir Putin began steering post-Soviet Russia in a more authoritarian direction and an avowedly nationalistic government was installed in Warsaw in 2005 (and again in 2015).

This also has implications for how political opponents who hold mnemonic views that differ from those of the ruling elite are perceived and treated. In authoritarian regimes or illiberal democracies, dissenters are typically regarded as existential enemies in a zero-sum political game rather than bearers of different viewpoints who can be engaged and reasoned with. Regime type likewise has a bearing on how the masses, as well as cultural and economic elites, are viewed by those in positions of political power and the opportunities, or lack thereof, they have for influencing historical discourses.

The rise of challenges to liberal democracy in post-communist Europe is closely related to the ascendance of mnemonic contestation in the political arena. Furthermore, this trend has been exacerbated by the divergence of what were once accepted as the region's dominant narratives. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise, for example, Russian President Boris Yeltsin was highly critical of Stalinism and the political repressions associated with it, which rendered the Kremlin's official narrative congruent with the narratives emanating from newly elected non-communist leaders in capitals like Riga, Tallinn, and Prague. However, Russian attitudes toward the past have changed markedly since then. Most of this reshaping occurred during the second Putin presidency (2004–2008), by which time the Kremlin's decision makers had become convinced that Western powers would never treat Russia as an equal.<sup>75</sup> As a result, Russia's official historical line turned increasingly in a statist direction, intent on establishing a legitimate continuity between the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the post-Soviet Russian Federation. While this development proved politically useful on the domestic front, where many rued the dissolution of the USSR, it was in large measure brought about by changes in the wider geopolitical context. But while shifts in historical policy may be predicated on external exigencies, they may also cause the development of international tensions.

Similarly, controversies surrounding monuments and other physical manifestations of the past speak to the effects of cultural framing and its cross-border salience.

Divald illustrates this in discussing how the youth movement *Via Nova* began to renovate Hungarian tombstones after a 2005 law threatened to remove them if cemetery fees had not been paid for five or more years.<sup>76</sup> Among the different tombstones, the organization chose to renovate the tomb of a Czechoslovak senator who had represented the Hungarian minority and worked for peaceful coexistence during the interwar period. Other controversies around monuments that address the uneasy coexistence of different national narratives include the banning of Hungarian President László Solyom from entering Slovakia to unveil a statue of King St. Stephen and the debate between a local mayor and Prime Minister Robert Fico on the placement of two key Slovak national figures in the town of Komárom.

### **Supranational Integration**

The countries of Eastern Europe also have to respond—either by assent or dissent—to the mnemonic frames propounded by Russia and the EU, the region's two major influence brokers. In particular, EU norms of remembering, namely the stress placed on the centrality of victimhood and the specificity of the Holocaust, have played a significant role in structuring contemporary mnemonic politics in Eastern Europe. At the same time, they have also provoked a populist backlash against narratives seen as disparaging the nation. Right-wing governments in countries such as Latvia and Poland have uncritically glorified the nation's resistance in World War II. Simultaneously, a movement has emerged that seeks to counter the prevailing Russian-sponsored narrative of the Red Army's liberation of the region; some of its adherents even seek to ascribe co-responsibility to the USSR for the outbreak of World War II.<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, many former Warsaw Pact members also want to have the EU more overtly recognize the suffering of those states that endured communism.<sup>78</sup>

The failure to constitute a pan-European memory project, reflected in the tepid reception accorded to the opening of the House of European History in Brussels in 2017, may be regarded as a threat to Europe's stability. The same holds true for regionally oriented attempts to achieve trade and infrastructural integration. For example, while the Three Seas Initiative—which was established in 2016 and focuses on the states located between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas<sup>79</sup>—purports to complement rather than compete with the EU, it nevertheless represents a fundamental reconceptualization of spatial thinking from an east–west axis to one that is north–south in its orientation.<sup>80</sup> The project also resonates historically with the *Intermarium* initiative, a proposed union of neighboring states advocated by Poland's interwar leader, Józef Piłsudski. The *Intermarium*, in turn, which was conceived of as a bulwark against undue German and Russian influence, echoes a prior center of alternate regional legitimacy, namely the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, recall of which implicitly challenges the hegemonic pretensions of many of the mnemonic narratives currently dominant in Europe.

## Technology and the New Media

The last factor that is crucial for understanding the regional dynamics that condition memory concerns *technology and the new media*. This is obviously not a point on which Eastern Europe differs from other regions, but rather one that speaks to linkages between regional and global dynamics. Cross-border connections between people include the transfer of political and cultural ideas in the form of remittances,<sup>81</sup> the circulation of which is particularly important for Eastern Europe.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, these connections not only have the power to increase the bonds between places of residence and origin, but also between members of ethnic communities that live in different migratory contexts. Especially given the increasing availability of television channels and newspapers online, the media play an ever-greater role in enabling previously localized interpretations of the past to travel widely.

Noteworthy in this regard is the transnational media sphere, which not only serves as a conduit of news, but—because of its linkage to linguistic and therefore cultural rules—is also capable of cultivating particular versions of history. Russian-language media, for instance, frame World War II in terms of the Red Army's victory over fascism, morally obligating Russians around the world to honor those who died in achieving it. This affective management of history constructs an emotional link with the past rather than promoting critical engagement with it.<sup>83</sup> Not only have Russian-language media enabled the spread of Russo-centric modes of commemorating Victory Day to neighboring states, but the resulting mediatization of these commemorations further augments their visibility. After all, the number of Russian participants in Helsinki's Immortal Regiment marches in 2017 and 2018 was small (somewhere between 200 and 300), but their visibility, given the event's coverage, was considerable. Social media algorithms only amplify these effects and reinforce how the past is interpreted within discrete ethnic and linguistic communities.

Moreover, the growing presence of a global media, both in terms of the availability of news and the means by which it is disseminated, has contributed to the deterritorialization of memory. In particular, social media outlets like Facebook, VKontakte, Instagram, and YouTube have all lowered the bar for mnemonic entrepreneurship and activism, making it possible to participate in, and comment on, historical events without the need to be physically engaged with them.

## Actors and Claims to Memory

Interpretations of the past require agents who vocalize them, endow them with authenticity, and mobilize the resources required for them to be heard in public discourse. Defining which actors are considered legitimate players in the struggle over memory is closely linked to the previous topic of conditioning factors. Political regimes, as well as cultural norms, meaningfully influence who is entitled, and permitted, to speak on behalf of whom. Four types of actors, and the relationships

between them, stand out when it comes to appreciating the dynamics of memory in Eastern Europe: (a) societal elites (especially pertinent in this regard are political and cultural elites, but economic elites may also play an important role); (b) social movements and civil society associations; (c) society at large and the opinions it holds, with the development of mass-level collective memory feeding into the process of national remembering; (d) those who claim to speak on behalf of others, the latter voiceless because they no longer constitute a meaningful demographic presence in the region.

### **Elites: Driving or Driven?**

For political elites, seeking recourse to mnemonic narratives has become a critical component of the fight for power, with the mobilization of the past having turned into a key facet of political legitimation and contestation.<sup>84</sup> Elite discourse, in this regard, is critical to analyze because it has the potential to shape the historical views of the wider society.<sup>85</sup>

Elites, because they hold positions of power over society, have the ability to profoundly affect the content of the politics of memory. They may do so in a number of ways, including by instituting official commemorations, building monuments, and controlling how the past is depicted in school textbooks. However, the ways in which elites, their historical narratives, and the policies resulting from them interact across state borders is another critically understudied element. Soroka illustrates this in his analysis of how Russian understandings of Katyń and its commemoration changed with the transition of power from Yeltsin to Putin.<sup>86</sup> During the Yeltsin presidency, the Russian government acknowledged Soviet guilt for the massacre and exhibited a relatively open attitude toward the Polish understanding of it (despite the persistence of interpretive divisions among Russian elites), which contributed to improving relations between the two countries. Meanwhile, the prevailing Polish and Russian interpretation of Stalinism placed emphasis on mutual suffering. Beginning with Putin's tenure, however, this more integrative interpretation of history was abandoned and profound disagreements over how Katyń was to be viewed began to manifest.

### **Social Movements**

Social movements and civil society constitute an important intermediary layer in the process of articulating demands from the masses to the political elite and, conversely, communicating elite stances on the politics of memory to wider society.<sup>87</sup> This is particularly the case in liberal democratic regimes, where the public sphere is most robustly developed.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the societal importance and political relevance of such collectives has been widely recognized in various regime types, as exemplified by their role in the memorialization movement during the USSR's breakdown.<sup>89</sup>

The Immortal Regiment is one such intermediary actor that has become a critical component of historical interpretations that embrace a pro-Russian view of World War II. What started as a private initiative in 2012 has evolved into an increasingly state-centered march that honors the victims of World War II but also functions to legitimate Russia's present-day political structure.<sup>90</sup> This movement has already spread across some seventy countries, with the Russian media portraying the marches as a sign of Russia's morally superior historical interpretation and an important challenge to the Eastern European (and to a lesser extent, Western) narrative. In Finland, as Davydova-Minguet illustrates, the participants of the Immortal Regiment see themselves as the true guardians of a memory that other European societies have forgotten, highlighting the horrors that Soviet society endured for the liberation of Europe from fascism.<sup>91</sup> The transnational success of this movement is all the more interesting in that migrant groups have traditionally found it difficult to introduce their own mnemonic narratives into host societies given their inherent transcultural liminality and generally weaker socioeconomic positions.

## Society at Large

Alongside those who get involved in social movements and civil society are ordinary citizens who maintain their own views on history without necessarily going out on the streets to proclaim them. Scholars have looked at public opinion concerning key historical figures to understand shifting attitudes in society.<sup>92</sup> Especially significant in the context of the post-communist region, societal attitudes in Russia have become much more positive toward Stalin in recent years. Attesting to this, a March 2019 survey by the Moscow-based Levada Center found 51 percent of respondents held generally positive attitudes toward Stalin and 70 percent believed he had played a beneficial role for their country.<sup>93</sup> Predictably, this led to a media outcry in Eastern Europe and rampant speculation over what it portends for Russia's future political development.

Notwithstanding the difficulties in understanding the precise causal relations between public opinion and elite politics in the realm of memory, it appears societal attitudes toward historical personages and events are governed by the interaction of elite- and grassroots-level framing effects. Historical narratives are transmitted through families, the school system, media, and political discourse, and they tend to be "sticky." At the same time, people's attitudes toward historical events are generally insulated from the ebb and flow of quotidian politics, unlikely to shift in the short run absent fundamental political changes. One such moment of change in which mass attitudes toward historical events were quickly altered occurred in Ukraine after the 2013–2014 Maidan protests triggered Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of separatist violence in the Donbas.<sup>94</sup> In other contexts, as Krawatzek illustrates, altered political narratives may fail to affect deeper underlying systems of historical orientation among local language-based communities.<sup>95</sup>

## The Absent Presence

The last type of actor integral to the dynamics of memory politics is represented by groups that once existed on a given territory but no longer do so, and whose self-professed spokespeople are today primarily academics, journalists, human rights activists or coethnics in other countries. In this respect, Jewish diasporas are a major factor, as they constitute an authoritative voice for representing the Jewish historical experience in Eastern Europe. The modifications made to Poland's controversial 2018 memory law, which in its initial incarnation criminalized any attempts to besmirch the "good name" of the Polish nation in connection to World War II and the Holocaust, illustrate this dynamic, as Israeli disapprobation went a long way toward pushing the Polish government to alter the law's wording and remove its criminal penalties.<sup>96</sup>

At the same time, these absent Jewish lives create an uneasy echo that political and societal actors in the region are forced to deal with, particularly as evidence continues to be unearthed regarding Jewish suffering at the hands of their fellow citizens.<sup>97</sup> Consequently, the Jewish communities of the past exhibit an agency that tarnishes the sanitized and mythologized memory of heroic resistance to the Nazi occupation that still prevails in Eastern Europe.

What makes such memories so problematic is that Jewish suffering challenges the very core of national identity for many Eastern European states. For example, in a country such as Belarus, the Jewish experience has few, if any, mnemonic advocates at the national level, which implies that inconvenient memories can be successfully sidelined in constructing the uncritical trope of the heroic partisan. But Belarus is not exceptional; Jewish suffering fits badly with the post-World War II national stories being told in a host of post-communist states. Illustrating this, Koposov argues that overtly acknowledging the violence Jewish citizens of Poland experienced at the hands of fellow Poles would fundamentally undermine the dominant narrative of the Polish experience in World War II, a mytho-heroic one that cannot easily incorporate self-critical elements.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

The articles in this special section demonstrate how much the interdisciplinary field of memory studies has developed over the last two decades in its ambitions, methodological diversity, and explanatory potential. While researching the implications of present-day interpretations of the past has long been an occupation of the humanities, it is particularly noteworthy that social scientists are now also taking up the challenge of studying this phenomenon. Fields like political science and sociology more and more enter memory studies, which has already yielded fascinating results.

Trying to advance this research agenda further, the contributions in this section all speak to different methodological approaches and engage with various aspects of the three key arenas that we have laid out in this introduction: (1) the

circulation of memory and the contestation of established narratives; (2) the conditioning factors of remembering (such as regime type or supranational integration), but also technological change; (3) the various actors engaged in the struggle over interpretive dominance.

Going further, we see several themes that can be exploited in upcoming research, for which this publication provides some groundwork. First, there is the need to consider in greater detail how specific memories and narratives of the past become entangled at the national and subnational levels, as well as across borders and through time. Examining this phenomenon is the major contribution of this special section, as all of our authors deal prominently with this theme. Still, further work remains to be done.

Second, there is the potential to deepen the study of memory and its societal impact through sophisticated methods and refined conceptual approaches. Within this section, Krawatzek is the most deliberate in his attempt to do so; list experiments and vignette priming hold great promise in assessing the historical views that individuals may hold. But there still exists much fertile ground to be plowed. One promising direction, for example, would be experimental research that measures the physiological effects on individuals of various historical figures and narratives. Another might involve applying web scraping, machine learning and automated content analysis to regional social media sources, along with employing mixed methods research designs that can complement the qualitative and small-n case studies that area specialists have long relied upon. While causal inference may not necessarily always be a desirable goal for projects focused on the past and its present-day ramifications, there remains a great deal of methodological rigor that can be fruitfully brought to bear on the questions that interest those who study the politics of memory.

Finally, we would suggest that while the past does indeed take a backseat in many situations to the centrality of economic and strategic concerns in political life, this does not mean that it should be regarded as epiphenomenal, or as having at best a marginal impact on formulating economic and strategic concerns. Overstating the divide between self-conception and material interest is a fraught and foolish undertaking. It is high time to decisively shift this paradigm. Material concerns exist not absent reference to the past but precisely as an outgrowth of it. Examining when and how beliefs about history shape wider political decision making remains a topic that has been virtually unexplored in a systematic fashion. That associated puzzles are both omnipresent and unresolved is what makes studying how the past affects the present such a promising and exciting field of research.

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## Notes

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11. Olga Davydova-Minguet, "Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings," *East European Politics and Societies*, part of this special section.

12. Nikolay Koposov, "Populism and Memory: Legislation of the Past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia," in *East European Politics and Societies*, part of this special section.

13. Susan Divald, "Looking to the Past to Survive the Future: The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia," in *East European Politics and Societies*, part of this special section.

14. George Soroka, "Recalling Katyń: Poland, Russia and the Interstate Politics of History," in *East European Politics and Societies*, part of this special section.

15. Félix Krawatzek, "Remembering a Contentious Past: Resistance and Collaboration in the Former Soviet Union," in *East European Politics and Societies*, part of this special section.

16. Davydova-Minguet, "Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings."

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18. Rolf Fredheim, "The Memory of Katyn in Polish Political Discourse: A Quantitative Study," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 7 (2014): 1165–87.

19. Divald, "Looking to the Past to Survive the Future."

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21. Soroka, "Recalling Katyń"; Koposov, "Populism and Memory."

22. Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka, "Bringing the Past Into the Present: Toward a New Social Scientific Research Agenda," *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (2018): e74–e79.

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# Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings: Russian Immigrants and the Remembrance of World War II in Finland

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This article discusses public and mediatized memory politics concerning World War II in Finland, particularly its transnational dimensions brought about by post-Soviet immigration from the former Soviet Union. Despite the ongoing multiculturalization of Finnish society, where Russian speakers have become the largest immigrant group, Finnish national identity is still constructed around the idea of national independence and its heroic defence. Finnish collective and public memory with its monuments and celebrations concentrates on the sacrifice the nation made for Finnish independence in the wars against the Soviet Union during 1939–1944. In turn, these (re)produce performative membership in the Finnish nation. Likewise, recent Russian memory politics that celebrate Russia’s “great victory” in World War II have become visible in the Finnish public and media space owing to the Immortal Regiment marches held in Helsinki since 2017. This event is embedded within a series of complex connections between Russian speakers, Russian mediascapes, and pro-Russian activists in Finland, and represents an instance of the mediatization of transnational memory politics.

**Keywords:** *Russians abroad; memory politics; memory of World War II; transnationalism; mediatization*

## Introduction

Developments in media and communication technologies today enable a growing connectedness between people despite geographical borders. This often leads to paradoxical outcomes: instead of connecting inhabitants of the same country, technologically mediated communications may enhance divides, leading to fragmentation and polarization. Immigrant communities that differ linguistically and culturally from the societies where they live foster connections with the countries of their origin through their media use. From the perspective of integrating into the society of the country of immigration, this may be problematic. Mediatization of immigrant groups challenges existing integration politics, which aim at the inclusion of immigrants.<sup>1</sup> As pointed out in the Introduction and in other articles of this special



section,<sup>2</sup> transnational and national identity politics based on collective memories deserve more attention, especially when they intertwine with the “techno-cultural opportunities” provided by contemporary media.<sup>3</sup> But also without technological change, transnationalism has been a crucial factor for understanding the dynamics of remembering.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I focus on the contemporary intertwining of immigration from Russia with potentially conflictual memory politics and mediascapes operating nationally and transnationally. The case study analyses the Immortal Regiment marches held to mark the 9 May celebration of Victory Day that have been organized by pro-Russian activists in Helsinki since 2017. My particular interest lies in pondering the interplay of the politics of memory with the different public narratives that are produced within the Russophone traditional and social media sphere.

This article is based on long-term studies of ethno-cultural processes related to post-Soviet immigration from the former Soviet Union to Finland. It is the result of a research project implemented between 2015 and 2017 focussing on Russian speakers’ media use in Finland and the attitudes of Finns and Russophone immigrants towards Russia. Additionally, it incorporates my study of Finnish and Russian national celebrations in the context of the cross-border and transnational connections brought about by immigration to Finland from Russia, as well as making use of a long-term ethnographic study of the Internet-based activities of Russian speakers in Finland.

The article aims at depicting and evaluating the ever-changing interrelations between collective memories, contemporary media environments, and migrations as sites of societal integration or disintegration. In the first part, I will outline the main features of the post-Soviet immigration to Finland, then characterize contemporary collective memories that have been formed in Finland and in Russia during this period. After presenting my theoretical points of departure, I briefly describe the performance of the Immortal Regiment march in Helsinki in 2018 and consider the developments that enabled it. I end by developing some conclusions concerning the need for advancing more inclusive forms of memory politics and their public display in contemporary Finnish immigrant society.

## **Russian Speakers: An Emerging Minority**

Russian speakers in Finland consist of two groups: the so-called “old” and “new” Russians. The former are the descendants of Russian immigrants who arrived in Finland before or shortly after Finnish independence. Their ties with contemporary Russia are mostly historical; for them, Russian has gradually faded from daily use and their languages of everyday communication have become Finnish and Swedish. The descendants of these “old Russians” are considered to be both an invisible and integral part of Finnish society and history.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the



majority of present-day Russian speakers are post-Soviet migrants. This wave of migrants started to arrive beginning in the 1990s, and Finland continues to annually absorb some 2,500 new immigrants from the Russian Federation.<sup>6</sup> As a result, by 2050 it is estimated that there will be around 200,000 Russian speakers in Finland.

This post-Soviet immigration started in the early 1990s and proceeded through two main channels: the re-migration of individuals with Finnish roots and marriage with Finnish citizens. The re-migration program, which was finally closed in 2016 after twenty-six years of operation, resulted in the immigration of approximately 30,000 people. This group's ethnic Finnish background was rarely accompanied by a mastery of the Finnish language. With the unfolding of this migration flow, the requirement for the incoming migrants to have a "Finnish identity" became inscribed in official documents and procedures. Likewise, demonstrating some kind of loyalty towards Finland was expected. The war-time evacuation of Ingrian Finns to Finland became a meaningful tie with the country.<sup>7</sup> The pattern of marriage migration is gendered: most migrants are Russian women who migrate mostly as the result of marriages with Finnish citizens.<sup>8</sup>

In the 2000s, immigration from Russia occurred predominantly through family, labour, and educational residence permits. Today, Russian speakers constitute the largest group of immigrants speaking a foreign language in Finland and are the third largest language group after Finnish and Swedish speakers. At the end of 2017, a total of 77,177 people in Finland declared Russian as their mother tongue. Of these, 59,271 held Russian citizenship, 29,183 persons had only Russian citizenship, and 30,088 held both Russian and Finnish citizenships. These Russian speakers have a clear migrant background, with 56,696 being born in the former Soviet Union and 14,227 in the Russian Federation.<sup>9</sup>

It can be assumed that the number of Russian speakers in Finland is in fact higher than the register suggests. Although the Finnish population register is very comprehensive, it does not reflect the whole picture, as one cannot, for example, register two native languages. Likewise, immigrants from other post-Soviet countries also speak Russian. Despite different ethnic and national backgrounds, Russian has become a *lingua franca* within post-Soviet migrant communities.<sup>10</sup>

The Russian-speaking minority in Finland is ethnically, historically, culturally, and socially heterogeneous. Its members usually originate from territories adjacent to Finland: the Republic of Karelia, Leningrad oblast, Saint Petersburg, and Estonia. Geographically, more than 40 percent of Russian speakers are concentrated in the capital region of Finland, and about 30 percent live along the eastern border in proximity to Russia. Against the background of discussion on asylum seekers, Russian speakers remain an "invisible" minority because of their "whiteness" and underrepresentation in politics and the media. Their integration and socioeconomic position in Finland are hindered by difficulties in learning Finnish, the historical image of Russia, experiences of discrimination, over-qualification, high unemployment (19 vs. 9 percent of the Finnish-speaking population), and lower income rates.<sup>11</sup> The

everyday lives of Russian speakers are permeated with transnational family, friendship, cultural, social, and media ties.<sup>12</sup>

Since the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine and Russian interference in different mediated processes in “the West,” Russian citizenship and transnational connections with Russia have been framed in Finland as a potential threat. The contemporary image of Russian speakers in Finland is negatively affected by an unquestioned, and banal, assumption associating them with the Russian state. Finnish discussions regarding imposing restrictions on individuals with dual citizenship, which is understood among Russian speakers as pertaining to them, are preoccupied with issues of loyalty and do not take into the account migrant’s everyday transnationalism and the meanings that they ascribe to citizenship.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, their everyday transnational family ties and the closeness of their native localities in Russia, along with their transnational media consumption (enabled by contemporary information and communication technologies), inevitably bond them with Russia and Russian identity politics.

### Conflicting Memory Setting

Russia and Finland share a 1,300-kilometer border and a long history of both coexistence and conflict. The seminal event that shaped the present-day Finnish–Russian border and the relations between these two neighboring countries took place during World War II. In today’s Finland and Russia, popular national interpretations of World War II have become “foundational events” through which to understand national identity, but the war is interpreted and remembered in very different ways.

In Finland’s collective memory, the result of World War II is interpreted as a defensive victory, even though the country lost.<sup>14</sup> The Winter War of 1939–1940 was started by the Soviet Union and resulted in the defeat of the Finnish army and the loss of the Karelian Isthmus, Ladoga Karelia, and territories in Northern Finland. Even so, Finland retained its sovereignty. In the Continuation War of 1941–1944, Finland aimed at regaining its lost territories and creating a “Great Finland” constructed from Finnish and historically Karelian territories on the Soviet side of the border. The Finnish army occupied a large part of Soviet Karelia and Leningrad oblast and fought in alliance with Nazi Germany. The Continuation War ended in 1944 with fierce defensive actions and a temporary peace treaty with the Soviet Union, which was cemented in the Paris Treaty of 1947. This treaty reaffirmed the territorial losses of 1940 with the additional territories in the North and set reparations, which Finland paid until 1952. In the Finnish–Soviet wars of 1939–1940 and 1941–1944, Finland lost approximately 10 percent of its territory and had to relocate more than 400,000 of its citizens. During the Soviet–Finnish war of 1939–1940, Soviet casualties amounted to 333,084 soldiers, whereas 26,662 Finnish soldiers were killed and 43,557 wounded.<sup>15</sup> During the war of 1941–1944 the USSR suffered 757,500 casualties, while the commensurate figure for Finland was 170,000.<sup>16</sup>

The memory of the wars between the USSR and Finland waged within the context of World War II still forms the “great narrative of the Finnish nation,”<sup>17</sup> although the country is becoming even more ethnically and culturally diverse, and the politics of history, such as how history is taught in schools, is being adjusted to this reality.<sup>18</sup> The memory of the lost territories, first of all Karelia, is strongly articulated in the activities of societies of evacuees, popular culture, and academic and public discourse. This war narrative, along with how the home front is portrayed, presents the Finnish nation predominantly as a victim of these conflicts. Likewise, memories of the fighting, as well as of fallen soldiers and veterans, are widely treasured by Finnish families and constitute a large part of the nation’s collective memory. This memory, in turn, forms the core of the celebration of the main national festival, Independence Day, and is ubiquitous in the popular cultural production.<sup>19</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union initiated a significant change in Finnish history and memory politics. While during the Soviet period the USSR’s victory over fascist Germany was recognized and praised on the official level, while patriotic memory was suppressed, after the Soviet Union’s collapse, Finnish war memory experienced a “neo-patriotic turn,” by which Finnish historians Kinnunen and Jokisipilä mean “the public renaissance of the pronouncedly nationalist attitudes and representations that began to dominate the public memory of the Finnish wartime. The neo-patriotic discourse builds on the constructed conception of wartime Finland as ‘unified and unique.’”<sup>20</sup>

In addition, for a long time, Finnish historiography of the war has been dominated by the so-called separate war thesis: Finland’s war against the Soviet Union in 1941–1944 has been understood as largely independent of Operation Barbarossa and German policies and practices in the war in the East. Historian Antero Holmila<sup>21</sup> notices that Finnish historical writing has followed a patriotic interpretative framework, and aimed at the “objective” construction of the past without attempts to evaluate problematic episodes in the war, such as Finland’s participation in the Holocaust: “the historian has taken a backseat, telling the story ‘as it was.’”<sup>22</sup> The alliance with Nazi Germany during the Continuation War, Finland’s complicity in the Holocaust, and the occupation of Soviet Karelia as part of a project to create a “Great Finland” are still poorly articulated in public or cultural memory, although during the 2000s several academic studies related to these topics were published.<sup>23</sup>

In Russia, the memory of World War II is formed around the symbolism of the “Great Patriotic War” and the 9 May celebration of Victory Day, which during the post-Soviet period has undergone a transformation from a late Soviet “celebration with tears in the eyes” to the joyful celebration of a victorious and powerful nation today.<sup>24</sup> In studies of Soviet and post-Soviet war memory, there is a common division made between the official memory of the “great victory” and a peripheral familial memory of the “bloody war.”<sup>25</sup> The post-Soviet war memory of the 2000s is characterized by state-led attempts to develop the neo-Soviet model of projecting the “great victory” onto the present-day state, and at the same time a multiplicity of local, non-governmental initiatives that aim at the individualization and personification of the

memory of the fallen, which the state successfully incorporates into its own memory politics.<sup>26</sup> In post-Soviet Russia, Victory Day has become the main national celebration.

Still, Mischa Gabowitsch<sup>27</sup> argues that the meaning of Victory Day has changed within Russia, and especially in the other former Soviet states. Outside of Russia, in addition to the reiteration of the Soviet “victory myth,” it accommodates the initiatives and interpretations of various groups and actors and reflects the changed position of Russian speakers, who live now in the states that interpret the results of World War II as merely beginning of the “Soviet occupation” rather than “liberation from fascism.”<sup>28</sup>

One of the recent “invented traditions” of the celebration of Victory Day on 9 May is the march of the so-called Immortal Regiment, which began in Russia in 2012 as a grassroots initiative before becoming incorporated into state-led celebrations in 2015. These marches are organized throughout Russia and abroad. In 2018, they were held in more than seventy countries where Russian minorities reside. The descendants of Soviet soldiers organize these marches, and they display portraits of their ancestors and performatively signal their veneration of what they endured.

Moreover, the Immortal Regiment presents itself as a “movement,” inviting participants to search out and present information about relatives who fought in the war and how their memory is cherished by their families.<sup>29</sup> The Immortal Regiment can therefore be simultaneously interpreted both as a successful outcome of state-led memory politics and as a way to protest against the state’s appropriation of the memory of the war.<sup>30</sup> Julie Fedor evaluates these marches abroad as declarations of support for the contemporary Russian leadership and its identity politics.<sup>31</sup> Such marches have been organized in the Finnish capital Helsinki since 2017, and have attracted two to three hundred participants each time.<sup>32</sup>

Victory Day celebrations have been held in Finland before as well, and they were organized with the leading role of the Russian embassy. They consisted of ceremonies such as the laying of wreaths on the graves of Soviet soldiers and POWs in Hanko, Porkkala, and other places. Since 2017, the Immortal Regiment has been organized in Hanko in connection with these celebrations and in the center of Helsinki on the initiative of civic organizations of Russian-speaking immigrants. It can therefore be seen as a new step in the development of the Russian diaspora in Finland.

### **Theoretical Viewpoints: Memory, Immigration, Media, and Public Space**

The relationship between collective memories and migration can be approached from several perspectives. In immigrant societies, the plurality of collective memories grows, and memory can be seen as one of the realms of transnational processes that produce identity and affective belongingness. On the other hand, collective or

cultural memory can be seen as a field of dialogue on the ethics and pragmatics of remembering the past in an immigrant society, as a realm of the incorporation of migrants' memories into the memorial culture of the host society.<sup>33</sup>

The presence of groups whose collective memories can differ from those of the majority of the population can also be viewed from a critical perspective that assesses membership in society not only from a national, but also a transnational (e.g., European), perspective. The European or transnational/transcultural perspective brings forward the conversation regarding the mnemonic processes that are going on in contemporary societies, and which suggest that the worthiness of human lives and rights is more essential than glorifying the nation.<sup>34</sup> Relevant in the Finnish–Russian context is how post-Soviet developments have affected the understanding of World War II and its results. As many scholars highlight, in post–Cold War Europe these narratives have changed “from triumphal to traumatic,” as the results of the war, at least in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc, are re-evaluated.<sup>35</sup> The interpretative framework through which the outcome of the war is evaluated has shifted from “liberation from fascism” to “Soviet occupation” in accordance with the new historical narratives of these nation-states. Meanwhile, the scope of war narratives has broadened. While the question of their compliance with the Holocaust narrative has to be asked with respect to the prevailing European discussion,<sup>36</sup> these post-Soviet national narratives are predominantly being built around the victimized images of the Warsaw Pact nations that were not part of the Soviet Union proper—in the Baltic states and in Ukraine.

The contemporary Russian memory narrative, which is founded on the Soviet myth of the “great victory,” seems to counter this Europeanization and exploit the nationalist heroic memory script.<sup>37</sup> While studies of the post-Soviet Russian memory of the war point to the state’s ever-tightening regulation of history and memory politics, as well as their instrumental use and affective character, history and memory politics are also assessed as a field of multilevel agency involving different actors.<sup>38</sup> In the 2000s, the memory of the war became a battleground over its interpretation within and between neighboring countries that culminated in the instrumental use of its symbolism in the Russian–Ukrainian conflict since 2014. Post-Soviet nationalized historical narratives among many of the Soviet Union’s former satellite states have been represented in Russian official discourse as attempts to “rewrite history” and those who oppose Soviet and Russian narratives labeled as “fascists.”<sup>39</sup>

This “memory war” has domestic, international, and transnational reach, the later appealing first and foremost to Russian-speaking minorities living abroad.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the transculturation,<sup>41</sup> or transnationalization, of the memory of the war, by which Assmann<sup>42</sup> means the diffusion of particular “grammars of memory” over national and cultural borders, has become a multilevel and transnational process that impacts on the further consolidation and fragmentation of mnemonic communities. Along with the Europeanization of the memory of World War II, which coalesced around the memory of the Holocaust, the spreading of the heroic Russia-sponsored

narrative is occurring first of all among Russian-speaking minorities outside of Russia.<sup>43</sup>

The transnational diffusion of memory discourses across national borders has to do with notions of publicity and publics in multicultural societies. Theoretically, a democratic and multi-ethnic public sphere has to accommodate within itself different minority points of view on important issues and be able to enhance deliberations and democratic decision making.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, according to Fraser, if people are involved in institutions that function transnationally, they need to have the possibility for democratic critique, and a transnational public space is needed.<sup>45</sup> Hence, in European immigrant societies, national public spaces are simultaneously rendered multiethnic and transnational.

Memory studies investigate the ways in which memories are articulated and presented in public spaces alongside an attention to power relationships within societies.<sup>46</sup> When collective memories are discussed in multiethnic immigrant societies, critical questions inevitably arise: What and whose memories are visible versus excluded from the public spaces? To whom are representations of memories addressed? What are the publics that can act in the public space? How does the public space become open to minority/immigrant memories? And how are the transnational dimensions of these memories dealt with?<sup>47</sup> Related questions include the following: What kinds of memories can be presented in democratic immigrant societies, and on what terms? Does the transnationalization of memory in fact mean the transnationalization of public memory and, if so, then in what way?

The process by which immigrants are incorporated into the memory community of a host society has been explored by Michael Rothberg.<sup>48</sup> As a model of inclusion, he applies the concept of multidirectional memory, which basically means a dialogic process of re-assessing collective memories against the memory of the Holocaust, and the gradual evolution of solidarity between members of different communities. German national memory of the war has developed through a long process of acknowledgement and adoption of the memory of the Holocaust as a way to deal with the past and serves as a model of European memory.<sup>49</sup> Obviously, in the case of Finland, where the patriotic “sovereign” national memory model prevails, the question of “how to immigrate into history” becomes more strained and bears the potential for conflict if two “sovereign” memories clash.

Studying collective memory also leads us to assess the role of the media in the transnationalization of memory discourses and practices. Media are traditionally seen as a realm of publicity. Contemporary, technologically driven transformations affect not only the media but also societies and cultures more broadly. Because of the development of information and communication technologies, media are increasingly woven into our everyday life: information consumption, entertainment, and communication with other people occur by means of the same mobile device and are highly intertwined. Everyday life becomes mediatized.<sup>50</sup> Krotz argues that mediatization should be seen as a meta-process relevant to other ongoing meta-processes,

such as globalization, commercialization, and individualization, and it should not be assessed as an isolated process in a single society.<sup>51</sup> Mediatization inevitably concerns public spheres and memory. In the view of Helen Rutten,<sup>52</sup> mediatization affects both what we remember and how we remember. Mediatized memory is spreading globally and reaches “geo-cultural publics”<sup>53</sup> who live outside the national metropolises.

Collective memories in immigrant societies become multilevel processes and involve different actors. In addition to the integrationist perspective, they need to be assessed from the viewpoints of uneven transnationalization and mediatization. Below I will concentrate on the performance of the Immortal Regiment in Helsinki in 2018 and examine its mediatized character.

### **The Immortal Regiment in Helsinki 2018: The Performance**

In 2018, I engaged in participant observation of the march of the Immortal Regiment in the center of Helsinki that started on 9 May at 4 p.m. and proceeded from the Finlandia Palace along the Töölö bay beach to the Cultural Palace where a “cultural program” was organized. The event lasted approximately two hours and gathered around two hundred participants.

Before departing for the march, people gathered in the forecourt of the Finlandia Palace. Some women sang Soviet songs, shouted hooray and “good victory day,” some shared St. George’s ribbons,<sup>54</sup> and others seemed busy sharing other post-Soviet symbols of Victory Day: orange-and-black balloons, red flags with the inscriptions of the Immortal Regiment, and portraits of soldiers on sticks. There were also other pro-Russian or Soviet symbols represented on clothing or decorations. Some people brought self-made portraits mounted on cardboard. Among the names of the soldiers were both Russian and Finnish names. The atmosphere was joyful; some children ran around with red flags provided by the Immortal Regiment (see Figures 1–3). Many people took photos using their cell phones or cameras. At some point, the organizer of the march arrived in her car with more equipment. She wore a Soviet female military uniform with high-heel boots. When everything was ready, the column marched off. In addition to the flags, portraits, and balloons, organizers carried a portable speaker from which Soviet and Russian Victory Day songs were audible. The organizer of the march walked at the head of the column, chatting with people and taking photos. Organizers carried small Russian and Finnish flags, along with the flag of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic. Some participants wore Soviet-style caps or jerseys emblazoned with the names of famous Russian ice hockey players. The column was very visible, loud, and colorful. A few Finns who were walking or running in the park seemingly did not understand what this event was about and ignored the commotion. The participants of the march walked along the park path by Töölö Bay, stopping to lay carnations in the water (because of the



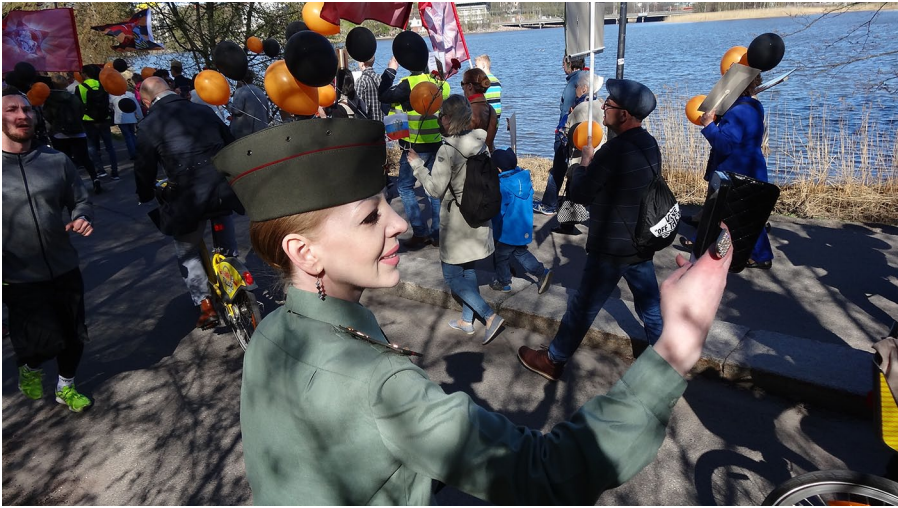
**Figure 1**  
**The equipment of the march prepared to be taken by the participants**



**Figure 2**  
**The Immortal Regiment march in Helsinki, 9 May 2018**



**Figure 3**  
**The organizer of the Immortal Regiment march taking a selfie**



absence of a suitable monument to the Unknown Soldier, according to the leader of the march). Then they arrived at the Cultural Palace, where the organizer once again congratulated everyone and the participants released balloons. The march was escorted by a police car, which followed it from a distance.

Afterwards the participants went into the cafeteria of the Culture Palace, where the organizer (clad in her Soviet military uniform) gave a speech, informing her audience that this year the march was organized with the support of the “all-world Immortal Regiment.” She observed that it was broadly announced in the social media and in the well-known Russian newspaper *Spektr*, whose new editor-in-chief turned out to be “brave” and had “initiated good changes” in the outlet. She likewise praised the participants for their courage and reproached Finland for its non-consistent adherence to freedom of speech and human rights.

She moreover presented the Immortal Regiment as a long-awaited event for all “ethnic Russians and those nationalities whose ancestors fought against Nazi Germany” and who now have the possibility to “walk with the photo of their hero, to honor the memory of the fallen, and sincerely rejoice over the victory.” According to her, the fact that four generations of people in Europe have lived in peace and enjoy “human rights, humanism and freedom” was possible because of the effort of Soviet/Russian people. In her words, “we have to prevent the recurrence of the war,” as “the West has apparently forgotten the horrors of war and thirsts for new conflicts.” After that, she read an amateur poem “from the Internet” that in a clichéd way presented

gratitude to the Russian veterans and expressed sorrow for their sacrifice for future generations.

Then a small choir of Russian women sang some Soviet Victory Day-related songs. The organizer next presented “a veteran,” who said that she was born in 1938 and survived the Leningrad siege, and congratulated everybody. After this, more songs were sung, and some participants danced waltz-style dances as usually presented in Russian war-related movies. As the event began to wind down, the participants poured steadily out. The portraits of the veterans on the sticks that were used during the march were piled up in the lobby of the palace, seemingly awaiting reuse next year.

