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The ebbs and flows of the Holocaust and the Gulag memory in EU-rope. Memory dynamics in national and transnational contexts

On May 6th 2017 the House of European History in Brussels was opened. The museum was created to promote a better understanding of European history and European integration. It took exactly ten years to realize this idea after it had been first launched by Hans-Gert Pöttering in his inaugural speech as President of the European Parliament.¹

In the way it has been planned, the core exhibition of the museum should not be a compilation of national stories, but rather should offer a sort of a bird's eye view on the history of Europe, with a special focus on the 20th century. Among the most conspicuous images one gets when looking from above on the European continent are certainly state border changes, but even more powerful are the population changes, first of all — the six million Jewish inhabitants of Europe who vanished, and secondly — great population transfers in Eastern Europe. These were the results of the German and Soviet policies during wartime.

This paper focuses on the memory about these dramatic population changes in wartime Europe and more specifically — on the memory of the Holocaust and the Gulag. Whereas the Holocaust does not require any terminological clarification, the scale of deportations to forced labor camps in the USSR may not be commonplace. The deportations to the Soviet hinterland were devised by Stalin in his policy of preventive punishment for the attributed political attitudes of specific social groups and national communities. Subjected to forced labour and permanent hunger were, aside from the nationalities caught within the Soviet Union at that

¹ H.G. Pöttering, *Inaugural Address by the President of the European Parliament*, European Parliament, Strasbourg 13.02.2007, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20070213&secondRef-ITEM-003&language=EN (access: 10.10.2015).

time, Balts, Poles, Romanians, Czechs, and to a lesser extent other nationalities of the region which now constitutes an Eastern part of the European Union.

Given the scale of both phenomena and the position the memory of the Holocaust had played in the EU-memory policy in the past two decades, it will be interesting to examine how both topics are tackled in the newly-opened exhibition in the House of European History.² Beyond any doubt, the exhibition located in the heart of Brussels is the reflection of the years-long process in which a 'European memory' was debated and negotiated. An important stage of this negotiation process began with the accession of the East Central European states to the EU and took place in various arenas. Among them were the European institutions.

Different memory trends in Europe

The main problem with memory culture after the 2004–2006 EU enlargements lay in the so-called 'asymmetry of memory'.³ It was the feeling of East Europeans that their history and memory had not found recognition and enough attention among their Western partners. The new member states as they were entering the Western community, were also supposed to join the Western 'ideological realm' reaching beyond market- and political regulations, and including also certain understanding of Europe's past, especially the Second World War and the aftermath of that conflict. Not surprisingly, but counter to some expectations in the spirit of the famous Francis Fukuyama's dictum about 'the end of history', visions of the past appeared to be quite a sensitive issue. The experience of the Second World War among East Europeans and the post-war undemocratic character of their Communist regimes remained on the margins of the EU historical/memory policy, which contributed to growing resentment and divisions in the newly united larger European community.

(At least) Two visions of European memory

The fact that those divisions could be found within the relatively narrow circle of politicians active in Brussels is nothing surprising, given that MEPs are representatives of their electorates. Contrary to expectations, the splits did not always neatly follow the East and West divide. Sandra Kalniete and Vytenis Andriukaitis have been two officials playing important functions in the European bodies,

² For the reviews of the exhibitions, see e.g. J. Jareš, "The house of European history: In search of a common history and its future", *Cultures of History Forum* 12.10.2017, DOI: 10.25626/0076.

³ G. Mink, L. Neumayer, "Introduction", [in:] *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games*, eds. G. Mink, L. Neumayer, Houndmills-Basingstoke, Hampshire 2013, p. 13.

including the position of a European Commissioner. Both politicians come from the Baltic States, Latvia and Lithuania respectively. The similarities did not end there. Both were born in the early 1950s (1952 and 1951) and both — in Siberia (in Togur and Jakutia). They were children of the Baltic deportees exiled to the vast territory of the Soviet Union. Their parents were deported at the very beginning of the 1940s and were allowed to return to their home countries only 15 years later.

