CONSTRUCTING MEMORY: CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITY

Edited by
Hanna Bazhenova

Instytut Europy Środkowej

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List of Abbreviations

BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence
BPR	Belarusian People's Republic
BSSR	Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPU	Communist Party of Ukraine
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EUROCLIO	European Association of History Educators
FSB	Federal Security Service
GDL	Grand Duchy of Lithuania
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GKChP	State Committee on the State of Emergency
HEH	House of European History
IHRA	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
JMTG-U	Joint Multinational Training Group Ukraine
KGB	Committee for State Security
LGGRTC	Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania

LITPOLUKRBRIG	Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian military brigade
MASSR	Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MGB	Ministry of State Security
MSSR	Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAWA	Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OUN	Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PCRM	Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
UINM	Ukrainian Institute of National Memory
UPA	Ukrainian Insurgent Army
UPR	Ukrainian People's Republic
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VR	virtual reality

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INTRODUCTION

Changes in Central and Eastern European Politics of History in the Context of Russian Aggression

Hanna Bazhenova

Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine that began on 24 February 2022 has unexpectedly given new colours to the notion of "desovietisation". Although it is hard to predict the outcome of the war at the time of writing of this monograph, it is evident that the ongoing warfare has triggered a reshaping of the entire geopolitical, security, and value architecture of the post-Soviet space and the whole of Europe. These shifts have in turn challenged the very object and framework of post-Soviet studies, including analysis of historical politics in the region.

By invading Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin destroyed the existing fragile consensus that the states of the region had managed to achieve in relation to the Soviet period. Irrespective of assessments of this period, it had already begun to be perceived as a bygone era. The Russian president justified his decision by citing fundamentally

contradictory and manipulative goals of conducting the "decommunisation" and "denazification" of Ukraine.[1] These references inter alia highlight that the current all-out war is a war over territory as much as memory. By means of this aggression, the Russian authorities seek to return not only to the former Soviet borders, but also to an imagined Soviet-era consensus about the recent past.

Putin's progressing historical revisionism[2] instrumentally intertwined reflections of a common European politics of history, which regards Nazism as the "ultimate evil", and of Leonid Brezhnev's vision of the Soviet Union as the defender against this evil and the liberator of peoples. There was also an attempt to challenge the results of Soviet national policy and the political project embodied in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) itself. For instance, the legitimacy of the territorial-administrative structure of the USSR was questioned. Putin argues that Ukrainians have never been a nation[3] and that Ukraine has no historical claim to independent statehood. On 21 February 2022, he even stated that modern Ukraine was "entirely created by Russia".[4] Most likely, the choice of the date for the start of the war was not accidental, since the day before, 23 February, Russia celebrated Defender of the Fatherland Day (the former Red Army Day). This can be considered

1 Антон Антонов, "Путин заявил о готовности России показать Украине «настоящую декоммунизацию»," *Взгляд. Деловая газета*, 21 февраля 2022, дата обращения 7.11.2022, https://vz.ru/news/2022/2/21/1144888.html.

2 See Бернар-Анри Леви, "Путин, Украина и исторический ревизионизм," *Иносми*, 6 мая 2015, дата обращения 7.11.2022, https://inosmi.ru/20150506/227887651.html; Михаил Соколов, "За Сталина, за Путина?", *Радио Свобода*, 24 декабря 2019, дата обращения 7.11.2022, https://www.svoboda.org/a/30342270.html?fbclid=IwAR3XSOJNKO-AiRfGQLjtQNW7gUkiBVORg8gt9yMeR8bBxRTHzlfCWvDrycc.

3 Владимир Путин, "Об историческом единстве русских и украинцев," *Президент России*, 12 июля 2021, дата обращения 8.11.2022, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181.

4 Idem, "Обращение Президента Российской Федерации," *Президент России*, 21 февраля 2021, дата обращения 10.11.2022, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828.

as an attempt to link modern Russian and Soviet memorial traditions in rather a dramatic way.

It is worth noting that the outbreak of the current war, although propagandistically based on the long and carefully constructed official mythology of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia (in particular, on the concepts of the "Victory over fascism", the "friendship of nations", and the unity of the three fraternal Eastern Slavic peoples), in fact destroys these ideological templates. For example, by referring to the "decommunisation" of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin is rejecting the legitimacy of the Soviet tradition by contrasting it with the doctrine of the "Russian world" (or historical Russia).[5] Simultaneously, the Russian president denies the existing post-Soviet consensus, aiming to change the security architecture in the region by military force and to return to the situation before the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to post-Soviet and post-socialist states. Putin's historical revisionism encourages the states of this region to engage in counter-revisionism, for instance in reassessing the memory of World War II and the Soviet Union's contribution to the defence of Europe against Nazism. This has already led to a spontaneous third wave of demolition of monuments in Central and Eastern European countries, this time targeting the remaining memorial sites of Soviet soldiers.[6] These processes show that

5 The concept of the "Russian world" has been progressively developed by Russia over the last two decades and now serves to justify the military invasion of Ukraine. See Ilya Budraitskis, "The Birth and Death of the 'Russian World': a History of the Concept," *Lefteast*, June 20, 2022, accessed November 15, 2022, https://lefteast.org/the-birth-and-death-of-the-russian-world-a-history-of-the-concept/.

6 See Dmitrijs Andrejevs, "Unhealed Wounds: Russia's Aggression against Ukraine Prompts Baltic States to Remove Soviet Memorials," *Milwaukee Independent*, August 24, 2022, accessed November 14, 2022, https://www.milwaukeeindependent.com/syndicated/unhealed-wounds-russias-aggression-ukraine-prompts-baltic-states-remove-soviet-memorials/; Andrew Higgins, "Soviet Monuments Become Latest Target of Backlash Against War in Ukraine," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2022, accessed November 15, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/25/world/europe/soviet-monuments-war.html.

Soviet-era relics are not neutral signs of a long-gone epoch, but still an important political instrument in the hands of each side.

Over the last two decades, Europe has seen significant changes in the area of historical politics, driven both by the expansion of the European Union (EU) to the east and by the EU's own changing role in world politics. In the 1980s and 1990s, a historical narrative was established at EU level that centred on the Holocaust as an event unique in European history in its scale and consequences. However, with the waves of EU enlargement in 2004, 2007, and 2013, this narrative was challenged by the new Member States.[7] These countries sought to equate Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism by treating the crimes committed by the former and the latter in the same way, thus equating the Gulag with the Holocaust.[8] However, this conflict remained rather latent, as the countries of the post-socialist region, in the hope of joining the EU sooner, imitated the adoption of the Western cosmopolitan canon of history as a "shared European value".[9] At the same time, this made the European politics of history more complicated and susceptible to internal disagreements and conflicts.

How and why did such a situation develop and what was its outcome? In which ways and to what extent can the current war in Ukraine be seen as a reflection of the politics of history of this region and the geopolitical problems that have remained unresolved in the decades since the collapse of the USSR? That is the focus of this collective monograph. The authors discuss different aspects of desovietisation and new geopolitical challenges in the countries of Central and Eastern

7 The Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia entered the European Union in 2004. Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, and Croatia became a member in 2013.

8 Алексей И. Миллер, "Введение. Большие перемены. Что нового в политике памяти и в ее изучении?", in *Политика памяти в современной России и странах Восточной Европы. Акторы, институты, нарративы: коллективная монография*, ред. Алексей Миллер и Дмитрий Ефременко (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге, 2020), 8–9.

9 Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, "Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents," *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 117–128.

Europe, concentrating on recent events that have led to rapid changes. They study the chosen subject from different perspectives: a transnational perspective (EU policy developments, analysed in Georgiy Kasianov's article), regional solutions in a situation of increased insecurity (the Intermarium project, discussed in Przemysław Furgacz's article), the change in the internal politics of countries linked by a common vision of the past (museum representations of the Molotov-Ribbentrop secret protocols and the consequences of Soviet rule in the Baltic States and Moldova, examined in Rasa Čepaitienė's article), and the perspectives of specific countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus) and pseudo-countries (Transnistria).

Structurally, this collective monograph consists of three parts and eight chapters. It is important to see the broader European context in order to understand the dynamics of memory politics in the individual countries of Central and Eastern Europe at the moment. This perspective is presented in detail in the first part of the book. Georgiy Kasianov in his chapter focuses on the description and analysis of projects in the field of history and historical memory aimed at creating a common European supranational identity. The author discusses projects for a pan-European textbook on European history, museum projects (the House of European History), and initiatives of trans-European institutions (the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the European Association of History Educators – EUROCLIO). A special section of the chapter is devoted to the history of the construction of the pan-European memory of the Holocaust. Kasianov critically evaluates the results of the studied projects that aim to construct a common European identity and notes their "moderate success". He also points out that in this particular case, the process may be more important than the immediate result.

The second chapter, written by Przemysław Furgacz, addresses the historical perceptions of the Intermarium idea and describes the revival of this geopolitical agenda in contemporary Poland. The author emphasises that the increasingly expansionist, aggressive, and belligerent Kremlin's policy in Central-Eastern Europe inclines some

of the policy-makers, commentators, and scholars, both inside and outside of the region, to once again revise the idea of Intermarium – an alliance of relatively small and weak states situated between the great powers of Germany and Russia and between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. The primary security provider and protector of these countries – the United States (US) – is evidently pivoting to Asia, and as such, it is also pivoting away from Europe, at least in the long term. Having this in mind, Furgacz also seeks to answer the following questions: Have the states of the region no choice but to form an alliance? Are the states in the region really evolving closer cooperation and alliance on security matters, and if so, is this a permanent trend or just a transitional phenomenon? Is the commonality of interests between Central and Eastern European states sufficiently close to overcome the existing disagreements, differences of opinions, and animosities to form such an informal alliance? Could the Intermarium concept be a viable response and effective antidote to Russia's unfriendly actions as well as acts of unprovoked aggression?

The next part of the book, also consisting of two chapters, focuses on analyses of memory institutions in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova, and Russia. The third chapter, by Rasa Čepaitienė, studies occupation museums in four post-Soviet states: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Moldova. All these countries are united by the fact of their incorporation into the USSR in 1940 as a result of the signing of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The author looks at the narrative that is shaped by the museums of occupation and provides a comparative analysis of the expositions' content in order to identify their semantic and visual similarities and differences. In the course of the research, Čepaitienė observed certain commonalities in terms of plot narrative and visual expression. It is concluded that, despite the efforts of the examined memory institutions to highlight the suffering and injustice experienced by a particular nation during Stalinism, the dramatic narrative created through the museums' work is emotionally quite similar in all of them.

The fourth chapter of the monograph, written by Igor Torbakov, addresses the issue of the persecution and liquidation of Memorial, Russia's oldest and most influential historical-educational and human rights group. The Memorial Movement was born in 1987 and almost immediately became one of the leading agents of democratic change in the country. It concentrated on researching repression in the USSR, restoring the memory of its victims, and on monitoring present-day repression of the political opposition in Russia. This activity, from the Kremlin's perspective, significantly damaged Russia's domestic and international reputation. Torbakov argues that the decision to liquidate Memorial in December 2021 marked the end of an era. The closure of the organisation and the Russian authorities' attempt to establish full control over the historical narrative is merely a means to a larger end. President Putin and his supporters' goal is the revision of the geopolitical results of the demise of the Soviet Union, which in their opinion was the biggest catastrophe of the 20th century.

The third part of the monograph consists of four detailed studies that discuss the discourses and diverse practices of memory politics in Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. The fifth chapter, written by Alla Kyrydon, offers an overview of the content and the main trends of memory politics in Ukraine over the years of its independence. The author's focus is on the years from 1991–2021, which she separates into six phases. Kyrydon shows that during these phases, the conceptual framework of memory politics changed and a new memory canon was formed. However, no comprehensive consolidating vision of the past has been constructed, and the politics of memory has remained non-systemic, selective, and situational. At the same time, Russia's full-scale military aggression evidently accelerated the elimination of Soviet heritage, the establishment of a Ukraine-centric model of memory, and the creation of a new pantheon of heroes, a new catalogue of places of memory, and new memorial practices.

The sixth and seventh chapters of the book address different aspects of the politics of history in Belarus after the 2020 protests against the existing regime. In the sixth chapter, Aliaksei Lastouski examines

the "historical turn" in the symbolic politics of the Belarusian authorities in the conditions of a deep political crisis following the protests. The authorities actively used the resources of historical politics to build a new model of loyalty and political mobilisation. In particular, memory of the Great Patriotic War was exploited both to stigmatise "traitors" and to rally the political camp of Aliaksandr Lukashenka. The author also analyses the main initiatives of Belarusian historical politics during 2020–22: the Year of National Unity, the adoption of the law "On the Genocide of the Belarusian People", and the Year of Historical Memory. Lastouski concludes that these initiatives do not actually lead to the restoration of the political unity of Belarusian society; on the contrary, they strengthen confrontation and social division.

Aliaksei Bratachkin in the seventh chapter examines the securitisation of memory politics in Belarus and the new laws and "images" of history that are taking shape in the public space following the 2020 mass protests. The author shows the increasing securitisation of memory politics in Belarus and the rising role of the security services, which in particular results in the transfer of the right of professional historic expertise from the academic community to representatives of the power structures. Bratachkin emphasises that the Belarusian authorities and state propaganda use the discourse of "the genocide of the Belarusian people" as the main argument, exploiting the theme of World War II history. Moreover, the authorities adopt memorial laws, imposing interpretations of history and creating a kind of "state of emergency" in the country.

The final, eighth, chapter of the monograph is written by Anastasia Felcher. She discusses mnemonic actors behind collective memory of the 1990–92 armed conflict on the Dniester River, as well as mechanisms of dissemination of this memory, including commemorative rituals and institutions. For more than thirty years, memory of the short-lived armed conflict (also known as the Transnistrian War) has remained a bone of contention between the authorities and the people living on the right bank of the Dniester in Moldova and on the opposite bank in the self-proclaimed Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (also known

as Transnistria). The chapter traces how commemorative strategies have changed over the last three decades and contextualises public memory of the conflict within the larger context of post-communist transition in the region, including the 2022 war in Ukraine.

This monograph is the collective effort of an international team of authors consisting of historians, historians of culture, cultural heritage scholars, political scientists, and sociologists from Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany, Hungary, and Austria. The book examines the specificity of identification of the post-socialist region of Central and Eastern Europe in the new geopolitical reality. This changing reality comes with both opportunities and challenges, demanding a rethinking of the content of memory politics and the culture of remembrance. Therefore, the themes discussed in the book draw our attention not only to the past or the present, but also to the future, signalling the challenges the Russo-Ukrainian war is likely to pose for memory politics in Central and Eastern European states.

Part I.
EUROPEAN AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Chapter 1

Shared Past as a Present: Transnational European Memory as a Challenge

Georgiy Kasianov

From the very beginning of the post-war European integration, the issue of a common European identity was one of the most crucial problems of the united Europe. Various European institutions, governmental, transnational, and non-governmental, addressed this problem with different strategies and visions, however, with one common idea in mind: to detect and develop a unifying concept.

History and Memory in United Europe: Supranational vs. National

Three major geopolitical shifts determined the nature and direction of historical politics on the continent in the 1990s–2000s: the collapse of the international communist system, accompanied by the breakdown of supranational entities (the USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia);

the disappearance of the bipolar world followed by the end of the confrontation between the two systems (communist and capitalist); and the formation of a new supranational entity (the European Union), along with its expansion to the east. The dissolution of the international communist system has resulted in the re-emergence of ethnic nationalism and relevant ethnocentric narratives of the past in the post-communist space in the 1990s. Central-Eastern Europe, the Baltics, and the Balkans considered the return to the classical national narrative as a restoration of historical truth and justice, as a farewell to communism, and, last but not least, as a re-establishment of true national identity and cultural sovereignty.

Concurrently, the construction of a united Europe (with no internal borders and a common economy, political institutions, values, and currency) led to a search for unifying transnational forms of identity that would match the idea of a shared European collective awareness. A sense of shared history and collective/historical memory had to play an essential role in establishing this kind of identity. A shared constructed past based on common values had to become the prerequisite of the historical politics of transnational European structures; the national governments of old Europe also supported this strategy.

As a result, two parallel approaches marked the period of the 1990s–2010s in the development of the politics of history: transnational and national. EU transnational institutions were preoccupied with elaborating and implementing various unifying strategies based on the idea of a common European identity. National governments and societies accepted this strategy; nevertheless, they insisted on keeping the sovereignty of national narratives. The EU institutions did not challenge national memory and history narratives as such. Their primary concern was to overcome the extremes of ethnocentrism that were so evident in history writing and remembrance, particularly in post-communist areas.

After the EU expansion in the middle of the 2000s, these approaches gained a new dimension. The newcomers took the unification component of the entrance package in identity policies (for instance,

Holocaust remembrance as a common framework) for granted. They were eager to (re)join the European family and to perceive themselves as a part of a common European past. However, they brought with them their own plan, first: defending their national narratives; second: promoting the idea of their unique roles as nations that suffered twice in the 20th century, from Nazism and from communism.

Apart from this, the idea of using the common past for building unity in the present and future was also determined by other challenges to the EU's internal unity. The failure of the European Constitution in 2005 revealed the communication problem between supranational political and bureaucratic elites concentrated in Brussels, the Hague, and Strasbourg, and EU citizens. These groups addressed the challenge through various political means and new cultural policies that included work on a common European past and memory. Decisions and new strategies aimed at constructing a common European memory (Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Europe for Citizens Programme, the House of European History, and others) emerged in the second half of the 2000s.

One can distinguish several significant trends within memory unification/transnational policy. The first aimed at creating transnational or supranational all-European narratives and spaces of memory. The second, which corresponds to the previous one, amounts to the selection of issues common to most European nations.[1] The third is the formation of supranational institutions and structures that assume specific functions focused on creating a common European identity. These new institutions had to develop all-European models and strategies that represent shared values and political principles connected to the past and its representations in the present. Finally, legislative acts regulating the interpretations of many past issues at the national and transnational levels are another all-European tendency worth mentioning.

1 See, for instance, Aline Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

Let us illustrate these trends with the most significant cases. Each example in practical implementation should be seen as a combination of the above-mentioned trends. Creating a supranational "all-inclusive" narrative is inevitably be linked to a specific common topic. For instance, the idea of a unifying supranational historical narrative has developed in at least two variants: first, as a common European history; and second, as transnational memory of the Holocaust. Implementing this idea and translating it into policies required institutional and financial support. These tasks, in turn, necessitated the creation of specialised institutions with international coordination and funding.

The emergence (or re-emergence, taking into account some trends of the interwar period, such as an attempt to overcome extremes of the national narratives in textbooks) of the idea of a unified Europe after World War II nurtured demand for projects that were now related to transnational all-European history based on the concept of integration. They usually have been initiated and sponsored by supranational European structures and, less commonly, by national organisations. Solid national and transnational memory could not be formed spontaneously; it could only take root under the influence of public discourse or media representation. It required political decisions, bureaucratic institutions, management networks, and adequate financial means.[2]

However, all initiatives aimed at establishing all-European narratives and remembrance often encouraged by European transnational institutions faced a whole range of hurdles – technical, cultural, and political. The primary obstacle in all European countries was the existence of traditional master narratives that, by definition, contradicted any attempt to propose or impose a standard unified European narrative. Furthermore, attempts to implement supranational or common histories usually provoked some defensive reaction: either an increasing in-

[2] Aleida Assmann, "The Holocaust – A Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Community," in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, ed. Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (Houndmills, Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 103.

terest in national history or a revival of autonomist national narratives (Catalonia, Scotland, Flanders)[3] that intended to vindicate a version of "Europeanness" held by one of the nations that lacked statehood.

Initially, the transnational narrative addressed the problem of overcoming the legacy of the violent past and dealing with the "long shadow" of World War II. Recent decades have been noticeably marked by defining Europe as a peaceful and stable continent in the framework of a "United Europe", congruent to the EU. Strategically, common values as a basis for common identity were seen as fundamental for a common framework. However, this general conviction met the difficulty of reaching a shared understanding of what Europe or United Europe is as a phenomenon: cultural, political, economic, religious, or sociopsychological. At the same time, complications accompany the process of identifying common unifying topics combined with an ambiguous attitude toward overcoming the Eurocentric approach to the European past (in light of postcolonial criticism of Eurocentrism and the "civilising" role of Europe). Finally, there is the difficulty of defining "all-European" values capable of supporting such a history's affirmative and didactic components.[4]

Common European History as Magistra Vitae

Efforts aimed at the unification of the past in the field of didactical history have probably the most protracted record. Bilateral and multilateral initiatives concerning the prevention of hatred and xenophobia in history teaching and textbooks date back to the interwar period.

3 Stefan Berger and Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 341–342.

4 Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger, "Introduction. Contours of a Critical History of Contemporary Europe: A Transnational Agenda," in *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, Thomas Lindenberger and Annelie Ramsbrock (New York, NY; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 7–8.

After World War II, emerging supranational European institutions took the lead in promoting such initiatives.

The Council of Europe (CoE) became the primary player and planner in common European history and memory at the supranational level as early as the 1950s. At the very first event organised by the CoE, which was dedicated to the promotion of the common Europe idea in history teaching, the participants stated that their

> purpose [was] not to use history as propaganda for European unity, but to try to eliminate the traditional mistakes and prejudices and to establish the facts… It is especially necessary to avoid any interpretation of historical development which might be used in the particular interest of one state, or which might disturb the friendly relations between peoples.[5]

Already at this stage, historians agreed that a project with such a guiding ideology would be unfeasible if it did not include such regions as the Iberian Peninsula (where autocratic regimes held power) and Eastern Europe, which was dominated by totalitarian communist regimes controlled by the Soviet Union.[6]

From the beginning, the idea of cementing Europe's unity through buttressing the common past was translated in practical terms into a strategy of combatting prejudices and biases in textbooks and the teaching of history. In the 1950s, bilateral Franco-German, German-Polish, and German-Israeli commissions were established. In all cases, it took almost half a century to obtain tangible results from their activities.[7]

5 "History textbooks (1953–1991)," *Council of Europe*, accessed June 24, 2022, https://www.coe.int/en/web/history-teaching/history-textbooks.

6 Berger and Conrad, *The Past as History*, 344.

7 Mona Siegel and Kirsten Harjes, "Disarming Hatred: History Education, National Memories, and Franco-German Reconciliation from World War I to the Cold War," *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (August 2012): 370–402; Karina V. Korostelina, *History Education in the Formation of Social Identity: Toward a Culture of Peace* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 7.

The idea of introducing a common European didactical history periodically re-emerged. For instance, in 1965, at the Elsnor symposium, educators from European countries agreed that "there could be no question of trying to impose a unified version of European history on schools in the countries that participate in the Council of Europe's education programme".[8] However, at the same time, the participants proposed a list of themes that could form a basis for the European history syllabus.

In the middle of the 1980s, the European Commission supported French historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle in writing and publishing "a European history of Europe" – supporters of the project envisioned a future book to become a sort of European history textbook. Once published,[9] the book provoked a lot of controversy among EU constituents, to the extent that the European Commission officially disassociated itself from the project.[10]

At the beginning of the 1990s, an attempt to produce a sort of European history textbook resulted in an edition written by scholars and educators from several countries and translated and published in several European languages in fifteen countries. This attempt to propose a kind of transnational European narrative resulted in a multinational representation of a "common European history". The book had several editions before the early 2000s.[11] Nevertheless, no visible feedback about its influence has ever been presented.

8 Council of Europe, *Against bias and prejudice*: *The Council of Europe's work on history teaching and history textbooks* (Strasbourg: Council for Cultural Co-operation, 1995), 10.

9 Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Europe: A History of its Peoples*, translated by Richard Mayne (London: Viking, 1990). See review by Paschalis M. Kitromilides in *European History Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1994): 123–127.

10 Oriane Calligaro, "Legitimation Through Remembrance? The Changing Regimes of Historicity of European Integration," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no 3: *Transnational Memory Politics in Europe: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (2015): 335.

11 Winfried Schulze, "From European History to the European History Book," *European Education* 32, no. 2: *Toward a European Identity: Finding a New Paradigm for Teaching History* (Summer 2000): 37–47.

Concurrently, in the 1990s–2000s, the idea of bilateral or multilateral commissions of historians or common bilateral history textbooks took further development in the light of the "reunification of Europe". The results of these efforts could be assessed as a moderate success in terms of participants from different countries of the region hearing each other and understanding colleagues' priorities. However, regarding institutional impact, these projects were less effective: national educational systems did not officially introduce their results into regular curricula.[12]

After the collapse of communism, promoting a common European history acquired a new meaning, especially in the context of the prospect of the "return to the European family" of the peoples of the former socialist camp. The CoE launched a strategy named "The New Europe", which prioritised (together with the support of the reform of history teaching in Central and Eastern Europe) the "review of the concept of the European dimension".[13]

In October 1993, the Vienna summit of the leaders and heads of government of the CoE states declared a goal of combatting racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and intolerance. European leaders considered history teaching among the essential tools to pursue this goal, asking for "strengthening [of] programmes aimed at eliminating prejudice in the teaching of history by emphasising positive mutual influence

12 Karina V. Korostelina and Simone Lässig, eds., with Stefan Ihrig, *History Education and Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Reconsidering Joint Textbook Projects* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, "A common textbook for Europe? Utopia or a Crucial Challenge?", in *Geschichtslernen – Innovationen und Reflexionen. Geschichtsdidaktik im Spannungsfeld von theoretischen Zuspitzungen, empirischen Erkundungen, normativen Überlegungen und pragmatischen Wendungen. Festschrift für Bodo von Borries*, ed. Jan-Patrick Bauer, Johannes Meyer-Hamme and Andreas Körber (Herbolzheim: Centaurus Verlag & Media, 2008), 5–9.

13 "The 'New Europe' (1989–1998)," *Council of Europe*, accessed June 20, 2022, https://www.coe.int/en/web/history-teaching/the-new-europe-.

between different countries, religions and ideas in the historical development of Europe".[14]

In 1992–93, the CoE supported the establishment of the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO), which initially brought together associations of history teachers in eleven Western European and three Eastern European countries.[15] It was a remarkable combination of a grassroots initiative (undertaken by motivated educators) and the political (as well as financial) support of the supranational institution and some national governments (for instance, the Dutch). Initially, the primary focus of EUROCLIO activities was on combatting the extremes of national narratives in "Eastern European history" education. Then, the association moved on to projects aspiring "to develop a sense of European identity, based on common values, history, and cultural diversity".[16]

In 2002, the CoE's Committee on Education launched another project, "The European dimension in history teaching". Among other objectives aimed at developing critical thinking skills, introducing a comparative perspective in teaching national histories, etc., the project emphasised the need to "focus on events, topics, themes or developments which are truly European either because they happened across much of Europe or had direct or indirect consequences for much if not all of the continent".[17] The topics selected, according to their "European significance", included the revolutions of 1848, the Balkan wars

14 Council of Europe Summit, Vienna Declaration, October 9, 1993, 10, accessed June 22, 2022, https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680536c83.

15 Website of the organisation: http://euroclio.eu/.

16 This was the definition of one of the aims of the Multi-faceted Memory project dedicated to the memory of Nazism and Stalinism. See Jaco Stoop, "Multi-faceted Memory," *EuroClio*, January 25, 2016, accessed June 23, 2022, http://euroclio.eu/projects/multi-faceted-memory/.

17 "The European dimension in History teaching (2002–2006)," *Council of Europe*, accessed June 22, 2022, https://www.coe.int/en/web/history-teaching/the-european-dimension-in-history-teaching.

of 1912–13, the peace treaties of 1919, the end of World War II, and the Cold War and events of 1989–90.

In 2007, German Minister of Education Anette Schavan came out with a renewed idea of a common European history textbook to be used in all 27 EU member countries. Notably, EU officials supported the idea, while representatives of national governments (Poland, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic) did not show enthusiasm (for different reasons, however).[18] Education professionals also demonstrated a good deal of scepticism about this idea.[19] Instead, EUROCLIO decided to promote an interactive media tool based on various topics united by the concept of a multiperspective approach and diversity.[20]

The name of another project, "Teaching 'Europe' to Enhance EU Cohesion", which was dedicated to the history of European integration in the history curricula of EU member states, spoke for itself.[21] The project resulted in a comprehensive report based on the study of the textbooks on European integration in twenty-eight countries. The expert team concluded that the teaching courses on "Europe" and European integration presented a common Europe as an elitist project which is not relevant to the everyday lives of citizens. However, these courses and textbooks considered and explained the EU positively, emphasising shared European values.[22]

18 See Lucia Kubosova, "Germany to present plans for EU history book," *EUObserver*, February 23, 2007, accessed June 25, 2022, https://euobserver.com/eu-political/23559; "Common European History," *Deutsche Welle*, March 2, 2007, accessed June 22, 2022, https://www.dw.com/en/call-for-european-history-book-as-education-ministers-meet/a-2370988.

19 For a detailed and broadly contextualised analysis of the common European textbook history, see Falk Pingel, "History as a project of the future – the European history textbook debate," in *History Education and Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Reconsidering Joint Textbook Projects*, ed. Karina V. Korostelina and Simone Lässig, with Stefan Ihrig (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 155–176.

20 Van der Leeuw-Roord, "A common textbook for Europe?".

21 Jaco Stoop, "Teaching 'Europe' to Enhance EU Cohesion," *EuroClio*, March 11, 2016, accessed June 21, 2022, http://euroclio.eu/projects/teaching-europe-enhance-eu-cohesion/.

22 Henrik Hartmann, Juliette Montlahuc, Aleksei Rogozin and Steven Stegers, *Teaching Europe to Enhance EU Cohesion. Final Research Report* (Barcelona 2017), 54–55,

Europe for Citizens Programme

Concurrently, after the enlargement of 2004–07, the Europe for Citizens Programme, financed by the European Commission, was augmented to include a new component, "Active European Remembrance", the aim of which was defined as follows: "Fostering action, debate, and reflection related to European citizenship and democracy, shared values, common history, and culture… bringing Europe closer to its citizens by promoting Europe's values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past."[23]

Ideologically, the programme aimed to promote activities devoted to preserving the memory of repressions, deportations, and other forms of human rights violations by the Nazi and communist regimes during and after World War II. The strategy focused on the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through direct funding of their activities. Between 2007 and 2013, the programme financed 322 projects and awarded grants totalling 14.203 million euros. One hundred seventy-eight projects that took place in Western Europe mainly focused on the crimes of Nazism, the Holocaust, and the memory of World War II. The other 144 projects took place in Eastern Europe, including the Balkans and the Baltic states, with most topics dedicated to the crimes of totalitarian regimes, both National Socialist and communist.[24] Approximately 1.7 million European citizens and 500 organ-

accessed June 21, 2022, https://euroclio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/EuroClio.-Hartmann-Montlahuc-Rogozin-Stegers.-Teaching-Europe-Final-Research-Report-2017.pdf.

23 "Europe for Citizens Programme," *European Commission*, accessed December 7, 2020, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens_en.

24 Calculated based on the reports under generic title "Selected projects" for the years of 2007–13, accessed December 9, 2020, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/stats_action_4.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/sucproj_p4.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/action_4_list_selected_projects.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/citizen_action4_selection_2010.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/12082011_accepted_publication.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/20120905_list_result.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/rem-selected-2013.pdf. These pages no longer exist.

isations were involved in remembrance projects at the programme's peak in 2011–13.[25]

In April 2014, the European Commission decided to extend the programme until 2020, with two major components, one of them named "European Remembrance", focused on "Europe as a peace project". The programme, with a total budget of 187.7 million euros, aimed to "support initiatives which reflect on the causes of the totalitarian regimes that blighted Europe's modern history" and projects that "look at its other defining moments and reference points, and consider different historical perspectives" to remember the lessons of the past as a prerequisite for building a brighter future.[26] In 2014–19, the programme supported 225 projects with total funding of 16.9 million euros.[27]

The authors of the interim evaluation report mentioned, among beneficiaries, that four Central and Eastern European countries "were disproportionally presented relative to their population", which may be considered as indirect evidence of an imbalance of interest in the project objectives in favour of former Eastern Europe or as an intention of the donor to invest more into the politics of memory in this region.

All the projects and strategies described above were built on the principle of indirect impact: through educational approaches and

25 Coffey International and Deloitte, *Ex-post evaluation of the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007–2013. Final report* (Luxemburg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015), 41, accessed June 20, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/final_efcp_final_report_2015_10_15.pdf.

26 EU Citizenship Portal, "The 'Europe for Citizens' funding programme for the period 2014–2020 is officially adopted!", April 15, 2014, accessed June 25, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news-events/news/15042014_en.htm.

27 Calculated with data from the following sites of the Europe for Citizens Programme: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens/selection-results/selection-results-european-remembrance-2014_en; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/efc_european_remembrance_list_of_projects_selection_results_2015_en.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/publicationremem2016.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/selected_applicants_remem_2017.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/european_remembrance_selection_2018.pdf; https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/publication_selected_0.pdf, all accessed December 7, 2020. These pages no longer exist.

the involvement of non-governmental organisations. Now we turn to a significant project, which from the beginning was quite definite and straightforward in formulating the task of constructing a past necessary to achieve a specific political goal.

The House of European History

Perhaps, the House of European History (HEH) provides the most illustrative attempt to create a pan-European transnational "space of memory". The idea itself was not a novelty. The House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn,[28] established in 1994, which is devoted to the history of Germany since 1945, or Parlamentarium,[29] the European Parliament (EP) visitors centre dedicated to the history of the EP, might be considered cultural and political predecessors that influenced the mode of thinking of those who initiated the project.

Another similar venture which could be seen as a prototype, based on a very similar idea (the notion of the common European past), could be the Museum of Europe (Musée de l'Europe), established in 1997 by a group of academics, intellectuals, and politicians in Brussels. The museum started functioning in 2001 as a private initiative, having strong ties to the Belgian government and EU structures.[30] Three temporary exhibitions in 2001–7 evolved from the idea of European cultural and historical commonality to the tale of the success of Eurointegration. The museum's narrative presents European heritage as a unifying basis where the "humanistic tradition of Europe culminates in the integrative process of the post-war era". Apart from presenting exhibitions,

28 *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, accessed June 25, 2022, https://www.hdg.de/haus-der-geschichte/.

29 "Parlamentarium," *Visiting European Parliament*, accessed September 25, 2022, https://visiting.europarl.europa.eu/en/visitor-offer/brussels/parlamentarium.

30 Christine Cadot, "Can Museums Help Build a European Memory? The Example of the '*Musée de l'Europe*', in Brussels in the Light of 'New World' Museums' Experience," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 2/3: *Arts and Politics: A French-American Perspective* (2010): 127–136.

the museum also promoted educational activities, again planning (however vaguely) a new attempt to publish a European history textbook.[31]

The idea of establishing the HEH was first expressed at the top political level by Hans-Gert Pöttering, the president of the European Parliament between 2007 and 2009. According to him, the HEH should become "a locus for history and for the future where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow".[32] The establishment of managing and consultative bodies and developing the concept took about four years.[33] The creation of the exhibition took another four. A prolonged search for consensus between political demands and the ambitions of various lobbying groups in the European Parliament, academic team, and the board again revealed the complexity of the problem of seeking a singular and universal reference point for a "common European memory".

The academic group presented an updated concept in 2013. All project constituents somehow agreed that the primary aim of the museum should be to foster a shared European historical consciousness and a common European identity based on it.[34] However, further development and implementation of this noble idea were challenged

31 Daniel Rosenberg, "Exhibiting Post-national Identity. The House of European History," in *History and Belonging: Representations of the Past in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. Stefan Berger and Caner Tekin (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2018), 24–25.

32 Taja Vovk van Gaal and Christine Dupont, "The House of European History," in *Entering the Minefields: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe: Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus; European National Museums: Identity Politics; the Uses of the Past; and the European Citizen; Brussels 25 January 2012*, ed. Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont and Chantal Kestelooteds (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012), 44.

33 See collection of essays, memoirs and discussion at: Andrea Mork and Perikles Christodoulou, eds., *Creating the House of European History* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018); Raivis Sīmansons, *Europe's Journey to Modernity: Developing the House of European History in Brussels*, PhD thesis (Leicester: University of Leicester, 2018).

34 Veronika Settele, "Including Exclusion in European Memory? Politics of Remembrance at the House of European History," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 3: *Transnational Memory Politics in Europe: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (2015): 408.

by the migration crisis and the need to include "marginal voices" in the bright picture of the European continent as a venue of a shared consciousness regarding human rights, democracy, liberty, legality, and solidarity.[35]

In the end, an international team of experts decided to clear these ideological and methodological hurdles by using the principle "unity through diversity". The museum's primary mission is to "enhance understanding of European history in all its complexity, to encourage the exchange of ideas and to question assumptions".[36] The main topics of the permanent exhibits are European history in the twentieth century and the history of European integration. The museum opened in Brussels in May 2017. The first permanent exhibition may come into existence in 2023.

The Holocaust as Pan-European Memory

Remembrance and constructed collective memory of the Holocaust exemplifies the transnational narrative of memory: first, as a global narrative of memory/history; second, as a selection of a topic capable of stitching together different national narratives; third, as a practice of establishing transnational institutions to implement the standard narrative; and fourth, as an attempt to codify and regulate interpretations of the past with the help of memorial laws and legal practices. The canonised historical narrative of the Holocaust looks like a classic example of the transnational version of the past and related supranational practices.[37]

The story of transforming the Holocaust into a universal transnational form of collective/historical memory started in the 1960s and

35 Ibid.
36 "Mission & Vision," *House of European History*, accessed September 25, 2022, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/mission-vision.
37 This is exemplified by the central slogan of this narrative: "Never again!".

took almost forty years to accomplish.[38] Holocaust remembrance went through several stages of internal transformation, from an imposed or intended oblivion to a victimhood narrative, then to a representation of heroic resistance, and finally to a paradigmatic case of genocide. On the European continent, Holocaust remembrance came to the fore of transnational memory politics at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s as the consensus of national governments and transnational bodies in search of a unifying symbol and narrative.

At the state level, Germany, Israel, and the US were initially the leading promoters of the Holocaust as a morally and politically effective form of collective memory.[39] In the 1990s, the war in the Balkans and the quest for a symbol that would become the mainstay of European identity triggered the transformation of the collective memory of the Holocaust and its corollary, a didactic historical narrative.

In 1998–99, just before the final stage of preparations for EU enlargement, Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, having secured the support of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President Bill Clinton, initiated the creation of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. Implementing such a large-scale project would undoubtedly have been impossible without international cooperation at the highest level.

Renamed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2013, it has become an organisation that brings together thirty-one countries (as permanent members) and ten observer countries; thirty-three of these countries are European.[40] Only governmental bodies represent their countries in the Alliance, ensuring that the project maintains its high political and bureaucratic status. The organisation states

38 For a discussion on this topic, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

39 For more detail, see Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 87–106.

40 The official website of the organisation is https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us.

that its goals are formative and educational (studying and teaching the history of the Holocaust) and political (fighting against xenophobia, racism, and antisemitism). For instance, in 2010–14, the Alliance financed ninety-three projects in forty-two countries, including twenty-nine in Europe. Its main targets are representatives of government structures and non-governmental organisations, teachers, and education authorities: these groups amounted to 56.7 percent of the audience.[41] In 2017, the Alliance redrafted its funding strategy for 2019–23, focusing on two significant areas: safeguarding the record of the Holocaust and the genocide of Roma, and countering distortion – this agenda became an urgent issue in the former "Eastern Europe".[42]

The supranational European historical politics in Holocaust memory, which aimed to establish a supranational community of memory, became a standard. Since 2005, 27 January, the day of liberation for the inmates of the death camp in Auschwitz, has been marked in the calendar of memorable dates for the European Union as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Additionally, national-level memorial complexes dedicated to the Holocaust exist in seventeen European countries, including Ukraine; eleven of these sites of memory are specialised museums.[43]

Most European countries accepted the Holocaust universalist claims as a form of all-European collective/historical memory. Eighteen countries of the European Union recognise International Holocaust Re-

41 Calculated in 2016 based on: https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/funding-grant-program/funding-overview. This page no longer exists. In 2015, the funding programme was paused. Information about the funding programme can be found here: "Funding," *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, accessed June 21, 2022, https://2015.holocaustremembrance.com/grant-programme/funded-projects-by-year.

42 "IHRA Grant Strategy 2019–2023," *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, June 21, 2022, accessed December 8, 2020, https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/IHRA%20Grant%20Guidelines_call_2021%20%281%29.pdf.

43 "Jewish Studies: Global Directory of Holocaust Museums," *Israel Science and Technology Directory*, accessed December 8, 2020, http://www.science.co.il/Holocaust-Museums.asp.

membrance Day as a national day of remembrance. In comparison, six countries have their own particular dates dedicated to the Holocaust,[44] insisting on their particularity in commemoration practices. Attempts of transnational bodies to introduce (if not to impose) a common standard of the Holocaust were confronted with the claims that these experiences are different in various countries and, therefore, its memory and representation should also be diversified.[45]

Moreover, additional problems arise regarding the perception of the Holocaust at the societal level. In Sweden and the United Kingdom, countries whose governments initiated the representation of the Holocaust as a pan-European phenomenon, the level of awareness among certain groups required to teach the Holocaust (history teachers, for instance) is still considered unsatisfactory.[46] The most recent study on Holocaust education shows that the successful and increasing institutionalisation of Holocaust education and proliferation of study programmes, research institutes, and museums about the Holocaust are now followed by growing ignorance about this event.[47]

In the post-communist space seen as the project's target audience, the pan-European version of the collective/historical memory of the Holocaust often conflicts with national narratives and their ambition to propose another transnational history about "Eastern Europe" as a victim of communism. Needless to say, they have many skeletons in the closet, as proven by stories of participation in the Holocaust by both ordinary people and prominent figures and organisations that possess a special

44 European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council. The Memory of the Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes in Europe*, COM(2010) 783 final (Brussels, December 22, 2010), 4, accessed June 21, 2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52010DC0783&from=FR.

45 Aleida Assmann, "The Holocaust – A Global Memory?", 100–102.

46 See data from surveys among teachers in Michael Gray, *Contemporary Debates on Holocaust Education* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4–5.

47 Andrea Pető, "A paradigm change in Holocaust memorialization: lessons to be learned," in *Holocaust Remembrance and Representation: Documentation from a Research Conference. Swedish Government Official Reports* (Stockholm 2020), 19.

place in the national pantheon (notably in the cases of Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Moldova).