## **The Enabling Background: Mediatization of “Russian” Memory**

Post-Soviet immigration to Finland has taken place for more than 25 years, but before the march of the Immortal Regiment, which took place for the first time in 2017, no self-organized event of the Russian diaspora had managed to organize a march in the center of Helsinki with so many participants and become so performative. In my view, it finally became possible because of a conjunction of several factors, including the increasingly mediatized and affective power of the “great victory” as a core element of contemporary Russian national identity, and the involvement of Russian speakers in transnational media use and social media communications. Additionally, an important role in the success of the Immortal Regiment march was played by its official organizer (a newly registered civic organization “for promotion of Finnish–Russian friendship”) and its chairperson. The perceived attitudes towards Russians as a source of threat that have strengthened in Finland since 2014, and the high concentration of Russian speakers in the capital area of Helsinki, in conjunction with the continuing immigration of ethnic Russians from Russia and other post-Soviet countries also had an impact on the mobilization of participants.

The techno-cultural opportunities provided by the media environment of the Russian-speakers and their involvement in social media communications play a pivotal role. In analyzing the relationship between the transformation of traditional media and the development of racist communication in both clandestine and open social media sites, which resulted in the institutionalization of a populist right-wing party in Finland, Karina Horsti<sup>55</sup> has leaned on the twin concepts of “mediapolis” and “folk-cultural production model.”<sup>56</sup> While a mediapolis conceptualizes today’s media environment as complex and fragmented (consisting of manifold connectivities, media cultures and information flows, and different platforms, as well as a convergence of communication and information genres and technologies), the “folk-cultural production model” reflects how media users operate within their media environments. This model acknowledges both the architecture of contemporary social media platforms, which provokes the diffusion of news stories and discussions

about them, and the actual reflexive and participatory production of culture within this means of communication. The active participation of people in the creation of “folk culture” is due to the plasticity of digital objects, which enable their use, reuse, molding, and remolding. At the same time, when people engage in social media and become media producers, they become more self-conscious about the artifacts of others and of their own attitudes and opinions. In Horsti’s<sup>57</sup> analysis, it is exactly this interplay between technology, traditional media, and the clandestine spaces of social media, along with the active participation of users, that resulted in the formation of the populist The Finns party.

Studies of the Immortal Regiment underline the mediatized character of this phenomenon. Alexandra Arkhipova and her co-authors<sup>58</sup> highlight the importance of mediated social networks in the formation of celebration communities: Victory Day is felt to be extremely important, and whatever attitudes individuals harbor towards the Immortal Regiment march, they feel the need to express their feelings online. Mischa Gabowitsch<sup>59</sup> identifies the Immortal Regiment as a copycat movement. Copycats are usually leaderless and can start from an idea of activity first implemented locally, which is then copied by others who may not have any links to the original organizer. However, such movements address issues relevant to the whole of society. Copycats are flat and built around weak, non-hierarchical ties within mediated networks; they are weak and temporary, and do not become networks of solidarity or transform themselves into civic society organizations. Like flash mobs, copycats temporarily occupy central urban spaces, making themselves visible and present. Gabowitsch asserts that one of the central factors in the success of copycats lies in technological change, which, due to the proliferation of mobile media and communication technologies, leads people to see themselves primarily as individuals, and only secondarily as members of collectives.

In case of the Immortal Regiment in Finland, the “techno-cultural opportunities” that enabled this event consisted of several interrelated and concurrent components. Obviously, the mediatized Russian remembrance of the war serves as fertile ground.<sup>60</sup> The growing meaning of the “great victory” in the production of the Russian “telenation” is reflected in the broadcasting of state-controlled Russian TV: throughout May war-related Soviet and Post-Soviet movies, talk shows, documentaries, concerts, and news programs are repeatedly shown, thus creating a national media event.<sup>61</sup> Televised celebrations of Victory Day are planned and performed in order to produce an affective reaction in viewers, “to link remembering people together, to provide them with social space and symbolic tools that could help to make such linkage tangible.”<sup>62</sup> Serguei Oushakine defines this way of building commemorations as the “affective management of history,” which does not aim at symbolizing or translating the war experience into new metaphors, but instead at producing an emotional link with an “authentic” heroic past.<sup>63</sup>

In a previous study, I described the attitudes of Russian speakers in Finland towards national celebrations. Whereas Finnish Independence Day is commonly



perceived as an extra day off, with its references to the wars between the USSR and Finland as reproducing Russia and Russians as an enemy, Victory Day is evaluated by Russian speakers as important and meaningful. One of the habitual practices Russian speakers engage in during the celebration of Victory Day was reported as “watching TV,” and the programs that self-evidently belong to this ritualized media-tized celebration are the televised military parade on Red Square in Moscow and old Soviet-era movies. Many of our interlocutors told us how they respect the new way of celebration, meaning the Immortal Regiment marches, and how some of them try to participate in them when they visit Russia. Our project on Russian speakers’ media use in Finland discovered the importance of Russian TV in their everyday lives: Russian state-controlled TV provides them both with information and entertainment, while their involvement with Finnish media remains (compared to Russian media) rather thin.<sup>64</sup>

Studies of the Russian television and media system highlight their dependence on the state and ruling elite, its propagandistic character and the ways it engages viewers by means of “nudge propaganda,” producing “truthinesses” on the issues of international and domestic politics and forming an image of President Putin as the “leader of the nation.”<sup>65</sup> The worldview that has been produced by the state-controlled channels portrays Russia as being unjustifiably accused and misunderstood by the West. The United States is presented mostly as a malicious manipulator that aims at the creation of a unipolar world, and Europe as follower of the United States. Meanwhile, Ukraine is presented as a battleground between the West and Russia. The engagement of the viewer happens by the means of juxtaposition between “us” and “them” in the news, infotainment, and entertainment formats with their simplified and rude rhetoric. The viewer is addressed as being informed and morally right.<sup>66</sup> This TV discourse is actively replicated on official and para-official Internet news sites and social media.<sup>67</sup>

Finland’s Russian speakers are involved with the Russian-language Internet (RuNet) in many forms: Russian TV is watched through Internet sites, news outlets are followed online, and people connect with their friends and relatives through social media. This impacts the “social curation” of media consumption and involvement with the media in general: media use becomes even more guided by the links and recommendations of a particular user’s mediatized social networks.<sup>68</sup> Social media algorithms also impact the formation of media environments for users, producing rather monolithic and circumscribed “echo chambers.”

In addition to people’s personal contacts, numerous groups of Russian-speakers in social media participate in the “social curation” of media consumption for their followers: participants share links to news outlets that represent the Russian official or para-official media, or media in Russian produced outside of Russia, including news produced by the Finnish national broadcast company YLE. These links are backed up by suggestions fed to them through social media algorithms. The posted news (mostly from YLE) concerning Finland is predominantly negative and concentrates on societal problems. Some of the links receive comments, which gradually become heated

as the conversation gains the typical features of an anonymous Internet discussion, such as use of the cursory and harsh language, hate speech, and an emotional character. These conversations end up with a sharp division into opposing groups, which after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine are habitually labelled with names that have been used to designate pro- and anti-Russian groups.

The language of these conversations contains lots of visual images, which refer to easily recognizable elements of Soviet and Russian popular culture, producing a sense of cultural and political like-mindedness. The comments that are left under the news links either praise or damn Finland or Russia; they also reiterate anti-American, homophobic, xenophobic, racist, heteronormative, and conservative viewpoints. Finland is criticized as too liberal and tolerant, pseudo-democratic, unfree, and Russophobic. Among the themes that have been producing sharp divides and “holy wars” (*holivary*) among those who participate in these groups are events in Ukraine and Crimea, child welfare in Finland and custody cases concerning Russian mothers, and the so-called migration crisis and asylum seekers in Finland. The attitudes towards World War II, the “great victory,” and the wars between Finland and the Soviet Union are among the most persistent themes of these conversations. Anastasia Rogova<sup>69</sup> has studied groups of Russian-speaking immigrants living in Canada that have formed around conservative family values as moral communities. One of the mechanisms for the formation of such like-minded entities is the involvement in “ordinary” Russian speakers’ social media groups that produce sharp affective polarizations with the help of heated conversation.<sup>70</sup> Hegemonic “Russianness” that has been developed in such conversations is based on ethnic (biological) descent, support of the Russian state, and reverence for the “Russian victory” in World War II. Simultaneously, Russians are there presented as being threatened in different ways—by migrants, Finns, child welfare inspectors, Americans, and so on.

The participants of these groups do not live exclusively in Finland. Some of them provide information on their location and history (which is asked during the social media registration process), but many stay unrecognizable or declare Russian or other non-Finnish locations as their places of residence. The character of some comments allows one to assume their writers work as paid commentators, “trolls” that have been interfering in social media abroad and in Russia.<sup>71</sup> The interference from abroad in the discussions that take place on the most popular Internet forum of Russian speakers in Finland was reported in our study<sup>72</sup> by the owner of the Internet portal in question. During the course of the occupation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine, lots of previously dormant accounts “awakened” and started commenting on these events in a pro-Russian way, initiating such a rude discussion that moderators decided to separate out Ukraine-related topics and disable the ability of some participants to comment on them.

These groups have thousands of registered members and are used by Russian speakers also as sources of practical information regarding immigration to Finland, finding jobs, promoting businesses, selling and buying goods, and so forth. Invitations to participate in the Immortal Regiment marches are also being spread through these

groups. Having both a mundane and “heated” character, they engage people to follow various conversations, and provoke more divisions and polarizations in opinions, in such a way mobilizing participants to enter the physical public space and perform activities and replicate symbols that have become already highly meaningful for them.

The official organizer of this event, an NGO named RUFI that was registered in March 2017 and succeeded in organizing the first march of the Immortal Regiment in May, presents itself as a new and effective, as well as non-political, “Russian–Finnish organization” that promotes friendship between the two countries and peoples. It is very active on different social media platforms, for which it produces a lot of textual and video content. This consists of reporting on its activities in a textual or video format, making statements concerning political events, announcing forthcoming events, and providing links to mostly Russian official media outlets. The association openly and passionately promotes official Russian viewpoints and is connected with both the Russian official and Finnish “false media.” The chairperson of RUFI is featured as a representative of the “Russian diaspora” by some Russian TV channels when they report on Finnish events. Among others, the association is connected with Finnish activists involved in the media of Donbas separatists and outlets of the Finnish “alternative,” anti-liberal Internet media. The association also organizes trips to Crimea.

The background and connections of RUFI to the Russian authorities has been speculated about in the Finnish media.<sup>73</sup> The head of the organization has stated that it is not sponsored by Moscow. Nevertheless, the connections of the organization with the Council of Russian Compatriots, which executes Russian diaspora politics<sup>74</sup> in Finland, and especially with Johan Bäckman, imply the involvement of the organization in the promotion of Russian influence abroad. Bäckman has been associated with Russian activities in Estonia, Moldova, Syria, and Eastern Ukraine; he functions as a representative of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” in Finland. He is also connected with the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies and Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service.<sup>75</sup> Through his continual presence in the official Russian mass media and his own activities on the Internet, he is well known in Russia (and among Russian-speakers in Finland) as a “Finnish antifascist,” a “human-rights activist,” and a “defender of Russians in Finland.” In October 2018, Bäckman, together with the founder of an “alternative” Internet outlet MV lehti Ilja Janitskin, was convicted for the harassment of journalist Jessikka Aro, who was investigating Russian “troll factory” activities.<sup>76</sup> With the help of the Immortal Regiment march, RUFI and the forces backing it have obviously strengthened their position as the “voice of the Russian minority” in Finland.

## Discussion

The entrance of the Russian-speaking minority into the Finnish public space could be evaluated as a positive development: it ostensibly signals the empowerment



of a group that has been repeatedly evaluated in the research as being invisible and discriminated against. However, given the present-day international situation and the accompanying sharpening of divisions not only between the West and Russia, but also between liberal-democratic and authoritarian-conservative values and political movements, such an assessment would be at best one-sided, if not simply naïve. The Immortal Regiment march has evolved within Russian national mediatized identity politics and is embedded in the media involvement of Russian speakers in Finland, which preferentially ties Russian speakers to the Russian state rather than promoting their integration into Finnish society. It strengthens not only pro-Russian actors, but actors that aim at shaking the liberal-democratic foundation of Finnish society.

The Immortal Regiment marches outside Russia should thus be seen in a broader context, and not only as part of mediatized identity politics and digitalized folk culture. Tatiana Zhurzhenko writes about them as tentative “points of crystallization of the Russian diaspora.”<sup>77</sup> A pro-Russia “Russian diaspora” has been manufactured throughout the 2000s within a framework of Russian compatriots’ politics, which construct Russians living abroad as conductors of the Russian state’s ideology and interests, and view the Russian state as their self-evident defender. In addition to the organizations of Russian speakers that join in the Russian government’s lead, Coordination Councils of compatriot organizations, the whole system of (non-Russians’) pro-Russian NGOs, politicians, media, and parties are involved in strengthening “alternative realities” which aim at diminishing trust in liberal-democratic societies.<sup>78</sup> The Immortal Regiment marches have become part of these larger ensembles and serve as a link that eventually connects Russian speakers with the Russian state and overcomes the mistrust towards Russian authorities that characterized the situation of the early 2000s.<sup>79</sup>

The results of the Russian presidential election of 2018 show that president Putin has stronger support among Russian citizens living abroad than in Russia. For example, in Latvia and Estonia he received more than 90 percent of the votes cast by Russian citizens.<sup>80</sup> In Finland, more than 5,300 Russian citizens participated in this election, which is a historically high number (in the parliamentary elections of 2016 approximately 1,600 voters participated, and in the presidential election of 2012 the number was about 3,000).<sup>81</sup> In comparison, only 16–19 percent of Russian speakers took part in the Finnish municipal elections of 2012 and 2017, where people can vote regardless of their citizenship.<sup>82</sup> The growing number of those who voted in Russian presidential elections, and their high level of support for the current Russian president, is usually explained by Russian speakers’ uncritical involvement in Russian media and detachment from everyday life in Russia.<sup>83</sup>

Russian speakers’ low level of involvement in Finnish societal life can also be explained by the fact that they tend to prefer media produced in Russia itself or Russian-language media produced in Finland. Our previous study of Russian speakers’ media involvement found that although there are several media outlets that are being created in the country on public and private funding, and even more actors who

develop their media in blogging and vlogging formats, the ethnic media in Russian suffers from a lack of quality journalism. The Finnish public broadcasting company YLE started issuing five-minute-long TV news segments in Russian and translating key stories into Russian on their Internet site by 2013, and in this respect Russian-speakers are in privileged position compared to other immigrant groups. However, YLE's activities are regarded as insufficient and guided "from above," failing to produce content "on its own terms" and "give voice" to the Russian minority. The monthly newspaper *Spektr*, which has been published in Finland since 1998 thanks to private funding, has recently brought aboard a new editor with a more pro-Russian orientation. Still, it is not regarded by Russian speakers as a "real" newspaper and is not followed on a regular basis. Social media, along with its associated groups and forums, seem to comprise the main sites where the formation of opinion occurs, but it is not channeled into more traditional "respectable" media.<sup>84</sup>

Conversations regarding the politics of memory, especially evaluations of war-related events, are churning in social media. "The war" remains one of the most addressed themes in the cultural production of both countries, and the memory of the war is interwoven into national celebrations and the "re-membering" of the nations. In Finland, we need more open and forward-looking conversation regarding the memory of the war, one that should involve Russian speakers too. This also requires the development of a more inclusive and functional journalistic system in Russian.

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## Notes

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# Looking to the Past to Survive the Future:

## The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia

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With reference to the Hungarian minority's overarching concern over its declining population in Slovakia, this article reveals how different elements of the past are activated, remembered, and renegotiated to ensure the minority's cultural survival. Using elite interviews, party documents, and a detailed analysis of two local newspaper archives in Hungarian, I unpack how memory and politics interact in the post-EU accession period. First, I uncover how political and civil society actors use acts of commemoration as a conduit to circulate certain narratives of the Hungarian minority identity. Through remembering historic Hungarian leaders and events, elites affirm and construct the minority identity, thus enabling its cultural reproduction. The Habsburg and Austro-Hungarian Monarchy period is referred to most frequently with the celebration of national heroes. Events spanning the twentieth century are generally mourned as painful and detrimental for the Hungarian minority. While the acts of commemoration are “soft” measures to ensure cultural survival, Hungarian political actors also desire “hard” guarantees through institutional measures, best encapsulated by their desire for autonomy arrangements. However, the Slovak nation's own past of claiming autonomy and their eventual secession from Czechoslovakia in 1939 conditions the cultural rules around language and the appropriate vocabulary that Hungarian elites can use. Consequently, Hungarian minority elites appropriate the past strategically in two ways. They readjust their tactics through using different vocabulary to claim autonomy and second, they pursue policy reforms across areas such as education and regional development, thus making the de facto possibility of autonomy more palatable to their Slovak counterparts.

**Keywords:** *history; ethnic minorities; Hungarian; cultural commemoration*

## Introduction

One landmark event that all countries in East-Central Europe share—as highlighted in the Introduction to the Special Issue—is the disintegration of multi-ethnic empires following World War I.<sup>1</sup> This greatly affected the ethnic landscape of the newly created states: as a result of treaty revisions, between 20.1 and 29.2 per cent of the population counted as a national minority, with many simply “ending up” on

the wrong side of the border.<sup>2</sup> Today, we find ethnic minorities across the region often fighting to ensure their survival and the ability to reproduce their culture and identity. Unlike many Western European countries, ethnic minorities may not be recognised in the constitution or may have weak institutional provisions to guarantee cultural reproduction. Some minorities, such as the Jewish, because of the atrocities of World War II, are not present in numbers large enough to challenge the narratives about them,<sup>3</sup> whilst the Russian minority in Finland is able to challenge Finnish national narratives about World War II through the support of the kin-state of Russia.<sup>4</sup> With limited guarantees of domestic state support for cultural reproduction, therefore, how do ethnic minorities ensure their survival in East-Central Europe? More specifically, how does the past figure in the minorities' present-day quests for survival? Which past is used, by whom and how?

I follow the conceptualisation found in the Special Issue's Introduction of the three inter-related arenas in which memory and politics interact (the circulation of memories, conditioning factors, and actors and their mnemonic claims) to analyze the politics of historical memory through an examination of the Hungarian ethnic minority in Slovakia. The Hungarian minority was much shaped by the Trianon agreement in 1920, which gave the land north of the Danube to Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian population in Slovakia is declining, with "an overarching fear of dying out like the dinosaurs"<sup>5</sup> and Hungarian elites wondering how to preserve the minority's identity and ensure its survival. Focusing on the post-EU accession period from 2004 to 2017, I draw on elite interviews, policy documents, and party platforms, as well as detailed analysis of two local newspaper archives in Hungary to unpack the interaction between history and politics. Analysis of these data sources illustrate which eras of the past are activated, how this is done, and how particular contentious pasts can condition the Hungarian elite's political strategy to ensure its survival.

I argue that the past affects the Hungarian minority elite's strategy of survival in two main ways. First, tying to the first arena of the *circulation of memories and their conflictive constellations*, I unpack how public acts of commemoration—comprising the remembering of important national events and national heroes either through public gatherings or the erection of monuments—serve as a conduit to activate particular memories of the Hungarian past. Making direct reference to historic Hungarian leaders and to national events serve to uphold a certain narrative of the Hungarian minority identity, thus enabling its cultural reproduction. I find the Habsburg Monarchy and Austro-Hungarian period is referred to most frequently whilst events spanning the twentieth century are generally mourned as painful and detrimental for the Hungarian minority. Moreover, events of commemoration are often accompanied by visits from the kin-state (Hungary) or other ethnic minority leaders, highlighting a transnational dimension.<sup>6</sup> Such commemorations are most often led by political elites or by civil society actors. I unpack the nature of their memory claims, thus also addressing the Introduction's third arena of *actors and their mnemonic claims*.

The second way the past affects the Hungarian minority's efforts to ensure its survival is found in the examination of the second arena of *conditioning factors*. A significant constraint the Hungarian minority faces is a cultural regime which conditions linguistic conventions and shapes how the Hungarians make their demands for institutional arrangements to promote their survival. The main institutional arrangement the Hungarian minority would like to claim is autonomy, which it sees as a suitable institutional solution enabling themselves to govern their own affairs. However, in the domestic Slovak context, the term is historically conditioned and fraught with associations of secession and independence. Consequently, aware of the historical connotation in the Slovak mindset equating autonomy with secession, Hungarian minority elites react and appropriate the past strategically in two ways. First, they readjust their tactics through using different vocabulary to claim autonomy and, second, they pursue policy reforms across areas such as education and culture. These two tactics aim to make the de facto possibility of autonomy more palatable to their Slovak counterparts. The discussion, therefore, highlights how a sensitive cultural context with particular linguistic constraints conditioned by the Slovak past define Hungarian elites' behaviour and own usage of language. A similar dynamic is also found in Krawatzek's article in the Special Issue.<sup>7</sup>

After providing a short contextual background and methodology, I analyze acts of commemoration based on the two local newspaper archives of *Komáromi Lapok* and *Gömöri Hírlap*. I then move to discuss how Hungarian minority political elites distance themselves from the historical concept of autonomy and strategically re-create the concept both in a play on words and through policy area reforms. The article demonstrates how different elements of the past are activated, remembered, and renegotiated in order to ensure the cultural survival of the Hungarian ethnic minority in Slovakia. It complements other articles in this Special Issue by highlighting how selective memories are diffused, how the kin-state and transnational actors play a role in supporting the commemoration of the past, and how minority-majority relations need to be continuously negotiated and navigated amidst what is often a historical minefield.

## The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia

From the perspective of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, a major turning point in their history is the border revisions following World War I in the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. The Treaty reduced the territory of Hungary—or the Kingdom of Hungary as it was known then—by two-thirds and resulted in 3.5 million ethnic Hungarians finding themselves in a new state, whether it be Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Austria, or Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of the Treaty were lamented repeatedly by ethnic Hungarian minorities as well as the Hungarian government (and lamentations continue to this day). Reuniting with their lost kin motivated

Hungary to side with the Axis Powers during World War II, during which some of its land was recovered in the First and Second Vienna Award in 1938 and 1940.<sup>9</sup> Unsurprisingly, following the end of World War II and the defeat of the Axis Powers, the original Trianon borders were reinstated; however, the memories of Hungarian irredentism were now stamped on the minds of neighbouring countries.<sup>10</sup>

Hungarians living in Slovakia face distinct problems linked to their own well-being and cultural survival. The prime concern, mentioned in policy documents as well as in elite interviews, is the declining population. Demographically speaking, according to the 2011 census there were 458,000 Hungarians living in Slovakia (8.5 per cent of the population) which was a decline of 110,000 compared to the 1991 census.<sup>11</sup> Causes of decline include emigration, a declining birth rate, and assimilation. However, migration and a declining birth rate are overshadowed by the prevalence of assimilation. In the cases of mixed marriages between Slovaks and Hungarians, for example, only 20% of their children register as Hungarian—compared to one-third in Transylvania.<sup>12</sup> In addition to population decline, another challenge facing the community is unemployment and poverty. Analysis done by Horbulák<sup>13</sup> shows that in terms of education, employment and indicators like earnings and industrial production, Hungarians in the south of Slovakia generally lag behind their Slovak counterparts. For example, between 1997 and 2014, the Hungarians in the 16 districts consistently had higher rates of unemployment than the national average.<sup>14</sup>

These difficulties, coupled with weak institutional provisions, render ensuring the reproduction and survival of the minority identity at the forefront of the minds of many Hungarian political elites.<sup>15</sup> Legally speaking, there is no comprehensive law on national minorities in Slovakia and there have been heated debates about the implementation of the 2009 Amendment to the 1995 Slovak Language Law<sup>16</sup> and its relationship to the 1999 Law on the Use of National Minority Languages.<sup>17</sup> In minority education, Hungarians have the right to be educated in the minority language in elementary and secondary schools, with mandatory classes in the Slovak language and literature.<sup>18</sup> There are challenges relating to the provision of education in the minority language that revolve around geographic names in textbooks and educational materials, how to teach Slovak to Hungarian students, and the threat of school closures with dwindling student numbers.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, it was only in 2017 that the Law on the Fund to Support the Culture of National Minorities<sup>20</sup> was passed, guaranteeing the Hungarian minority with €4 million per year for cultural projects. However, the Fund only supports short-term projects rather than covering costs such as administration that would provide a long-term stability for cultural institutions. Moreover, the Act does not grant the Hungarian minority full oversight for funding decisions, with two out of five members of the decision-making council coming from the government.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, a further issue is the lack of a unified political voice on the part of the Hungarian community. There was a major split within the main political party,

Magyar Koalíció Párt (MKP; Party of the Hungarian Coalition),<sup>22</sup> in 2009, resulting in the emergence of Most-Híd, or Bridge party. Most-Híd is an inter-ethnic party with Slovaks and Hungarians. With these two Hungarian political parties and a 5% threshold to get into Parliament, Most-Híd has outperformed MKP in the national elections since 2010. Most-Híd gained seats in Parliament in the 2010, 2012, and 2016 elections, serving in coalition in 2010–2012 and 2016–2020 whilst MKP has yet to make it into Parliament since its loss in 2010. MKP, however, remains powerful at the regional and local levels. With these many challenges across socio-economic, demographic, and institutional dimensions, Hungarian minority elites need to find ways to encourage the cultural survival of their community.

## Methodology

To examine *how* the past and *which* past figures in the Hungarian minority's quest for survival in the post-EU accession period, I draw on newspaper archives, party programmes and elite interviews. To analyse the dimension of the *circulation of memories* through acts of commemoration, I draw primarily from two local newspaper archives over two time periods. The first newspaper is *Komáromi Lapok* from the city of Komárno/Komárom located just north of the Slovak-Hungarian border in the south-west. Historically, Komárom was one city spanning two sides of the Danube, but the Treaty of Trianon split it in two, with the northern half going to Czechoslovakia and the southern half remaining in Hungary. According to figures collected in 2017, the city is composed of 62 per cent self-identifying ethnic Hungarians and 36 per cent self-identifying ethnic Slovaks.<sup>23</sup> The second newspaper is *Gömöri Hírlap* from the city of Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat, located in south-central Slovakia. The population profile is the reverse of Komárom, where Hungarians make up 36 per cent of the self-identifying population and ethnic Slovaks approximately 62 per cent, as of 2017.<sup>24</sup> This population difference, as well as the different proximity in location to Hungary, makes the two cities interesting to include.

Regarding the time period under study, given the immensity of data to be analysed in each year alongside practical reasons (i.e., *Gömöri Hírlap* was out of print for almost three years), I chose two three-year time periods after EU accession: 2009–2011 and 2015–2017. The time periods are not compared as such, but rather allow for an overview of the post-accession period. Many different events occurred throughout these years, but for contextual purposes, the first time period includes the “earthquake” in minority politics when MKP underwent a split that saw the formation of Most-Híd and the latter's entrance into parliament at the expense of MKP in the 2010 elections. During the second time period, the two parties had their most comprehensive policy platforms for the Hungarian minority articulated. Discussion of the results of data analysis draw on typical examples and illustrations found in the

archives. The newspaper archives were coded using Qualitative Content Analysis<sup>25</sup> in NVivo. The coding frame is provided in the Methodological Appendix.

The examination of the *conditioning role* of the past in the Hungarian elites' strategy for survival was gained first through elite interviews. I carried out eleven semi-structured interviews with political elites and civil society activists in 2017. The sample reached saturation and provides a fair representation of the different viewpoints within Slovakia. The amount of extra and novel information gleaned from additional interviews would have been minimal. Following these discussions and the findings around the importance of autonomy and the related linguistic conventions and tactics of policy area reforms, I moved to analyze policy documents from the post-EU accession period until 2017 and the same newspaper archives as mentioned above. These data sources further unpacked how Hungarian elites adapted to the linguistic and cultural conventions around autonomy and how they pursued autonomy through policy area reforms. The simple coding frame used for the newspaper archives is also in the Methodological Appendix.

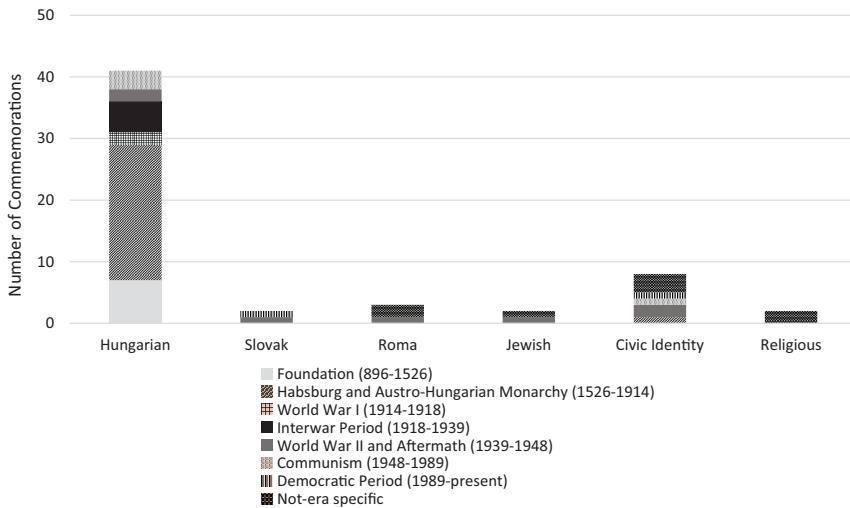
## **A Past That Is Celebrated and Mourned**

Acts of commemoration serve as the conduit for the circulation of memories and particular mnemonic narratives to uphold the Hungarian minority identity. The selective usage and activation of the past through public commemoration is one way elites pass on and strengthen the minority identity. Commemoration of the past ensures the perpetuation of the minority's identity and its history. This process, however, is not apolitical: the collective remembering of the past is a political process.<sup>26</sup> Given the emergence over the last century of the Hungarian Slovak community as a distinct community separated from most of its ethnic kin by a new border, remembering historical events and historical figures becomes a way to cement identity. Commemorations of identity and affirmation of a "historical memory" provide an avenue for creating a political community with a "shared past" and a "perception of unity."<sup>27</sup> The role of commemorations to pass on identity becomes all the more important in the Hungarian Slovak context where the Hungarian minority does not have, for example, institutional provisions guaranteeing full oversight of minority reproduction of culture in the fields of education and language use (as discussed in the second section). Acts of commemoration are detailed below by first examining public gatherings for acts of commemoration and then discussing how monuments are used for commemorating the past.

### **Gathering the Public to Commemorate the Past**

Commemorations of the past can be of either a person (such as poet or soldier) or an event (such as a nationalist uprising, the passing of a treaty, or founding of a city).

**Figure 1.**  
**Commemorations of the Past by Identity and Era, 2009–2011 and 2015–2017.**



To determine *which* particular pasts were being commemorated in the Hungarian newspaper archival coverage, I first coded all the articles mentioning commemorations using Qualitative Content Analysis (as detailed in the third section). I then compiled a simple database categorising the commemorations along two lines. First, I categorised the commemoration according to the era in which the event occurred and/or the era in which the person being commemorated existed. Second, I categorised the ethnic group that the event or person was relevant for such as ethnic Hungarian, ethnic Slovak, Roma, Jewish, etc. As expected, most of the coverage in the Hungarian newspapers was related to the ethnic Hungarian identity, although the inclusion of other identities also shows how other national narratives can coexist. Figure 1 shows the results.

What emerges is that the Hungarian minority disproportionately commemorates its past linked to the Habsburg Monarchy and Austro-Hungarian period (1526–1918) compared to other eras of its history. Moreover, it looks to its past from Habsburg rule nostalgically, while the twentieth-century events that are recalled are generally ones of mourning and loss. Regarding the former, many cultural figures are celebrated (such as writer Mór Jókai, composer Ferenc Liszt, composer Ferenc Erkel, statesman István Széchenyi, and writer János Arany). Some commemorated figures were also revolutionaries in the 1848–1849 national uprising, such as Mór Jókai. The main event that is remembered during the Habsburg period is the 1848–1849 national uprising and is commemorated every 15 March. Besides this era, another period that is celebrated is of the initial founding of Hungary and its kings. For example, the



founder of the Hungarian state, King Saint Stephen, is celebrated on 20 August, which is a national holiday in Hungary. When looking at other time periods subdivided across the twentieth century, the events commemorated are generally ones of mourning for the ethnic Hungarian community. These include the Komárom uprising that in 1919 failed to prevent the Czechoslovaks from splitting the city, the Trianon Treaty of 1920 that partitioned the Kingdom of Hungary, the controversial deportation of Hungarians from what was then Czechoslovakia following World War II, and the unsuccessful 1956 uprising against communism in Hungary.

There were other commemorations that did not focus on the ethnic Hungarian identity. For example, commemorations for ethnic Slovaks ranged from important national leaders during the 1848 uprising or cultural/political figures, the Slovak National Uprising in 1944, and the celebration of the Slovak constitution as an important event for the Slovak nation. There were also a small proportion of commemorations that appealed to a civic identity, such as marking the end of World War II and the victory over fascism, remembering those lost in a major flood in 1965, and recalling the fall of communism (which could be celebrated by both Slovaks and Hungarians together). Other ethnic groups such as the Roma and the Jewish community also had events they recalled publicly, such as Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jewish Cultural Days, as well as Roma National Day and remembrance of the Roma killed in the Holocaust. The different coverage of events of commemoration by ethnic group highlights the delicate coexistence of different national narratives—a coexistence that in other cases is sometimes not always feasible.<sup>28</sup>

There are differences in coverage between the cities that tie into their geographical location, local history, and particular demographic composition. The first is the difference in ethnic coverage of events. For the town of Rimaszombat, where Hungarians comprise a minority of about 36 per cent and the Roma are the next biggest ethnic group, the coverage of different events included more Roma and Slovak commemorations as well as more commemorations of civic identity. For example, *Gömöri Hírlap* covered the twentieth anniversary of the fall of communism (civic identity), as well as a celebration of worker's rights (1 May), and International Children's Day. Ethnic Slovak events included the 1944 Slovak National Uprising as well as the Slovak Constitution. This is in contrast to *Komáromi Lapok*, which did not cover ethnic Slovak or Roma commemorations. Moreover, while the two cities have similar heroes and historical events that they both remember—such as writer János Arany, King Saint Stephen, the 1848–1849 national uprising, Trianon, and the deportation following World War II—they also celebrate their local Hungarian heroes. For example, actress Lujza Blaha and mathematician István Hatvani are remembered in Rimaszombat whilst the famous writer Mór Jókai and composer Ferenc Lehár are celebrated in Komárom. Interestingly, despite the smaller size of the Hungarian population in Rimaszombat compared to Komárom, many more commemorations of Hungarian historical events and personages are recorded in the newspaper.

A closer examination of the coverage of key historical events across both newspapers highlights the difficult plight of the Hungarian minority in terms of their population decline and the usage of history to craft a stronger minority identity and sense of belonging. For example, in his speech remembering the events of 15 March 1848, professor and politician Alajos Mészáros emphasised that the threat facing Hungarian identity today, particularly due to Prime Minister Fico's policies, is just as menacing to the Hungarian nation as the threat 150 years ago, which led him to call for greater unity within the community.<sup>29</sup> A similar angle was taken by the keynote speaker Balázs Veszelyovszki in Rimaszombat, where he asked whether, despite the similarities between the present and the circumstances of 1848, the Hungarian community would have its own Sándor Petőfi. Petőfi was a poet but also revolutionary and freedom fighter in the 1848 uprising and was killed in Sighișoara, Romania. The parallel between the threat to the Hungarian national community in 1848 and the present was clearly stated: "We are living historical times, from both the inside and the outside they would like to remove us, and the freedom heroes tell us that no one can be idle."<sup>30</sup>

Different events of commemoration, such as the deportation after World War II, Trianon, or the 750th anniversary of the founding of Komárom, link the past struggles of the Hungarians to the present with a message for the future. Komárom mayor László Stupendek, speaking at the 750th anniversary of the founding of Komárom, stated, "Our city's historic flag proclaims the proud past, the struggles of the present, and a future full of hope."<sup>31</sup> However, not all speeches were optimistic for the future, with many mentioning the threat to the survival of the Hungarians unless more rights were given, such as improvements in the educational system, freedom to use the Hungarian language, and support for Hungarian culture.<sup>32</sup> Another common theme was the importance of unity amongst the Hungarian minority, which emphasised that together they stand stronger than apart. (This led some to bewail the political split that resulted in two ethnic Hungarian political parties, MKP and Most-Híd.) Finally, the theme of peaceful coexistence also arose, with references to the past made to show that the Hungarians have lived side-by-side with other ethnic groups (such as Slovaks, Serbs, and Roma) and called the same place home for many centuries, and still desired to live peacefully together.<sup>33</sup> In this case, reference to peaceful coexistence resonated with the Hungarian Slovak population whereas the peaceful narrative given by elites in Yugoslavia did not resonate with its own population.<sup>28</sup>

Across the commemorations—and also linked to the discussion on monuments below—the main actors involved are political elites as well as leaders of civil society organizations. Examples of civil society organizations organizing or partaking in the commemorations range from Csemadok—an important cultural organization formed after World War II—to Te Ügyed Kör (Your Issue Circle), Egy Jobb Komáromért (For a Better Komárom), and Deportálások Áldozataink és Leszármazottaiknak Szövetsége (Association for the Victims and Descendants of the Deportation).

Political representatives are in attendance and often keynote speakers, such as local council representatives and mayors. Kin-state officials are frequently present amongst the list of attendees and speakers, such as Hungarian MP László Medgyasszay, the Hungarian Defence Minister Csaba Hende, and Hungary's ambassador to Bratislava Zsolt Harmati.

### **Telling a Tale with Monuments and Tombstones**

Events of commemoration often involve meeting at, or processing to, a monument to lay a wreath, recite a poem, or make a speech. For this reason, public monuments and the politics behind them are also worthy of further examination, as they are a “tangible manifestation of some ‘memory work’ process.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, public institutions like museums are also examples of memory work in progress. When examining the local newspaper archives, similar emphases are put on statues of events or personages from the Habsburg-Austro-Hungarian period, as well as symbols of Hungary's foundation like the Turul bird, which is a national symbol and mythic legend dating back to the arrival of the Magyars in the Carpathian Basin. While still present, there was less coverage of statues and monuments linked to the ethnic Slovaks, Roma, or Jewish populations.

Importantly, statues tell a tale not just of the person or event they commemorate, but also of the statue itself, such as when and how it came to be erected or renovated. One serious controversy that arose in Komárom was linked to the installation of a statue of King Saint Stephen in 2009. The statue was commissioned with the support of the local authority. However, on the day of the unveiling, Prime Minister Robert Fico banned Hungarian President László Solyom from entering Slovakia to make his appearance at the ceremony. Despite this diplomatic incident, the ceremony went on, and mayor Tibor Bastrnák emphasised that the foundation of the Hungarian state by King Saint Stephen one thousand years ago was based on the idea of unity and cohesion, and the recognition of the role that other nations could play in the Hungarian state. He highlighted that King Saint Stephen's message of inclusion was an important one for those currently in Europe who prefer policies of exclusion and xenophobia.<sup>35</sup> Soon after the King Saint Stephen statue controversy, Prime Minister Fico confronted the city of Komárom over the placement of the statues of Saints Cyril and Methodius—two religious figures important to the Slavic nation and called “Apostles to the Slavs”—which were originally on the facade of the Matica Slovenská cultural institute. He argued this was not a prominent enough placement for these two key figures. Following debates between Fico and the mayor of Komárom about the legality of moving the statues—the latter arguing that permission was not sought from the local council to move the statue—in 2010 Saints Cyril and Methodius were moved to a roundabout next to Kossuth Square.<sup>36</sup>

The battle between the prominence of statues of key figures of national identity in the multicultural town of Komárom highlights the importance of control over space

and asserting the narrative of which identity that territory belongs to.<sup>37</sup> A similar dynamic arose in the town of Rimaszombat in 2016–2017, where renovations made to the central Tompa Square caused arguments amongst local council representatives about which statues to erect and their location in the square and linked them to questions about the past and the identity of the town. Debates about where to put Tompa Mihály's statue (Mihály was a famous Hungarian poet local to Rimaszombat), along with the possible statue of Hungarian poet and revolutionary Sándor Petőfi and the creation of a prospective third statue, occupied the local council for more than one year. Accusations of re-Slovakization and Magyarization surfaced. In the end, the council narrowly agreed to place a statue of János Arany—a famous Hungarian writer—in the square alongside those of Petőfi and Tompa. Other prospective statues discussed were of Slovak writer and politician Janko Jesenský and Hungarian writer and politician Kálmán Mikszáth.<sup>38</sup> The statues were ceremoniously unveiled on the two-hundredth anniversary of Tompa's birth in September 2017, with keynote speakers including the Deputy Secretary for Culture from the Hungarian Human Resources Ministry.<sup>39</sup> While the King Saint Stephen statue debacle reaches back to the founding of the Hungarian state, the Tompa Square controversy highlights the important role of the national heroes from the Habsburg past and their link to Hungarian identity more than 150 years later.