Despite their similar ages, geographical background, family histories and later political careers, these politicians represent a division which took place within the EU institutions *vis-à-vis* the 20th-century history of the continent. Sandra Kalniete may be associated with the so-called *Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism*. This 2008 document signed mainly by some members of the European Parliament, but also other public figures (often coming from the former Communist bloc, such as historians cum politicians Joachim Gauck and György Schöpflin), called for an “all-European understanding that both the Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes should be considered to be the main disasters, which blighted the 20th century”.⁴ Following the announcement of that declaration, a number of political actions have taken place, referred to as the ‘Prague Process’ and initiated by a consortium of different memory agencies under the umbrella of the so-called Platform of European Memory and Conscience as well as the Reconciliation of European Histories Group, an all-party group in the European Parliament chaired by Sandra Kalniete.

Vytenis Andriukaitis on the other hand, may be associated with 2012’s *The Seventy Years Declaration*. Launched at the European Parliament on the 70th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference it was a response to *The Prague Declaration*. Here too, signatories were recruited from political and academic circles and included politicians as Martin Schulz and historians like Dovid Katz. They opposed the remembrance policies “treating Communism as equal, similar or equivalent to Nazism as suggested by *The Prague Declaration*”.⁵ After *The Seventy Years Declaration* had been announced, an interesting debate ensued, mostly in the Baltic States. It included the so-called ‘moustache comparison controversy’, the claim by a Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs that one cannot see a difference between Stalin and Hitler, except in the length of their moustache. Vytenis Andriukaitis was active in this debate, opposing this line of argumentation which he denounced as historical revisionism.

Although *The Seventy Years Declaration* is four years younger than *The Prague Declaration*, it is this one that is closer to what many East European memory agents active in Brussels have considered to be ‘the European mem-

⁴ *Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism*, 3.06.2008, <http://www.webcitation.org/64otCtAyz?url=http://www.victimsofcommunism.org/media/article.php?article%3D3849> (access: 10.06.2017).

⁵ *Seventy Years Declaration*, 2012, <http://www.seventyyearsdeclaration.org/> (access: 2.06.2017).

ory culture' and which they have tried to challenge. They have been doing so in a number of steps which were supposed to draw public attention to memory issues of Eastern Europe. These steps included: the 2006 Council of Europe's resolution condemning the crimes of totalitarian Communist regimes, 2009 European Parliament's designation of the 23rd of August as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Two Totalitarian Dictatorships, numerous Brussels-held public hearings and conferences devoted to the topic of the Communist legacy.⁶ Some of them were addressing the Communist crimes in general, such as the conference 'Europe 70 years after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact' or the public hearing 'What do young Europeans know about Totalitarianism'. Some other events tackled the topic of the Gulag, which was turning into an important symbol of the Stalinist crimes (the exhibition 'The Expelled' portraying the expulsions of Polish citizens; 'Your past is our past' commemorating seventy years from the first mass deportations from the Baltic States in general; 'Birch Bark Letters from Siberia' devoted specifically to the deportations of Latvians).

Moreover, it was in Brussels, where the first public viewing of a provocative Latvian movie by Edvīns Šnore *The Soviet Story* (2008), took place. The documentary attempted to show the Soviet atrocities in a new light by drawing the parallels between Nazi and Soviet systems. The film was financially supported and invited to the screening at the European Parliament by the two Latvian MEPs who belonged to the Reconciliation of European Histories Group.

Sandra Kalniete herself is the author of the 2001 bestseller *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snows*, which tells the story of the deportation of her family to the USSR.⁷ The book was translated into many languages and, with the exception of Germany, received an overall warm reception: "From the Gulag to Brussels: a journey never experienced before. At the end of her journey, as she crossed the threshold of the European Union, Sandra Kalniete's quest for justice had reached its destination",⁸ noticed the Italian *Corriere della Sera*, which interestingly saw Brussels as the place where justice *vis-à-vis* the Soviet crimes can be appealed for and achieved.