The most recent study, undertaken by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in ten countries of Europe and Russia, exposed systemic cases of Holocaust distortion and revisionism in Europe at the state level. The list of such practices includes public statements denying or minimising national and societal responsibility for crimes against Jews or collaboration with Nazi Germany; attempts to limit academic and public discourse on Holocaust history through legislation, penalties, and political interference with the accurate representation of history in museums and exhibitions and at historical sites; rejection of the importance of Holocaust remembrance and memorials by influential political and societal leaders; and efforts to glorify, honour, forgive, or otherwise "rehabilitate" Holocaust-era historical figures or entities despite their association with crimes against humanity, collaboration with Nazi Germany, or direct involvement in the persecution and murder of Jews.[48]

Conclusion

The idea of a common European past (in the forms of memory and history) emerged and developed together with the paradigm of a united Europe. It has gone through different phases and shapes since the 1950s. In the beginning, different strategies and approaches were aimed at overcoming the legacy of the immediate past. Since 2000, the narrative of the harmful past as a unifying symbol and the "Never Again!" formula was amended by positive symbolism based on the European Union's history in a triumphalist tone. In all cases, visionaries, discourse mongers, and policy-makers based these strategies on the con-

[48] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Memory at Risk. The Distortion of Holocaust History across Europe. Summary of Findings and Recommendations* (Washington, September 2021), 5, accessed June 21, 2022, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/USHMM-Holocaust-Memory-at-Risk-2021.pdf.

cept of cultural integration and a common European supranational identity. "Europeanisation of remembrance processes and actions related to Europe's past were directly connected to the theme of citizens' sense of belonging to the European community as a political project."[49]

As we see, these strategies and actions spurred by them resulted in what we can describe as a "moderate success" (to use the language of project management). None of them reached their strategic goal. Moreover, each faced permanent internal and external challenges, starting from the formulation stage of the basic concepts. These challenges stemmed from factors including the different political or corporate interests or ideological diversity among actors. In the final analysis, most of these projects accepted the idea of "unity in diversity".

Perhaps the primary and most fundamental reason for "moderate success" lies in the origin of the idea of "common European identity". Its promoters tailored it on the paradigm of national identity. In their vision, the transnational common European identity looked like a national identity covering the whole of Europe, in other words. Basically, it was the same discourse, just framed within broader political boundaries.

Another fundamental reason is that all these projects and initiatives followed a top-down approach (except EUROCLIO, perhaps). The Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European Parliament, presidents, heads of governments, and members of parliament proposed, initiated, formulated, and promoted specific ideas based on political interests and values. Of course, preliminary research and baseline studies were done in many cases, expert recommendations were sought, and ideas and strategies were discussed and tuned. In many cases, these ideas were noble and potentially useful. However, their implementation at the grassroots level was routinely less successful than expected, perhaps due to a lack of communication with the objects of these strategies.

[49] Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, "The EU Politics of Remembrance: Can Europeans Remember Together?", *West European Politics* 35, no. 5 (2012): 1192.

Finally, perhaps paradoxically, the idea of a common European memory and remembrance was too Eurocentric. A considerable share of new Europeans with less European memory (both communicative and cultural) populated the continent. Memory managers have only recently noted this fact and are only just now starting to adjust their strategies.

Chapter 2

Revival of the Intermarium Concept as a Remedy for Russia's Aggressive Foreign Policy: Achievable Reality or Impossible Fantasy?

Przemysław Furgacz

Introduction

Though in political discourse and in historiography the term "Intermarium concept" is commonly used, one thing ought to be explained. We should in fact talk about Intermarium concepts, not a single Intermarium concept, because over the past decades there have been many variants of this political idea. There have been various configurations of states proposed to form this alliance. Some versions of Intermarium were broader and deeper, others narrower and shallower. As a minimum, they should encompass at least two states of the region; as a maximum, a dozen or so countries from Sweden to Bulgaria and Croatia. As far as pure geography is concerned, in less open variants, Intermarium was understood as an area between the Baltic and Black Seas. In more open variations, Intermarium was interpreted as the territory lying between three seas: the Baltic, the Black Sea, and the Adriatic.

As the foundation of the whole Intermarium geopolitical idea lies the conviction that small and medium-sized nations situated between aggressive, belligerent, predatory, and powerful Germany to the west and expansionist, bellicose, imperialist, and mighty Russia (regardless of its current incarnation) to the east cannot survive on their own, but if they team up and unite to repel any potential aggressor, then the chances for their survival in this hostile environment would rise appreciably. Only such an alliance, union, or federation of small and medium Central European states can potentially hold Russia and Germany in check. To put it differently, the backers of this geopolitical design argued that if Intermarium were founded, both Germany and Russia would be deterred from invading the countries, which are otherwise very susceptible to invasion. If there is a truth in the saying "the weak are meat the strong do eat", Intermarium would make the weak Central and Eastern European states no longer weak and, therefore, they would cease to be easy prey for invaders. As history has proved many times, for the states in this region, the ramifications of falling prey to conquest by foreign tyrannies trying to realise insane totalitarian ideologies are extraordinarily painful, deadly, and dire. Presently, Ukraine is sharply feeling the consequences of Russian invasion, with numerous war crimes perpetrated against civilians, a devastated economy, and progressing general impoverishment of society. It is well justified that reputable American historian Timothy Snyder named the Intermarium area "Bloodlands" when he described the numerous genocides and cruelties that these countries experienced during the first half of the 20th century, mainly at the hands of Moscow and Berlin.[1]

The goal of this chapter is to respond to the following research questions:

- Are the nations of Central and Eastern Europe truly and consistently evolving into closer cooperation and alliance in the realm

[1] See Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Philadelphia, PA: Perseus Books Group, 2010).

of security, and if so, is this a permanent tendency or merely a temporary political fashion that would cease if Russia were to resign from its imperial ambitions?

- Are the raisons d'état of Central European countries similar and congruent enough to become a serious driver of a strengthening security partnership?
- To what extent do the animosities, differences of opinion, historical disputes, divergent interests, various geopolitical locations, and differing ambitions among Central and Eastern European states impinge on their will and ability to create a sustained and viable formal or informal alliance?
- Which states of the region are particularly prone to strengthen their security cooperation and which regional states – in marked contrast to the former – prefer to remain outside Intermarium and similar security conceptions?
- Can the Intermarium idea be a wise response and a feasible antidote to manifold antagonistic activities on the part of Russia?

At first, the chapter examines the historical background of the whole Intermarium idea, enumerating its four most famous incarnations. Then there is a description of the Intermarium concept in contemporary Poland – the country from which it originates. The final section briefly discusses the increasing cooperation in the Poland, Ukraine, Romania triangle – the three largest states of the region.

The Beginnings of the Intermarium Political Concept

Very often the conception of the Intermarium project is incorrectly ascribed solely to Józef Piłsudski, though in reality many other people vastly contributed to this idea.[2] Most of them were Poles, but the con-

[2] Robert D. Kaplan, "Pilsudski's Europe," *Stratfor Worldview*, August 6, 2014, accessed August 5, 2022, https://cc.bingj.com/cache.aspx?q=%22Pilsudski%e2%80%99s+Europe%22+Stratfor&d=4864639222549030&mkt=pl-PL&setlang=pl-PL&w=Eapq--zwmSykLu2sSLsJsjntw-TKj8Ng.

cept gained ground – however limited – also outside of Poland. During the interwar period, Poland on different occasions pursued four principal versions of the Intermarium concept in its foreign policy. In chronological order, they were as follows:

1. *Federalist concept*. This was endorsed by Polish marshal Józef Piłsudski and his followers at the dawn of the II Rzeczpospolita (Second Republic). Józef Piłsudski, who dominated Polish political life in the interwar period and is considered by the majority of Poles to be a national hero, profoundly believed that no matter what particular government – be it *white* or *red* – was in power in Russia, this state had been, was, and would be an imperialist one because imperialism was immanent to the nature of this important world power. He stated in an interview given in 1919 to French newspaper *Le Petit Parisien*: "Irrespective of what its government will be, Russia is fiercely imperialistic. It is definitely the underlying feature of its political character."[3] He was convinced that in order to stop expected future Russian armed expansion into Central-Eastern Europe, a confederation or even federation of the nations which in the remote past formed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth should be established. In other words, Piłsudski and his adherents intended to create, at the minimum, a sort of alliance or, at the maximum, a federation of states consisting of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Moldova. Forming such an alliance would result in two fundamental advantages. Firstly, a close alliance or Intermarium federation would make Poland as well as the aforementioned countries militarily, economically, demographically, and diplomatically stronger. Secondly, it simultaneously would make Russia weaker, because Russia devoid of the resources of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic states would be measurably weakened. The following words written by Col. Adam Skwarczyński, one of

[3] Janusz Cisek, "Kilka uwag o myśli federacyjnej Józefa Piłsudskiego," in *Międzymorze: Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX–XX wiek: studia ofiarowane Piotrowi Łossowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Andrzej Ajnenkiel et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1995), 94.

Piłsudski's followers, in the article entitled "The Goals of the War in the East", accurately summarised the way of thinking of the pro-Piłsudski political camp: "Either Poland standing on the enormous so-called Intermarium must be powerful or its right to existence will be questioned."[4] These words turned out to be prophetic. Future events proved Skwarczyński was right in his pessimistic evaluation of Poland's geopolitical location and the intentions of its stronger neighbours.

Though in Polish historiography it is sometimes stressed that all the member states of such an Intermarium federation would enter this design on equal conditions and with equal rights, an in-depth analysis of the Polish-Ukrainian Treaty of Warsaw of April 1920 agreed upon by Józef Piłsudski and Symon Petliura (thus also known as the Petliura-Piłsudski Alliance/Agreement) indicates that this view is far from accurate. In particular, the economic provisions of this treaty were obviously disadvantageous to the Ukrainian People's Republic. To express this another way, according to Piłsudski's intentions, the planned Intermarium federation would be something very similar to the earlier great geopolitical idea of German "Mitteleuropa", but with Poland – not Germany – at the helm and in charge. In any case, Piłsudski's federalist plans ended inconclusively. During the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920, it turned out that Ukrainian society – to Warsaw's chagrin – did not support the Polish-Ukrainian armies' offensive of spring 1920 as had previously been promised by Petliura. Apparently, Ukrainian national consciousness – not to mention that of Belarusian – was still immature in those times. Disenchanted, Piłsudski had to slowly re-evaluate his hopes and judgements.

2. *The Baltic Union concept*. The author of the idea to set up the Baltic Union was the first ever Estonian minister of foreign affairs, Jaan Poska, who came up with such a proposal in 1919. The suggestion was

[4] Piotr Okulewicz, *Koncepcja "międzymorza" w myśli i praktyce politycznej obozu Józefa Piłsudskiego w latach 1918–1926* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2001), 120.

willingly received in Poland. However, it must be highlighted that this concept had never been crystallised into specific plans. Nevertheless, from 1919, Polish diplomats presented this project to their colleagues from the region. According to Warsaw, the planned grouping should have consisted of five Baltic states: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland.[5] Most notably, all of them had just gained independence from the collapsing Russian Empire, hence from the outset, the design took an evident anti-Russian direction. Lithuania, in spite of being open to a sort of unification within the Baltic Union, absolutely excluded Poland from this grouping. At the time, Poland was seen in Lithuania as a principal foe. Interestingly, the United Kingdom opted for the foundation of the Baltic Union, but also without Poland and under its own patronage. Generally, during the whole interwar period, Tallinn – or at least a large part of the leading Estonian political establishment – was the one most in favour of this design.[6] As far as Poland was concerned, representatives of the Polish Armed Forces were particularly sympathetic to the union concept in their belief that such an alliance would enhance the defensive potential of Poland in case of war with the Soviet Union.[7] In 1922, diplomats from Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland signed a political agreement which stipulated, among other things, that in case of a foreign aggression by a third state against one of the signatories, the others would take an attitude of friendly neutrality. However, the agreement was not ultimately ratified by Finland, therefore it did not go into effect.[8] After 1923, disappointed and disillusioned, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs evidently lost interest in further pushing through the Baltic Union project. Warsaw came to the conclusion that from the military point of view, a Baltic Union without

5 Lech Wyszczelski, *Polska mocarstwowa: wizje i koncepcje obozów politycznych II Rzeczypospolitej: Międzymorze, federalizm, prometeizm, kolonie i inne drogi do wielkości* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Bellona, 2015), 141.
6 Ibid., 148.
7 Ibid., 150–151, 155.
8 Ibid., 151–153.

Finland would not contribute substantially to the nation's security. On their parts, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia began to conclude bilateral accords.[9] The General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces blamed Kaunas, Riga, Tallinn, and Helsinki for the freeze in forging a military alliance with Poland, accusing them of purposeful interlinking with Moscow, which for its part incessantly and intransigently went to great lengths to thwart this design. From Moscow's viewpoint, the whole concept of a Baltic Union was nothing more than a feature of Polish eastern policy clearly oriented against the Soviet Union.[10]

3. *The Promethean project.* The idea of so-called Prometheism appeared in Polish political thinking in the 19th century. Its followers treated Russia as the most threatening and implacable enemy of Poland. This set of political views was sui generis continuation of the federalist concept but with some fundamental differences. Whereas the federalist versions of Intermarium postulated the separation of Poland from Russia with buffer states in close partnership with Poland, Prometheism posited breaking Russia apart through a series of simultaneous or consecutive secessions of non-Russian nations from the empire. It was based on the conviction that Soviet Russia as well as its Tsarist predecessor was strongly hostile vis-à-vis Poland and was patiently waiting for the best possible moment to attack it. Concurrently, communist Russia was also a tyrant to a multitude of small nations which would very willingly split from the Soviet empire if only some external power would help them. Therefore – according to the proponents of Prometheism – Poland should actively encourage these nations in their pro-independence aspirations in order to make Russia weaker. It was thought that after gaining independence, the ethnically non-Russian nations would enter a close defensive alliance with Poland. Moreover, in case of Soviet aggression against Poland, these nations were expected to practise subversion and sabotage or even rise up against the Soviet

9 Ibid., 151–164.
10 Ibid., 165–167.

Union.[11] The idea was quite popular not only in Poland but also among intelligentsia of the East European and Caucasian nations. The name Prometheism for the whole project was probably concocted for the first time in Georgia. Józef Piłsudski was a fervent supporter of both the federalist and the Promethean concepts, though his preferences slowly evolved over time from the former to the latter.

In line with the prescriptions of Prometheism, in the interwar period the Polish intelligence services clandestinely shored up Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Tatars, Azeris, Don Cossacks, Karelians, Komi, and Ingrians in their struggles with the Kremlin.[12] Activity aimed at undermining the Soviet Union was particularly intense in the 1920s, especially in the latter half of the decade. After the Soviet Union and Poland struck a non-aggression pact in 1932, these "Promethean" activities significantly abated.[13] To speak metaphorically, Warsaw decidedly did not want to tease the Soviet bear, all the more due to the undeniable fact that every consecutive year, this bear boasted bigger claws and teeth. Interestingly, Prometheism concentrated primarily on supporting Caucasian nations, despite the great geographical distance separating the Caucasus from Central Europe. Poland supported Ukrainians to a much lesser extent. This can be explained in part by the fact that a substantial part of Ukrainian society at the time had a negative attitude toward Poland. Another reason was that the Ukrainian diaspora did not enjoy measurable support among the Ukrainian nation then and, on top of that, treated Poland only as a passing instrument to realisation of its political aims, preferring and prioritising liaison with Czechoslovakia, Germany, and France over cooperation with Poland.[14]

11 Ibid., 197–200.
12 Alexandr Bovdunov, "Poland: The Jagiellonian Alternative," *Katehon.com*, May 10, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, https://katehon.com/en/article/poland-jagiellonian-alternative.
13 Wyszczelski, *Polska mocarstwowa*, 209.
14 Ibid., 211–212.

4. *Józef Beck's Intermarium concept*. In 1934, Poland's then foreign minister Józef Beck – a person who steered Polish foreign policy through almost all of 1930s – after taking stock of the geopolitical situation, came to the conclusion that the Intermarium design should be brought back to life. He furtively worked out a new version of the Intermarium idea, which intended to unite countries stretching from Scandinavia to the Balkan Peninsula in a sort of defensive alliance against possible future aggressions of firstly the Soviet Union and secondly the Third Reich.[15] Accordingly, the politician commenced a series of diplomatic initiatives aimed at convincing other states to adopt this idea. To Beck's disappointment, the Scandinavian states turned out to have reservations about his plans. In general, they wanted to preserve their neutrality[16] and did not intend to antagonise the Soviet Union, let alone Germany, with which they maintained deep economic relationships. Beck's endeavours to co-opt the Baltic states to the project also foundered. In spite of Estonia and Latvia being interested in the idea, Lithuania, which at that time was at loggerheads with Poland over a territorial dispute around Vilnius, staunchly torpedoed the Polish démarche.[17] Beck appealed to the countries south of Poland, but attempts to unite them around the concept also failed. In those times, it was impossible to accommodate the divergent interests of Romania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, which were joined together in the so-called Little Entente against revisionist Hungary. The latter in turn was intending to change its borders with the states mentioned above. This time around, with strong pressures pushing the countries in different directions, such an alignment proved to be too hard to achieve.

Retrospectively, all these projects came to a calamitous end.[18] Actually, the only state that sincerely, consistently, and productively acted on strengthening its security and economic ties with Poland was Romania.

15 Ibid., 269.
16 Ibid., 269–271.
17 Ibid., 271–272.
18 Ibid., 276.

Poland's alliance with Romania in the interwar period benefited both states.[19] As one of the Polish ministers of foreign affairs from that time, Konstanty Skirmunt, correctly stated, the Polish alliance with Romania which was initiated in 1921 created a continuous defensive line against Russia and provided both states with the shortest communication lines between the Black and the Baltic seas.[20] Warsaw at the beginning of 1920s appreciated Romania's military capabilities, which had the potential to relieve Poland during its war with Bolshevik Russia.[21]

After World War II, the Intermarium concept had been vividly discussed amid manifold Polish – and not only Polish – emigrant organisations in exile, to name just a few: the Christian Service for the Liberation of Nations,[22] the Assembly of Captive European Nations,[23] the "Bridge" Socio-Political Movement, and the most famous and most influential

19 For information about the beginnings of Polish-Romanian alliance in the interwar period, see Okulewicz, *Koncepcja "międzymorza" w myśli*, 67–68, 71; Wiesław Balcerak, "Strategiczne uwarunkowania polityki zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej (1918–1925)," in *Międzymorze: Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX–XX wiek: studia ofiarowane Piotrowi Łossowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Andrzej Ajnenkiel et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1995), 165–166; and Henryk Bułhak, "W poszukiwaniu sojuszów i związków integracyjnych z państwami Europy Środkowej i Południowo-Wschodniej: Przyczynek do dziejów dyplomacji polskiej jesienią 1920 r.," in *Międzymorze: Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX–XX wiek: studia ofiarowane Piotrowi Łossowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Andrzej Ajnenkiel et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN 1995), 227–239. For the succinct description of Polish-Romanian political relations in the interwar period, see Manuel Stănescu, "Jeden naród o dwóch sztandarach," *Mówią Wieki*, no. 5 (May 2016): 12–16; and Bogusław Kubisz, "Manifestowana przyjaźń. Wizyty głów państw Polski i Rumunii w okresie międzywojennym," *Mówią Wieki*, no. 5 (May 2016): 17–21.

20 Maria Nowak-Kiełbikowa, "Objęcie Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przez Konstantego Skirmunta," in *Międzymorze: Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX–XX wiek: studia ofiarowane Piotrowi Łossowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Andrzej Ajnenkiej et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1995), 282.

21 Balcerak, "Strategiczne uwarunkowania", 173.

22 See Mirosław Boruta, *"Międzymorze" w myśli politycznej ośrodków emigracji narodów Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej w latach 1945–1985* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Pomost, 1998), 8–9.

23 Ibid., 9.

Figure 1. Intermarium states in the most typical configuration.
Source: Eugene Chausovsky, "In Europe's Borderlands, the Winds of Change Blow in Every Direction," *Stratfor Worldview*, February 28, 2017, accessed September 23, 2022, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/europes-borderlands-winds-change-blow-every-direction.

of these, the Polish Government-in-Exile,[24] as well as many others. Admittedly, most of these were quite exotic; nonetheless thanks to them, the idea did not vanish entirely but circulated among an Eastern European intelligentsia which did not let it die (Figure 1). Simultaneously, in communist Poland, the Intermarium concept was also taken up from time to time by opposition factions, like the right-wing party the Confederation of Independent Poland.[25]

24 Ibid., 4–6.
25 In 1993, this party issued a special brochure in which it concisely clarified its position vis-à-vis the Intermarium and related Polish foreign policy concepts. See Tomasz Szczepański, *Międzymorze: Polityka środkowoeuropejska KPN* (Warszawa: Dział Poligrafii KPN, 1993), 3–23.

The Intermarium Idea in the 21st Century in Contemporary Poland

At the foundation of the contemporary foreign policy of the Republic of Poland lies the assumption that sovereign and relatively strong states, situated east of Poland and independent from Russia, would make Poland noticeably safer. This presumption was clearly and unequivocally put forward for the first time by Józef Piłsudski just after World War I ended.[26] Polish leaders, regardless of their party affiliation, almost universally believe that until Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic nations are independent and not subjugated by Moscow, Russia in its aggressive aspirations will concentrate on subordinating or even conquering these countries, putting Poland aside for a while. As one of the most controversial Polish politicians and a member of the European Parliament, Janusz Korwin-Mikke once amusingly – yet accurately – opined: "I like Russia very much, but the farther Russia is from Polish borders, the more I like it!"

Polish political leaders never really believed that Moscow had completely resigned from its imperialist ambitions, in contrast to many Western politicians who naively and groundlessly took this controversial assumption for granted in the 1990s. Since 2014, apprehensions about the Kremlin's long-term intentions and plans toward neighbouring states have only increased, from Tallinn through Warsaw to Bucharest. However, it is one thing to identify the potential external risks for one's nation, but another to find solutions that minimise these risks. Whereas Polish politicians are, by and large, united in their fear of possible invasion from Russia, they are not so united in trying to find an answer of what to do in this situation. Most of them have a strongly held belief that Poland should remain a member state of NATO and crave close security ties with the United States. Nevertheless, except for that common conviction, there are some serious differences. For one, the main current opposition party, Civic Platform, opts for close integra-

[26] Kaplan, "Pilsudski's Europe."

tion within the European Union and is looking for security allies among the Western European powers – primarily Germany and France – whereas the ruling conservative party, Law and Justice, conspicuously distances itself from Berlin and Paris, apparently in preference to close relationships with the United Kingdom and some Central-Eastern European states. Donald Tusk – the former prime minister of Poland and the former president of the European Council – staunchly criticises this policy. According to him, the Intermarium design propagated by Law and Justice is the consequence of a mistaken assessment of Poland's capabilities. On one occasion, he reflected: "What worries me the most is Poland's drift in this geopolitical arrangement again toward peripheries, toward loneliness."[27] Tusk argues that endorsement of the Intermarium concept is dangerous because it exaggerates Poland's strength and is a sign of the immature great power-dreams of the current Polish government, which is dangerously out of touch with reality.[28] Another representative of Civic Platform, during a debate in the Polish parliament dedicated to the question of Polish foreign policy, called the Intermarium concept "an anachronism and a whim".[29]

Civic Platform, which is positioned roughly at the centre of Polish political spectrum, is not the only opposition party undermining the possibility of promoting the Intermarium geopolitical project, particularly as an alternative to good relationships with Western European powers. The left-wing parties are also sceptical of that idea. For instance, the for-

27 "Szczerski krytycznie o bilansie przewodnictwa Tuska w Radzie Europejskiej," *Dziennik. Gazeta Prawna*, December 10, 2016, accessed September 14, 2022, https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/1000580,bilans-przewodnictwa-tuska-w-radzie-europejskiej.html.

28 "Tusk krytykuje politykę zagraniczną PiS: To dryfowanie na peryferia," *Dziennik. Gazeta Prawna*, December 8, 2016, accessed September 14, 2022, https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/1000023,tusk-krytykuje-polityke-zagraniczna-pis-to-dryfowanie-na-peryferia.html.

29 "Witold Waszczykowski przedstawił tezy informacji o kierunkach polityki zagranicznej," *Rzeczpospolita*, February 8, 2017, accessed March 19, 2017, http://www.rp.pl/Rzad-PiS/170208990-Witold-Waszczykowski-przedstawil-tezy-informacji-o-kierunkach-polityki-zagranicznej.html#ap-1.

mer prime minister of Poland, Leszek Miller, representing the social democratic party the Democratic Left Alliance, called the Intermarium ideas outmoded historic concepts that are meaningless, or even worse, daydreams.[30]

The criticism for the Intermarium dimension of present Polish foreign policy comes also from experts associated with rather right-wing Polish political factions. For example, a well-known lecturer from the Jagiellonian University and political commentator, Prof. Antoni Dudek, expressed the opinion that if Poland is not able to come to terms with other Visegrad Group countries (namely, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary), then it is even less likely that it would be able to work out a harmonised and coordinated foreign policy amidst the much wider grouping of Intermarium states. Prof. Dudek responded straightforwardly to a journalist's question whether the Intermarium design is an illusion with following words:

> Yes. I will say brutally. Poland is too poor for that. If we had had at least half the German GDP, we could have thought about that, but we do not have it. Nothing sustainable is going to emerge from this.[31]

The opinions expressed and arguments mentioned above imply that the Intermarium project has difficulty gaining traction in Polish politics. Yet, there are prominent Polish top politicians who eagerly promote Intermarium. Probably the most frank proponent of the Intermarium alliance is the incumbent President, Andrzej Duda.[32] Another passionate supporter of the Intermarium design is Polish historian and publicist

30 Leszek Miller, interviewed by Marek Migalski, "W ocenie PiS zachowuję zdrowy rozsądek," *Do Rzeczy* 206, no. 4 (January 23–29, 2017): 62.

31 Antoni Dudek, interviewed by Marek Migalski, "Trzeba grać i z Berlinem i z Waszyngtonem," *Do Rzeczy* 200, no. 49 (December 5–11, 2016): 61.

32 "Prezes PiS Jarosław Kaczyński spotkał się z premierem Słowacji Robertem Fico," *Rzeczpospolita*, February 5, 2017, accessed March 19, 2017, http://www.rp.pl/Polityka/170209442-Prezes-PiS-Jaroslaw-Kaczynski-spotkal-sie-z-premierem-Slowacji-Robertem-Fico.html#ap-1.

Leszek Moczulski.[33] In his opinion, Poland "is able to integrate with Ukraine to the same extent as took place between Sweden and Norway. And considerably easier and faster with Lithuania along with the rest of the Baltic countries."[34] He staunchly claims that the ties linking Intermarium states have been and still are very firm, which can partly be explained by the strikingly similar geopolitical location, social mentality, a common sense of identity, or – at least – interests and external threats that are convergent to a significant degree.[35]

Another distinguished Polish scholar and political commentator backing up the Intermarium idea – however with some relevant reservations – is Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas. He pays attention to the fact that at the beginning of the 1990s, when Poland's membership in NATO and the EU, along with that of other Central European countries, was by no means a foregone conclusion, many politicians and pundits presented the Intermarium project as an alternative to integration with Euro-Atlantist structures. Furthermore, he maintains that the Intermarium design absolutely should not be treated as a substitute for NATO, because the military potential of the Intermarium countries – even if unified altogether – does not reach even half of the military might of the Russian Federation. Kostrzewa-Zorbas indicates that the defence expenditure of Poland accounts for around half of the defence spending of all Intermarium states and is low in comparison with Russian defence expenditure.[36] To sum it all up, regarding Intermarium as a military alliance

33 Bovdunov, "Poland: The Jagiellonian Alternative."

34 "Leszek Moczulski o koncepcji Międzymorza," *Rzeczpospolita*, November 3, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, http://www.rp.pl/Plus-Minus/311039905-Leszek-Moczulski-o-koncepcji-Miedzymorza.html?template=printart.

35 Ibid.

36 For comparison, in 2021 Poland allocated for its defence $13.4 billion, whereas Romania $5.61 billion, Greece $7.86 billion, Ukraine $4.27 billion, the Czech Republic $3.97 billion, and Hungary $2.85 billion. The remaining states in the region have had defence budgets below $2.5 billion. At the same time, in 2016, Poland allocated for its defence $9.2 billion, whereas Romania $ 3.08 billion, Greece $2.7 billion, Ukraine $2.4 billion, the Czech Republic $1.8 billion, and Hungary $1.1 billion. See *The Military Balance 2022: The Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defence Economics*, International Institute for Strategic

able to deter or repel Russian aggression is completely unrealistic. Such a military alliance would certainly not be able to provide its own members with military security against the most likely potential external threat. He also stresses out that the Intermarium states are economically poor and backward compared to Western Europe, so the countries of the region need to cooperate closely with Western powers to catch up with them economically. But despite all these indisputable factors, Kostrzewa-Zorbas still supports the idea of Intermarium not as a separate organisation but rather as an informal grouping of states within the broader community of the West. Only if this precondition is fulfilled will forcing through the Intermarium design be achievable.[37]

Trilateral Relations Among Poland, Ukraine, and Romania

Ukraine–Romania

Of particular note is the essential deepening of relations between Ukraine and Romania in recent years.[38] As far back as 2011, Bucharest and Kyiv were involved in a territorial dispute over the Snake Island. Neither country wanted to concede its claims to this territory. It's worthy of praise that both states were mature enough to resolve the problem in the Court of Justice in the Hague instead of resorting to violence.

Studies (London: Routledge, February 2022), 96, 112, 115, 134, 139, 211; "Romania has second-highest defense budget in Eastern Europe," *Romania-Insider.com*, December 2, 2016, accessed September 9, 2022, http://www.romania-insider.com/romanias-second-highest-defense-budget-eastern-europe/.

37 Grzegorz Kostrzewa-Zorbas, interviewed by Jakub Maciejewski, "Jeśli jesteś orędownikiem idei Międzymorza, koniecznie TO przeczytaj!", *Telewizja Republika*, February 19, 2017, accessed August 5, 2022, http://telewizjarepublika.pl/jesli-jestes-oredownikiem-idei-miedzymorza-koniecznie-to-przeczytaj,44805.html.

38 Tomasz Dąbrowski and Tadeusz Iwański, "Breaking through distrust in relations between Romania and Ukraine," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, *Analyses*, April 27, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-04-27/breaking-through-distrust-relations-between-romania-and-ukraine.

Just a few years ago, Romania and Ukraine were squarely distrustful of one another. Romanian economic activity in the Black Sea was perceived in Kyiv as impinging on Ukraine's economic interests.[39] Likewise, support given by Bucharest to the Romanian minority in Ukraine was viewed suspiciously in Kyiv, which had been afraid of a possible secessionist movement in that area of the country.[40] Both states sparred also over the use of the transport potential of the Danube Delta.[41]

Since that time, the bilateral relations of these two Orthodox Christian countries have gradually evolved toward friendship and partnership. Russia's annexation of Crimea was met with apprehension in Bucharest. The biggest Romanian port in Constanța is situated 392 km (244 miles) in a straight line from the Russian naval base in Sevastopol, whereas the distance from Constanța to another crucial Russian naval base on the Black Sea in Novorossiysk is 728 km (393 miles). In essence, the Romanian political and military leadership considers Crimea to be a kind of giant stationary Russian aircraft carrier on the Black Sea. Bucharest not only fears a repetition of the events in Crimea and Donbas in Transnistria, but also the rapidly growing militarisation of the Crimean Peninsula together with Russian dominance in the Black Sea. Therefore, the Romanian authorities declared their intention to boost military spending more than symbolically from the unambiguously insufficient level of 1.4% of GDP in 2014 to 2% in 2017.[42] This promise was principally kept. In 2020, Romania earmarked $5.18 billion for defence

39 Tadeusz Iwański, "Ukraine – Romania: a sustained deadlock," *OSW Commentary*, no. 68 (December 29, 2011): 1.

40 Ibid.: 3–4.

41 Ibid.: 4–5.

42 See Tomasz Dąbrowski, "Romania after the NATO summit in Newport," *Centre for Eastern Studies*, *Analyses*, September 10, 2014, accessed August 5, 2022, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-09-10/romania-after-nato-summit-newport; "Romania has second-highest defense budget in Eastern Europe"; and "Romania's defense minister confirms defense spending will increase," *Romania-Insider.com*, December 15, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, http://www.romania-insider.com/romanias-defense-minister-confirms-defense-spending-increase/.

expenditure (2.08% of GDP), whereas in 2021, it funnelled $5.61 billion for defence purposes (1.95% of GDP).[43]

It is justifiable to draw the conclusion that primarily thanks to Russia's aggressive steps in Ukraine, bilateral relations between Kyiv and Bucharest clearly improved in the three years after the annexation of Crimea. Nevertheless, these relations were strained in 2017 when Romanian President Klaus Iohannis cancelled his visit to Kyiv in an act of protest against a new Ukrainian education law that was unfavourable to ethnic minorities.[44] Undoubtedly, against the background of Russia, Romania presents itself as a friendly, responsible, and predictable neighbour for Ukraine. The Romanian government not only unequivocally condemned Moscow's aggression against Ukraine, but also without hesitation expressed its support for the imposition of sanctions against the Russian Federation. Moreover, Romania was one of the first states to ratify the EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine. Additionally, in 2014, both countries signed a deal facilitating border traffic for their citizens. Bucharest also endorsed the help for Ukraine from the NATO's Trust Fund in the domain of cyber-security.[45] There are many clues indicating that Romania and Ukraine took a decision to grow closer to each other and to seriously instigate military security cooperation. In Chernivtsi in March 2017, Viktor Muzhenko and Nicolae-Ionel Ciucă signed a plan on bilateral cooperation between the armed forces of both states.[46]

43 *The Military Balance 2022*, 139.

44 Jakub Pieńkowski, "Romania's Support for Ukraine Clear but Restrained," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 122 (2038) (July 29, 2022): 1.

45 Tomasz Dąbrowski, "President Iohannis's first steps in foreign policy – how much change, how much continuation?", *Centre for Eastern Studies*, *Analyses*, March 11, 2015, accessed August 5, 2022, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-03-11/president-iohanniss-first-steps-foreign-policy-how-much-change-how.

46 "Szefowie sztabów generalnych Ukrainy i Rumunii podpisali umowę o priorytetach we współpracy wojskowej," *Kresy24.pl*, March 16, 2017, accessed August 5, 2022, http://kresy24.pl/szefowie-sztabow-generalnych-ukrainy-i-rumunii-podpisali-umowe-o-priorytetach-we-wspolpracy-wojskowej/.

The Romanian government became even more worried when in February 2022, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian troops captured Kherson and approached the Romanian-Ukrainian border, threatening Mykolaiv and Odessa. Moreover, both warring sides laid many sea mines along the Ukrainian Black Sea coast. Some of these were drifting mines, which pose risks for shipping to Romanian ports. Especially worrying for Romania was the temporary occupation of Snake Island by Russian soldiers, due to its proximity to Romania: This island is situated some 40 km off the Danube delta. Any potential deployment of Russian surface-to-water missile launchers on this island would pose a serious threat to Romanian shipping. At the same time, the Romanian authorities are concerned that the next victim of Russian invasion could be Moldova. Preservation of independent Moldova is regarded in Romania as a vital national interest. Hence, the new stage of Russian aggression against Ukraine contributed to the rapprochement between Bucharest and Kyiv.

Diplomatically, Romania unequivocally condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Romania accepted roughly 1 million Ukrainian refugees in February and March 2022, and several tens of thousands still remain on its territory. The country also supported giving EU membership candidate status to Ukraine and allowed for the transit of US and Western armaments to Ukraine, although supplies of Romanian weapons and arms to Ukraine are modest in comparison with, for example, Poland. Most importantly, the Romanian government has made the port of Constanța available for the export of Ukrainian grain and agricultural products.[47] Given that about 40% of Ukraine's annual export revenues come from exporting agricultural products, the ability to ship them abroad is of vital importance to Ukraine.

All the aforementioned actions were positively received in Kyiv and vastly contributed to the enhancement of bilateral relations, which had previously been poor. Sparring over islands or minority rights seems

47 Pieńkowski, "Romania's Support": 1–2.

at present to be a matter of the distant past. Once again, the old belief that nothing unites so much and so close as a common foe turns out to be true.

Poland–Ukraine

One of the fields of potential fruitful liaison between Poland and Ukraine is cooperation in military manufacturing. Taking into account that Ukraine is a relatively poor country,[48] it boasts a surprisingly modern and advanced military industry. Many technical innovations of Ukrainian military industrial firms are unique. On March 2017, the CEO of the biggest Ukrainian defence industry association, Ukroboronprom, proposed to the Polish vice-minister of defence that Poland and Ukraine work together on the construction of a new short-range air defence system known under Polish code name Narew.[49] The offer was rejected. The fact that the defence industries of Poland and Ukraine are relatively complementary to one another is an additional factor favouring cooperation in this sector. For one, Poland can boast a well-developed helicopter production industry. However, it does not produce helicopter engines. Ukraine, in turn, has the famous enterprise Motor Sich in Zaporizhzhia, which produces advanced helicopter engines. Some time ago, the Polish Minister of National Defence suggested that both states could jointly construct a new military helicopter. Examples of successfully implemented Polish-Ukrainian partnerships in the mil-

48 In the "GfK Purchasing Power Europe 2016" report Ukraine was ranked exactly at the unenviable last – that is 41st – position in Europe in terms of its GDP per capita. See "GfK Purchasing Power Europe 2016," *GfK*, November 8, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, http://www.gfk.com/insights/press-release/pp-europe/. Since that time Ukraine, did not improve its position in the ranking. In 2021, the country was ranked 41st with only Kosovo behind Ukraine in Europe. See "GDP per capita PPP | Europe," *Trading Economics*, accessed August 5, 2022, https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/gdp-per-capita-ppp?continent=europe. The revived and ablazed war will only deepen already severe Ukrainian economic problems.

49 See Wojciech Łuczak, "Nowy gracz o Narew," *Raport: Wojsko, Technika, Obronność*, no. 3 (March 2017): 26; and idem, "Nowy gracz o Narew," *Altair.com.pl*, March 16, 2017, accessed August 5, 2022, http://www.altair.com.pl/news/view?news_id=21810. The Narew is a river in northeastern Poland.

itary industry include: the light anti-tank missile complex Pirat (Pirate), the precision artillery strike munition APR 120 and APR 155,[50] and the Ukrainian laser self defence system Adros mounted on Polish military helicopters W-3 Głuszec.

By and large, since 2014 Ukraine has increasingly often approached Poland with offers of cooperation in the defence sector. This was chiefly the result of the loss of the Russian market for Ukrainian weaponry and subassemblies which took a toll on the Ukrainian military industrial complex. Nowadays, Ukrainian firms from this sector are desperately searching for new partners and customers abroad. In other words, Ukraine's defence industry complex is experiencing a pressing need to reorient itself as soon as possible. If it fails in this endeavour, its further existence – to say nothing of successful development – will be open to doubt. Currently, production of military equipment in the country is considerably hampered by repeated air and missile strikes on the factories of the defence industry. Therefore, even relocating some military plants from Ukraine to Poland would make sense – the probability of an open Russian strike on a factory located in a NATO member state is less likely, though not entirely impossible.

Kyiv has been continuing to ramp up its joint training and military drills with Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and other NATO eastern flank countries. For instance, in the years preceding the second Russian invasion, Ukrainian soldiers were trained in Yavoriv by the Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine (JMTG-U) established by NATO. Many officers serving in the JMTG-U are seconded from the Polish Armed Forces. Many Ukrainian soldiers and civilians wounded in combat are being treated in Polish hospitals. This applies to both the military operations conducted in 2014–15 and those in 2022. Since 2014, a joint Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian military brigade (also known as LITPOLUKRBRIG)

[50] On Polish-Ukrainian cooperation in development of advanced precision artillery munition, see Andrzej Kiński, "APR 155 gotowy do produkcji," *Wojsko i Technika* 82, no. 7 (July 2022): 20–26.

has been in existence.[51] This brigade has conducted military exercises regularly.

Even before 2022, Poland also provided some logistical assistance as well as non-lethal military equipment to Ukraine's army during its fight in Donbas with pro-Russian and Russian forces. Since 2022, Poland has shipped a significant number of miscellaneous weaponry to Ukraine, including tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, drones, self-propelled howitzers, hand-held anti-tank grenade launchers, rifles, man-portable air defence systems, bulletproof vests, helmets, and munitions of various calibres. Most of these weapons were given to Ukraine for free. However, not all relevant information, especially the exact numbers of weapons delivered, have been made public. The weaponry conveyed to Ukraine by Poland varies in terms of its modernity, advancement, and quality. Some of the weapon systems handed over are outdated, such as T-72 tanks or BWP-1 infantry fighting vehicles. On the other hand, Ukraine has received such up-to-date weapons as the Piorun man-portable air defence system, which is regarded as the leading system of its type in the world,[52] and modern Krab self-propelled howitzers. Apparently, only the United States has sent more weaponry and munitions to Ukraine. Taking into account that Poland is less economically and militarily powerful than the US and the Western European powers, Polish military and economic aid for Ukraine is very significant. The aforementioned cases are evidence in support of the thesis that military cooperation amongst Intermarium states (and particularly between Poland and Ukraine) has taken off. This trend will almost surely be continued in the coming years.

51 "Poland, Baltic States Will Continue to Promote Ukraine's Western Ties," *Stratfor Worldview*, January 7, 2015, accessed September 11, 2022, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/poland-baltic-states-will-continue-promote-ukraines-western-ties.

52 Jerzy Reszczyński, "Ukraina: Pochwały dla przeciwlotniczego Pioruna," *Defence24*, August 4, 2022, accessed August 4, 2022, https://defence24.pl/sily-zbrojne/ukraina-pochwaly-dla-przeciwlotniczego-pioruna.

According to Prof. Andrzej Zybertowicz, as of the end of June 2022, Polish military aid provided to Ukraine was three times greater than the German, French, and Italian deliveries combined.[53] At the same time, Poland has a smaller population, a much smaller economy, and weaker armed forces than Germany, France, and Italy. Ukrainian society undoubtedly notices this substantial aid "in the hour of trial". According to the June 2022 Rating Group Ukraine survey, Poland's President Andrzej Duda enjoyed the greatest trust of Ukrainian citizens amongst foreign political leaders.[54] Another opinion poll, conducted by Ukrainian research institute Info Sapiens for the Mieroszewski Centre, indicates a very high level of sympathy toward Poles amongst Ukrainians at present.[55]

Ukraine has also intensified cooperation with Poland in the sphere of energy security. In the years after 2014, the Ukrainian authorities went to great lengths to lessen Ukraine's dependence on imports of natural gas from Russia. Due to, among other things, the good cooperation with Warsaw, Kyiv successfully managed to diversify the sources and routes of its gas imports. Currently, a significant quantity of gas is flowing to Ukraine via pipeline interconnectors linking Ukraine with Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. In 2016, both Ukraine and Poland announced their plans to construct a new gas pipeline by 2020, thanks to which Ukraine would have been able to import an additional 5 billion cubic

53 Andrzej Zybertowicz, interviewed by Jan Wróbel, "Agentura i związki gospodarcze – tu się nic nie wyklucza," *Dziennik*. *Gazeta Prawna*, no. 136 (5798) (July 15–17, 2022): A21.