Another way to revitalise the past and reinforce a sense of identity is found in the initiative of Via Nova, the youth wing of MKP, called "Saving our Ancestors' Tombstones," whose goal was to clean up the tombstones of deceased Hungarians. This initiative was undertaken in reaction to a 2005 law that would clear away tombstones that had not paid the cemetery fee after a five-year notice period. One notable tombstone Via Nova renovated was of József Törkölly, a Czechoslovak Senator representing the Hungarian minority. He was born in 1878 in Rimaszombat and played a key role in the politics of the interwar period, representing the Hungarians but also focusing on their peaceful coexistence with Slovaks.<sup>40</sup> Linked to a respect for ancestors, in 2017 the idea of taking care of tombstones was taken up by a group of volunteers in Komárom, where 3,500 Hungarian tombstones were documented. It was seen as a best practice to be spread to other Hungarian towns in the Carpathian Basin to better protect cemeteries. The Hungarian government was also open to funding some of the costs of the venture.<sup>41</sup> This activity highlights a clever way of bringing historically well-known national figures—as well as the broader national ancestral community—into the consciousness of Hungarians living in present-day Slovakia and connecting them to the past of a cross-border nation. A similar phenomenon of uniting a cross-border nation is found in the Immortal Regiment march by the Russians.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, the example of these tombstones shows that the role of the kin-state cannot be understated. During the time periods under study, connections between the Hungarian minority and its motherland emerge on several occasions. This is particularly the case in the divided city of Komárom, where some events—including the

commemoration of 15 March 1848 and 20 August—were jointly organised. Moreover, Komárom compared to Rimaszombat had more kin-state visits, most likely owing to proximity. For example, in the commemoration of the 1945–1948 deportation, Komárom welcomed Hungarian Parliament President László Kövér and State Secretary Árpád Potápi.<sup>43</sup> Other events included the visit of Hungarian ambassador Éva Czibalmos and, as mentioned above, the aborted visit of Hungarian President László Solyom. Rimaszombat had less high-profile visits but it did welcome other Hungarian kin such as Romanian-Hungarian leader and MEP László Tőkés. Across the different visits and speeches, Hungarian co-ethnics offer their support—both financially and morally—and emphasise the unity of the Hungarian nation, which historically had co-existed with other national groups such as the Slovaks, Roma, Serbs, and Roma.<sup>44</sup>

The different dynamics surrounding these commemorations highlight how seemingly innocuous events can become politically charged and controversial, in the process implicating local, national, and kin-state actors. The selection of the types of events to be commemorated, as well as the particular statues to be put up or renovated, bring with them their own narratives of identity and history. With the threat of a diminishing population and lack of institutional guarantees for the reproduction of identity, reminiscing about the beginning of the Hungarian state and the heroes of the Habsburg-Austro-Hungarian era, whilst mourning various injustices of the twentieth century, brings a narrative unity for the Hungarian minority but also can ruffle the feathers of the Slovak majority.

## The Spectre of the Past on Claims to Autonomy

Events of commemoration are only a “soft” means to ensure cultural reproduction. Without “hard” guarantees through legislation and institutions, the future of the ethnic minority cannot be assured. In this regard, minority elites view autonomy as one important way to guarantee the future of their community. Several elite interviews mentioned how autonomy is a way to ensure the growth and sustenance of the Hungarian community. However, in the Slovak context, the spectre of the Slovak past creeps in to influence the autonomy claims of the Hungarian minority. The Slovak nation’s own past of claiming autonomy conditions the cultural rules around language and the appropriate vocabulary to use for claiming “autonomy.” This importantly ties into the discussion of the second arena of *conditioning factors* through which historical memory and politics interact, as discussed in the Introduction to the Special Issue. Hungarian political actors must be sensitive to the conditioning factors of culturally and linguistically appropriate rules linked to autonomy that consequently affect *how* Hungarian elites claim for greater institutional guarantees for survival.

From the Slovak perspective, an examination of history reaching to the nineteenth century, and including episodes before World War I and World War II, shows that in

the Slovak mind the term *autonomy* connotes a future plan for independence. Following the 1848 Revolution and after the 1867 Compromise, the Slovaks sought autonomy (unsuccessfully) in the Kingdom of Hungary, the understanding being that autonomy would mean becoming free from Hungary.<sup>45</sup> From 1918, the Slovaks claimed autonomy within Czechoslovakia; this was in theory granted in the 1918 Pittsburgh Agreement and then openly declared by Hlinka's Slovak People's Party in October 1938. Once the Slovaks received autonomy in 1938, Slovakia then declared independence from Czechoslovakia in March 1939. This independence was short-lived as Czechoslovakia was then reunited in 1945, but the link between autonomy and the desire for eventual secession is drawn quite strongly in the Slovak mind.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, in several elite interviews, and usually unprompted, interviewees would quickly say that "autonomy" is "impolite" and has negative political connotations.<sup>47</sup> As a result, Hungarian minority elites have had to work within the historical constraints to make the claiming of autonomy palatable to their Slovak counterparts.

## The Early Years: Cultural Rules and Linguistic Conventions

Understanding the power of the linguistic conventions and cultural norms around autonomy must begin with the landmark Komárom Meeting in January 1994. It is frequently mentioned as one of the key moments in the Hungarian autonomy struggle, and also as a missed opportunity.<sup>48</sup> Following the failed efforts of the Hungarian minority to be recognised as a "partner-nation" in the Slovak constitution, autonomy was seen as a viable institutional solution to recognise and protect the historical Hungarian minority.<sup>49</sup> In the context of proposed administrative reforms by the Slovak government and concern over the future of the Hungarian community in a newly independent Slovakia, Hungarian leaders in the southwestern Slovakian region of Csallóköz/Žitný Ostrov made a declaration in 6 December 1993 and planned a meeting in Komárom on the 8th of January 1994 to ratify their plan. The December plan called for an assembly made up of one hundred members that would represent the Hungarian community. It also included the formation of a Hungarian province with a "self-administration and special status."<sup>50</sup>

The atmosphere leading up to the event was tense, with Slovak opposition to the meeting. Days before the conference, what emerged was a play on words: Miklós Duray, the leader of *Együttélés* (Coexistence), one of the main Hungarian political parties at the time, and a supporter of territorial autonomy, stated that Hungarian parties were not talking about autonomy (*autonómia*) but rather self-government (*önkormányzatiság*).<sup>51</sup> A later report defended this change of vocabulary by stating that the two words are identical but that self-government is "more politically admissible."<sup>52</sup> The finalised Komárom document was a watered-down version of the December proposal. It did not mention territorial autonomy, but rather featured two proposals for new administrative units. In the end, nothing came of the declaration. There has

never again been such a strong call to territorial autonomy as the 1993 December plan. Moreover, and most importantly for the purposes of this article, we can see the beginning of the movement away from calls for “autonomy” to the play on words to “self-governance.”

What difference does a word make? The fact that political actors go so far out of their way to avoid the word “autonomy” is remarkable in itself. For example, in 2007–2008 local Komárom mayoral candidate János Bócsa’s civil society organization went through different names—Southern Slovakia Self-Determination Council and Southern Slovakia Autonomy Council—which were banned because the organization was deemed a threat to the territorial unity of Slovakia. The final version of his organization, Movement for Regionalism, was approved, but later banned because of its website being a Hungarian (country) portal.<sup>53</sup> Words matter. As the spokesman of the Roundtable of the Hungarians in Slovakia—a major civil society organization—put it in an interview with the author:

Autonomy is impolite, it shouldn’t be discussed. It means dissolution of the state in general. That’s the reason why MKP is talking about self-governance and why parties are not talking directly about autonomy.

In the Hungarian–Slovak context, therefore, the autonomy debate is in essence couched in a language that uses “self-governance” (*önkormányzatiság*) instead of “autonomy” (*autonómia*). If the latter is used instead of the former, it is often for purposes of confrontation rather than difference in meaning. Interviewees across political parties and civil society made the same point: the two words are synonyms and mean the same thing. The essence of what elites are demanding is the ability to have control over the institutions making decisions about issues that concern the life of the minority. Autonomy, or self-governance, is seen as a way to encourage the self-sustainability of the Hungarian minority and to fight against the trends of assimilation and emigration (as mentioned in the second section).

### **Analysis of the Post-EU Accession Period (2004–2017)**

The claiming of “autonomy,” therefore, is conditioned by culturally and linguistically acceptable rules related to the Slovak nation’s own past experience. Hungarian elites have responded through a substitution of “self-governance.” This substitution strategy continues throughout the post-EU accession period, regardless of the changing surrounding political context. Indeed, despite the different political party governing coalitions in Slovakia during 2004–2017, the formalisation of a strategy for neighbouring Hungarian kin by the Orbán government in Hungary only in 2011<sup>54</sup> and a more divided political scene for the ethnic Hungarian minority in Slovakia, Hungarian minority actors consistently claim “self-governance” rather than “autonomy.” This is found across political documents and is further unpacked by an



examination of how Hungarian elites pursue policy area reforms that would provide them increased self-governance.

An examination of key party documents over the time period confirms how actors have moved away from “autonomy” to the entrenchment of “self-governance.” This applies to the two main political parties in the period—MKP and Most-Híd—as well as to the Roundtable of Hungarians in Slovakia. The Roundtable is a civil-society umbrella organization that also provides legal opinions and promotes coordination between the different political parties. In this vein, it put together the *Minimum* document agreed to by both political parties and the Roundtable in 2012.<sup>55</sup> This document claimed the need for cultural and educational self-governance, as well as better regional economic development and the formation of regional administrative units that align with Slovakia’s “natural” cultural and economic regions.

When examining major political documents by MKP and Most-Híd, each has a major document on its idea of “self-governance.” In 2014, MKP launched its own proposal officially titled “The Institutional Requirements for the Slovak-Hungarian Community’s Preservation, Growth and South-Slovakia’s Economic Development.”<sup>56</sup> The document itself speaks not of “autonomy” but of self-governance on both the personal dimension and regional level. When MKP politicians were interviewed, they stood by this document as exactly what the party thinks of autonomy. Meanwhile, the policy document referenced by Most-Híd politicians is their 2016 *Civic Vision*, which encourages the development of a regional identity called “Southern Slovakian” (*Dél-Szlovákia*, as compared to the more used term *Felvidék*) and advocates support for educational and cultural self-governance.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, these different documents—as well as other election manifestos during the period—demonstrate the usage of the “self-governance” terminology across major national political actors and a general awareness of the taboo connotation of the “autonomy” term because of the Slovak association of autonomy with independence. In contrast to Poland, Ukraine, and Russia where speech about the past is controlled through memory laws,<sup>58</sup> the taboo on the term *autonomy* is in the air and political culture for the Hungarians in Slovakia.

With cultural conditioning around the language and vocabulary of what can actually be claimed by the Hungarian minority, the Hungarian minority needs to find alternative ways to achieve institutional control over cultural reproduction and to achieve autonomy in practice. Elite interviews highlighted how Hungarian minority elites have altered their strategy by focusing on claims across a range of policy areas which would encourage the economic and cultural survival of their community. Further analysis of the local newspaper archives unpacks how this happens, with claims across a range of policy areas such as education, language, and culture. Moreover, regional development focusing on infrastructure and economic development is a catchy theme and targeted policy area amongst Hungarian minority political actors, especially given that some regions with a large proportion of ethnic Hungarians are amongst the least developed and face high unemployment, as discussed in the

second section. The following analysis highlights how policy reforms are claimed in practice through analysis of such claims in the newspaper archives.

First, unpacking the theme of regional development and its subcomponents, one way to promote greater *de facto* autonomy and control over the governance of their own affairs has been through promoting infrastructure development. Whether protesting the closure of the railroad lines that have kept the region connected—as in Rimaszombat in 2011—or clamouring for motorways (such as the R2) to be extended, developing infrastructure to further transportation links is a key claim area found across years and newspapers. Improved infrastructure serves two purposes. The first is to bring members of the Hungarian community into closer contact with each other. However, the planned R2 route connecting Kočice with Zvolen, running through Rimaszombat, began in 2007 and still has not been completed. The other expressway, the R7, which would connect Bratislava with Hungarian-populated towns along the southern section of Slovakia, also does not yet exist. Difficulty reaching each other undermines a common sense of regional identity. Yet whilst development has been slow on the R2 motorway completion, cross-border infrastructure connections between Hungary (in particular its own town of Komárom) and its sister city of Komárom in Slovakia have powered ahead. In 2017, the Elisabeth bridge (which united the sister cities across the Danube) was finished, unveiled during a visit by Prime Ministers Robert Fico and Viktor Orbán. The latter emphasised that the Danube did not divide but rather united the two countries whilst Fico highlighted the success of the Slovak–Hungarian relationship.<sup>59</sup>

The second function of infrastructure is that it promotes economic development. As one expert put it, “investment goes where the infrastructure is good.”<sup>60</sup> Across the political spectrum, Hungarian actors agree on the importance of infrastructure. One MKP politician claimed, “We need to recognise that where infrastructure is missing, investment will not go there. Our goal is to make the underdeveloped parts of southern Slovakia reach the Slovak average in the near future.”<sup>61</sup> One Hungarian Most-Híd politician said, “We need to create an economically strong and self-aware community because that will be the pulling force . . . which will keep us together and bring home those who are searching for happiness abroad.”<sup>62</sup> Economic development and investment in the region are seen as solutions to the dilemma of young people emigrating to Hungary or moving to Bratislava, and also as a way of reducing unemployment. Debates surrounding economic development were heated at times, with the mayor of Rimaszombat even issuing an open letter to Prime Minister Fico criticising the lack of adequate government aid and investment in agriculture and job creation.<sup>63</sup> The economic dilemmas facing Rimaszombat are especially frustrating given that the region was one of the wealthiest in the Kingdom of Hungary during the early twentieth century, yet by 2011 it was facing one of the highest rates of unemployment in the country (almost 35 per cent).<sup>64</sup>

To get around the absence of territorial autonomy and institutionalised cultural autonomy, the Hungarian minority has also focused on policy areas such as education, culture, and language use to gain as much leverage as possible over the reproduction of its own

identity. The choice of words used by the different political actors has been education “self-governance,” cultural “self-governance,” and language rights, while the term “autonomy” has been assiduously avoided. Different civil society groups and political leaders have emphasised the importance of using the mother tongue since it “it is one of the cornerstones of our identity.”<sup>65</sup> Whether in schools and reading updated Hungarian textbooks, speaking Hungarian in public administration, or seeing signs in Hungarian, there are many practical challenges in using the minority language. For example, road signs in the minority language usually have the Hungarian language underneath in a smaller text size than the Slovak text above. The “KétNyelvű DélSzlovákia”—Bilingual Southern Slovakia—movement has taken up enforcing the bilingual railroad signs and announcing railway stops in Hungarian across southern Slovakia.

In the quest for more control over different institutions—without making an outright demand for autonomy—one common theme that arose in the archival analysis was the frequent claim to financial support. Money is the necessary enabler to guarantee an institution will function. Whilst some financing does come from the domestic government, other sources include the kin-state and the European Union. The kin-state acts through its different foundations—such as the Bethlen Gábor Foundation—as well as the Ministry for Education and Culture. As one minority rights activist said, “If Hungarian support did not come, then the civil sphere would not be possible to be active. The Slovak system only gives money to projects, nothing to support the upkeep of institutions.”<sup>66</sup> Another minority researcher confirmed, “The cultural organizations receive greater support from Hungary than they do from Slovakia. Without it, they could not function.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Hungary supports its co-ethnics not just in Slovakia but in neighbouring countries such as Romania, Serbia, and the Ukraine.<sup>68</sup> One political forum is the Autonomy Council of the Carpathian Basin (KMAT)—*Kárpát-medencei Autonómia Tanács*. The historical references to Trianon cannot be underplayed, as the solution of autonomy is seen as the way forward. With the upcoming one-hundredth anniversary of Trianon, Hungarian Romanian minority leader László Tőkés argued that “Autonomy is the solution to Trianon, without it any minority politics would be self-deception.”<sup>69</sup>

In Slovakia, the sources of kin-state support are several. The Baross Gábor Plan provides money for economic development from the Hungarian government. It focuses primarily on small and medium enterprises, offering as much as 5 billion forints (approximately €15.5 million) in funds.<sup>70</sup> The goal of the Plan is to encourage the preservation of the Hungarian minority community through strengthened economic development.<sup>71</sup> At a joint meeting between kin-state officials from Hungary and the MKP party to discuss the Plan, MKP President József Menyhárt noted, “If there is work, then young people will stay in the region, there will be children, education, culture and life . . . this economic plan plays a huge role in encouraging this.”<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the kin-state has different outreach activities aimed at supporting business investment. In 2016, it was to support Hungarian young people from leaving Slovakia through supporting their local start-ups.<sup>73</sup> Further links were strengthened when the Hungarian Trading House (Magyar Nemzeti Kereskedőház) opened up seven offices in Slovakia to develop better trading contacts.<sup>74</sup>

There is an important difference between the two ethnic Hungarian political parties regarding the support they receive from their the kin-state and their choice of political partners. MKP has promoted good ties with Hungary and has had the backing of the FIDESZ government. Meanwhile, FIDESZ refuses to acknowledge Most-Híd as a Hungarian party since it is composed of both Slovaks and Hungarians, although Most-Híd would think of itself as a Hungarian party.<sup>75</sup> For important meetings with other Hungarian minority parties in the region, such as through KMAT, FIDESZ will invite MKP but will not invite Most-Híd. On the other hand, from Most-Híd's point of view, focusing on domestic politics and domestic partners is the preferred approach rather than hoping for support from neighbouring Hungary: "We perceive that MKP tries to find help in Hungary and beyond, and we are trying to find partners at home."<sup>76</sup> MKP argues, however, that not much help will come from the Slovaks themselves: "Slovakia will give wider minority rights provisions once we will be only a few in the country."<sup>77</sup> As a result, strong claims or 'big steps' in the form of administrative reforms such as those laid out in the MKP's 2014 policy document is seen as the way forward. Most-Híd, on the other hand, emphasises small steps and believes that big claims will alienate domestic partners.<sup>78</sup> These divergent viewpoints and strategies illustrate the tension between overlapping layers of history and how the consequences of Trianon are lived. Both actors accept the status quo but to move ahead MKP looks towards its long-term connection with Hungary to draw on as support while Most-Híd focuses on adapting to a new set of domestic partners and allies.

The Hungarian minority does not have *de jure* autonomy and cannot claim it as such—due to the negative historical connotations discussed previously. Nevertheless, despite the constraining linguistic rules around claiming "autonomy," political elites have gone out of their way to creatively target relevant policy areas and institutions that could provide for the well-being and economic survival of the community. This has occurred across areas such as regional development, education, and culture. Moreover, their demands are also aimed at different actors. Claims for financial resources from the domestic, kin-state, and also European levels provide a way to continue the minority identity's survival. Whilst accepting the historical significance and irreversibility of the Treaty of Trianon, segments of the Hungarian minority political elite, led particularly by MKP, cling to the relationship with the kin-state whilst Most-Híd takes a more domestic approach to finding partners.

## Conclusion

As the Introduction to the Special Issue highlighted, the distinctive imperial past of East-Central Europe (compared to Western Europe's more stable state system), the monumental ramifications of the dismemberment of three multi-ethnic empires following World War I and the East's history of communism make it all the more important to understand how the past is activated in the present.<sup>79</sup> As János remarks, East

Europeans “are inclined to seek solace in the past” rather than look towards the future.<sup>80</sup> The Introduction highlights three inter-related arenas in which historical memory and politics interact: the circulation of memories of historic narratives, conditioning factors such as political or cultural regimes, and finally, the actors involved. I examined how these three arenas apply to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and how the past figures in their quest for survival.

Through an analysis of two Hungarian newspaper archives, I have unpacked *how* and *which* historic memories are circulated and by *whom*. Acts of commemoration of the past is the conduit for historic memories to be relived and serves to cement a Hungarian identity. They include the participation of mainly political and civil society actors who remember a range of events and people from the Hungarian past. Moreover, commemorations often involve meeting at, renovating, or putting up monuments that bring alive certain elements of the past. The Habsburg era is celebrated as well as the foundation of the Hungarian state, while the events of the twentieth century are generally mourned.

The second half of this article illustrated the linguistic and cultural rules which condition the vocabulary and tactics of the Hungarian minority in their desire to have better institutional guarantees for cultural reproduction. In other contexts, this would be claimed as “autonomy”; however, the negative historical connotation of “autonomy” in the Slovak mindset has led Hungarian elites to claim “self-governance” rather than “autonomy.” In addition to this linguistic strategy, elites have also pursued policy reforms in a range of areas such as education and regional development that would help them achieve *de facto* autonomy. Whilst this is relatively unsuccessful as yet, it is a manner more palatable than the outright claiming of “autonomy.” Indeed, the different articles in this Special Issue highlight how contentious finding an acceptable and palatable version of history can be, whether for different ethnic groups within a country or across different countries.<sup>81</sup>

In the face of a declining population, rising unemployment, and emigration and assimilation, whether or not these tactics will prove sufficient to sustain the Hungarian minority as an identifiable community remains to be seen. Fruitful avenues of future research could compare different Hungarian minorities in the surrounding region—such as in Romania or Serbia—and their usage of the past in minority politics, as well as memory politics in the kin-state. The transnational dimension of memory politics can also be further elaborated, in a similar vein to Davydova-Minguet.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, this analysis focussed explicitly on the past from the perspective of the Hungarian minority without detailed coverage of the Slovak perspective, which could show interesting dynamics at play. Whilst my methods were elite interviews and qualitative content analysis, a more detailed process tracing method could also uncover different causal mechanisms allowing for minority identity to be reproduced within the community. As this current article shows, the past is never too far away to be remembered, whether activated directly to commemorate identity or by conditioning the strategies of political actors.

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## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Notes

1. Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka, "Circulation, Conditions, Claims: Examining the Politics of Historical Memory in Eastern Europe," *East European Politics & Societies*, part of this special section.

2. Raymond Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe 1848-1945* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1983), 148. His statistics include the countries of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

3. Félix Krawatzek, "Remembering a Contentious Past: Resistance and Collaboration in the Former Soviet Union," *East European Politics & Societies* part of this special section.

4. Olga Davydova-Minguet "Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings: Russian Immigrants and Remembrance of World War II in Finland," *East European Politics & Societies* part of this special section.

5. Ábel Ravasz, interview with author, 17 June 2017, Bratislava.

6. See also Olga Davydova-Minguet, "Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings".

7. Félix Krawatzek, "Remembering a Contentious Past."

8. Bartek Pytlas, "Radical-Right Narratives in Slovakia and Hungary: Historical Legacies, Mythic Overlaying and Contemporary Politics," *Patterns of Prejudice* 47, no. 2 (2013): 167.

9. Eva Balogh, "Hungarian Foreign Policy 1918-1945," in *The Hungarians: A Divided Nation*, ed. Stephen Borsody (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988).

10. Stefano Bottoni, "The Creation of the Hungarian Autonomous Region in Romania (1952): Premises and Consequences," *Regio—Minorities, Politics, Society*, no. 1 (2003): 87.

11. Government of Slovak Republic, "Fourth Report Submitted by the Slovak Republic Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 2 of The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Annexes" (Bratislava, 2014).

12. László Gyurgyík, "Demographic Processes in Minority Hungarian Communities," in *Minority Hungarian Communities in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Nándor Bárdi et al. (Boulder, CO: Atlantic Research & Publications, Inc., 2011), 472–75.

13. Zsolt Horbulák, "Dél-Szlovákia Gazdasági És Szociális Helyzete Néhány Mutató Tükrében (3. Rész) [Southern Slovakia's Economic and Social Situation in Light of Some Indicators; 3rd Part]," *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*, no. 3 (2019): 91–100; Zsolt Horbulák, "Dél-Szlovákia Gazdasági És Szociális Helyzete Néhány Mutató Tükrében (2. Rész) [Southern Slovakia's Economic and Social Situation in Light of Some Indicators; 2nd Part]," *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*, no. 4 (2017): 71–78; Zsolt Horbulák, "Dél-Szlovákia Gazdasági És Szociális Helyzete Néhány Mutató Tükrében [Southern Slovakia's Economic and Social Situation in Light of Some Indicators; 1st Part]," *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*, no. 3 (2015): 43–56.

14. Horbulák, "Dél-Szlovákia Gazdasági És Szociális Helyzete Néhány Mutató Tükrében," 2015.

15. This is a short overview of the institutional provisions. For more background, please see Council of Europe, "Fourth Opinion on the Slovak Republic" (Strasbourg, 2014); Government of Slovak



Republic, "Fourth Report Submitted by the Slovak Republic Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Annex" (Bratislava, 2014); Government of Slovak Republic, "Fifth Report Submitted by the Slovak Republic Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities" (Bratislava, 2019); János Fiala-Butora, "Operationalizing Cultural Autonomy in International Law as a Form of Effective Participation in Decision-Making," *International Relations and Diplomacy* 7, no. 10 (2019): 441–63; Ágnes Vass, "If Yes, Why Not? Minority Language Use and Accommodation of Minority Language Rights in Slovakia," *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 43–56; Lukasz Wardyn and Jan Fiala, "The 2009 Amendment of the Slovakian State Language Law and Its Impact on Minority Rights," *The Polish Yearbook of International Law* 29 (2009): 153–74.

16. Government of Slovak Republic, "Principles of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Implementation of the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic N° 270/1995 Coll. on the State Language of the Slovak Republic," 2009.

17. Government of Slovak Republic, "Act No. 184/1999 Coll. on the Use of the Language of National Minorities," 1999.

18. Council of Europe, "Fourth Opinion on the Slovak Republic," 25; Government of Slovak Republic, "Fourth Report Submitted by the Slovak Republic Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Annex," 78–79.

19. Council of Europe, "Fourth Opinion on the Slovak Republic," 24–26; KA, "Vörös Péter: 'Minden Magyar Alapiskola Megmenekült' [Vörös Péter: Every Hungarian School Was Saved]," *Komáromi Lapok* 25, no. 12 (2016): 1.

20. Government of Slovak Republic, "Act No. 138/2017 Coll. on the Fund for the Promotion of the Culture of National Minorities and on the Amendment and Supplement of Certain Acts," 2017.

21. Fiala-Butora, "Operationalizing Cultural Autonomy," 457–59.

22. MKP later renamed itself in 2012 to "Magyar Közösség Pártja," or Party of the Hungarian Community.

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24. Statistical Office of Slovak Republic.

25. Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice* (London: Sage, 2012).

26. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, "Introduction," in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–6. See also Nikolay Koposov "Populism and Memory: Legislation of the Past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia," *East European Politics & Societies*, part of this special section; Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, "Introduction," in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–6. Nikolay Koposov.

27. Karsten Bruggemann and Andres Kasekamp, "The Politics of History and the 'War of Monuments' in Estonia," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 3 (2008): 425–48; Karsten Bruggemann and Andres Kasekamp, "The Politics of History and the 'War of Monuments' in Estonia," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 3 (2008): 425–48.

28. Mark A. Wolfgang, *Antigone's Ghosts: The Long Legacy of War and Genocide in Five Countries*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2018).

29. György Ifjabb Batta, "1848 Emlékezete És Üzenete [The Memories of 1848 and Its Message]," *Komáromi Lapok* 19, no. 3 (2009): 1.

30. János Dózsa Juhász, "Az 1848/49-Es Szabadságharcra Emlékeztünk [We Remember the 1848-49 Freedom Fight]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 48, no. 5 (2017): 1–2. The exact quote that I translated in the article is "Történelmi időket élünk, hisz kívülről és belülről is szeretnének bennünket megszüntetni, s bizony senki sem lehet tétlen, üzenik az 1848/49-es szabadságharc hősei."

31. György Batta, "Városunk 750. Születésnapját Ünnepeztük [We Celebrated Our City's 750th Birthday]," *Komáromi Lapok* 24, no. 5 (2015): 1. Exact quote that I translated in the article is, "Városunk történelmi zászlaja hirdesse a büszke múltat, a harcos, küzdelmes jelent és a reménytelí jövőt."

32. György Ifjabb Batta, "Március 15—Városunk Szép Műsorokkal Ünnepelel [15th March—Our City Celebrated with Beautiful Programmes]," *Komáromi Lapok* 20, no. 6 (2010): 1; János Dózsa Juhász, "Ezernyolcszáznegyvennyolc, Te Csillag. . . [1848, You Star]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 47, no. 6 (2016): 1; Batta, "1848 Emlékezete És Üzenete [The Memories of 1848 and its Message]."

33. Batta, "Városunk 750. Születésnapját Ünnepeztük [We Celebrated Our City's 750th Birthday]."

34. Stuart Burch and David J. Smith, "Empty Spaces and the Value of Symbols: Estonia's 'War of Monuments' from Another Angle," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 6 (2007): 917.

35. N.A., "Szoboravatás—Képekben [Statue Inauguration—In Pictures]," *Komáromi Lapok* 19, no. 14 (2009): 1–3.

36. BU, "Bastrnák Tibor Polgármester: Tiltakozni, a Törvények Betartásával [Mayor Tibor Bastrnák: Objecting, Compliance with the Laws]," *Komáromi Lapok* 20, no. 13 (2010): 1.

37. David Newman and Anssi Paasi, "Fences and Neighbours in the Postmodern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 2, no. 2 (1998): 186–207. Discussion of this is characteristic of political geography studies.

38. János Dózsa Juhász, "Lesz Arany János Szobor a Tompa Téren [We Will Have a Statue of János Arany at Tompa Square]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 48, no. 11 (2017): 2.

39. János Dózsa Juhász, "Janko Jesenský Is Kiállt Tompa Emléke Mellett" (Janko Jesensky Also Stands Behind Tompa's Memory)," *Gömöri Hírlap* 48, no. 19 (2017): 6.

40. János Dózsa Juhász, "Törköly József Ébresztése [The Awakening of Törköly József]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 43, no. 12 (2010): 5; János Dózsa Juhász, "1956-Ra És a Rimaszombati Hősökre Emlékeztek [They Remembered 1956 and Rimaszombat's Heroes]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 44, no. 43 (2011): 1.

41. Ági Padlovics, "A Komáromi Civilek Ezidáig 3500 Sírt Dokumentáltak a Temetőben [Komárom's Civilians Have Documented 3,500 Cemetery Tombstones]," *Komáromi Lapok* 26, no. 18 (2017): 2.

42. Author A. (under review), "Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings."

43. György Batta, "Felvidéki Kitelepítettek És Deportáltak Emléknapja—2015 [The Remembrance Day of Those Deported in Southern Slovakia]," *Komáromi Lapok* 24, no. 5 (2015): 3.

44. Batta, "Városunk 750. Születésnapját Ünnepeztük [We Celebrated Our City's 750th Birthday]."

45. Géza Tokár, "Autonomy in Slovakia—Difficulties and Problems," in *Autonomies in Europe: Solutions and Challenges*, ed. Zoltán Kántor (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2014), 141–50; Iván Farkas, interview with author, 16 June 2017, Muzsla.

46. Tokár, "Autonomy in Slovakia—Difficulties and Problems," 141–42.

47. Géza Tokár, interview with author, 8 June 2017, Somorja; Ravasz, interview.

48. Miklós Duray, "Miért Nem Vált Történelmi Sikertörténeté a Komáromi Nagygyűlés? [Why Didn't the Komárom Meeting Become a Success?]," *Felvidékma*, 4 January 2014, <http://felvidek.ma/2014/01/miert-nem-valt-tortenelmi-sikertortenette-a-komaroni-nagygyules/>.

49. Együttélés, "Az Elnyomott Kisebbségből Legyen Társnemzet. Magyarok Csehszlovákiában/ Szlovákiában 1918-1992. Politikai Memorandum, 1993" [Let the Oppressed Minority Be a Partner-Nation], in *Önrendelkezési Kísérleteink*, ed. Miklós Duray (Somorja: Méry Ratio, 1999), 113–46.

50. Miklós Duray, "Nagygyűlés Pedig Lesz! [We Will Have a Meeting!]," in *Önrendelkezési Kísérleteink*, ed. Miklós Duray (Somorja: Méry Ratio, 1993), 216–17. The exact quote that was translated was "egy saját önkormányzattal és saját közigazgatással rendelkező különleges jogállású tartomány."

51. Sherrill Stroschein, *Ethnic Struggle, Coexistence, and Democratization in Eastern Europe*, Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 217. She references the article Slovenský Denník, "Duray Urges 'Self-Administration' over 'Autonomy,'" 7 January 1994, reprinted in FBIS-EEU, 12 January 1994, 17.

52. Stroschein, *Ethnic Struggle*, 218. She references Miklós Duray, "Önrendelkezés a Szlovákiában élő magyarság törekvéseiben," in *Komárom Lapok, Az Önkormányzat az önrendelkezés alapja*, 8–21.

53. László Gulyás, "A Szlovákiai Magyar Kisebbség Újabb Etnoregionalista Kísérlete: A Bósza-Tervezet 2007-2008 [The Slovak-Hungarian Minority's Newest Ethnoregional Experiment: The Bósza Plan]," *Regionális Tudományi Közlemények* (2008), 110–11.

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55. Eva Balogh, "Hungarian Foreign Policy 1918-1945," in *The Hungarians: A Divided Nation*, ed. Stephen Borsody (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988).

56. Translation of author. The original text is "A Szlovákiai Magyar Közösség Megmaradásának és Gyarapodásának, valamint Dél-Szlovákia Gazdasági Felzárkoztatásának Intézményi Feltételei."

57. Most-Híd, Polgári Vízión [Civic Vision]" (2016).

58. George Soroka and Félix Krawatzek, "Nationalism, Democracy, and Memory Laws," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 2 (2019).

59. Városi Hivatal, "Kormányfők Mutatták Be Az Új Duna-Hídat," *Komáromi Lapok* 26, no. 18 (2017): 1.

60. Péter Urban, "Infrastruktúrára van Szüksége a Régióknak! [The Region Needs Infrastructure!]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 42, no. 15 (2009): 7. Exact quote is "például az infrastruktúra kiépítése: hiszen a beruházások oda mennek, ahol jó az infrastruktúra."

61. János Dózsa Juhász, "Visszaadni a Mezőgazdaság Rangját: Beszélgetés Miklós Lászlóval [Returning Agriculture to its Place: Conversation with Miklós László]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 44, no. 47 (2011): 5. The exact quote is "Tudomásul kell vennünk, hogy ahol az infrastruktúra hiányzik, oda beruházó nem megy. A célunk az lesz, hogy a dél-Szlovákiai elmaradott régiókat legalább szlovákiai átlagra fel tudjuk hozni a közeljövőben."

62. Szerkesztőség, "Én Az Emberek Szemével Látom a Világot" Beszélgetés Vörös Péter Parlamenti Képviselővel [I See the World Through Everyone's Eyes: Conversation with MP Vörös Péter]," *Komáromi Lapok* 24, no. 18 (2015): 2. The exact quote is "Egy gazdaságilag erős és öntudatos közösséget kell teremtenünk, mert ez lesz a húzóerő. Ez lesz az a gravitációs erő, ami összetart majd bennünket és hazavonzza azokat, akik külföldön keresnek boldogulást."

63. József Šimko, "Šimko József Nyílt Levele a Kormányfőhöz [Šimko József's Open Letter to the Head of Government]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 47, no. 23 (2016): 2.

64. János Dózsa Juhász, "Šimko József: Mindent Önerőből Kell Megvalósítanunk [Šimko József: We Have to Implement Everything with Our Own Strength]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 44, no. 25–26 (2011): 4–5; János Dózsa Juhász, "Keressük Meg, Ami Összeköt Bennünket! [Let's Find What Brings Us Together]," *Gömöri Hírlap* 43, no. 3 (2010): 3.

65. Zoltán Bara, "CSAK BÁTTRAN! Anyanyelvhasználat Idehaza És Külföldön [Let's Be Brave! Usage of the Mother Tongue at Home and Abroad]," *Komáromi Lapok* 20, no. 2 (2010): 2. Exact quote, "Az anyanyelvünk identitásunk egyik legfontosabb alapköve."

66. Ákos Horony, interview with author, 9 June 2017, Somorja. The exact quote that was translated is "Ha magyarországi támogatások nem jönnének, akkor itt a civil szféra, ellehetetlenne, nem is tudnánk működni. Eleve a szlovák rendszer úgy működik, hogy csak projektekre adnak támogatást. Intézmény fenntartásra nincs támogatás."

67. Minority rights expert, interview with author, 7 June 2017, Somorja. The exact quote that was translated is "Tehát itteni kulturális szervezetek, nagyobb támogatást kapnak magyarországról, mint szlovákiától. Anélkül nem tudnának létezni."

68. This is similar to Russia as shown in Davydova-Minguet, "Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings"; and Félix Krawatzek, "Remembering a Contentious Past."

69. Krónika.ro, "Az Autonómia Fontosságát Hangsúlyozta Tőkés László a Kárpát-Medencei Magyar Autonómia Tanács Budapesti Ülésén [Tőkés László Emphasized the Importance of Autonomy at the

Budapest Meeting of the Autonomy Council of the Carpathian Basin],” *AutonoKronika.ro*, 5 October 2018, <https://kronika.ro/erdelyi-hirek/az-autonomia-fontossagat-hangsulyozta-tokes-laszlo-a-karpat-medencei-magyar-autonomia-tanacs-budapesti-ulesen>. Exact quote which was translated, “Trianonra az autonómia a válasz, enélkül minden kisebbségpolitika csupán öncsalás.”

70. János Dózsa Juhász, “Rimaszombatban Is Bemutatták a Baross Tervet [They Introduced the Baross Plan in Rimaszombat],” *Gömöri Hírlap* 48, no. 17 (2017): 2.

71. Erzső Pósa Homoly, “Együtt Erő Vagyunk! [Together We Are Strong],” *Gömöri Hírlap* 48, no. 8 (2017): 3.

72. Homoly. The exact quote translated in the article is “Ha lesz munka, akkor a térségben marad a fiatal, lesz gyerek, lesz oktatás, lesz kultúra, és lesz élet. Ha ez elmarad, akkor a kistérség kiüresedik. Ezt kell megakadályozni, s úgy gondolom, hogy ennek a gazdaságélénkítő csomagnak pontosan ebben van hatalmas szerepe.”

73. János Dózsa Juhász, “Fiatal Vállalkozók Fórumát Tartották [Young Entrepreneurs Held a Forum],” *Gömöri Hírlap* 47, no. 8 (2016): 3.

74. János Dózsa Juhász, “Irodát Nyitott a Magyar Nemzeti Kereskedőház [Hungary’s National Trade House Opens an Office],” *Gömöri Hírlap* 47, no. 2 (2016): 1.

75. Ravasz, interview.

76. Ibid.

77. Farkas, interview. The exact quote translated in text is “Szlovákia akkor fog engedni sokkal szélesebb körű közösségi jogokat a kisebbségeknek vagy kisebbségének, amikor már csak néhányan leszünk az országban.”

78. Ravasz, interview.

79. V. Bunce, “The National Idea: Imperial Legacies and Post-Communist Pathways in Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics & Societies* 19, no. 3 (2005): 406–42; Jon Elster, Klaus Offe, and Ulrich Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea*, Theories of Institutional Design (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); G. Pop-Eleches and J. a. Tucker, “Associated with the Past? Communist Legacies and Civic Participation in Post-Communist Countries,” *East European Politics & Societies* 27, no. 1 (2012): 45–68; Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

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81. Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka, “Circulation, Conditions, Claims.”

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# Populism and Memory: Legislation of the Past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia

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The rise of historical memory, which began in the 1970s and 1980s, has made the past an increasingly important soft-power resource. At its initial stage, the rise of memory contributed to the decay of self-congratulatory national narratives and to the formation of a “cosmopolitan” memory centered on the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity and informed by the notion of state repentance for the wrongdoings of the past. Laws criminalizing the denial of these crimes, which were adopted in “old” continental democracies in the 1980s and 1990s, were a characteristic expression of this democratic culture of memory. However, with the rise of national populism and the formation of the authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes in Russia, Turkey, Hungary, and Poland in the 2000s and 2010s, the politics of memory has taken a significantly different turn. National populists are remarkably persistent in whitewashing their countries’ history and using it to promote nationalist mobilization. This process has manifested itself in the formation of new types of memory laws, which shift the blame for historical injustices to other countries (the 1998 Polish, the 2000 Czech, the 2010 Lithuanian, the June 2010 Hungarian, and the 2014 Latvian statutes) and, in some cases, openly protect the memory of the perpetrators of crimes against humanity (the 2005 Turkish, the 2014 Russian, the 2015 Ukrainian, the 2006 and the 2018 Polish enactments). The article examines Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian legislation regarding the past that demonstrates the current linkage between populism and memory.

**Keywords:** *Memory laws; populism; politics of memory; Holocaust; Eastern Europe*

Over the past few years, a new research (sub)field has been rapidly emerging at the confluence of history, political science, international relations, and law, for which “Law and Memory” is the most commonly accepted name.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the initial academic publications on memory laws, authored mostly by legal scholars, appeared shortly after the adoption of the first ad hoc statutes against the “Auschwitz lie.”<sup>2</sup> More recent research differs from those publications in three respects. First, the (sub)field is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Second, scholars are becoming interested in the variety of forms that legal governance of history takes in various countries. Unsurprisingly, the concept of memory laws, which was coined (in the 2000s) to refer to the enactments that either criminalize certain statements about the past or formulate their official interpretation, is increasingly often used

now to refer to any legislation that regulates collective representations of the past and commemorative practices.<sup>3</sup> And third, the geographical focus has shifted from Germany and France, where the first Holocaust denial laws were adopted in 1985 and 1990, to Eastern Europe, which has become the main “laboratory” for studying the relationships between law and memory.