Other active memory agents in the so-called 'Prague process' (aiming at achieving the recognition of Communism as a part of Europe's common history) include next to the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, institutes of memory and many recently created museums around Eastern Europe. These memory actors have struggled to bring the issue of Stalinist crimes to the attention of European institutions. They justified their efforts with three main arguments.

⁶ S. Troebst, "Der 23. August als Euroatlantischer Gedenktag? Eine Analytische Dokumentation", [in:] A. Kaminsky et al., *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939 in den Erinnerungskulturen der Europäer*, Goettingen 2011, pp. 431–467.

⁷ S. Kalniete, *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snows*, Rīga 2006.

⁸ D. Messina, "Nata in un gulag, ministro in Lettonia. La favola a lieto fine di Sandra", *Il Corriere della Sera* 22.08.2005, p. 31.

Including the Stalinist crimes into European memory in three arguments

Firstly the ‘true story’ of the Iron Curtain still had to be written. In numerous declarations, meetings, and statuses they pointed to the deficiency of knowledge of Stalinist crimes in the West and to the need to fill this painful and dangerous gap. The second argument: ‘duty to remember’ referred to the duty to speak for the victims and so to prevent atrocities from happening again. The third argument ‘security through integration’ relied on a belief in memory policy, especially in the ability of European institutions to make something remembered. The common collective memory was seen as a remedy for the distressing feeling of — in the words of a Lithuanian speaker in Brussels — “insecurity East Europeans feel despite their membership in the EU and NATO”.⁹ This insecurity turned to be less theoretical after Putin’s annexation of Crimea.

Interestingly enough, in individual European states the Gulag has not played the role of the symbol of the Stalinist regime. It received this type of a universal label only in the course of the cultural exchange that had taken place in Brussels among the representatives of the newly accepted member states 2004–2006.¹⁰ Long before that, in the Eastern part of Europe, the Gulag as a Soviet crime was naturally a taboo topic for most of the time after the war and until the 1980s. The situation changed with the advent of the strong dissident movement which used the previously tabooed topics as a weapon in the discursive struggle against the communist interpretations of the past. This was the case in Poland and the Baltic Republics, where in the 1980s this topic cherished the most popularity, even if, or maybe precisely because, most commemorative initiatives were unofficial. However, after the short-lived revival of the memory of Siberian deportations during ‘the carnival of revolution’ around 1989, the interest in this topic has substantially waned, which took its main memory activists — for the first time finally heard and recognised — by (bitter) surprise. If we consider the Polish case or the situation in the Baltic States, we will see that after 1989 there was no shortage of unaddressed memory issues. In the 1990s the memory of the Gulag had lost its dissident appeal and even seemed to have gone out of fashion.¹¹ The moment of accounting for this

⁹ A. Stranga, “A few words about collective memory in Europe”, [in:] *Europe 70 Years After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a collection of presentations given at the conference organised by the national parliaments of the Baltic States*, October 14, Brussels-Vilnius 2009, p. 71.

¹⁰ L. Zessin-Jurek, “The rise of an Eastern European community of memory? On lobbying for the Gulag memory in Europe”, [in:] *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, eds. M. Pakier, J. Wawrzyniak, New York 2016, pp. 131–149.

¹¹ L. Zessin-Jurek, “Forgotten memory? Vicissitudes of the Gulag remembrance in Poland”, [in:] *Life Writing and Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe*, ed. S. Mitroiu, Houndmills-Basingstoke-New York 2015, pp. 45–65.

past was short and unsatisfactory. None of the political parties was truly interested in taking up this topic.¹²

In the Western part of Europe, the Gulag has never established itself as a prominent *lieu de memoire*. It was one of the dramatic narratives which has been ineffectively trying to win public attention for decades. Among several reasons for that was that the Western societies were touched by the deportations to forced labour in Siberia only to a very limited extent. Even if thousands of former Gulag inmates (mostly from Poland and of Jewish origin) decided after liberation to live their lives in the West, their memory had not found resonance in the memory cultures of their new homelands. It was also the post-war intellectual climate of Western Europe, interestingly described by Francois Furet in *The Passing of an Illusion*, which did not favour the full disclosure of the transgressions of the communist regimes throughout the post-war decades.¹³ Last but not least, when in the 1990s Europeans recovered from the Communist illusions, another very important memory — that of the Holocaust underpinned by the feeling that there has never been equivalent crime in European history — initially blocked other stories of victimisation from coming to the Western — and later European Union's — fore.