54 "Sondaż: Ukraińcy najbardziej pozytywnie postrzegają Dudę, Johnsona i Bidena," *Rzeczpospolita*, June 21, 2022, accessed September 23, 2022, https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art36542131-sondaz-ukraincy-najbardziej-pozytywnie-postrzegaja-dude-johnsona-i-bidena.

55 Łukasz Adamski, interviewed by Łukasz Rogojsz, "Ukraińcy w sondażu opowiedzieli się za zbliżeniem z Polską. Dr Łukasz Adamski wyjaśnia," *Interia*, August 24, 2022, accessed September 23, 2022, https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/raporty/raport-ukraina-rosja/aktualnosci/news-ukraincy-w-sondazu-opowiedzieli-sie-za-zblizeniem-z-polska-d,nId,6240755#utm_source=paste&utm_medium=paste&utm_campaign=firefox.

metres of gas from the sources to the west.[56] Unfortunately, this natural gas interconnector has not been built. The Polish authorities blamed the delay on the Ukrainian side. The objective fact is that to complete this interconnector on the Polish side of the border, it was enough to construct a 1.5 km stretch of the gas pipeline, whereas a 100 km stretch was needed on Ukrainian territory. This imbalance meant that the construction costs of the interconnector on the Ukrainian side were much higher than that on the Polish side.[57] Given Ukraine's limited budget, finding financial resources for this purpose was a challenge.

Good relations and cooperation with Poland without doubt give Ukraine more leeway as to its Russian policy. After the start of the next stage of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022, a lot of oil has been exported to Ukraine from Poland, supplementing shortages in fuel supplies after the damage done to the Ukrainian oil refinery in Kremenchuk.

It must be emphasised that Poland received around 4 million Ukrainian war refugees. This was by far the largest movement of migrants in Europe since World War II. The massive Ukrainian emigration in 2022 eclipsed the European migration crisis of 2015–16. Just during the first three months of the war, Polish public spending on aid for refugees from Ukraine amounted to around PLN 15.9 billion, while private expenditure amounted to around PLN 10 billion. Ukrainian refugees were given access to the Polish healthcare system. At the same time, thanks to a simplified procedure, 360,000 Ukrainians found employment in Poland as of 28 July 2022.[58]

56 Eugene Chausovsky, "Picking Up Where the West Leaves Off," *Stratfor Worldview*, December 9, 2016, accessed September 8, 2022, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/picking-where-west-leaves.

57 Leszek Kadej, "Rynek ciągle zainteresowany przesyłem gazu na Ukrainę," *Wysokie-Napiecie.pl*, November 10, 2021, accessed August 4, 2022, https://wysokienapiecie.pl/42237-rynek-ciagle-zainteresowany-przesylem-gazu-na-ukraine/.

58 "358 tysięcy Ukraińców znalazło pracę w Polsce," *Kresy.pl*, July 29, 2022, accessed July 29, 2022, https://kresy.pl/wydarzenia/358-tysiecy-ukraincow-znalazlo-prace-w-polsce/.

Though Poland can by no means replace the EU or NATO as Ukraine's ally, it has one big advantage from Kyiv's standpoint: its foreign policy toward the Russian Federation is stable and much less hesitant. Irrespective of which political party or coalition of parties is in charge in Warsaw, Poland's stance and policy vis-à-vis Russia is more or less the same. Of course, sometimes it can be a little bit milder, sometimes slightly harsher, but it does not change drastically regardless of which party holds power. This cannot be said in the case of Germany or France. Germany's left-wing Social Democratic Party (SPD) is traditionally more concessive and compliant to Moscow. The chancellery of Gerhard Schroeder has made plenty of statements that support such a thesis. Various statements by Sigmar Gabriel or Frank-Walter Steinmeier give additional evidence confirming this opinion. Also, the incumbent chancellor Olaf Scholz's enthusiasm for aiding Ukraine in repelling the aggression appears to be limited. In contrast to Germany's Social Democrats, the right-wing Christian Democratic Union (CDU) – particularly under the leadership of chancellor Angela Merkel – was evidently more critical toward the Kremlin. Similarly, in France there is doubtlessly a clear-cut gap between François Hollande or Emmanuel Macron, on the one hand, and Marine Le Pen or François Fillon on the other in their Russian policies. The former are more distrustful towards Russia, the latter are much more enthusiastic and decidedly more likely to lift sanctions. In this respect, Poland presents as a more reliable and predictable ally than the western European states or Hungary. Moreover, as the old proverb says, "beggars can't be choosers". In fact, Ukraine does not have the luxury of freely choosing among a raft of potential allies courting it incessantly. As Robert Kaplan bitterly remarked:

> It is common knowledge that neither the EU nor NATO want Ukraine to become their member. It is too poor, too large, too corrupt. The union

> had too many troubles with absorbing new member states to think of Ukraine yet.[59]

If this judgement, highly pessimistic and upsetting for Ukrainians as it may be, is right, then Kyiv does not have many options apart from strengthening its links to those states which sincerely and squarely strive after a long-term, authentic, and honest cooperation with Ukraine on mutually advantageous terms. Poland appears to be one of few such countries.

As a matter of fact, the only serious problem in bilateral Polish-Ukrainian relations concerns Kyiv's historical politics. The promotion of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (known under the abbreviation UPA) together with Ukrainian nationalists who perpetrated ethnic cleansing of Poles and Jews on a massive scale during World War II, remains point of contention in Polish-Ukrainian bilateral relations. This issue is of special significance to the currently ruling conservative Polish party Law and Justice and its electorate, which is responsive to historical issues. Many people who voted for Law and Justice are descendants of the victims of the UPA's atrocities; hence the party listens intently to their voices. However, this emotional issue has been impinging on Polish-Ukrainian relations for many years, it is arguably not severe enough to completely obscure the benefits of the mutual partnership.

Poland–Romania

According to Robert Kaplan, Poland and Romania are the "two largest NATO states in northeastern and southeastern Europe respectively, that are crucial to the emergence of an effective Intermarium to counter Russia. Together they practically link the Baltic with the Black

[59] Robert Kaplan, interviewed by Ziemowit Szczerek, "Jaka będzie Rosja po Putinie?", *Polityka*, December 27, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/1687354,1,jaka-bedzie-rosja-po-putinie.read.

Sea."[60] The bilateral relations of Warsaw and Bucharest throughout the last quarter of a century are without a doubt good. To a very substantial degree, both countries share their perception of Russia. Even though Romania does not border Russia, it feels almost as endangered by the Kremlin as Poland does. Both states look for intensification of bilateral relations. However, Romania was slightly disappointed by the lack of sufficient activity by Warsaw oriented toward tightening mutual relations not only verbally but also in more practical, tangible ways during the rule of the former Civic Platform and Polish People's Party coalitional government. To put it simply, from Bucharest's viewpoint at the time, in reality the Polish-Romanian strategic partnership was not implemented to a satisfactory extent. That was a point at least in the past.[61] Now, the situation in this respect has somewhat improved. For the incumbent Polish President, Andrzej Duda, who took office in mid-2015, Romania appears to be one of the priority directions of diplomatic activity. For President Duda, Romania "is absolutely a strategic partner of Poland in the region".[62] On a joint Polish-Romanian initiative undertaken in November 2015, that is before the Warsaw NATO Summit, the leaders of all the eastern NATO flank countries met in Bucharest – with the notable exception of the Czech Republic, which delegated a lower official to the meeting.[63] This event proves the thesis

60 Kaplan, "Pilsudski's Europe."

61 Interestingly, my personal experiences partly confirm Robert Kaplan's account from his visit and talks in Romania in 2014. He tellingly remarked: "Indeed, during a recent visit to Romania, the president, the president's national security adviser, and the prime minister all told me in separate meetings that Poland and Turkey were critical countries for Romania in light of the Ukrainian crisis. Throughout my stay in Bucharest, calls for closer relations with Warsaw and Ankara as part of an anti-Russian alliance were made explicit." See Kaplan, "Pilsudski's Europe."

62 "Prezydent w Rumunii m.in. o bezpieczeństwie i szczycie NATO," *Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego*, November 2, 2015, accessed August 5, 2022, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/aktywnosci-prezydenta/7154,Prezydent-w-Rumunii-min-o-bezpieczenstwie-i-szczycie-NATO.html.

63 For detailed information on what was decided at this meeting, see Kamil Sobczyk, "Współpraca ośrodków prezydenckich państw wschodniej flanki NATO w toku

that Poland and Romania have an aspiration to jointly and in a coordinated manner lead the eastern flank of North Atlantic Alliance.

As far as the economic domain is concerned, both states are trying to build the Gdańsk–Constanța[64] transport corridor, which would certainly accelerate their mutual commercial exchanges and the dynamics of their economic development. During the NATO Warsaw Summit in 2016, a decision was made that the 205th Air Defence Battalion of the Romanian Army, numbering approximately 100 soldiers, would be stationed in Poland[65] within the broader scheme of backing NATO's presence in its eastern flank to deter Russian aggression. These troops became subordinated to the US-led special NATO battlegroup. At the time, NATO member states were not too willing to send their troops to Poland, so a political decision made by the Romanian authorities to send a small contingent of soldiers to be stationed on Polish soil might have been interpreted as a gesture toward Warsaw that Bucharest was seriously interested in military partnership with Poland. It is worth mentioning that it was the first time a Romanian Army battalion had been deployed in one of the NATO member states. For its part, Warsaw decided to send a mechanised company to Romania.[66]

It must be noted that strengthening of Polish-Romanian partnership is viewed with satisfaction in Washington. The White House treats both states as the two most pro-American and most loyal nations in Central and Eastern Europe regardless of which particular party holds power

przygotowań do szczytu Sojuszu w Warszawie," *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe*, no. I–IV (37–40) (January – December 2016): 56–57.

64 Anita Sobják, "An 'Economic NATO' – A Polish-Romanian Answer to the current Questions of Europe," *Polish Institute of International Affairs*, October 28, 2013, accessed March 20, 2017, http://www.pism.pl/events/PISM-visitors/Crtin-Antonescu.

65 Maksymilian Dura, "Pierwsza bateria przeciwlotnicza 35 mm już w tym roku w Polsce," *Defence24.pl*, March 18, 2017, accessed August 5, 2022, http://www.defence24.pl/564323,pierwsza-bateria-przeciwlotnicza-35-mm-juz-w-tym-roku-w-polsce.

66 "Wizyta szefa BBN w Rumunii," *Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego*, November 20, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/7716,Wizyta-szefa-BBN-w-Rumunii.html?search=7589631.

in Warsaw or Bucharest, so actually no one ought to be surprised that US policy-makers took the decision to locate the key elements of the advanced Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) on the territories of these two particular states. Since 2010, Polish and Romanian Defence Ministries have closely and widely consulted about miscellaneous intricacies of the BMD project on a regular basis.[67]

Besides Poland, Ukraine, and Romania, other states in the region also foster their mutual ties in various configurations. In short, they all seek closer links with each other. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have been consistently enhancing their military security liaison, creating de facto a single security space.[68] Perhaps the best example of coordinated actions of Intermarium states is their joint protests against the development of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.[69]

Conclusion

The main thesis of this chapter is that the Intermarium concept is viable and realistic to a limited extent, though the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 noticeably increased the prospect of the Intermarium political concept being realised. Closer security ties, particularly in military and energy areas, among certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe are by all means imaginable. Six states of the region appear to be more inclined to align on security matters, namely Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. These states share in essence the same perception of Russia and see it as a potent threat. Other countries of the region, such as Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Moldova, and Bulgaria, are much less prone to creating an

67 Przemysław Pacuła, "Polsko-rumuńska współpraca obronna. Stan obecny i perspektywy," *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe*, no. III (35) (July – September 2015): 19.

68 Olevs Nikers, "Baltics Take Step Toward Creating Single Security Space," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 14, no. 35 (March 15, 2017), accessed August 5, 2022, https://jamestown.org/program/baltics-take-step-toward-creating-single-security-space/.

69 "Międzymorze zablokuje Nord Stream-2?", *Kresy24.pl*, March 17, 2016, accessed August 5, 2022, http://kresy24.pl/miedzymorze-zablokuje-nord-stream-2/.

informal alliance against Russia. Hungary under Victor Orban's leadership took quite a pro-Russian stance, distancing itself from Kyiv. Slovakia holds a position that is in line with the Kremlin's expectations more often than other countries in the region.[70] It should be pointed out that from a military, demographic, economic, and political viewpoint, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania are the core and the backbone of the whole region, thus the cooperation of these countries makes the idea of the Intermarium worth considering. Moreover, these states noticeably strengthened their cooperation, especially on military and energy security, after the Russian Federation annexed the Crimean Peninsula and incited rebellion in Donbas. Polish-Ukrainian cooperation and mutual support considerably intensified in 2022. Without the broad assistance provided to Ukraine by Poland, the prospects of repelling the Russian invasions would be clearly worse.

What's more, such an intensified cooperation is taking place under the informal aegis of the United States of America, which is unquestionably interested in holding Russian influences back from this part of the world. Even though preservation of the independence and full territorial integrity of Ukraine is not a vital interest of Washington, nonetheless the US does not want Moscow to fully subjugate Ukraine because this would vastly ease the recreation of the Russian Empire which, in turn, would markedly threaten the hegemony of the US and the West in the long run.

It must be emphasised that the formal enforcement of the Intermarium alliance between the states of the region may be fulfilled in practice solely in very specific and not very likely scenarios, such as the breakup of NATO and/or the EU, the total withdrawal of the US from European affairs, etc. Unless Russia finally turns swords into ploughshares and ultimately abandons its traditional imperial ambitions and penchant for the use of armed forces to interfere in its smaller neighbours' domestic

[70] See Krzysztof Dębiec, "Słowacja: strategiczne dylematy po rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę," *Komentarze OSW*, no. 445 (May 10, 2022): 1–5.

affairs, the endangered states of the region will continue to heighten their security through either military partnerships with external powers like the US at present or France in past, or strengthening security ties among themselves.

The budding Polish-Ukrainian alliance seems to be the most promising one in this context. The experiences of 2022 decidedly corroborate such an opinion. As an old saying goes, "a friend in need is a friend indeed". Poland at the time of need provided invaded Ukraine with military and economic aid that was considerable given its limited financial and military resources. If the idea of Intermarium were to come true, the alliance between Poland and Ukraine would certainly play a key role in such a geopolitical concept. In the context of reviving the idea of Intermarium, Polish-Ukrainian relations are of high importance, if only for the simple reason that the two countries are the largest in the region.

At the same time, a healthy Polish-Romanian partnership also matters. During the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, Poland and Romania enjoyed a sincere and mutually beneficial security partnership, though there were some short periods when Bucharest and Warsaw were more reserved toward one another.[71] Yet, even during the time when Nicolae Titulescu, at the helm of Romanian foreign policy, forced through a pro-Moscow turn in Romanian diplomacy – much to Warsaw's discontent – bilateral military security cooperation, though troubled for a while, did not cease entirely.[72]

[71] To make a long story short, in the 1930s, Polish military circles, including Marshal Piłsudski, were increasingly concerned with the really bad – in their assessment – condition of the Romanian armed forces, which diminished Romania's usefulness and reliability as a military ally. On their part, the Romanian authorities were disgruntled with the way Poland treated Czechoslovakia in 1938 and Warsaw's permanent sympathy for Hungary. See Stănescu, "Jeden naród o dwóch sztandarach": 21.

[72] Marian Leczyk, "Polscy attachés wojskowi w Bukareszcie o sojuszu polsko-rumuńskim (1934–1937)," in *Międzymorze: Polska i kraje Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX–XX wiek: studia ofiarowane Piotrowi Łossowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Andrzej Ajnenkiel et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1995), 299–303, 309–310.

Poland, Ukraine, and Romania are currently on track to tighten their mutual cooperation. The Intermarium idea appears to once again be on an upward trajectory and will become more popular with time. Who knows, perhaps the simplest way Intermarium may be realised will be the increasingly likely breakup of the European Union into smaller blocs – a contingency that cannot be ruled out in light of Brexit and the deteriorating condition of the financial sector in the euro area. If that occurs, Intermarium could go into force much quicker than anyone expected in the past.

Moscow interprets Warsaw's vivid and unequivocal support of the pro-Western Orange Revolution and Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine as a Polish continuation of the interwar Promethean concept. Similarly, Poland's active backing of Georgia in the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 as well as its sympathy to Chechen separatism in the 1990s are perceived in Russia as indications that the old political concept mentioned above is still present in the foreign policy of contemporary Poland. Some Russian scholars, such as Alexandr Bovdunov, maintain that this old Intermarium concept is nowadays oftentimes masked under phrases like "Baltic-Black Sea axis", "Baltic-Black Sea arc", "Baltic-Black Sea cooperation", or "Baltic-Black Sea corridor".[73] This opinion appears to be factual. Russia is evidently increasingly concerned and annoyed by tightening of Polish-Ukrainian relations in security, military, economic, financial, energy, social, and educational fields. In the Polish-Russian competition for influence in Ukraine, it seems that Poland's soft power has definitely won over Russia's. Another question is whether Polish soft power will be enough to win out against Russian hard power in Ukraine.

In general, Russians tend to lean towards the conviction that although the Intermarium doctrine is ostensibly univocally and categorically anti-imperialist (and especially oriented against Russian imperialism), in practice it is the manifestation of Polish imperialism

[73] Bovdunov, "Poland: The Jagiellonian Alternative."

and tendencies to dominate the region.[74] This opinion seems to be true only to a limited extent. Admittedly, some variants of Intermarium have either an explicit or hidden trace of Polish "imperialism". However, the majority of Intermarium's variations focus merely on assuring the sovereignty and security of Central-Eastern European countries against external invasions and appear to be far from pushing through the purported long-term, well-hidden agenda of building a Polish empire on the territory between Germany and Russia. Such interpretations are all the more unconvincing when one takes into account the obvious and irrefutable fact that Poland definitely does not have the economic, demographic, military, territorial, or political resources to build an empire equally powerful and mighty as the ones Russia and Germany created on many different occasions in the past. Moreover, Poland's "imperial" traditions are very modest in comparison with the imperial traditions of Germany, Russia, or Turkey. In fact, one cannot point at a single period of Poland's history in which it could be justifiably and convincingly called "an empire". Even at the zenith of Poland's might and influence at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, Polish rulers called themselves "kings" as opposed to the German and Russian emperors or Turkish sultans/caliphs. Last but not least, pro-democratic and anti-imperialist values are very well rooted in the psyche of the Polish nation, which makes it even more impossible to imagine Poland as an empire in the future. For these reasons, Intermarium should be rather interpreted as an original way to secure the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Poland and other Central-Eastern European states against any unfriendly designs on the part of primarily Russia and secondarily Germany.

However, having the potential to bring plenty of advantages to the states of the region, Intermarium absolutely cannot replace NATO or the EU, due to the simple fact, that the associated states are too

[74] Compare with the argumentation of Alexandr Bovdunov: Bovdunov, "Poland: The Jagiellonian Alternative."

weak, too small, and too poor to replace the Euro-Atlantist structures, particularly in their function of deterrence against aggression. Indeed, nothing can replace the strong, sincere security ties of the region with the single global superpower. Yet by expanding security ties among themselves, countries of the region strive for an insurance policy in case of a decline in NATO or US assistance and their will to fulfil the role of protector(s). In addition, history proves that a shared perception of a common adversary can be a powerful driver for unification. In fact, the main reason why the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a predecessor of Intermarium, emerged was the common foe for both the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the form of a powerful and hostile Teutonic Order. Nowadays, some Central-Eastern European countries have found once more a common cause of precluding Russia from imposing its will on them. Unquestionably, the Kremlin would prefer to see the nations of the region disunited, antagonised, and squabbling, because it would ease the attainment of its not always friendly purposes. Thus, the Intermarium design is universally perceived in Moscow as a US-Polish conspiracy to contain, or even worse hem in, Russia that should be countered and ultimately thwarted. We must wait to see which of these two divergent visions of Intermarium's future will eventually come to fruition. Nevertheless, the aggressive, possessive, and expansionist policies of the Russian Federation greatly contribute to reviving the idea of Intermarium. Nothing can unite states as much as a common stronger and aggressive enemy, openly trying to deprive them of independence and wanting to seize their territory.

Part II.
INSTITUTIONALISATION OF MEMORY

Chapter 3

Reflection of National Suffering and Freedom Fighting in Museums of Occupation

Rasa Čepaitienė

Introduction

According to the semiotician Yuri Lotman, each culture decides for itself what to remember and what to forget.[1] This observation can also be applied to an analysis of museums devoted to the communist period, because their exhibitions can also be considered as specific cultural texts that are created and recreated by both their authors and readers.[2] Contemporary museums reflect a radical change in the perception

1 Юрий Лотман, "Память в культурологическом освещении," in Юрий Лотман, *Избранные статьи*, в 3 т., т. 1: *Статьи по семиотике и типологии культуры* (Таллинн: Александра, 1992), 200.

2 Марина Ф. Румянцева, "Музейная экспозиция как форма репрезентации / позиционирования актуального исторического знания: от постмодерна к постпостмодерну," in *Роль музеев в формировании исторического созна-*

of the past that has taken place in the West, which Aleida Assmann describes as "the collapse of temporal relations".[3] She maintains that the temporal regime of modernity,[4] which has existed since the end of the 18th century, is in crisis, and the contours of a new temporal orientation are already emerging. Whereas in modernity the past, the present, and the future were clearly separated, the present can be currently described as a "deep now" that is filled with the past and carries the future in itself.[5] Filling the present with the past is not a reason to panic, but an excuse to work with the past, which cannot be simply forgotten but has to be recycled and overcome in order to better understand the present and to cope with the future (this is what Assmann theorises about the German programme of "working with the past" and "overcoming the past"). Creating a public space for dialogue with the past, museums play a key role in this process. In other words, they become one of the forms and components of the expression of public history.

In a museum, the past is represented in a unique way. The communication of a museum with its visitors is achieved through the display and interpretation of selected museum exhibits. What is important here, however, is both the material, documentary truth of the authentic eyewitness to the past, and the coherence and persuasiveness of the narrative about the past. The selection, accumulation, and categorisation of objects in a historical museum allows them to be placed in a certain logical system of meanings that promotes a better understanding of the lives of people in the past and the passage of time itself. However, while traditional historical museums used to focus on creating

ния: Международная научно-практическая конференция (Рязань, 25–28 апреля 2011 года). Материалы и доклады (Москва: Nota Bene, 2011), 16–26.

3 Алейда Ассман, *Распалась связь времен? Взлет и падение темпорального режима Модерна*, [пер. Б. Хлебникова и Д. Тимофеева] (Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2017).

4 Assmann defines the temporal regime of culture as a structure in which some values, desires, and hopes are mobilised, while others are ignored, bypassed, silenced, and erased. Ibid., 85–86.

5 Andrew Hoskins, ed., *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York, NY; London: Routledge, 2018).

systematic (i.e., typological-chronological sequence) or ensemble (i.e., recreation of the environment) exhibitions based on the use of museum objects, it has finally become evident that this principle is no longer sufficient for conveying the complexities of historical processes and phenomena. This has led to the emergence of the thematic method of presenting exhibitions, which is based on the selection of a particular theme, idea, problem, or narrative to be revealed not only through authentic artefacts, but also through a wide variety of exhibition materials.[6]

The events of the 20th century that involved extreme state-perpetrated violence, crimes against humanity, and extreme long-term traumatisation of entire groups (world wars, the Holocaust, Stalinist repression, genocides, etc.) laid the foundations for a rethinking of a museum's functions and its relationship with the past. Unlike conventional historical museums, which present society's past in a linear way and usually with a heroic tone, the newly established museums of memory[7] focus on working with this painful past and efforts to overcome it. The activities of such museums, which reflect an ethical turn in museology, are concerned less with the accumulation, preservation, and display of museum objects and collections than with the reflection of history from the perspective of the victims, and especially with the pursuit of the restoration of historical justice. The creators of these museum exhibitions are also concerned with the present: the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime, preparation for research into

6 Rūta Šermukšnytė, "Istorijos muziejus: samprata, šiuolaikinių muziejinių naratyvų kūrimo idėjos ir jų raiška Vilniaus mieste," *Lituanistica* 58, no. 2 (88) (2012): 148–149.

7 Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014); Susan A. Crane, ed., *Museums and Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); Paul Harvey Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford; New York, NY: Berg, 2007).

the material on crimes against humanity committed by the state, the defence of human rights, and the consideration of topical social issues. That is why personal stories and testimonies of ordinary people with tragic experiences, which would not have found a place in museums before, are placed in the foreground. These new museums are the result of the joint effort of architects, designers, historians, and artists, and most often their exhibitions are based not on historiography, but rather on historiophoty,[8] as Hayden White puts it. This means that they give preference to visual sources, such as photography and video, to represent the past.

In specialist literature, museums of communism as one type of museum of memory are often discussed as a specific kind of institution of memory, which is supposed not only to bear witness to the past ("it was like this") but also to warn against it ("this should not happen again"). The examples researchers investigate often range from the most famous "specimens" of the type, such as the German Democratic Republic (GDR) Museum in Berlin or the House of Terror in Budapest,[9] to a comparative analysis[10] of typologically quite different

8 Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1193–1199.

9 Ljiljana Radonić, "Post-communist invocation of Europe: memorial museums' narratives and the Europeanization of memory," *National Identities* 19, no. 2 (2017): 269–288; Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor, eds., *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989* (Budapest; New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2008); Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Teaching Communism at the Museum: A Comparative Study of Museums Dedicated to Communism in Eastern and Central Europe," *Edukacja Humanistyczna* 29, no. 2 (2013): 95–106; Александр Астров, "Историческая политика и «онтологическая озабоченность» малых центрально-европейских государств (на примере Эстонии)," in *Историческая политика в XXI веке*, ред. Алексей Миллер и Мария Липман (Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2012), 184–213; Alexander Astrov, "Estonia. The Political Struggle for a Place in History," *Russian Politics & Law* 48, no. 5 (2010): 7–24. Александр Филюшкин, "Как изображать прошлое нации? Два подхода в музейных экспозициях (на примере Эстонии и Белоруссии)," *Вопросы музеологии*, № 1 (13) (2016): 3–9.

10 For example, Estonian scholar Aro Velmet juxtaposes the Estonian and Latvian Occupation Museums with Grūtas Park, which is not only a different type of open-air exhibition (a theme park), but is also based on a different narrative concept.

institutions, which complicates a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The museums of occupation have played an important role in the process of desovietisation in post-socialist and post-Soviet countries and have contributed considerably to imparting more tangible content to the concept. The histories of their establishment suggest two distinct phases. The first phase, that of 1992–93, marked the early wave of spontaneous desovietisation initiated by anti-communist NGOs and individuals who were very active at the time, were often linked to dissident circles and national diasporas abroad, and who felt obliged to preserve the memory of Soviet repression. This led to the establishment of museums in Vilnius (Lithuania), Riga (Latvia), and Sighetu (Romania). The process reflected the need to replace one hegemonic (Soviet) version of history with a national one, which resulted in ideological decolonisation.[11] Museums of the second phase were more concerned with the countries' preparations for accession to the European Union, when the intention was to elevate the memory of communist crimes in the Central-Eastern European region to a pan-European scale. The founders and staff of these museums undoubtedly looked to each other's decisions and museum practices for the optimal way to convey not only the local, but also the regional shared experience of totalitarianism. For example, Amy Sodaro, who analysed the narrative structure of such museums, observes that the *Terror Háza* (House of Terror) in Budapest is conceptually closer to the ideas and meanings of similar museums in the Baltic countries.[12]

See Aro Velmet, "Occupied Identities: National Narratives in Baltic Museums of Occupations," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 42, no. 2 (2010): 89–211.

11 Pierre Nora, "Reasons for the current upsurge in memory," *Eurozine*, April 19, 2002, accessed May 5, 2022, https://www.eurozine.com/reasons-for-the-current-upsurge-in-memory/.

12 Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity. Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 60.

However, it can be noted that museums of occupation in the Baltic countries are described either individually[13] or together with other post-socialist Central-Eastern European museums of the same type, which does not always help to bring out their local and regional specificity. In this context, the aim of this chapter is to clarify the kind of narrative that is shaped by museums and exhibitions of the occupation in post-Soviet countries. To what extent do the four cases selected for the study covering museums and exhibitions of the occupation in Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, and Chişinău share common features and which of them are specific to a particular country? How do these museums and exhibitions define the very notion of "occupation"? Do they cross the threshold of the national perspective of "suffering and freedom fights" and move to the regional (common Baltic) level (or, more broadly, to the level of memory of the countries affected by the Molotov-Ribbentrop conspiracy) and, finally, to the level of common European memory? How and by what means do they interpret and distinguish between Nazi and Soviet "totalitarianisms"? What is the extent that these museums reflect the narrative of "victims" on the one hand and of "heroes" on the other? What emotional effects are they trying to evoke? Finally, who is the collective "we" that the curators of these museums and exhibitions address? An important consideration in the analysis of this case, just as of the case of other types of museums and exhibitions addressing the Soviet era, was the question of the authenticity of their location, which enhances their informational and emotional impact.

13 Laura A. Lenss, "Capturing the Next Shift: The Mapping of Meaning onto the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia," *Future Anterior* 3, no. 1 (2006): 48–57; Валентина Хархун, "Политика памяти о коммунизме и музейная коммуникация," *Труды «Русской антропологической школы»* 11 (2012): 119–126; Linara Dovydaitytė, "Which Communism to Bring to the Museum? A Case of Memory Politics in Lithuania," *Meno istorija ir kritik*a, no. 6 (2010): 80–87; Екатерина Махотина, "Вильнюс. Места памяти европейской истории," *Неприкосновенный запас*, № 4 (2013): 277–297; Meike Wulf, "The Struggle for Official Recognition of 'Displaced' Group Memories in Post-Soviet Estonia," in *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*, ed. Michal Kopecek (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 221–246.

Lithuania

Lithuania has a number of museums dedicated to the Soviet period, both public and private, mostly devoted to freedom fights and deportations.[14] Their exhibitions highlight the tragic aspects of the Soviet occupation and the incorporation of the Republic of Lithuania into the USSR, and emphasise the negative long-term consequences of Sovietisation and the resistance of Lithuanian society to the imposition of Soviet rule. In terms of the semantics of place, the most prominent of all the museums discussed below is the Museum of Genocide Victims in Vilnius (since 2018, the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights), which is located in the building where some of the events discussed in the exhibition took place. The cells in the basement of what used to be a KGB (Committee for State Security) prison became a museum where former prisoners led tours and later worked as guides eagerly answering questions from visitors. A permanent exhibition devoted to the tragedy of the Holocaust opened in one of the cells in 2011 is still poorly connected to the overall context of the exhibition. Although partially reconstructed, the facility is most valuable for the preserved authentic surroundings of its interior and exterior spaces (punishment cells, torture cells, prisoners' exercise yard, and the execution cell). The idea of the creative staff of the company Ekspozicijų Sistemos, which developed the design of the museum, to install a glass floor in the execution cell, the most emotionally powerful part of the building, in order to show the sand underneath and the prisoners' authentic belongings seems to metaphorically express not only the desire of mu-

[14] In addition to the institutions and memorial museums of famous cultural figures established during the Soviet period, mention should also be made of the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius, the Museum of Freedom Fights in Utena, the Museum of Freedom Fights in Lazdijai, the Museum of the History of Freedom Fights and Exile in Priekulė, the Ramovėnai Museum of Freedom Fights, the Museum of Lithuanian Freedom Fights in Garliava, the Museum of the History of Freedom Fights in Obeliai, the Museum of the Afghanistan War Veterans' Club in Alytus, the Cold War Museum in Plokštinė, Grūtas Park, the Atomic Bunker on Raudondvario Road in Kaunas, the House-Museum of the Brazauskas Family in Kaišiadorys, Kaunas 9th Fort Museum, etc.

seum curators to remain transparent in the face of the historical truth, but also signals the fragility of existence to the visitor. (This idea was also replicated in an exhibition at the White Manor – the former villa of Franciszek Walicki – in Tuskulėnai Peace Park.) Information and photographs printed on glass make it possible to reconstruct the personalities of the prisoners who were shot here, thus turning this horrible place into a cold and impassive forensic laboratory. Glass separates the area on a bare wall where most of the bullet traces remain. On a screen in the centre of an empty room, a three-minute-long excerpt from Andrzej Wajda's 2007 film *Katyn* depicting the execution plays on a loop. The same scene is also shown in the Tuskulėnai Peace Park, commemorating victims of the KGB (Figure 2).

The tragic nature of this particular place and of Lithuanian people who were caught up in the maelstrom of the occupation and repression is also conveyed by the surroundings of the former KGB palace, which is enriched with memory fragments created by artists. These include the names of the partisans who were imprisoned and killed here, carved on the bricks of the foundations of the former KGB palace by the artist Gitenis Umbrasas; they achieve a strong emotional impact through minimal means. They also include a modest pyramid made of boulders brought from places of imprisonment and deportation in Victims' Square nearby. The monument to the Lithuanian exiles who suffered and died in Yakutia between 1942 and 1956 (sculptor Jonas Jagėla, architect Algis Vyšniūnas) which was supposed to be unveiled in Yakutsk in 2006 (the Russian side unexpectedly cancelled the coordinated decision) rises behind the pyramid.[15] Lukiškių Square, which bears other symbols of resistance and repression, is also very close by. All

[15] In 2011, such a memorial did appear in a churchyard in Yakutsk, on the initiative of the "Gintaras" community of former Lithuanian exiles and their descendants. "В Якутске (наконец) установлен памятник репрессированным литовцам," *Международный Мемориал: Проект «Уроки истории»*, 25 июня 2011, дата обращения 15.04.2022, https://urokiistorii.ru/articles/v-jakutske-nakonec-ustanovlen-pamjatni.

Figure 2. A fragment of the exposition of the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights, Vilnius.
Photo by Rasa Čepaitienė, June 2020.

of this facilitates viewing the former KGB building and its surroundings as a meaningful, coherent, and consistent text. The Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights is therefore not only a cultural institution, but also a place of remembrance of extraordinary political importance.

The dominant colour palette in the exhibition on the ground and first floors of the museum is limited to white, black, and red, which is quite typical of museum exhibitions depicting tragedies. The starting point of the museum narrative is the Molotov-Ribbentrop collusion and its consequences for the security of the region and the independence of the Baltic countries. The narrative continues with a coherent account

of the course of the occupation, the destruction of Lithuania's sovereignty, and repression. Through blown-up photographs, video installations, and a collage of authentic documents and artefacts, the emergence of the anti-Soviet resistance, the armed struggle, and the suppression of this movement unfold before the visitor. The contrast of authentic objects (such as the uniforms of NKVD [People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs] officers) and photographs with blown-up photographic prints creates an impression of authenticity and makes it possible to recreate the events of the past. The first floor of the museum is devoted to deportations of Lithuanians and the Gulag and follows the same principle of combining a variety of materials and images to create empathy for the victims of repression.[16] Exile is depicted as a world of women, children, and the dead, but there is also the space of the deportees' everyday life and cultural activities. A small room houses an installation dedicated to the return from exile, with a fragment of railroad tracks and a suitcase standing on top of it as the centrepiece. The exhibition ends with a depiction of the figures of the 1954–91 unarmed resistance, its main events, and the means of resistance and disobedience, thus bringing the narrative to an optimistic scene of "victory won after long struggle and suffering". However, the remaining two sections of the museum exhibition, which detail the activities of the KGB in Lithuania, contradict this interpretation, thus implying that the control and repression of society continued right up to the collapse of this system. The company Ekspozicijų Sistemos, which created the design for the museum, often collaborates with the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania (*Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo cen-*

[16] The Folk Life Museum in Rumšiškės was perhaps the first to dedicate space to the memory of the deportations. In 1994, it built the first of several deportees' yurts, similar to those built for the deportees on the shores of the Laptev Sea. This attracted a lot of public attention.

tras, hereinafter LGGRTC) and has also developed exhibition designs for other Lithuanian museums and visitor centres of protected areas.[17]

Anthropologist Neringa Klumbytė relates the design of the museum to "affective ideology", whereby a visit to such a place allows citizens and tourists to emotionally experience the suffering once endured by other people there. According to her, the building's dungeons (terror), the ground floor of the exhibition (lives in the name of freedom), and the first floor (the deported nation), or, in other words, repression, resistance, and the Gulag, convey the narrative through the eyes of the victims, thus depicting and summarising the losses and deprivations suffered by Lithuanian society during the years of the occupations.[18]

The branch of the museum directly related to the dungeons of the former KGB palace – the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights – and the events that took place there is located in the territory of the historic Tuskulėnai Manor, which was converted into a peace park. The area near the Neris River at the boundary of the present-day residential area of Žirmūnai is famous for the fact that from 1944 to 1947, the bodies of the victims of the Soviet repressive system shot in the basement of the NKVD-MGB (Ministry of State Security) palace were secretly buried in this area, which was then under the jurisdiction of the NKVD. A total of 767 remains were discovered during archaeological excavations carried out in 1994–95 and 2003.[19] Although the ethnic composition of the victims varied, the majority of them were Lithuanians involved in the anti-Soviet underground.

On 2 February 1998, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania established a commission for the memorialisation of the victims

17 For more, see *UAB "Ekspozicijų sistemos"*, accessed April 25, 2022, https://ekspozicijusistemos.com/.

18 Neringa Klumbytė, "Sovereign Pain: Liberation and Suffering in the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Lithuania," in *Museums of Communism. New Memory Sites in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Stephen M. Norris (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 23–45.

19 Remigijus Černius, "Tuskulėnų masinės kapavietės atsiradimas: 1944 ar 1945 m.?", *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, no. 1 (41) (2017): 7–24.

of Tuskulėnai. On its proposal, in 2002 and 2007, the government approved a programme for the founding of a memorial complex – the Memorial Complex of Tuskulėnai Peace Park, with the buildings of the former manor house and the chapel-columbarium, in which the remains of the victims of NKVD are kept, as its main highlights. In 2008, the Ministry of Culture handed this territory over to the LGGRTC and the park became an integral part of the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights, which is attached to the Memorial Department of the LGGRTC. The main functions of the memorial complex are the collection, preservation, and publication of historical-documentary material reflecting the ideology of the occupying Soviet government and the repression perpetrated against the population of Lithuania; protection of the columbarium and ensuring access to visitors; and the implementation of the educational programmes of the LGGRTC. When archaeological and anthropological examination to identify the remains was completed, the design for the columbarium was created (architects Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas and Algirdas Umbrasas, architect-restorer Lina Masliukienė, sculptor Gediminas Karalius, artist-monumentalist Gitenis Umbrasas, technical design by architects Marius Šaliamoras and Jūras Balkevičius). The design of the complex and the restoration of the buildings were completed by the public company Lietuvos Paminklai. In 2009, the ceiling of the columbarium was decorated with the mosaic *Trinity* by Gitenis Umbrasas. It is dedicated to the memory of the victims of Stalinism, with birds symbolising destiny, happiness, and freedom.[20] The part of the manor that previously accommodated servants now houses the administration of the park and is also used for conferences and temporary exhibitions.

A permanent exhibition dedicated to the victims of Stalinism, "Secrets of Tuskulėnai Manor", designed and installed by the aforemen-

[20] The broader history of this place is described in the monograph Severinas Vaitiekus, *Tuskulėnai: egzekucijų aukos ir budeliai (1944–1947)* (Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2002).

tioned Ekspozicijų Sistemos, was opened in the territory of the park, in the so-called White Manor. There is therefore a certain stylistic and conceptual affinity with the main exhibition of the museum of the former KGB prison on Aukų Street. However, there are some differences. While the main exhibition emphasises the massive numbers of fighters and victims, here, along with the extension of this strategy, there are also attempts to personalise the historical narrative by contrasting the personality of Bishop Vincentas Borisevičius, who was shot at Tuskulėnai in 1946, with that of Vasily Dolgiriov, the deputy head of the NKVD prison, by setting them against each other physically (their photographs face each other in the hall) and visually (blown-up photographs of the executioner and his victim look at one another). The museum is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Lithuania; it is also an important part of the country's historical policy as delegations of foreign leaders visit it during official visits.

Latvia

Unlike its Lithuanian counterpart, the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia was created as a private initiative and financed by private and public funds. As in the case of Vilnius, the museum is also visited by foreign officials. However, its authenticity is different: the building chosen for this exposition is a gloomy socialist modernist building with a dark façade. It is situated in the very centre of Riga, next to the restored house of the Blacksmiths' Guild, where the Museum of the Revolution used to be (architects Dzintars Driba and Gunārs Lūsis-Grīnbergs, 1968–70). In 1971, a monument to the Latvian Red Riflemen (sculptor by Valdis Albergs) was erected in the nearby square. In 2000, a new plaque, "Latvian Riflemen 1915–1920", appeared on this monument and in 2006, the monument was restored.

Laura Lenss, an American architectural scholar, believes that the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia has at least two meanings, which contradict each other. On the one hand, the building symbolises the Soviet period of Latvia's history and the then attempts to create a coherent

symbolic landscape in the historic city. On the other hand, however, the fact of its transformation into a museum of the occupation and the creation of an exhibition that is diametrically opposed to the meaning of the previous one makes the building a symbol of the fights for independence, thus demonstrating that contemporary Latvia is capable of reworking its past in accordance with new ideological attitudes, even though the propagandistic functions of the museum remain.[21] In 2012, when renovation began, the museum temporarily moved to the building of the former US embassy and, due to a lack of space, it could display only a part of the exhibition, while the reconstruction of the main building has been delayed (Figure 3).