These historiographic developments reflect the evolution of the phenomenon itself: the legal governance of history is indeed becoming more diversiform and systematic; it is rapidly emerging as the key instrument of the politics of the past, in line with the growing juridification of our societies;<sup>4</sup> and memory laws can no longer be called a “distinctively French legislative sport.”<sup>5</sup> Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian lawmakers today are at least as imaginative as their French colleagues in proposing and adopting new past-related norms.

Viewed from the Eastern Europe of the 2000s and 2010s, legislation of the past presents differently from how it looked in the Paris of 1990. At the turn of the 1990s, the international political and cultural climate was largely determined by the fall of communism and the seemingly decisive triumph of liberal democracy, for which the formation of a humanistic, victim-centered culture of memory and the notion of state repentance for the crimes of the past were crucial aspects. Despite all objections that could be (and have been) raised against Holocaust denial laws, they came into being as a manifestation of this culture. In contrast, the continuing rise of national populism all across Europe and the formation of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes in Russia, Turkey, Hungary, and Poland marked the beginning of the new century. Manipulative uses of memory have become the hard currency of populist politics all across the world. In particular, a distinctively different culture of memory has emerged in some of the former Communist countries, which seek to promote their national narratives rather than the “cosmopolitan” EU-sponsored memory of the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup>

East European legislation has faithfully reflected this change: typical of the region are statutes that victimize the past for the sake of the respective national communities and shift the responsibility for historical injustices entirely to others. Today, the conceptual pair crucial to understanding the politics of history (in Eastern Europe even more so than elsewhere) is “populism and memory,” while in the 1990s it was, rather, “memory and democracy.” One cannot insist enough on the point that “the transition away from communist rule no longer represents the dominant political paradigm in East-Central Europe.”<sup>7</sup>

In this article, I examine the Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian memory laws that, I believe, demonstrate the current linkage between populism and memory. My focus will be on criminal memory laws, which form a hard core of the legislation of the past, with special reference to the most recent developments, including the Polish memory law of 2018. On 26 January 2018, Poland passed a law aimed at “protecting the good name of the Polish State and the Polish Nation,”<sup>8</sup> which has become known as the “Holocaust law” and has caused a wave of protests, especially in Israel and the United States. Indeed, the protection of Poland’s “good name” may have entailed



obscuring the role that the Poles themselves played in the extermination of Polish Jews during and in the aftermath of the Second World War. The fact that “Jewish suffering challenges the very core of the national mythos for many East-Central European states”<sup>9</sup> remains one of the decisive factors that determine mnemonic dynamics in the region.<sup>10</sup> In response to international pressure, the Polish government revoked the most controversial provisions of the law on 27 June 2018.<sup>11</sup> However, some of its other provisions have remained in force and mark a significant step in the populist take-over of the East European legislation of memory.

### Populism and Empty Signifiers

Populism is one of the best-researched aspects of modern politics.<sup>12</sup> However, the concept refers to too many different things, which share almost no single common property, including with respect to the politics of the past. I am interested here in the “new-wave” national populism (also referred to as right-wing radical populism, ethno-populism, nativist populism, conservative populism, or authoritarian populism), which is rapidly coming to dominate the political scene, especially in Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars have paid relatively little attention to the national populists’ politics of history, although it is sometimes argued that “populism is about constructing and using a past.”<sup>14</sup> Some theories of populism do indeed supply important premises for the further development of this approach. In fact, since the concept of a “people” and the sense of belonging to a (national) community are fundamental for populists, “it can be argued that constructing a ‘people’ requires . . . constructing powerful myths that draw on a collective memory of an imagined past in order to define who belongs to ‘the people.’”<sup>15</sup> Although the notion of constructing a people goes back to Ernesto Laclau’s highly influential *On Populist Reason*,<sup>16</sup> this approach typically opposes his theory. Laclau argues that the concepts used by populists (including the concept of people) have no clear positive meaning and function as “empty signifiers,” because “we are dealing with purely differential identities.”<sup>17</sup> Laclau is, of course, building here on Saussure’s claim that “language (and by extension all signifying systems) is a system of differences.”<sup>18</sup>

I agree with Laclau that some concepts can present as empty signifiers and that this fact is crucial to understanding the ways in which populists use concepts. But I believe that he has failed to explain the reasons for that and has overestimated the degree to which empty signifiers are empty. Any (historical) term can, in certain contexts, become an empty signifier (*vide sémantique*).<sup>19</sup> This happens when the term is used to refer to a thing (or a class of things) in the world without specifically invoking any of its properties.<sup>20</sup> Yet the term’s meaning remains available to both the speaker and the listener. Proper names (including those of “collective individuals” such as nations) are most often used in this way.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, while using a common

(or general) name, we are most often (although not always) in a position of having to engage certain aspects of its meaning in order to formulate and understand the message. The ways in which we use concepts fluctuate between the model of the proper name (an empty signifier with an always available, albeit nebulous, meaning) and the model of the general name, which seeks to capture a class of things by calling attention to some of their common properties.

In contrast to concepts in the natural sciences, which have more abstract, general, and “definable” meanings, historical concepts (and most words of our everyday language) typically function as “semi-proper names”<sup>22</sup> and refer both to (more or less) abstract—and potentially universal—meanings and to those concrete occurrences that best exemplify a given category. Thus, the concept of absolutism relates both to unlimited monarchy and to the government of Louis XIV, and we usually avoid using it to allude to unlimited monarchies too distant from the Sun King’s France in space and/or time.

The ways we use concepts (and their grammatical types) change over time. As Reinhart Koselleck suggests, the proliferation of relatively more abstract and universal social and political concepts began in the late eighteenth century with the emergence of future-oriented philosophies of history.<sup>23</sup> One can argue that the “crisis of the future” and the rise of memory in the late twentieth century have stimulated changes in an opposite direction, namely, a decay of abstract notions and universal values and the growing importance of “local logics” and particularistic identities.<sup>24</sup> Most importantly, the forms of political legitimation have undergone a similar change: individual paths of past development have replaced projects of the future and master narratives as its main source.

In the age of populism, proper names of different communities of memory and myths that are parts of their meaning have grown in importance at the expense of the philosophies of history incarnated in more abstract and universal concepts. “Peoples” (French, Polish, Russian, and so on—the adjectives are crucial here, although they are often implied rather than spelled out when we use this word in a particular national context) have replaced social classes as the main protagonists of history and identity concepts. In fact, the very concept of identity came into use in the 1980s, in the context of transition from class-based images of society to those based on nations, ethnicities, and more particular characterizations of societies’ members.

The memory laws’ cultural form corresponds to this juncture in the evolution of Western historical consciousness.<sup>25</sup> All ad hoc statutes that criminalize certain claims about the past protect the interpretation of particular historical *events* (typically traumatic), which function as sacred symbols of national and other communities, and none of them bans any philosophy of history. And although memories of certain particular events are inseparable from a given master narrative,<sup>26</sup> the emphasis matters, and the new-style politics of the past resonates with the logic of the proper names. The evolution of the legislation of memory from Holocaust denial laws to statutes that exculpate nation-states from any responsibility for crimes against humanity has reflected the ascendance of the populist *Zeitgeist* and a decay of the democratic politics of memory.<sup>27</sup>

## Faces of De-communization: Legislation of the Past in the 1990s

Battles over the past were an essential aspect of East European politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In a sense, Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika was a revolt of the suppressed counter-memories of various social, national, ethnic, and religious groups against the Soviet master narrative. The notion of legislating on issues of the past emerged in Eastern Europe (including in Russia) at the turn of the 1990s in the context of those battles and, more broadly, of the de-communization process. The Czechoslovak Lustration Act of October 1991, the German Stasi Records Act of December 1991, and the Czech Act on the Illegality of the Communist Regime of July 1993 marked the emergence of this legislation. After a long series of failed attempts, Poland adopted its own lustration act in April 1997. Similar enactments were passed all across the region, including laws on the restitution of property confiscated under communist rule, on the creation of occupation museums (or of similar institutions charged with preserving national memory), on the prohibition of Soviet symbols, and even on citizenship, which in some countries was denied to certain categories of people who were associated with the Soviet occupation and perceived as the Kremlin's potential "fifth column."<sup>28</sup> The importance of the memorial component differed from one enactment to another, but as a rule, symbolic considerations were at least as important to their adoption as pragmatic ones.<sup>29</sup>

In the USSR/Russia too, governmental declarations and legal acts were passed to codify the new view of history, including the November 1989 resolution of the USSR Supreme Soviet that declared Stalin's deportations of repressed peoples "illegal and criminal"; the December 1989 resolution of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR that condemned the "secret protocols" of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact; the April 1991 Law of the Russian Federation On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, which in Article 2 characterized Stalin's deportations of entire peoples as acts of genocide; and the October 1991 Law of the Russian Federation On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions, which condemned Stalinism as a "totalitarian state." In its turn, Ukraine also passed a rehabilitation act in April 1991, which cautiously extended the right for rehabilitation only to those "fighters for Ukraine's independence" (Ukrainian anti-Soviet partisans, that is) who had not collaborated with the Nazis and had not been found guilty of war crimes.

De-communization was not, however, a monolithic enterprise. It was obviously crucial to Eastern Europe's transition to democracy. But at the same time, the language of de-communization could be, and often was, also used by nationalists and populists, who were seeking to outplay their socialist opponents and improve their own image in Western eyes. With the exception of Russia, breaking with communism in Eastern Europe involved a struggle for national liberation in which democrats and nationalists were allies (hence the phenomenon of liberal nationalism, or national liberalism, which is so typical of Eastern Europe and so clearly different from national populism).<sup>30</sup> As a result, de-communization has evolved into an ambivalent phenomenon that has both democratic and nationalist components.

During the 1990s, Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish governments pursued three significantly different strategies of de-communization and the political construction of history. Memory was undeniably no longer as central to those countries' politics as it had been during the perestroika period: expectations of a better future temporarily soften disagreements over the past. But at the same time, the hardships of the transition period, nostalgia for both the communist and the pre-communist past, and the growing dissatisfaction with global capitalism and the neoliberal politics of austerity gave rise to a wide variety of populist movements all across the former Eastern Bloc, which would reinvigorate passions surrounding the past in the early twenty-first century.

In Ukraine, former communist apparatchiks became moderate nationalists and kept firm control over the country until the early 2000s. Pro-Western liberals and radical nationalists remained relatively marginal there, and the Ukrainian government pursued a very limited de-communization agenda and a "multi-vector" politics of history.<sup>31</sup> A handful of laws having to do with historical memory<sup>32</sup> followed their Soviet/Russian prototypes, such as the April 2000 Law On Perpetuating [*sic!*] the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, modeled after a similar Russian statute of May 1995 (let me mention *en passant* that memory laws are a privileged vehicle of "mnemonic diffusion"<sup>33</sup> between the countries). In Poland, despite the social democrats' (most of whom were former communists) coming to power in 1993, the tradition of national liberalism remained sufficiently strong to decisively influence the politics of memory, which found its expression in particular in the December 1998 law on the creation of Poland's "Ministry of Memory," the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [IPN]). In Russia, where political collisions were much sharper than in Poland and Ukraine and where the "red-brown" populists at times came quite close to seizing power, the battles over the past reflected the political turbulence.

On the one hand, several Russian enactments (such as the aforementioned 1995 legislation on the victory over fascism) gave the force of law to the old Soviet-style cult of the Great Patriotic War (the name under which the Second World War is commonly known in Russia), despite the fact that this cult was by no means as central for Yeltsin as it had been for his predecessors and was to be for his successor. On the other hand, in response to the growing red-brown danger, there emerged the idea of passing some kind of "anti-fascist" law, which would also counter attempts to spread neo-Stalinism. This idea harkens back to the mid-1990s, when a group of democratic politicians and activists supported by the Moscow Anti-Fascist Center proposed several draft laws modeled after the Gayssot Act of 1990, which prohibited Holocaust denial in France.<sup>34</sup>

The memory of the Holocaust was almost non-existent in Russia (and in other communist countries) during the Soviet period.<sup>35</sup> It was an "irritating competitor" to the Soviet war myth,<sup>36</sup> which portrayed the victory of the USSR over Nazi Germany as proof of the superiority of communism over capitalism. The Shoah was considered irrelevant in the "struggle of the two social systems." In the late 1980s, however, the

memory of the Shoah emerged in the context of the rise of memory characteristic of Gorbachev's perestroika and largely in response to the growing far-right movement. During the 1990s it was cautiously promoted by Boris Yeltsin's government. The authors of the Russian bills did their best to find formulas that would apply to the denial not only of Nazi crimes but also of Stalin's repressions. However, the Russian Parliament, dominated as it was by the communist and nationalist opposition, blocked all those initiatives, the only outcome of which was the ban on fascist propaganda included in the July 2002 Law On Countering Extremist Activities (Articles 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3) and the ban on the display of fascist symbols in the December 2001 Code of Administrative Offenses (Article 20.3).

Russian attempts to criminalize the denial of both Nazi and communist crimes were not without parallels in other post-communist countries. Thus, in December 1991, the parliament of the Czech and Slovak Republic amended Article 260 of the old Czechoslovak Penal Code to forbid "movements that demonstrably aim at suppressing the rights and freedoms of citizens or preach national, racial, class or religious hatred (such as, for example, fascism or communism)."<sup>37</sup> Although this was by no means an ad hoc memory law, certain statements about the past would have become illegal had the reference to fascism and communism not been invalidated by the Constitutional Court (on the grounds that, by referring to fascism and communism, the legislators were endorsing the notion of collective guilt).

Poland was the first country to outlaw the denial of both Nazi and Communist crimes, by virtue of the aforementioned 1998 Law on the Institute of National Remembrance, which was also the first case of explicitly banning certain claims about the past in Eastern Europe. The law prohibited the denial of Nazi and Communist "crimes perpetrated against persons of Polish nationality and Polish citizens of other . . . nationalities" (the word "nationality" is here used in the sense of ethnicity). This was an obvious attempt to downplay the importance of the Holocaust and present the Poles rather than the Jews as Hitler's main victims. The law passed over in silence the participation of Poles in the Holocaust.<sup>38</sup>

In adopting the 1998 act, Poland created a memory law model that presented an alternative to the model in Western Europe. Western European memory laws, most of which came into force in the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>39</sup> prohibit Holocaust negationism and/or the denial of crimes against humanity more generally. Since the 1990s and especially the 2000s, the European Union has thrown its full support behind this approach.<sup>40</sup> However, the Western European model did not take into account certain concerns typical of some Eastern European countries, which derive from their respective historical specificities. There, the legacy of communism is usually perceived as a particularly important issue, while the collaboration of the local population with the Nazi and the Communist regimes and its share of responsibility for the Shoah are systematically denigrated.<sup>41</sup> This crucial denigration had its own role to play in the memory wars of the following decades. It also partly explains "the failure to set up a pan-European memory project."<sup>42</sup>

## Banning the Denial of Communist Crimes

The relatively peaceful international climate of the 1990s began rapidly deteriorating in Eastern Europe early in the new century with the continuing rise of populism and the emergence of Putin's authoritarian regime. The years 2004 and 2005 were decisive for the formation of a new memory landscape in the region, as evidenced by several developments. The pretentious celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the victory over Nazism in Russia started well before May 2005 and showcased the Kremlin's neo-imperial ambitions. Putin's involvement in Ukraine's internal affairs around the November 2004 presidential elections aimed to promote the Soviet war myth and support his candidate, Viktor Yanukovich. These events triggered an avalanche of mutual accusations of past misdeeds. The Orange Revolution brought to Ukraine's presidency the liberal nationalist candidate Viktor Yushchenko, almost openly supported by Poland. Lech Kaczyński and his Law and Justice (PiS) party won Poland's parliamentary and presidential elections in the fall of 2005. Nationalists came to power in all three countries, and in the years that followed they faced the need to consolidate their support by using increasingly nationalistic rhetoric. Memory wars broke out in the Russian–Ukrainian–Polish triangle.<sup>43</sup>

The politics of history, including memory laws, became a weapon of choice that the three regimes consciously relied upon in their political propaganda. The term *Geschichtspolitik* first came into use in Germany in the context of the 1986–1987 *Historikersreit*, although the adjective *geschichtspolitisch* was occasionally used in the early twentieth century to denounce politically biased interpretations of the past.<sup>44</sup> The neologism quickly gained popularity, arguably because it resonated with a widely shared feeling that in the emerging age of memory, public uses of the past would gain in importance and take on new forms. Chancellor Helmut Kohl was himself one of the first devotees of this politics.

In the 2000s, this notion began spreading across Eastern Europe. As in Kohl's Germany, it was viewed there as a program of action rather than an analytical device. Soon after Lech Kaczyński came to power, a group of Polish right-wing intellectuals (which included such figures as Marek Cichocki, Dariusz Gawin, and Tomasz Merta) began advocating for a *polityka historyczna*, which they viewed as crucial to both domestic and foreign policy.<sup>45</sup> About the same time, Russian "political technologists" had also come to appreciate the promise of the politics of the past. Thus, according to Gleb Pavlovskiy, an "architect of Putinism," after the collapse of traditional political ideologies, "the politics of history will become the standard of politics as such."<sup>46</sup> Influences from Russia and Poland (and the Baltic countries) decisively affected the situation in Ukraine, where the consolidation of the nationalist movement around the reformed Svoboda ("Liberty") party was accompanied by a sudden boom for the politics of memory, in sharp contrast with the situation of the 1990s (another case of mnemonic diffusion). In other words, in Eastern Europe as elsewhere, the past became



a crucially important “soft-power” resource, with right-wing populists taking the lead in using it.

The 1998 Polish statute was followed by a series of Eastern European enactments that criminalized certain claims about the past. And while several countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Croatia) criminalized the denial of crimes against humanity in accordance with the EU model, others have followed the Polish example by prohibiting the denial of both communist and Nazi crimes. For example, Lithuania’s memory law of 2010 forbids the denial of crimes “committed by the USSR or Nazi Germany on the territory of the Republic of Lithuania or against the inhabitants of the Republic of Lithuania,”<sup>47</sup> which is a clear case of whitewashing the national past, because many Lithuanians in fact collaborated with the Soviet regime and were complicit in the Holocaust.<sup>48</sup> De-communization memory laws also exist in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Latvia. These are countries that, like Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, have a particularly strong record of anti-Soviet resistance and have been typically involved in fierce conflicts with Russia over the interpretation of the past.

There are no such laws in Western Europe, because the USSR and the leading Western countries were allies during the Second World War and because considering Nazism and communism two equally criminal regimes is hardly compatible with Western traditions of anti-fascism and social democracy. In contrast, in the east of the continent, both anti-fascism and socialism have been compromised by the Soviet communists. But although the EU has not supported the notion of criminalizing the denial of communist crimes, it has adopted several declarations calling for a fuller confrontation of the legacy of both totalitarian regimes, thus recognizing the legitimacy of Eastern European concerns with the memory of communism.<sup>49</sup>

The problem with laws that ban the denial of communist crimes is not that they view fascism and communism as two equally criminal regimes, which is understandable in light of those countries’ historical experience. The problem, rather, is that they shift the blame for historical injustices entirely to others and draw a veil over the ordinary people’s earlier support for both communist and fascist regimes and their participation in Nazi and communist crimes. In other words, they give legal protection to typically populist self-congratulatory national narratives, which is the opposite of what the European Union intends to achieve by promoting memory laws, namely, to overcome nationalism and create a pan-European mnemonic community.

There is an important difference between the East European memory laws that assimilate communism to fascism and the aforementioned attempts of the Russian democrats to do the same in the 1990s: in the Russian case, banning the denial of communist crimes did not signify whitewashing national history. Rather, those bills were intended as an expression of Russia’s repentance for the crimes of its own dictatorial regime, which makes them closer in the spirit, if not in the latter, to West European memory laws.

## PiS, Populism, and Memory Laws in Poland

Since first coming to power in 2005, PiS has sought to adapt the Polish legislation of memory ever more closely to the needs of the populist politics of memory. The first attempt in this direction was undertaken in 2006, when the party controlled both the government and the presidency. In October, the Sejm passed a lustration act that considerably expanded the functions of the IPN and amended the Penal Code by introducing Article 132a, “Slander of the Polish People,” which stipulated:

Anyone who publicly imputes to the Polish people participation in, organization of, or responsibility for communist or Nazi crimes shall be subject to the penalty of imprisonment for up to 3 years.<sup>50</sup>

This amendment is commonly known as the Gross Act, because Polish populists viewed Jan Gross’s research on Polish anti-Semitism, including his 2001 book *Neighbors*,<sup>51</sup> as a scandalous affront to the country’s reputation. However, in September 2008, when PiS was no longer in control of the government, the Constitutional Tribunal nullified the Gross Act on procedural grounds.<sup>52</sup> (Article 133 of the 1997 Penal Code, which remains in force, envisages the same penalty for “anyone who publicly insults the Republic or the Polish people”—a provision that few other countries have.)

The aforementioned 2018 Holocaust law is another step in the same direction. It was introduced into the Polish parliament in August 2016, soon after PiS’s accession to power in October 2015. It shows that a belligerent politics of history remains the party’s preferred instrument for consolidating electoral support. Both the 2006 and the 2018 statutes are not only silent on crimes against humanity committed by ethnic Poles but openly shield the perpetrators from exposure.

Partisans of the new Polish law present it as a reaction to phrases such as “Polish death camps” being colloquially used to refer to Nazi extermination camps. But there is a lot more in the statute than an invitation to watch one’s language. The law has added “the crimes of the Ukrainian nationalists and of the members of Ukrainian organizations that collaborated with the German Third Reich” to the roster of crimes against humanity the denial of which is punishable on the basis of the 1998 act on the IPN (Article 1). The lawmakers are here referring to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which were implicated in the 1943 Volhynia massacre (Article 2), one of the most painful episodes in the history of Polish–Ukrainian relationships. In the 1990s, Poland took the initiative in overcoming this legacy through an open discussion with an independent Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> But in April 2015, on the instigation of Ukrainian nationalists, the Ukrainian parliament forbade any criticism of those two organizations, which were now glorified as “fighters for Ukrainian independence.”<sup>54</sup> The Polish government (then run by the liberal Civic Platform party) condemned the law but refrained from taking countermeasures

in the face of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In contrast, the PiS government has chosen confrontation, and in July 2016, the Sejm endorsed a resolution recognizing the Volhynia massacre as a genocide and declaring 11 July as a “National Day of Remembrance for Victims of the Genocide perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists on citizens of the Second Polish Republic.”<sup>55</sup> One month later, the Holocaust law was first introduced in the Polish parliament.

The 2018 statute establishes that the provisions of the 1964 Civil Code “regarding the protection of personal rights should apply to the protection of the good name of the Polish Republic and the Polish nation” and that civil cases on these issues (which can result in the imposition of substantial fines) can be instigated by an NGO acting within the scope of its statutory tasks and by the Institute of National Remembrance (Article 5). The most controversial provision of the new act (Article 6) reads:

Whoever publicly and contrary to the facts attributes to the Polish Nation or to the Polish State responsibility or co-responsibility for the Nazi crimes committed by the German Third Reich . . . or for any other offenses constituting crimes against peace, humanity or war crimes, or otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the actual perpetrators of these crimes, shall be liable to a fine or deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly, Nazi crimes were committed by the Nazis. However, the mention of “other offenses” suggests that things are somewhat less straightforward than they may at first appear. Although located in Poland, the Nazi extermination camps were by no means Polish. But the peoples of Eastern Europe did not need camps to exterminate local Jews. In Poland in particular, local populations, including the Nazi-controlled police force (the “blue police”), actively participated in the *Judenjagd*, “the hunt for the Jews.”<sup>57</sup> This continued after the war too: during the first postwar year, hundreds of Jews were killed by Polish nationalists, including in the infamous Kielce pogrom.<sup>58</sup>

To be sure, the Polish case is somewhat special. In contrast to most other countries of Eastern Europe, Poland was not allied with the Nazis: Polish resistance was, in fact, among the most heroic acts of the Second World War. Poland’s human losses were proportionally higher than those of any other country, including the USSR. And while some Poles enthusiastically assisted the Nazis in their *Judenjagd*, others risked their lives saving Jews. Postwar “People’s Poland” prided itself on being one of the world’s most anti-fascist countries and played a key role in prosecuting Nazi war criminals. As a Polish historian puts it, the Poles have for decades been “compet[ing] with the Jews for a palm of martyrdom.”<sup>59</sup> The current right-wing Polish government is now promoting that legacy as an essential part of the Polish identity, just as the country’s communist authorities once did. This explains certain similarities between (otherwise significantly different) Polish and Russian memories of the war<sup>60</sup> and makes these countries particularly sensitive to accusations of crimes against humanity and to the notion of the Holocaust as the Nazis’ most abominable crime.

In June 2018, Poland repealed Article 6 of the new law in response to international pressure.<sup>61</sup> In January 2019, the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland, on the initiative of President Andrzej Duda, ruled unconstitutional the expression “Ukrainian nationalists” as “inconsistent . . . with the principle of specificity of legal provisions” proclaimed by Polish Constitution.<sup>62</sup> This was clearly intended as a way of softening the Polish–Ukrainian confrontation. However, other provisions of the 2018 statute remain in force, including Article 5, which has made claims of Polish co-responsibility for the Holocaust punishable with considerable fines after civil litigation.<sup>63</sup> Other recent memory laws also remain in force in Poland, including the April 2016 act that prohibits “the propagation of communism or any other totalitarian system through the names of public buildings, structures, and facilities” and provides for the removal of communist monuments, including monuments to the Soviet “soldier-liberators.”<sup>64</sup> This law is clearly modeled after the 2015 Ukrainian de-communization law. As in the case of Ukraine, the destruction of those monuments after the adoption of the Polish law brought about a tense confrontation with Russia.

### **Populism and Memory Laws in Putin’s Russia**

In the 1990s, Boris Yeltsin and his advisors pursued a politics of memory that was largely inspired by the Western model. This approach combined Holocaust commemoration with anti-communism and a cult of national heritage, which served to counterbalance the negative assessment of the Soviet system. However, this politics failed because of a lack of resources and of trust from the population.

With the emergence of Putin’s authoritarian regime, the politics of memory in Russia took a different turn.<sup>65</sup> Instead of blaming the communist past and using the notion of national heritage to stimulate “cultural patriotism,” the new regime began promoting the cult of the Great Patriotic War as a foundational event in Russian history, which—as in the Polish case—is partly understandable in light of the country’s historical experience. The groundwork for the present-day cult of the war was laid by a persistent mythologizing of the war during the late Soviet period,<sup>66</sup> with the goal of whitewashing the Soviet past, including Stalin’s mass crimes, the memory of which has been marginalized by the heroic war myth.<sup>67</sup> The cult of the war includes, as one of its main components, the notion of the Yalta postwar political order, which legitimizes Putin’s neo-imperial ambitions and simultaneously makes a majority of Eastern European countries reject the “new Russian ideology.”<sup>68</sup> Since the early 2000s, the memory wars between Russia and her former East European satellites typically deploy around interpretations of the war.

As with PiS, Putin’s regime has also co-opted the legacy of anti-fascism, portraying all anti-Russian forces—including “the historic West,” which in the Kremlin’s idiom is traditionally and irreparably anti-Russian—as inherently pro-fascist. This goes back to Stalinist propaganda, when whoever dared to criticize communism was immediately called fascist.<sup>69</sup>

The immediate prehistory of the 2014 Russian memory law, also known as the Yarovaya Act,<sup>70</sup> goes back to the Russian–Estonian war of words that ensued after the relocation of the “Bronze Soldier” (a memorial to Soviet “soldier-liberators”) from downtown Tallinn to a war cemetery in 2007.<sup>71</sup> This episode emboldened Russian nationalists who sought to introduce new legislation that would “ban insults to the significance of [Russia’s] great Victory.”<sup>72</sup> As a precedent, they routinely evoked criminalization of Holocaust denial in the West. The 2008 armed conflict with Georgia further contributed to the radicalization of Putin’s politics of memory. So did the subsequent confrontation with the West, as well as the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism calling for the “recognition that many crimes committed in the name of Communism should be assessed as crimes against humanity . . . in the same way as Nazi crimes [had been] assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal.”<sup>73</sup> The rise of the democratic protest movement in December 2011 and its May 2012 suppression by force showed that the “Putin consensus” of the 2000s, based on a compromise between liberal values and neo-imperial restoration, had outlived itself. The regime drastically changed its cultural policy, adopted an aggressive posture vis-à-vis the West in international relations, and passed several repressive laws that introduced censorship of the Internet, restricted the freedom of meetings, and proscribed “insults to religious sentiments” and “the denial of traditional family values.”<sup>74</sup> A law criminalizing counter-memories of the war was a logical continuation of this policy. Although the government’s experts remained critical of the draft law due to its vagueness, the bill (the first version of which was introduced in the Duma in May 2009) was passed in the wake of the 2014 annexation of Crimea, suggesting that the war myth was an essential component of the propaganda campaign aimed at justifying Putin’s aggression against Ukraine.

The May 2014 law added a new article (Article 354.1, “Rehabilitation of Nazism”) to the Penal Code of the Russian Federation:

The denial of facts established by the Judgment of the [Nuremberg] Tribunal . . . , the justification of crimes established by the above-mentioned Judgment, as well as dissemination of knowingly false information on the activities of the USSR during the Second World War, when expressed publicly, are punishable by a fine of up to three hundred thousand roubles . . . or by deprivation of liberty for up to three years.<sup>75</sup>

The punishment is increased to up to five years of imprisonment if “the same deeds [have been] committed with the use of one’s official position or through the mass media, as well as with fabrication of prosecution evidence”<sup>76</sup> (which arguably applies to historical research that is not in line with the official interpretation of the Second World War). The act also provides that “manifest disrespect toward society regarding Russia’s days of military glory . . . or public insults to the symbols of Russia’s military glory” are punishable by a fine or by correctional labor for up to one year.<sup>77</sup> Presumably, the goal of the Russian lawmakers was to justify the Soviet Union’s policies in response to the three main charges leveled at its actions before,

during, and after the Second World War: its involvement in the outbreak of war, war crimes committed by the Red Army, and the establishment of puppet regimes in the “people’s democracies” of Eastern Europe.

Members of the Russian Duma claim that this particular piece of legislation is no different from Western memory laws.<sup>78</sup> But it can, rather, be regarded as an extreme case of the East European trend toward using memory laws for the protection of national narratives, as it openly privileges the memory of an oppressive regime over that of its victims. In contrast, West European (and some East European) memory laws, notwithstanding their shortcomings, protect the memory of victims of state-sponsored crimes. A statute similar to the Russian law of May 2014 exists only in Turkey: Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code in 2005 criminalized insults to the Turkish state and is normally used against those who recognize the extermination of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as a genocide.<sup>79</sup> As noted above, Poland repealed parts of a comparable law in June 2018.

The repealed Polish statute and its Russian and Turkish prototypes differ in important ways. Russian and Turkish crimes against humanity were state-sponsored crimes imputable to the oppressive regimes that existed in those countries, while the Polish crimes were those of individual perpetrators.

To better understand the meaning of the 2014 Russian statute, we will compare it with an alternative Russian bill whose authors sought to find a middle ground between the Russian myth of the war and Western memories of the Holocaust, with the obvious goal of making this myth more acceptable to international opinion. This bill was initiated by Boris Spiegel, a Russian “oligarch,” politician, and prominent Russian-Jewish activist. In June 2010, he created World Without Nazism, an international human rights movement, which proclaimed the struggle against Nazi ideology and historical revisionism as its main goal.

The memory of the Holocaust had been cautiously promoted by Boris Yeltsin’s government, but its status in Russia began to change under Putin. This memory, and the notion of human rights more generally, gradually came to be seen as an ideological weapon wielded by the West in its “crusade” against Russia. At the same time, however, Holocaust commemoration had promise, insofar as the Nazis had indeed found collaborators in some Eastern European countries—a fact that the politics of memory in those countries sought to obscure.<sup>80</sup> The Kremlin could therefore hope to build a “coalition of memory” with the West against its Eastern European opponents. The traditional Stalinist war myth, however, would be of little use here (as almost unanimously negative Western reactions to Yarovaya’s draft law of 2009 had clearly demonstrated).

In March 2013, Spiegel had proposed expanding the list of offences detailed in Article 282 of the Penal Code by including the rehabilitation of Nazism and Holocaust denial. Had his proposal been accepted, Article 282 would have criminalized

actions aiming at inciting hatred or enmity, rehabilitating Nazism, glorifying Nazi criminals and their accomplices, denying the Holocaust, the disparagement of the



human dignity of a person or a group of persons on the basis of gender, race, nationality, language, origins, religion, or belonging to a social group, committed publicly or through the media.<sup>81</sup>

This bill was indeed similar to West European Holocaust denial laws, which consider Nazi crimes to be offences of a racist nature. But Spiegel's approach eroded the "purity" of the Russian war myth and was rejected by the Duma (while Spiegel himself had to resign as a member of the Council of the Federation, formally because of a new law that forbade combining positions in the parliament with those in international NGOs, which would include a World Without Nazism).

After the adoption of the Yarovaya Act in 2014, several other memory law drafts were introduced in the Russian parliament, including two similar drafts of 2015 (prepared by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and by the national-populist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) that criminalized "publicly equating the political regime of the USSR and the regime of Nazi Germany."<sup>82</sup> None of them were approved by the Parliament; neither was the proposal (submitted by Boris Spiegel's former collaborator, Konstantin Dobrynin) to criminalize the denial of those actions "that had been officially condemned by the [Russian] state as crimes of Stalin's totalitarian regime"<sup>83</sup> (which would include political repressions and the deportations of entire peoples).

The Yarovaya Act is very infrequently used in Russian courts (in contrast to the ban on the display of Nazi symbols, to which a November 2014 law assimilated the symbols of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army).<sup>84</sup> And when it is, it serves to penalize any criticism of the official Soviet/Russian narrative of the war, while numerous cases of Holocaust denialism go unpunished. Thus, in June 2016, Vladimir Luzgin was sentenced by a court in Perm to a fine of 200,000 roubles (currently about \$3,000) for reposting an article claiming that the Second World War began with the German and Soviet invasion of Poland. In November 2017, Ivan Lyubshin from Kaluga was sentenced to a fine of 400,000 roubles for posting on the popular social network VKontakte a video showing the joint Nazi-Soviet military parade in Brest in 1939, criticizing war crimes committed by the Red Army, and equating the Stalinist USSR and Nazi Germany. In February 2018, a case against Igor Dorogoy was brought on the initiative of the Magadan office of the Federal Security Service for a post on Odnoklassniki, another well-established social network, where, among other things, he called Marshal Zhukov a "marauder." The prosecutors are interpreting this as a public insult to a symbol of Russia's military glory. At the time of writing, the case is still ongoing.

The first attempt (and the only one to date) to use Article 354.1 to counter Holocaust denial was made in August 2017, when a criminal case was brought against Roman Yushkov, a nationalist activist from Perm, who had reposted an article by Murmansk blogger Anton Blagin entitled "Jews! Return to Germans Money for Your Fraud with 'Holocaust Six Millions Jews [*sic*]!'" This typically denialist text is still available on

Blagin's page on LifeJournal, and links to Yushkov's post can be found on several pages on VKontakte, Facebook, and elsewhere. So far, no charges against Blagin have been brought, even after he publicly intervened in support of Yushkov and acknowledged his authorship of the original blog. In September 2018, Yushkov was acquitted by a court at Perm, in yet another sign that the Russian authorities' real concern is to protect the memory of Stalinism rather than that of the Holocaust.

## Populism and Memory Laws in Ukraine

Since 2004, the politics of the past in Ukraine has been closely interwoven with the Russian–Ukrainian memory war. This politics consists of harsh confrontations between, on the one side, the Kremlin and its Ukrainian supporters who seek to promote the Soviet/Russian war myth in Ukraine, and on the other Ukrainian nationalists and national liberals who reject the Communist legacy, condemn Stalin's repressions (including the Holodomor, the 1932–1933 man-made famine that cost some three million Ukrainian lives), and—although to different degrees—rehabilitate “fighters for Ukraine's independence” and their far-right leaders, such as Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych. The rapid polarization of political forces and the radicalization of their memory claims in the 2000s and 2010s stand in sharp contrast to the cautious history politics in Ukraine in the 1990s. Ukrainian lawmakers have proven to be exceptionally prolific drafters of memory laws: since 2005, they have introduced more than eighty bills in the Supreme Rada on various issues related to history.<sup>85</sup>

Upon coming to power in 2005, Viktor Yushchenko launched a large-scale campaign to promote the memory of the Holodomor as a myth of the origins of independent Ukraine, for which he expected to gain support in the predominantly Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine (where the Holodomor had taken place), as well as the broad endorsement of the international community. However, he failed to overcome nostalgia for the USSR or create a national consensus around his de-communization agenda in memory politics and ended up by joining the (mostly West Ukrainian) radical nationalists in promoting the cults of Bandera and Shukhevych (awarding the title of Hero of Ukraine to both).<sup>86</sup> His attempt to criminalize the denial of the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people (and of the Holocaust as genocide of the Jewish people) resulted in only partial success: in November 2006, the Rada agreed to recognize the Holodomor as a genocide and its public denial as “an insult to, and humiliation of, the dignity of the Ukrainian people.”<sup>87</sup> No criminal sanctions for contesting this assessment were however introduced.

The battle of memory laws in Ukraine reached its peak in 2008–2012, on the eve and in the aftermath of the 2010 presidential elections (which Yushchenko lost to Viktor Yanukovych). Most new legislative initiatives came from a group of pro-Russian politicians, many of whom collaborated with Boris Spiegel (who had been born in Ukraine and had strong political and business connections there) and supported his

World Without Nazism project. It was in this milieu (supported by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and arguably by the Russian secret services) of pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians, Russian nationalists involved in Ukrainian politics, and Russian-Jewish activists close to the Kremlin that the new vocabulary of Putin's history politics was developed. The vocabulary centered on condemning attempts to rehabilitate Nazism and the glorification of Nazi war criminals and their accomplices (such as Bandera and Shukhevych, who had indeed collaborated with the Nazis). The first memory law draft to use this formula was proposed by Vadim Kolesnichenko, an MP from Viktor Yanukovych's Party of the Regions, in January 2009.<sup>88</sup> It was rejected by the Rada on formal grounds (due to its imprecise language), as were dozens of other bills that either prohibited the rehabilitation of Nazism or banned both Nazi and communist ideology, recognized anti-Soviet partisans "as a party to the Second World War," and gave them the full privileges of war veterans.

It was not until January 2014, however, that a bill criminalizing "the public denial or justification of fascist crimes against humanity . . . , including crimes committed by . . . those who fought against the anti-Hitler coalition and collaborated with the fascist occupiers,"<sup>89</sup> was adopted by the Rada as part of the "dictatorship laws package," which was passed by Yanukovych's supporters in violation of parliamentary procedures as part of a failed attempt to suppress the Maidan protest movement. This law was drafted by Petro Simonenko, leader of the Ukrainian communists, and the reference to the anti-Hitler coalition was clearly borrowed from the Yarovaya Act (or more exactly, from its first version). In contrast to other dictatorship laws, which were declared null and void just a few days after their adoption, the Simonenko Act remained in force (although it was never implemented) until April 2015, when the new Ukrainian government passed four de-communization laws, all of which had to do with historical memory.

Some of these laws were drafted, on behalf of the predominantly centrist government, by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (created under Viktor Yushchenko in 2005 in imitation of, and with the help of, its Polish homologue), while others were proposed by ultra-nationalists from Oleg Lyashko's Radical Party (which was then part of the governmental coalition). The new laws declassified Soviet-era archives (including security files)<sup>90</sup> and modified the rules for celebrating the memory of the victory over Nazism in the Second World War (not the victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War, as formulated in the aforementioned law of 2000).<sup>91</sup> They also prescribed the demolition of Soviet monuments (which inaugurated the *Leninopad*, literally "the fall of Lenin," a mass destruction of Lenin's statues), recognized both communist and fascist regimes as criminal, and banned "the public denial of [their] criminal character" as well as the use of their symbols.<sup>92</sup> They further prohibited criticism of the independence movement and specifically any "lack of respect" toward its participants and "public denial of the lawfulness of the struggle for Ukraine's independence in the twentieth century," such denial being "recognized as an outrage toward the memory of fighters for Ukraine's freedom . . .

and as a disparagement of the Ukrainian people.” None of these laws, however, has introduced any criminal sanctions for violating any bans on the statements about the past.<sup>93</sup> Most of the norms introduced by the de-communization laws harken back to a bill that was drafted by Oleh Tyahnibok, leader of the ultra-nationalist Svoboda party, back in November 2005,<sup>94</sup> and have since remained, although in somewhat different versions, on the agenda of both Ukrainian right-wing populists and national liberals. It goes without saying that the de-communization laws have been negatively perceived in both Poland and Russia and have contributed to the exacerbation of memory conflicts in the region.<sup>95</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

The “war of laws” has become an essential part of the memory wars fought both within and between Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. In recent years, national populism has decisively influenced these countries’ legislation of the past. But although national populists may fight each other, they largely share the same patterns of thought and behavior. And what unites them may prove far more powerful than what divides them, as evidenced in particular by the “family resemblance” between Poland’s 2018, Russia’s 2014, and Ukraine’s 2015 statutes. In all cases, populist-promoted memory laws protect national narratives rather than the transnational memory of the victims of state-sponsored crimes. The notion of state repentance for the crimes of the past is totally alien to the populist politics of memory, which is why this politics is inherently conflictual.