In this way, the East European new EU member states were caught between the requirements of critical confrontation with their own pasts (featuring mostly their participation in the Holocaust) on the one hand and on the other — the *désintéressement* of their Western partners towards their own difficult experiences (casualties suffered from the hands of both Germans and Soviets). Once members of the EU, the East European deputies used their new position of equal partners to challenge what the historian Harald Wydra called 'the hegemonic model of history by Western design'.¹⁴ It included the concentration on the Holocaust as a universal crime against humanity and a ban put on the attempts to compare the Holocaust with other violations of human rights in recent European history.

Undoubtedly, one important reason why East Europeans tried to put the Stalinist crimes on the EU-uropean memory agenda was the problem with tackling their own national guilt towards the Jews. Redirecting attention from their own culpability and focusing it on their victimhood instead was one way to ease the hardship that came in due process of acknowledging the past of their forefathers. This is also the framework in which the memory of the Gulag in the post-EU-enlargement context has been rekindled in Brussels and assigned the role of a symbol

¹² Still, the memory of Siberian deportations played a more important role in the Baltic States, where this was the persecution that befell the biggest number of local citizens. However, it had not figured prominently in the memory of Ukrainians, Belarusians or East Germans, many of whom also fell victim to forced labour in Siberia, but as a result of their political setting other past events dominated the mnemonic landscape of these countries.

¹³ F. Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago-London 1999.

¹⁴ H. Wydra, "The dynamics of memory in East and West: Elements of a comparative framework", *Remembrance and Solidarity. Studies in 20th century European History* 1, 2012, pp. 125–147.

of the Stalinist/Communist crimes and as such — a counterpart of the Holocaust to some extent. The East Europeans' uneasiness about facing the problem of their forefathers' complicity in the crimes of the Holocaust is somewhat different than Western European discomforts.

National vs. transnational memories on the example of Poland and Germany

Eastern Europe belonged to the countries under Soviet domination, which means that in the postwar period, as it is known, the memory of the Second World War had been primarily presented as a victory over fascism. That victory took a very heavy toll — admitted propaganda and counted the victims of fascism in many millions, without however differentiating between them. Although with hindsight it seems almost impossible, the unique status of the Jewish victims was obscured, in the words of Tony Judt: "Dead Jews were posthumously assimilated into the local communities that had so disliked them when they were alive".¹⁵ Following the erasure of their Jewishness, Jewish victims were incorporated into the nationality of the countries in which they had lived, which was especially conspicuous on the memorial plaques that listed East European victims of fascism without paying a special tribute to the suffering of the Jews (e.g., the famous inscription in the Auschwitz Museum). In this way, the distinctive character of the genocide of the Jewish people was blurred. There were many reasons for that.

The first and most obvious reason was the official ideology of the Communist International, which attached minor importance to the question of nationality. The second reason was the paradoxical contradiction to the first one, and closer to the truth: East European Communist regimes had in fact a nationalistic character, as demonstrated by Marcin Zaremba in the Polish case.¹⁶ The Communist regimes looked for the approval of their respective societies by appealing to their 'national feelings'. In Poland the government turned to satisfy the victimhood status of Poles associated with the *topos* of messianic suffering.¹⁷ Polish society was much more ready to hear about the suffering of ethnic Poles in the Second World War than about Jewish martyrdom.

This memory policy, even if they did not choose it, was in accordance with the expectations of most Poles who survived the war. And they, one may venture the thesis, welcomed it with a certain degree of relief. After all, they had borne

¹⁵ T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, New York 2006, p. 182.

¹⁶ M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warszawa 2001.