The exhibition was mainly structured as a poster display dominated by panels of documents, photographs, and posters, none of which were originals. The showcases and authentic objects were not numerous. With the exception of a few posters on Latvia's history before 1940 and after 1991, all the exhibition materials were divided into the periods of Nazi and Soviet occupations, marked by the swastika or the hammer and sickle, respectively, and, naturally, rendered in unequal proportions (14 to 30). As in Vilnius, the colour palette of the exhibition was dominated by black, white, and red. The exhibition started with a demonstration of the changing borders of European countries during the occupation and a reproduction of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop protocols (this document was also represented by the installation of a "border pillar" in the next hall, where one could also watch a documentary on the deportations of 1941). Other themes were similar to those displayed in Vilnius: they also dealt with the mechanisms of occupation, annexation, destruction of statehood, and repression, and emphasised their illegitimate nature. Considerable attention was given to the Latvian anti-Soviet underground and deportations. A significant part of the exhibition was devoted to the Nazi occupation. The Holocaust was presented as a purely German affair which Latvians had nothing

[21] Lenss, "Capturing the Next Shift": 56.

Figure 3. Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, Riga.
Photo by Rasa Čepaitienė, September 2016.

to do with. Interestingly, Latvians are equally open about their collaboration with both the Nazi and Soviet authorities by engaging in military action on a respective side (this was shown in the display of military decorations of both regimes placed side by side in a showcase). The last of the four halls of the temporary museum was dedicated to the second Soviet occupation: with more artefacts and multimedia displays, the themes of resistance and non-adaptation dominated here. After ten years of using the former US embassy in Riga as an interim exhibition space while the museum building was under construction, in 2022 the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia returned to its permanent location with a renewed exhibition.

Another branch of the museum opened in 2014 in the former KGB building, the so-called "Corner House" (*Stūra māja* in Latvian). It houses an exhibition of posters about the victims of Soviet terror and offers a visit to the underground part of the building where the prison was located. Such a visit, however, is only possible in a group with a guide who locks the door from the inside, thus enhancing the effect of the place. The execution cell shows the same fragment of Wajda's film, which would indicate that the Latvians have copied a lot from their Lithuanian colleagues in preparing their exhibition.

Estonia

The name of the Estonian Museum of the Occupations indicates that both Nazi and Soviet occupations are addressed. Like its Latvian counterpart, this museum avoids the notion of "genocide" and therefore does not face the problems that the museum in Vilnius was forced to deal with. In 2018, it was reconstructed and renamed the "Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom". Interestingly, Lithuanian web surfers wishing to visit the website of the museum are immediately redirected to a page in Lithuanian, where the description of the museum appeals to the common experience of deportation and repression of both nations.

The Vabamu Museum is located in the centre of Tallinn. Here one can learn about Estonia's history during the years of occupation, after the country regained its freedom, and beyond. The museum follows a slightly different concept from the exhibitions already discussed: it avoids gloom, while "the exposition of people's personal stories encompasses everything, both bitter and happy memories".[22] Unlike other museums of the occupation in the Baltic countries, the building of the Estonian Museum of the Occupations was specially designed and

[22] *Okupatsioonide ja vabaduse muuseum Vabamu*, accessed April 25, 2022, https://vabamu.ee/.

built with funding exclusively from private individuals. Its steel and glass aesthetic appeals to the interests and needs of contemporary society by avoiding allusions to the conventional representation and functions of institutions of this type. Simplicity, openness, and attentiveness to the visitor are expressed not only through the means of display, but also through the possibility of having a cup of coffee in the museum café or to engage in educational activities. This is a way of underlining that the museum is not a memorial or a place of mourning. However, in 2017, a U-turn to a more "classical" model of this type of museum was made with the opening of an additional exhibition in the building of the Estonian KGB, which makes use of exhibition forms analogous to those used in Lithuania and Latvia.

As before the 2018 renovation, the museum exhibition in the main building begins in the street, at the entrance, with an installation depicting a birch grove. Stone suitcases are placed among the trees. Earlier, a similar installation with suitcases could be seen inside the museum, where they symbolised deportations. Another installation made of authentic prison doors is reminiscent of a similar artistic presentation in the Gulag Museum in Moscow.

The previous exhibition was divided into three thematic blocks: the first Soviet occupation, the Nazi occupation, and the second Soviet occupation. Unlike similar museums in Riga and Vilnius, it was dominated by objects, with grey, black, and white as the main colours of the exhibition. Again, unlike the other museums have discussed here, where, next to the national language, the texts, captions, and inscriptions are given also in English, most of the texts under the exhibits in the Vabamu Museum are in Estonian only. The starting point of the museum is the narrative of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the beginning of the occupation, which, through exhibits, is juxtaposed with the industrial and other output of independent Estonia. The displays include mannequins dressed in Estonian, Nazi, and Soviet uniforms. The years of subjugation are recreated using the materiality of many everyday objects of the Soviet era produced in Estonia and elsewhere (because of their size, some of them – a Moskvich car,

a telephone box, a dentist's chair, a sparkling water dispenser, etc. – could not fit into the showcases), which is a distinct difference between this museum and the two discussed above. In the underground part of the museum, specimens of Soviet propaganda sculpture are randomly scattered and are reminiscent of both Muzeon Park of Arts in Moscow and Grūtas Park in Lithuania, only reduced in scale. The chaotic nature of the museum exhibits, sometimes to the extent of creating perplexing surprises such as the pairing of a small bust of Lenin with a condom in a showcase, "reflected the fragmented, schizophrenic life of Estonian society for more than 50 years", according to the exhibition text. The abundance of household artefacts is complemented and expanded by thematic films put together from newsreels and interviews with contemporaries of that time. Another distinctive feature of the museum is its inclination to organise temporary exhibitions with the aim of not only being a part of school education or the official representation of the state, but also a cultural institution that is constantly renewed and attractive to the local population.

Since the 2018 reconstruction, the museum has focused much more on interactivity and virtual reality (VR) technology: at the entrance, the visitor receives a tablet with all the relevant information about the exhibits and the museum itself, which automatically responds to the visitor's movement in the space by activating the relevant information. The principle of the new exhibition, "Freedom Has No Limits", was also changed from the usual chronological to a thematic approach. Both the section on the Nazi occupation and the museum's "calling card", the steam locomotive installation, have been removed. Authentic documents and artefacts are combined with video interviews and installations. For example, one installation depicts Siberia in winter (apparently this corresponds to the subconscious stereotype that Siberia is eternal cold, ice, and a soulless wasteland). Meanwhile, interactivity is manifested in the opportunity to play the game "A Hard Choice" on a special screen. The game consists of following the lives of specific people and trying to choose the most appropriate existential challenge from those that these people actually faced, and

in this way to "try on" their fates, as it were, enriching one's historical knowledge at the same time. Still, a certain conceptual continuity can be seen between the original and present exhibition. The renewed museum has made room for domestic life: in the section "Soviet Estonia", one can see the interior of a *khrushchevka*, a typical house built in Khrushchev's times; with the help of virtual reality glasses, one can create one's own Soviet-era apartment design from typical furniture. The exhibition concludes with the installation "Equilibrium", where a boy and a girl stand on a swing trying to keep their balance, as if to symbolise the fragility of freedom, and an exposition devoted to the stages in the life of the expatriate Olga Kistler-Ritso, the founder of the museum.

Unlike the other museums discussed here, the Estonian museum did not have a branch for a long time and it was only in 2017 that one was established in the former KGB building in the Old Town of Tallinn, replicating the model of the Baltic museums of the occupation. This particular exhibition occupies the territory of the former prison. Posters put up along a corridor tell the story of Estonian statehood and of the building itself. However, the information in the exhibition does not make it clear whether executions took place in this prison. Soviet repression is revealed through a cartoon using the technique of drawing on sand (similar to the one in the White Manor in Tuskulėnai, the only difference being that here, visitors can draw on the sand themselves). Portraits of the victims are displayed in the cells, but it remains unclear whether these people were imprisoned in these particular cells.

Comparison of Museums of the Occupation in the Baltic Countries

All three museums discussed are located in the very centres of the Baltic capitals and reflect the official historical politics of the states. Although the Estonian museum was established a decade later than the other two, this was only because of a delay in the construction of the new building intended for it. All the museums are of mixed

administrative subordination and funding (except the one in Tallinn, which is privately owned), and are (partly) free to visit. Their initial concepts differed. For example, in Lithuania, the emphasis was originally on "genocide" rather than "occupation", which was a constant source of confusion and annoyance due to the overshadowing of the Holocaust and which was eventually resolved by a change of name. Local authenticity is important to all three museums (the existence and activities of the KGB offices), which gives them an additional appeal among foreign tourists. Strategies for displaying the material are also different: the Lithuanians chose to emphasise tragedy and resistance by reinforcing the impression of authentic objects combined with photographic posters. The Latvians are more inclined to emphasise the documentary nature of the events in question (which somewhat adds to the dryness of the exhibition and reduces its appeal to visitors of all ages and historical expertise), while the previous exhibition of the Estonians mainly displayed household objects, focusing on the everyday rather than the tragedy; after the reconstruction, the exhibition became closer to the emotional tone of those in the other Baltic countries.

The aforementioned cultural institutions focus on the deportations, which are uniformly perceived as national tragedies in which the suffering of other nations is not visible. In the same way, the "forest brothers" are treated unambiguously as freedom fighters and heroes in all three institutions. Although the names of these institutions currently include "occupations", the period of Nazi rule receives considerably less attention, while the theme of the Holocaust, if mentioned at all, is not developed. Analysing the museums of the occupation of the three Baltic countries in the context of their overall historical politics, James Mark observes that in their narrative programmes, the Nazi occupation remains overshadowed by the Soviet occupation in order to shape an anti-Communist outlook. The exhibition is constructed in such a way as to give the visitor the impression that the first Soviet occupation was so terrible that the Nazi occupation of the Baltic peoples that followed was perceived

almost as liberation.[23] To support this conclusion, the researcher's selection of museum material is rather arbitrary. Thus, with the exception of the old exhibition of the Estonian museum, the narratives of the museums discussed are dominated by a self-victimising approach and exclusivism, which prevent these narratives from being placed in a broader historical context (which is, however, compensated for by the authenticity of the sites and memorial values). The changes in the conceptual content of the exhibitions have been influenced by general trends in the cosmopolitan historical politics of the EU (e.g. the genocide of the Roma that finds a place in the exhibitions, etc.), but not to such an extent as to overwhelm the dominance of national approaches. The discussion of another example of a museum of occupation will help to verify these observations.

The Case of Moldova

Moldova is a post-Soviet country that also bases its right to statehood on questioning the outcome of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and also included this provision in its Declaration of Independence of 27 August 1991.[24] There, the reinterpretation of the past began at a similar time as in the other Soviet republics. As early as 1990, a temporary exhibition "Stalinism in the Fates of the People"[25] was organised at the State History Museum to fill in the "blank spots" of history.

23 James Mark, "Containing Fascism: History in Post-Communist Baltic Occupation and Genocide Museums," in *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, ed. Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor (Budapest; New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2008), 354.

24 Declarația de independență a Republicii Moldova, 27 August 1991, *Парламент Республики Молдова*, дата обращения 30.09.2022, https://old.parlament.md/img/pdf/declaratia.pdf.

25 Анастасия В. Фелькер, "Мемориальные музеи г. Кишинева как институты политики памяти: негибкость и конкуренция в условиях разделенного общества," in *Политика памяти в современной России и странах Восточной Европы. Акторы, институты, нарративы: коллективная монография*, ред. Алексей И. Миллер и Дмитрий В. Ефременко (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Европейского университета в Санкт-Петербурге, 2020), 546.

Moldova has undergone the same steps of desovietisation as other former republics of the USSR: the removal of most of the Soviet monuments and the changing street and institution names. A declaration of Romanian as the official language was accompanied by the changing of place names and personal names into Romanian, which was linked to a search for historical roots in the Roman province of Dacia. A law on the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism was adopted in 1992.[26] In the same year, the Moldovan Military History Museum was opened in the Army Palace under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence. It became a pioneer in the interpretation of the country's anti-Soviet past and would later play an important role in the development of the concepts for other museums and exhibitions on communism. Thanks to the efforts of its staff, the period of the rule of the Russian Empire (1812–17), the incorporation of Bessarabia into the USSR in 1940–41, and reoccupation at the end of the war in 1944 came to be seen as a time of subjugation and historical injustice. Meanwhile, the interwar period when Moldova was part of Romania (1918–40) was portrayed as a "golden age" and a time of national prosperity. As Ady Schnytzer and Alina Zubkovych point out, the term "occupation" came to be used in Moldovan museums only to refer to the Russian Empire/the USSR and not to the Romanian or Nazi periods of rule.[27]

It should be noted that the specifics of the historical politics of post-Soviet Moldova were largely determined by an internal political struggle between the so-called "Moldovanists" and the "Romanianists". They represented different versions of the historical origins

[26] Закон № 1225 от 8 декабря 1992 г. "О реабилитации жертв политических репрессий," *Государственный реестр правовых актов Республики Молдова*, дата обращения 15.04.2022, http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=313312&lang=2.

[27] Adi Schnytzer and Alina Zubkovych, "Comparative Symbolic Violence: The Chisinau and Tiraspol National Historical Museums," *Crossroads Digest*, no. 8 (2013): 69.

of the country's statehood,[28] in which the results of parliamentary elections and the geopolitical and value-oriented orientations of the parties temporarily entrenched at the top of the power hierarchy had played an important role. A more pronounced change in the field of historical politics could be observed under the liberal Mihai Ghimpu, Moldova's acting president in 2009–10, when, on his initiative, the country was steered onto a path of de-legitimisation of the Soviet legacy and a more consistent desovietisation campaign was launched. Early in 2010, the Commission for the Investigation and Assessment of the Totalitarian Communist Regime was set up and, after half a year of work, came up with conclusions calling for a ban on communist symbols, establishment of commemorative dates linked to Soviet repression, etc. This resulted in the declaration of 28 June as the Day of the Soviet Occupation. On Ghimpu's instructions, a stone commemorating the "Victims of the Totalitarian Soviet Communist Regime" was erected in front of Government House, to be replaced by an appropriate monument in the future.[29] Finally, on 23 August 2010, Ghimpu signed a decree awarding the highest state decoration, the Order of the Republic, to "a group of fighters against the occupying communist totalitarian regime",[30] most of them posthumously.

28 An interview with the Moldovan historian and researcher on memory cultures Alexandr Voronovici on 2 May 2018. According to the interviewee, at first, in Moldovan political circles and in the public sphere, supporters of Romanianism were entrenched and there were even considerations of joining Romania. Later, they were replaced by representatives of the view that the preservation of Moldova's sovereignty could also integrate the Soviet identity of the Moldovan nation, who also favoured relations with Russia. The country was left with a split collective identity, in which Romanianism was somewhat more ethnocentric and closed, and Moldovanism more strongly oriented towards the recognition and tolerance of cultural differences between ethnic minorities.

29 For more on this, see Maria Axenti, "Urban Transformations as an Ideological Tool of Political Regimes: The Case of the Chisinau City Centre," in *Ritualizing the City. Collective Performances as Aspects of Urban Construction from Constantine to Mao*, ed. Ivan Foletti and Adrian Palladino (Rome: Viella, 2017), 121–137.

30 Указ Президента Республики Молдова № 507 от 23 августа 2010 г. "О присвоении ордена 'Ordinul Republicii' группе борцов с оккупационным коммунистическим тоталитарным режимом," *Государственный реестр правовых*

As a result of these political steps, two museums dedicated to Soviet repression were established in 2012 and 2016. The first, the Museum of Victims of Deportations and Political Repression, under the National Museum of Archaeology and History of Moldova (since 2013, the National Museum of History of Moldova), opened with the exhibition "Soviet Moldova: Between Myths and the Gulag", which used the term "genocide" by the Soviet regime against the local population and did not mention the Holocaust. In 2013, on the initiative of Dorin Chirtoacă, the mayor of Chişinău, a monument to the victims of Stalinist repression, "The Train of Pain", was unveiled in front of the railway station. In 2016, the Museum of the Soviet Occupation opened its doors, which led to a strain in diplomatic relations with Russia. The narrative of its exhibition begins with the Molotov-Ribbentrop plot, which is followed by the installation "The Wall of Faces", the aesthetic design of which is recognisable from the Hall of Names in Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, and other similar museums, even though there is no mention of the Holocaust. The exhibition is complemented by the personal belongings of the arrested and deported, mainly suitcases, models of freight cars, Soviet agitation material, and busts of Lenin. Some space is also devoted to presenting the activities of the various anti-Soviet resistance groups active in Bessarabia between 1940 and 1953. The exposition ends with a panel depicting the national liberation movement of 1986–91 in an attempt to create a coherent anti-Soviet narrative in which repression is the main focus of meaning, while everyday life of the Soviet period is given a secondary role (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

In this way, starting with 2010, a canon of memory defined by the narratives of the victims of the Soviet occupation, repression, and Stalinism, which were intended to create an impression of the unique-

актов Республики Молдова, дата обращения 15.04.2022, http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=335857&lang=2.

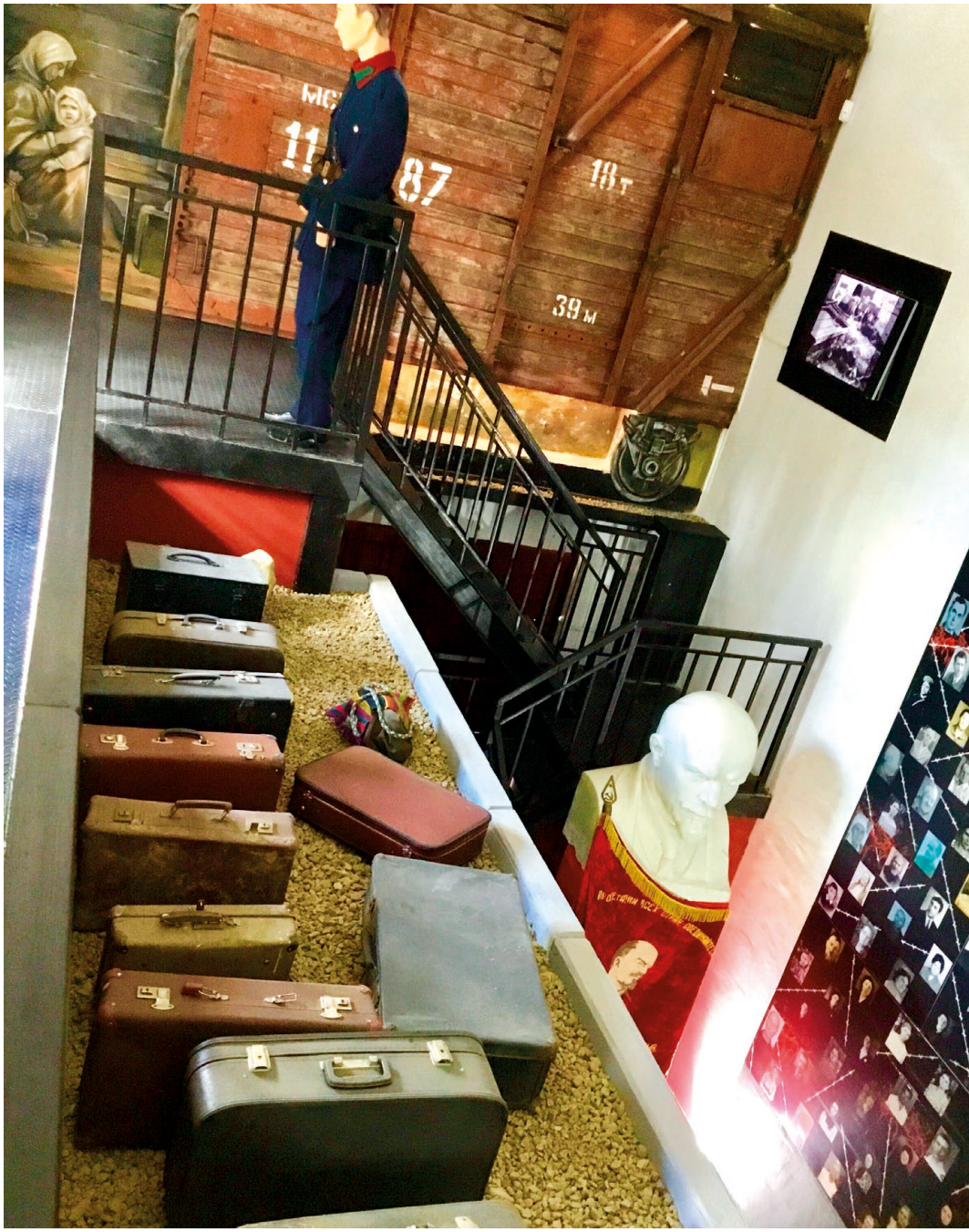

Figure 4. Museum of the Soviet Occupation in Chişinău, suitcases representing the exile.
Photo courtesy of Anastasia Felcher, March 2019.

Figure 5. “Wall of Faces” of the repressed at the Museum of the Soviet Occupation in Chişinău.
Photo courtesy of Anastasia Felcher, March 2019.

ness and exclusivity of the Moldovan experience, was established in the country. This was achieved through a series of legislative initiatives, memorial dates, and the establishment of new museums and exhibitions. As for the field of historical politics, not only specific politicians but also academic and cultural elites played an active role in it. Persistent delegitimisation of the Soviet period "as normality" allowed them to knock the guns out of the hands of their political opponents, mainly the communists who upheld the discourse of Moldovanism as a continuation of the Moldovan Soviet statehood.[31] Thus, as mentioned above, although the exhibition concepts of the two new museums in Chişinău followed those of the communist museums in other countries (both in the Baltic countries and in Romania), these institutions of memory were, in comparison, much more involved in the political struggles of the present.

Conclusion

The wave of museification of traumatic memory and anti-Soviet resistance that swept across the post-socialist and some post-Soviet countries of Central-Eastern Europe made it possible to consolidate the narrative of the "occupation" for the purposes of domestic historiographical politics and for a foreign audience. The American social psychologist James V. Wertsch describes narrative templates that schematise and summarise the structures of knowledge and are filled with symbolic meaning. These are narratives with a distinctive structure characterised by traits of "cognitive narcissism" and reflecting a desire to perceive the past as one's own – "our".[32] The museum narrative becomes

[31] For more, see Андрей Кушко, "Политика памяти и историческая политика в постсоветской Молдове," in *Историческая политика в XXI веке*, ред. Алексей Миллер и Мария Липман (Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2012), 256–291.

[32] James V. Wertsch, "Collective Memory and Narrative Templates," *Social Research* 75, no. 1: *Collective Memory and Collective Identity* (Spring 2008): 133–156.

an instrument for the materialisation of these "narrative templates", which creates a "narrative truth" that serves to affirm and consolidate the official version of history. Such narrative templates can be such concepts as "occupation", "genocide", "terror", and "resistance", which, as we have seen, are often used in the names of the above-mentioned institutions of memory and in the descriptions of their exhibitions. However, their impact on visitors remains ambiguous and not always in line with what their curators wish to convey. The displayed Soviet artefacts can evoke not only reactions of rejection or disgust, but also vague and confused feelings of recognition and nostalgia. On the other hand, we can also talk about the abundance of "visual templates" typical of museums of occupation, which only become apparent in a comparative perspective. Their emergence is the result of shared experience: for example, deportation is everywhere best represented by images of cattle cars or suitcases, and repression by displays of forensic documents or wounds inflicted on the victims.

The cases of the occupation museums discussed above show that memorialisation of the victims of Soviet terror in the region has undergone a certain canonisation and standardisation of memorial devices and effects, which in many cases were taken from representations of the Holocaust and reproduced in various other museum contexts of a legacy of violence.[33] For example, Ljiljana Radonić, who has studied a number of memorial museums across Central-Eastern Europe, concludes that most of them apply the "Holocaust template" for their exhibitions, despite the fact that they have their own objectives that are often defined by the local political context.[34] Such museum devices

[33] See, for example, Mischa Gabowitsch, *Replicating Atonement: Foreign Models in the Commemoration of Atrocities* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (Houndmills, Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 2006).

[34] Ljiljana Radonić, "From 'Double Genocide' to 'the New Jews': Holocaust, Genocide and Mass Violence in Post-Communist Memorial Museums," *Journal of Genocide*

as collages of photographs intended to give the impression of the mass scale of repression and the large numbers and anonymity of the victims, the combination of authentic personal belongings of the victims with anonymous documents, or the stereotypical images of the totalitarian system prevalent in the region (busts of Lenin, the red flag), terror (a portrait of Felix Dzerzhinsky, lists of the repressed, or photographs of the arrested), exile (suitcases, handicrafts made by the deportees), or resistance (partisan dugouts, photographs of armed fighters), suggest that the creators of these exhibitions wanted to inscribe their past and the material that evidences it in a broader discourse on memory. This discourse remains paradoxical, however: on the one hand, the hope is to show the uniqueness of the fights and suffering experienced by their own people, which is depicted as comparable to or even surpassing the atrocities of the Holocaust, but, on the other hand, it is precisely the same experiences that lead to their apparent similarity and to the homogenisation of their representation. It goes without saying that such a conclusion is only possible if one rises above the content of a particular institution of memory or exhibition, but this broader perspective would allow the curators of such museums to forestall the unforeseen and unwanted effects of the standardisation of tragic memories in different countries in the future. However, while the experience of "occupation", "repression", and "resistance" was inevitably similar in many of the neighbouring countries, the subsequent decades of "soft" Sovietisation allowed for the formation of distinctive national cultural responses to the regime, and today this legacy has become as important an object of understanding and reflection of Soviet identity as the Stalinist period. For example, the museum Projektas: *Homo sovieticus*, which recently opened its doors in the Tuskulėnai Peace Park in Vilnius, reveals this specificity.

Research 20, no. 4: *Special issue on The Holocaust/Genocide Template in Eastern Europe* (2018): 510–529; eadem, "Post-communist invocation of Europe": 269–288.

Chapter 4

Memory Politics *à la Russe*: Memorial vs. Vladimir Putin's Repressive State

Igor Torbakov

The clampdown on Memorial, Russia's oldest and most influential historical-educational and human rights group, has thrown into sharp relief a crucial feature of the country's contemporary history. For the past century, the struggle for freedom, democracy, and human dignity in Russia has been intimately intertwined with the struggle for historical truth. The Memorial Movement was born amid the political turmoil of the late 1980s and almost immediately became one of the leading agents of democratic change. The Kremlin's decision to liquidate Memorial marks the end of an era. The Putin regime is seeking to establish full control over the historical narrative, but that is merely a means to a larger end. Its ultimate goal has been on full display since Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine: it is to turn the clock back 30 years and erase some fundamental consequences – both domestic

and geostrategic – of the momentous revolutionary upheaval that culminated in the demise of the Soviet Union.

Shifting Political Landscape

There is a famous joke that Russia is a country with an unpredictable past. It would seem, however, that the opposite is true. Throughout Russia's history, one of its rulers' main concerns was to make the Russian past *predictable*: historians were encouraged to craft the grand narrative in such a way as to make their story optimistic, patriotic, heroic, and uplifting.[1] Uncomfortable past events should be better forgotten or kept under wraps. In his celebrated memoir, *The Oak and the Calf*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn vividly described a paradigmatic episode: the encounter between the author, eager to speak truth to power, and a communist potentate lecturing on how the difficult past has to be tackled. In the early 1960s, Solzhenitsyn was instantaneously catapulted to nationwide fame when the literary magazine *Novy Mir* published his Soviet labour camp novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. In July 1965, Solzhenitsyn was invited to an audience with Piotr Demichev, the Communist Party Central Committee Secretary in charge of ideology, who was curious to meet the famous and reclusive writer. In the course of the conversation, Demichev made it plain that the Party needed no more books about Stalinist prison camps. "No, there is no need [to write again] about the camps," he said. "It's a difficult and un-

[1] This vision was best epitomised by the memorable dictum of Count Alexander von Benckendorff, the head of Tsar Nicholas I's secret police: "Russia's past was admirable, its present is more than magnificent, and as for its future – it is beyond anything that the boldest mind can imagine". There appears to be a curious continuity: in Putin's Russia, Sergei Naryshkin, director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, is also head (since 2012) of the Russian Historical Society, and often pontificates on how national history should be presented in terms not dissimilar to those of his predecessor Benckendorff. М. И. Жихарев, "Докладная записка потомству о Петре Яковлевиче Чаадаеве," in *Русское общество 30-х годов XIX в. Люди и идеи: Мемуары современников*, ред. И. А. Федосов (Москва: Издательство Московского государственного университета, 1989), 105.

pleasant [topic]." Later on, Solzhenitsyn reminisced, the top party boss gave him detailed instructions as to what the Party did *not* want to see in literary works dealing with the Soviet past. According to Demichev, authors should eschew three things: pessimism, *ochernitel'stvo* (negative bias), and "sneak attacks" (i.e. furtive criticism).[2] The era of *glasnost* in the late 1980s appeared to have dispatched these instructions (as well as the very notion of the "party's general line") to the dustbin of history. The dissolution of Memorial by Putin's repressive regime has demonstrated that history writing and historical memory in general are again being put under strict state control.

When in November 2021 state prosecutors took action to shut Memorial down, its leadership was not greatly surprised. In fact, they had seen it coming. Asked why his organisation was being persecuted, Aleksandr Cherkasov, chairman of the board of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, gave a succinct answer: "We do not fit into the [current political] landscape".[3] Several years earlier, Memorial had been labelled a "foreign agent" in accordance with a controversial law passed in 2012. This law was designed to signpost foreign-funded non-profits but later expanded to include independent media and individuals. Any entity or individual labelled a foreign (media) agent must register and provide details of its activities and finances every six months. Any material it produces, including social media messages, must contain a long message indicating its status as a foreign agent. The very term is laden with Stalin-era connotations of double-dealing, duplicity, and betrayal, and carries an unmistakably pejorative meaning. From the first, the Kremlin made it clear that this legislation would effectively be used as a weapon against "disloyal" rights groups and media outlets. In February 2013 – speaking, quite appropriately, at a Federal

2 See Александр И. Солженицын, *Бодался теленок с дубом: очерки литературной жизни*, [2-е изд., испр. и доп.] (Москва: Согласие, 1996), 112.

3 Юлия Дудкина, "«Тебя это тоже касается»: Александр Черкасов – о судах «Мемориала» и логике безумия," *Холод*, 25 ноября 2021, дата обращения 30.01.2022, https://holod.media/2021/11/25/cherkasov/.

Security Service (FSB) board meeting – President Vladimir Putin stated in no uncertain terms that "no one holds a monopoly that gives them the right to speak on behalf of all Russian society, especially the entities managed and financed from abroad as they inevitably serve others' interests". He went on to refer specifically to the new law:

> The regime governing the activities of NGOs in Russia is in place, and it also applies to funding from abroad. Obviously, these laws must be complied with. Any direct or indirect interference in our internal affairs, any form of pressure on our country or on our allies and partners, is unacceptable.[4]

In the case of Memorial, as in those of various other NGOs and independent media outlets, the foreign agent law played the role of Chekhov's proverbial gun: hung on the wall in Act One, it went off in Act Three. In late December 2021, Kremlin-controlled courts agreed with prosecutors' allegations that Memorial (both Memorial International and its Human Rights Centre) had violated the law and ordered the liquidation of a "villainous foreign agent".

Remarkably, while Memorial was formally charged with technical breaches of mind-numbing legal regulations, the court hearings appeared to reveal the true reason for the assault on the group – the distortion of historical memory. A passage from the prosecution's remarks speaks volumes about the Kremlin's real motives:

> It is obvious that Memorial, having capitalised on the theme of political repressions in the 20th century, has created a *[deliberately] false image of the Soviet Union as a terrorist state*… Why should we have to be ashamed of and repent our allegedly hopeless past instead of having

4 Vladimir Putin, "Federal Security Service Board Meeting," *President of Russia*, February 14, 2013, accessed January 30, 2022, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/17516.

> pride in a country that had won a terrible war and liberated the world from fascism?

Summing up its case, the prosecution stated:

> Currently, the activities of Memorial are, in fact, largely aimed at *falsifying the history of our country*, *at gradually reformatting the mass consciousness of the population from the memory of the victors to the need for repentance for the Soviet past*.[5]

This statement neatly reflects the irreconcilable differences between the Kremlin and Memorial's intellectual and ethical stances. Unlike Putin, who postulates the existence of one unchanging "thousand-year-old historical Russia" with an unproblematic – if not downright magnificent – past, Memorial rejects this triumphalist black-and-white approach and embraces instead national history's tragedy and complexity. Otherwise, it argues, it would be impossible to account for the political terror and systematic mass violations of human rights that have occurred throughout Russian history and in particular during the Soviet period. Referring to the humanist traditions of classical Russian literature, the late Arsenii Roginskii, Memorial's chair in 1998–2017, contended that Russia's past cannot be perceived as simply great: "It is both great and shameful, and the shameful part weighs at least as much as the great one".[6]

5 State prosecutor Aleksei Zhafiarov's remarks in "Выступления сторон в прениях по ликвидации Международного Мемориала," *Мемориал*, 28 декабря 2021, дата обращения 30.01.2022, https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/memorial/departments/intermemorial/news/666. Emphasis added.

6 Арсений Рогинский, "Что такое «Мемориал»?", *Colta*, 31 января 2014, дата обращения 30.01.2022, https://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/1872-chto-takoe-memorial. Roginskii's statement echoes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's assessment of the Soviet past. Reflecting on the lines of one of Aleksandr Tvardovskii's poems – "In the golden book [of our history] / There's neither a line, nor even a single comma / That could compromise our honour. / Yes, everything that happened to us / Did happen!" – Solzhenitsyn commented: "Too soft: what about

Such a view was widespread among Soviet freethinkers and dissidents – the social milieu that played a crucial role in the intellectual and political processes unleashed by Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the waning years of the Soviet Union. Indeed, in 1987–88 – the years in which Memorial emerged as a popular mass movement – the idea of historical truth appeared to have become something akin to a national idea. The search for historical truth was focused above all on the state terror during Joseph Stalin's rule. Notably, before *perestroika*, there were two types of memory of Stalinism with almost no overlap between them. The first was an individual and family memory based on the tragic experiences of the victims of terror and their close relatives. This memory was preserved as a forbidden knowledge within the narrow circle of family and friends but lacked a deeper analysis and understanding of the broader historical context. The second type of memory was the product of dissidents' reflections, which encompassed memoirs (usually published in *samizdat*), political commentary, translations of Western historical scholarship, and literary fiction. In the late 1980s, when most of the previous ideological taboos had been lifted in the atmosphere of *glasnost*, an opportunity appeared for the two types of memory of Stalinism to merge. During those heady years, remembered by political activists as a truly "heroic epoch", Memorial was – even before its formal registration in early 1990 – at the forefront of the struggle to increase public awareness of Stalinist crimes. It is noteworthy that from the outset, its leadership understood full well that it is impossible to tackle a difficult past without opposing various illiberal, undemocratic, authoritarian, and repressive trends in the present. Thus, human rights advocacy became part of Memorial's agenda more or less from day one. In the group's political philosophy,

the 40-year-long disgrace of prison camps – didn't this compromise our honour? Too shapeless: 'let bygones be bygones', 'nothing to add, nothing to take away'. This could be said about all types of fascism. Then Nuremberg [trials] should not be held, right? – let bygones be bygones…? It's a flawed philosophy incapable of theorising history". See Солженицын, *Бодался теленок с дубом*, 21.

the two dimensions of historical education and the defence of civil rights are closely interconnected. As Roginskii aphoristically put it, "We look at history through the prism of rights, and look at rights through the prism of history".[7] This core ideological principle put Memorial squarely on a collision course with a Russian political regime that has been growing increasingly authoritarian since the early 2000s.

Historical Memory and Domestic Politics

There is a direct link between the rise of authoritarianism in Russia and a more benign view of the Soviet past being promoted by the state. A steady curtailment of freedom and democracy, the resurrection of quasi-Soviet political practices such as the imitation of democratic procedures, infringement of the independence of the courts, state control of media outlets, and repression of political opposition inevitably necessitate putting a more positive spin on Soviet history. The Kremlin's search for a usable past on which to construct a new state-centred grand narrative was another reason to embrace the Soviet era as an inalienable part of the "glorious history" of the timeless "Great Russia". Here, the centrepiece of the story is the Soviet victory in the "Great Patriotic War". The Soviet Union's triumph over Nazism – the undeniable Absolute Evil – presents an opportunity for Kremlin-friendly spin doctors to cast the victors – mostly Russians – as an Absolute Good that "saved the world in 1945" and to portray Russia as a "country of great victories". Since the "Greatest Victory" was achieved on Stalin's watch, the amount of bad press the ruthless dictator received in the twilight years of Soviet communism came to be perceived as excessive. Stalin's image has been thoroughly revamped over the last two decades, especially compared to his representation in the latter years of *perestroika*. Instead of denouncing Stalin as a bloody tyrant and the chief organiser of state terror, the official narrative now emphasises his managerial

7 Рогинский, "Что такое «Мемориал»?".

skills, geopolitical wisdom and, above all, his important role in defeating Nazi Germany and turning the Soviet Union into a global superpower.[8] At this point, it should be clarified that Putin and his ideologues are not die-hard Stalinists. Nor are they particularly interested in lionising historical Stalinism. In fact, they are engaged in a different kind of ideological game. They turn to certain aspects of Soviet history and manipulate the Stalin myth in order to legitimise present-day authoritarian and repressive domestic politics. This is precisely what has been the target of Memorial's sharpest criticism. In all of its research, educational, and civic activities, the group has emphasised a fundamental connection between liberal values and serious historical reflection. The Kremlin's politics of history, Memorial researchers note, has now demonstrated this connection "working backwards", as there is a clear link between Russia's current illiberal course and the mythologising of the Soviet totalitarian past.

Two fundamental issues raised by Memorial caused particularly acute displeasure to the Russian authorities. The first concerns the perpetrators of Stalinist/Soviet terror. The communist regime left millions of victims in its wake: But *whose* victims were these people? *Who* killed them? Admittedly, Russia's present-day powers-that-be appear willing to honour the memory of all those innocent souls who lost their lives in execution chambers or Gulag prison camps, but they are extremely reluctant to confront the thorny problem of legal and political responsibility. It is worthy of note that, 30 years after the Soviet collapse, there is not a single state-legal act that characterises in strictly juridical terms the crimes of the Soviet Union regime as *crimes*. For its part, Memorial's position on this issue is unambiguous: Soviet-era repression was part of the system of public administration – it was *state* terror against the country's citizens. The upshot of this thesis is crystal clear: the Soviet state that organised and carried out mass repression was a criminal

[8] For an excellent discussion on this issue, see Mark Edele, *Debates on Stalinism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

terrorist state. This statement is a direct challenge to the *etatist* political philosophy of Putin's regime, which aggressively upholds Russia's long-standing tradition of the sacralisation of the state.

Another major irritant for the Kremlin is Memorial's human rights advocacy – an activity that the group views as inseparable from its incessant search for historical truth. For Memorial, preserving the memory of Stalinist repressions is as important as shining a light on political repressions in Putin's Russia. For many years, it has monitored civil rights abuses in the country and compiled lists of political prisoners. It is instructive to compare the number of prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union at the time of Gorbachev's incumbency with today's Russia. When Memorial was set up in 1987, there were around 200 political prisoners; at the end of 2021, there were more than 400. Kremlin officials (including Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov) state that no one in Russia can be sent to prison on political grounds. They assert that Russia's Criminal Code does not contain a single article dealing with political offences and that the very terms "political prisoner" and "political repression" are not on the books. Memorial counters this assertion by referring to the Russian Federation Law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions", which the group's senior members, Sergei Kovalev and Arsenii Roginskii, helped to draft. This legal act, which was adopted on 18 October 1991, defines "political repression" as

> *various measures of coercion used by the state for political reasons* in the form of deprivation of life or freedom; incarceration in psychiatric hospitals for compulsory treatment; expulsion from the country and deprivation of citizenship; eviction of groups of the population from their places of residence; sending them into exile and "special settlements"; involvement in forced labour in conditions of restriction of freedom, as well as other deprivation or restriction of the rights and freedoms of persons recognised as socially dangerous to the state or political system on class, social, national, religious, or other grounds, carried out by decisions of courts and other bodies, endowed with judicial functions, or administratively, by executive authorities and

> officials and public organisations or their bodies endowed with administrative powers.[9]

In accordance with this law, rehabilitation covers all those persons who have suffered repression since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. What is especially significant, however, is that the law does not specify a closing date, which means that it can be applied to the current political situation. This is precisely what Memorial lawyers were doing: they analysed criminal cases to determine whether they were politically motivated. The method was simple: if a person is being persecuted for political activities and/or for exercising basic civil rights, this person is recognised as a political prisoner. Furthermore, in its civic work, Memorial was guided by the resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). A forum where Russian parliamentarians were also represented until Moscow's exit from Europe's top human rights watchdog in March 2022, PACE not only defines the term "political prisoner" and provides the appropriate criteria, but also calls for the release of all political prisoners.[10]

Politics of History and International Relations

The Russian leadership is alert to the fact that "national remembrance" takes place in an international context and thus has a foreign policy dimension. Any reinterpretation of the past based on "national remembrance" inevitably involves not only the self-image of a given nation but also its relations with other nations. A clash between national memories is therefore prone to lead to growing tensions be-

9 Закон РФ от 18 октября 1991 г. № 1761-I "О реабилитации жертв политических репрессий" (с изменениями и дополнениями), *Гарант*, дата обращения 30.01.2022, https://base.garant.ru/10105390/. Emphasis added.

10 Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1900 (2012) "The definition of political prisoner," *Parliamentary Assembly*, accessed January 30, 2022, https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19150&lang=en.

tween states. This is exactly what has happened with Russian-European relations in the past 15 years.[11] As a result, historical memory has been securitised. Russia's amended constitution declares the "defence of historical truth" to be one of the state's principal rights and obligations – but *who* determines what the truth *is*? The Kremlin leadership appears convinced that it should be Russia. As Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrogantly asserted at the 29th Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy in October 2021: "We always know that the truth is on our side". He then suggested that his audience should "regard this [thesis] as our ideology or the ideological content of our foreign policy".[12] In parallel, in his comments on the court's decision to ban Memorial, one of the group's defence lawyers noted that the shutdown's main political message was that "the [Russian] state is always right".[13] So why then would some miscreants want to deviate from the state-approved interpretation of the past? The prosecution's explanation was that Memorial had been distorting historical memory because "someone is paying them to do it".[14] This kind of rhetoric unmistakably demonstrates that the Russian authorities were not only seeking to cast Memorial as a perfidious foreign agent and treacherous "fifth column", but really perceived it as such.

11 Igor Torbakov, "Divisive Historical Memories: Russia and Eastern Europe," in *Confronting Memories of World War II: European and Asian Legacies*, ed. Daniel Chirot, Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Sneider (Seattle, DC: University of Washington Press, 2014), 234–257.