There are, however, significant differences between the narratives supported by Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian nationalists. Thus, Russian and pro-Russian Ukrainian populists promote a cult of the Great Patriotic War to legitimize the Kremlin’s neo-imperialist ambitions, while Polish and anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalists consider their countries as victims of both Nazism and communism and reject the “good war” consensus. For this, Moscow condemns them as “Nazi allies.” At the same time, Russian and Polish nationalists alike cultivate the legacy of antifascism, which Ukrainian nationalists typically downplay (it goes without saying that in each country there are also populists who openly sympathize with fascism). Finally, Polish and Ukrainian nationalists radically disagree on the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Poles against Ukrainians and by Ukrainians against Poles. In this debate, the Kremlin presents as *tertius gaudens*.

The legacy of anti-fascism features prominently in today’s politics. Holocaust denial laws, including the postwar antifascist legislation that forms the core of international human rights law, have been born of this legacy. But the array of those claiming anti-fascist credentials is broad, including far-right anti-fascists and far-left anti-fascists. Before 1989, Soviet and Polish communists alike used anti-fascism to legitimize alternative forms of dictatorship, and national populists in both countries currently do the same.

Alongside the legacy of anti-fascism, both the Putin and the Kaczyński regimes have inherited their countries' own far-right traditions. In Russia's case, this encompasses the Eurasian movement and such conservative historical thinkers as Ivan Ilyin, whom Putin particularly admires.<sup>96</sup> In the Polish case, the legacies of Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski, all differences between them notwithstanding, are fundamental to PiS-style nationalism.<sup>97</sup> Anti-fascism has paradoxically merged in Russia and Poland with their national traditions of near-fascism.

But here again, the Polish and the Russian cases are by no means identical. Present-day Polish right-wing anti-fascism goes hand-in-hand with anti-communism. The Kremlin, in contrast, is (very cautiously) using anti-communism mostly in domestic politics, because anti-communism in international relations often involves an anti-Russian component (namely, criticism of the Soviet empire). And it goes without saying that in many respects, Putinism is a continuation of, rather than a break with, the Soviet system. Also, Poland does not seem to have strong neo-imperial ambitions (although at a certain point in its history it was the dominant political force in Eastern Europe), while Putin's Russia clearly does. The prewar Polish regime, although dictatorial, was not even remotely as oppressive as Stalinism, and today's Poland is still far from attaining the level of unfreedom typical of Putin's Russia. Yet in both cases, anti-fascist rhetoric is widely used to present Poles and Russians uniformly as victims and to whitewash crimes that some of them were involved in. This makes Poland and Russia different from most other Eastern European countries (including Ukraine), where anti-fascism is less a matter of national pride. This explains why the 2018 Polish enactment differs from other de-communizing memory laws and comes closest to the 2014 Russian statute.

Was the transformation of memory laws, from an instrument of democratic politics of history into a weapon of choice used by national populists, inevitable? I believe that it was quite likely to occur because the rise of memory favors particularism and the logic of proper names. Laws that penalize the denial of concrete historical events could certainly be, and have indeed been, used to protect essentially universal symbols such as the memory of the Holocaust, but their focus on individual events makes them especially suitable for protecting sacred symbols of particular communities and their national narratives. Those laws largely operate on the level of political symbolism rather than of rational discourse. Populism, with its appeal to the emotional, appears more than democracy to be at home in the domain of symbolism, memory, and myth.

Laws criminalizing certain cases of enunciation about the past have marked a new stage in the development of history politics across Europe, and not only because of an obvious distance between promoting certain ideas and punishing those who publicly disagree with them. These laws have contributed to the reactivation of the notion of the sacred in our societies, a notion that can, and often does, generate and legitimize an emotional need for suppressing opinions commonly assessed as blasphemous. The current revival of antagonistic memories promoted by national populist movements<sup>98</sup>

could only profit from a mental climate that favors such reactions. It has also profited from the “growing punitive trend that is introducing new speech bans into national criminal codes,”<sup>99</sup> the trend that liberal democracies initiated at the time of their apparent triumph over their fascist and communist rivals in the late twentieth century. By doing so, they have forged a weapon that populists could not fail to use. Today, this punitive trend, of which memory laws are an essential component, increasingly often informs the politics of the new authoritarian regimes and national populist parties and governments.

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## Notes

1. Uladzislau Belavusau and Aleksandra Gliszczynska-Grabias, eds., *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Luigi Cajani, “Criminal Laws on History: The Case of the European Union,” *Historiein* 11 (2011): 19–48; *Riparare, Risarcire, Ricordare: Un dialogo tra storici e giuristi*, eds. Giorgio Resta and Vincenzo Zeno-Zencovich (Napoli: Editoriale Scientifica, 2012); Marc Olivier Baruch, *Des lois indignes? Les Historiens, la politique et le droit* (Paris: Talandier, 2013); Stiina Löytömäki, *Law and the Politics of Memory: Confronting the Past* (London: Routledge, 2014); Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Emanuela Fronza, *Memory and Punishment: Historical Denialism, Free Speech and the Limits of Criminal Law* (The Hague: Asser Press, 2018); Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka, “Bringing the Past into the Present: Toward a New Social Scientific Research Agenda,” *The Journal of Politics* 80/4 (2018). Characteristically, the program of the 12th Pan-European Conference on International Relations (Prague, September 2018) included fifteen (!) panels on topics such as “Memory Matters! Understanding How Collective Memory Narratives Impact on Foreign Policy,” “Memory and Heritage in International Relations,” and “Exploring the Link between Foreign Policy and Historical Memory,” with most participants either representing or working on Eastern Europe.

2. Eric Stein’s “History against Free Speech: The New German Law against the ‘Auschwitz’—and Other—‘Lies,’” *Michigan Law Review* 85, no. 2 (1986): 277–324 was arguably the first article to discuss this legislation. Robert A. Kahn’s *Holocaust Denial and the Law: A Comparative Study* (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) summed up the first stage of the study of, and reflections on, Holocaust denial laws.

3. On the concept of memory laws see Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*, pp. 1–8.

4. On juridification, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* [1981] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 357.

5. Pierre Nora, “Lois mémorielles: pour en finir avec ce sport législatif purement français,” *Le Monde*, 27 December 2011.

6. Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006). On the distinctive features of Eastern Europe as a “region of memory,” see Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka, “Circulation, Conditions, Claims: Examining the Politics of Historical Memory in Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics & Societies* part of this special section.

7. See Introduction to this special section by Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka: 2.

8. Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 2018 r. o zmianie ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej—Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu.



9. See Introduction to this volume by Félix Krawatzek and George Soroka: 19.
10. As documented in particular by several contributions to this special section.
11. Ustawa z dnia 27 czerwca 2018 r. o zmianie ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej—Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu . . . , Article 1.
12. Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (1997): 22–43; Idem, “Populism on the March: Why the West Is in Trouble,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 6 (2016): 9–15; Ivan Krastev, “The Populist moment,” *Eurozine*, 18 September 2007; Ivan Krastev, “Eastern Europe’s Illiberal Revolution: The Long Road to Democratic Decline,” *Foreign Affairs*, 16 April 2018; Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Manuel Anselmi, *Populism: An introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
13. Cas Mudde, ed. *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2017).
14. Patricia Chiantera-Stutte, “Populist Use of Memory and Constitutionalism: Two Comments—I,” *German Law Journal* 6, no. 2 (2005): 394. See also Ritchie Savage, “From McCarthyism to the Tea Party: Interpreting Anti-Leftist Forms of US Populism in Comparative Perspective,” *New Political Science* 34, no. 4 (2012): 572–73; Norbert Lechner, “À la recherche de la communauté perdue: Les défis de la démocratie en Amérique latine,” *Revue internationale des sciences sociales* 43, no. 3 (1991): 587. Cf. Frank Furedi, *Populism and the European Culture Wars: The Conflict of Values between Hungary and the EU* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
15. Anna Cento Bull, “The Role of Memory in Populist Discourse: The Case of the Italian Second Republic,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 50, no. 3 (2016): 217.
16. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005): 65.
17. *Ibid.*, 69.
18. Ernesto Laclau, “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” in *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 37.
19. Nikolay Koposov, *De l’imagination historique* (Paris : Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2009), pp. 73–105 ; Idem, “Events, Proper Names and the Rise of Memory,” *Afterlife of Events: Perspectives of Mnemohistory*, ed. Marek Tamm (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 44–61.
20. For instance, terms used in dictionary entries function as empty signifiers whose meanings are explicated subsequently.
21. Although a proper name can also have meaning: thus, “Alexandros tou Philippou ton Makedonon” tells us a lot about the person in question.
22. Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique: L’espace non-popperien du raisonnement naturel* (Paris: Nathan, 1991): 60–61.
23. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985); Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Reinhart Koselleck, “Geschichte/Historie,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 2, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972–1997), 593–717.
24. Javier Fernandez Sebastian and Juan Francisco Fuentes, “Conceptual History, Memory, and Identity: An Interview with Reinhart Koselleck,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 1, no. 2 (2006): 119. On the rise of memory in the late twentieth century, see François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* [2003] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
25. Cited in note 1.
26. Thus, the memory of the Holocaust acquires its meaning within the framework of the liberal narrative, even though it calls into question the very notion of progress, which is its foundation. See Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Orations of the Dead / Silences of the Living: The Sociology of the Linguistic Turn,” in *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 29–43; Jeffrey C. Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The Holocaust from War Crime to Trauma Drama,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 30–32.

27. In this article, I do not examine the interconnection between populism, the rise of memory, and neoliberalism, although the latter has been crucial in the emergence of populist history politics across the world. I argue elsewhere (Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*, pp. 52–58) that neoliberalism as an economic ideology marginalizes traditional history-based ideologies “by assimilating economy to a mathematical model, which can work well only if social groups (seen as ‘redistribution coalitions’) do not intervene into its operation. Within this framework, history viewed as the struggle of human collectivities to assert their own interests presents as irrelevant, if not detrimental, to a society’s wellbeing. . . . But alternative ways of dealing with the past had to be found to replace the modern idea of history. . . . The ostracized narrative of human liberation has returned in the form of fragmented memories, including those of particular subaltern communities.” However, the relationships between neoliberalism and right-wing populism deserve a longer discussion. While some scholars argue that populism is but a Trojan horse of neo-liberalism, others suggest that economic programs are of secondary importance to most right-wing populist parties and that many of them are not neoliberal. See Hans-Georg Betz, “The Two Faces of Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe,” *The Review of Politics* 55, no. 4 (1993): 663–86; and Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). I do not think, though, that the question can be resolved by examining the populists’ economic programs. Neoliberalism and national populism seem to be interconnected on a deeper level, namely, that of the perception of history. But I leave this discussion for another article.

28. For memory and identity of the members of the Russian minority in Latvia, see Félix Krawatzek “Remembering a Contentious Past: Resistance and Collaboration in the Former Soviet Union,” *East European Politics & Societies* part of this special section.

29. On the role of mnemonic considerations in East European politics, see Introduction to this special section, p. 2.

30. Mark R. Beissinger, “Nationalism and the Collapse of Soviet Communism,” *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 3 (2009): 331–47; and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 8.

31. Andrey Portnov, *Uprazhneniya s istoriyei po-ukrainski* (Moscow: OGI, Polit.ru, Memorial, 2010); Georgiy Kasyanov, *Danse macabre: Golod 1932-1933 rokiv u polititsi, masoviyi svidomosti ta istoriografii, 1980-ti—pochatok 2000-kh* (Kiev: Nash Chas, 2010); Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1, 92, 113, 195, 196.

32. On the concept of historical memory, see Introduction to this special section.

33. On the notion of mnemonic diffusion, see Introduction to this special section, p. 10. On the notion of vehicle of memory see Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 1996), 31–52.

34. Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*, pp. 220–237.

35. *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997). See also Author C’s contribution to this volume.

36. Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 381.

37. Zákon 557/1991 Sb. ze dne 11. prosince 1991, kterým se mění a doplňuje trestní zákon.

38. Law No. 155 of 18 December 1998, On the Institute of National Remembrance—Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Articles 1 and 55.

39. In Germany in 1985 and 1994, in France in 1990, in Austria in 1992, in Switzerland in 1993, in Belgium in 1995, in Spain in 1995 and 2015, and in Luxembourg in 1997. Portugal adopted such a law in 2007 and Italy in 2015.

40. Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, Concerning the Criminalization of Acts of a Racist and Xenophobic Nature Committed through Computer Systems, Strasbourg, 28 January 2003, Article 6.1; European Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by Means of Criminal Law, Article 1.

41. Silencing the participation of local populations in the extermination of the Jews had been also typical of Western Europe during the first postwar decades, before the memory of the Holocaust became central to Western historical consciousness. See Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*, pp. 27–38.

42. See Introduction to this volume, p. 16. See also Laure Neumayer, *The Criminalisation of Communism in the European Political Space after the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2019).

43. On the Polish–Ukrainian–Russian mnemonic triangle, see in particular George Soroka “Recalling Katyń Poland, Russia and the Interstate Politics of History,” in *East European Politics & Societies*, part of this special section.

44. Harald Schmid, “Vom publizistischen Kampfbegriff zum Forschungskonzept: Zur Historisierung der Kategorie ‘Geschichtspolitik,’” in *Geschichtspolitik und kollektives Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskulturen in Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Harald Schmid (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 65; Stefan Troebst, “Geschichtspolitik: Politikfeld, Analyserahmen, Streitobjekt,” in *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989: Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen in internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Kornelia Kończal, Robert Traba, and Stefan Troebst (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013): 17–19. In English, the term “politics of history” was occasionally used with regard to publicly engaged historical research. See, e.g., Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History* [1970], 2nd ed. (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

45. Anna Wójcik, “Polityka historyczna jako forma budowy wizerunku Polski na arenie międzynarodowej,” *Świat Idei i Polityki* 15 (2016): 439–41.

46. Gleb Pavlovskiy, “Plokho s pamyatyu—Plokho s politikoy,” *Russkiy zhurnal*, 9 December 2008. In 2011, Pavlovsky ill-advisedly expressed his support for Dmitry Medvedev (not Putin) as the candidate from the party in power at the 2012 presidential elections and was eliminated from “high politics.”

47. Law No. VIII-1968 of 26 September 2000, on the Approval and Entry into Force of the Criminal Code, consolidated version valid as of 1 April 2016, Article 170.2.

48. On the present-day unwillingness to recognize the collaboration of their fellow citizens with the Nazis during the war see Félix Krawatzek’s “Remembering a Contentious Past”. To be sure, Félix Krawatzek focuses on Latvia and Belarus, but sheds light on the situation in the region in general.

49. For example, *Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century*, Vilnius Declaration of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 3 July 2009.

50. Ustawa z dnia 18 października 2006 r. o ujawnianiu informacji o dokumentach organów bezpieczeństwa państwa z lat 1944–1990 oraz treści tych dokumentów, Article 37.2.

51. Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). On the reception of his book and on recent research on the Holocaust in Poland, see Jan Grabowski, “The Holocaust and Poland’s ‘History Policy,’” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 10, no. 3 (2016): 481–86; Joanna Beata Michlic, “‘At the Crossroads’: Jedwabne and Polish Historiography of the Holocaust,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 31, no. 3 (2017): 296–306; Jörg Hackmann, “Defending the ‘Good Name’ of the Polish Nation: Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015–18,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 4 (2018): 587–606; Audrey Kichelewski, Judith Lyon-Caen, Jean-Charles Szurek, and Annette Wiewiorka, eds., *Les Polonais et la Shoah: Une nouvelle école historique* (Paris: CNRS, 2019); Klaus Bachmann, “Protecting the Nation’s Good Name,” in *Criminalizing History: Legal Restrictions on Statements and Interpretations of the Past in Germany, Poland, Rwanda, Turkey and Ukraine*, ed. Klaus Bachmann and Christian Garuka (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020), 53–88; Kornelia Kończal, “Mnemonic Populism: The Polish Holocaust Law and Its Afterlife,” *European Review* (2020): 1–13.

52. Tomasz Tadeusz Koncewicz, “On the Politics of Resentment, Mis-memory, and Constitutional Fidelity: The Demise of the Polish Overlapping Consensus?,” in Belavusau and Gliszczynska-Grabias, *Law and Memory*, 271.

53. Timothy Snyder, “Memory of Sovereignty and Sovereignty over Memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939–1999,” in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 39–58.

54. See below, p. 17.

55. Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 22 lipca 2016 r. w sprawie oddania hołdu ofiarom ludobójstwa dokonanego przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na obywatelach II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1943–1945. A similar, although much more moderate in tone, resolution had been adopted by the Polish parliament in July 2009, when the Volhynia massacre was described as a “mass murder having a character of ethnic cleansing with genocidal aspects” (Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 15 lipca 2009 r. w sprawie tragicznego losu Polaków na Kresach Wschodnich). Lech Kaczyński was then the country’s president, but the government was controlled by the Civic Platform party.

56. Cited in note 5.

57. Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors*; Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

58. Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007), 81–117; and Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 43, 804–8.

59. Piotr Wróbel, “Double Memory: Poles and Jews after the Holocaust,” *East European Politics and Society* 11, no. 3 (1997): 574. See also Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

60. Timothy Snyder, “Poland vs. History,” *The New York Review of Books*, 3 May 2016.

61. See note 7.

62. Judgment K1/18, Amendments to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance, 17 January 2019.

63. I am grateful to Aleksandra Gliszczynska-Grabias from Poland’s Academy of Sciences, who has attracted my attention to this fact.

64. Ustawa 744 z dnia 1 kwietnia 2016 r. o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego ustroju totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej. The law was amended on 22 June 2017.

65. Nanci Adler, “The Future of the Soviet Past Remains Unpredictable: The Resurrection of Stalinist Symbols amidst the Exhumation of Mass Graves,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 8, no. 57 (2005): 1093–1119; Dina Khapaeva, “Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Gothic Society,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009): 359–94.

66. Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of WWII in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

67. Dina Khapaeva, “Historical Memory in Post-Soviet Gothic Society,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009): 367.

68. On the role that the Russian cult of the war plays in the “near-abroad” countries, see Félix Krawatzek “Remembering a Contentious Past” and Olga Davydova-Miguet “Performing Memory in Conflicting Settings.”

69. François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 209–314.

70. Irina Yarovaya, a State Duma deputy for the ruling United Russia Party, played a key role in passing the law.

71. Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp, “The Politics of History and the ‘War Monuments’ in Estonia,” *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 3 (2008): 425–48; Maria Mälksoo, *The Politics of Becoming European: A Study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold Security Imaginaries* (London: Routledge, 2010), 106–16; and Meike Wulf, *Shadowlands: Memory and History in Post-Soviet Estonia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 156–63.

72. Natalia Narochnitskaia, “Komu vygoden peresmotr itogov Vtoroi mirovoi?” Interview to rian.ru, 8 May 2007.

73. Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism of 3 June 2008. The list of signatories included Václav Havel, Joachim Gauck, Vytautas Landsbergis, Jiří Stránský, and other distinguished politicians and intellectuals.

74. Federal’nyi zakon 136-FZ ot 29 iyunya 2013 O vnesenii izmenenii v statii 148 Ugolovnogo kodeksa Rossiiskoi Federatsii i otdelnye zakonodatelnye akty Rossiiskoi Federatsii v tseliakh protivodeistviia

oskorbleniiu religioznykh ubezhdenii i chuvstv grazhdan and Federal'nyi zakon 135-FZ ot 29 iyunya 2013 O vnesenii izmenenii v statiu 5 Federalnogo zakona 'O zashchite detei ot informatsii, prichiniauiushchei vred ikh zdoroviu i razvitiuu' i otdelnye zakonodatelnye akty Rossiiskoi Federatsii v tseliakh zashchity detei ot informatsii, propagandiruuiushchei otritsanie traditsionnykh semeinykh tsennosti.

75. Federal'nyi zakon 128-FZ ot 5 maya 2014 O vnesenii izmenenii v otdelnye zakonodatelnye akty Rossiiskoi Federatsii," Article 1.

76. Ibid., Article 1.2.

77. Ibid., Article 1.3.

78. Cf. the rationale for the 5 May 2014 law annexed to its draft (filed in the State Duma archives as 197582-5).

79. Talia Naamat, Nina Osin and Dina Porat, eds., *Legislating for Equality: A Multinational Collection of Non-Discrimination Norms*, vol. 1: Europe (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2012), 478. See also Grażyna Baranowska, "Memory Laws in Turkey: Protecting the Memory of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk," in Bachmann and Garuka, *Criminalizing History*, 107–26.

80. See Félix Krawatzek "Remembering a Contentious Past."

81. Zakonoproekt 246065-6 ot 25 marta 2013 O vnesenii izmenenii v stat'yu 282 Ugolovnogo kodeksa Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Article 1.

82. Anzhelina Grigoryan and El'dar Akhmadiev, "Publichnoye priravnivaniye SSSR k natsizmu ne stanet sostavom prestupleniya," *Izvestiya*, Septemer 15, 2015.

83. Zakonoproekt 885220-6 on 21 sentyabrya 2015 O protivodeystvii reabilitatsii prestupleniy stalinskogo totalitarnogo rezhima (stalinizma), Article 3.

84. Federal'nyi zakon 332-FZ ot 4 noyabrya 2014 goda O vnesenii izmenenii v statyu 6 Federal'nogo zakona "Ob uvekovechenii Podedy sovetetskogo naroda v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne 1941-1945 godov" i v statyu 20.3 Kodeksa Rossiyskoy Federatsii ob administrativnykh pravonarusheniyakh, articles 1 and 2.

85. Nikolay Koposov, "Ustawy memorialne w Rosji i na Ukrainie: krzyżujące się historie," *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 13/2 2015, pp. 167–216; Idem, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars*, pp. 117–206.

86. For more details, see Oxana Shevel, "Memories of the Past and Visions of the Future: Remembering the Soviet Era and Its End in Ukraine," in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146–67; and Ivan Katchanovski, "Terrorists or National Heroes? Politics and Perceptions of the OUN and the UPA in Ukraine," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48, nos. 2–3 (2015): 217–28.

87. Zakon Ukraini 376-V vid 28.11.2006 Pro Golodomor 1932-1933 rokiv v Ukraini.

88. Proekt zakonu Ukraini 3618 vid 15.01.2009 Pro zaboronu reabilitatsii ta geroizatsii fashistskikh kollaboratsionistiv 1933-1945 rokakh.

89. Zakon Ukraini 729-VII vid 16.01.2014 Pro vnesennya zmini do Kriminal'nogo kodeksu Ukraini shchodo vidpovidal'nosti za zaperechennya chi vidpravdannya zlochiniv fashizmu.

90. Zakon Ukraini 316-VIII vid 09.04.2015 "Pro dostup do arkhiviv repressivnykh organiv kommunistichnogo totalitarnogo rezhimu 1917-1991 rokiv"

91. Zakon Ukraini 315-VIII vid 09.04.2015 "Pro uvichnennya peremogi nad natsizmom u Drugiy svitoviy viyni 1939-1945 rokiv"

92. Zakon Ukraini 317-VIII vid 09.04.2015 "Pro zasuzhdennya kommunistichnogo ta natsional-sotsialistichnogo (natsists'kogo) rezhimov v Ukraini ta zaboronu propagandi ikhn'oy simvoliki"

93. Zakon Ukraini 314-VIII vid 09.04.2015 "Pro pravovoy status ta vshanuvannya pamyati bortsiv za nezalezhnist' Ukraini u XX stolitti"

94. Proekt Zakonu Ukraini 8364 vid 01.11.2005 "Pro zaboronu komunistichnoy ideologii v Ukraini."

95. On Polish reactions to Ukraine's decommunization laws, see above, pp. 10–11. Several articles published in the official *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* are typical of Russian reactions to this legislation. Their titles speak for themselves: "Decommunization Laws Have Triggered an Uncontrollable Process of Ukraine's

Disintegration” and “OSCE: Decommunization Laws in Ukraine Threaten Freedom of Speech.” See Pavel Dul’man, “Kamnepad: Zakony o ‘dekommunizatsii’ zapuskayut nekontroliruyemyi protsess razvala Ukrainy,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 4 April 2015, and Anna Fedyakina, “OBSE: Zakony o dekommyinizatsii na Ukraine ugrozhayut svobode slova,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 18 May 2015.

96. Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

97. Andreas Kossert, “Founding Father of Modern Poland and Nationalist Antisemite: Roman Dmowski,” in *In the Shadow of Hitler: Personalities of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Rebecca Haynes and Martyn Rady (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 100–2; Tomasz Nałęcz, “Dmoczyński, czyli żywoty równoległe Jarosława Kaczyńskiego i Romana Dmowskiego,” *Polityka*, 3 February 2015; Adam Krzemiński, “Polens neue Helden,” *Die Zeit*, 18 February 2016. In Ukraine too, Dmitro Dontsov and especially Stepan Bandera have become icons for right-wing populists.

98. On the rise of antagonistic memories see Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen, “On Agonistic Memory,” *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016): 390–404. I am not totally convinced though by the authors’ project to “domesticate” antagonistic memories by conceptualizing them as agonistic.

99. Miklos Haraszti, “Foreword: Hate Speech and the Coming Death of the International Standard before It Was Born (Complaints of a Watchdog),” in *The Content and Context of Hate Speech: Rethinking Regulation and Responses*, ed. Michael Herz and Peter Molnar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), XIV–XV.

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# Recalling Katyń:

## Poland, Russia, and the Interstate Politics of History

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This article explores the role played by the 1940 Katyń massacre in structuring foreign relations between post-communist Poland and Russia. In so doing, it offers a theoretical model through which to understand the combative politics over history that have burgeoned in Eastern and Central Europe after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Tracing how political discourse over the massacre has evolved from the late 1980s to the present, it examines the impact of exogenous influences and changing geopolitical realities on how this event is recalled within these two states, which exhibit markedly different relationships to their shared past. Questions of regime type, relative standing within the region, and how—as well as by whom—interstate discourse over contentious historical events is initiated are all central to the model of dispute origination developed herein, as is the presence of various institutional factors, chief among them membership in the supranational European Union (EU). A shadow study of Polish–Ukrainian relations concerning history, focusing on the mass killing of ethnic Poles that took place in Volhynia and eastern Galicia in the period 1943–1945, is also undertaken in order to illuminate the significant differences in how the past has been politically activated in relations between the respective post-Soviet dyads of Poland–Russia and Poland–Ukraine.

**Keywords:** *Poland; Russia; Ukraine; politics of history; Katyń; Volhynia*

Lawina bieg od tego zmienia,  
Po jakich toczy się kamieniach.<sup>1</sup>

—Czesław Miłosz, *Traktat moralny*

The politics of history permeate post-communist Europe, a region where conversations within and among states are frequently framed in terms of the past and its contemporary, politically conditioned assessment. In this regard, no event has proven more divisive in post-communist Poland's fraught relationship with Russia than the 1940 Katyń massacre, wherein the NKVD executed some twenty-two thousand Polish citizens on Stalin's orders, an act that the Kremlin—citing the falsified findings of the 1944 Burdenko Commission report<sup>2</sup>—blamed on German forces for the next five decades and that Russia today still refuses to acknowledge as a war crime. Demonstrating the deep hold that Katyń has on Poland's national consciousness, President Lech Kaczyński, in the text of the speech he was fated to never deliver at

the commemoration of the massacre's seventieth anniversary, referred to this monumental cover-up as "the founding lie of the PRL."<sup>3</sup>

## Theorizing Polish–Russian Relations

From the late 1980s onward, the question of how to interpret Katyń has served as an effective barometer of Polish–Soviet, and later Polish–Russian, relations. The massacre, however, was chosen as a focal point for this analysis not only due to dissonant narratives surrounding its recall marking a major rupture between these countries, but also because attendant conversations were revitalized in the wake of the 10 April 2010 Polish Air Force Tu-154 crash in Smolensk that claimed the lives of President Kaczyński and ninety-five others en route to honor Katyń's victims. Efforts made by both sides to shift the tone and tenor of political engagement after this tragedy therefore provide an opportunity to assess not only how historically contingent relationships are engendered between states but also how durable these are and what the prospects may be for modifying them. That the seventy-fifth anniversary of the massacre fell in 2015, when bilateral tensions were already heightened as a result of the crisis in Ukraine, provides further leverage for understanding how Katyń has defined relations across successive governments and evolving regional dynamics.

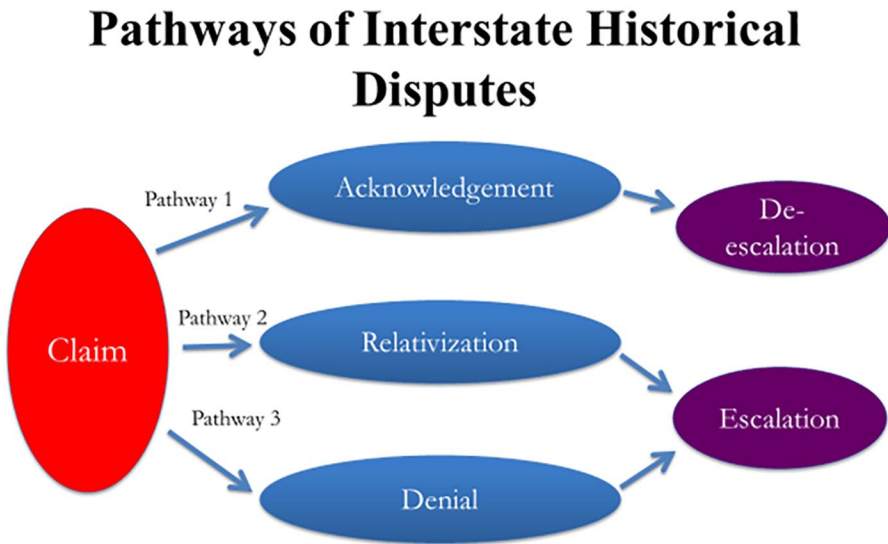
The primary puzzle framing this research is longitudinal: Why has recall of this event varied so dramatically over time among these two states, and how have the changing stresses evinced colored the interactions of their respective political elites? (The term "recall" is employed deliberately, to distinguish the functional and contextually discrete use of past events that occurs when they are politically activated, as opposed to "remembering," a process that unfolds more organically at the societal level.) Posing these questions, however, highlights an ancillary, but theoretically broader, cross-sectional puzzle: Why are some historical episodes consistently invoked in interstate relations, while others, often equally or even more problematic, remain relatively quiescent?

Addressing the above adequately requires acknowledging that certain contentious interpretations of the past are primarily fodder for domestic politics, while others more readily structure interactions between states (although these are by no means impermeable categories). In the former instance, the politics of history are typically shaped by conflicting internal accounts of what actually occurred. In contrast, regional-level disagreements over the past tend to function as an extension of nationalized identity politics, emphasizing episodes around which an interpretational consensus prevails at home for at least one of the actors involved. Discourses emanating from adjacent states then either compete or align with the dominant thrust of this narrative.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, it is critical to examine how regional interpretations of the past influence, as well as respond to, domestic conversations over history. As borders become ever more porous not just to flows of people but also information, *what* is recalled, as well as *how* and by *whom* it is recalled, increasingly affects the

construction and revision of national-level understandings regarding the past, as well as the degree to which these are allowed to (re)intrude upon interstate relations.

There are three main pathways contentious historical claims follow once introduced into cross-border politics (see figure 1). In the first, an accusation is levelled against one side and that side acknowledges the grievance and its accompanying stipulations (e.g., restitution or an official apology), leading to a de-escalation of tensions. This is the model that eventually came to be followed by West Germany relative to the Holocaust, though it required decades to fully take hold within government and throughout society. The second pathway is that of relativization, exemplifying a “yes, but. . .” approach characterized by seeking equivalencies to counteract the thrust of the other side’s grievance without, however, contradicting the basic facts of it. As will be discussed below, this approach has characterized official Russian responses to Polish claims concerning Katyń in recent years. The third pathway, meanwhile, is marked by outright denial, which entails one side either asserting that the event in question did not happen as depicted or that an altogether different party bears responsibility. An example would be the ongoing minimization by Turkish officials of the systematic persecution and killing of Armenian civilians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I and its immediate aftermath, which Ankara adamantly refuses to recognize as an instance of genocide. Predictably, the latter two approaches function to escalate interstate tensions.

Figure 1



In this regard, it is important to take account of how national leaders respond to a region's major influence brokers, or *anchoring hegemons*. Anchoring hegemons are not necessarily those political entities possessed of the largest armies or most robust economies, though these factors can, and frequently do, coincide. Instead, the term first and foremost denotes states or supranational organizations preferentially capable of controlling the main "storylines" (exclusively or in competition with one another) undergirding the historical and/or civilizational interpretation of a defined geographic space.

This ability to create, frame, and legitimate perceptual realities in ways that transcend political boundaries, whether due to imperial legacies or current positioning in the world-system, is enormously relevant in the post-communist context, where countries routinely articulate or defend policies and preferences via recourse to claims concerning the past. These claims, in turn, reverberate against regionally dominant understandings, the latter utilized by states as heuristic devices in the fractious process of working out their own Janus-faced politics. Understood in this manner, at the interstate level the principal referential antipodes transecting the political imagination of the post-communist world are those of Western Europe (represented, however imperfectly, by the EU) and the Russian Federation, the legal successor to the USSR and de facto inheritor of its recondite legacies.

Critically, the ideational influences anchoring hegemons exert beyond their borders are not epiphenomenal to political processes, which speaks to the frequent temporal persistence of the interpretive divides they promulgate. (It could hardly be otherwise given the elite-led nature of this enterprise.) At the same time, the regional storylines anchoring hegemons promote, despite their typically normative and didactic connotations, do not necessarily countermand strategic impulses, there being no clear-cut causal directionality inherent in them relative to the formulation of foreign policy. Consequently, the historically bound discursive positions anchoring hegemons adopt and export are capable of fomenting discord between states as well as justifying conflictual positions ex post facto; functioning in the latter versus the former capacity in any given instance does not diminish the centrality of these narratives. For instance, regardless of whether the Kremlin primarily annexed Crimea in 2014 because doing so comported with an understanding that Russia had a more legitimate historical claim to the peninsula than Ukraine or whether Russian officials sought to justify what was in reality an opportunistic decision by presenting it in terms of righting a past injustice,<sup>5</sup> the end result—amplifying divergent ways of interpreting the past—was effectively the same. Likewise, how states that are not anchoring hegemons respond to such narratives may also result from instrumental or principled motives, but the outward manifestation is essentially equivalent. What matters is that mnemonic discourses routinely link to real foreign policy consequences.

Similarly, recognizing the theoretical value of the anchoring hegemons concept does not imply that other states lack political agency when it comes to utilizing the

past (though its impact is likely to be far more limited regionally); for evidence of this, consider the ubiquity of the “perpetual victim” trope in Poland, which emphasizes the near-constant abuse that Poles have historically endured at the hands of adjacent powers. Instead, it merely suggests which metanarratives and geopolitical orientations a given subaltern is inclined towards. Likewise, while anchoring hegemony is, by definition, more influential in the regional scope of their appeals than other actors, this does not mean they are immune from reassessing or evolving their stances under changing circumstances. For instance, while the EU was able to promote more explicit recognition of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust among the post-communist states as a tacit condition of their joining this supranational body, on other matters where the “old” EU did not yet have a strong position, its new post-communist members were able to exercise considerable sway. An example would be the concerted campaign waged by political and cultural elites from certain former Warsaw Pact states to have the EU affirm the commensurability of Stalinism and Nazism, as reflected in the Prague Declaration of 3 June 2008.<sup>6</sup> Not all such appeals were successful, but their interjection into a wider political milieu did affect attitudes, as when the European Parliament declared in September 2008 that 23 August, the date on which the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed, would henceforth be commemorated as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (which many observers took as promoting an equivalence between the two totalitarianisms). Similarly, while EU member states did not pay a great deal of attention to the Katyn massacre prior to Poland joining its ranks, Polish elites were well aware that during the communist period it was only in the West that open discussion of this event was allowed, and correctly intuited that their interpretive stance would resonate with the EU’s understanding of twentieth-century history.

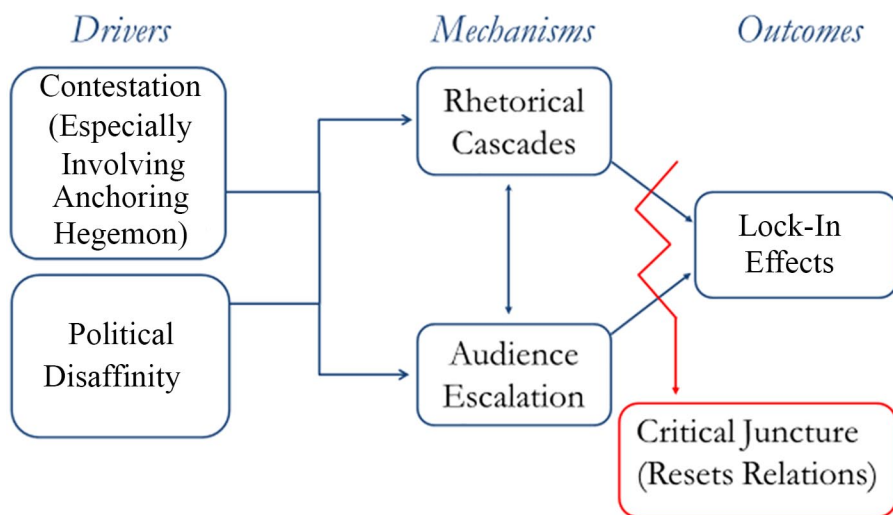
Consequently, while fully recognizing the intrinsic gravity of Katyn for the Polish nation, I nevertheless contend it is the Kremlin’s reinterpretation of Soviet legacies in ways that have progressively diverged from the perceptions predominant in East-Central Europe that best explains why this event features so prominently in relations between Poland and Russia, while other crimes of a similar vintage, notably the ethnic cleansing of Poles by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in Volhynia and eastern Galicia between 1943 and 1945, have, in comparison, minimal political relevance.<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, these tragedies are not directly analogous; among other distinctions, it was primarily peasants who were killed in the latter instance and Polish self-defense units and Home Army soldiers retaliated not just against the UPA, but also Ukrainian civilians (moreover, the UPA was not a formal state organ, but a paramilitary organization, unlike the Soviet NKVD). Nonetheless, the contrast in the attention paid to them remains striking. This is especially so given that the UPA’s terror campaign claimed two to three times the number of Katyn’s victims in Volhynia alone,

including a great many women and children.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, bifurcations in contemporary political resonance are also apparent in the case of the Katyń massacre itself, which has come to be associated almost exclusively with Russia even though many of its victims were incarcerated and are known (or presumed) to have eventually been shot on the territories of what are today the sovereign states of Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>9</sup>

However, theorizing that the contentious historical narratives of post-communist Europe are, at an interstate level, defined against the interpretive frames provided by a region's anchoring hegemon(s) is, by itself, insufficient to explain why Poland's political interactions with Russia concerning the past have become increasingly adversarial over the last two-plus decades, while relations with other neighbors (including not just Ukraine but also Germany, which within lived memory started a war that claimed the lives of nearly one out of every five Polish citizens), remain by and large cordial. Assessing how countries evaluate discordant external claims relative to internal conversations, and how these influence the attitudes adopted toward other states, also requires considering the effects of *political affinity* (see figure 2 below).

Figure 2

## Schema of Contentious Interstate Disputes over History (Pathways 2 & 3)





Political affinity posits that national leaders are more trusting of, and hence willing to interact positively with, states whose worldviews are congruent with those of their own. Because of the high degree of institutional isomorphism exhibited among them and the predictability this fosters, these regime-level effects are most evident among liberal democracies, whose normative commitments and universalistic claims predispose them towards acceptance of pluralistic recall.<sup>10</sup> Modern democracies are therefore better able to tolerate, or at least comprehend, dissenting views among those they consider their peers as compared to authoritarian regimes of the nationalist and populist variety, which are defined by the circumscribed specificity of their ideological appeals. This renders liberal democracies more likely to resolve tensions over history, the actors involved conditioned to regard one another as inherently more transparent and relatable. Alternately, on issues where no compromise can be reached, they are more willing to “agree to disagree” with relative amicability. The converse pertains as well: states with incompatible regime types are far more likely to politicize contentious legacies and to misinterpret important cues that could aid in resolving them. However, while this phenomenon is most apparent at the regime level, it is also discernible across governments, especially as even democratic states may experience shifts over time in the degree to which the latter tolerate expressions of liberalism, depending on the politicians and parties in power at any given moment.<sup>11</sup> Affinity effects, however, are not limited to reinforcing or juxtaposing views between “most similar” and “most different” cases; they may also manifest if one state views another as potentially capable of converging ideologically with it, particularly if a tutelary relationship, whether actual or perceived, exists between them. (Many Polish politicians styled themselves as promoters of democracy in Ukraine, especially after the 2004–2005 Orange Revolution.)

Nevertheless, even accepting that the degree of political affinity exhibited among states and the interpretive framing provided (or elided, in the case of the EU relative to Katyń) by a region’s anchoring hegemon(s) represent the processual drivers controlling the salience of the past in cross-border relations, this still leaves the method of their operationalization undefined. Shifting analytical granularity to focus specifically on contentious interstate dealings reveals the oftentimes synergistic effects of *rhetorical cascades* and *audience escalation*, two mechanisms that promote feedback loops that may culminate in *discursive lock-in* unless the process is disrupted by a *critical reorientation* of the relationship.