¹⁷ E. Plonowska-Ziarek, "Melancholic nationalism and the pathologies of commemorating the Holocaust in Poland", [in:] *Imaginary Neighbors: Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations after the Holocaust*, eds. D. Głowacka, J. Zylińska, Lincoln 2007, pp. 301–326.

witness to the brutality of *Zagłada*, the later Polish term for the Holocaust, for many years and wanted to forget about the cruelty of what they had to witness and could do little about. But even more importantly, they wanted to forget, because some of them participated in this process or materially benefitted from the absence of their neighbours and did not want to be reminded of that. It was an inconvenient memory. So also on the unofficial communicative level of memory, the Holocaust was not present, not even dwelt on.¹⁸ Moreover, in the towns and cities which lost their Jewish populations, there was hardly anyone left to preserve the Jewish heritage and memory after the war.

Finally, Stalin was also playing off anti-Semitic resentment within Polish society at the political level. When the Communist parties took over in Eastern Europe, some of their leading cadres were of Jewish origin, often returning from exile in the USSR. This was particularly marked at the level just below the top. The returning Jews were not received particularly favourably in their native states: neither as Communists nor as Jews. By intentionally not recognising the nightmare they went through and playing out anti-Semitic sentiment, Stalin achieved what he wanted — the Jewish Communist officials had a constant feeling of insecurity — had they made a mistake of disloyalty, they would lose their privileged position and would hardly have any future in Poland. This central Soviet anti-Jewish policy is confirmed by the anti-Semitic tides which recurrently went through the Soviet Union and its satellite states, beginning with 1948 (with Jews being purged and fleeing).

At the same time, those early postwar years witnessed the first debates about anti-Semitism, but they mainly involved intellectual circles and were spurred on not only by the living, intense and very emotional wartime memory, but also by news about new horrific transgressions against Jewish neighbours in post-war Eastern Europe, as in the case of the Kielce pogrom in Poland. If we stick to Poland as an example, we will see that the Jewish topic was present in the first books addressing wartime atrocities as well as in the first films dealing with the war. Also early commemorations embraced the topic and included the 1948 erection of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw.

This Communist-imposed selective amnesia dominated the official culture of remembrance in Poland from the 1950s to the 1980s. Many themes remained taboo or were distorted by Communist interpretation. Throughout these years, the Holocaust was mentioned somehow in passing, as a side issue, but was present in media and culture. It is the time when movies like *Pasażerka* (The Passenger), 1963 by Andrzej Munk and *Świadectwo urodzenia* (Birth Certificate), 1961 by Stanisław Różewicz were shot; some outstanding pieces of literature were written, with early works by Henryk Grynberg, including *Żydowska wojna* (The Jewish War), 1965.¹⁹

¹⁸ M. Duch-Dyngosz, "From absence to loss: Holocaust commemoration in present-day Poland", *Remembrance and Solidarity: Studies in 20th Century European History* 5, 2016, pp. 115–136.

¹⁹ H. Grynberg, *Żydowska wojna*, Warszawa 1965.

Works like these were critically appraised by fellow artists, but found little support from the omnipotent cultural agent — the state apparatus.

The Communist anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 had literally put a ban on the Jewish topic in Poland, which lasted until the next important period — the 1980s, when taboos were broken. The Solidarity movement used the hitherto silenced topics as a tool in the symbolic and discursive fight for independence from the communist regime and communist interpretations of the past and present. Among the three hottest themes with a subversive potential undermining the legitimacy of the communist government in Poland were: Katyń, Siberian deportations and Jewish affairs. Here we can see some material for another chapter of Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* — different victimhood narratives coming into being at the same time and in fact supporting one another.²⁰ Increasingly towards the political turnaround of 1989 as well as immediately afterwards, , previously frozen topics quickly began to thaw out. In this respect the 1987 text by the intellectual Jan Błoński appeared to be a breakthrough in the way Poles perceived the Holocaust. The famous essay *Poor Poles looking at the ghetto* questioned the Polish self-image of innocent witnesses to the Holocaust.²¹

In the next stage, after 1989, Poland and Eastern Europe in general regained 'mnemonical autonomy'. This meant also that from a system with one official version of the past the societies of the region have stumbled over a reality in which multiple visions of the past could be freely expressed but which now have started to compete for (limited) media attention. For the memory of the Holocaust, the early 1990s were a good moment, which coincided with the general international and so much belated interest in this past. *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg came to be seen as a symbol for this interest in the USA; in Poland many important films were shot at the same time as well (*Europa Europa* by Agnieszka Holland, *Korczak* by Andrzej Wajda, *Birthplace* by Paweł Łoziński).