12 Сергей Лавров, "Выступление на XXIX Ассамблее СВОП," *Российский совет по международным делам*, 4 октября 2021, дата обращения 16.04.2022, https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/vystuplenie-na-xxix-assamblee-svop/.

13 Defence lawyer Genri Reznik's remarks in "Выступления сторон в прениях по ликвидации Международного Мемориала".

14 State prosecutor Aleksei Zhafiarov's remarks in "Выступления сторон в прениях по ликвидации Международного Мемориала". This is of course an old Soviet tradition: to cast political or ideological opponents as traitors on an enemy payroll. As Solzhenitsyn noted, "[There is] a widespread Soviet anathema: whoever thinks *differently* has definitely sold out and gets paid by the enemy". See Солженицын, *Бодался теленок с дубом*, 250.

To get a better handle on the Kremlin's vehement assault on Memorial, it is necessary to take a closer look at the link between Moscow's geostrategic interests and the historical narrative it aggressively advances in opposition to the one that has become the mainstream story in Europe. At the heart of the controversy is the Soviet Union's role prior to, during, and in the aftermath of World War II. The conflict between the two narratives came to a head in September 2019 when the European Parliament adopted a resolution "On the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe".[15] The document effectively dismisses Moscow's official interpretation, which boils down to the above-mentioned battle between good (Soviet Union) and evil (Nazism), in which the Soviets played a major role in defeating Nazi Germany and liberating Europe, thereby gaining enormous moral and political capital. Instead, the European Parliament resolution endorses a narrative of two totalitarianisms – German Nazism and Soviet communism – that were both equally responsible for the outbreak of war. In this story, Russia is not so much a successor state to the victorious Soviet Union as the heir to the brutal Stalinist regime that first contributed to unleashing World War II and then occupied the eastern half of Europe.

For the Kremlin, this is not a mere historiographical issue: it is a matter of geostrategic importance. Russia's status as a great power and its role on the world stage depend on which narrative ends up winning broad public support. The 2019 European Parliament resolution on historical memory was supported by the overwhelming majority of MEPs. Moreover, not a single European leader questioned the interpretation that the document proffered. This seriously alarmed the Kremlin and galvanised it into action. Significantly, Putin personally launched a counter-attack when he penned an essay on "The Real

[15] European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (2019/2819(RSP)), *European Parliament*, accessed January 30, 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.html.

Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II".[16] This 9,000-word treatise – published in *The National Interest*, a Washington policy journal, in June 2020 – should be seen as the Russian president's desperate effort to stop the progressive erosion of symbolic capital on which his country's international prestige and global role have largely rested since 1945. The article's aims are abundantly clear: Putin wants to focus global attention on the Soviet Union's role in ending World War II, not in starting it. He assailed as provocative the European Parliament resolution's narrative of "two totalitarianisms", arguing that such an interpretation seeks to destroy the post-war order and discredit Russia's role in shaping it as a member of the allied coalition that defeated Nazi Germany.

In this clash of narratives, Memorial finds itself squarely in the camp of Putin's opponents. The group's research presents the Soviet Union (and Russia as its successor) as "unrepentant totalitarianism" – one of two dictatorships responsible for most of the horrors of 20th century European history. Furthermore, in a political climate fraught with tension, the story in which Stalin's Soviet Union was a force for evil that unleashed global carnage in cahoots with Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany appears to chime perfectly with the image of Putin's Russia, which is increasingly perceived in Europe as a contemporary "force for evil". From the Kremlin's perspective, Memorial activists helped to create Russia's negative image "from within". Specifically, they have damaged Moscow's international reputation in two ways: by assiduously documenting Stalinist crimes and by monitoring present-day repression of the political opposition. Finally, Memorial's recommendations on "what should be done", which flow directly from its interpretation of the country's past, are totally unacceptable to the Kremlin leadership. To repent, ask for forgiveness, and legally recognise past crimes

16 Vladimir Putin, "The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II," *The National Interest*, June 18, 2020, accessed January 30, 2022, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982.

as *crimes* – as Germany did in the aftermath of World War II – are all non-starters as this would undermine Russia's global status and force it to accept a marginal position in the new world order.

Conclusion

As early as 2007, Putin formulated the key principles of Russia's official "memory politics": "Past events should be portrayed in a way that fuels national pride" and "We cannot allow anyone to impose a sense of guilt on us".[17] Undoubtedly, the Russian president's thinking has been strongly influenced by the trauma of the breakup of the Soviet Union. Among the lessons Putin learned from what he famously called the "major geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century, there are at least two directly related to the conflict between the Russian state and Memorial: Lesson 1, never allow your political opponents to use the uncomfortable past (Stalinist crimes) against you; and, Lesson 2, always prevent the opposition and its Western allies from ganging up on you.

For Russia's governing elites, securing "internal stability" is a "vitally important" task these days, the Kremlin-friendly political analyst Timofei Bordachev contends. Referring to the Soviet Union's demise, Bordachev warns that "*exclusively domestic factors*" could again be responsible for a new "national catastrophe and defeat" – precisely like what happened 30 years ago.[18] Amid the growing tensions caused by Russia's intention to revise the geopolitical results of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin is keen to ensure that it can rely on a steadfast and patriotic "home front". In the eyes of the Russian au-

17 "Стенографический отчет о встрече с делегатами Всероссийской конференции преподавателей гуманитарных и общественных наук," *Президент России*, 21 июня 2007, дата обращения 30.01.2022, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24359.

18 Тимофей Бордачев, "Настоящий противник сверхдержав," *Профиль*, 24 января 2022, дата обращения 30.01.2022, https://profile.ru/columnist/nastoyashhij-protivnik-sverhderzhav-1004406/. Emphasis added.

thorities, Memorial's political philosophy and civic activity, as well as its international ties, put the group in the category of "internal enemy". In an atmosphere shaped by the principle "whoever is not with us is against us", the liquidation of Memorial was preordained.

Part III.
CONFLICTS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

Chapter 5

The Politics of Memory in Independent Ukraine: Main Trends

Alla Kyrydon

Introduction

With the proclamation of independence on 24 August 1991, the processes of nation- and state-building began in Ukraine. These processes entailed the transformation of all spheres of social life, the formation of political institutions, and the development of new relations between social institutions. This was also a time of value paradigm formatting, identity construction, growth of heterogeneity and symbiosis of social and cultural structures, gradual blurring of rigid social and ethnocultural boundaries. The transformation led to a clash of at least two value systems: one derived from the previous society (Russian-imperial-Soviet) on the one hand, and a new national-democratically oriented one on the other. During this crucial period of state development, identification processes related to the self-determination of citizens were actualised and intensified.

Consequently, at the nation-building stage, an important task for the transitional society was to achieve an optimal level of national consolidation and to unite citizens around socially significant goals and values. Collective/social memory, social traditions, customs, and language are major factors and instruments for achieving such a consolidation. One of the state's powerful tools for ensuring social consolidation and the formation of national (state-wide) identification among its citizens is memory politics, although, if used carelessly, this tool can also reveal its destructive potential. The relevant model, instruments, and mechanisms of memory politics implementation are determined and conditioned by political, ideological, social, cultural, and other discourses of nation- and state-building.

The central hypothesis of this study is that different models of memory politics are implemented at different stages of social development. The nature of the politics of memory and the mechanisms of its implementation reveal a clear connection and correlation with the dominant political discourse. The politics of memory is a specific type of ideological practices of a society in the field of interpreting the past, building mnemonic codes, and forming the commemorative space. The (re)articulation of meanings in relation to the past and the present becomes a characteristic phenomenon in transitional periods with accelerated dynamics of sociocultural processes. A reinterpretation of acquired experience occurs according to the parameters of comprehensibility, consistency, and usefulness from the point of view of the historical and cultural moment. This temporal coherence implies a particular repetition of scenarios only in a new time-space paradigm: the representations and images created by history and memory are completely dependent on the mental interpretive models formed by modernity and the corresponding sense-making of the discourse of modernity.

"Regimes of historicity" (François Hartog) define the categories of "past", "present", and "future". It is the memory, which is a social construction created in the present, that "constitutes a system of social conventions" (Maurice Halbwachs). Memory and memory's meanings serve as a powerful factor in:

- construction of social/collective identity;
- formation/formatting of consciousness;
- (re)constructing/formatting the image of the past;
- consolidation or, on the contrary, division/confrontation of society;
- understanding and reconciliation or discord and conflict.

In the complex space of creating new relations, an important factor is the politics of memory, which operates within a time-appropriate normative and cognitive discourse. A change in the internal political situation is directly reflected in the nature of the memory politics and shifts the emphasis in semantic-symbolic organisation of space. It is worthy of note that the politics of memory can have both a consolidating national-creative potential and a conflictogenic one.

On the basis of a comparative analysis, this chapter aims to outline the main trends of memory politics in Ukraine during the years of independence, highlighting the specifics of each period between 1991 and 2021. To achieve this goal, the theoretical approaches to interpretation of the notions of "memory politics", "politics of history", and "memorial politics" will be summarised; the essence, instruments, and mechanisms of memory politics implementation will be determined; and the content and directions of memory politics transformation in the context of sociopolitical changes over Ukraine's thirty years of independent will be analysed.

Historiography

Among Ukrainian researchers, the works of Viacheslav Artiukh, Volodymyr Babka, Oleksandr Boiko, Vadym Bondar, Khrystyna Fedoriv, Vladyslav Hrynevych, Yaroslav Hrytsak, Oleksandr Hrytsenko, Ihor Hyrych, Kyrylo Ievseiev, Georgiy Kasianov, Anastasiia Konyk, Volodymyr Kryvosheia, Alla Kyrydon, Olha Makliuk, Vitalii Masnenko, Iryna Musiienko, Larysa Nahorna, Vitalii Ohiienko, Serhii Poltavets, Andrii Portnov, Mykola Riabchuk, Oleksii Rozumnyi, Victoriia Sereda, Iurii Shaihorodskyi, Iurii Shapoval, Valerii Soldatenko, Serhii Troian,

Oleksandr Udod, Iryna Vasiruk, Volodymyr Viatrovych, Olha Volianiuk, Leonid Zashkilniak, Iuliia Zernii, and others are devoted to the understanding of various aspects of collective memory and memorial politics. These studies can be divided into five thematic blocks. The first group includes works of a generalising/synthetic nature on state politics of memory (albeit without a proper in-depth analysis of the whole array of memorial politics acts and their implementation) and the formation of public perceptions of the past. The second group, the smallest in terms of quantity, is represented by studies devoted to comprehension of theoretical and methodological problems of memory discourse, and the conceptualisation, modelling/construction, content, and purpose of the politics of memory in Ukraine. The third group consists of publications which analyse individual periods of memory politics formation or specific memory practices. The fourth group is represented by studies focused on memory politics in the regional dimension. The fifth group consists of works on memorialisation/commemoration of individual figures.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The theoretical and methodological framework of this study is based on the conceptualisation of commemorative meanings, as laid down in the works of Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, Paul Connerton, Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Paul Ricœur, Yosef Yerushalmi, and others.[1] The chosen problem is considered in the context of the inter-

[1] Пол Коннертон, *Як суспільства пам'ятають*, пер. з англ. С. Шліпченко (Київ: Ніка-Центр, 2004); Морис Хальбвакс, *Социальные классы и морфология* (Санкт-Петербург: Алетейя, 2000); idem, *Социальные рамки памяти*, пер. с фр. и вступ. статья С. Н. Зенкина (Москва: Новое издательство, 2007); idem, "Коллективная и историческая память," *Неприкосновенный запас*, № 2 (40–41) (2005), дата обращения 24.08.2022, https://magazines.gorky.media/nz/2005/2; Пьер Нора, Мона Озуф, Жерар де Пюимеж и Мишель Винок, *Франция – память*, пер. с фр. Д. Хапаевой (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Санкт-Петербургского университета, 1999); Поль Рикер, *Память, история,*

disciplinary field of memory studies, which focuses specifically on issues of collective memory.

The term "politics of memory" is relatively new within the framework of various social sciences and humanities, and this causes notable discussions. The wide range of existing interpretations of this notion can be conditionally divided into several groups. Representatives of the *value-based approach* define politics of memory as:

- a variety of social practices and norms related to the regulation of collective memory (Georges Mink);
- a self-conscious strategy for projecting images of the past into projects for the future (Pierre Nora);
- a public space for dialogue between social forces and historians (Alexei Miller).

Within the framework of this understanding, the possibility of political manipulation of public memory is recognised. At the same time, this understanding implies the need to coordinate competing interests in the system of constructing images of the past arising from a certain configuration of political power and social relations.

In contrast to the value-based approach to politics, the *instrumentalist interpretation* of politics exclusively as a permanent struggle for power has also become widespread. Under this approach, the politics of memory is considered as a system of measures to unify individual views of the historical past in accordance with the single logic of the national historical narrative.

Meanwhile, proponents of the *constructivist approach* interpret the politics of memory as:

- imposed memory and permitted history (Paul Ricœur);
- creating criteria for selecting those historical events that should be kept in the national memory and those that need to be "erased" from it;

забвение, [пер. с фр. Ирины Блауберг и др.] (Москва: Издательство гуманитарной литературы, 2004); etc.

- a programme and actions to introduce these criteria into the mass consciousness in order to turn them into unconscious stereotypes;
- a development and propaganda of the context in which the events selected for restoration in the mass consciousness are connected to actual reality and create politically expedient attitudes and preferences (Sergei Kara-Murza);
- a process of constructing images of the past consonant with the moods of the epoch (and certain political forces), a symbolic resource that is quite acceptable to use, in particular during political and cultural rivalry between elites (Iurii Shapoval).

Some researchers agree that the policy of ruling state elites to intensively rewrite history and thus distort public memory corresponds to the notion of "historical politics" (targeted political influence on historical science). However, when it comes to the contemporary tasks of politics, which are not to impose a single reading of history but to reflect on the conditions of coexistence of different layers of public memory and corresponding experiences, the formulation "politics of memory" is more appropriate. At the same time, similar concepts in terms of content have come into scholarly use: "politics of history",[2] "politics of the past",[3] "memorial politics", "chronopolitics", and others.

Aleida Assmann distinguishes the following memorial strategies in the formation of identity, which most often act antagonistically: "memorial culture" (creation of group identity on the basis of historical

[2] Martin O. Heisler, "Introduction: The Political Currency of the Past: History, Memory, and Identity," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, no. 1 (2008): 14–24; Pilvi Torsti, "Why do History Politics Matter? The Case of the Estonian Bronze Soldier," in *The Cold War and Politics of History*, ed. Jahana Aunesluoma and Pauli Kettunen (Helsinki: Edita Publishing Ltd., 2008), 19–35; Алексей И. Миллер, "Историческая политика в Восточной Европе начала XXI века," in *Историческая политика в XXI веке*, ред. Алексей Миллер и Мария Липман (Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2012), 7–32.

[3] David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

material) and "politics of history" (direct activities of state structures to create their own symbolic space).[4] Larysa Nahorna in turn suggested another way of relating the notions:

> There is every reason to apply the concept of 'politics of memory' as a generalising one, 'politics of history' as a specifying one to denote its state-legal aspects, and the rarely used concept of 'mnemohistory' as the use of historical heritage in the very process of remembering.[5]

Georgiy Kasianov suggests defining historical memory as a form of "collective" or "cultural" memory which claims the status of tradition (invented and constructed). Historical memory is a mythologised form of a group's representations of the past, usually existing as a set of simulacra reflected in texts, symbols, visual images, and other "sites of memory". In an information society, it achieves the status of hyperreality, which has a major influence what is generally thought to be reality.[6] In Kasianov's opinion,

> Historical memory is a relatively stable set of interrelated collective ideas about a group's past, purposefully designed by means of historical politics, and codified and standardized in social, cultural, and political discourses and stereotypes, myths, symbols, and mnemonic and commemorative practices.
>
> On the one hand, historical memory is a result of cultural, social, and political engineering; on the other, it is also a tool used to shape cultu-

4 Алейда Ассман, *Длинная тень прошлого: мемориальная культура и историческая политика*, пер. с нем. Бориса Хлебникова (Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2014).

5 Лариса Нагорна, *Історична пам'ять: теорії, дискурси, рефлексії* (Київ: ІПіЕНД ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України, 2012), 113.

6 Georgiy Kasianov, *Memory Crash: The Politics of History in and around Ukraine, 1980s–2010s* (Budapest; Vienna; New York, NY: Central European University Press, 2022), 17.

> ral, social, political, and religious identities then synthetized into one during an era of nationalism.[7]

According to Iurii Shapoval,

> Politics of memory is a process of constructing images of the past that are consonant with the moods of the epoch (and of certain political forces). It is in this information-symbolic sphere that a 'battle for the past' takes place, with a sharp clash of interests of different social strata and political actors. Since the past, which is modelled in a certain way, is a valuable symbolic resource and has its own mobilising potential, its interpretations in polarised societies gain the power of an ideological weapon. At the same time, they [interpretations] are able to perform social protection functions, minimising the traumatic impact of contemporary realities.[8]

Oleksandr Hrytsenko distinguishes memory politics as a direction of public policy, "purposeful actions or refraining from actions of the state (or other public institutions, sociopolitical force) aimed at shaping and establishing in the minds of society the desired representations of the historical past".[9]

In the context of the problem discussed in this chapter, the author uses the term "politics of memory" and proposes the following definition of it. *Politics of memory is a component of the humanitarian policy of the state, a set of social practices aimed at the representation or modification of certain images of the past (images of the common past), actualised/mediated by the contemporary political context*. "Historical

7 Ibid.

8 Юрій Шаповал, "Політика пам'яті в сучасній Україні," *Харківська правозахисна група. Інформаційний портал "Права людини в Україні"*, 24 грудня 2008, дата звернення 28.05.2022, https://khpg.org/1230112797.

9 Олександр А. Гриценко, *Президенти і пам'ять. Політика пам'яті президентів України (1994–2014): підґрунтя, послання, реалізація, результати* (Київ: К.І.С., 2017), 25.

memory" is a kind of social (symbolic/cultural) capital. The politics of memory is directed by public authorities in order to legitimise the chosen model of state and power, as well as to shape images of the past and manage collective/social memory. However, the politicisation of memory and its resources deprives articulated experience of objectivity. The politics of memory is an integral element of symbolic politics, which is explained by the importance of images of the past in the context of justifying the decisions made by the political system. Symbolic politics, as a struggle for meanings, actively uses images of the past and becomes a mediator between collective perceptions of the configuration of political space and the real structure of this space. In fact, the politics of memory does not deal with the political structures themselves, but with symbols, thus being an important element of realpolitik.[10] Under the influence of memory politics, the adjustment of mnemonic practices, sites of memory, "rewriting" of textbooks, etc. takes place.

The politics of memory is a significant component of the state's humanitarian strategy, and it takes on a fundamental character in the context of nation-building, as it should ensure the principle of continuity in the directions of state-building. Its characteristic features are immanence to the political system, incorporation into the state's humanitarian strategy, and focus on the current needs and values of society. The politics of memory mostly concerns the interpretation of the past and is shaped by specific internal and external factors in the functioning of the state and the nature of political power. It is focused on solving important political and social problems, such as building a political

10 See Ольга Ю. Малинова, "Символическая политика: контуры проблемного поля," in *Символическая политика: сборник научных трудов*, ред. Ольга Ю. Малинова и др., вып. 1: *Конструирование представлений о прошлом как властный ресурс* (Москва: ИНИОН РАН, 2012): 5–16; eadem, *Актуальное прошлое: Символическая политика властвующей элиты и дилеммы российской идентичности* (Москва: РОССПЭН, 2015); eadem, *Конструирование смыслов: исследование символической политики в современной России* (Москва: ИНИОН РАН, 2013).

nation, forming a national identity, ensuring political stability, etc. The politics of memory is characterised by actualisation and selectivity, focusing on certain events, heroes, and places, while ignoring others. The essence of the present in the context of memory space formation is, firstly, a vision of its future, which a nation, group or family aspires to have, and, secondly, what must be retained from the past in order to prepare this future.

The subjects of memory policy include: state institutions, international organisations, political parties, public associations and movements, individual political leaders and public figures, historians, media representatives, and others. Among the key instruments of the politics of memory are lawmaking, memorialisation, educational programmes, and media resources. Memorialisation consists of commemorative practices (collective remembrance, commemoration, celebrations) and the mastering of symbolic space (monuments, memorial plaques, toponyms). The level of subjects' access to the instruments of memory politics is determined by the functioning political regime.

Periodisation of Memory Politics

State politics of memory in an unarticulated form began to form after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent Ukraine, and had generally nationally oriented content. One of the peculiarities of the memory politics was its rather clear identification with the actions of a particular official. Traditionally, this sector of public administration in Ukraine was directly controlled by the president and therefore depended on their personal views.[11] Consequently, one can speak about the conditionality of memory politics on the nature of power (presidential terms).

[11] Ігор Симоненко, "Концептуальні засади державної політики пам'яті. Аналітична записка," *Національний інститут стратегічних досліджень*, 26 грудня 2010, дата звернення 25.05.2022, https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/gumanitarniy-rozvitok/konceptualni-zasadi-derzhavnoi-politiki-pamyati-analitichna.

First Phase (1991–1994): Leonid Kravchuk's Presidency

The name of the first president of independent Ukraine is traditionally associated with the adoption of the Act of Declaration of Ukraine's Independence, the holding of a referendum on 1 December 1991, the abolition of the USSR, the adoption of basic state symbols rooted in the historical past (the national coat of arms, flag, and anthem approved by parliament), distancing from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and taking the first steps towards Ukraine's integration into European structures. One of the first public actions in the field of memory politics was the ritual of handing over to Leonid Kravchuk, as the first president of Ukraine, the state symbols of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR, 1918–1920), which was to symbolise the legal succession from the UPR to modern Ukraine.

During the short period of Kravchuk's presidency, a public project and the concept of "state-building" were initiated. The formation of the Ukrainian nation was taking place. This new community was directly linked to the previous one, which defined itself in 1991 and continued to function mainly on the worldview, sociocultural, and institutional basis of the former USSR. Therefore, in this phase, the ambivalence of memory models and the competition among different types of memory – the existing "Soviet" and the emerging "nationalist" memory – is vividly represented. The space of memory was characterised by a kind of palimpsest, as the culture of memory layered cultural practices of the past and practices generated by the new reality of the era.

Kravchuk's experience as head of the propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) manifested itself in his further political career while building the matrix of memory politics in independent Ukraine. His activity in the field of memory politics was, on the one hand, inertial ("restoration of historical justice") and, on the other hand, was determined by the need to adapt to the new situation that emerged as a result of gaining

independence. Memory politics focused then around the standard ethno-national myth of the "resurgent nation".[12]

The legitimisation of the new political subject – the state – was achieved, in particular, at the expense of history as a resource to justify political decisions. The most illustrative example was the construction of the Holodomor memory discourse, which began in the late 1980s. At that time, Kravchuk was actively participating in counterpropaganda actions directed against "an anti-Soviet campaign unleashed in the West on the occasion of the so-called '50th anniversary of the man-made famine in Ukraine' " and firmly opposed to the "nationalist myth about the famine".[13] However, as president of Ukraine in the early 1990s, he later ardently promoted the state commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the tragedy. Kravchuk clearly articulated the attitude of the highest authorities to these events in September 1993 during the international scientific conference "Holodomor in Ukraine 1932–1933: Causes and Consequences". In the opening speech he declared: "...it was a planned action... it was a genocide against one's own people... Yes, against one's own people, but under directives from another centre."[14] Interestingly, neither the former dissidents who supported Kravchuk, nor representatives of the diaspora, against whose "nationalistic fabrications" he had so fiercely once fought, tried to mention this worldview metamorphosis.

In 1994, Kravchuk initiated the commemoration of the victims of deportation from Crimea. He decreed 18 May to be the Day of Sorrow and Memory of the Crimean Tatars, Armenians, Greeks, and "persons of other nationalities" who were evicted from the peninsula in 1944.[15] More-

12 Георгій В. Касьянов, *PAST CONTINUOUS: історична політика 1980-х – 2000-х. Україна та сусіди* (Київ: Лаурус; Антропос-Логос-Фільм, 2018), 105–107.

13 See Владимир Литвин, *Украина: политика, политики, власть. На фоне политического портрета Л. Кравчука* (Киев: Альтернативы, 1997), 98–101.

14 Леонід Кравчук (Президент України), "Ми не маємо права знехтувати уроками минулого!", in *Голодомор 1932–1933 рр. в Україні: причини і наслідки. Міжнародна наукова конференція. Київ, 9–10 вересня 1993 р. Матеріали* (Київ 1995), 10.

15 Указ Президента України від 14.04.1994 №165/94 "Про заходи щодо вшанування пам'яті жертв депортації з Криму," дата звернення 18.05.2022, http://zakon3.

over, during Kravchuk's presidency an attempt was made to publish a multivolume history of the Ukrainian people. However, this large-scale project failed due to a lack of funds.[16]

In April 1991, the Ukrainian parliament adopted the law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions in Ukraine". Pursuant to this law, the problem of the creation and functioning of the totalitarian system in Ukraine became one of the priority research areas in historiography. The declassification of documents from the state archives, the archives of the Central Committee of the CPU and its local party committees, and archival units of the former USSR Committee of State Security, and the publication of memoirs of former Gulag prisoners made it possible to explore in detail the implementation of the Stalinist model of socialism in Ukraine, as well as state terror as a management method and the role of the Soviet secret services as one of the instruments of state terror. Simultaneously, a large-scale publishing project (state programme) "Rehabilitated by History" was launched,[17] and by Resolution of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine No. 324 of 9 December 1992, this academic project was determined as one of the priorities in the study of national history.[18]

Assessing the results of Leonid Kravchuk's brief stay in the presidential office, Georgiy Kasianov argues that through his public stance and concrete actions, Kravchuk contributed to the initial process of "nationalising" the Ukrainian past and developing a national/nationalist nar-

rada.gov.ua/laws/show/165/94.

16 Рем Г. Симоненко, *До концепції багатотомної «Історії українського народу» (міжнаціональний та міжнародний аспекти)* (Київ: Інститут історії України АН України, 1993).

17 Постанова Верховної Ради України № 2256-XII від 06.04.1992 р. "Про підготовку багатотомного науково-документального видання про жертви репресій на Україні," *Верховна Рада України. Законодавство України*, дата звернення 18.05.2022, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2256-12#Text.

18 *Головна редакційна колегія науково-документальної серії книг «Реабілітовані історією»*, дата звернення 18.05.2022, http://www.reabit.org.ua/aboutus/.

rative of memory. However, Kravchuk did not so much shape the agenda in this sphere as he tried to adjust to it and use it to legitimise himself.[19]

The period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, then, may be regarded as the first phase in the development of state politics of memory, when a gradual reorientation was taking place from the disclosure of the negative aspects of the past (particularly the Soviet past) to a strategy of dealing with the past which would consolidate society. Political necessity demanded the invention of one's own "historical canon", distinct from the Soviet one, and the construction of a national identity. At the same time, a comprehensive concept of memory politics had not been formulated.

Despite Kravchuk's insufficiently consistent memory politics, his attempts to break with the Soviet historical canon were noticeable, first and foremost through the publication of normative acts and participation in commemorations, which undermined the Soviet system of historical coordinates. This rupture, however, was not complete. One such theme was the 1917–21 Ukrainian national liberation movement, the appeal to which was intended to symbolically legitimise the newly-created state, its authorities, and institutions. In general, the memory politics of Kravchuk's time was considerably influenced by the long-term presence of the former Soviet nomenklatura and the CPU on the Olympus of power.

Second Phase (1994–2004): Leonid Kuchma's Presidency

During Leonid Kuchma's presidency, memory politics was dependent on the interests of "multi-vector" domestic and foreign policies. On the one hand, it was during this period that Mykhailo Hrushevsky received official recognition as "father of the Ukrainian nation", but on the other hand, there was no active dismantling of Soviet myths. Hence, Kuchma's presidency was characterised by a mechanical combination of national and Soviet history paradigms (an attempt to match the Soviet past

[19] Касьянов, *PAST CONTINUOUS*, 107.

to the national past and to "repaint" the Soviet past in "national colours"), which resulted in the parallel celebration of anniversaries with opposing ideological content. For example, the honouring of the Kruty heroes and simultaneously the celebration of the Soviet "military" holiday of 23 February. There were attempts to take into account the interests, identities, and values of different social groups, regions, and sociopolitical forces in order to avoid conflicts of memorialisation.

In general, Kuchma's policy was mostly "reactive". He did not offer a coherent national historical narrative and he resorted to rethinking certain events (e.g. Holodomor, Ukrainian Insurgent Army [UPA] activity) only under pressure from other actors of memory politics, stepping back from addressing issues when conflicts arose. Besides that, Kuchma avoided clear unambiguous evaluation of controversial historical events or personalities. The memory politics of this period was characterised by the lack of explicit thematic priorities, superficial assessments of historical figures, a "multi-vector approach" to regional cultures of memory, an overloading with ideologised regional configurations of symbols of the past, and significant revival of commemorative politics during election campaigns. The theme of cultural heritage and the restoration of lost monuments featured prominently. Nonetheless, no coherent policy document on memory politics was created at that time.

Ukrainian scholar Oleksandr Hrytsenko singled out three main scenarios according to which memory politics was formed and implemented under Kuchma's presidency:

1. *Support of public initiatives*. This scenario was used by the president in cases where a proposed initiative to celebrate an anniversary of a certain historical event or a jubilee of eminent personalities did not evoke much opposition, controversy, or conflict in society.

2. *Confrontation of memories*. The scenario of confrontation of memories unfolded if a historical event or personage provoked an ambiguous response in society (among different social groups, political forces or regions of the country). This referred in particular to the Pereyaslav Council of 1654; the Battle of Konotop; the events of the Northern War

on the territory of Ukraine; the struggle of the UPA; the anniversaries of such figures as Ivan Vyhovsky, Ivan Mazepa, Symon Petliura, Stepan Bandera or Volodymyr Shcherbytsky; and disagreements over the Holodomor and the "Great Patriotic War". In his political decisions concerning the commemoration of such events, President Kuchma generally tried to avoid ideological extremes in his assessments, and declared his desire for rethinking, mutual understanding, and compromises regarding the events of the past. However, under pressure from public reactions, he was forced to choose one of the options. It is possible to suspect that some decisions and actions of the president were implicitly aimed at provoking such conflicts in order to split or weaken his political opponents and their electorate on the ground of historical memory. Among such hidden provocations were the decree on the 350th anniversary of the Pereyaslav Council or a "compromise" with Poland on the appearance of the restored "Eaglets' Cemetery".

3. *Rivalry in honouring*. In this scenario, the presidential politics of memory was implemented when the honoured figure or historical event did not generate negative attitudes or conflicts in society at all, but the authorities tried to establish an official view of the event or figure as the most adequate and acceptable to the whole of Ukrainian society.[20]

In the system of values of memory politics under Leonid Kuchma's presidency, the leading positions were taken by statehood and public consent (or understanding), "education of patriotism", and respect for Ukraine's historical past. At the same time, there were few international messages in Kuchma's politics of memory. Among them one can mention the attempts to achieve world recognition of the Holodomor tragedy, Ukrainian-Polish understanding regarding the controversial pages of "common history", and the failed initiative to "rethink" the Pereyaslav Council.

Memory politics during this phase was characterised by regionalisation, an attempt to combine old Soviet and new national elements, and

[20] Гриценко, *Президенти і пам'ять*, 269–270.

a rejection of controversial topics to consolidate power, achieve support from a wider constituency, and ensure political stability. Kuchma's appeal to historical themes during election campaigns became especially prominent. At the same time, the majority of his memorial initiatives concerning the period of the Ukrainian revolution of 1917–21 were in fact legitimisation of existing and frequently repeated commemorations by the public.

Thus, memory politics up to 2005 was mostly directed at reaching compromises for the sake of reconciliating public opinion, including followers of the post-Soviet and state-oriented narratives. It was characterised by amorphism, ambivalence, and opportunism. The country's political leaders tried not so much to shape the historical consciousness of citizens, as to adapt the politics of memory to situational circumstances. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, during the celebration of anniversaries and commemorations and the formation of the holiday calendar, there was a partial return to the traditions of the Soviet period. Such a position allowed for a certain degree of public tranquillity but transferred the contentious historical themes into a latent state, without resolving urgent issues and without breaking with Soviet tradition.[21] After all, even in a limited democracy, totalitarian methods of shaping historical memory could no longer work.

Third Phase (2005–2010): Viktor Yushchenko's Presidency

Viktor Yushchenko's presidency marked a new phase of state memory politics characterised by radical changes in the content, intensity, and methods of work. One could observe the intensification of the study of the past and rejection of Soviet templates of its interpretation. The Ukrainian authorities evidently set a course for a purely national version of memory politics and increasing the number of memory sites. The main message of the state memory politics was a desire to consoli-

[21] Вадим Бондар, "Державна політика історичної пам'яті в Україні 1990–2000-х рр.: основні тенденції," *Історіографічні дослідження в Україні*, вип. 23 (2013): 386.

date society into a Ukrainian nation on the basis of a single vision of its own past. It concerned rethinking historical events, returning figures' names from oblivion, creating a national pantheon of heroes (including figures of the national liberation movement of the interwar period and World War II), and shaping national consciousness in society through history, language, culture, and construction of a symbolic reality. There have been fragmented attempts to decommunise public space. On 12 June 2009, President Viktor Yushchenko ordered the general dismantling of monuments and memorial signs dedicated to persons who were involved in the organisation and implementation of the Holodomor and political repression in Ukraine during the Soviet era.

Memory politics of this period was characterised by a lack of integrity, competition among different types of memory, as well as a nonconsolidated policy of shaping collective perceptions of the past in the activities of different branches of government[22] and eclecticism in relation to the Soviet heritage. It's worth noting that Yushchenko considered a significant part of Ukraine's Soviet past to be a component of national history. At the same time, a principled stance on controversial topics of the past and determination in shaping collective perceptions became one of the reasons for intensified polemics around the issues of memory discourse inside and outside the country. In particular, the political discourse on the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava, the interpretation of events related to the Holodomor, the beginning of World War II, the activities of the UPA, the status of Ukraine within the USSR, and other themes were characterised by sharp controversy. Differing representations of history significantly interfered with the formation of national memory. Similarly, the erection of monuments to figures of the imperial and Soviet era disoriented the collective memory of Ukrainians, slowing down the processes of nation and state-

[22] While a number of presidential acts were aimed at decommunising national memory, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine could have acted in the opposite direction, adopting, for example, a resolution to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the establishment of Ukraine's Komsomol.

building.[23] At the regional level, it was necessary to follow a generally determined politics of memory. However, state commemoration campaigns or the reverse – removal of Soviet monuments – often generated a weak response at the local level.

Among the major thematic priorities of the memory politics of Yushchenko's presidency were the Cossack-Hetman period, the national liberation movement of the 20th century, the Holodomor tragedy of 1932–33 (an active campaign to promote worldwide recognition of the famine as the genocide of the Ukrainian people), and the political history of Ukraine, with an emphasis on military victories in the struggle for national liberation and the gaining of independence. About half of the presidential decrees on memory politics were devoted to these topics and most of the organisational efforts and financial resources were aimed at promoting them.[24]

Such steps by Viktor Yushchenko provoked a negative reaction from Russia, which saw his reassessment of Ukrainian history as an attack on "common history". However, both in the president's policies and in society "there remained an ambivalent attitude to the Soviet period". On the one hand, the Soviet mythology and memorial practices related to the Great Patriotic War persisted and monuments to Lenin continued to stand in thousands of cities and villages. On the other hand, neither legislative recognition of the national liberation movement (the UPA struggle) nor a change in the predominantly negative attitude towards it in Ukrainian society (except in Galicia and Volhynia) was achieved.[25]

At the same time, President Yushchenko tried to institutionalise a normative approach to history focusing mainly of decommunisation. In 2006, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM) was created to coordinate memory politics. Among its priorities were the National

23 Симоненко, "Концептуальні засади державної політики пам'яті."
24 Гриценко, *Президенти і пам'ять*, 825.
25 Idem, *Декомунізація в Україні як державна політика і як соціокультурне явище* (Київ: Інститут політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України; Інститут культурології НАМ України, 2019), 41.

Liberation Struggles of 1917–21; the Holodomor of 1932–33, qualified as genocide against the Ukrainian nation; and World War II, in particular the history of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army as fighters for national independence. What did resonate was Yushchenko's decision at the end of his presidential term to posthumously confer the title "Hero of Ukraine" on the head of the OUN, Stepan Bandera.

The policy brief of the Ukrainian National Institute for Strategic Studies entitled "Conceptual Foundations of State Memory Politics" listed the following features of the state of collective memory of Ukrainians at the end of Yushchenko's presidential tenure:

- Presence of an expressive dualism in views on the past. Different, at times antagonistic, models of "historical memory" have prevailed in the public consciousness. Most significant among them were the "nation-centric-state" and the "imperial-soviet" models.
- Existence of certain regional variants of collective memory which produced different types of national identity.
- Underdevelopment at the level of collective memory of the Ukrainian nation's historical separateness; blurred ideas about the origin, and ethnic and national genesis of Ukrainians, as well as about the duration and continuity of their historical development.
- Lack of a holistic vision of national history and excessive fragmentation of collective visions of history.
- Existence of a victimhood complex in the historical memory, when in the public consciousness Ukraine becomes a victim, an object, rather than the creator of its own history.
- Orientation towards historical narratives of neighbouring countries by a certain part of Ukraine's population, primarily citizens belonging to national minorities.
- Ethno-exclusiveness of collective perceptions of the past. In other words, the history of national minorities almost did not exist in the national memory of Ukrainians.

- The tangible presence in the historical consciousness of Ukrainian citizens of vestiges of communist times, fed not only through retransmission across generations but also through established patterns of Soviet artwork and symbolic space (a list of public holidays, ceremonies, toponymy, monuments).
- A certain detachment of national memory from the pan-European historical narrative, as well as the distancing and non-articulation of the Ukrainian nation in the memory of Western European peoples. This should be regarded as a consequence of Ukraine's centuries-long semi-colonial status.[26]

Fourth Phase (2010–2014): Viktor Yanukovych's Presidency

Given that Ukraine was a de facto "dominion" of the Russian Federation throughout 1991–2013, a significant part of Ukrainian society retained essential signs of post-communist syndrome, such as nostalgic memories of the Soviet era; loyalty to Russian politics, culture, language, and information products; and acceptance of "façade" democracy and vertical power mobility modelled on communist partocracy.[27] The construction of memory politics during Viktor Yanukovych's presidency was based not only on an attempt to reject the national historical narrative and return to the Soviet one in its "republican" version. Rather, efforts were made to undermine or dismantle certain elements of the national narrative, which were actively promoted in public cultural communication during Yushchenko's presidency, as well as to restore and return to the public consciousness some elements of the Soviet historical narrative. The prolonged colonial position of the Ukrainian ethnos and the territory it occupied within neighbouring states has manifested itself in the functioning and spread of myths and stereotypes created by the great-power ideologists of imperial times and neo-imperial apol-

26 Симоненко, "Концептуальні засади державної політики пам'яті."
27 Юрій Шаповал, Ірина Васильєва та Ірина Матвієнко, "Українське суспільство у 2014–2020 рр.: проблеми політики декомунізації," *Український історичний журнал*, № 4 (2020): 111.

ogists. The state of public consciousness and social memory of many Ukrainians remained thoroughly "postcolonial", i.e. it was a mixture of Russian and Soviet worldviews and images.[28]

Memory politics under Yanukovych's presidency also had no comprehensive concept. However, there were several emphatic statements of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on historical and political issues, in particular against the revision of the conclusions of the Nuremberg Tribunal. The developers and implementers of presidential memory politics resorted to discrediting "undesirable" perceptions of history through propaganda campaigns, as well as avoiding mentioning certain historical events and blocking access to archival documents.

With Yanukovych's election in February 2010 and the gradual replacement of government officials with representatives of the "Party of Regions" and the "Communist Party", Ukraine began to actively promote the ideology of the "Russian world". There has been a gradual shift of emphasis from a nationally oriented paradigm to an "internationalist" and Russian-centric one. Ukraine's history, historical and cultural heritage were seen as part of the "common heritage of the three fraternal Slavic peoples". The first demonstrative step in this direction was the joint Ukrainian-Russian-Belarusian celebration of "Victory" in World War II and the return of the term "Great Patriotic War" to public statements by those in power and government speakers. In May 2011, the parliament adopted a decision on the "Victory Flag" which de facto allowed the use of the Soviet red banner as a symbol on Victory Day.[29] Simultaneously, counter-versions of this "common history" were deliberately glossed over, negated, or even discredited.

The fact that Ukrainian history was a part of European history was not denied, but neither was this emphasised, and historical conflicts with Western neighbours were sometimes exploited in internal political

[28] Леонід Зашкільняк, "Теоретичні проблеми сучасної історичної політики в Україні," *Res Historica* 46 (2018): 372.

[29] Юрій Шаповал, "Антикризовий ресурс політики пам'яті в Україні," *Політичні дослідження*, № 2 (2021): 118.

struggles. Yanukovych did not have any coherent vision of Ukraine's past of his own. At the same time, "not being-bound" to a clear historical narrative allowed him more freedom than his predecessor had to fluctuate across a fairly wide range, from "Russian world" to moderate, "non-exclusive" nationalism. Politics of memory was given a non-self-standing, instrumental role in the general thrust of state policy. While being aware of the usefulness of symbolic capital, and hence cultural politics and politics of memory, Yanukovych and those close to him tried to actively, though not entirely successfully, apply them as political tools. In reality, they used different methods/tactics: from undermining the opponent's version of history or its key elements (regarding the Ukrainian liberation movement of the 20th century) to appropriating individual elements of "foreign" historical narratives popular in society (e.g. borrowing Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Oleksandr Dovzhenko from the national narratives or the "Great Victory" and the "atrocities of OUN-UPA" from the Soviet historiography).[30]

The nature of the activities of the UINM changed. From an organ of central authority, it turned into a budgetary research institution. A distinctive feature of the UINM's work during this period was an attempt to unite around this institution leading experts of memory studies, which advantageously positioned Ukraine in comprehending the new direction of research and ensured the formation of research tools.