*Rhetorical cascades* postulate that once historical narratives are articulated in deontic language (e.g., by asserting that there exists an obligation to pursue justice), even politicians reluctant to deal with moral imperatives concerning the past find it difficult to avoid answering in kind, if only to refute the initial allegation (“we did not do what you say we did”). Given the centrality of didacticism to the politics of history, such a precipitation of claims and counterclaims is extremely difficult to resolve short of one side acquiescing to the other’s perspective. This is especially true when disputes involve anchoring hegemons, as disagreements featuring them are much more likely to receive

widespread attention than if competing viewpoints were confined to subaltern states. *Audience escalation*, meanwhile, takes seriously that the scope of the venue into which historical narratives are introduced determines how far their influence extends. Firmly ensconced in the EU and the wider institutional architecture of Europe and the West, Poles now have an expansive stage from which to express their historical grievances, as well as the formal ability to invoke transnational scrutiny of these claims.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, as rhetorical cascades and audience escalation polarize and amplify narratives, *discursive lock-in* may occur if a tipping-point threshold is breached, causing inflexible interpretations of the past to replicate across successive cohorts of national politicians. This is not an inevitably deterministic outcome, but once disagreements over how history is to be understood become politically entrenched, they are unlikely to change substantively absent a systemic shock of sufficient magnitude (e.g., a change of regime) to bring about a *critical reorientation* in how feuding states interact with one another.

### Katyń in Polish and Russian Recall

Referential frames relative to the Katyń massacre differ dramatically between Polish and Russian elites. Among the former, there exists little substantive contestation concerning how these killings are to be viewed, Poles understanding them in terms of Stalin's extrajudicial murder of the citizens of another country. Interpretative variations, when present, are thus fairly minor and typically involve debates over symbolic issues, such as whether Katyń should be referred to as an instance of genocide. Consequently, *domestic political fault lines in Poland run along differences of degree rather than differences of kind*, the former attributable to individual politicians' ideological commitments and policy-making styles.<sup>13</sup>

This virtual unanimity in understanding stems from the fact that not only did the NKVD eliminate Poland's "best and brightest," military leaders, government officials, and white-collar professionals having been executed in disproportionate numbers, but also because among Poles there exists a pervasive feeling that the killings irrevocably altered the outcome of World War II and the subsequent course of national development. Furthermore, because it was forbidden to talk about Katyń during the communist period, the delimited physical act came to transcend itself, accreting a host of mnemonic associations.<sup>14</sup> Perceived in this light, references to the Smolensk disaster as a "second Katyń" resonate all the more, the crash seen by many as but the latest narrative arc in a calamitous book of Polish memory. In the words of former Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, what happened that day in April 2010 "re-awoke some of the deepest layers of Polish messianism and victimhood."<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, in Russia the recollection of Katyń exhibits considerably less uniformity and stability; as will be discussed below, three principal interpretive tropes have been evinced there:

*Liberal*—Katyń was a war crime, potentially qualifying as genocide. Linked to a highly negative perception of Stalinism and the need to distance Russia from its Soviet past.

*Statist*—the NKVD/Stalin were responsible for the killings, but Katyń was one event in a long list of totalitarian repressions. Proponents stress moral equivalencies and emphasize Russian/Soviet suffering.

*Reactionary*—the USSR was not responsible for Katyń. Outright denial or obfuscation is associated primarily with communist hardliners and far-right nationalists.

In terms of their respective prominence, the liberal interpretation gained traction among reform-minded elites and former dissidents immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when it provided both a means by which to identify with the West and a moral cudgel to wield against remnants of the old order. It was soon eclipsed, however, by the ascendance of the statist model. Meanwhile, the reactionary perspective, though never a mainstream current, has proven to be a persistent distraction, its relevance varying according to the alignment of political forces in government or vying for power at any given time.

Another sharp disjuncture in how these countries relate to the legacy of Katyń arises from underlying differences in Polish and Russian perceptions concerning the meaning of the Soviet experiment and its aftereffects. Politicians in Poland, by and large, regard the massacre as a crime against an explicit ethnic identity, while their Russian counterparts stress its class aspects, rendering it a crime against an ideologically ascribed status. The existential implications of these viewpoints are significant, with the Polish perspective complementing ongoing efforts among many former Warsaw Pact members to deemphasize the role autochthonous elements played in communism's imposition and cast the master narrative of the latter half of the twentieth century as one of Soviet neo-colonialism.<sup>16</sup> Russia, for its part, has no such credible appeal to make.

At issue as well is the vexing question of political guilt and its heritability. Much as they did during Soviet times, Polish commentators and politicians today routinely conflate Russia with the USSR, a proclivity abetted by the growing ambivalence Moscow has come to display toward the Soviet regime. Meanwhile, post-communist Russian leaders have consistently emphasized that their country is not culpable for the crimes of a state that no longer exists.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the two sides often find themselves discussing the same events in mutually unintelligible terms.

### **Glasnost, “Blank Spots,” and the Search for an Anti-Katyń**

According to Mikhail Gorbachev's senior advisor Anatolii Cherniaev, the “problem” of Katyń resurfaced on the Kremlin's radar beginning in 1987 with the advent of an international letter-writing campaign urging the USSR to clarify the circumstances of the massacre.<sup>18</sup> Gorbachev was similarly confronted by discomfiting questions during his visit to Poland in 1988. Pressed on the matter by a group of

intellectuals in Warsaw, the Soviet leader admitted that he was aware many considered the killings to be “the work of Stalin and Beria,”<sup>19</sup> but reminded Poles that this was not yet a foregone conclusion. Emphasizing the common tragedy of the massacre, he also noted that there were two monuments in the Katyń Forest, one dedicated to the executed Poles and the other “to the Soviet POWs who perished, shot there by the fascists.”<sup>20</sup>

For the Polish side, the issue of the massacre never fully went away, remaining a sore spot even for PRL leaders like Wojciech Jaruzelski, who recounts raising questions about Katyń with his contacts in the Soviet military as far back as the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>21</sup> It was during Jaruzelski’s April 1987 visit to Moscow that Poland and the USSR concluded a resolution to tackle difficult issues concerning the past, leading to the formation of a joint commission tasked with looking into “blank spots” in Polish–Soviet history, foremost among them Katyń. Headed by the Soviet historian Georgii Smirnov and his Polish counterpart Jarema Maciszewski, the group met intermittently from 1987 until the fall of Poland’s communist regime. Despite facing an obvious political agenda and stalling on the part of Soviet authorities, the Polish side made headway, providing their colleagues with a report contesting the Burdenko Commission’s findings in May 1988.<sup>22</sup>

But while the advent of glasnost loosened the fetters of censorship, it also reinforced the need for carefully managing Katyń in the minds of Soviet leaders, the massacre having come to be seen as a potent tool in the hands of the Poles. As Edward Shevardnadze, Valentin Falin, and Vladimir Kriuchkov wrote in a 22 March 1989 brief to the Central Committee of the Communist Party:

The theme of Katyń is now artificially relegating to second place even questions connected to the start of the Second World War and the German attack on Poland. The subtext of this campaign is obvious—the Poles are intimating that the Soviet Union is in no way better, and perhaps even worse, than the Germany of the day, that it carries no less responsibility for the start of the war and even for the military defeat of the Polish government.<sup>23</sup>

These remarks were not hyperbolic; in 1989, the Soviet side was confronted with a perfect political storm. Not only did the fiftieth anniversaries of the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland fall during that year, but in June 1989 Solidarity activists routed the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) in Poland’s first competitive legislative election in more than four decades. Consequently, although Shevardnadze and company counselled that it might “make more sense to admit what really happened and who is to blame for it,”<sup>24</sup> Gorbachev did not acknowledge Soviet responsibility until Jaruzelski’s visit to Moscow on 13 April 1990, when two files regarding the massacre were handed over to the Polish delegation, forty-seven years to the day after Berlin radio announced the discovery of the Katyń burials.<sup>25</sup> Concurrent with this transfer, the Soviet news agency TASS issued a statement countermanding the

USSR's previous position and expressing regret for what it termed "one of the weightiest crimes of Stalinism."<sup>26</sup>

Despite this admission of guilt, Soviet leaders were not willing to condemn the past unequivocally. Realizing something needed to be done to attenuate Poland's claims, which were rapidly coming to be seen as a threat to the USSR's reputation and international standing, Gorbachev issued a secret directive on 3 November 1990 instructing archivists to seek out material showcasing instances where Polish actions "brought harm to the Soviet side," the intent being to have this information available as a palliative and counterweight to accusations directed against the USSR.<sup>27</sup>

Soon thereafter, the rhetorical trope of an "anti-Katyń" emerged in Russia, the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1919–1921 recast to serve in this capacity.<sup>28</sup> This conflict proved an imperfect fit, but focusing on it allowed *realpolitikers* and aggressive nativist elements to argue that the deaths of Red Army POWs in Polish prison camps constituted a crime commensurate to Katyń, despite the fact that a large number of Polish POWs also perished while incarcerated by the Bolsheviks.<sup>29</sup> Soon the Russian side was circulating mortality figures that at their upper bounds strained reason (claims of eighty to one hundred thousand dead were routinely cited) and referring to what took place as a war crime. However, while there is no doubt that conditions in the camps were extremely harsh and thousands of POWs perished, most reputable historians believe that their deaths resulted from infectious diseases and poor sanitary conditions in the hastily improvised and overcrowded internment facilities rather than deliberate attempts at extermination. A comprehensive 2004 study of this conflict, produced by a Polish–Russian team of specialists, estimated the number of prisoner deaths at around sixteen to eighteen thousand.<sup>30</sup>

## Balancing Liberalism with Statism: The Yeltsin Years

After the 1991 August Putsch failed to remove Gorbachev from power, the reorganized Procuracy of the Russian Republic took over the investigation into Katyń. The matter was assigned to a young prosecutor named Anatolii Iablokov, whose review of the evidence persuaded him that the massacre should be treated as a war crime according to Nuremberg statutes.<sup>31</sup> On 13 June 1994, however, the Military Prosecutor's Office nullified Iablokov's decision and removed him from the case.<sup>32</sup> The investigation was to formally proceed for another decade.

But while the Soviet, and later Russian, military-security apparatus was loath to mollify Poland, the dissolution of the USSR brought with it a liberalization of attitudes among Russia's new civilian leadership. President Boris Yeltsin unreservedly acknowledged Soviet culpability for Katyń and, at least during his first years in office, seemed intent on conveying a remorseful tone to the Polish side

while conspicuously distancing his government from the preceding regime.<sup>33</sup> This represented a clear manifestation of the liberal interpretive position, which functioned to de-escalate political tensions between the two countries.

Exemplifying this, Yeltsin and Polish President Lech Wałęsa signed a declaration of friendship and mutual understanding during Wałęsa's visit to Moscow in May 1992, precipitating a second transfer of documents on 14 October 1992. Included among these was the long-sought-after "smoking gun," namely Beria's memo advocating the execution of the Poles, prominently featuring Stalin's bright-blue signature affirming the decision to liquidate them. The following day, Wałęsa sent an emotional letter of gratitude to the Russian leader in which he noted that Katyń "had become a symbol of truth, a test of sincerity between our two nations."<sup>34</sup>

This is not to imply that a consensus view prevailed among Russia's post-Soviet elite in the early 1990s regarding the massacre.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, the overall tenor of the rhetoric emanating from the Kremlin during these years was decidedly liberal, critical of the Soviet legacy, and desirous of fostering good relations with neighboring states. Yeltsin's August 1993 visit to Warsaw, when he assured Wałęsa that Russia would cooperate with Polish officials in investigating Katyń and release additional archival materials as they were uncovered, exemplified this dynamic.<sup>36</sup> It was during this trip that Yeltsin experienced a potential Willy Brandt moment, the Russian leader overheard whispering "forgive, if you can" as he fell to his knees while placing a wreath to honor Katyń's victims in Warsaw's Powązki Military Cemetery. But unlike in 1970, when the West German Chancellor was photographed kneeling before a monument to the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising, Yeltsin's gesture lacked follow through, and the possibility of reconciling Polish and Russian understandings of the massacre soon evaporated.

Beginning in 1995, which Wałęsa declared the Year of Katyń, Russian attitudes began turning in a more statist direction. Facing political headwinds at home from a burgeoning coterie of nationalists and the reconstituted Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), Yeltsin was not present in the Katyń Forest to mark the massacre's fifty-fifth anniversary that year. Instead, he sent Sergei Filatov, the head of his presidential administration, to deliver remarks emphasizing the Russian victims of Soviet totalitarianism. Likewise reflecting this shift in orientation was Yeltsin's 22 May 1995 letter to Wałęsa, wherein he underscored that prospects for resolving this complex issue were not aided by "the inflaming of emotions . . . in the mass media by certain political circles" or "the escalation of demands presented to the Russian side."<sup>37</sup>

Despite the rather antagonistic tone of Yeltsin's letter, Polish leaders did not take public umbrage. In fact, Wałęsa echoed the idea of collective suffering during his 4 June 1995 speech at Katyń, observing that Stalin's repressions led to the deaths of an estimated ten million Russians and that the two nations were "connected by the tragic brotherhood of martyrdom."<sup>38</sup> To a large extent, this response resulted from Yeltsin's ability to appear sincere when expressing contrition for the Soviet past, Poles wanting to believe him when he insisted Russia was turning over a new leaf. Moreover, for all that he was an imperfect democrat, Yeltsin was



viewed as having genuinely liberal inclinations. As such, he often received the benefit of the doubt from Polish democrats in light of his difficult domestic situation, it being assumed that what backpedaling on promises he did engage in was done for reasons of political expediency in the face of muscular challenges emanating from anti-democratic ideologues.

Nor was the gradual turn towards statism during the latter half of Yeltsin's term absolute. For example, on 19 October 1996 the Russian Duma resolved to create memorial complexes at Katyń and Mednoe, and in June 1998 Yeltsin and Kwaśniewski (who had succeeded Wałęsa as president in December 1995) agreed to jointly mark the opening of the two sites in April 2000. Nevertheless, from this point onward attempts to establish competing hierarchies of suffering and victimhood came to increasingly characterize Russia's rhetoric concerning the massacre. Illustrating this, in September 1998 Yurii Chaika, who was then the First Deputy Prosecutor of the Russian Federation, demanded Warsaw launch a criminal investigation into the deaths of Red Army POWs in the Polish–Bolshevik War,<sup>39</sup> which Poles took to be a deliberate provocation intended to deflect responsibility for Katyń. Consequently, while the exhibition of lock-in effects over the massacre in Polish–Russian relations was not yet a foregone conclusion, the situation was ripe for the emergence of rhetorical cascades and audience escalation.

### **Statism Hardens: The Putin Years (and Medvedev Interregnum)**

Relations at the top echelons of government worsened markedly after Vladimir Putin assumed the Russian presidency in 2000 and adopted an avowedly statist interpretation of Soviet history. Putin's election intensified currents already present among Russia's elite, but unlike with Yeltsin, his stance could not be excused as contingent on the demands of domestic politics. Even during the 2000 presidential contest—well before he consolidated power—Putin handily defeated his closest challenger, Gennadii Zyuganov (KPRF), in a first-round electoral victory with 53.4 percent of the vote (as compared to Zyuganov's 29.5 percent). Thus, in contrast to the 1996 election when the so-called “red-brown” coalition posed a real threat to Yeltsin, Putin had little need to pander to far-right nationalists or what was by then the dependably uncompetitive KPRF and its aged base.

Meanwhile, for Putin's first five years in office, his analogue in Warsaw was Kwaśniewski, a fluent Russian speaker affiliated with the communist-successor Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Despite this, the relationship soured rapidly, its deterioration catalyzed by Putin's heavy-handed policies in Chechnya and Kwaśniewski's support for the “color revolutions” that swept the post-Soviet space beginning in the early 2000s. In addition, by this time Poland was already in NATO and well on its way to joining the EU (it acceded in May 2004), developments that not only reinforced the growing rift with Russia but also freed up political energy for backward-looking glances. Reflecting this, on the sixtieth anniversary of the Katyń

massacre the Sejm promulgated a decree conflating and condemning the “Nazi and communist genocide.”<sup>40</sup>

Relations were further tarnished by Putin’s refusal to attend the opening of the Katyń and Mednoe memorials in 2000.<sup>41</sup> Kwaśniewski, observing diplomatic protocol in his absence, was also not present. Instead, Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek represented the Polish government at Katyń, while the Russian delegation was headed by Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko.

Comparing their remarks reveals very different emphases. Buzek’s speech opened on a sardonic note:

Katyń was not merely a terrible crime carried out under the majesty of Soviet law, it was also a lie. A lie repeated thousands of times, but one which still remained a lie. For entire generations in Poland and throughout the world the word “Katyń” will remain a signifier of genocide and a war crime.

It ended with no less a rhetorical flourish, the Polish PM emphasizing: “I pay homage to all the people murdered and tortured at Katyń, as well as throughout the Soviet Union. Our pain is equal to yours.”<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, Khristenko noted that “we, Russians, well understand the feelings Poles connect to Katyń. . . . After all, it was the nations of the former Soviet Union who were the first and main victims of the inhuman machinery of Stalinism, which broke and injured millions of lives.” He then went on to emphasize a numerical comparison: “Here, in this ground, rest four thousand Polish officers and tens of thousands of our countrymen. In our national memory the Katyń Forest will forever be a symbol of a terrible tragedy experienced by our society, one which also touched the representatives of other countries.”<sup>43</sup>

Kwaśniewski, in a letter penned for the opening of the Mednoe memorial two months later, echoed the sentiments Buzek had expressed. Noting that the truth behind the killings was never meant to be discovered, he termed the massacre a “symbol of Polish martyrology on the Golgotha of the East.” However, he also expressed “sympathy for the millions” of Stalin’s Soviet victims and concluded his missive by extending an olive branch to Russia: “After having exited the darkness of the totalitarian night, we would like to, together—though it is not easy—today seek the road of reconciliation.”<sup>44</sup>

Putin therefore disappointed Poles during his first visit to Poland on 16 January 2002 when he did not offer an apology for Katyń, as many expected he would.<sup>45</sup> He also explicitly rejected comparisons between Nazism and Stalinism, which were by then becoming commonplace across East-Central Europe. Nonetheless, Putin did make an attempt to mend relations, announcing, for example, that he would find a way to offer reparations to Polish victims of Stalinism (this pledge was never realized).<sup>46</sup> His visit also heralded the formation of a bilateral working group tasked with examining the controversies over history that existed between the two sides, recalling a previous Soviet-era effort.<sup>47</sup>

While Putin, like his predecessor, accepts that the NKVD was behind Katyń, he has proven himself far more willing to promote a selective version of Soviet history, one which emphasizes episodes Russians can justifiably vaunt—the Red Army’s fight against fascism in World War II having become “the central legitimating myth of the Russian state”<sup>48</sup>—while overlooking the worst excesses of Stalinism. This predilection quickly garnered him the suspicion of neighboring states, such an interpretive realignment not only complicating how Soviet crimes are perceived at home, but also how Russia’s leadership is viewed abroad.

Illustrating this, on 11 March 2005 Aleksandr Savenkov, the Russian Federation’s Chief Military Prosecutor, announced the closure of the investigation into Katyń on the grounds that all those accused of carrying out the killings were deceased (without, however, revealing the identities of the executioners). Of the 183 volumes of records that had been compiled pertaining to the massacre and subsequent Soviet response, 116 were to remain sealed, designated as state secrets. Savenkov also refused to rehabilitate the victims or recognize Katyń as either a war crime or genocide, categorizations not subject to statutes of limitations under international law. Further antagonizing Poland, the final verdict only confirmed 1,803 deaths among the almost fifteen thousand prisoners held in the three principal camps of Kozelsk, Ostashkov, and Starobilsk. The fate of the more than seven thousand Poles detained in various other facilities across western Ukraine and Belarus, who are customarily enumerated among the massacre’s victims, was ignored.<sup>49</sup>

Savenkov’s actions did not come as a complete surprise to Warsaw; the decision had already been signaled by September 2004, leading Poland’s newly organized Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) to open its own investigation later that same year.<sup>50</sup> This did not, however, temper the political firestorm that ensued after it was officially revealed. Reaction in Poland was negative across the ideological spectrum, with European Parliament deputy Bronisław Geremek, an unabashedly center-left figure, retorting that as a result of this “shameful” act, “Russian authorities take upon themselves co-responsibility” for Katyń.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the speaker of the Sejm Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz (SLD) stated that he could not fathom why it was “easier for Boris Yeltsin’s Russia to acknowledge its responsibility for the Katyń crime than for the Russia of Vladimir Putin to release the names of those who committed this crime.”<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, the Polish side demonstrated itself consistently careful, even while the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) was in power (it controlled the legislature from 2005 to 2007, and was the party of President Kaczyński), to emphasize that it did not blame the Russian people or minimize their suffering under Soviet rule. As a 2006 Senat decree noted, “this crime implicates not the Russian nation, but the communist system, which led to the deaths of tens of millions of people.”<sup>53</sup>

Putin also struck a balance between acknowledging the Polish victims and reminding the world of their Soviet counterparts, but in distinctly statist terms. Indicative of

this is the letter he published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* prior to his second visit to Poland in 2009 (this time as Prime Minister, Dmitrii Medvedev having become Russia's president in 2008) to mark the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. Averring therein that "half-truths are always problematic," Putin counseled that "the memory of the cemeteries in Katyń and Mednoe, like the tragic fate of the Russian soldiers who were captured during the 1920 war, should become a symbol of shared grief and mutual forgiveness."<sup>54</sup>

The Soviet-centric tone of these remarks was echoed in his speech at Westerplatte the following day, in which Putin emphasized "there are 600 thousand Red Army soldiers buried in Polish ground, our citizens who died here. Of the 55 million victims of World War II, more than half—half!—were citizens of the Soviet Union. Please stop and think about this."<sup>55</sup> These words contrasted starkly with Lech Kaczyński's address, which alluded to the perils of neo-imperialism and the previous year's conflict in South Ossetia before rebuking Russia for comparing Katyń to the unintentional deaths of POWs in the Polish–Bolshevik War.<sup>56</sup>

Putin's statist orientation was again on display in a speech he gave three days before the Smolensk disaster, when he and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk (of the center-left Citizen's Platform [PO]), met at Katyń on the occasion of the massacre's seventieth anniversary in an effort to mend relations:<sup>57</sup>

Our people, who endured the horrors of the civil war, forced collectivization, and the mass repressions of the 1930s, understand very well—perhaps better than anybody else—what [execution sites] like Katyn, Mednaya, Pyatikhatka mean to many Polish families, because this sad list includes sites of mass executions of Soviet citizens too.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, at a press conference afterwards, Putin went on to share his "personal opinion" that the killings represented Stalin's revenge for the "32 thousand Red Army soldiers" who died while incarcerated in Polish prison camps some two decades earlier.<sup>59</sup>

### **After Smolensk: What Changed?**

The period immediately following the crash of the presidential Tu-154—undoubtedly a critical juncture—offered genuine opportunities for the reorientation of Polish–Russian relations. Cutting a kinder, gentler figure than Putin, Medvedev in particular impressed Poles with his evident sincerity in sending condolences. He also ordered Russia's Federal Archival Agency (Rosarkhiv) to make key massacre-related documents available on its website, where they appeared on 28 April 2010. In addition, right before Victory Day in May 2010, Medvedev released sixty-seven volumes of classified Katyń materials, leading Poland's then-acting president Bronisław Komorowski to stress that revealing the truth about the massacre could form a "good basis" on which to build Polish–Russian relations going forward.<sup>60</sup>

Medvedev likewise took pains to distance himself from those in Russia who continued to deny Katyń was the work of the NKVD, deriding reactionary forces in his October 2010 Munich Security Conference speech.<sup>61</sup> And during his official visit to Poland in December 2010 (the first by a Russian president in nine years), Medvedev pledged that Russia would “continue cleaning up its historical debris.”<sup>62</sup> Lending credence to these words, one week earlier the Duma passed a resolution (by a vote of 342 for, 57 against) denouncing Stalin and condemning Katyń as a political crime, albeit in unambiguously statist language.<sup>63</sup>

Sharing our grief with the Polish people, the deputies of the State Duma remember that Katyn is a tragic place for our country as well. In the trenches of Katyn lie thousands of Soviet citizens destroyed by Stalin’s regime in the years 1936-1938. It was on them that the technology of mass murder was worked out, which was later in the same location used on Polish troops. Next to them are the graves of Soviet war prisoners shot to death by Nazi executioners during World War II.

However, despite these encouraging signs, tensions over the massacre did not disappear. A textbook example of audience escalation emerged in 2011, when the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) agreed to hear a case (*Janowiec and Others v. Russia*) brought by the relatives of 12 Katyń victims. While it was the family members that lodged the lawsuit alleging Russia had not carried out a proper inquiry into the killings, the litigation represented politics-by-proxy, with the Polish government participating as an interested party. During the proceedings the Russian Federation’s Deputy Minister of Justice, Georgii Matiuskin, argued that not only did the Court lack standing in the matter, as Moscow had only signed the European Convention on Human Rights in 1998, but that there was insufficient evidence to conclude the “missing” Poles had actually been murdered.<sup>64</sup> On 16 April 2012 the Court’s Fifth Section, labelling Katyń a war crime, found Russia guilty of treating the families in a degrading and inhuman manner and of not cooperating with the ECtHR (regarding the question of whether an effective investigation had been carried out, it cited a lack of jurisdiction). As if this was not enough to further aggravate tensions, the matter was subsequently referred to the Court’s Grand Chamber. The latter, in a controversial 21 October 2013 judgement, vacated much of the previous finding, ruling only that Russia failed to cooperate with the ECtHR probe.<sup>65</sup>

In hindsight, although the numerous formal and informal examples of Russian solicitude evinced after Smolensk resonated with Poles, they did not augur a substantive transformation in relations. Matters were not aided by the fact that conspiracy theories concerning the crash soon began to circulate widely in Poland, rejuvenating mistrust of the Kremlin’s motives and raising doubts about whether the full truth regarding Katyń would ever be revealed.<sup>66</sup> Following Putin’s return to the Russian presidency in 2012, regional developments likewise reinvigorated tensions over history, with Warsaw’s support for the Maidan protests and Moscow’s interventionism

in Ukraine emphasizing profoundly different understandings of Soviet (and Tsarist) legacies.

Accordingly, the divisive interpretive frames that existed previously remain active, modified but not relinquished. In light of this, President Komorowski marked the massacre's seventy-fifth anniversary in 2015—which was also the fifth anniversary of the Smolensk tragedy—by paying homage to the victims in a 3 April ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw before traveling to Bykivnia, located outside Kyiv, to attend a memorial service with his Ukrainian counterpart, Petro Poroshenko.<sup>67</sup> Unlike in 2010, the Katyń Forest was only visited by low-level delegations from Poland and Russia.<sup>68</sup> More recently, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (PiS) indicated that he intended to travel to Russia in April 2020 to observe both the eightieth anniversary of the massacre and the tenth anniversary of the Smolensk disaster. However, this trip, which would have occurred at a particularly difficult point in Polish–Russian relations given the inflammatory comments Putin made in late December 2019 ascribing partial blame for the outbreak of World War II to Poland,<sup>69</sup> ultimately did not take place. Although the ostensive reason for the cancellation was the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland, Michał Dworczyk, accused Russia of making inadequate preparations for the visit, which resulted in the Russian Foreign Ministry castigating Poland for what it termed a “provocative outburst” and “outrageous ingratitude.”<sup>70</sup>

It is improbable, absent another black swan event, that Warsaw and Moscow will reconcile their political representations of the massacre anytime soon. Instead, Andrzej Duda's election as Poland's president in May 2015, coupled with PiS securing a strong plurality in the October 2015 parliamentary election, has assured that Warsaw will continue to pursue an active politics of history in its foreign affairs. Russia, meanwhile, hardened its statist position, with Minister of Culture Vladimir Miedinski declaring in January 2016 that future museum exhibits at Katyń and Mednoe will address the Polish–Bolshevik War as well, given that a “significantly larger” number of Red Army POWs died in Polish custody than there are Poles buried at these two sites.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Ukrainian–Polish Counterexample: Why Anchoring Hegemons Matter**

Comparing how contentious legacies have factored into Polish–Ukrainian, as opposed to Polish–Russian, relations across successive governments and political constellations provides a useful foil for understanding the enduring relevance of Katyń to the latter dyad. Given the complicated nature of their historical interactions, the lack of sustained friction between Warsaw and Kyiv over the past seems counterintuitive, particularly as iterative public opinion surveys conducted throughout the 1990s and 2000s reveal that Poles harbored generally unfavorable attitudes towards Ukrainians for



most of this period, at times even viewing them more negatively than Russians.<sup>72</sup> This suggests political dynamics between Poland and Ukraine are primarily governed by elite dynamics rather than societal attitudes, which is in line with the theoretical predictions advanced herein.<sup>73</sup>

For example, Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko, just days prior to leaving office in 2010, posthumously bestowed the title “Hero of Ukraine” on Stepan Bandera.<sup>74</sup> Yet despite Bandera having been the ideological leader of the OUN-B, an eponymous faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists whose military wing, the UPA, was responsible for the bulk of non-combatant deaths in Volhynia and eastern Galicia between 1943–1945, this provoked only cursory condemnation from the Polish side. As the Marshal of the Senat, Bogdan Borusewicz, explained to reporters, while the decision was regrettable from Poland’s perspective, honoring Bandera was ultimately an internal Ukrainian matter.<sup>75</sup> That a similar remark could have been uttered by a Polish politician regarding a Soviet figure such as Molotov or Kalinin is inconceivable.

What accounts for this differential treatment, particularly in light of the contentious history both sides share with one another, as well as with Russia?<sup>76</sup> It is tempting to explain away this discrepancy by contending that post-communist Polish leaders have paid preferential attention to Katyń because of the victims it claimed and the fact that the Soviet Union covered up its involvement in the massacre for decades. But this argument is not fully satisfactory, especially as it does not account for why Volhynia suddenly assumed a salient role in Polish–Ukrainian relations in the last few years. Instead, a fundamental distinction lies in the durable commitment to historical rapprochement Warsaw and Kyiv established after the USSR’s collapse. Exemplifying this, presidents Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leonid Kuchma unequivocally condemned the crimes committed by both nations in 1997, including Operation Vistula, the forced resettlement of Ukrainians by Poland in 1947.<sup>77</sup> And Yushchenko, while still Prime Minister in 2003, apologized for the Volhynia massacres on the occasion of their sixtieth anniversary, with the Rada and Sejm passing resolutions recognizing all the victims that same year.<sup>78</sup> Concerning Katyń specifically, the Kharkiv memorial opened in June 2000 with Kwaśniewski and Kuchma both in attendance. Similarly, despite their differences, Komorowski and Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych jointly officiated at the 2012 dedication of the Polish war cemetery at Bykivnia.

More generally, Poland quickly became a liberal democracy after the fall of its communist regime, while Ukraine may be regarded as semi-democratic for much of its post-1991 existence. However, because successive governments in Kyiv either tried to balance between Russia and the EU (as was the case under Leonid Kuchma) or adopted an unambiguously pro-EU stance (as happened under Viktor Yushchenko), the two states enjoyed a considerable degree of political affinity among their respective elites. Indicative of this, the Volhynia massacres became a significant issue only in 2013, when relations between Poland and Ukraine were ebbing because of Yanukovych’s increasingly illiberal tilt and pro-Moscow stances. Contention centered about an abortive Polish attempt to legislatively affirm the killings as genocidal, despite a 2009 resolution having

already labelled them “mass murder with characteristics of genocide.”<sup>79</sup> (Conditioned on domestic political realities, this proposal was championed by the unlikely alliance of PiS, SLD, and the Polish People’s Party [PSL] in what many observers interpreted as a bid to embarrass the ruling PO, which opposed the use of the term for pragmatic reasons connected to their desire to maintain good relations with Kyiv.)<sup>80</sup> But even though Yanukovych’s general interpretation of regional history comported much more closely to Russia’s than did that of his stridently pro-EU predecessor, his unease with the anti-Soviet credentials of the UPA ensured this proposal would not unduly impair relations between Warsaw and Kyiv.<sup>81</sup>

As a result, the matter was only revisited in 2016, after recently installed governments in both Poland and Ukraine began to exhibit strongly nationalistic tendencies, prompting a rise in historical tensions between them. Indeed, Polish–Ukrainian relations worsened considerably after a controversial quartet of memory laws was adopted by Kyiv in April 2015.<sup>82</sup> Included was a statute that, alongside its other provisions, designated paramilitary groups and organizations that fought for Ukraine’s independence in the twentieth century, among them the UPA, as national freedom fighters and prohibited the public denigration of their veterans.<sup>83</sup> This did not, however, lead to a sustained rupture in relations, and even though the Sejm finally adopted a resolution on 22 July 2016 designating the Volhynia massacres genocide (the Senat had ratified a similar measure two weeks earlier), its language was quite measured.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the leaders of both countries have also made conspicuous efforts to mitigate the impact of contentious domestic discourses on bilateral affairs. Poroshenko, for instance, visited Warsaw’s Volhynia memorial on 8 July 2016, while in the Polish capital for a NATO summit. In turn, Duda was the only foreign head of state present when Ukraine celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its independence in August 2016. The Polish president also voiced concerns over the language of article 2a of the 2018 Amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance, which singled out crimes committed by Ukrainian nationalists between 1925–1950 (annulled by Poland’s Constitutional Tribunal in early 2019, the article had been championed by the right-wing Kukiz’15 movement—which initially proposed it in July 2016—despite opposition from politicians aligned with both PO and PiS).<sup>85</sup>

Critically, they found common ground by emphasizing the mutual threat posed by Russia, an anchoring hegemon that increasingly associates its regional policies (including the annexation of Crimea and military incursions into Ukraine’s Donets Basin) with historical narratives that contravene the broader understandings of World War II and the Soviet period that Kyiv and Warsaw now share. Consider the 2 June 2016 letter to Polish legislators from a group of prominent Ukrainians, among them former presidents Kravchuk and Yushchenko. In it, the Ukrainian side apologizes for past “crimes and wrongdoings” but urges Warsaw to not equate Volhynia with genocide, as such an “ill-considered political declaration” will “only be exploited by our common enemy.”<sup>86</sup> Tellingly, although Polish responses were not uniformly positive, a number of leading intellectuals and politicians, including all three surviving former presidents, answered by thanking the Ukrainians for their apology and asking them

to likewise forgive Polish misdeeds, noting that in the face of “nationalism and Russian imperialism,” it is “easier to survive these threats together.”<sup>87</sup>

Despite the recent intensification of tensions between Warsaw and Kyiv over specific legacies, the main regional fault line in post-communist Europe’s politics of history continues to demarcate a neo-authoritarian Russia from those more democratic states that display a greater political affinity, whether as its members or partners, for post-communist Europe’s other anchoring hegemon, the EU. In this respect, the decisive move away from the Kremlin that Ukrainian politics exhibited after 2014 attenuates the possibility that disagreements with Poland will experience audience escalation to the European level. Similarly, it is probable that the vast majority of rhetorical cascades currently manifesting between Poland and Ukraine will prove self-limiting, as the contentious legacies in question encompass historical episodes that are, for the most part, also highly problematic in Ukrainian–Russian relations (where they are more likely to be activated, given Russia’s geopolitical standing). All this suggests that the present issues Poland is experiencing with Ukraine are, to a large extent, by-products of political salvos over history Kyiv and Moscow are primarily targeting at one another. Comments made by the then head of Ukraine’s Institute of National Memory, Volodymyr Viatrovych, bolster this perception; Viatrovych argued that in contemporary Ukraine, honoring the UPA carries no anti-Polish connotations, as the insurgents are today recognized not for the role they played in the “Polish–Ukrainian conflict” of the 1940s but because they fought against Soviet communism.<sup>88</sup> Further indicating that regional metanarratives concerning history have consolidated about two primary antipodes, in October 2016 the Sejm and Rada adopted a joint Declaration of Remembrance and Solidarity that condemns the USSR as a co-aggressor in World War II on par with Nazi Germany and denounces Russia’s current foreign policy as a threat to European security and international order.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

More than a decade ago, Martin Šimečka observed that throughout East-Central Europe “the fight for history in the past twenty years was actually more of a fight for legitimacy on the part of those who are supposed to interpret history.”<sup>90</sup> This remains true today not only at the domestic level but among states as well, with post-communist polities increasingly vying to determine how the past is to be depicted beyond their borders. Illustrating this is the sheer volume of rhetorical cascades over interpretations of history that have been exhibited in recent years, as well as the audience escalation that has occurred via appeals to such supranational institutions as the European Parliament and the ECoHR.

At the same time, it is important to remember that not all problematic pasts become fodder for cross-border disagreements. Even horrendous crimes may be removed from the realm of interstate contestation provided there exists some basic accord regarding how they should be understood. In this respect, it is the perceived offenses

committed against one side that are not sufficiently acknowledged by the other that tend to turn into enduring conflicts, with interpretive misalignments becoming all the more pronounced when they involve anchoring hegemonies and differing regime types (or at least divergent political orientations among governments). Thus, while discursive lock-in has taken place in Polish–Russian relations over Katyń, it is unlikely to do so in Polish–Ukrainian relations over Volhynia. In significant measure, this is because Ukrainian narratives concerning history harbor no credible hegemonic pretensions beyond Ukraine’s borders; as a result, even when they run afoul of Polish interpretations, they do not challenge the latter’s legitimacy at home or within Europe in the same way that Russian narratives do. Furthermore, while both Poland and Ukraine have more nationalistic governments in place today than was the case for much of the post-communist period, neither side views the other as imperiling their respective nation’s physical or mnemonic survival. In contrast, the historical wrongs committed by the USSR remain salient in Polish–Russian affairs because the two sides have diverged both institutionally and ideologically, their politics of the past fueled by, and reflecting, events in the present. In this environment, Russia, as an anchoring hegemon within the post-communist region, poses exactly the sort of existential threat to Poland’s politics of history that Ukraine never could.

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## Notes

1. “An avalanche alters its course based on the rocks it flows over.” (Author’s translation.)
2. Headed by the Red Army’s Chief Surgeon, Nikolai Burdenko, this body was formed soon after the Red Army retook Smolensk from the Germans in September 1943 (its official name was “The Special Commission for the Determination and Investigation of the Circumstances of the Killings by German-Fascist Invaders in the Katyn Forest of Polish POW Officers”). It quickly concluded—its findings were first published in the 26 January 1944 issue of *Pravda*—that the Nazis were the real culprits behind the massacre, absolving the USSR of any responsibility. N. Lebedeva et al., eds., *Katyń. Mart 1940 g.-sentjabr’ 2000 g. Rasstrel. Sud’by zhivyykh. Ekho Katyni. Dokumenty*. (Moscow: Ves’ mir, 2001), doc. 215.
3. PRL stands for *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* (“People’s Republic of Poland”), the official name of communist Poland between 1952 and 1989. The text was published in *Rzeczpospolita* on 11 April 2010.
4. On this point, see F. Krawatzek and G. Soroka, “Circulation, Conditions, Claims: Examining the Politics of Historical Memory in Eastern Europe” in this issue.
5. This is exactly how President Vladimir Putin characterized it. “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” 18 March 2014, [www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/342](http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/342).
6. <https://www.praguedeclaration.eu>.
7. The term “Volhynia massacres” (*Rzeź wołyńska* in Polish, literally the “Wołyń slaughter”) is frequently utilized in a blanket fashion (including herein) to refer to a series of events that took place across Volhynia and eastern Galicia (nearby regions, including Chełm, were also affected, though not as

dramatically) between 1943 and early 1945, with the peak of the anti-Polish violence occurring in July and August 1943.

8. According to Per Anders Rudling, mainstream estimates place the number of Poles killed by the UPA in Volhynia at between forty and seventy thousand. "Theory and Practice: Historical Representation of the Wartime Accounts of the Activities of the OUN-UPA (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists—Ukrainian Insurgent Army)," *East European Jewish Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2006): 171. Meanwhile, Polish experts cite mortality figures in eastern Galicia ranging from around twenty thousand to thirty or forty thousand. G. Motyka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do akcji 'Wisła'. Konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943–1947* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011), 447; J. Kęsik, "Ogólny bilans strat ludności w wyniku ukraińsko-polskiego konfliktu narodowościowego w latach II wojny światowej," in vol. 9 of *Polska-Ukraina. Trudne pytania* (Warsaw: Fundacja Ośrodka Karta, 2002), 41.

9. Ukraine has aided Polish investigators over the years (for instance, in 1994 Kyiv turned over the names of 3,435 Poles executed there), but the Belarusian side has proven considerably less helpful, making this asymmetry all the more surprising. (Although archival records released by Moscow indicate that more than three thousand Poles were killed in Belarus, President Aliaksandr Lukashenka has stated on more than one occasion that Belarus was only a transit point and that no Polish victims are buried there. "Lukashenko: Belarusian Katyn List Cannot Exist," *BELTA*, 15 January 2013, <http://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-belarusian-katyn-list-cannot-exist-14573-2013>.)

10. F. Krawatzek and G. Soroka, "Circulation, Conditions, Claims: Examining the Politics of Historical Memory in Eastern Europe."