The democratisation of memory gave rise to many alternative fora, where memory was performed in independent ways. In media and academia the most important moment came with the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross' *Neighbours* — disclosing the shocking details about the pogrom of Jews in Jedwabne, carried out by their Catholic neighbours. It was the defining moment in the arduous process of the Polish nation coming to terms with the past. In the Jedwabne debate, and debates that followed and included discussion on, among others, the Kielce Pogrom, many Poles were caught in the conflict between the national paradigm of innocent suffering and the dark pages of their attitude towards their fellow-citizens.

²⁰ M. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford 2009.

²¹ J. Błoński, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto", *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2, 1987, pp. 17–23; Such texts were not completely new to Poles, see: J.J. Lipski, "Dwie ojczyzny, dwa patriotyzmy", *Kultura* 10, 1981, no. 409, pp. 3–29.

At present, the process of dealing with the dark past continues mostly in academia and some media. A number of chairs at universities and institutes of science are devoted to the study of the Holocaust. There are also many NGOs, foundations and other stakeholders engaged in that memory work. At schools however, the history of the Holocaust is taught according to the preference of the teacher and these preferences may vary a great deal. At the same time, the current public discourse in Poland increasingly encourages society to rationalise or justify past Polish attitudes towards the Jews (and other minorities) during the war. It is being done in the framework of a politically proclaimed shift from ‘the pedagogics of shame’ to ‘the pedagogics of pride’.

What belongs to the least contested (by broader public) commemorations of the Jews in Poland are events promoting Jewish culture and Jewish life in the past. They took form of festivals mostly, but also some local initiatives tackling the presence of the material vestiges of Jewish culture. In the past two decades many of the historic Jewish sites have undergone revitalisation, with Krakow’s Kazimierz district or White Stork Synagogue in Wrocław as the most remarkable examples. Parts of other spaces underwent ‘re-Jewisation’, as in the case of the POLIN Museum of History of Polish Jews, situated in the old Jewish district of Muranów in Warsaw. A pinch of salt to these types of endeavours has been added by the American scholar, Michael Meng who recognised in this phenomenon — which he called ‘redemptive cosmopolitanism’ — a performative embrace of the Jewish past that celebrates the liberal, democratic nation-state rather than thinking critically about its past and present failures.²² Joanna Michlic would call the same thing ‘pamiętanie dla korzyści’ — ‘remembering for benefits’:²³ featuring Poles who wish to see themselves and present themselves as multicultural and tolerant, which obscures the darker strata that rest beneath Jewish folklore, cuisine and architecture.²⁴

In the Western part of Europe the road towards the proper recognition of Jewish suffering was also surprisingly long and arduous. There too, forgetting and avoidance dominated the first postwar decades. It had to do, among other reasons, with the beginnings of the Cold War and the necessity to consolidate forces against the Communist enemy rather settling accounts with Germany. Those priorities meant that the victims of the Holocaust had to deal with their trauma mostly on their own. In a nutshell, there were four main stages which the

²² M. Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*, Cambridge 2011.

²³ J. Michlic, “‘The many faces of memories’: How do Jews and the Holocaust matter in post-communist Poland?”, [in:] *Lessons and Legacies*, vol. 11. *Expanding Perspectives on the Holocaust in a Changing World*, eds. H. Earl, K.A. Schleunes, Illinois 2014, p. 146.

²⁴ M. Waligórska, “In the cellars and attics of memory. Mapping Jewish and Non-Jewish spaces in contemporary Poland”, [in:] *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context*, eds. A. Gromova, F. Heinert, S. Voigt, Berlin 2015, pp. 243–258.