In Yanukovych's entourage and among his allies, there were those who openly and actively opposed the Ukrainian national narrative as such, trying either to replace it with a "Russian imperial" narrative or hypocritically denying the relevance of national historical narratives in the modern world. The events of the "Great Patriotic War" as well as the Orthodox heritage of Ancient Rus and Ukraine were prioritised. No attention was paid to the liberation movement of the 20th century; on the contrary, efforts were made to discredit it. Of the cultural

30 Гриценко, *Президенти і пам'ять*, 1013–1014.

figures, the president's decrees honoured mainly representatives of Russian and Soviet science, while only a few prominent Ukrainian figures received attention. At the same time, the selection of personalities or events for official commemoration was based on political expediency of the use of the related symbolic capital.

There was a gradual rejection of the declassification and disclosure of archival documents initiated by Yushchenko. In cultural communication related to the implementation of memory politics, two types of commemorative practices were favoured: the organisation of mass celebrations and counterpropaganda campaigns.

With regard to local and regional cultures of memory, the authorities used selective integration tactics that provided for the application of political and civilisational "filters". Thus, the nostalgic-Soviet and pro-Russian components of the culture of remembrance in the East and Crimea, including monuments to Russian emperors, Lenin, and Stalin, were fully tolerated. Simultaneously, the regional culture of memory in Galicia cultivated "harmless" elements (such as Ukrainian poet and writer Ivan Franko) and struggled against "harmful" ones, e.g. OUN-UPA. However, even here there was a certain tolerance: under Yanukovych, monuments to Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych continued to be erected in Galicia.

The memory politics of this period was oriented towards that part of society which maintained pro-Russian and nostalgic-Soviet attitudes. One could mainly observe a rollback to Soviet symbols, myths, stereotypes, and ways of thought. At the same time, Yanukovych was unable to completely ignore the worldviews and perceptions of the past of a population with a distinctly Ukrainian identity. Overall, there was a reorientation from an anticolonial policy of memory to a "restorative" one.[31]

[31] Шаповал, "Антикризовий ресурс політики пам'яті в Україні": 118.

Fifth Phase (2014–2019): Petro Poroshenko's Presidency

The events of 2013–14 became a watershed moment, a kind of point of no return in the post-communist and postcolonial transformation of Ukraine and Ukrainian society, in which there were still relapses of imperial and postimperial influences. The Revolution of Dignity also marked a turn in official memory politics: for the first time in the history of Ukrainian independence, memory politics became systemic and operational. An important nuance was that "the content accents, the vocabulary of memory, and mnemohistorical discourse in general became different – instead of victimisation the emphasis was put on glorification".[32]

After the Revolution of Dignity and the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the UINM was transformed from a research institution into an executive authority. Thus, the politics of national memory returned to the priorities of the country's leadership. According to experts, such changes were caused by a public demand for citizens to define their identity and rethink the past against the background of Russia's hybrid aggression. A particular feature of national memory politics after 2014 was the reform of decommunisation, and the return of memory of different categories of victims of the communist and other totalitarian regimes.[33]

The simultaneous existence in cities, towns, and villages of both Ukrainian symbols and symbols of the totalitarian past has led to ambivalence in collective memory, preserving and creating a certain ideological disorientation. It was impossible to build a national version of memory discourse "under conditions where the names of leaders of the totalitarian epoch are immortalised in monuments, and the names of squares and streets, alongside names of figures whose lives embody the struggle of Ukraine for independence and democ-

32 Ibid.: 119.

33 "Виклики і перспективи політики пам'яті," *Фонд «Демократичні ініціативи» ім. Ілька Кучеріва*, 30 листопада 2020, дата звернення 30.05.2022, https://dif.org.ua/article/vikliki-i-perspektivi-politiki-pamyati.

racy".[34] Consequently, the priority areas of the memory politics have become condemnation of the crimes of the communist past, desovietisation, decommunisation, and the heroisation of the OUN and UPA, supported by relevant laws.

Decommunisation is a system of measures in the sign-symbolic space aimed at destroying the markers of the past era, its values and ideals, as well as at rejecting the influence and consequences of communist ideology not only in public life, but also in all spheres of national and social life. Decommunisation was a derivative of the domestic political reforms initiated in 2014–15. In a broader context, this refered to attempts to change conventional interpretations of the past, expressed in the sign-symbolic space and mental-psychological markers, by means of political regulation. The result of decommunisation practices was the complete dismantling of all communist monuments and the condemnation of communist propaganda. In a narrow sense, decommunisation is now commonly referred to as the implementation of the so-called "decommunisation laws" adopted by the Ukrainian parliament on 9 April 2015. These are the laws "On the Legal Status and Honouring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the 20th Century" (No. 314-VIII), "On Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War 1939–1945" (No. 315-VIII), "On Access to the Archives of the Repressive Agencies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime of 1917–1991" (No. 316-VIII), and "On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Propaganda of their Symbols" (No. 317-VIII). As Ukrainian political scientist Mykola Riabchuk noted, decommunisation is necessary at least to "separate Ukraine from the dominant Russian imperial narrative of 'common' history and place it in the broader context of world events, memories, and interpreta-

[34] [Василь Яблонський, Віталій Лозовий, Олексій Валевський, Сергій Здіорук, Сергій Зубченко et al.], *Політика історичної пам'яті в контексті національної безпеки України: аналітична доповідь*, ред. Василь Яблонський (Київ: НІСД, 2019), 22.

tions as a completely separate and sovereign historical entity".[35] One of the consequences and at the same time the means of such recontextualisation was the cleansing of Ukrainian public space of Soviet-communist and in fact colonial symbolism. The actualisation of the processes of decommunisation and separation from the imperial-Soviet past was particularly evident in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine as an independent democratic state.

Russia's annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and military actions in Donbass catalysed the widespread implementation of decommunisation practices. This author shares Ukrainian historian Iurii Shapoval's view that with the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, one can talk about a new quality of post-Soviet memory politics, and perhaps a new phenomenon beyond the usual instrumentalisation of the past. Currently, "we are witnessing the emergence and in some cases the cultivation of a new quality of time, where elements of the past and the present merge into one, and linear history disappears".[36] Functionally, decommunisation was aimed at reassessing Ukraine's status – from a satellite of the Russian Federation to a sovereign state with its own geopolitical subjectivity.[37] It is clear that decommunisation as a multifaceted sociocultural process should have become a matter not only for political institutions but also for society as a whole.

Thus, decommunisation laws have become a kind of symbolic marker of state memory politics and a manifestation of political changes. But decommunisation is a component of a much deeper process of decolonisation. After all, "the Soviet past was just a continuation of the Russian imperial one; the Soviet heritage is destructive for Ukraine not because it is communist... but because it is imperial and essentially

35 Микола Рябчук, "Декомунізація чи деколонізація? Що показали політичні дискусії з приводу «декомунізаційних» законів?", *Наукові записки Інституту політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України*, вип. 2 (82) (2016): 106.

36 Шаповал, "Антикризовий ресурс політики пам'яті в Україні": 120.

37 Ігор Симоненко, "Меморіальний простір України: кризовий стан та шляхи оздоровлення," *Стратегічні пріоритети*, вип. 4 (13) (2009): 61.

anti-Ukrainian, oriented towards symbolic oppression and psychological enslavement".[38]

Russian aggression has actualised those aspects of Ukrainian collective memory that are associated with ideas of national identity, solidarity, self-sacrifice, patriotism, and armed resistance against the invader. In this context, not only the Western Ukrainian memory of the UPA struggle was revitalised, but also the Eastern Ukrainian memory of the Red Army fighting with Nazis was reinterpreted and assimilated into the pan-Ukrainian narrative of joint resistance to an alien invader. A common narrative of World War II finally substituted the dominant narrative of the "Great Patriotic War", which in fact split Ukrainians, placing them on different sides of the historical barricade. The new narrative included both Soviet and anti-Soviet Ukrainians in a broad anti-Nazi coalition, primarily as patriots and defenders of Ukraine. Russians in this narrative ceased to be "brothers" or even "allies", but turned into "Russian-terrorist troops".[39]

On 19 May 2019, President Petro Poroshenko announced the completion of decommunisation, despite the controversial attitude to it.[40] One of its results was the de-ideologisation, de-Leninisation, and desovietisation of the map of Ukraine. The moral aspect is also important in this context: one could observe a change in public consciousness, including a rejection of totalitarian practices and of tolerance of evil.[41]

So, in that period, there was a change of emphasis in the politics of memory along with the corresponding symbolisation of space and

38 Рябчук, "Декомунізація чи деколонізація?": 113.

39 Ibid.: 111.

40 See "Трагедія комуністичного терору має стати надійним запобіжником від спроб реанімувати «русский мир» на нашій землі – Порошенко," *Прямий*, 19 травня 2019, дата звернення 31.05.2022, https://prm.ua/tragediya-komunistichnogo-teroru-maye-stati-nadiynim-zapobizhnikom-vid-sprob-reanimuvati-russkiy-mir-na-nashiy-zemli-poroshenko/.

41 See "Завершення декомунізації – початок деколонізації," *Український інститут національної пам'яті*, 9 квітня 2019, дата звернення 19.09.2022, https://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/zavershennya-dekomunizaciyi-pochatok-dekolonizaciyi.

commemorative practices. However, the national-state model of memory politics, chosen as the basic model in 2014–19, would not always lead to the mobilisation and solidarity of Ukrainian society and ultimately would not become a guideline for moving away from neo-Soviet mnemohistorical practices. In this situation, the Revolution of Dignity and the Russian-Ukrainian war played a decisive role, which contributed to the forced decommunisation of the country.[42]

Sixth Phase (2019–2021): Volodymyr Zelensky's Presidency

The vector of memory politics under Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency was not immediately determined, since other issues were declared as priorities, such as social policy, improvement of living standards, reforms, fighting corruption, and resolving the armed conflict. Initially, the general character of memory politics was rather disparate and ambiguous. The 2019 presidential election did not lead to a curtailment of the proclaimed decommunisation and President Zelensky did not declare any plans to revise or repeal the decommunisation laws.[43] However, the official rhetoric became more moderate. As a result, by the time the thirtieth anniversary of Ukraine's independence was celebrated, decommunisation was not seen as a priority goal of domestic policy either by the authorities or by citizens.

A significant impact on the implementation of much clearer memory politics came from giving the Ukrainian language full legal status. The law "On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State Language" was passed and signed by former President Petro Poroshenko in 2019, as he was leaving office, with several provisions scheduled to come into force in subsequent years. The promotion of the Ukrainian language became an equal element of decommunisa-

42 Шаповал, "Антикризовий ресурс політики пам'яті в Україні": 125.

43 See "Володимир Зеленський дав перше розлоге інтерв'ю під час виборчих перегонів," *ZAXID.NET*, 18 квітня 2019, дата звернення 19.09.2022, https://zaxid.net/volodimir_zelenskiy_dav_pershe_rozloge_intervyu_pid_chas_viborchih_peregoniv_n1479792.

tion to de-Russification, which contributed to a refocusing of cultural policy and redefinition of basic statehood values in the direction of superiority of the national over the post-Soviet.

Memory politics remained a significant element of diplomatic relations. Important in this context was a visit of the Ukrainian president to Poland in September 2019. Volodymyr Zelensky and Polish President Andrzej Duda discussed a number of complex historical issues and agreed to update and reset the bilateral working group on solving historical issues, which was to work under the patronage of both heads of state.[44] In January 2020, Zelensky noted that it had been possible "to reduce the degree of emotions around problematic issues of the past" in Ukrainian-Polish relations.[45]

In July and August 2020, the Ilko Kucheriv "Democratic Initiatives" Foundation interviewed experts from different regions of Ukraine on the topic of memory politics and prepared a policy brief that assessed risks and opportunities for Ukrainian society that followed from the results of the implementation of national memory politics during 2014–19. It concerned the existence of significant differences in views on national memory politics among representatives of public authorities and NGOs, as well as on a holistic vision of the development of the state and determining what is important for the formation of the Ukrainian political nation. Thus, recommendations included:

- ensuring the formation of state memory politics at the legislative level;

44 "Україна та Польща домовились оновити й перезавантажити двосторонню робочу групу з вирішення проблемних історичних питань – Володимир Зеленський," *Президент України / Володимир Зеленський*, 31 серпня 2019, дата звернення 19.05.2022, https://www.president.gov.ua/news/ukrayina-ta-polsha-domovilis-onoviti-j-perezavantazhiti-dvos-57029?fbclid=IwAR1T9M3tMlbktQoKl5mu5TxpnpKODlqMY7rGmvpFYm1DbABtc6ZqdyeKN5s.

45 Олена Губар, "Зеленський і Дуда обговорили складні питання минулого," *DW*, 27 січня 2020, дата звернення 19.09.2022, https://www.dw.com/uk/зеленський-україна-і-польща-знизили-градус-емоцій-навколо-питань-минулого/a-52165042?maca=ukr-rss-ukrnet-ukr-all-3816-xml.

- adoption of the law "On Decolonisation", which should help to eliminate the negative consequences of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire on Ukrainian lands (renaming of toponymic objects associated with the imperial past; removal of modern Russian imperial symbols from the public space; decolonisation in the field of language policy, museums, etc.);
- adoption of the law "On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine", which should determine the mechanisms for overcoming the colonial and totalitarian heritage of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine;
- conducting a systematic analysis (audit) of the politics of historical memory, and development and approval of its state concept, programme, and implementation strategy;
- informational support of memory politics;
- creating an authoritative, multilevel, inclusive "memory platform" to promote discussion within public authorities and provide them with effective forms, tools, and mechanisms for their interaction with the public, creating conditions for the participation of citizens in the formation and implementation of public policy;
- providing a clear and grounded defence of the state's position on controversial historical events at national and international levels;
- ensuring the development and operation of a strong memory politics infrastructure at various levels: expanding the functions and powers of the UINM and other central executive authorities; intensifying the activities of educational institutions, state and municipal museums, and civil society institutions; creating new commemorative practices, memorials and museum-memorial complexes;
- protection of the achievements of national memory politics obtained from 2014–20.

At the same time, experts highlighted the following negative results of memory politics:

- the communist totalitarian metanarrative was replaced by a largely nationalist metanarrative;
- the dominance of centralist and directive tendencies increased, which manifested themselves in the imposition of the values of integral nationalism of the 1920s and 1940s;
- the politics of memory lacked inclusiveness: firstly, civic society organisations were not sufficiently involved in decision-making; secondly, there was a lack of attention to the return of memory about ethnic and religious minorities; thirdly, the gender aspect of memory politics was undeveloped and the so-called "women's history" was not adequately supported.[46]

As it was in the earlier phases, the politics of memory during Zelensky's presidency was built taking into account the factor of Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian war for independence and territorial integrity. At the same time, the preservation of the ambivalence of the memorial space and the differentiation of public opinion was followed by the radicalisation of value judgements and characteristics.

Conclusion

The transformational transition from one model of society to another in Ukraine was accompanied by a reassessment of moral-value orientations, behavioural matrices, and dynamic changes in spiritual life. One could also observe an increased interest in history and the cultural heritage of the people, the genesis and evolution of national identity. All this has led to an increase in the importance of memorial themes and their comprehension. State memory politics is

> one of the key elements in the complex and controversial process of transformation of the culture of memory in Ukraine, which, in turn,

[46] "Виклики і перспективи політики пам'яті."

> is only one of the components of the broader process of sociopolitical and cultural transformation of Ukrainian society.[47]

The conducted study showed that the characteristics of memory politics, its functional, representational, and symbolical content, as well as commemorative practices, depend on the political-power component. During the thirty years of Ukraine's independence, the conceptual framework of memory politics has changed and a new memory canon has been formed. However, the apparent inconsistency of historical determinants has led to a situation where the same events of the past have became a source of alternative and even conflictogenic interpretations. Meanwhile, it is necessary to emphasise that any incorrect, reckless, or excessive "memory management" can lead to irreversible consequences. Therefore, it is important to form a unifying commemorative space not on a negative but on a positive basis and to find a compromise in the interpretation of significant and complex pages of history. Another crucial factor is the determination of the value basis for the development of modern Ukrainian society while using collective memory and social myths as a political resource and a means of consolidating the nation.

In the broadest sense, the construction of memory politics is a political process with clear signs of goal-setting and articulated motivations. Its main content is ideally the development of an "image of the past" as close to reality as possible and as an effective tool for influencing public consciousness. Memory politics is designed to structure the past in a certain valuable retrospective.

During the thirty years of Ukraine's independence, the conventional integral vision of the past has not been conceptually built: the politics of memory has remained mostly reactive, and its consolidating feature has not been fully used. One of the serious obstacles on this path was that mnemohistorical politics was selective, situational, speculative,

47 Гриценко, *Президенти і пам'ять*, 46.

and formed on the basis of an ambivalent model with elements of neo-Soviet and Ukraine-centric (state-centric) images, symbols, and accents.[48]

At the same time, Russia's armed aggression accelerated the dismantling of the traditional "common" memory and the gradual establishment of the Ukraine-centric model of memory. This gives grounds to state that with the outbreak of war in Ukraine, a new quality of post-Soviet memory politics (and possibly a new phenomenon that goes beyond the usual instrumentalisation of the past) can be identified. A new pantheon of heroes, a new catalogue of places of memory, new memorial practices, values, and national autostereotypes are being created and the state-centric model of memory is being normalised. The dismantling of Soviet thought schemes and Soviet mnemonic heritage continues.

Translated by Hanna Bazhenova

[48] Шаповал, "Антикризовий ресурс політики пам'яті в Україні": 112–113.

Chapter 6

Recoding the Nation: Historical Politics in Belarus after the 2020 Protests

Aliaksei Lastouski

The political protests of 2020 in Belarus led to the deepest political crisis in recent Belarusian history. In fact, the entire model of the political system, which had been established in Belarusian society since 1994, was called into question. All of the developments in the state's ideology, as well as the models of civic loyalty based on the depoliticisation of the masses, were challenged. The institutions that were supposed to mobilise Aliaksandr Lukashenka's supporters turned out to be dysfunctional during the protests. Neither the Belarusian Republican Youth Union nor the state trade unions nor the public organisation "Bielaia Rus" ("White Rus") could resist the protests, which the regime was forced to suppress by force. One can talk about the exceptional delegitimisation of the Lukashenka regime, both external and internal. This crisis left the Belarusian authorities with the task of recoding the political nation, creating a new model of loyalty that would be able

to reassemble the fragments of the former social contract into an acceptable form. Oddly enough, the politics of history seemed to Lukashenka the most suitable instrument for creating a renewed nation. In fact, all of sociopolitical life after 2020 in Belarus passes under the guise of the phantasmagorical role of the "historical memory", which has become the main phrase in the rhetoric of state officials. Naturally, this presents us with the task of a careful and critical analysis of the new course of the politics of history in Belarus.

Return to the War

An important strategic line for the Belarusian authorities' current politics of history is the accusation of opponents of "betrayal", which is linked to their identification with the collaborators of World War II (also known as the Great Patriotic War). This identity is symbolically reinforced by an appeal to the practices of using the white-red-white flag during the Nazi occupation. The first attempts to look for connections to the Great Patriotic War took place during the protests, when Soviet wartime songs were loudly played. Not the preservation of the political system, but the defence of the historical memory from encroachment by "traitors" was proclaimed as the main goal for the representatives of law enforcement agencies. This can be treated as a policy of delegitimisation of political opponents and as an attempt to strengthen the unity of the ruling political camp, which does not simply have the task of protecting its privileged position, but has a more important moral task to protect historical memory from falsifications. In this case, historical memory itself is actually reduced to the events of the Great Patriotic War, and Lukashenka's supporters in this situation act as defenders of the memory of the achievements of the Soviet Army, which defeated the main evil in history – Nazism. When adopting such a worldview, any criticism of the present authorities is framed as being based on the justification of Nazism. This approach can be easily transferred to other countries whose authorities are critical of the Belarusian authorities. Thus, the imposition of sanctions on Belarus can be seen as a direct

continuation of the Nazi policy of genocide. Aliaksandr Lukashenka's reaction to the June 2021 EU sanctions package is quite revealing. In his speech on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War he defined German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas as the main symbolic enemy:

> Mr. Maas, who are you? A German who was repenting yesterday or an heir of the Nazis?... You have to not just repent, you must kneel before the Belarusian people for another 100 years and give thanks that you happened to be born after that war... You must not strangle us. You, the Germans, the Poles, the so-called European Union, must carry us in your arms, because we saved you from the brown plague.[1]

The demarcation "Belarus vs. the Nazi apologetic countries" was also used in the development of the topic of genocide of the Belarusian people during the Nazi occupation. To a great extent, the focus was not on the activities of the punitive Nazi formations themselves, but rather on the activities of various ethnic collaborationist structures. The Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Belarus made several appeals to Lithuania and Latvia in 2021; the loudest was the summons of the former Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus as a witness. When these appeals were predictably refused, the Prosecutor General Andrei Shved interpreted it as the result of the conscious cover-up of Nazi criminals: "These states make no secret of the fact that they both cover up living Nazi criminals and refuse to carry out investigations to establish the crimes committed by the punitive SS battalions consisting of Lithuanians and Latvians."[2]

1 "Лукашенко о последних санкциях ЕС: история их ничему так и не научила," *Белта*, 22 июня 2021, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-o-poslednih-sanktsijah-es-istorija-ih-nichemu-tak-i-ne-nauchila-447175-2021/.

2 "Швед: отказ Литвы и Латвии в правовой помощи по уголовному делу о геноциде немотивирован," *Белта*, 8 сентября 2021, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://www.belta.by/society/view/shved-otkaz-litvy-i-latvii-v-pravovoj-pomoschi-po-ugolovnomu-delu-o-genotside-nemotivirovan-458803-2021/.

Moreover, the actual situation itself is perceived as a war – a war not new, but the same, endless, and eternal war of good against evil, the highest apogee of which was the Great Patriotic War. However, the confrontation does not end there. In this perspective, the Belarusian authorities act as the last wall and the protector of the order before sliding into chaos. If there is no distinction between the Great Patriotic War and modernity, then there is a complete identification between the camp of Lukashenka's supporters and the Soviet Army, just as there is between the political opposition and the Nazis. Therefore, there is also no difference between the European states' sanctions and the burning of Belarusian villages, as these are perceived only as distinct phases of the same confrontation. One cannot maintain that it is a completely new phenomenon for Belarusian politics: Such statements about protecting the memory of the victories and successors to the Nazi policy from outside Belarus have been reproduced quite regularly by Lukashenka before. However, back then they were mostly voiced in a solemn ritual form (predominantly on Victory Day), while now the idea of the actual war has been absolutised and has spread from the level of ceremonial rhetoric to general public discourse and has become the core of practical politics. At the same time, the terms "historical memory" and "historical truth" have become extremely widespread and have gone far beyond the limits of previous usage. They are now used not only by politicians and propagandists, historians and sociologists, but have also become the basis for the rhetoric of representatives of the power structures (the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of the Interior), who in the current situation are on the crest of historical politics. In fact, this model of endless war has become an exhaustive one, which can explain any political action and provide a supreme dimension.

This model's suitability can also be seen in its use during the migrant crisis in 2021. The harsh reaction of neighbouring countries to migration flows from Belarus is presented as another manifestation of the essentially Nazi policy of neighbouring states, which is hidden under European liberal rhetoric, but in times of crisis shows its real

nature. For example, one of main public propagandists of Lukashenka's regime Vadzim Gigin describes Lithuania as a neo-Nazi state:

> Historical oblivion is the basis of neo-Nazism, and we see it happening in Lithuania. Over the years of independence they have rehabilitated blood-soaked butchers... And since the country's power structures are brought up on the examples of criminals, murderers, blood-soaked butchers, we should not be surprised that what is happening there is happening. It could be even worse. And concentration camps can be not only for migrants, but also for dissenters.[3]

Accordingly, the political protests of the summer and autumn of 2020 are then perceived exclusively as having been provoked by Western states for the sake of enslaving the Belarusian people. In practice, the objectives of the political opposition are described as being similar to the Nazi policy of extermination: "It is the same common fascism. It has spilled out onto our peaceful streets in a brown hateful colour. It has once again, 75 years later, raised its head, again wants to enslave us, to exterminate, trample, burn us in our homes and in gas chambers".[4] Such a model of military mobilisation may boost the morale of the supporters of the Belarusian authorities, as they are not just fighting to maintain power, but are standing against the absolute evil – Nazism. However, such a worldview has its obvious disadvantages, as it is aimed at increasing and open confrontation. It is impossible to come to terms with the absolute evil: It must only be defeated. At the same time, the question remains open as to whether Belarus has

3 "Гигин о событиях в Литве: историческое беспамятство – это основа неонацизма," *Беларусь сегодня*, 12 августа 2021, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://www.sb.by/articles/gigin-o-sobytiyakh-v-litve-istoricheskoe-bespamyatstvo-eto-osnova-neonatsizma.html.

4 Сергей Михович, "Нужен был болевой толчок, предательский удар, чтобы мы встрепенулись и поняли: это тот же обыкновенный фашизм," *Беларусь сегодня*, 30 октября 2021, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://www.sb.by/articles/ot-otveta-natsistam-ne-uyti-.html.

enough resources (even with the indirect support of Russia) to defeat the Western world in open confrontation.

National Unity Day and a Divided Nation

One of the most notable innovations of the new course of historical politics was the establishment of a new public holiday (so far, without the status of a non-working day) – National Unity Day. The creation of the holiday was a logical continuation of the symbolic politics of the Belarusian authorities, since 2021 was declared the Year of National Unity, with the aim "to turn the page of the past and write a new chapter of independent Belarus together".[5] The need to redefine the political nation in Belarus is obviously felt here, as the previous version of national consensus proved unreliable. The seventeenth of September was chosen for the celebration, referring to the beginning of the march of the Soviet Army into Western Belarus and Western Ukraine, the consequence of which was the unification of most of the ethnic Belarusian lands within a single state formation – the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR). But it is interesting that an event from the Soviet period of history, which according to sociological surveys causes the most contradictions and disagreements in the assessments of the country's population, was chosen as a point of reference. At the same time, according to various studies, this holiday was not mentioned as significant for the canon of public historical memory. Again, in the BSSR, 17 September was celebrated as a holiday only until 1949; afterwards the main focus was on the commemorations of the Great Patriotic War and the Great October Revolution. The only resource for fixing this holiday in the public space was the compulsory presence of streets bearing the name "17 September" in western Belarusian cities. Yet at the same

5 "Новогоднее обращение Президента Республики Беларусь Александра Лукашенко к белорусскому народу," *Президент Республики Беларусь*, 31 декабря 2021, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://president.gov.by/ru/events/novogodnee-obrashchenie-1640948656.

time, very few street names bearing this name existed in eastern Belarusian cities.

In this scenario, one can in fact observe the creation of a new tradition, rather than the use of already existing and fixed symbolic resources, as was the case when the Belarusian authorities turned to the cult of victory in the Great Patriotic War. However, in a situation of heightened interest in the issues of cooperation with the Nazis (which has become the main accusation of the Belarusian national movement), the intent to highlight the historical event, which actually happened due to the temporary cooperation between the Soviet and the Nazi regimes, looks rather strange. This immediately subjects the new holiday to legitimate criticism, which the independent media took advantage of almost right away. Also, the very context of annexation of the western Belarusian lands to the BSSR, with further repressions against potential enemies of the Soviet system, has its own specific imprint in the collective memory of the inhabitants of these territories. This is especially felt among those of Polish heritage, who make up a significant part of the population of the Grodno region, where family memory conveys a very different version of these events.

Another important issue is the content of National Unity Day. The introduction of this holiday was preceded by a lengthy media campaign, when during at least August and September 2021 the state media outlets had to explain to their audience what happened on 17 September and what the meaning of this holiday was.

The most fundamental narrative features are the following:

1. Construction of a collective enemy embodied by "Poland" ("horrors of Polish atrocities and bullying" – these words are suitable both for describing interwar Western Belarus and for the contemporary Polish policy of resisting migration). It is worth noting that the rhetoric towards Poland has become more aggressive than during the post-war BSSR, when the western neighbour also belonged to the socialist camp. One can observe a return to the accusations from the era of Polish-Soviet confrontation, and here the extremely active quotation of newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s plays a fundamental role. The political journal-

ism of communist publications has become a "testimony of the time", authentic voices which should once again immerse us in the situation before 1939.[6]

2. In fact, the entire public rhetoric concerning National Unity Day was built on conflict: Poles vs. Belarusians, territorial disunity vs. national unity, economic exploitation vs. social justice, national oppression ("destruction of the nation") vs. freedom of national expression, "total genocide" vs. the Belarusian people. Certainly, such a Manichean worldview with a black-and-white division of symbolic space excludes all the nuances and complex interpretations inherent in historiographical understanding of the past. Thus, national unity in this case is modelled without creating a single symbolic body, which inevitably implies some framework of tolerance for political and cultural divergence, the search for some common compromise understanding of the past and the future. It should be remembered that sometimes this political unity was built simply through the policy of oblivion (a clear example is post-Franco Spain). In the Belarusian variant, national unity is built through the rhetoric of mobilisation, through a rigorous moralising understanding of the world (the truth is only on our side), which inevitably has the consequence of further marginalisation and exclusion of political opponents from the body of the political nation. Therefore, in fact, the task of the new holiday is to unite and strengthen one political camp, which points to the existence and insurmountability of the current political divide. Moreover, the proposed version of the historical past also excludes large parts of the population (Poles, Catholics) who have their own understanding of the historical past. This version of nation-building is extremely exclusive and does not resolve the conflicts that exist in the Belarusian society.

[6] Татьяна Шимук, "Зарплата ниже, чем в других регионах Польши, мясо лишь по праздникам, вынужденный наем к помещикам – как жили в крупных местечках Западной Белоруссии до 1939 года," *Беларусь сегодня*, 2 сентября 2021, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://www.sb.by/articles/tyazhelyy-krest-vskhodnikh-kresov.html.

An Unnoticed Anniversary

For Belarus, 1991 became a defining year in modern history. Amid growing disintegration of the USSR and after the failure of the putsch of the State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP), the declaration on state sovereignty of the BSSR was given constitutional status on 25 August 1991, and on 19 September, the country received its current name – the Republic of Belarus. The process of forming the Community of Independent States and the simultaneous dismantling of the USSR led also to diplomatic recognition of the independence of the Republic of Belarus. Thereby, Belarus could have celebrated the 30th anniversary of its independence in 2021, as many other post-Soviet republics have done. However, this did not happen. The reasons are complex, so let us try to get to the bottom of it.

It is necessary to start with the fact that there are not many issues or topics on which there is an established consensus in the Belarusian society. One such topics is the positive attitude towards gaining independence. This has been confirmed by opinion polls, including those conducted in 2020.[7]

But at the same time, the discourse of the authorities (and this has been Lukashenka's discourse since 1994) towards independence remains internally contradictory. During the 1994 presidential campaign, Aliaksandr Lukashenka won a convincing victory over Viachaslau Kebich, a representative of the nomenklatura, largely due to his skilful use of pro-Soviet sentiments, contrasting the symbolic resource of the Soviet past with the harsh realities of the political and economic crisis of the first half of the 1990s. In subsequent years, Lukashenka regularly manifested himself as the only deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR who voted against the approval of the Belovezh Accords and consequently in the romantic role of the last defender of the USSR. And

7 "Исследование: самый важный праздник для белорусов – День независимости," *Белсат*, 30 июня 2020, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://belsat.eu/ru/news/issledovanie-samyj-vazhnyj-prazdnik-dlya-belorusov-den-nezavisimosti/.

yet he came to power in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, he has been heading the Republic of Belarus for 28 years, and constantly presents himself as the defender of the country's independence and sovereignty. Thereby, one can observe here the construction of a certain genealogy – the Republic of Belarus becomes a positive continuation of the BSSR, where the system of social protection, industrial production, memory of the Great Patriotic War, etc. are preserved. Accordingly, the period from 1991 to 1994 is viewed not as the beginning of independent Belarusian statehood, but as a deviation from the natural line of development, as a trauma caused by external forces.

Such declarative continuity with the experience of Soviet Belarusian statehood should not conceal the ongoing changes, as Lukashenka's ideological and political project has its own logic for development, where pragmatic objectives are much more important than maintaining allegiance to the communist legacy. Many social guarantees were revised, the socialist economy was transformed into a version of state capitalism, the communist ideology was completely discarded, and the pathos of revolutionary transformation and class struggle is completely alien to this government.

Contradictions in the interpretation of the transition period and involvement in other commemorative initiatives has resulted in the Belarusian authorities actually refusing to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Republic of Belarus in any way. This means that in 2021, there were no official events commemorating the anniversary: no parades, no ceremonial concerts, no museum exhibitions, and no academic conferences. Remarkably, Lukashenka's traditional Independence Day greeting in 2021 did not even mention the 30th anniversary of the Republic of Belarus; there were only references to the Great Patriotic War. Solely the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union was perceived as a proper occasion for reflection, primarily by the state media, which turned to the traditional paradigm of a "major geopolitical catastrophe".

Of particular importance in the interpretation of these events was the question of responsibility: Who was to blame for the collapse of the USSR? In this case, the dominant theme was that of "traitors"

to characterise the country's leadership. Here one can see the overlap of the public discourse of the post-protest period, when supporters of the authorities began to actively use the label "traitors" to discredit their opponents for political purposes. In this rhetoric, protesters betray the interests of their country, destroying order and well-being for the sake of the goals of hostile Western countries, which in fact are behind the protests and direct them. Such a logic of alienation allows internal problems to be fully explained as being due to the intrigues of external actors. An important symbolic mechanism for discrediting "traitors" was also their identification with the collaborators of the Nazi occupation period, which makes it possible to exploit the powerful emotional resource of the Great Patriotic War. Parallels were drawn between "Hitler's servants" and the participants in the protests of summer and autumn 2020 because they were all "traitors".

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 was discussed in a similar vein: "The collapse of the USSR was primarily the result of the criminal intentions or political impotence of the ruling elite of the Soviet Union";[8] "they had all been 'staunch Communists' for years and betrayed the party that had brought them to the top".[9] Moreover, an emotional reference to collaboration with the Nazis is used here too. Again, it is impossible to avoid comparisons with the present, when the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which betrayed its country, is contrasted with Aliaksandr Lukashenka, who showed radically different qualities in a situation of crisis.

Another important feature of the interpretation of the collapse of the Soviet Union is the construction of the image of an "eternal enemy" from Western countries. The civilisational idea of the eternal op-

8 Дмитрий Шамко, "Вячеслав Данилович о причинах распада СССР, важности межгосударственных объединений и сохранении суверенитета," *Беларусь сегодня*, 26 декабря 2021, дата обращения 11.05.2022, https://www.sb.by/articles/vmeste-my-silnee33.html.

9 Вадим Гигин, "Юбилей, который не радует," *Беларусь сегодня*, 8 декабря 2021, дата обращения 16.09.2022, https://www.sb.by/articles/yubiley-kotoryy-neraduet.html.

position of the "Russian world" to the "collective West", which was not only built on alien values but is also constantly striving to dominate the world, is resurrected. Accordingly, the disintegration of the Soviet project is also seen primarily as deriving from the machinations of Western intelligence services aimed at distracting the main rival to these plans of domination. One can also see here parallels with the current situation of the "hybrid war deployed by the so-called democratic Western countries against the peoples of Belarus and Russia",[10] where the West again appears as the main enemy of Belarusian statehood, initiating protests and trying to strangle the country with sanctions.

From this perspective, the crisis phenomena during the last period of the Soviet Union's existence are either downplayed or attributed to the failed/treacherous actions of the Soviet leadership. Thus, the USSR could have renewed itself and continued to exist: "We can argue that the Soviet system in the BSSR (maybe based on the Chinese or on its own model) could have survived until now."[11] Destructive strategies of disintegration are countered by integration projects – the Union of Belarus and Russia, the Eurasian Economic Union – which appear not only as a gradual restoration of the normative order, but also as an important tool to withstand a hybrid war with the "collective West".

Thereby, the 30th anniversary of the sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus was virtually unnoticed in Belarus in 2021, due to a shift in ideological emphases. However, for the pro-governmental political rhetoric that "normalises" the cultural and political landscape, the case of the collapse of the USSR proved significant, allowing for a renewed condemnation of "traitors" and demonstrating the advantages of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's political course.

10 Шамко, "Вячеслав Данилович о причинах распада СССР."
11 "Горбачёв разрушил СССР? Мнение историка Вадима Гигина," *СТВ*, *Азарёнок. Тайные пружины политики 2.0*, 8 декабря 2021, дата обращения 11.10.2022, http://www.ctv.by/gorbachyov-razrushil-sssr-mnenie-istorika-vadima-gigina.

Russia as a Cultural Model

It should be noted that the new initiatives of the Belarusian authorities also show considerable dependence on Russia in the field of cultural policy. Many of Lukashenka's policies have traditionally been borrowed from Russia, and this dependence only increases with the growing international isolation of Belarus. This can also be eloquently revealed in the sphere of historical politics. The Russian influence is easily visible in the initiation of the National Unity Day, as this holiday was introduced in Russia back in 2004, and was also supposed to become a substitute for the October Revolution celebration to some extent. But sociological research in Russia demonstrates that the new holiday has had little success in finding its place in the symbolic calendar of ordinary Russians, and has not in fact fulfilled its task of strengthening Russian collective identity. It is even more difficult to imagine National Unity Day being able to unite the nation in Belarus.

The initiative to recognise the genocide of the Belarusian people by the Nazis during the Great Patriotic War, which was launched in the public space of Belarus in 2021, also borrows from Russia, where a group of activists (the project "Without a Statute of Limitations") is promoting the idea of recognising the genocide of the Soviet people. In October 2020, for the first time in the practical experience of Russian legislation, the Saletsky Court of Novgorod Region recognised the mass murder of Soviet citizens by the Nazis during the war to be a genocide. The fact that this initiative was awarded the "Victory" National Prize and was supported by the state news agency RIA Novosti is evidence of the conformity of its aspirations with those of the Russian authorities. Thus, one can observe the pattern here, which includes prosecutors.

Russian historian and head of Historical Memory Foundation Alexander Dyukov, who has been working actively in Belarus in recent years, stands out as one of the main authors of the transfer of historical politics mechanisms from Russia to Belarus. Since 2010, he has been compiling a database of burned Belarusian villages, in collaboration with the Belarusian National Archives. However, what seemed to be an archiving project has suddenly, in the last year, acquired

a political dimension, as these studies have become a justification for the concept of the genocide of the Belarusian people. It is worth noting that this foundation is engaged in diverse activities aimed at participation in the Belarusian historical consciousness. For example, in September 2021, it published Alexander Dyukov's book *Неизвестный Калиновский. Пропаганда ненависти и повстанческий террор на белорусских землях, 1862–64 гг.* ("Unknown Kalinowski. Hate Propaganda and Insurgency Terror in the Belarusian Lands, 1862–64").

But there is also a fundamental difference: while contemporary Russia appeals to the supranational and political category of "Soviet people" (although in practice, only crimes in the contemporary territory of the Russian Federation are dealt with), in Belarus there is an obvious problem with the fact that "Belarusian people" has a long tradition of being read and interpreted specifically in ethnic, not political, categories. Moreover, if, for example, Russia recognises the "genocide of the Soviet people", then theoretically the crimes that took place on the territory of Belarus should also be included there. Why, in that case, should the genocide of the Belarusian people be singled out, and what is the difference between the genocide of the Soviet people and the genocide of the Belarusian people? These conceptual problems remain unaddressed.

In Search of Recognition of the Genocide of the Belarusian People

The enormous importance attached by the Belarusian authorities to the genocide of the Belarusian people raises the question of what the aims of this initiative might be, and who should recognise this genocide? Sometimes the idea that all criminals should be punished irrespective of the time elapsed since the crime was committed is used as a justification for addressing the subject of war crimes in Belarus. But obviously, this reasoning looks rather weak: Who prevented the investigation of these crimes earlier (in the Soviet Union, this did indeed take place)? Why, even after Lukashenka came to power almost 30 years

ago, have the crimes only recently been remembered? Therefore, to understand the reference to the topic of genocide, the international viewpoint is more suitable. After World War II, during the creation of the new system of international security, the system of values was completely changed. The victims received a privileged status, and the word "genocide" thus became the measure of the highest recognition of such status. Accordingly, a struggle unfolded between different countries as to which of them had the greater degree of traumatic experience to be recognised by other states. Using this model, Israel has achieved international recognition of the Holocaust tragedy, but then other states started to operate on this model. Armenians began to seek recognition of their genocide by the Turks during World War I; Ukrainians have sought recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide of the Ukrainian people; etc.

However, it is clear that the very question of recognising certain crimes as genocide cannot be resolved solely at the national level. The crucial thing is how the international community reacts to these crimes, which, in its turn, depends on current relations with other states, the presence of certain lobbying structures, mainly among the representatives of diasporas, and so on. At the same time, the initiative to recognise the genocide of the Soviet people, launched in Russia, was pragmatically intended as a means of pressuring the international community. It is obvious that after the recognition of the genocide of the Belarusian people at the national level as a relevant law, Belarus, too, has the task of its international recognition; otherwise, the effect of so much effort will be poor. But in a situation of growing international isolation of the country, recognition of Belarus as a country-aggressor, and conflict with the diasporas (and the list can go on), there is almost no chance for other countries – except for Russia – to recognise the genocide of the Belarusian people. So it will only be possible to use this resource for internal propaganda, which is a rather weak result.

The law "On the Genocide of the Belarusian People" was adopted very quickly: On 9 December 2021, a draft law was published; on 14 December it was approved by the House of Representatives; and on 5 Jan-

uary 2022, the law was signed by Aliaksandr Lukashenka, after which it came into force. What surprises the most in this case is the very short time between the publication of the draft and its adoption by parliament with virtually no discussion or amendments. Meanwhile, there are many inaccuracies and vague wordings in the law, which immediately provoked several sceptical reactions from Belarusian historians in the independent media. The following omissions in the adopted law were criticised:

1. Vague wording, a lack of a clear definition of the term "genocide" itself – and in particular the criteria for "genocide denial", which, according to the new law results in criminal liability.

2. The practical identification in the text of the law (which is explicitly expressed in the chronological framework of the genocide – before 1951) of the extermination policy of the Nazis with the activities of nationalist formations on the territory of Belarus. This virtually gives grounds to subsume not only the Belarusian collaborationist structures, but also the Polish, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian underground organisations (the Home Army, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, etc.) under this law.

3. The lack of special consideration of the extermination policy by the Nazis towards the Jews and the Roma, which leads to the practical identification of different ethnic categories into a single all-encompassing category of "Belarusian citizens" without the possibility of differentiating the occupation policy.

4. The threat of the adopted legal regulations in terms of the possibilities of free and critical professional historical study of World War II period.