11. As will be discussed later, tensions between Poland and Ukraine over the killings in Volhynia and eastern Galicia only flared up after nationalist-leaning governments were installed in both Kyiv (in 2014) and Warsaw (in 2015).

12. On historical matters such as Katyń, concerning which there was previously no coherent (much less hegemonic) pan-European narrative, the post-communist EU members are often able to set the interpretive agenda.

13. Which is not to say that differences of degree do not, at times, form salient fissures in domestic politics. See, for example, R. Fredheim, "The Memory of Katyn in Polish Political Discourse: A Quantitative Study," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 7 (2014): 1165–1187.

14. P. H. Kosicki, "Forests, Families, and Films: Polish Memory of Katyń, 1943–2015," *East European Politics and Societies* 29, no. 4 (2015): 730–760; J. Niżyńska, "The Politics of Mourning and the Crisis of Poland's Symbolic Language after April 10, 2010," *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 4 (2010): 467–479.

15. Author's interview, 18 April 2018.

16. On this trend, see G. Soroka and F. Krawatzek, "Nationalism, Democracy, and Memory Laws," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 2 (2019): 157–171.

17. Instructive in this regard are the words of Andrei Kozyrev, post-Soviet Russia's first foreign minister, who notes that Russia represents the USSR's legal successor, but in a political rather than moral sense. As he puts it, "we all shared [an] awful past, it's over." Author's interview, 16 February 2015.

18. A. Cherniaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym. Po dnevnikovym zapisiam* (Moscow, 1993), 172–73.

19. At the time, Lavrentii Beria was head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD).

20. *Inteligencja wobec nowych problemów socjalizmu: spotkanie Michaiła Gorbaczowa z przedstawicielami polskiej inteligencji* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1988), 89. Burdenko's report did more than just conclude the Poles were victims of Nazi aggression; it also asserted that German troops executed "as many as 500" Red Army POWs at Katyń. See A. Etkind et al., *Remembering Katyn* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2012), 127–31. Despite it never having been corroborated (Aleksandr Guryanov, a Russian human rights activist and prominent Katyń researcher, terms the allegation a "complete fabrication" [author's interview, 20 March 2020]), Soviet leaders repeatedly invoked this apocryphal claim, and post-communist Russian politicians have continued the practice.

21. "Słowo wstępne," in J. Maciszewski, *Katyń. Wyrzec prawdę* (Pułtusk: Akademia Humanistyczna im. A. Gieysztor, 2010), 9–10.

22. See G. Soroka, "The Politics of the Past: Polish–Soviet and Polish–Russian Efforts at Historical Reconciliation," *Nationalities Papers* (published online 25 January 2021), doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1844023.

23. Reproduced in E. Wosik, ed., *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa: dokumenty i materiały archiwalne przekazane Polsce 14 października 1992 r.* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1992), 104–6.

24. Reproduced in Wosik, *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, 106.

25. The Sejm had already decreed three weeks earlier that the Poles "were murdered by the NKVD on the order of Stalin and the authorities of the USSR." "Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 22 marca 1990 r. w sprawie Katynia," *Monitor Polski* 11, no. 80 (1990), <http://www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/mp/1990/s/11/80>.

26. It was published the following day in *Izvestiia* and *Pravda*.

27. Reproduced in Wosik, *Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa*, 130.

28. See the interview with Boris Nosov in W. Radziwinowicz, "Szukanie anty-Katynia," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 12–13 August 2000.

29. Z. Karpus and S. Alexandrowicz, *Zwycięzcy za drutami. Jeńcy polscy w niewoli (1919–1922). Dokumenty i materiały* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 1995). Karpus and Alexandrowicz contend that some twenty thousand Polish POWs died as a result of their confinement.

30. N. E. Eliseeva et al., *Krasnoarmeitsy v pol'skom plenu v 1919–1922 gg. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow: Letnii sad, 2004), i, 14, 24–26, 28. However, see also the divergent estimates in the tome that was the product of the bilateral Polish–Russian Group on Difficult Matters (*White Spots–Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish–Russian Relations, 1918–2008*, ed. A. D. Rotfeld and A. V. Torkunov [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015]), wherein Daria Nałecz and Tomasz Nałecz (writing for the Polish side) note that Polish scholars place the death toll among Bolshevik POWs at sixteen to seventeen thousand (29), while Gennady Matveyev (writing for the Russian side) estimates some twenty-five to twenty-eight thousand Bolshevik POWs perished (57).

31. D. Boćkowski and A. Dzieńkiewicz, "Katyń—zbrodnia (nadal) chroniona tajemnicą państwową," in *Oprawcy z Katynia*, ed. W. Abarinow (Kraków: Znak, 2007), 318.

32. I. Iazhborovskaia, A. Iablokov, and V. Parsadanova, *Katynskii sindrom v sovetsko-pol'skikh i rossiisko-pol'skikh otnosheniakh* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 416–18.

33. As Yeltsin emphasized in a 5 November 1992 letter to Jaruzelski, "a restored, democratic Russia does not bear responsibility for the atrocities of the totalitarian Stalinist regime" (reproduced in Maciszewski, *Katyń. Wydrzeć prawdę*, 239).

34. A. Cienciala, N. Lebedeva, and W. Materski, eds., *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), doc. 119.

35. Among the more dramatic dissenters was Boris Szardakov, the Russian Consul in Kraków, who proclaimed on 7 November 1994 that Poland's interwar ruler Józef Piłsudski was "a warlord and criminal equal to Stalin" given the Red Army POWs who died in Polish custody during the early 1920s (quoted in J. Wilamowski, *Kłamstwo stulecia. W cieniu Katynia* [Warsaw: Agencja Wydawnicza CB, 2004], 85).

36. Yeltsin also indicated he was open to compensating the victims' families, but this did not go anywhere. Although the issue arises from time to time (Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 261), neither the relatives nor the Polish government have made a concerted bid for reparations over the years, with the Association of Katyń Families stating in 2010 that it did not plan to seek monetary damages (Etkind et al., *Remembering Katyn*, 28, 107). Despite this, Russian politicians and media outlets frequently impute a pecuniary motive to the Polish side.

37. Yeltsin concluded by claiming that "alongside the remains of Polish officers" there are some nine thousand and other victims of Soviet repression buried in the Katyń Forest. He also mentions that "over five hundred" Soviet POWs were shot there by the Nazis (Cienciala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, doc. 120).

38. W. Materski et al., eds., *Echa Katynia, kwiecień 1943–marzec 2005*, vol. 4 of *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni* (Warsaw: Naczelnej Dyrekcji Archiwów Państwowych, 2006), 572–74.



39. S. Fiłonowa, "Wielka wojna kатыńsko-hipokrycka," 21 April 2019, <https://wnet.fm/kurier/wojna-o-prawde-będzie-sie-toczyć-poki-istnieje-system-oparty-na-klamstwie-swietlana-filonowa-kurier-wnet-58-2019/>. This source refers to Chaika as Russia's Prosecutor General, a position he did not yet occupy at the time.

40. "Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 13 kwietnia 2000 r. upamiętniająca 60. rocznicę zbrodni kатыńskiej," *Monitor Polski* 11, no. 198 (2000), <http://www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/mp/2000/s/11/198>.

41. Originally slated to open in April, Katyń was dedicated on 28 July and Mednoe on 2 September.

42. Materski et al., *Echa Katyń, kwiecień 1943-marzec 2005*, 580–82.

43. Lebedeva et al., *Mart 1940g.-sentiabr 2000g.*, 587–88. Khristenko was correct in absolute terms, the locale having been used to dispose of Stalin's victims for years prior to World War II. But in shifting the emphasis away from Polish suffering, his remarks produced a cognitive disconnect, as the ceremony had originally been timed to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the 1940 massacre.

44. Materski et al., *Echa Katyń, kwiecień 1943-marzec 2005*, 583–84.

45. The timing of his visit was symbolic, as the following day marked the anniversary of the Red Army's wresting control of Warsaw from German forces in World War II.

46. Cienichala, Lebedeva, and Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 261. See also "Putin v Pol'she: obshchaniia vmesto izvinenii," *Lenta.ru*, 16 January 2002, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2002/01/16/warszawa/>.

47. Soroka, "The Politics of the Past."

48. T. Sherlock, "Unhealed Wounds: The Struggle Over the Memory of World War II," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2009): 460.

49. V. K. Kondratov, "Otvét GVP na pis'mo obshchestva 'Memorial'," 15 March 2005, <http://www.memo.ru/daytoday/5katyn2.htm>.

50. "Komunikat w sprawie Zbrodni Kатыńskiej oraz informacja o stanie śledztwa," 6 March 2006, <http://ipn.gov.pl/wydzial-prasowy/komunikaty/komunikat-w-sprawie-zbrodni-katynskiej-oraz-informacja-o-stanie-sledztwa>.

51. A. Kaczyński, "Rosja musi wyznać prawdę," *Rzeczpospolita*, 6 March 2006.

52. Quoted in "Katyn Resolution Adopted," *Warsaw Voice*, 30 March 2005.

53. "Uchwała Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 26 kwietnia 2006 r. w sprawie rocznicy Zbrodni Kатыńskiej," *Monitor Polski* 32, no. 349 (2006), <http://www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/mp/2006/s/32/349>.

54. "List Putina do Polaków—pełna wersja," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 August 2009.

55. "Do wojny doprowadziły układy z nazistami: przemówienie premiera Władimira Putina na obchodach 70. rocznicy wybuchu II wojny światowej," *Rzeczpospolita*, 1 September 2009.

56. "Prawda jest jedna, choć często bywa bolesna: przemówienie prezydenta Lecha Kaczyńskiego na obchodach 70. rocznicy wybuchu II wojny," *Rzeczpospolita*, 1 September 2009.

57. "At Katyn Memorial, Putin Calls For Poland, Russia To 'Move Toward Each Other,'" *RFE/RL*, 7 April 2010.

58. Putin's visit also had the effect of reanimating reactionary discourse in Russia, with the KPRF releasing a statement on the day of the commemoration castigating "the Russian authorities' inability to defend the country's geopolitical interests and historical truth" ("At Katyn Memorial, Putin Calls for Poland, Russia to 'Move Toward Each Other,'" *RFE/RL*, 7 April 2010).

59. "Putin: Katyń to była zemsta Stalina za porażkę w 1920 roku," *Gazeta.pl*, 7 April 2010, [http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,7742647,Putin\\_Katyn\\_to\\_byla\\_zemsta\\_Stalina\\_zaporazke\\_w\\_1920.html](http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114873,7742647,Putin_Katyn_to_byla_zemsta_Stalina_zaporazke_w_1920.html). Where he derived this figure from is unclear.

60. "Medvedev Hands over Poland Katyn Massacre Documents," *RT*, 8 May 2010, <https://www.rt.com/news/katyn-russia-poland-documents/>. By fall 2012, Moscow had released a total of 148 volumes (35 remain classified).

61. "Stenograficheskii otchet o vstreche s uchastnikami Miunkhenskoi konferentsii po voprosam politiki bezopasnosti," 20 October 2010, <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/9299>.

62. Quoted in J. Dempsey, "Poland and Russia Vow to Open New Chapter of Cooperation in Relations," *New York Times*, 6 December 2010.

63. "Zaiavlenie Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Federal'nogo Sobraniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii o Katynskoi tragedii i ee zhertvakh," 26 November 2010, [http://ntc.duma.gov.ru/duma\\_na/asozd/asozd\\_text.php?nm=4504-5%20%C3%C4&dt=2010](http://ntc.duma.gov.ru/duma_na/asozd/asozd_text.php?nm=4504-5%20%C3%C4&dt=2010).

64. E. Łosińska, "Europejski trybunał wyda wyrok w sprawie zbrodni katyńskiej," *Rzeczpospolita*, 6 October 2011.

65. For a summary of the proceedings written by the lead lawyer for the Polish side, see I. Kamiński, "The Katyn Massacres Before the European Court of Human Rights: From Justice Delayed to Justice Permanently Denied," *East European Politics and Societies* 29, no. 4 (2015): 784–810.

66. Between 2012 and 2015, the percentage of Poles believing the crash was "definitely" or "more likely than not" deliberately orchestrated ranged from 25 to 33 percent ("Przed piątą rocznicą katastrofy smoleńskiej," *CBOS Komunikat z badań* NR 49/2015, April 2015). Aggravating suspicions of a cover-up, as of November 2020 Russia has still not, despite repeated requests, returned the wreckage of the doomed Tu-154.

67. Long known as a burial site for Soviet victims of Stalinism, in 2007 it was determined Poles killed as part of the Katyn massacre were also interred there.

68. Poland was represented by the Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Jacek Cichocki, and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Małgorzata Omilanowska; the Russian side featured the Minister of Transportation, Maksim Sokolov, and the Governor of Smolensk oblast, Alexei Ostrovskii.

69. S. Radchenko, "Vladimir Putin Wants to Rewrite the History of World War II," *Foreign Policy*, 21 January 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/21/vladimir-putin-wants-to-rewrite-the-history-of-world-war-ii/>.

70. "Russia Condemns Polish Claims That It Failed to Organize Visit to Smolensk and Katyn," *TASS*, 3 April 2020, <https://tass.com/politics/1140005>.

71. "Rosja rozbuduje muzea w Katyniu i Miednoje. Powstanie tam kontrowersyjna wystawa," *PolskieRadio.pl*, 30 January 2016, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1577015,Rosja-rozbuduje-muzea-w-Katyniu-i-Miednoje-Powstanie-tam-kontrowersyjna-wystawa>. See also A. Guryanov, "O popytke rossiiskikh vedomstv opravdat' Katyn'," *Istoricheskaia ekspertiza* 12, no. 3 (2017): 22–25.

72. "Zmiany nastawienia Polaków do innych narodów," *CBOS Komunikat z badań* NR 113/2015, August 2015.

73. Public opinion does not appear to be the driving force behind the political activation of these events. For example, despite the massive media attention being paid to Katyn at the time (due to an ultimately unsuccessful lawsuit seeking to rehabilitate the massacre's victims that was then making its way through the Russian court system), in 2008 only 80 percent of Poles reported knowing that the Soviets/Russians bore sole responsibility for the massacre ("Pamięć o zbrodni katyńskiej i ocena jej znaczenia dla stosunków polsko-rosyjskich," *CBOS Komunikat z badań* BS/70/2008, May 2008). The sixty-fifth (2008) and seventieth (2013) anniversaries of Volhynia are also instructive. Although extensive news coverage preceded both commemorations, a July 2013 CBOS poll revealed that only 28 percent of Poles reported having "heard a lot about" about the massacres. In contrast, 47 percent did not know who their victims were, while 9 percent of those who said they did know seemingly managed to confuse Volhynia with Katyn ("Trudna pamięć: Wołyń 1943," *CBOS Komunikat z badań* BS/93/2013, July 2013). And although 71 percent of Poles interviewed on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the start of World War II in 2014 replied that it should be actively remembered, only 10 percent listed Katyn as the most significant event of the twentieth century for their country ("75 Rocznicą wybuchu II wojny światowej," *CBOS Komunikat z badań* NR 114/2014, August 2014).

74. It was rescinded by a Ukrainian court later that year on a technicality. Yushchenko had similarly honored Roman Shukhevych, another seminal UPA figure, in 2007 (the latter award was likewise rescinded in 2010).

75. "Varshava vvažhaie pryvlasnennia S. Banderi zvannia heroia Ukraïny vnutrishn'oiu spravoiu Kyieva—marshal senatu Pol'shi," *Ukraïns'kyi pohliad*, 9 February 2010. Like Yeltsin, Yushchenko was perceived as democratically inclined and compatible with Polish (and EU) interests, predisposing Poles to overlook the more controversial legacies he highlighted at home, especially given the stark cleavages present in Ukrainian recall. Reciprocal recognition of historical narratives has also featured prominently in Polish–Ukrainian relations, especially while Kaczyński and Yushchenko were in office. For example, in 2006 Poland's legislature recognized the 1932–1933 Ukrainian famine (*Holodomor*) as a Soviet-orchestrated genocide. Likewise, in 2008 Yushchenko conferred the Order of Yaroslav the Wise on Polish director Andrzej Wajda for his acclaimed motion picture *Katyń*, released the prior year.

76. The existence of significant historical quarrels between Poles and Ukrainians, as well as Poles and Russians, is important to emphasize, since this pushes back on commonly encountered explanations for Polish–Russian enmity that root discord between the two nations in a primordialist "ancient hatreds" thesis, which largely removes institutional or individual agency from the equation.

77. "Wspólne oświadczenie Prezydentów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Ukrainy o porozumieniu i pojednaniu," 21 May 1997, <http://www.bbn.gov.pl/portal/pl/473/393/naglowek.xml>.

78. "Kamienie pamięci," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 31 May–1 June 2003.

79. "Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 15 lipca 2009 r. w sprawie tragicznego losu Polaków na Kresach Wschodnich," *Monitor Polski* 4, no. 684 (2009), <http://www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/mp/2009/s/47/684>.

80. At the time Ukraine was negotiating an Association Agreement with the EU that was backed by Warsaw.

81. In fact, in an effort to discredit the nationalist opposition at home, 148 Rada deputies (most associated with Yanukovich's Party of Regions) actually came out in support of the Polish initiative ("Kolesnichenko i shche 147 nardepiv prosiat' pol's'kyi Seim vyznaty Volyn's'ku trahediiu henotsydom pol's'koho narodu," *Korrespondent.net*, 5 July 2013, <http://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/1577817-kolesnichenko-i-shche-147-nardepiv-prosyat-polskij-sejm-viznati-volynsku-tragediyu-genocidom-polskog>). This led Polish political pundit Sławomir Sierakowski to wryly observe that "the best friends Polish nationalists have are Ukrainian communists" (interview with J. Nizinkiewicz, "Nie jesteśmy lepsi od Ukraińców," *Rzeczpospolita*, 10 July 2013).

82. O. Shevel, "Decommunization in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: Law and Practice," *PONARS Policy Memo* 411 (January 2016); see also N. Koposov, "Populism and Memory: Legislation of the Past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia" in this issue.

83. Law 2538-1: "On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the Twentieth Century," <https://old.uin.gov.ua/laws/law-ukraine-legal-status-and-honoring-memory-fighters-ukraines-independence-twentieth-century?q=laws/law-ukraine-legal-status-and-honoring-memory-fighters-ukraines-independence-twentieth-century>.

84. "Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 22 lipca 2016 r. w sprawie oddania hołdu ofiarom ludobójstwa dokonanego przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na obywatelach II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1943–1945," *Monitor Polski* 726, no. 1 (2016), [www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/mp/2016/726/M2016000072601.pdf](http://www.monitorpolski.gov.pl/mp/2016/726/M2016000072601.pdf). Claiming that the clash between Nazism and Stalinism created conditions conducive to the massacres, the resolution further acknowledges crimes were also committed by Polish forces and honors Ukrainians who helped save Poles. It concludes by expressing solidarity with a Ukraine today "fighting against external aggression to maintain its territorial integrity."

85. "Ekspert: orzeczenie Trybunału Konstytucyjnego ws. nowelizacji ustawy o IPN może otworzyć drogę do dyskusji," *Polskie Radio 24.pl*, 17 January 2019, <https://www.polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/Artykul/2247655,Ekspert-orzeczenie-Trybunału-Konstytucyjnego-ws-nowelizacji-ustawy-o-IPN-moze-otworzyc-droge-do-dyskusji>; "Kukiz oskarża kierownictwo PiS o uległość wobec spadkobierców

Bandery,” *Do Rzeczy*, 11 July 2017, <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/35189/Kukiz-oskarza-kierownictwo-PiS-o-uleglosc-wobec-spadkobiercow-Bandery.html>. The text of the article appears here: [http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/nazwa/771\\_u/\\$file/771\\_u.pdf](http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/opinie8.nsf/nazwa/771_u/$file/771_u.pdf).

86. “Vidkryte zvernennia do provodu Pol’s’koï derzhavy, dukhovnykh i kul’turnykh diiachiv ta pol’s’koho suspil’s’tva,” *Iniitsiayvna hrupa «Persshoho hrudnia»*, 2 June 2016, <http://1-12.org.ua/2016/06/02/3823>. Reinforcing these fears, in the midst of this controversy representatives of the KPRF suggested that the Russian Duma also acknowledge the killings as genocide.

87. W. Czuchnowski, “Polsko-ukraińska historia listów,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 5 July 2016. Parliamentarians from PiS had earlier responded with a letter more critical of post-Maidan Ukraine’s positions on historical memory, though even this document emphasized a desire to maintain close ties. W. Ferfecki, “PiS odpowiada Ukraińcom w sprawie Wołynia,” *RP.pl*, 20 June 2016, [http://www.rp.pl/wolyn\\_listy#ap-1](http://www.rp.pl/wolyn_listy#ap-1).

88. “Szef ukraińskiego IPN odpowiada na list PiS: to jednostronne oskarżenia,” *PolskieRadio.pl*, 22 June 2016, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1634873,Szef-ukrainskiego-IPN-odpowiada-na-list-PiS-to-jednostronne-oskarzenia>.

89. “Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 20 października 2016 r. Deklaracja Pamięci i Solidarności Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej oraz Rady Najwyższej Ukrainy,” *Monitor Polski* 1016 (2016), <http://monitorpolski.gov.pl/mp/2016/1016>.

90. M. Šimečka, “Still Not Free: Why Post-’89 History Must Go beyond Self-diagnosis,” *Eurozine*, 29 May 2009, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-05-29-simecka-en.html>.

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# Remembering a Contentious Past

## Resistance and Collaboration in the Former Soviet Union

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The Western outskirts of the former Soviet Union suffered huge levels of destruction during World War II. It is for this reason that the memories of the war in countries such as Belarus and the Baltics have centered on the local opposition to the Nazi occupiers in an attempt to bring societies together after the war. This article compares how Latvia and Belarus have represented their involvement in World War II over time and undertakes an analysis of how young people today perceive of this aspect of their country's history. Of particular interest is the extent to which young people are prepared to admit the existence of collaboration and whether a persona of moral authority is able to shift how young people assess the need for critical engagement with history. To that end, the study relies on an original survey generated in early 2019, which also enquired into questions related to historical memory. I argue that young Belarusians are, on average, more prepared to acknowledge collaboration than young people in Latvia and that the involvement of a moral authority shifts assessments of history in a decisive way in Belarus only. The results for Latvia stress in particular the persistent divide relating to the country's two linguistic communities.

**Keywords:** *collective memory; Belarus; Latvia; youth; collaboration; World War II*

### Introduction

The Western outskirts of the former Soviet Union were devastated during World War II. The violence committed in the context of the German and Soviet occupations of those territories led to the death of millions of soldiers and to an extreme suffering of the civilian population.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Belarus, Ukraine, and countries in the Baltic region shared in a similar wartime experience, sustaining a region of memory.<sup>2</sup> This article studies two of these countries on the Western outskirts of the former Soviet Union, namely, Belarus and Latvia. Its goal is to investigate the extent to which young people today are willing to accept that some citizens of their country of residence contributed to the violence during World War II. Constructions of national identities in

both Belarus and Latvia strongly rely on the partisan myth and narratives of heroic opposition to Nazi occupation.<sup>3</sup> However, it is beyond doubt that a serious degree of collaboration with the occupiers did take place, facilitating the exercise of terror.<sup>4</sup>

Across the former Soviet Union, young people are today a target of the state's mnemonic discourse. They are exposed to visions of national history through the school curriculum and media, as well as through their potential involvement in national commemorative practices and youth organizations. They are also exposed to wartime stories in their families. To explore the reception of mnemonic narratives by young people, this article uses original survey data from Belarus and Latvia, generated at the beginning of 2019. The survey, which targeted urban youth, included questions about collective memory, specifically about the extent to which respondents believe that there was collaboration with the Nazi occupiers during World War II, and whether they consider it necessary to engage critically with their country's national history. The analysis offers a unique insight into the *perception* of historical narratives, and the way in which young people deal with memory.

Comparing Belarus and Latvia is intriguing for a number of reasons. Both countries share an experience of extreme violence during World War II, which saw a huge number of civilian and military deaths: around 20 percent of the total population of the Belarusian SSR and more than 10 percent of the total Latvian population.<sup>5</sup> But historically similar experiences have been received in distinct contexts. With the Soviet Union's disintegration in 1991, both countries set off on diverging paths, also in terms of how they dealt with history. Whereas politicians in Belarus accepted independence reluctantly, and for a long time remained oriented towards the Soviet past and Russia, Latvian representatives quickly embraced Europe and strove for integration into Western political and mnemonic structures.

In both countries—and further afield—national identities rely upon the appeal to historical memories and the construction of alter images.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, Latvia emphasizes both its differences from Russia and its European qualities to fold its own narrative into that of a shared European resistance against totalitarian regimes. Indeed, in the Baltic States' dominant political discourse, the occupations by both Soviet and Nazi forces are considered to be distinctly foreign occupations. At the same time, however, the Latvian situation is further complicated by the fact that the integration of its Russophone population into the country's mnemonic setting remains unaccomplished, illustrating the important circulations of memories within the region.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, interpretations found in Belarus celebrate the Red Army as a liberating force and label the fascist occupier as the enemy. A self-critical engagement with national history is yet to take place in Belarus, with emphasis remaining on the country's partisan groups.

Meanwhile, both countries are differently exposed to attempts to Europeanize their collective memory, that is, the harmonization of historical commemorative rules across Europe.<sup>8</sup> One core element of the attempts to Europeanize historical narratives is the focus on universal victimhood.<sup>9</sup> With European integration comes the



expectation that a country should be prepared to critically examine its own national history.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the Russian memory culture emphasizes heroism and strength. One might therefore assume that—as an EU member state—a more self-critical discourse on national history should prevail in Latvia than in Belarus. In the latter, meanwhile, one expects a less self-critical view of the country’s history—including collaboration with Nazi occupiers—to prevail.

The article argues that young Belarusians, most of whom grew up under an authoritarian system and are exposed to significant state efforts at crafting a heroic historical memory, are more likely to state that some form of collaboration took place than are their Latvian peers. Latvian youth, on average, do not believe that collaboration occurred, and instead take a somewhat defensive position on their country’s history. In Belarus, differences in view relate to what young people make of the country’s power structures and their own level of education; in Latvia, the self-declared mother tongue and the type of media that one consumes are the key factors. A second analysis considers the impact of a speaker with some degree of authority on whether respondents agree with the need to critically confront their country’s past. The vignette experiment demonstrates that this person of intellectual authority only has a significant impact in the case of Belarus, where it increases the view that one should self-critically face one’s country’s past.

I begin with a review of the literature on how World War II has been remembered in both Belarus and Latvia over time to then proceed to a discussion of the data and methods used for the analysis. The third and fourth section presents two related sets of analysis on the acknowledgement of collaboration and the influence of a public authority. The final section offers concluding thoughts and indicates avenues for further research.

## **Memories of World War II in Belarus and Latvia**

### **Belarus: The partisan republic and the Russian mnemonic world**

In Belarus the persistent visibility of symbols of the Soviet past,<sup>11</sup> combines with a weakly developed and highly contested sense of the nation’s historical roots.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the country’s political elites have framed today’s Belarus as continuing the previous Soviet order, aided by the fact that Belarus lacked a sizeable and independent dissident movement during that period. Reflecting this continued importance of the Soviet order, November 7th—the anniversary of the October Revolution—remains an important national holiday, even if its meaning is today somewhat blurred.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Belarus seems a special case in the Eastern European battleground of memories. As Ackermann argues, “With a very limited public sphere and few actors unconnected to state-run institutions, Belarus is not so much a battleground as a playground for a more circumscribed remembering of the past, involving the

ongoing re-invention, updating, localization, and appropriation of standard Soviet narratives in a host of competing ways.”<sup>14</sup> The state is omnipresent in defining the rules of the game that characterize the official Belarusian memory culture. Speaking to this, Marples observes, “Essentially it is the regime that determines what is important about the past and why, and further, it regulates the interpretation of the past and funds books, school texts, monuments, and historic sites to ensure that its desires are met. . . . In this respect, modern Belarus is following the Stalinist tradition of legitimizing the present through ruthless control over the past.”<sup>15</sup>

The leadership has cultivated an emphasis on the contribution of the people of Belarus to the partisan struggle during World War II.<sup>16</sup> Irrespective of the political rupture caused by the Soviet Union’s dissolution, this emphasis has persisted and has provided the basis for Belarusian–Russian cooperation after 1991.<sup>17</sup> In Soviet historiography, the partisans were framed as a mass movement that included the entire country, rendering them a “sacred and untouchable part of Belarusian national consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> The manufacturing and manipulation of the partisan myth during the Soviet era displaced the country’s war trauma, and contributed to a rather monolithic view of the Belarusian people.<sup>19</sup> Politically, this strategy is understandable, as the war provided a shared experience for all of Belarus, and its narrative presented the Soviet regime as an emancipatory force. In present-day Belarus, the war myth has therefore encouraged a selective and nostalgic view of the Soviet past. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka is the major guardian of this patriotic tradition, serving as a patrimonial figure and guarantor of social stability.<sup>20</sup>

The lack of a critical confrontation with Stalinism, and the severe limits imposed on open discussions, are conducive to a shared historical outlook by Russia and Belarus, irrespective of ongoing political tensions.<sup>21</sup> In this context, a more self-critical and anti-Soviet interpretation of World War II can only be expected from societal initiatives, but will be conditioned by the surrounding political regime.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, several local initiatives have raised attention to specific historical aspects and contributed to raising awareness for historical complexity: “The Belarusian case is therefore a curious patchwork of reworked Soviet tropes that simultaneously assert Eurasian civilizational identity—rejecting Western victim-centered narratives and claiming descent from the pan-Soviet Victory—and carve out a separate, non-Russian space of national memory.”<sup>23</sup> One notable grassroots initiative is the resistance against the removal of memorial crosses—which the Russian Orthodox Church in Belarus, the majority denomination, has supported—at Kurapaty, the site of NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) executions prior to the Soviet entry into World War II.<sup>24</sup> Debates around the memory of Kurapaty has also attracted some limited attention through public debates carried by intellectuals.<sup>25</sup>

Scholarship has identified various forms of collaborations and stressed the role of local perpetrators in the Holocaust.<sup>26</sup> Such collaborations, however, are sidelined within the country’s memory politics, reflecting President Lukashenka’s emphasis on a nationwide struggle against Nazism.<sup>27</sup> However, local populations have clearly

been involved in the killing of Jews, for instance, by dragging them out of hiding places.<sup>28</sup> Collaboration with the Nazi occupiers took various forms, and included ordinary people, elements of local administration, the press, and the Orthodox Church.<sup>29</sup> The involvement of the Church reflects to some extent the grief of church officials over the Polonization (including Catholicization) that occurred in the country's Western parts, and the pressure applied by Soviet authorities on the Eastern parts of the country prior to the war.<sup>30</sup> As is known from scholarship on Western European countries, the murder of the Jewish population and others would have been impossible without the local population's support.<sup>31</sup> In all the occupied territories, resistance fighters were always only a small, albeit diverse, minority.<sup>32</sup>

During perestroika, a timid discourse on collaboration grew in Belarus, challenging the myth of a monolithic fight against the Nazi occupiers.<sup>33</sup> This discourse acknowledged the Belarusian appropriation of Jewish property and the fate of Polish minorities.<sup>34</sup> However, the political will and resources needed for alternative visions of Belarusian history to gain traction are lacking. For instance, the fact that the Belarusian Youth Union was modelled on the Nazi Hitler Youth and had more than 10,000 members during the war remains largely ignored in the public and scholarship. This aspect of history is mentioned on the website of the Belarusian state archives, alongside other forms of collaboration, but remains truncated and hard to locate.<sup>35</sup>

The Holocaust is rarely mentioned in political debates, despite the fact that proportionally, Belarus had the largest population of Jews in Europe, and almost all of them were murdered. The absence of survivors testifying to Jewish life in Belarus before and during the war has also enabled today's wide silence on the Shoah.<sup>36</sup> Where the term *Holocaust* is used, the event is not placed in its wider European or global context. Rather, the few accounts typically relate primarily to the Belarusian population and tend to be factual and impersonal, failing to clearly portray either the victims or the perpetrators as historical agents. History textbooks are generally silent regarding both the local inhabitants who participated in the extermination operations and those who risked their lives to save the Jewish population.<sup>37</sup> The memorial culture, meanwhile, honors Soviet victims, and only very few mentions are made of Belarusian Jews. This interpretation reiterates Soviet historiography, which did not treat the Holocaust as having targeted the Jewish population, but rather discussed it as having targeted the entire Soviet citizenry.<sup>38</sup> As the Nazi terror is univocally condemned, the criminal nature of the Soviet regime is denied.<sup>39</sup>

The prevalence of World War II memories in Belarus relates to the relatively late emergence of the country's national independence movement. Given imperial rule over most of Eastern Europe, and comparatively late changes in agricultural organization and industrialization during the second half of the nineteenth century, Belarusian national consciousness materialized comparatively late.<sup>40</sup> Its timid beginnings took shape with the emergence of modern Belarusian literature, through Vincent Dunin-Martsinkevič (1807–1884), who was the first to demonstrate the

richness of the Belarusian language, notably by translating the poet Adam Mickiewicz's Polish-language works into Belarusian. Later, Belarusian students in St. Petersburg contributed to the late nineteenth-century framing of the national idea. They also began organizing in political groups, such as the Belarusian Revolutionary Party, led by Waclau Iwanouski (1880–1943). The writer Francišak Bahušėvič (1840–1900) channeled many of these ideas and linked the cultivation of the Belarusian language to the creation of a national identity.<sup>41</sup> The foundation of the first legal Belarusian newspaper promoting the Belarusian language—*Naša Niva*—in 1906 further aided the emergence of national consciousness.<sup>42</sup>

Ideas about national identity took a more decisive form during the decade leading up to the Revolution of 1917.<sup>43</sup> Such ideas were made manifest largely in the form of a cultural nationalism that lacked great political ambitions, more so given that Belarusian nationalism remained inherently contested within the multicultural territory. Following the brief period of independence under the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR, from 1918–1919), the 1921 Riga settlement, which ended the Polish–Bolshevik War of 1919–1920, divided the country. The Eastern territories of today's Belarus became part of the Soviet Union in 1922 and the Western territories parts of Poland.<sup>44</sup> Differences between East and West, the Soviet and the Polish parts, respectively, were important in the interwar years.<sup>45</sup> In the Soviet part, some flourishing of national culture took place during the 1920s, such as the promotion of the language within the educational system.

During Stalinism, the intellectual elite largely disappeared and the civilian population suffered large-scale repression.<sup>46</sup> With the annexation of the Western territories through the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact of August 1939—which also saw the culmination of anti-Polish terror in the BSSR—Belarus became a Republic. In today's borders, Belarus took shape on the ruins of mass devastation in 1945.<sup>47</sup>

In this environment of nation building, the experience of war had a socially integrating effect. The war's brutality had affected the country's entire population.<sup>48</sup> As Klymenko notes, the war provided narrative elements that are particularly evident in the history textbooks, and that relate to the country's foundation, such as the united struggle against Nazi oppression and the suffering of ordinary Belarusians, which is symbolized by the Minsk ghetto and the Maly Trostinets extermination camp.<sup>49</sup> The framing of World War II that sidelines the suffering of the Jewish population is reiterated by President Lukashenka and seemingly agreed on in Belarus.

However, over the last two decades, there have nonetheless been some discernible shifts in the re-Sovietized and Russo-centric perspective. Until 2003, state discourse emphasized the unity of the three East Slavic peoples, and the majority of Soviet-era monuments were preserved. Indeed, President Lukashenka upheld a purified idea of Soviet history and culture, with great proximity to the Russian memory culture.<sup>50</sup> A university history textbook commissioned by the President in 2003, for example, presented the history of Belarus as a struggle for reunion with Muscovy Russia, but portrayed the country's Western neighbors as aggressors.<sup>51</sup>

After 2003, the country's mnemonic orientation changed, notably with the introduction of the ideology of the Belarusian state.<sup>52</sup> When Putin's Russia began to assert itself as the only genuine voice of the "Russian World," Lukashenka was downgraded to a second-class assistant, no longer presented as an equal partner of Putin. In this situation, Belarus's mnemonic narrative increasingly asserted the country's independent nationhood, framing it as a nation between East and West, striving for independence. Nevertheless, World War II has remained the major event in Belarusian historical memory, and a focus for the state's historical discourse.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, Soviet-era legends have been reiterated, and the partisans have been turned into an almost mythical and sacrosanct topic within the country's mnemonic culture. Among the key developments between 2003 and 2010 was the expansion of memorial sites such as the Brest Hero Fortress, the Khatyn Memorial Complex, and the Liniya Stalina. The presentation of these sites emphasizes the heroism of the Belarusian people and their resistance to the fascists.

Further change occurred after 2010, with increasing assertion of a distinct Belarusian identity. The death of Yakau Trashchanok in 2011 enabled a new set of history textbooks to appear. Trashchanok, a former university teacher of Lukashenka, was key in developing the history teaching notably with an officially approved textbook published in 2003. In this book, he denied the independence of the Belarusian people and considered it being part of the three East Slavic ethnicities.<sup>54</sup> The newer history textbooks, however, stressed Belarusian cultural independence and the political significance of the ninth- and tenth-century *polozk* (Duchy). This interpretive shift aimed at elevating the weakly developed national identity by rooting it in a historical narrative that stretched back to the medieval period. The now popular reenactments of medieval events, for instance, emphasize the country's Europeanness: "Belarus was on the outskirts but nevertheless a part of Europe" and therefore "the return of medieval knightly culture in Belarus is the return of Belarus to the European tradition."<sup>55</sup> Within this new perspective, Russia, in turn, is framed as a threat to Belarusian independent statehood and to the country's distinctive national idea. But despite the distance adopted towards present-day Russia, the Soviet war narrative is hardly contested.

Russia's annexation of Crimea spurred Belarus's will to assert its independent national identity and its distance from Eurasian integration.<sup>56</sup> Tensions over economic questions concerning Belarus's relationship with Russia had been apparent for long, but the 2014 annexation of the peninsula raised the fundamental question of how Belarus should relate to Russia. At the same time, President Lukashenka realized that the cultivation of a strong national identity—or even the promotion of nationalism—might help to play a stabilizing role for authoritarian rule, as had occurred in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan.<sup>57</sup> The need for political stability suggests that historical narratives in political and media discourse will remain prominent in Belarus.

## Latvia: Memories of a Triple Occupation and the Route to Europe

Central to Latvia's foreign policy have been attempts to get the country's status as a victim of triple occupation during and after World War II recognized at the European level. The country's history of foreign-imposed rule began with the Soviet occupation in 1940—one year after the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. This was followed by the Third Reich's occupation of the country in 1941, and the return of Soviet rule from 1944 until 1991. As a goal of its mnemonic foreign policy, Latvia has strived to emphasize that it (along with the two other Baltic countries) suffered disproportionately during these years of war and foreign occupation.<sup>58</sup> Although a recognition of Soviet and Nazi atrocities as being part of Europe's mnemonic canon has been slow to emerge and has met with some indifference, the idea that the two regimes are in some ways equivalent has not been contested as such.<sup>59</sup>

In Russia, however, Latvia's demand for an acknowledgement of having been a victim of Soviet aggression has encountered open resistance. In Russia's present-day mnemonic self-understanding, the “Great Patriotic War” is central and its leaders have continuously dismissed demands by the Baltic States for any kind of official apology, including for the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, challenging the dominant war narrative questions the very core of how Russia has understood itself.<sup>61</sup> Inversely, from a Latvian perspective, challenging the interpretation of World War II as a war of liberation from fascism is a way to emancipate itself from Russia and assert independence. To this day, the Latvian population is embedded in conflicting mnemonic discourses expressed in the country's linguistic-cultural divide.