Regarding experts' opinions, the general assessment of the law "On the Genocide of the Belarusian People" was unequivocally negative, but there was no coordinated reaction from the historical community. It is possible that this was also due to the fear of a feasible repressive reaction, especially since critics of the law were almost immediately subjected to public defamation in the state media.

Obviously, the vague formulations of the law leave it up to the judiciary to interpret what counts as genocide and especially what is genocide denial. Nevertheless, during the first months after its adoption, the law was not used as a repressive mechanism, leaving it open to the question of how the law will work in practice to punish genocide denial.

The State Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Belarus was the main state institution to take up the cause of the genocide of the Belarusian people. However, the experience of Central and Eastern European countries has not been considered. For example, the elaboration of the "dark pages" of the 20th century history in Poland, Ukraine, and Slovakia was made the responsibility of specially created Institutes of National Memory in the respective countries. These institutions employ professional historians who have wide powers to regulate the archives and initiate legal proceedings. In the Belarusian case, this task is almost entirely monopolised by the power structures while professional historians are sidelined.

As for the practical activities of the employees of the Prosecutor General's Office, they were engaged throughout 2021 in searching for unidentified World War II gravesites and interviewing potential witnesses to war crimes. The means to publicise the investigative work done was the creation of a special series of museum exhibitions throughout Belarus under the general title "Without a Statute of Limitations", which opened in almost all museums of all levels throughout the country. These exhibitions included archival documents that testified to war crimes, and also paid special attention to fresh finds of unrecorded burials of victims.

It remains debatable to what extent the newly discovered evidence of mass murders found by the Prosecutor General's Office can lead to a radical revision of the scale of atrocities. Conventionally speaking, from the estimate "every fourth" person killed in Belarus during the war adopted in the BSSR during the times of Piotr Masherau as first secretary to "every third", which has become a common formula in the Republic of Belarus in recent years. This requires discussions with professional historians, but for the moment the Prosecutor General's Office

is avoiding them, although it did announce an international conference in Spring 2022, but then kept quiet on the subject.

The problematic aspect for the initiators of the case on the genocide of the Belarusian people is international recognition: For the moment, even Russia has not voiced its readiness to recognise the genocide. The Prosecutor General's Office is trying to work according to its usual scheme, through sending out requests to find war criminals, which in the context of the externally perceived lack of legitimacy of the judicial system of the Republic of Belarus has had no practical effect, except to give rise to another wave of accusations against the governments of other countries of "supporting Nazism". The only known controversial issue is the position of Israel, which continues to cooperate with Belarusian state structures, despite criticism from Israeli historians. Nevertheless, in this respect also, support will clearly remain limited (exclusively within the framework of the study of the implementation of the Holocaust), and it is predictable that the genocide of the Belarusian people will remain a matter of internal use and internal propaganda. This indicates the extremely low level of effectiveness of this initiative, despite the enormous resources invested in it.

Boom of the Past – the Year of Historical Memory

Another important initiative by the Belarusian state in terms of historical politics was the designation of 2022 as the Year of Historical Memory. This in turn continued the symbolic politics of recoding national identity by appealing to historical resources. As mentioned above, 2021 was held under the title of the Year of National Unity aimed at strengthening the symbolic unity of the Belarusian nation by referring to the unification of the Belarusian people within the BSSR after the entry of Soviet troops into the territory of Western Belarus in September 1939.

The Year of Historical Memory was announced during Aliaksandr Lukashenka's New Year's greeting address:

> Belarus remembers the lessons of the past. Therefore, in the past year, together we have revived the tradition to celebrate the date of reunification of the Belarusian lands. National Unity Day has become a state holiday – one of the symbols of the establishing of the Belarusian nation state. This is our land, this is our destiny, this is our history. And only we will rule it. It cannot be changed as long as an inextinguishable flame of love for the Motherland burns inside each of us. In setting new goals, we know that we cannot foresee everything, but it is in our power in the coming year to define for ourselves the main thing. This is what should be in the memory of generations and in the hearts of everyone. These are our real sources, the life-giving power that for centuries has nurtured and shaped our spiritual and moral world. From it, even today, we draw wisdom, experience, and faith in ourselves. That is why 2022 will be the Year of Historical Memory.[12]

Noteworthy is the fact that the New Year address itself virtually lacks any specifics regarding the content of the Year of Historical Memory, only talking about strengthening the collective national identity on the basis of historical memory. Decree No. 1 "On the Proclamation of 2022 as the Year of Historical Memory" of 1 January 2022 did not add any more clarity either. The document only directs the responsible state institutions to develop an action plan for the current year. It should be emphasised that while the Council of Ministers is the first, the second on the list of the responsible institutions for the Year of Historical Memory is the Prosecutor General's Office. However, this becomes quite understandable if one remembers that actually this same institution has taken control of the implementation of the law "On the Genocide of the Belarusian People". The proclamation of the Year of Historical Memory and Aliaksandr Lukashenka's signature of the Genocide Law practically coincided in time (1 and 5 January), which demonstrates the close connection between these initiatives.

12 "Новогоднее обращение Президента Республики Беларусь."

Soon afterwards (on 6 January), at the special session on the "implementation of the historical politics", Lukashenka announced in his speech the new outlines of the programme of the historical past interpretation by the Belarusian state. The speech is quite interesting, as it practically does not touch upon the already tried and understood interpretation of the Great Patriotic War, but pays much attention to other periods of Belarusian history, about which the Belarusian authorities lacked a transparent and definite position. The Principalities of Polatsk and Turau have been pointed out as the longest period of Belarusian history to have been undeservedly relegated to the background. However, the meeting offered no cardinal answer to the question: Were these principalities independent or should they be seen as a part of Kievan Rus?

The complication of relations with Poland and Lithuania in recent years was perceived as an immediate pretext for a "nationalist" revision of the past, and to reject the "externally imposed" interpretations. But the treatment of the periods of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth looks radically different. It has been suggested that the GDL should be considered as a state dominated by the Belarusian/Russian/Slavic element:

> And take the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Modern Lithuanians have actually privatised the legacy of this state formation. But what was Lithuanian there? The language was ours, and the Constitution – the Statute – was written in it. The predominant faith was Orthodoxy. The territory consisted of mainly Belarusian, Ukrainian, partially Russian lands. 80% of the people were ours. Slavs. And these are the basic attributes and signs of statehood. Moreover, when the Principality of Polatsk and the Principality of Turau thundered throughout Europe as centres of spirituality and enlightenment, the ancestors of the Lithuanians were still living in the darkness of paganism and had a primitive economy.[13]

[13] "Лукашенко выступил за адекватную оценку исторических периодов, включая времена ВКЛ и Речи Посполитой," *Белта*, 6 января 2022, дата

Here one can trace a logical continuation of the trend towards the nationalisation of the ancient past, which has been slowly observed in recent years in Belarus, and which has been most clearly manifested in the release of a new wave of textbooks on Belarusian history. For instance, the textbook on the history of Belarus for grade 6, published in 2016, emphasised the cultural and economic domination of the Belarusian lands in the GDL.[14] In this anti-Lithuanian interpretation of the history of the GDL, borrowings from the "Western Russian" narrative of the 19th century are also evident. Such important figures for Belarusian state policy in education and science as Ihar Marzaliuk and Vadzim Gigin openly consider themselves followers of this narrative.

If the period of the GDL was interpreted through the strategy of "appropriation", the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was dominated by a strategy of "alienation":

> Let's, for example, call the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in history textbooks, and in castle and museum expositions, the occupation of the Belarusian land by the Poles. Ethnocide of the Belarusians. But what was it for our ancestors? Native language, culture, faith were banned. Magnates used to trade Belarusian peasants for dogs. But the people survived and preserved their identity.[15]

The critical attitude towards the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth has a long tradition: It dominated the imperial historiography, was adopted during the formation of national historiography, and prevailed during the Soviet period, when "Polish" was identified with "Polish landowner". In fact, it was only in the independent Republic of Belarus

обращения 11.05.2022, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-vystupil-za-adekvatnuju-otsenku-istoricheskih-periodov-vkljuchaja-vremena-vkl-i-rechi-478283-2022/.

14 Аляксей Ластоўскі, "Вяртанне «доўгай генеалогіі» ў школьныя падручнікі па гісторыі Беларусі," *The Ideology and Politics Journal*, no. 2 (13) (2019): 74.

15 Ibid.

that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth period was revised in a positive way, as an integral part of Belarusian history, and the historical figures of Tadeusz Kościuszko and members of the Radziwiłł family were gradually introduced into the Belarusian national pantheon. But with the deterioration of relationship with Poland and accusations of the Polish and Catholic minority representatives of swaying the protests directed from the outside, we see a kind of backlash. On the whole, the attitude to the ancient history of Belarus, voiced at the meeting by Lukashenka, in its major points is consonant with the "Western Russian" version of history developed in the 19th century, which was supposed to reconcile local identity and loyalty to imperial authorities. It is obvious that this version of historical politics aims to further develop confrontation with Poland and Lithuania, and at the same time will lead to stronger rapprochement with Russia.

However, the effect of these claims should not be exaggerated. It is quite difficult to completely change the interpretation of history, which has been developed consistently over the last century and a half. It requires enormous intellectual resources, the production of monographs, popularisation at all levels of cultural production, etc. So far, the authorities rely on the inputs of a few historians (Ihar Marzaliuk, Vadzim Gigin, Viachaslau Danilovich), which is clearly not enough to implement such a complex task. Breaking the "national paradigm" is only possible through a rather long process of educating a new generation of historians, but it is unclear whether Lukashenka has such a resource of time. Obviously, though, a Year of Historical Memory is not enough for that. It is also unclear what to do in such a case with the huge resources spent on restoration and renewal of historical monuments, castles, and palaces, as well as creation of new monuments.

Vadzim Gigin tried to intercept the main role in defining the outlines of a "new history" for Belarus. From his position as a dean of the Belarusian State University, he was reassigned to the reanimation of the "Knowledge" Society, which had led an almost unnoticeable existence since Soviet times. As a new communication format, Gigin chose a mode of weekly videos with discussion of controversial

and debatable topics of Belarusian history ("Polish uprising" of 1863, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth period, Joseph Stalin and Belarus). But even with full-scale promotion through state media the videos did not gather an extraordinary number of views. It is still debatable whether such a media platform is capable to radically change the situation in the field of Belarus history which consists of a huge amount of research, popularisation works, and a well-developed infrastructure of historical heritage.

On the whole, the declaration of the Year of Historical Memory was perceived by the state bureaucratic machine as another occasion to hold obligatory events of patriotic and educational nature in the sphere of culture and education. Under the banner of the Year of Historical Memory, a range of completely different events were arranged: an exhibition on the history of the creation of the National Museum of History, educational lectures at the National Library, and a ball in the Drucki-Lubecki Palace. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the activities carried out were related to the theme of the Great Patriotic War.

Conclusion

Belarus' entry into the war in Ukraine on Russia's side has not led to a fundamental revision of historical politics, which was already set up to confront the Western world and exploit the theme of the Great Patriotic War to the maximum. Only certain tendencies intensified: Russian aggression with Belarusian support led to a new acute confrontation with the Western world and, as a consequence, the Great Patriotic War began to be understood as a confrontation between the Soviet/Russian/Slavic world and all of Western Europe. Any mention of the Allies' participation came to be perceived as belittling the feat of arms of the Soviet people; hence the common sin outside the Russian-Belarusian alliance was to "rewrite history". The new formula of the genocide of the Belarusian people proved extremely convenient for accusing all foreign adversaries of harbouring a perennial desire

to destroy all Belarusians, the only obstacle to which was the irresistible figure of Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

However, the sociopolitical split within Belarus has only intensified; the war has forced everyone to articulate their values. Attempts to bring the nation together have not worked; instead, one can observe the virtual disintegration of a once-united society into two parallel worlds, between which no dialogue is now possible. Historical politics has greatly contributed to this confrontation, reinforcing the boundaries of the communities, but without deciding what to do with the rest of the citizens of Belarus, who have no place in the newly created political model.

Translated by Hanna Bazhenova

Chapter 7

The Politics of Memory in Belarus after 2020: Securitisation, Memorial Laws, Instrumentalisation of History

Aliaksei Bratachkin

Following the 2020 mass protests in Belarus and the attempts by the political regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to suppress them, a new situation in the field of memory culture and memory politics has emerged. Some of the historians who took part in the protest movement have been dismissed from academic and educational institutions, and censorship and propaganda relying on certain interpretations of the past have increased significantly. The political instrumentalisation of history and manipulation using the theme of World War II have reached a maximum. One example is the construction of a link between the protesting opponents of the regime and the legacy of World War II collaboration, as well as the political promotion of the discourse of "genocide

of the Belarusian people" carried out during World War II and planned by the "collective West" today.[1]

Although not on the same a scale, all these phenomena (dismissals, censorship, propaganda) have taken place in the history of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's authoritarian regime in Belarus before, starting in 1994, but one can now speak of a number of changes that create a new context for analysing the culture of memory and the politics of memory in Belarus. What kind of changes are these? It is above all the transformation of state memory politics into a subject of special concern for the political regime through its securitisation and the institutionalisation of extraordinary measures in 2021–22; in particular, the adoption of a number of laws that fall partly under the definition of "memorial", e.g. the law "On the Genocide of the Belarusian People", amendments to the law "On Countering Extremism", and the law "On Preventing the Rehabilitation of Nazism".

One of the consequences of the securitisation of memory politics is the transfer of the right of expertise and to create interpretations of history from the academic community to representatives of the power structures. In turn, these interpretations of politically sensitive topics, which emerge from the power structures, are then legitimised through speeches by pro-government propagandist historians and disseminated through the state media and the education system. Also, these interpretations only take the form of historical discourse, being outright propaganda.

This chapter focuses on how the process of securitisation of memory politics in Belarus is taking place and analyses the new laws and "images" of history that are taking shape in the public space following the 2020 protests.

[1] This idea is being spread by the state propaganda in Belarus and is presented in the 2022 edition under the title *Геноцид белорусского народа: информационно-аналитические материалы и документы*, which is the subject of this chapter.

Securitisation and "Memory Studies": General Aspects

In political science research and the study of international relations, the concept of "securitisation" has been actively interpreted by representatives of the Copenhagen School, Barry Buzan, Ole Wœver, and other scholars. They placed the issue of "securitisation" within the framework of a constructivist approach, identified the main sectors of securitisation – military, economic, social, and others – defining "securitisation" as an "extreme version of politicisation" in which a problem is presented as an "existential threat" that requires emergency measures and justifies going beyond usual political procedures.[2]

Gradually, with the development of "security studies", an interdisciplinary approach began to emerge and works appeared in which the issue of securitisation was linked to the field of memory politics and the analysis of memory culture in general. In 2015, Maria Mälksoo proposed the introduction of the concept of "mnemonical security" – "the idea that distinct understandings of the past should be fixed in public remembrance and consciousness in order to buttress an actor's stable sense of self as the basis of its political agency". She criticises this discourse by showing that it leads to a specific situation: a certain interpretation of the past is seen as a kind of core of a state's "biographical narrative", something that is "misrepresented", for example by external actors whose interpretation of the past is seen as "existentially endangering" for that state. This, in turn, leads to an increase in and reproduction of "mutual insecurities and... historical animosities" in international relations.[3]

In 2018, the collection of articles *Memory and Securitization in Contemporary Europe* appeared, edited by Vlad Strukov and Victor Apryshchenko. It examined different aspects of "securitisation" through examples of domestic and foreign policy cases, focusing predominantly

2 Barry Buzan, Ole Wœver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1998), 1–21.

3 Maria Mälksoo, "'Memory must be defended': Beyond the politics of mnemonical security," *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (June 2015): 221–237.

on the interaction between the discourses of memorialisation and securitisation. The editors consider "securitisation" as both a series of "threats" which are "social constructs that evolve in time" and also as "a speech act wherein power is derived from the use of particular words, statements, and signs, and in conformity with the existing rules of governing". The authors of the book focus mainly on the actors of securitisation and various securitisation strategies, including a subject which has previously received less attention: attempts to produce an influence through art, film, etc.[4]

This chapter examines the securitisation of memory politics in Belarus by analysing a series of "statements" by representatives of the political regime, which formulate "threats" to the security of the existing order and propose various "emergency measures" through which attempts are made to extinguish these threats. The aforementioned "threats" are of a particular nature and are primarily linked to attempts to combat those who try to criticise state-supported interpretations of history through extraordinary measures, in particular, by the adoption of "memorial" laws.

Securitisation of Memory Politics in Belarus

The securitisation of memory politics in Belarus appears to be directly linked to the political transformation of the authoritarian regime. While previously such terms as "electoral authoritarianism" were used to define this regime, which was meant to demonstrate the semblance of the institution of "elections", after the events of 2020 and the loss of legitimacy experts started using the concept of "junta", "sultanist regime", and so on. In that way, they emphasised the dramatically increased role of representatives of power structures in state governance.

[4] Vlad Strukov and Victor Apryshchenko, "Introduction," in *Memory and Securitization in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Vlad Strukov and Victor Apryshchenko (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–22.

The securitisation of memory politics was the result not only of internal changes, but also of changes in the foreign policy context. Since that time, the closest neighbouring countries, such as Poland and Lithuania, have become major enemies of the political regime.

Even before the aforementioned events took place, back in August 2019, an issue of the Presidential Administration's magazine *Беларуская думка* (Belarusian Thought) was published[5] in which an article entitled "К вопросу об исторической политике" (About the Issue of Historical Politics) appeared. Its authors were professional historians Aliaksandr Kavalenia and Viachaslau Danilovich, respectively former and current heads of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus, as well as, most characteristically, two representatives of power structures, Deputy State Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus Major General Uladzimir Archakau and Head of the Information and Analytical Department of the State Secretariat of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus Aliaksei Ban'kouski, PhD in Law.[6]

In the article, the authors tried to create a canon of "correct" interpretations of history in Belarus, defining historical politics as a task of the state:

> The main purpose of state historical politics is to prevent attempts to distort and interpret historical facts and events to the detriment of national self-awareness, the authority of the nation (people), and to form optimal approaches to the historical past and ensure their positive perception by society.[7]

5 During the USSR period, this magazine was published under the title *Коммунист Беларуси* (Communist of Belarus).

6 In July 2022, Uladzimir Archakau was dismissed from his post.

7 Владимир Арчаков, Алексей Баньковский, Вячеслав Данилович и Александр Коваленя, "К вопросу об исторической политике," *Беларуская думка*, № 8 (2019): 4.

The authors also mentioned an earlier document, the "Concept of National Security", which as early as in 2010 referred to the connection between interpretations of history and the problem of "national security": "Paragraph 27 of the National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus identifies attempts to revise history in a biased manner as a major potential or actual threat to national security."[8]

In addition, the article lists fourteen points concerning "wrong" interpretations of history. When it comes to the history of the 20th century, special attention is paid to the history of the national movement, World War II, and the Soviet past in general. According to the authors, it is impossible to allow, for example, "artificial overemphasis of the tragedy of political repressions of the 1920s–1930s in order to indiscriminately denigrate the Soviet past of Belarus", or "silencing of the achievements of Belarus during the Soviet period and highlighting its shortcomings in order to create a negative image of the Soviet past".[9]

The very appearance of the article "К вопросу об исторической политике" was, to a certain extent, symptomatic. Since the early 2000s, Belarus has attempted to implement a project of "ideology of Belarusian statehood", which essentially consisted of propaganda on the achievements of the authoritarian regime after 1994. Through school and university education (including history education), the state media constructed certain images of history in the public space, which had to be shared by all Belarusians. However, the former ideological monopoly of the late USSR period had already become impossible, and the spread of social networks and new media, access to the Internet, and the availability of independent publishing projects created a new infrastructure for the dissemination of counter-narratives of history.

Overall, the politics of memory in Belarus after the election of Aliaksandr Lukashenka in 1994 gradually turned into a discourse of power, from which independent actors were practically excluded. Nevertheless,

8 Ibid., 4.
9 Ibid., 9.

there were still opportunities for the public representation of the counter-narratives of memory and history, and periods of increased censorship and propaganda alternated with periods of "liberalisation".

One such period of "liberalisation" began after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the events in eastern Ukraine in 2013–14. In order to expand electoral support and to simulate the sustainability of the regime to external actors, the authoritarian regime then attempted to appropriate the rhetoric of the political opposition, including its historical narratives. For instance, in 2018, the Belarusian authorities permitted public celebrations in Minsk and some other cities of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Belarusian People's Republic (BPR). This state formation was a non-communist version of Belarusian statehood that arose before the declaration of the communist Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Although riot police surrounded the 100th anniversary celebration area in the centre of Minsk, the public nature of the commemoration was perceived by society as certain recognition by the authorities of the significance of the history of the BPR.

Moreover, a monument to victims of Stalinist repression in Kurapaty near Minsk was finally unveiled in 2018, however, the competition to install it was not open. It's worthy of note that the authorities made promises to the public to erect the monument back in the late 1980s, before the collapse of the USSR. Since 1988, Kurapaty has been the site of political and peaceful protests related to the desire to commemorate the victims of Stalinism and to preserve Kurapaty as a site of memory. During Lukashenka's rule, the conservation of this space has often been threatened. The protests and defence of Kurapaty involved the political opposition, which the authorities tried to counter by force. The installation of the monument in 2018 meant on the one hand that public pressure was playing its part in maintaining historical memory, but on the other hand also represented an attempt to establish control over interpretations of history; and the very appearance of the monument should have ended dangerous discussions about state violence, as well as about political and historical responsibility for the Stalinist period.

In the 2000s, two themes were always at the top of the agenda in the official politics of memory. These were the memory of World War II and the glorification of the history of the authoritarian regime after 1994. The memory of World War II, as before, was within the former Soviet framework of "the Great Patriotic War", although the narrative itself was partially "nationalised". It referred not to the Soviet people as participants in the war, but to the Belarusians, or, at least, to the Soviet Belarusians.

Starting from the late 1980s and the collapse of the USSR, the modern history of Belarus has in fact been transformed into an apologia for the existing political regime. One could observe the erasure of the variation of history and all its episodes up to 1994 from social memory. This trend has been evident for a long time. One example of this was the creation back in 2011 of the Museum of Contemporary Belarusian Statehood in Minsk, where the entire focus was on events in Belarus' history after Lukashenka came to power in 1994.

The period between 2014 and 2019 has often been referred to in the independent media as a period of "soft Belarusisation", alluding to the liberal policies of the authoritarian regime, including on issues of history and identity. At that time, experts suggested that a certain consensus was forming in Belarus. The emerging narrative of history included different periods, albeit with specific interpretations, and the Soviet period of history was not the only point of reference.[10]

However, as we can see from the article "К вопросу об исторической политике", back in 2019 there were already signs that the authoritarian regime was returning to its usual methods of controlling the public sphere, including attempts to establish control over interpretations of history. This turn was most likely due to the need to prepare for the next presidential election campaign, which mainly took place in late

[10] Алексей Ластовский, "Политика памяти: перспективы для Беларуси," *Eurobelarus.info*, 13 апреля 2021, дата обращения 22.06.2022, https://eurobelarus.info/news/analytics/2021/04/13/politika-pamyati-perspektivy-dlya-belarusi.html.

spring to summer 2020. It should be noted that against the backdrop of events in Ukraine, Lukashenka's "reelection" in 2015 occurred almost without protests. At the same time in 2020, the largest protest movement in the history of independent Belarus took place. Its emergence, followed by the imposition of repressive policies by the authorities, changed the entire political and social landscape in the country.

Confrontations between security forces and protesters began to occur after election day on 9 August 2020. People took to the streets in Minsk and other cities and joined mass marches. The urban space of the capital was taken over by protests; the majority of mass actions, for example, were centred around the new building of the Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War opened in 2014. However, the protests did not touch upon the topic of the history of the war in any way; all the slogans of the initial stage of the protests were mainly oriented towards the political agenda.

From a symbolic point of view, the protest needed a context and references that would suggest the idea of the political subjectivity of the community, as opposed to markers of support for authoritarian power. The protest was visually framed by the symbols that had been used by the state during 1991–95 and had become official symbols of the BPR as early as 1918. First of all, there was the white-red-white flag. While at the initial stage of the electoral campaign in 2020, the protesters used this flag rather rarely, from August 2020 onwards it became the main symbol of the protest. On social media, messaging apps, and local chat groups before the mass marches, protesters argued about which symbols should represent them. They would often choose new elements on a white-red-white background.

Historian Iryna Ramanava describes this situation, while referring to the idea of a split in historical memory in the community:

> The events of 2020 actualised the confrontation in the sphere of historical memory as well. Two narratives collided in society: an official one (the "pro-Soviet" one, oriented to the cult of the Great Patriotic War) and an "opposition" one (formed outside state structures and

> institutions). The physical embodiments of this struggle were important places of memory for each of these narratives: the Museum of the Great Patriotic War for the former, and the site of the mass shootings and burials of Stalinist victims in Kurapaty for the latter.[11]

The regime's propaganda immediately began to use tried-and-tested methods. Just as in the mid-1990s, it identified protest with attempts to "desecrate" shrines associated with the memory of the "Great Patriotic War". The main thesis of the propaganda was the comparison of the 2020 protesters with the collaborators of the Nazi regime during World War II. On 23 August 2020, a message appeared on the official Telegram channel of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus (peculiarities of its writing have been retained):

> In its last war, Belarus lost one of every three citizens and was virtually wiped out off the face of the earth!! Thousands of memorials and monuments have been created in our country as signs of sorrow, sadness and remembrance. For us they have always been and remain sacred places! People have always come to them to bow, to pray, and to lay flowers to the fallen defenders of the Motherland! We the military will not allow any desecration of these places, there is no place for fascism!
>
> WE CANNOT LOOK QUIETLY AT THE FLAGS UNDER WHICH FASCISTS ORGANISED MASS MURDERS OF BELARUSIANS, RUSSIANS, JEWS, AND PEOPLE OF OTHER ETHNICITIES – TODAY, THEY ORGANISE DEMONSTRATIONS IN THESE HOLY PLACES. WE CANNOT ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN! THAT IS WHY, FROM TODAY, WE ARE TAKING THEM UNDER OUR PROTECTION.

[11] Ирина Романова, "Война миров: знаки, символы, места памяти (Беларусь, 2020)," *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2020): 281.

> WE CATEGORICALLY WARN YOU: IF YOU VIOLATE ORDER AND PEACE IN THESE PLACES, YOU WILL HAVE TO DEAL NOT WITH THE POLICE, BUT WITH THE ARMY.[12]

They set up barbed wire fences and army patrols around the Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War, demonstrating the implementation of the policy announced in this propaganda message. The very threats to use the army to suppress the protest, as well as the immediate militarisation of part of the security forces, including Aliaksandr Lukashenka and his 16-year-old son Mikalai who took up an automatic rifle, demonstrated the extraordinary nature of the events.

Later in the propaganda discourse and speeches of regime representatives, the theme of "history" has always been linked to the notion of "security". The term "historical politics" also began to be actively used. In January 2022 at a specially convened meeting "On the implementation of the historical politics", Aliaksandr Lukashenka said that

> we must recognise that the pages of national history have turned into an information battlefield. And it didn't happen today. Our historical politics is now a strategy of self-preservation in the context of the global redistribution of spheres of influence in the world. It is a factor of national security.[13]

As part of the official politics of memory after 2020, the authorities tried to impose their own interpretations of what had happened. Almost immediately, in 2021 school history textbooks were published

12 Настасья Занько "Министерство обороны предупредило о протестах в «священных местах»: «Будете иметь дело с армией»," *Onliner*, 23 августа 2020, дата обращения 23.06.2022, https://people.onliner.by/2020/08/23/ministerstvo-oborony-predupredilo-o-protestax.

13 "Лукашенко назвал историческую политику фактором национальной безопасности Беларуси," *Belta*, 6 января 2022, дата обращения 19.06.2022, https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-nazval-istoricheskuju-politiku-faktorom-natsionalnoj-bezopasnosti-belarusi-478282-2022/.

that claimed that the 9 August 2020 election ended with 80.1% support for Aliaksandr Lukashenka. The sections about the Great Patriotic War empathised the use of white-red-white armbands and flags, as well as the symbol of the "Pahonia" ("Chase")[14] by the collaborators and their participation under these symbols in punitive operations, although no such documented facts have been established. It was indicated that the introduction of the white-red-white flag and the "Pahonia" coat of arms in 1991 as the state symbols of independent Belarus took place without a referendum, by an ordinary decision of parliament.[15] When it came to school education, one of the innovations was the emphasis on "patriotic education" and the creation of military-patriotic clubs at military units for schoolchildren, as well as the opening of "146 military-patriotic camps" during school holidays.[16]

Prosecutor General Andrei Shved became one of the main spokespersons and actors of the securitised politics of memory. He was appointed to this position in September 2020, when the protest movement was still active in the public space. With Shved's participation, in April 2021 a criminal case "On the genocide of the Belarusian people during the Great Patriotic War" was started and a large-scale questioning of witnesses began. Among them were various categories of war victims forced to interact with officials against the background of repressive policies towards the whole of society (according to official data, around 14,500 people were interrogated during that year).[17]

[14] "Pahonia" is a symbol of the Belarusian national movement of the early 20th century, the BPR coat of arms.

[15] Александр В. Касович, Наталья В. Барабаш, Александр А. Корзюк, Виталий А. Йоцюс, Павел А. Матюш и Андрей П. Соловьянов, *История Беларуси, XIX – начало XXI в.: учебное пособие для 11 класса учреждений общего среднего образования с русским языком обучения (с электронным приложением для повышенного уровня)*, ред. Александр Касович и Андрей Соловьянов (Минск: Издательский центр БГУ, 2021), 40–42, 50, 132–134.

[16] "Белорусских детей массово учат стрелять и «быть патриотами». Внутренние войска открыли уже 17 клубов и 146 лагерей," *Zerkalo*, 7 июля 2022, дата обращения 20.07.2022, https://news.zerkalo.io/life/17455.html.

[17] "Более 14 тыс. свидетелей допрошены по делу о геноциде населения Беларуси в годы ВОВ," *Belta*, 29 апреля 2022, дата обращения 21.07.2022,

One of the outcomes of this criminal case became the emergence of publications by the state media claiming that Belarus cannot achieve the extradition of Nazi criminals from Poland and Lithuania and the public speeches by the Prosecutor General himself in which he reported falsified information that "Polish President Duda's grandfather was involved in the activities of a Ukrainian punitive battalion".[18] Moreover, in 2022 one thousand copies of "mass-political publication" *Genocide of the Belarusian People: Informational and Analytical Materials and Documents* was published, edited by Andrei Shved. An abstract from this manual states:

> The book includes referential/analytical and documentary materials on the genocide of the Belarusian people during the Great Patriotic War, the post-war period, and the use of Nazi ideology by the participants in the coup attempt in Belarus in 2020...[19]

The very promotion of the discourse of "genocide of the Belarusian people" was meant to create imaginary enemies inside and outside the country. The internal enemies were the protesters in 2020; the external enemies were the "collective West" imposing sanctions.

"Memorial Laws" and Synchronisation with Memory Politics in Russia

According to representatives of the regime, the emergency nature of the situation required the adoption of appropriate legislation, which

https://www.belta.by/society/view/bolee-14-tys-svidetelej-doprosheny-po-delu-o-genotside-naselenija-belarusi-v-gody-vov-499050-2022/.

18 Илья Бер, "Правда ли, что дед президента Польши Анджея Дуды был фашистским карателем?", *Delfi*, 27 июня 2022, дата обращения 20.07.2022, https://rus.delfi.ee/statja/120027258/pravda-li-chto-ded-prezidenta-polshi-andzheya-dudy-byl-fashistskim-karatelem.

19 Александр Швед, ред., *Геноцид белорусского народа: информационно-аналитические материалы и документы = Genocide of the Belarusian People: Informational and Analytical Materials and Documents* (Минск: Беларусь, 2022).

was quickly created. In June 2021, Lukashenka approved amendments to the law "On Countering Extremism", in May of the same year he signed the law "On Preventing the Rehabilitation of Nazism", and in January 2022, the law "On the Genocide of the Belarusian People" came into force.

The term "extremism" was in fact applied to all manifestations of dissent while at the same time being interpreted completely arbitrarily. For example, a number of publications were declared "extremist" post factum, long after they were published. Such a fate befell a collection of interviews *Белорусская национальная идея* ("Belarusian National Idea") which was prepared by Dzmitry Lukashuk and Maksim Goriunov, employees of Euroradio (as this media outlet was declared "extremist"). Interviews including those with historians were collected and published back during the period of the so-called "soft Belarusisation" and they were broadcast legally in radio programmes.

Of particular interest is Article 6 of this law which lists 15 "subjects of countering the rehabilitation of Nazism". At the top of the list are "the state internal affairs services, state security services, prosecution services, border control services, customs offices, state protection services, the Investigative Committee…", and almost at the very bottom of the list is the National Academy of Sciences. The latter represents, as one should assume, the entire academic community, which is precisely the sector that should have been giving qualified opinions if the situation were different. This article is an example of how public policy issues are being prioritised today and how the securitisation discourse is being institutionalised.

The law "On the Genocide of the Belarusian People" was not publicly discussed by any actors and was initiated by bureaucrats. The law gives the following definition of "genocide":

> Atrocities committed by Nazi criminals and their accomplices, nationalist organisations during the Great Patriotic War and in the post-war period aimed at the systematic physical destruction of the Belarusian people by means of murder and other acts recognised as genocide

> in accordance with the legislative acts and norms of international law, are to be considered the genocide of the Belarusian people.

The law also states that "the post-war period for the purposes of this law shall mean the period up to 31 December 1951" and "for the purposes of this article the Belarusian people shall mean Soviet citizens who lived in the territory of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic during the Great Patriotic War and (or) the post-war period".[20]

A number of independent historians have spoken critically about this law. Leonid Smilovitsky (Belarus/Israel) pointed out that one cannot equate terror and genocide, or the punitive operations that took place as a reaction to the guerrilla movement and the premeditated measures to implement the Holocaust.[21] In the opinion of historian Alexander Friedman (Belarus/Germany), the chronological framework of genocide in the law (22 June 1941 to 31 December 1951) excludes the problematising of the initial period of the war (1939–41) and the issue of Stalinist repressions. Moreover, the crimes of the Holocaust are "dissolved" in the law.[22] Historian Aliaksandr Pashkevich (Belarus) believes that this is how the authorities are trying to "tie" anti-Soviet resistance to Nazism.[23]

20 Закон Республики Беларусь от 5 января 2022 года № 146-З "О геноциде белорусского народа," *Pravo.by*, дата обращения 23.07.2022, https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&p0=H12200146&p1=1&p5=0.

21 "Историк об искажениях в законе «О геноциде»: Нацисты никогда не убивали белорусов за то, что они белорусы," *Белсат*, 27 января 2022, дата обращения 20.06.2022, https://belsat.eu/ru/news/27-01-2022-istorik-ob-iskazheniyah-v-zakone-o-genotside-natsisty-nikogda-ne-ubivali-belorusov-za-to-chto-oni-belorusy/.

22 Александр Фридман, "Что не так с законом «О геноциде белорусского народа»," *DW*, 27 декабря 2021, дата обращения 23.06.2022, https://www.dw.com/ru/chto-ne-tak-s-zakonom-o-genocide-belorusskogo-naroda/a-60251597.

23 Александр Пашкевич, интервью Змитера Лукашука. "«Ограниченный» геноцид: признать, чтобы законно пытать?", *Euroradio.fm*, 13 декабря 2021, дата обращения 18.07.2022, https://euroradio.fm/ru/ogranichennyy-genocid-priznat-chtoby-zakonno-pytat-efir-v-1400.

Following an independent review of the law, the human rights organisation Human Constanta published its conclusion:

> The law 'On the Genocide of the Belarusian People' effectively consolidates the monopoly of the authoritarian Belarusian authorities on the interpretation of history and gives the state an additional punitive tool in the form of criminal punishment for expressing opinions that differ from the 'only true' state interpretations of history.[24]

The issue of the genealogy of these "memorial laws" is of particular interest here. Back in 2015, a proposal to introduce administrative responsibility "for falsification of the history of the Great Patriotic War" was publicly voiced by communist Ihar Karpienka (who later became the minister of education), and this proposal was discussed using references to the Russian context.[25]

It is also worthy of note that the promotion of the discourse on "genocide of the Belarusian people" almost coincides chronologically with the wave of focusing on "genocide of the Soviet people" in Russia. Since 2021, Russia has declared 19 April as "the Day of Unified Action to Commemorate the Genocide of the Soviet People". The use of the "genocide" discourse in the two countries therefore needs further analysis. On the one hand, one can observe the authorities trying to put forward demands for genocide recognition and get on the list of countries that also seek international recognition of the 20th century crimes as genocide (e.g. Ukrainian Holodomor in the 1930s and the mass killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915). However, in the case

24 "«О геноциде белорусского народа» – правовой обзор нового закона," *Human Constanta*, 8 июня 2022, дата обращения 23.07.2022, https://humanconstanta.org/o-genocide-belorusskogo-naroda-pravovoj-obzor-novogo-zakona/.

25 "И. Карпенко: «Возможно, нужно ввести ответственность за фальсификацию истории Великой Отечественной войны»," *Управление культуры мингорисполкома*, 7 апреля 2015, дата обращения 20.06.2022, http://uk.minsk.gov.by/vse-novosti/423-i-karpenko-vozmozhno-nuzhno-vvesti-otvetstvennost-za-falsifikatsiyu-istorii-velikoj-otechestvennoj-vojny.

of Russia and Belarus, such a request for recognition is accompanied by active anti-Western rhetoric and is motivated solely by the needs of the contemporary political agenda. This leads inter alia to the legitimisation of the right to use the discourse of "genocide" arbitrarily, extrapolating it to the actions of protesters in Belarus in 2020 or applying it as a justification for Russia's war in Ukraine, which entered an active phase on 24 February 2022.

The aspect of the discursive shift is also interesting. The memory of World War II was constructed in the USSR, as well as in post-Soviet Russia and Belarus, as the memory of victors, while the emphasis on suffering and victims has always been an illustration of the "cost of Victory", and has not played a dominant or independent role in relation to the discourse of "Victory". Now, however, one can observe an active promotion and mainstreaming of the discourse on genocide and the suffering of the population as a topic which, from the perspective of propaganda, is not finished and requires proper memorialisation and active action. It can only be assumed that this discursive shift is a strategy to justify the militarisation of the memory of World War II, which has begun to take place in Russia and then in Belarus in recent years. The moral and other limitations arising from the tragic images of World War II, and the denial of war as a means of solving political problems, are being replaced by counterarguments backed by propaganda of the alleged non-recognition of the suffering and sacrifice of the people of Belarus by the "collective West".

The suppression of the 2020 protests in Belarus as well as the continued existence of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime would not have been possible without Russian support. The beginning of the active phase of Russia's war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was also the start of the use of Belarusian territory for organising missile attacks against Ukrainian cities. All this raises the question of the autonomy of Belarus' domestic and foreign policy, including various aspects of memory politics. Russia has long acted within Belarus through the soft power of foundations and organisations such as the Historical Memory Foun-

dation, the Gorchakov Foundation, and Rossotrudnichestvo,[26] and has been involved in creating the infrastructure for funding historical research within Belarus and establishing a joint commission of historians. A number of documents, such as those from which the law "On Preventing the Rehabilitation of Nazism" evolved, emerged within the framework of joint projects of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Union State of Russia and Belarus. Some of the most active historian-propagandists of the authoritarian regime, such as Vadzim Gigin, have always been deeply involved in pro-Russian and Russian events in Belarus and beyond. During the 2020 protests and later, the narratives of Russian and Belarusian propaganda using the terminology "fascism", "Nazism", and "genocide" were largely synchronised, most notably in the coverage of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Instead of a Conclusion: The Increasing Instrumentalisation of History

On 1 January 2022, Aliaksandr Lukashenka signed a decree "On declaring 2022 the Year of Historical Memory" with the aim "to form an objective attitude of the society towards the historical past, preserve and strengthen the unity of the Belarusian people".[27] The core of all activities related to the signed document is to preserve the memory of the Great Patriotic War in general and "perpetuate the memory of the victims of the genocide of the Belarusian people during the Great Patriotic War".[28] The implementation of this decree is taking place

26 Rossotrudnichestvo is a Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation.

27 Указ Президента Республики Беларусь от 1 января 2022 г. № 1 "Об объявлении 2022 года Годом исторической памяти," *Президент Республики Беларусь*, 3 января 2022, дата обращения 18.07.2022, https://president.gov.by/bucket/assets/uploads/documents/2022/1uk.pdf.

28 "От создания региональных центров патриотического воспитания до исторических реконструкций – Совмин утвердил план мероприятий в рамках Года исторической памяти," *Pravo.by*, 28 января 2022, дата обращения 17.07.2022, https://pravo.by/novosti/novosti-pravo-by/2022/january/68457/.

against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine and persistent fears of Belarus becoming directly involved in that war.

The power structures play an active role in controlling the public sphere. At the same time, independent social and political media within the country have all been destroyed, independent publishing projects are being closed, and "purges" in academic institutions continue.[29] Among the recent events worth mentioning are the destruction of some tombstones and graves of the Polish Home Army soldiers in Belarus (at least three such cases) and proposals to declare the Home Army an "extremist organisation".[30] These strategies of propagandists and authorities lead to conflict and the formation, to use Michael Bernhardt's and Jan Kubik's definition, of a "fractured" mnemonic regime, characterised by acute confrontation of actors and the active imposition of a dominant interpretation of history.[31]

A characteristic trend for Belarus is the extreme degree of political instrumentalisation of history, in which the very form of historical discourse is used completely arbitrarily and is filled with propaganda content, and the leading role in this is played primarily by the power structures. The securitisation of memory politics has led to a kind of "state of emergency", a combination of censorship and repression in the sphere of the culture of memory instead of creating conditions for a public and democratic dialogue about the past.

Translated by Hanna Bazhenova

29 "Ожидаются новые чистки среди историков. Уже уволили директора библиотеки Академии наук Александра Грушу," *Наша Ніва*, 28 июня 2022, дата обращения 20.07.2022, https://nashaniva.com/?c=ar&i=294340&lang=ru.

30 Наста Кривошеева, "«Силовики превратились в историков». Беларуско-польская война памятников с точки зрения ученого," *Медиазона Беларусь*, 15 июля 2022, дата обращения 20.07.2022, https://mediazona.by/article/2022/07/15/graves.

31 Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14–18.

Chapter 8

Thirty Years of Discontent: Memory Confrontation Regarding the Transnistrian Conflict on the Banks of the Dniester River

Anastasia Felcher

Introduction

The 1990–92 armed conflict on the Dniester River, also known as the Transnistrian Conflict (or, in rare cases, as Transnistrian War), is one of the conflicts that accompanied the collapse of the USSR. In comparison to the armed conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Nagorno-Karabakh that took place around the same time, the conflict in Transnistria stands out. Its particular qualities impact and to a certain extent define the memory culture surrounding it. First, this conflict is considered to be based primarily not on ethnic rivalry or territory contest, as the conflicts in the Caucasus were. The bone of contention in the Soviet Moldovan Republic, which the territory was known as when the conflict erupted in March 1990, were incompatible differences in the geopolitical aspirations held by the parties emerging on

the ruins of the USSR. The language question was a heated one, as well as a dilemma of self-identification on the both shores of the Dniester River. After a ceasefire in August 1992, the conflict remained frozen. Since then, a de facto state known as Pridnestrov'e (or Transnistria, a more commonly used title in English) emerged on the territory that sought separation during the conflict. The breakaway region occupies as little as about four thousand square kilometres, a narrow strip of land with its own self-proclaimed administration and government under the patronage of Russia.

The second specific characteristic important for the memory culture of the conflict is the close interconnection of Moldova proper and Transnistria, not on the official level, but on the level of everyday interaction. Residents of both entities share economic, cultural, and social ties, easily crossing the de facto border whenever necessary. Despite this, the political, informational, linguistic, and – most importantly – symbolic realities and frames of reference on either side of the Dniester River remain strikingly different. Across the existing border, an attentive observer witnesses the shaping and fostering of two very different symbolic pasts. Memory confrontation in Moldova and its breakaway region – about the conflict and about the past of the region in general – has long surpassed "a war of monuments". In present-day Moldova, a strong reference to pan-Romanian symbolic discourse with its commitment to the interwar years as a "golden age" pairs with anti-communist and pro-Western symbolic markers. In contrast to this, public space in Transnistrian towns and villages is filled with monuments, and street and other signs that refer to the multi-ethnic past of the region, strong ties with the "Russian world", the communist past (interpreted in a positive light), and a separate, Transnistrian identity. These symbolic pasts, carefully curated by politicians and other mnemonic actors on both banks of the Dniester River, are in strong contrast to one another. The 1990–92 armed conflict in Transnistria and the collective memory of it played a significant role in the continuous sharpening of these different symbolic visions of the past, present, and, to some extent, future on both shores of the Dniester River. In every decade out

of three that has passed after the ceasefire, the intensity varied with which mnemonic actors have "worked" with memory of the conflict. What has remained unchanged is a resilience to rhetoric of reconciliation in favour of nurturing the grief, loss, and recrimination that still dominate the memorial landscape of the conflict and its armed stage. Symbolic confrontation and investing in visual markers of viewing the past of the region differently intensified and gained new meaning with the 2013–14 crisis in Ukraine. The war that Russia launched in Ukraine in 2022 further aggravated the state of affairs. On the one hand, it shifted the 1990–92 conflict as a memory event into the background, despite the 30th anniversary of the ceasefire. On the other hand, memory of the past armed conflict gets continuously incorporated in memory of the present one as it unfolds across the border.

Overview of the Conflict

The outbreak of the 1990–92 conflict in Transnistria dates back to legislative decisions implemented while the Soviet Union was still intact. In September 1989, following an internal struggle between old and new factions among the people's deputies, a new law was introduced in Chişinău. It unprecedentedly gave the Moldovan language based on Latin letters the status of the sole state language, while Russian received a special status as a language of intercultural communication.[1] The law, however, went far beyond regulating the use of languages in the Soviet Moldovan Republic and linked the language spoken in the region with identity-related matters, postulating a "reality of Moldovan-Romanian language identity". The adopted document was a milestone

1 On the political circumstances of adopting the law on uses of languages, see Charles King, "Marking Time in the Middle Ground: Contested Identities and Moldovan Foreign Policy," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, no. 3 (2003): 60–82. On language question in Moldova, see Matthew H. Ciscel, *The Language of the Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and Identity in an ex-Soviet Republic* (Lanham, MA; Baundler, CO; New York, NY; et al.: Lexington Books, 2007), 1–15.

in the nationalisation of policies that a faction that took over leadership in Chişinău implemented. Pan-Romanian tendencies among this leadership prevailed, and a geopolitical idea of potentially joining Romania entered public discourse in Chişinău.[2]

Chişinău authorities declared sovereignty from the Soviet Union in late June 1990. Two months later, in early September 1990, people's deputies from the left bank of the Dniester River, a largely Russified and industrialised region, declared the part of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) they claimed to represent to be "sovereign". In this, they joined other Soviet republics and parts of them that had declared sovereignty while still within the Soviet Union. Tension between the Chişinău leadership and the self-proclaimed government on the left bank of the Dniester River gained momentum. The first clashes with casualties took place in early November 1990 in Dubăsari, a town in close proximity to Chişinău.[3] After the failed coup in Moscow in August 1991, the Chişinău government declared full state independence later that month. In response to this, deputies from the left bank mobilised public support and declared their wish to stay within the USSR, thus, to secede from Moldova. Two months before the final dissolution of the Soviet Union, in November 1991, the secessionists secured their bid for independence by rejecting communist ideology and renaming the region as "the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic". However, after the Soviet Union finally collapsed in late December 1991, the newly seceded territory failed to gain recognition as an independent entity. Self-proclaimed elites from the left bank had to negotiate

2 On the presence of pan-Romanian discourse in Moldovan politics and culture, see Charles King, "Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 345–368. On evolution of pan-Romanian discourse in Moldova's political life, see William Crowther, "Ethnic Politics and the Post-Communist Transition in Moldova," *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 1 (1998): 147–164.

3 Three residents of Dubăsari were killed and thirteen were wounded after policemen opened fire in response to Dubăsari residents storming the court and prosecutor's office.

with the Moldovan government in Chişinău on political and economic arrangements that from then on should have defined how the region would operate. As they failed to do so, the situation escalated quickly. The fighting was brief (about five months in 1992) but bloody and took place in three areas along the Dniester River: the Cocieri-Dubăsari area, near Coşniţa village, and in the Bender/Tighina urban area. Pro-secession forces included Pridnestrovian (or Transnistrian) guard, militia, and neo-Cossack units supported by some 14th Guards Army personnel, while Moldovan forces consisted of troops, police, and volunteers.[4]

Clashes in the Cocieri-Dubăsari area broke out between police, local villagers, militia, and the Cossacks on 1–2 March 1992, followed by further escalation and ad hoc clashes in the Coşniţa area in mid-March. Recurrent fighting continued during the spring of 1992. The armed phase of the conflict reached its peak with a full-scale battle in the town of Bender/Tighina on 19–21 June. The battle took place after the Moldovan authorities dispatched military forces in an attempt to re-establish their control in the seceded region. The former 14th Soviet Army intervened on the side of the secessionists, which ended the armed phase of the conflict. A ceasefire agreement was signed a month later, on 21 July 1992, between the Moldovan and Russian presidents. The conflict claimed over one thousand casualties, military personnel and civilians among them. The ceasefire line was turned into a de facto border between Moldova proper and the breakaway region. Since then, the conflict has been in a frozen phase. To observe the ceasefire and security arrangements, joint peacekeeping forces composed of Russian, Moldovan, and Pridnestrovian (Transnistrian) battalions were stationed along this de facto border.

The key dates of the fighting listed above immediately became milestones around which commemoration ceremonies are organised.

4 Media discourse supported the division of narratives in the armed conflict. See Eduard Baidaus, "Portraying Heroes and Villains: Moldovan and Transnistrian Print Media during the 1992 War in the Dniester Valley," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 60, no. 3–4 (2018): 497–528.

However, despite a single timeline of how the conflict progressed, the commemoration routines on the two banks of the Dniester River are not synchronised. In Moldova, emphasis is made on the first days of the armed phase of the conflict, i.e. in March 1992. As might be expected, the breakaway region emphasises the eruption of the battle in Bender/Tighina and the signing of the ceasefire agreement. As revealed below, striking differences in the memory culture of the conflict on the two banks of the river don't end there.

First Decade (1992–2000): Laying the Foundations for Memory Culture of the Conflict

In the first decade after signing the ceasefire agreement, the leaders of the breakaway region invested significant effort and resources in creating a memorial landscape in synergy with the ideology of the seceded region. The 1990–92 conflict, and especially its armed phase, played a crucial role in the making of this new landscape. However, the conflict didn't stand alone – it was carefully integrated into the existing landscape created and curated under Soviet rule. This "inherited" memorial landscape projected continuity of Russian-speaking presence in the region. Moreover, it highlighted the continuous presence of the Russian state and military there. Memorials and monuments that the region's authorities eagerly used for their own vision of its history commemorated the pre-1917 era and the Soviet rule that lasted in that very area for almost seventy years.[5] Some memorials praised the Russian imperial

[5] In contrast with Moldova "proper", which was under Soviet rule for a shorter period of time, in between 1940/44 and 1991, the territory on the left bank of the Dniester River was under Soviet rule from 1917, and in 1924, the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) was founded. On these events, see Andrei Cusco, "Nationalism and War in a Contested Borderland: The Case of Russian Bessarabia (1914–1917)," in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, ed. Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov and Mark von Hagen (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2014), 137–162; Alexandr Voronovici, "Overlapping Spaces: Negotiating and Delineating the Ukrainian-Moldovan Border during the Interwar and Wartime Years," in *Making Ukraine: Negotiating, Contesting, and Drawing*

troops that had been stationed at Bender Fortress in the 18th and 19th centuries. Others told the winning story of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, highlighting the 1919 Bender/Tighina resistance against interwar Romania.[6] Major memorials were devoted to a triumphant narrative of victory in the Soviet-German war, which culminated in the Soviet takeover of the Bessarabian region in 1944.

In Moldova "proper", after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the symbolic landscape was radically changed in favour of pan-Romanian discourse and the Soviet past was contested and denied. In contrast to this, the de facto regime kept all its existing monuments and street names intact. By adding new memorials relating to the 1990–92 armed conflict next to monuments praising Soviet rule, the authorities appealed to nostalgia, but also invested in boosting a strong local loyalty. Many researchers interpreted this loyalty as a separate, Transnistrian, identity, and so did the authorities.[7] The political forces behind the pan-Romanian agenda lost ground in Moldova "proper" by the mid-1990s, giving way to political actors that promoted a Moldovan identity agenda.[8] Despite that, fear of Romanian nationalism remained strong in the breakaway region over the decades. Commemorating the 1990–92 armed conflict reflected this fear and reinforced it.

In the first decade after signing the ceasefire, the spatiality of the memory landscape relating to the 1990–92 armed conflict had a top-down grassroots expression. Until recently, many streets in Bender/Tighina bore traces of the 1992 armed clashes. Metal crosses marked

the Borders in the Twentieth Century, ed. Olena Palko and Constantin Ardeleanu (Montreal; Kingston et al.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022), 210–237.

6 In the interwar years, as part of the Romanian national state, the town currently called Bender was called Tighina.

7 On the multiplicity of Transnistrian identity, see Alexandr Voronovici, "Internationalist Separatism and the Political Use of 'Historical Statehood' in the Unrecognized Republics of Transnistria and Donbass," *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 3: *Encounters after the Soviet collapse: Chinese presence in the former Soviet Union border zone* (2020): 288–302.

8 Rebecca Haynes, *Moldova: A History* (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 157–163.

Figure 6. "Memorial of Memory and Sorrow" (built in 1993–95) in Bender, a town in non-recognised Transnistria.
Photo by Anastasia Felcher, August 2018.

the exact locations of where civilians and members of the military or militia had been shot. Many buildings, including the one where the city executive committee sits, showed marks of bullets and projectile impacts on their walls.[9] This intact landscape of destruction was a vivid reminder of the armed conflict. Several memorials were built right after the ceasefire. In June 1993, the authorities inaugurated the first memorial to the conflict (Figure 6). An authentic infantry fighting vehicle was mounted on a pedestal at the entrance to Bender/Tighina, close to where the armed clashes had taken place. A plaque underneath

[9] The de facto authorities decided to renovate the buildings, removing visible bullets marks only in late 2010s. The iron crosses from the town streets were moved to the cemetery not far from the town.

quoted Aleksandr Suvorov on bravery and loyalty to the state. Suvorov was a Russian general under the reign of Catherine II, and a central historical figure promoted in the region in late Soviet years.[10] The same year, to further solidify 19 June as a central memorial date in the context of the conflict, trolleybus route no. 19 was launched to connect Bender with the capital of the breakaway region, Tiraspol.

In 1995, three years after the ceasefire, the second part of the memorial, a stylised open chapel, was built next to the infantry fighting vehicle. A year later, in 1996, a memorial sign was added with the engraved names of Bender residents who died in the full-scale battle in late July 1992. The following year, in 1997, to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the conflict, a separate branch of the Bender Museum of Local History opened its doors to the public in that town. This branch was dedicated to the entire conflict, yet graphic emphasis was made of the battle in Bender (Figure 7) . The permanent exhibition displayed names, photographs, and biographical accounts of the town residents who were killed. It also showcased items of everyday use damaged by the fighting and donated by town residents. This immediate participation of witnesses of the July battle in its commemoration was of core significance in the first decade after the outbreak of violence. As important as naming each and every casualty of the conflict was to refer to them as Transnistrians. Memorial signs, museums, and monuments in Transnistria, expectedly, omit commemoration of those who fought on the Moldovan side and perished in the conflict. Strikingly, memorial signs on the right bank of the Dniester River, in Moldova "proper", do the same.

A major stretch of the de facto border runs along the Dniester River. In some cases, such as in the Dubăsari and Bender-Slobozia regions, the border runs through villages and towns. Residents of such locali-

10 On Suvorov as a cultural hero in the MSSR and Transnistria, see Daria Isachenko, *The Making of Informal States. Statebuilding in Northern Cyprus and Transdniestria* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 66–98.

Figure 7. An exhibit at the branch of the Museum of Local History in Bender on the 1990–92 armed conflict: "Museum of the Bender Tragedy" (launched in 1997). The exhibit shows how the attack of Moldovan troops destroyed the lives of the town's residents.
Photo by Anastasia Felcher, June 2017.

ties cross this new border easily, some on an everyday basis. One such town, Varniţa, administered by the Moldovan government, stands in very close proximity to Bender. Next to Varniţa's town hall is a memorial to those perished in the conflict, yet only the names of those who fought and died on the Moldovan side are mentioned and engraved in stone.[11] The Varniţa memorial is located some fifteen minutes' drive from the Bender memorial. This vicinity of memorials that commemorate neighbours who fought for the two warring parties is striking. Most importantly, memorials on the Moldovan territory neither signal readiness of the "mother" state to reconcile with its breakaway territory, nor do they interpret the 1990–92 conflict as a common trauma/tragedy/loss. Instead, the memorials built in the first decade after the ceasefire reflected memory confrontation and grieving for human loss separately.

In contrast to de facto authorities in the breakaway region, the authorities in Moldova "proper" did not have a "central" memory site to commemorate the 1990–92 conflict until six years after the ceasefire. In 1998, the most important memorial dedicated to the conflict in Moldova "proper" was inaugurated in Chişinău. Allegedly (as this is not stated on the monument), it was built under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence. The new memorial was placed within a larger complex that initially appeared in 1975 to commemorate the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945. This large memorial complex incorporates multilayered memories of past conflicts, and with changing political circumstances, new elements are added to the monument year by year.[12] In the centre of the memorial to the 1990–92 conflict, there is a figure of a grieving mother with a cross (Figure 8). The names of those killed in the armed conflict are engraved on a plaque behind

11 Роман Губа и Валентин Алексеенко, "Бендеровцы окружили. Как живет молдавское село внутри Приднестровья," *Фокус*, 19 декабря 2017, дата обращения 6.01.2022, https://focus.ua/world/387407.

12 Alexandr Voronovici, "A Tangle of Memory: The Eternitate Memorial Complex in Chişinău and History Politics in Moldova," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 5, no. 2 (2019): 225–260.

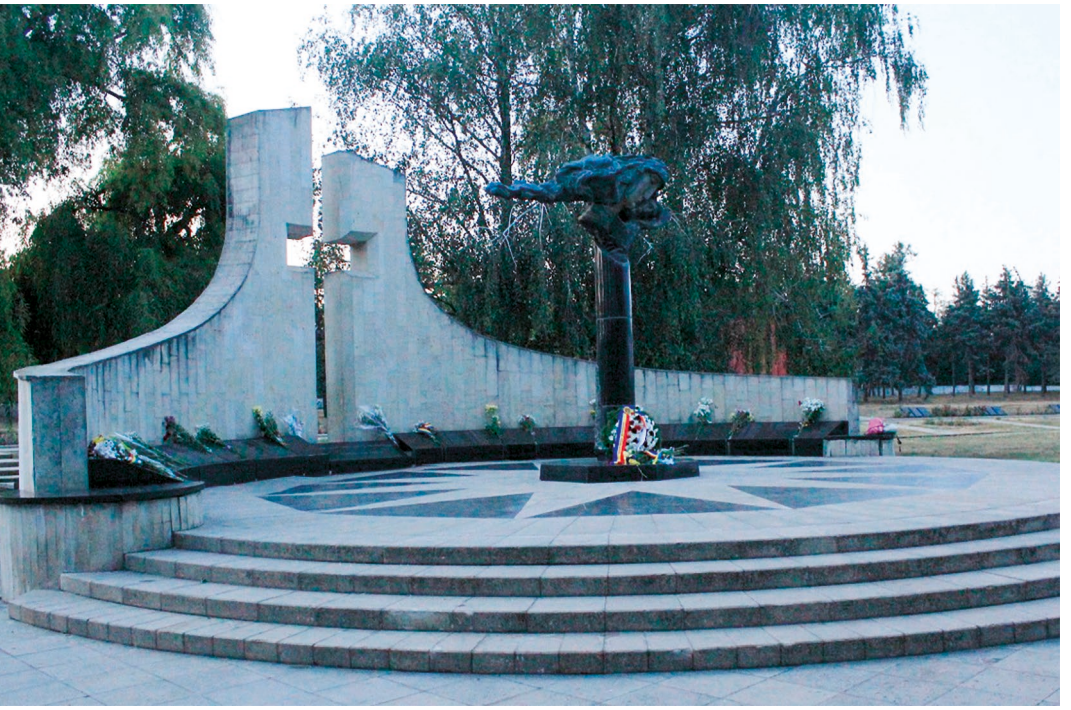

Figure 8. Memorial to the 1990–92 conflict "Grieving Mother" (built in 1998), part of the memorial complex "Eternitate" in Chişinău.
Photo by Anastasia Felcher, August 2018.

this figure. A plaque nearby states that they fell fighting for the independence and territorial integrity of the motherland. This monument, as well as the one in Varniţa, defined the visual and conceptual manner in which the conflict is commemorated in Moldova "proper". Similar to other memorials on the right bank, this one did not specify the opponents in the conflict, and only referred to those who fought on the Moldovan side. However, by mentioning the threatened integrity of the country, the memorial in Chişinău hinted at the secession behind the conflict. The paradox was that by omitting the very existence of the breakaway region and by not recognising the victims from the left bank, the authorities behind the memorial played into the hands of their opponents across the Dniester River. The de facto authorities secured

their position by convincing the residents on the left bank that their Moldovan counterparts intentionally disregarded "Transnistrians", their interests and aspirations. The monument in Chişinău reaffirmed these statements.

Back in 1995, the Ministry of Defence inaugurated the Military History Museum in the capital of Moldova. In 1999, seven years after the ceasefire, the museum welcomed the public to a renewed permanent exhibition. This exhibition informed visitors about all military conflicts that took place on the territory of the country, including the 1990–92 conflict on the Dniester River. This exhibition had a strong non-reconciliatory rhetoric, insisting that the creation of the breakaway region was a Russian strategy back in 1990, and that Bender (the exhibition uses its interwar name, Tighina) was attacked by the tanks of the Russian army. The exhibition solely commemorated those who died from the Moldovan side, which it numbered at 315 people, all called victims of separatism and heroes of Moldova. Both the 1998 memorial and the 1999 renewed permanent exhibition at the museum in Chişinău raised two important questions that remain unanswered in Moldovan public discourse till today. Why exclude civilians of a breakaway region from commemorative rhetoric and neglect their agency while commemorating the conflict? What does this exclusion imply about whether authorities saw those living in the breakaway territory as part of the Moldovan nation (understood in ethnic or civic terms)?[13]

Second Decade (2001–2009): Adding New Memorials

In the 2000s, in the de facto state, memory of the conflict became part of a new, intense effort to reinvent the past. Memory of the 1990–92 conflict kept its importance, yet significant work was invested in new

[13] On troublesome nation-building in Moldova, see Wim Van Meurs, "Moldova – nationale Identität als politisches Programm," *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 43, no. 4–5 (2003): 30–43.

memorials that would emphasise "historical ties with Russia" and cast Transnistria as an enduring "outpost of Russia". Once the leaders of the breakaway region realised the conflict would remain frozen, they started undertaking state- and nation-building similar to that implemented in recognised states.[14] These de facto authorities had to deviate from the memory strategies of the 1990s as the pan-Romanian agenda was no longer a leading one in Moldova's politics in the 2000s. Changes in government of Moldova "proper" brought to the fore a very different state-sponsored politics of memory than before. Thus, relying on memory of the 1990–92 conflict and nostalgia for the Soviet past no longer met the demands of the time.

In 2001, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) won the parliamentary elections in Moldova "proper". The party remained in power for the following eight years and invested a great deal of effort in history and memory politics.[15] It appropriated the Moldovan-oriented identity agenda (as opposed to a pan-Romanian one), promoted a vision of Moldovan nation as a civic one and embraced national minorities and their memory agendas.[16] The government relied heavily on incorporating victory in the Soviet-German war to the canon of national memory, investing funds in reconstructing war memorials in Chişinău and its vicinity in 2004 and 2006.[17] Initially committed

14 On state-building in Transnistria, see Helge Blakkisrud and Pål Kolstø, "From Secessionist Conflict Toward a Functioning State: Processes of State- and Nation-Building in Transnistria," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2011): 178–210; Alexander Osipov and Hanna Vasilevich, "Transnistrian Nation-Building: A Case of Effective Diversity Policies?", *Nationalities Papers* 47, no. 6 (2019): 983–999.

15 On politics of history and memory launched by the PCRM, see Luke March, "From Moldovanism to Europeanization? Moldova's Communists and Nation Building," *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 4 (2007): 601–625; Julien Danero Iglesias, "Constructing National History in Political Discourse: Coherence and Contradiction (Moldova, 2001–2009)," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 5 (2013): 780–800.

16 On how PCRM "worked" on the history and memory of ethnic minorities, see Diana Dumitru, "The Use and Abuse of the Holocaust: Historiography and Politics in Moldova," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 49–73.

17 Gabriela Popa, *War Remembrance in the Republic of Moldova: Commemoration, State Formation and Belonging*, EUI PhD theses (Florence: European University Institute, 2011), 165–186.

to pro-Russian geopolitical orientation, this party also promised its voters it would resolve the frozen conflict and reunify the country. Their efforts proved to be fruitless with the failure to sign the Kozak Memorandum in 2003. Since then, the PCRM has reoriented towards Europe, geopolitically.

Political failure to resolve the frozen conflict in 2003 gave the authorities of the breakaway Transnistria an impulse to further secure ties with its patron, Russia.[18] In 2006, the authorities held a referendum, expressing the will to secede from Moldova "proper" and join Russia instead. In memory politics, Transnistria's leaders had to be more creative. In the 2000s, the authorities in Chişinău promoted a history and memory agenda somewhat similar to those in Transnistria – of an inclusive civic nation attentive to its minorities. The authorities in Moldova also no longer rejected the Soviet past, but used it for their own purposes. To emphasise symbolic differences with Moldova "proper", in 2006, the Transnistrian authorities launched a campaign to redraw the memory landscape of the breakaway region. This campaign ousted the centrality of the 1990–92 conflict. Instead, this conflict was incorporated into an expanded memorial setting.

In 2006, timed to coincide with the 600th anniversary of Bender, large-scale work to reconstruct an abandoned military cemetery and turn it into a memorial complex started. The memorial fostered an image of a region that has rich history. Authentic gravestones were restored and symbolic ones added to have those perished in multiple military campaigns commemorated at the same cemetery. These were the soldiers of the Russian imperial army from the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as those who perished in World War I, World War II, and in 1990–92. It is noteworthy that authorities in Chişinău reconstructed their war memorial complex the same year, but the two refurbish-

18 On Russia acting as a patron in Transnistria, see Michael H. Seth, *Not on the Map. The Peculiar Histories of De Facto States* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 78–80.

ments were timed to match the celebrations of different anniversaries. In 2008, to continue the campaign in Bender, reconstruction works started at Bender Fortress to emphasise Russian imperial military presence in the region. In 2009, in the courtyard of the fortress, there was the inauguration of a pantheon of Russian military leaders, who commanded the military operations in the fortress during three Russo-Turkish wars.[19]

In the de facto state, memory of the 1990–92 conflict got further inscribed in alleged continuity of local history. In 2009, preparations for the forthcoming 65th anniversary of the end of the Soviet-German war began. Igor Smirnov, who by that time had held the position of the president of the breakaway region for nineteen years, introduced a plan to reconstruct several war memorials and build new ones. This project was dedicated to all "defenders of the fatherland" and aimed to emphasise a symbolic continuity with the Soviet past consonant with its treatment and interpretation in Russia. Major work took place at a memorial in Tiraspol, to which a wall was added with the names of those who perished in 1990–92. They are referred to as defenders of Pridnestrov'e. In Tiraspol, a sculpture of a grieving mother was also added, along with a new museum. Back in 1997, a museum in Bender emphasised the tragedy and horror of the bloodshed. In 2010, the commemorative rhetoric in the museum in Tiraspol shifted towards a more glorifying pathos for the defenders. By commemorating those who perished in the Soviet-German war on the same memorial as those died in the armed conflict fifty years later, Smirnov and his associates interpreted these as stages of a continuous struggle against invaders for the safety of the region and its residents.

[19] Russo-Turkish wars of 1768–1774, 1787–1792, and 1806–1812.

Third Decade (2010–2020): New Faces of Power, Rethinking the Conflict

In the 2010s, "work" with public memory of the 1990–92 conflict intensified further. In Moldova "proper" and in the breakaway region, new actors joined the high-ranking political positions, which however didn't put an end to corruption and embezzlement scandals.[20] In Moldova "proper", spring governmental elections in 2009 were accompanied by a riot on 7 April.[21] The protesters claimed election fraud and demanded a reelection. Eventually, a new faction took power after reelections and formed a coalition government, which was very active in memory politics in its own right. This government introduced memory initiatives that primarily condemned the communist rule of 1940/44–91, leaving the 1990–92 conflict on the periphery of public attention.[22] The government also proclaimed European integration as its major geopolitical aim, no matter how illusory reaching this goal was in reality. This further intensified the symbolic drift with the de facto authorities on the left bank. With the background of the Ukrainian crisis of 2013–14, the symbolic space in the breakaway region gained new elements of the "Russian world".

Despite investing major efforts in condemning communist rule, the new government in Chişinău introduced a special day to mourn the memory of those fallen in the conflict on the Dniester River. In 2010, the authorities designated 2 March as the Day of the Commemoration of those Fallen in the Armed Conflict of 1992, Defending the Integrity and Independence of the Republic of Moldova. This memorial occa-

20 Mihai Popuşoi, "Moldova's Great Dissillusionment," *New Eastern Europe* 1, no. 20 (2016): 84–89.

21 Henry E. Hale, "Did the Internet Break the Political Machine? Moldova's 2009 'Twitter Revolution that Wasn't'," *Demokratizatsiya. The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 21, no. 4 (2013): 481–505.

22 On the politics of history and memory implemented by the government in Moldova in 2009 and later, see Andrei Cusco, "The 'Politics of Memory' and 'Historical Policy' in Post-Soviet Moldova," in *Convolutions of Historical Politics*, ed. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 175–210.

sion could have incorporated participants and victims from both sides of the conflict, but failed to do so. The wording chosen for the day of mourning aggravated the "our"/"their" division. As previously, it kept residents of the left bank of the Dniester River as being treated solely within the rhetoric of separatism. By introducing a memorial date that implicitly excluded people living on the left bank, the authorities sealed the path of further non-reconciliation regarding public memory of the conflict.[23]

In response to introducing this new memorial day in Moldova "proper", the same year, a new memorial was unveiled at the military necropolis in Bender. To mark the 18th anniversary of the armed clashes in the town, a new composition of black granite slabs, the intersection of which forms a cross, was added on 19 June 2010. The memorial listed the number of human losses in the town and commemorated not only those who took part in armed action but also those of the civilian population who "died of wounds and went missing during the aggression of the nationalists of Moldova".

The next year, in 2011, a new memorial was erected in a public space in Cocieri village, another Moldovan locality separated in two by the border with the de facto state (Figure 9). After the conflict, the village remained under the control of the Moldovan authorities, and the new memorial commemorated the names of sixty-four people who fell in fighting on the Cocieri plateau. The memorial was erected on the initiative of veterans' associations and had three inlaid elements in the shape of a cross symbolising the sovereignty, statehood, and independence of Moldova. The country's authorities were present at the inauguration, calling it another stone in the foundation of a sove-

[23] The date chosen as the memorial day in Moldova "proper" (2 March 1992) did not coincide with the main memorial date in the de facto state (19 June 1992). The first date commemorated the first armed clashes in 1992 in Dubăsari between Moldovan police and local volunteer corps, which took lives from both sides, but had not yet caused massive human losses. The second date, commemorated in the breakaway region, marked the date of regular units of Moldovan army entering Bender, the date of the start of major bloodshed.

Figure 9. Memorial to the fallen in the 1990–92 armed conflict in Cocieri village in Moldova "proper" (built in 2011).
© Ahmed El Smaili. Accessed November 20, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cocieri#/media/File:Monumentul_Eroilor_Căzuți_ân_Războiul_de_pe_Nistru_din_1992_(s.Cocieri).jpg.

reign and independent state. The message behind this memorial does not foster common remembrance, grieving or reconciliation. Similarly to Varniţa, this memorial in Cocieri stands in the closest proximity to the de facto border with the breakaway region.

Later the same year, for the first time in two decades, Transnistria had a new leader. Igor Smirnov was replaced by a younger candidate, Yevgeny Shevchuk, who also contributed to the widening of the memorial landscape of the region.[24] In 2012, twenty years after the cease-

[24] Simultaneously, the de facto regime kept empathising symbolic continuity with the Soviet past. See Ala Şveţ, "Staging the Transnistrian Identity within the Her-

fire, a bust to general Aleksandr Lebed, commander of the Russian forces back in 1992, was added to the original memorial in Bender. The bust signalled the image of Russia as a defender of Transnistria, while the media kept quiet about disagreements between Lebed and local elites back in the 1990s. In 2015, timed to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Soviet-German war, Shevchuk inaugurated a new stele next to the Bender memorial. The stele brought together memories of all conflicts that took place in the town, from the 17th century to 1992. The new monument stated that back in 2008, the town was awarded a status of "town-peacekeeper" by a Russia-backed international charity foundation "Peacekeeper". This indicated a shift in the memory of the 1990–92 conflict in the breakaway region. From then on, memory of the conflict was used to forward the image of Russia as a peacekeeper. This was a local reaction with a background of a rapidly deteriorating image of Russia at the international level after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, international sanctions, and always-denied involvement in breakaway events in the Donbass area in eastern Ukraine.

The 2014 parliamentary elections in Moldova "proper" resulted in a more diverse political landscape, forcing centrist and right-wing parties to make room for new competitors from the left. A new party gained visibility with a conservative and moderate pro-Russian geopolitical rhetoric. Its leader, Igor Dodon, won the presidential elections in 2016 and, despite having made no progress in resolving the frozen conflict, he intensified contacts with the breakaway region.[25] Dodon's rhetoric on memorial days about the 1990–92 conflict focused more on the suffering and tragedy of loss and less on defending the sover-

itage of Soviet Holidays," *History and Anthropology* 24, no. 1: *Politics and Performance in South-Eastern Europe* (2013): 98–116.

25 At the same time, mainly due to changes in trade opportunities as a consequence of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA), Transnistria has been slowly driven to the West, at least economically. See Eiki Berg and Kristel Vits, "Transnistria's European Drive: A Means to What End?", *Geopolitics* 27, no. 3: *Decentering the Study of Migration Governance in the Mediterranean* (2022): 852–874.

eignty and integrity of the state. Yet, Moldova's memory landscape altogether remained diverse. Alternative voices, such as those emanating from the Ministry of Defence, where the pan-Romanian and anti-Russian rhetoric has always been strong, were also active in these years. In 2016, Minister of Defence Anatol Şalaru oversaw the opening of a new Museum of Soviet Occupation in Chişinău. This cultural institution canonised national suffering under communism and once again drew attention to the exhibition at the Military History Museum, where the 1990–92 conflict was blamed on Russia (these exhibitions are aligned and are designed in a manner that visitors pass through the Military History Museum first).

In the breakaway region, there was also competition on the political scene. In 2016, Vadim Krasnoselsky became president. While in office, he kept investing in further reconstruction of Bender Fortress, driving the imagined past of the region further from Moldova. New memory initiatives were addressed to patrons in Russia as much as to non-partners in Moldova "proper". The crisis in Ukraine, among other factors, meant that the patron state would start delivering significant resources to Crimea and Donbass. Under these conditions, intensifying effort in memory politics was meant to confirm loyalty to Russia next to new competitors for the patron's resources.

In 2017, a year after Krasnoselsky gained momentum as a de facto leader, the breakaway region celebrated the 25th anniversary of the presence of Russian peacekeepers on its territory. A year-long jubilation campaign caused much consternation in Moldova "proper". Although the peacekeeping forces stationed in the breakaway region include Moldovan and Transnistrian personnel, the campaign of 2017 mainly praised Russia as a guarantor of peace and stability. Both in Bender and Tiraspol, new monuments added to the gallery of public memory manifestation. In Bender, a new monument was set up portraying a member of the military holding a dove of peace (Figure 10). In Tiraspol, two human-size statues were added at the entrance to the town, next to a building housing officers of the armed forces. These statues joined the monument to Mikhail Kutuzov, a military officer who served under

Figure 10. Monument to a Russian peacekeeper in Bender (built in 2017).
Photo by Anastasia Felcher, August 2018.

the reign of three Romanov monarchs. This conglomerate of statues to military men signalled that the continuous presence of the Russian military in the region was welcomed by the breakaway regime. Parallel to this, the Moldovan parliament used the occasion of the anniversary to once again require the Russian military contingent to withdraw from its territory.

2020–2022: Memory of the Conflict during the Pandemic and the War

In the late 2010s, the political landscape in Moldova "proper" changed again. In 2019, a political crisis, notoriously known as the "captured

state" under oligarchic control, was brought to an end under international pressure. The snap parliamentary elections of 2021 gave power to a centre-right party. This party's agenda was focused on resolving the internal political and economic crisis and corruption. The leader of this party, Maia Sandu, won the presidential elections back in 2020. However, neither the new president nor the new government put an emphasis on resolving the frozen conflict. During her presidential term, Sandu has been consistent in interpreting the 1990–92 conflict as a crisis that damaged the integrity of the country. Despite embracing the ethnic and language diversity of Moldovan residents in her agenda, so far no reconciliation rhetoric regarding the breakaway region, its regime or memory of the conflict has followed. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated tensions between those in power on both sides of Dniester River as mistrust and mutual accusation grew over the availability of medication, equipment, and vaccines.

Several months before Sandu was elected president, Moldovan veterans of the armed conflict on Dniester River came out on the streets of Chişinău to protest. These veterans have been largely absent from Moldovan public space and the political agenda. Their discontent reflected not only their desperate need for higher pensions, but also a more comprehensive discussion in the Moldovan public sphere of what happened in 1990–92, including the experiences of those who carried weapons.

In June 2021, a new memorial stele was inaugurated in Bălţi, a town in the north of Moldova "proper". It was not long after the modest inauguration ceremony was over that a sharp controversy around it erupted. The stele was dedicated to three Moldovan policemen and two reservists who died in spring and summer 1992 on a plateau next to Cocieri village. At the inauguration, the officials called them heroes and martyrs of the people who fell in the line of duty in the struggle for the independence and integrity of Moldova. One of the main initiators and sponsors of the monument, combat veteran Boris Markoch, summarised the societal attitude in Moldova towards the events on the Dniester River back in 1990–92 saying: "The war is over, but the wounds remain."

This inauguration immediately generated fierce reactions from the left bank. Three days after the ceremony in Bălţi, the Transnistrian media cited a message by Krasnoselsky. He strongly disagreed with calling Moldovan officers and military personnel heroes. Instead, according to Krasnoselsky, these people were either criminals or victims, "whose lives had been sacrificed for political purposes". He went so far as to claim that the conflict had been nothing less than a genocide of Transnistrian people. The initiators of the new memorial in Bălţi, according to de facto leader, tried to "distort history and cleanse their conscience of blood".

In late 2021 to early 2022, tension over Russian army units at the Ukrainian-Russian border grew exponentially. The Moldovan authorities once again expressed their concern over the presence of Russian military personnel on their territory. In press statements on the matter, Moldovan politicians interpreted the 1990–92 conflict on the Dniester River in light of Russian territorial expansion to Crimea in 2014 and to what happened in the Donbass region. In late January 2022, President Sandu, in a TV interview, claimed that Russia was behind the outbreak of unleashing hostilities in 1990–92, having tried to hinder Moldova gaining independence. Krasnoselsky immediately reacted denying these allegations and insisting that in 1992, Russia had had a solely peacekeeping agenda. He maintained that the armed conflict stemmed exclusively from internal reasons and disagreements at a local level.

One day before the full-scale military attack on Ukraine by Russia, on 23 February 2022, the breakaway region celebrated "Defender of the Fatherland Day". Krasnoselsky visited the memorial in Tiraspol for a wreath-laying ceremony. There he spoke about the intergenerational continuity of military personnel during the times of the Russian Empire (an image of the region as an "outpost of the southern borders of Russia"), the military during the Soviet-German war (known as Great Patriotic War), and during 1990–92. Krasnoselsky emphasised that commemorating this continuity was a step in the struggle for historical memory.

After the full-scale war in Ukraine was launched by Russia the following day, on 24 February 2022, major attention in the region was given to this new conflict. Concerns were voiced whether Moldova would become the next target of Russian troops and whether the breakaway region would become a foothold of potential military invasion. Despite these concerns and several outbreaks of damage to infrastructure (explosions, etc.), the de facto authorities distanced themselves from the Russian rhetoric of the need for military action in the region. With an influx of refugees from Ukraine, Moldova "proper" invested significant efforts in humanitarian assistance and welcomed an unprecedented number of people from the neighbouring country. The de facto authorities did the same. By accommodating refugees and providing them with the conditions to stay in Transnistria for a longer period of time, the local authorities were trying to convince its residents and neighbours that they could guarantee safety. Against this background, the 30th anniversary of the 1990–92 conflict on the Dniester River did not become a major public memory occasion. An exhibition in the National History Museum in Chişinău and a small number of commemoration ceremonies in Moldova "proper" repeated the narrative of threatened territorial integrity. In the breakaway region, commemorative ceremonies were organised with significant rigour, yet no deviation from the usual memory narrative took place.[26]

Conclusion

Over the past three decades, the memory culture around the 1990–92 conflict on the Dniester River has been developing along the lines of confrontation. Numerous memorials on the left bank and rare ones

[26] Some material of this chapter was used in an article published online earlier this year: Anastasia Felcher, "The 1990–92 Armed Conflict at the Dniester River: Continuous Memory Confrontation," *Cultures of History Forum*, September 19, 2022, accessed September 23, 2022, https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/politics/the-1990-92-armed-conflict-on-the-dniester-river.

in Moldova "proper" secured public memory of the pain for losing "our" policemen, military personnel, volunteers, and civilians. The question that is still rarely addressed by the politicians on either side of the dividing river is how memory culture could contribute to potential resolution of the frozen conflict. Would memory culture of the 1990–92 conflict adopt a reconciliation narrative if political actors finally reached agreement on how to resolve the conflict? Or, conversely, are steps towards reconciliation and common remembrance of all casualties vital to progress with resolving the frozen conflict?

Despite no major changes in rhetoric during commemorative events in 2022, the war in Ukraine will undoubtedly impact public memory of the Transnistrian Conflict. With the military action continuing in Ukraine, beyond the breakaway region, the 1990–92 conflict gets further interpreted within the history of Russian forced territorial expansion in this part of Europe. The Russian military attack in Ukraine weakened the position of the de facto authorities in Transnistria. For years, they have been insisting on a solely peacekeeping mission as the purpose of the Russian forces stationed in the region. Escalation of violence in the larger surroundings would further separate the memory culture of the 1990–92 conflict on both banks of the Dniester River. Neither would it facilitate grieving families on both sides to draw closer to each other.

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Index of Names*

* The "Index of Names" includes the list of all surnames and names recorded in the main text of the book, with the exception of footnotes.

"In recent decades, concepts of memory and memory politics have been among the most popular topics in social sciences and humanities, being the subject of numerous monographs, studies, and selections of articles. Therefore, the question arises: What is the importance and innovation of the presented monograph? First, it focuses on Central and Eastern Europe and on the construction of memories there in recent decades (and even years) in the changing geopolitical reality. Another advantage of the monograph is a 'cautious', and therefore professional, approach to memory."

Rūta Šermukšnytė, Vilnius University

"The considerations in the study concern an area of Central and Eastern Europe that is particularly important from the perspective of memory games and memory wars. The book includes chapters on the Baltic states, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova (together with the rebellious, separatist region of Transnistria), and finally Russia. Taken together, we will get a panoramic view of a wide spectrum of problems and issues related to the formation and transformation of collective forms of consciousness based on historical memory – a memory that is alive and cannot be enclosed in a predictable framework. Collective historical consciousness as captured by the authors of the publication is admittedly in a relationship with geopolitical reality, but this relationship is not static...

The relationship between freedom and memory is a subject that we should neither ignore nor disregard, because the struggle for either a free or an enslaved future for our part of the world is taking place here and now. The book *Constructing Memory: Central and Eastern Europe in the New Geopolitical Reality* certainly does not ignore this relationship. On the contrary, it contains both valuable knowledge derived from empirical studies and interesting reflections based on these studies."

Wiktor Werner, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

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