This mnemonic struggle between Russian and Latvia has been ongoing since independence and can be seen in—among other things—the politicization of the law.<sup>62</sup> For example, in October 1996, the Latvian Parliament adopted a “Declaration of Occupation of Latvia.” The declaration concerned the entire period of Soviet rule and was dismissed by Russian parliamentarians. Critics argued that the declaration reflected a biased and incorrect interpretation of history and the relationship between the two countries.<sup>63</sup> Fundamentally, such a declaration contrasts with how Russia thinks about the Soviet Union's rule during and after World War II. How could the liberator of Europe have also imposed occupation? A law proposed in 2015 further illustrates the bilateral historical tensions. Veiko Spolitis, a non-affiliated Latvian MP, proposed a bill that would have made it illegal to wear the St. George Ribbon, punishable by a fine or a short prison sentence. The proposal generated an emotional debate in the Russian press, in which commentators pointed to the MP's alcohol consumption and the fact that the St. George Ribbon is a symbol of victory with which many Latvians sympathize.<sup>64</sup>

The question of the appropriate date to commemorate the anniversary of the end of World War II also conveys the existing tensions between Russian and Latvia. Currently, 8th May symbolizes the end of the war across Western Europe. This date has been part of Latvia's official commemorative calendar since April 1995. While



Russophone Latvians continue to mark Victory Day on 9th May—the anniversary as celebrated in Russia—non-Russophone Latvians tend to regard this date as marking the beginning of the Soviet occupation.<sup>65</sup> Officially, Latvia has tried to reframe the meaning of 9th May by organizing small-scale events related to the 1950 Schuman Declaration, coining 9th May “Europe Day.”<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the Russian Immortal Regiment commemorative marches have also been organized in Latvia in recent years. The annual marches on 9th May attracted between ten and twenty thousand participants in 2019.<sup>67</sup> Primarily, it is the country’s ethnic Russians who participate in this celebration of the Soviet victory, showing the contested nature of Latvia’s World War II commemorations.<sup>68</sup>

Speaking further to these divisions within historical memory, in contrast to the 9th May marches organized by Russophone Latvians, other Latvians commemorate the fallen soldiers of the 15th and 19th Waffen-SS divisions. The Daugavas Vanagi war veterans’ organization holds annual memory walks on March 16th, which is marked as the day of the Latvian Legion. These walks usually gather around one hundred participants and cause a great media outcry. Some celebrate the legionnaires today for their resistance to the Soviet occupation, but their support of Nazi Germany makes this a highly controversial group and a difficult memory. Over the commemorations hovers the question whether the Latvian Legion qualifies as a criminal organization, according to the criteria laid out by the Nuremberg Tribunal.<sup>69</sup>

In comparison with Belarus, Latvia’s independent statehood was more developed throughout the twentieth century, which influences the country’s mnemonic culture. After having been part of the Russian Empire throughout the nineteenth century, Latvia became independent in August 1920 with the Latvian–Soviet Peace Treaty, following a period of armed conflict during and in the immediate aftermath of World War I.<sup>70</sup> Other countries gradually recognized Latvia’s independence. In this young country, the development of independent cultural and educational policies became part of the nation-building project.<sup>71</sup>

Latvia’s short-lived democratic experiment found its end prior to World War II with the coup that brought Kārlis Ulmanis to power in May 1934. He dissolved Latvia’s parliament, the Saeima, and the country became increasingly authoritarian. Initially, there were hopes that a more authoritarian exercise of power and a clear one-man rule might allow for better control of the threat coming from anti-system right-wing forces.<sup>72</sup> But this hope ultimately proved naïve. Under Ulmanis, Latvia’s independent preparations for the war accelerated in response to Germany’s occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1938. In spring 1940, the advancing Soviet forces arrested Ulmanis and other members of the government and occupied the Baltic countries from 17 June 1940 for one year.<sup>73</sup> In July 1941, the Nazi forces then occupied Latvia. The system of self-administration granted under German occupation facilitated the exercise of influence and control of the country. Oskars Dankers—the Latvian general in charge of administering the country—fulfilled the task most obediently.<sup>74</sup>

German rule granted greater cultural rights to ethnic Latvians than to Slavs. The former were, for instance, encouraged to learn German, which was not expected of Ukrainians or Russians: “By conceding and compromising on cultural matters—which the less ideologically minded Germans regarded as mostly symbolic gestures anyhow—the Germans also assuaged Latvian national sensitivities, raised morale, and improved the likelihood of Latvian collaboration and contributions to the war effort.”<sup>75</sup> It was under German occupation that Latvian cultural symbols, such as the anthem and folk songs, returned to Latvia.

Under Nazi occupation, various forms of collaboration existed to enable the killing of more than 90 percent of the prewar Jewish population.<sup>76</sup> The limited research on the topic has touched on some of the most striking examples, such as the Arājs Commandos. This unit of indigenous murderers—subordinated to the German *Sicherheitsdienst*—lacked a counterpart in other regions that were under German control.<sup>77</sup> The group, led by Viktors Arājs (1910–1988), a Latvian nationalist partially of German descent, consisted of students and far-right military officials.<sup>78</sup> With well over one thousand members, it was responsible for the killing of around twenty-six thousand Jews, Gypsies, and people regarded as mentally ill, also in neighboring Lithuania and Belarus.

The 2005 commemorations of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II added a new layer of conflict to the mnemonic tensions between Russia and the three Baltic States. Notably, Latvia’s Russian-language media reported widely on the Russian celebrations in Riga. Since then, commemorations held by the Russian-speaking population have steadily increased. Research has identified that those participating in such commemorations identify less with Latvia and more with the Russian Federation.<sup>79</sup> With the highest number of Russian-speakers in the Baltics, Latvia is indeed an important case for understanding the implications of this societal division.

Russia invests substantial resources in activities involving Russophone populations, be it in Crimea or elsewhere.<sup>80</sup> The Baltic States, notably Latvia and Estonia, are a key area of such attention,<sup>81</sup> and the Russian media serves as a particularly powerful means of exercising control and spreading information. Television seems to influence the Russian community in Latvia, substantiating the divide between the country’s two linguistic communities and shaping the conflicting mnemonic narratives.<sup>82</sup> The rebirth of Russian nationalism plays an increasingly central role in the Russian media, and those consuming it are not exposed to the histories of Soviet occupation or violence committed against Latvians. Particularly striking in the mnemonic frontier is the use of the term *genocide*. Its use in the Latvian media—as a synonym for Soviet atrocities to push for the recognition of suffering and victimhood—contrasts with the term’s neglect in the Russian-language media. Russia’s annexation of Crimea has further amplified divisions between the Russian and the Latvian mnemonic community and “brought back anxious memories of the Soviet Empire.”<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, this discourse of a clear-cut opposition between linguistic communities is not simply replicated in everyday practice. Here, the divide is less rigid than state rhetoric suggests. Research on Latvian Russian-speakers living in London has highlighted this permeability.<sup>84</sup> In the same vein, Cheskin argues that it would be mistaken to assume that the majority of Russian-speakers has simply internalized the Russian version of history. Based on a survey conducted on 9 May 2011, he identified a move towards a democratization of historical understanding among Russian-speakers in Latvia.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the survey data highlighted the importance of generational differences, with younger Russophone Latvians being more likely to accept the Latvian national version of history. This seems to mirror the effect of reforms in the school curriculum, and the increasing emphasis placed upon the Latvian language.

### **Data and Analysis: Understanding Young People's Views of the Past**

At the Berlin-based Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), we commissioned a survey among one thousand Latvians and two thousand Belarusians living in the country's largest urban areas.<sup>86</sup> The survey included questions related to the political and social attitudes of people aged sixteen to thirty-four years, and also aimed to explore their historical memories. The sample was based on a quota to ensure the representation of the reference population regarding age, gender, income, and place of residence. In Belarus, we included the cities of Minsk, Brest, Vitsebsk, Hrodno, Homyel, and Mogilev; in Latvia, we included the cities of Riga, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Jūrmala, Liepāja, Rēzekne, Valmiera, and Ventspils.

Respondents completed the survey online. Such a method comes with certain advantages and drawbacks. If freedom of expression is limited, as in Belarus, it is clearly advantageous that respondents do not face another person when answering potentially sensitive questions such as those related to their views on national history. In addition, the online medium is a form of communication that young people are particularly used to. Using an online survey may therefore help to minimize hesitations in the respondent, enabling them to answer more sincerely. Another advantage is that the costs are significantly lower than for conventional surveys. On the flipside, the obvious drawback of an online survey is the impossibility to control the immediate environment in which respondents answer the questions.

Both survey samples were drawn from an actively managed consumer panel, which includes extensive quality controls and face-to-face recruitment. We used a digital fingerprint technology to prevent respondents from filling in the survey more than once; information on gender, age, place of residence, and income indicated in the survey were cross-checked with information that the company managing the

panel holds. Online penetration in both countries is sufficiently high to enable reliable investigation of the major urban areas.

### **Dependent Variable: Collaboration and Facing the Past**

This article aims to understand the memories of young people in relation to the collaboration of their home countries in the Holocaust, and in relation to the issue of the moral importance of critically confronting one's national history. To that end, two sets of analyses are undertaken.

The first analysis takes as a dependent variable the responses to the following question:

Do you think it is true that some [Belarusians/Latvians] collaborated during the Great Patriotic War with the Nazi forces and thereby contributed to the killing of Jews during the Holocaust?

The response options consisted of "yes," "no," and "do not know." Respondents also had the opportunity to skip this question (as all other questions in the survey). In the analysis below, all three response options are kept separate, leading to three distinct dependent variables, each of which was dummy coded into 1 if this option was chosen, or 0 if otherwise. It was a conscious decision not to specify the form of collaboration, but to instead get a sense of the extent to which there is a reckoning of the fact that *some* kind of collaboration with the Nazi forces actually existed.

A second analysis revolves around questions of whether respondents feel that there is a need to recognize and critically confront the actions of their country during the Holocaust. To that end, each country's sample was split in half, respecting the set quotas; otherwise respondents were allocated to each group on a random basis. Both groups received one question that related to the issue of collaboration during the Holocaust and whether it seemed important to recognize collaboration, rather than to continue underlining that the war was a patriotic fight for the homeland and thus using the war for the goal of nation-building. One group, the control group, received this question without any further specification. The treatment group, meanwhile, got a question with a speaker who had previously emphasized this need for a critical confrontation of the national past.

In Belarus, the questions read as follows:

Do you agree that it is more important to critically confront the participation of Belarus in the Holocaust and come to terms with the national past, rather than to continue to insist that the Great Patriotic War was only a patriotic struggle for the Soviet homeland? (Control Group)

Recently, Svetlana Aleksiyevich stressed that it is more important to critically confront the participation of Belarus in the Holocaust and come to terms with the national past, rather than to continue to insist that the Great Patriotic War was only a patriotic struggle for the Soviet homeland. Do you agree with her? (Treatment Group)

In Latvia, the questions read as follows:

Do you agree that it is more important to critically confront the Latvian involvement in the Holocaust and come to terms with the national past rather than to continue insisting that the war was a patriotic fight for the homeland? (Control Group)

Recently, the Commission of the Historians of Latvia underlined in a book publication that it is more important to critically confront the Latvian involvement in the Holocaust and come to terms with the national past rather than to continue insisting that the war was a patriotic fight for the homeland. Do you agree with this view? (Treatment Group)

When designing the survey, it was decided that it was more important to generate a plausible scenario for respondents than to enforce the exact same wording in both countries. Therefore, the type of speaker differs in the questions put to the respondents in the two countries, but each example is authentic, that is, both Svetlana Alekseyevich and the Commission of the Historians of Latvia have made these calls.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the issue of collaboration and the representation of World War II differs in both countries. Therefore, it seemed implausible to use exactly the same question wording. In an ideal experimental setting, one would use and compare the exact same questions, but in the present design, the framing of the questions was designed to be meaningful to each country. Indeed, the choice to force exact equivalence might have confused participants and led to a lower response quality. As in the first analysis, respondents had the option to express agreement and disagreement, or to state that they did not know how to respond. All three options were retained and dummy coded.

## Independent Variables

The analysis includes a set of explanatory and control variables that are expected to have a bearing on respondents' views on history.

It can be expected that respondents with a higher level of education might demonstrate a heightened awareness of the existence of collaboration during World War II, and of the need to critically engage with one's own past. To this end, a variable for *education* (coded on a scale from 1 to 4 ranging from less than secondary to completed full higher education, mean value for Belarus 2.0 and Latvia 2.9) and *historical knowledge* (coded on a scale from 1 to 4 for self-assessed historical knowledge about the country's history, mean value for Belarus 2.4 and Latvia 3) is included in the model. In the case of Latvia, a variable that relates to the language that respondents consider to be their mother tongue is included. Three independent variables capture whether a respondent indicates Latvian, Russian, or both.

It can also be expected that trust in state institutions will raise the loyalty to the mnemonic narrative that these institutions develop. To explore this aspect, different variables of institutional trust (all coded on a scale from 1 to 4) are part of the analysis. In the case of Belarus, trust in the *president* (mean value 2.5) and the Orthodox

*Church* (mean value 2.3) are included; in Latvia, trust in the *parliament* (mean value 1.7) and the *army* (mean value 2.9) are included. This choice of variables makes sense given that Latvia is a parliamentary democracy, whereas Belarus is centered on the president. Moreover, the Church plays an important role in Belarusian sociopolitical life, but has lower visibility in Latvia. To sense the influence of attitudes towards a traditional state-power institution, the army was included in the Latvian case. The analysis also includes a variable relating to the frequency at which respondents participate in religious services (scale from 1 to 5, mean value for Belarus and Latvia 1.9).<sup>88</sup>

In Belarus, the use of the social media site vKontakte stands out as a primary source for acquiring information. The survey asked about the media that respondents use as their first source of information (YouTube is also important, but the alternative broader online media category does not change the results). Also, as a second variable on media usage, the survey asked whether respondents use TV, radio, or newspapers, which are largely state controlled. In Latvia, the media is more diverse, and it would not make sense to try and fit clear-cut categories on the various web portals and TV stations. Instead, for Latvia a variable trust in the *Russian media* (mean value 1.5) was included as this seemed an important variable to further gauge the linguistic divisions within the population.

For both cases, control variables are *age* (ranging from 16 to 34), the household *economic situation* (scale from 1 to 7, mean value for Belarus 3.9, for Latvia 4.1, determined by asking for the household's socio-economic position), and *gender* (female being coded as 0). Living in the capital is also included and coded as 1 for those living in the capital cities of each country, respectively.

## Collaboration and National Perpetrators in the Holocaust?

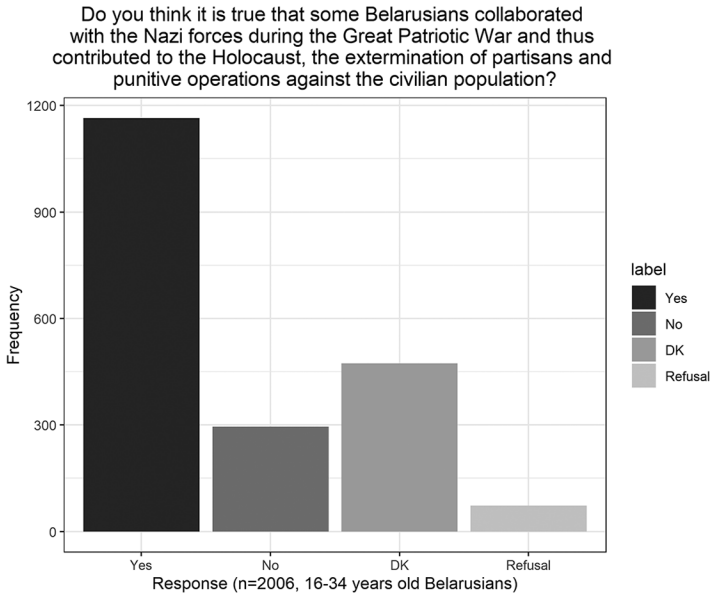
### Did Collaboration Exist?

The issue of collaboration with the Nazis during World War II has been treated very differently in Belarus and Latvia. To what extent do young respondents differ in their view on whether citizens of their country collaborated with the Nazi occupiers during the war?

In Belarus, nearly 60 percent of the sampled population acknowledged that some form of collaboration took place (Figure 1). Around 24 percent avoided the question, by stating that they did not know what to answer. In Latvia, however, the picture looks markedly different, with a very dispersed set of answers (Figure 2). The most frequent response among those surveyed was that they did not know the answer, followed in close succession by those who thought that there was collaboration and those who thought there was none.

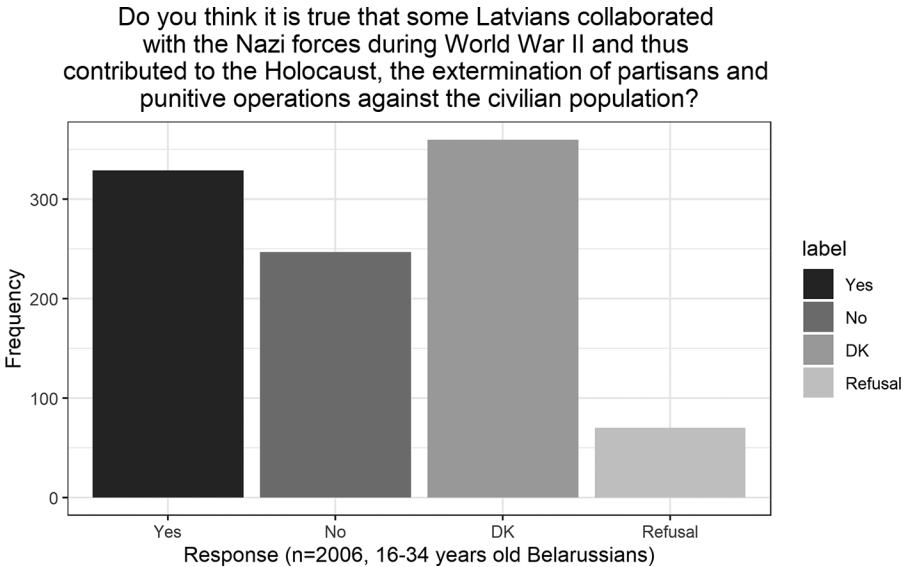


**Figure 1**  
**Views on Collaboration in Belarus**



Comparing these distributions is already intriguing. Across the European Union, there is the expectation of a self-reflexive narrative of history—which includes a recognition of one’s own guilt and the active involvement in the crimes committed during World War II. However, Latvian youth, on average, do not believe that collaboration occurred, and instead take a somewhat defensive position on their country’s history. By contrast, youth in Belarus, who grew up under an authoritarian system with limited freedom of expression and who live in a country where the state has crafted the historical memory with an emphasis on the partisan myth, are more likely to state that some form of collaboration took place.<sup>89</sup> Below the surface of the rigid state discourse in Belarus, young people have developed their own independent thinking, certainly with regard to the country’s historical trajectory. Moreover, the views on collaboration point to the extent to which young people in Latvia might share in the impression that their memory is being threatened and that they need to defend a nation-affirming view of history. In the case of Belarus, on the other hand, the partisan myth seems unchallenged, whereas young people might be aware of the limitations of the state-imposed view on history and therefore more at ease with admitting the fact that collaboration was bound to exist.

**Figure 2**  
**Views on Collaboration in Latvia**



### **Affirming Collaboration in Belarus**

What characterizes those respondents who believe that collaboration took place? Looking at socio-economic variables, the effect of age and gender strongly predict who affirms that collaboration took place (Table 1). Being male increases the odds of asserting that collaboration existed by 56 percent, while older people are also more likely to affirm collaboration. The older share of young people often had the chance to travel abroad and many continue to maintain ties to friends and family members abroad, which affects their political and historical views through the remittances that these networks channel. Younger respondents were more likely to oppose the fact that collaboration existed, whereas women were more likely to indicate that they do not know whether collaboration took place. The level of education matters, with higher education relating to higher likelihood of agreeing with the existence of collaboration and lower education having the inverse effect. Household wealth or religiosity have no statistically significant effect.

Looking beyond the socio-economic indicators, the level of trust expressed in the president further relates in important ways to views on collaboration. The higher the

**Table 1**  
**Regression Belarus Views on Collaboration**

	Dependent variable: Do you think it is true that Belarusians collaborated during the Great Patriotic War with the Nazi forces and thereby contributed to the killing of Jews during the Holocaust?		
	Yes	No	DK
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Age	1.362* (0.955, 1.768)	0.593** (0.378, 0.807)	1.069 (0.679, 1.459)
Gender	1.559** (1.111, 2.006)	0.803 (0.517, 1.088)	0.636* (0.413, 0.859)
Minsk	1.257 (0.911, 1.604)	1.014 (0.670, 1.358)	0.703* (0.469, 0.938)
Wealth	1.005 (0.717, 1.292)	1.162 (0.748, 1.577)	0.860 (0.563, 1.158)
Education	1.497* (1.031, 1.963)	0.677* (0.417, 0.938)	0.813 (0.513, 1.112)
Religiosity	0.843 (0.610, 1.077)	0.931 (0.608, 1.255)	1.357 (0.914, 1.800)
Trust President	0.621** (0.427, 0.814)	1.160 (0.714, 1.605)	1.804** (1.109, 2.499)
Trust Church	0.682* (0.459, 0.905)	1.326 (0.793, 1.858)	1.383 (0.832, 1.935)
VKontakte	1.091 (0.691, 1.491)	0.652 (0.343, 0.961)	1.309 (0.738, 1.879)
State Media	0.857 (0.585, 1.128)	1.038 (0.637, 1.439)	1.228 (0.762, 1.694)
Historical Knowledge	1.864*** (1.300, 2.427)	1.017 (0.653, 1.380)	0.361*** (0.218, 0.504)
Constant	1.761*** (1.504, 2.018)	0.203*** (0.166, 0.240)	0.206*** (0.166, 0.246)
Observations	980	980	980
Log likelihood	-613.149	-448.456	-458.689
Akaike information criterion	1,250.299	920.912	941.378

\* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

trust in Lukashenka, the lower the probability that a respondent acknowledges that collaboration took place. Inversely, higher trust increases the likelihood to say no, but is only statistically significant for those who indicate that they do not know what response to give, indicating a limited reach of the presidential rhetoric. Low trust in

the Church significantly predicts agreement with the idea that collaboration existed. There is no significant effect for the kind of media that respondents consume. Moreover, self-assessed historical knowledge is a significant factor for understanding the responses. Those who indicate that they have a high historical knowledge have nearly double the odds to affirm the existence of collaboration. Lower historical knowledge has no effect on believing that there was no collaboration, but a large effect on indicating that one does not know whether collaboration took place.<sup>90</sup>

### **Affirming Collaboration in Latvia**

In the case of Latvia, the statistically most significant and substantive effects relate to a respondent's self-declared mother tongue (Table 2). The odds to state that collaboration took place are more than seven times higher among those who indicate that their native language is Russian, whereas they are nearly 70 percent less likely to indicate that no collaboration existed or that they do not know what to respond. For native speakers of Latvian, the direction of the effect is the opposite. Although the coefficients are smaller, they remain highly significant and substantive. For those who indicate that both languages are their mother tongue, no statistically significant effect can be identified for views on collaboration. The integrated narrative regarding Latvia's national history is therefore clearly dividing the young population along lines of linguistic division, with Latvian speakers being significantly more assertive about a positive view of their country's history, speaking to the idea of a defense of national history mentioned above. By contrast, the Russophone population is prepared to acknowledge the existence of collaboration and to critically engage with Latvia's national history, clearly also reflecting the contemporary historical discourse crafted within Russia on the Baltic countries.<sup>91</sup>

Beyond the linguistic divide, the self-assessed historical knowledge also plays a key role in what answer respondents give regarding the issue of collaboration. The higher the historical knowledge, irrespective of one's mother tongue, the more likely one is to side with one of the clear response options—to say yes or no—but the less likely one is to state that one does not know, though not all results achieve levels of conventional statistical significance. Moreover, respondents who indicate that both languages are their mother tongues are twice as likely to affirm that collaboration existed if their level of trust in the Russian media is higher; inversely, lower trust in Russian media predicts that respondents are less likely to state that no collaboration took place. Trust in parliament does not generate a clear picture, though higher trust increases the likelihood that respondents state they do not know what to answer. The level of education is largely irrelevant, as is religiosity, trust in the army, gender, and age.

In Belarus and Latvia, two different pictures regarding views on collaboration can be identified. In the former, it is the relationship to the country's power structures and the level of education that informs an individual's opinion. In the latter, the linguistic divide dominates responses and the type of media that one consumes.

Table 2  
Regression Latvia Views on Collaboration

Dependent variable: Do you think it is true that Latvians collaborated during the Great Patriotic War with the Nazi forces and thereby contributed to the killing of Jews during the Holocaust?								
	Yes			No			DK	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(9)
Latvian	0.340** (0.102, 0.578)			3.004* (0.254, 5.754)			1.439 (0.429, 2.450)	
Russian		7.094*** (1.543, 12.645)			0.329** (0.064, 0.595)			0.341** (0.071, 0.610)
Both			0.497 (0.121, 0.874)			1.528 (0.162, 2.894)		1.673 (0.477, 2.869)
Age	1.075 (0.460, 1.689)	0.974 (0.404, 1.544)	0.851 (0.370, 1.331)	1.683 (0.553, 2.813)	1.917 (0.635, 3.199)	2.030* (0.676, 3.385)	0.667 (0.296, 1.037)	0.665 (0.297, 1.034)
Gender	1.115 (0.550, 1.680)	1.140 (0.544, 1.736)	1.227 (0.612, 1.841)	0.928 (0.414, 1.441)	0.927 (0.411, 1.442)	0.874 (0.394, 1.353)	0.947 (0.485, 1.409)	0.919 (0.471, 1.366)
Riga	1.621 (0.741, 2.502)	1.651 (0.729, 2.574)	1.855* (0.858, 2.851)	0.809 (0.346, 1.271)	0.799 (0.340, 1.258)	0.734 (0.318, 1.151)	0.731 (0.358, 1.104)	0.683 (0.335, 1.030)
Wealth	1.003 (0.482, 1.524)	0.896 (0.418, 1.374)	0.931 (0.456, 1.405)	0.999 (0.448, 1.550)	1.072 (0.473, 1.672)	1.045 (0.468, 1.623)	0.978 (0.494, 1.462)	1.025 (0.515, 1.534)
Education	1.055 (0.419, 1.691)	1.100 (0.415, 1.785)	1.240 (0.508, 1.973)	1.340 (0.413, 2.267)	1.289 (0.398, 2.180)	1.166 (0.370, 1.962)	0.758 (0.321, 1.196)	0.704 (0.300, 1.107)
Religiosity	0.969 (0.474, 1.465)	1.006 (0.480, 1.532)	0.967 (0.475, 1.458)	1.113 (0.512, 1.715)	1.117 (0.523, 1.711)	1.135 (0.528, 1.742)	0.934 (0.495, 1.419)	0.952 (0.491, 1.412)
Trust Parliament	0.710 (0.325, 1.094)	0.677 (0.299, 1.054)	0.670 (0.314, 1.027)	0.675 (0.285, 1.066)	0.688 (0.290, 1.086)	0.711 (0.299, 1.123)	1.842* (0.888, 2.797)	1.928* (0.926, 2.929)
Trust Russian Media	1.775* (0.758, 2.791)	1.587 (0.656, 2.518)	2.666*** (1.225, 4.106)	0.463 (0.100, 0.826)	0.480 (0.105, 0.855)	0.319** (0.082, 0.555)	0.855 (0.364, 1.347)	0.733 (0.342, 1.124)
Trust Army	1.049 (0.435, 1.663)	1.125 (0.474, 1.777)	0.651 (0.310, 0.992)	1.412 (0.420, 2.403)	1.449 (0.490, 2.409)	2.177* (0.752, 3.603)	0.744 (0.320, 1.168)	0.893 (0.430, 1.356)
Historical Knowledge	1.670 (0.792, 2.549)	1.923* (0.860, 2.986)	1.471 (0.715, 2.227)	2.126* (0.860, 3.392)	2.091* (0.857, 3.325)	2.359** (0.977, 3.742)	0.364*** (0.178, 0.550)	0.376*** (0.186, 0.566)
Constant	0.498*** (0.371, 0.624)	0.508*** (0.375, 0.640)	0.518*** (0.389, 0.648)	0.287*** (0.196, 0.378)	0.015 (-4.440, 4.470)	0.292*** (0.202, 0.383)	0.587*** (0.445, 0.729)	0.577*** (0.436, 0.718)
Observations	315	315	315	315	315	315	315	315
Log likelihood	-185.469	-176.788	-188.402	-160.265	-152.861	-162.872	-195.440	-194.974
Akaike information criterion	394.937	377.576	400.803	344.529	329.722	349.744	414.881	413.947

\*p < 0.1; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01.

### Facing Your Country’s Wrongdoings: A Vignette Experiment

The second analysis considers respondents’ perspectives on the need for a critical confrontation with their country’s past, and considers the extent to which young people change their perspective when reminded of a speaker who has some degree of authority. The responses suggest that the effect of the treatment question (above) was effective in Belarus (Table 3). Those who received a vignette in which the famous author Svetlana Aleksiyevich stressed the need for a critical confrontation with one’s past were much more likely to affirm that they also believed that one should self-critically face one’s country’s past. They were also much less likely to not have an opinion on the topic. In Latvia, however, those who received a question mentioning the Commission of the Historians of Latvia, did not differ from the control group in their view on whether or not a critical confrontation with the past is desirable. If anything, the treatment made respondents less likely to say no and, instead, they stated they did not know.

**Table 3**  
**Descriptives for Effects of Treatment in Belarus and Latvia**

	Yes	No	DK
Belarus: Control	31%	29%	40%
Belarus: Treatment	43%	25%	32%
Latvia: Control	43%	36%	21%
Latvia: Treatment	41%	31%	28%

Note: Values represent percentage of subsample.

It is remarkable that young Belarusians are more likely to affirm that collaboration took place, as the previous analysis has demonstrated. However, moving on to the second issue of critically facing your country’s wrongdoings, it is staggering that they were less likely than their Latvian peers to state that a critical confrontation with one’s history should take place if no treatment question was given. On the abstract level at least, when it is not directly related to the issue of collaboration during the Holocaust, young Latvians are therefore more prepared to engage with their country’s history in a self-critical way. Those respondents in Latvia who agree that collaboration took place also state that a critical engagement with national history should take place (Spearman coefficient of 0.33), whereas those who state that no collaboration took place also are more likely to have stated that no critical engagement with national history should take place (Spearman coefficient of 0.21).

### The Power of a Moral Authority in Belarus

Young people in Belarus strongly shift their assessment if presented with Aleksiyevich urging for a critical confrontation with the country’s history. These



**Table 4**  
**Regression Belarus: Critical Confrontation of Own History**

	Dependent variable: Do you agree that it is more important to critically confront the Belarusian involvement in the Holocaust and come to terms with the national past rather than to continue insisting that the war was a patriotic fight for the homeland?		
	Facing Past Yes	Facing Past No	Facing Past DK
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Treatment Group	2.094*** (1.526, 2.663)	0.658** (0.475, 0.841)	0.676** (0.481, 0.870)
Age	0.714* (0.483, 0.945)	1.409* (0.945, 1.873)	1.014 (0.660, 1.367)
Gender	1.013 (0.722, 1.303)	1.390* (0.981, 1.799)	0.687* (0.477, 0.897)
Minsk	1.249 (0.904, 1.593)	0.897 (0.644, 1.151)	0.879 (0.621, 1.136)
Wealth	0.974 (0.697, 1.252)	1.358* (0.957, 1.759)	0.739 (0.512, 0.967)
Education	1.081 (0.742, 1.420)	0.639** (0.435, 0.844)	1.469* (0.975, 1.962)
Religiosity	0.928 (0.671, 1.185)	1.017 (0.727, 1.306)	1.082 (0.763, 1.402)
Trust President	0.581*** (0.401, 0.761)	1.169 (0.802, 1.537)	1.582** (1.055, 2.110)
Trust Church	0.721* (0.488, 0.953)	1.213 (0.812, 1.614)	1.190 (0.773, 1.607)
VKontakte	1.017 (0.649, 1.385)	0.956 (0.601, 1.312)	1.017 (0.621, 1.414)
State Media	1.076 (0.726, 1.427)	0.861 (0.573, 1.149)	1.085 (0.716, 1.454)
Historical Knowledge	1.436* (1.029, 1.844)	1.153 (0.820, 1.487)	0.534*** (0.361, 0.707)
Constant	0.661*** (0.568, 0.754)	0.440*** (0.374, 0.505)	0.369*** (0.310, 0.428)
Observations	965	965	965
Log likelihood	-612.100	-587.479	-554.579
Akaike information criterion	1,250.200	1,200.957	1,135.157

Note: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

respondents agree significantly more often with the need for a critical confrontation with their country's past (Table 4). It doubles the odds of a respondent agreeing with the need for critical confrontation and decreases the odds of a respondent saying that

this is not necessary by 35 percent, and it also decreases the likelihood of stating “do not know” by more than 30 percent. Moreover, self-assessed historical knowledge plays a large role. Respondents with a higher self-assessed historical knowledge are more likely to say that they recognize a need for critical confrontation with the history of their own country, irrespective of the kind of group to which they were assigned. Respondents with less historical knowledge are more likely to say that they do not know. Those respondents with a lower level of education are in a statistically significant way more likely to say that they do not agree with the need for a critical confrontation of one’s country’s past.

The two trust items, related to the President and the Church, play a significant role. They both work in opposite directions, which is to say that a higher level of trust in the President decreases the probability of agreeing with the need to critically confront one’s past, but increases the likelihood of stating no or do not know to the question. Low trust in the Church significantly increases the likelihood of agreeing with the need for a critical confrontation of one’s past. It is worth noting that for some time now, the Orthodox Church has taken a more critical position towards the crimes of Stalinism, and has become an actor that has contributed to the critical assessment of national history. Moreover, the Church does not primarily amplify the discourse of political power, as is the case in neighboring Russia. Rather, it has assumed an identity distinct from the state, which explains these results.

A number of other variables are important for understanding the responses. Socio-economic status turns out to be a statistically significant item. Respondents with a higher level of household wealth are more likely to disagree with the need to critically confront the past, whereas those with lower levels of household income are less likely to reply that they do not know what to say (though this is not statistically significant). Gender is statistically significant, with men being more likely to say no and less likely to say that they do not know. Exposure to media, however, merely has a small and statistically insignificant effect on the responses—be it the state-controlled or Internet media.

## **Latvia’s Linguistic Divide in Memory**

In Latvia, the effect of language also dominates the assessment of whether one ought to critically confront one’s national history (Table 5). In line with the above, native speakers of Latvian are almost 60 percent less likely to agree with the need for a critical confrontation with national history and more than three times as likely to say that no critical confrontation with the past is required. The opposite effect occurs for Russian speakers, who are twice as likely to agree with the need for critical confrontation of their country’s past. As the frequency analysis of the responses has already indicated, there is a treatment effect only insofar as the presence of the named speaker in the vignette increases the likelihood that respondents will state that they do not know whether one should critically engage with one’s past.

**Table 5**  
**Regression Latvia: Critical Confrontation of Own History**

Regression: Latvia									
Dependent variable: Do you agree that it is more important to critically confront the Latvian involvement in the Holocaust and come to terms with the national past rather than to continue insisting that the war was a patriotic fight for the homeland?									
Facing Past Yes					Facing Past No				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Treatment Group	0.741	0.758	0.736	0.731	0.710	0.758	2.555**	2.624**	2.547**
	(0.393, 1.089)	(0.402, 1.114)	(0.394, 1.079)	(0.384, 1.079)	(0.373, 1.046)	(0.407, 1.110)	(1.013, 4.097)	(1.035, 4.213)	(1.011, 4.082)
Latvian	0.423**			3.522***			0.646		
	(0.167, 0.679)			(1.248, 5.796)			(0.194, 1.099)		
Russian		2.162*			0.273***			1.644	
		(0.726, 3.597)			(0.067, 0.478)			(0.400, 2.889)	
Both			1.388			0.662			1.084
			(0.464, 2.312)			(0.195, 1.130)			(0.215, 1.954)
Age	0.672	0.614*	0.641	1.177	1.326	1.270	1.405	1.347	1.357
	(0.308, 1.037)	(0.283, 0.945)	(0.296, 0.987)	(0.542, 1.812)	(0.616, 2.035)	(0.599, 1.941)	(0.465, 2.345)	(0.449, 2.244)	(0.449, 2.265)
Gender	1.025	1.045	1.055	1.432	1.377	1.330	0.572*	0.580*	0.586*
	(0.545, 1.505)	(0.558, 1.532)	(0.567, 1.544)	(0.751, 2.112)	(0.729, 2.026)	(0.713, 1.946)	(0.230, 0.913)	(0.234, 0.926)	(0.238, 0.933)
Riga	0.676	0.704	0.739	1.498	1.424	1.300	1.003	1.014	1.044
	(0.344, 1.008)	(0.361, 1.047)	(0.383, 1.095)	(0.741, 2.255)	(0.714, 2.133)	(0.665, 1.935)	(0.388, 1.618)	(0.394, 1.634)	(0.410, 1.679)
Wealth	1.284	1.211	1.241	0.681	0.743	0.724	1.242	1.194	1.200
	(0.672, 1.897)	(0.638, 1.783)	(0.653, 1.828)	(0.354, 1.008)	(0.389, 1.096)	(0.383, 1.065)	(0.495, 1.989)	(0.481, 1.907)	(0.481, 1.920)
Education	1.539	1.621	1.646	0.769	0.719	0.700	0.792	0.807	0.830
	(0.666, 2.413)	(0.705, 2.538)	(0.722, 2.569)	(0.339, 1.200)	(0.319, 1.119)	(0.317, 1.084)	(0.249, 1.336)	(0.254, 1.359)	(0.264, 1.395)
Religiosity	1.517	1.492	1.418	0.797	0.819	0.874	0.681	0.686	0.658
	(0.804, 2.229)	(0.798, 2.185)	(0.763, 2.072)	(0.410, 1.183)	(0.433, 1.205)	(0.461, 1.286)	(0.249, 1.113)	(0.246, 1.125)	(0.242, 1.075)
Trust Parliament	1.196	1.108	1.079	0.899	0.993	1.044	0.847	0.827	0.784
	(0.623, 1.769)	(0.586, 1.629)	(0.574, 1.583)	(0.464, 1.333)	(0.523, 1.463)	(0.553, 1.535)	(0.338, 1.355)	(0.337, 1.318)	(0.323, 1.245)
Trust Russian Media	1.012	1.123	1.425	1.132	0.988	0.686	0.839	0.831	0.993
	(0.491, 1.534)	(0.559, 1.686)	(0.786, 2.063)	(0.519, 1.746)	(0.471, 1.506)	(0.369, 1.003)	(0.323, 1.355)	(0.317, 1.346)	(0.448, 1.538)
Historical Knowledge	1.857*	1.810*	1.817	1.142	1.181	1.349	0.340***	0.336***	0.317***
	(0.953, 2.761)	(0.928, 2.691)	(0.859, 2.378)	(0.584, 1.700)	(0.610, 1.752)	(0.713, 1.984)	(0.138, 0.542)	(0.136, 0.536)	(0.132, 0.503)
Constant	0.619***	0.632***	0.628***	0.649***	0.632***	0.660***	0.215***	0.218***	0.218***
	(0.471, 0.766)	(0.482, 0.781)	(0.479, 0.776)	(0.494, 0.804)	(0.481, 0.783)	(0.507, 0.814)	(0.147, 0.283)	(0.149, 0.286)	(0.150, 0.286)
Observations	332	332	332	332	332	332	332	332	332
Log likelihood	-211.849	-213.202	-215.341	-207.655	-209.158	-207.655	-150.830	-150.753	-151.553
Akaike information criterion	447.697	450.405	454.682	439.310	442.315	439.310	325.660	325.506	327.105

\*p < 0.1; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01.

Beyond language, the variables of age, self-assessed historical knowledge, and gender turn out to be statistically significant in some of the models. Younger respondents tend to be more critical and agree more with the need to critically confront one's past across all language groups, probably reflecting the discourse found within schools. However, age is statistically significant only for Russophone Latvians. Historical knowledge significantly increases the likelihood of agreeing with the need for a critical assessment and decreases the probability of stating that one does not know whether it is needed, irrespective of the indicated mother tongue. Across language groups, gender is relevant as women are in a statistically significant way more likely to say that they do not know. Wealth, living in the capital city, or consuming Russian media, however, have no statistically relevant effects in this analysis.

The linguistic divisions in Latvia are clearly manifest in the view on history that both groups express. In the vignette experiment, self-declared mother tongue has the largest effect and is key for differentiating between those who state yes or no to the question of whether one needs to critically confront the past of one's country. In Belarus, the presence of a named authoritative speaker within the question has the most sizeable effect on respondents' views. Other variables, such as the relation to the state or the level of a respondent's historical knowledge also continue to play a crucial role.

## Conclusion

This article has analyzed one aspect of the historical assessments that young people in two countries at the Western periphery of the former Soviet Union remember. Belarus and Latvia have engaged in very different ways with their national history, and vary in the extent to which they have emphasized the role of local perpetrators in the Holocaust, and thus of collaboration during World War II. In Belarus, national identity has been constructed around the partisan narrative with collaboration being foreign to the official discourse. The emphasis on this narrative has remained constant since the post-war period. In Latvia, however, the relationship with World War II is more complex, as evinced by the existence of a significant Russophone population and continuing contestation over how to commemorate, on a national level, the country's Soviet and Nazi occupations. At the same time, Latvia, as with the other two Baltic States, has strived for integration into the European mnemonic sphere and has lobbied for the recognition of the violence of Stalinism being equal to that of Hitlerism.

For assessing memories in relation to these contested periods of national history, this article makes use of a survey that is representative of urban youth in both countries. From the survey, two questions were used that investigate whether respondents believe in the existence of collaboration and whether they see a need to critically confront one's own national history. In this respect, the identified differences between Latvia and Belarus, and the importance of the linguistic division in Latvia, offer avenues for

further research and for deeper exploration of the competing discursive elements that might explain why these differences have come to exist. I do not hesitate to emphasize that while a survey offers the advantage of allowing insights into the reception of mnemonic narratives, it does not allow one to trace the production of these narratives and to identify the interesting micro-argumentative structures in which individuals embed them. Although this remains a task to be addressed through further research, the present article has hopefully indicated the potential of combining large-scale survey work, the study of memory, and historical representations as they exist in the present.

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## Notes

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90. For better interpretations, the coefficients are standardized. Variables that take on more than two values are each rescaled to have a mean of 0 and an SD of 0.5. Binary variables are rescaled to have a mean of 0 and a difference of 1 between their two categories.

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