Holocaust culture of remembrance underwent in the postwar period in the West: 1) 1945–1949 *confrontation* — immediate, short-lived and followed by silence, 2) 1950s *interpretation* — with the first feeble attempts to understand what happened, 3) 1960s–1990s *justice* — with national trials, the first thorough documentation projects, 4) 1990s onwards — *remembrance*. Importantly, the country which finally excelled most in the remembrance process which began in the 1990s, was Germany.

Achieving the current high status in the process of coming to terms with the past was not an internal German thing, however. It had a lot to do with external influences and was in line with significant international changes. Among them was the post-1989 feeling that after the collapse of the communist dictatorships, history had to be rewritten in the spirit of shared values within Europe which was hitherto divided. Soon after, the mass killings of civilians in ex-Yugoslavia shocked Europeans and led them to critically debate the past of their continent. This contributed to the Europeanisation of the memory of the Holocaust, both as history and as a moral guidepost. Moreover, values such as diversity, tolerance and respect for human dignity were becoming ever more central as the global process of de-colonisation was coming to its end. The past was finally used as a warning. The references to the Holocaust received new cultural and juridical understanding: the Holocaust was now a EU ‘negative founding act’ as famously stated by Dan Diner.²⁵ Dealing with this past became one of the ‘soft EU accession criteria’ and the memory of the Holocaust was transcending still new borders (the Stockholm Declaration signed by 40 governments in 2000, the Washington Holocaust Memorial, etc.).²⁶

Germany, as mentioned earlier, became the leader in coming to terms with this past. It is noticeable that the majority of the memorials in Berlin have only emerged over the last 25 years. The way in which Germans discuss and confront their history has received a separate term: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which literally translates as ‘coping with the past’. It became a model for many other cultures of remembrance and embraces several realms in public life. One of them is a certain consensus in political life — political correctness towards the topic of the German crimes and responsibility for the Holocaust. The German media are still periodically dominated by debates over the proper portrayal of the Holocaust. Politicians can be damaged by ill-considered remarks about the Nazi era. But the topic may occasionally step away from the political arena down to the everyday lives of Germans. Many of them would chose for example Daniel Goldhagen’s

²⁵ D. Diner, “Restitution and memory: The Holocaust in European political cultures”, *New German Critique* 90, 2003, pp. 36–44; *Cultural Transformations after Communism: Central and Eastern Europe in Focus*, eds. B. Törnquist-Plewa, K. Stala, Lund 2011.

²⁶ *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, eds. D. Levy, N. Sznaider, Philadelphia 2006.

Hitler's Willing Executioners as their tourist reading 'while sunning themselves in Majorca'.²⁷

The second way in which the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* takes shape are public commemoration initiatives: various memorials and remembrance days. The third realm is education — the treatment of the Nazi period in all its aspects is part of the compulsory curriculum in all German schools and at all levels of education. This does not mean that the Federal Republic is done with settling accounts with its Nazi past. In the words by Jürgen Habermas, who is still the intellectual father figure in Germany (despite the current re-growth of nationalism in this — as well as in other parts of Europe) — in order for the descendants of the murdered Jews to be able to breathe in a present-day Germany, Germans are obliged to remember, continuously and without distortions.²⁸ This memory policy is confronted of course with a number of challenges. Among them — there is a risk of developing the so-called 'memory fatigue' with too much memory, or 'banal memory', which may leave its recipients indifferent. Other possible dangers include the evasive language of the public debate, where the references to the 'Nazi dictatorship' replaced the references to 'the Germans', the society which should try to account for the past. Moreover, the postwar successes of Germany — economic and political — the fall of the Berlin Wall and peaceful reunification may be more appealing to the young than dealing with the dark past. There is also growing (and recently used as a political instrument) problem of the so-called *Schlussstrich*, German for: drawing a final line, making a clear break, i.e., the conviction opposite to Habermas' belief — that the time has come to stop atoning for the past. Finally, the changes in the social landscape of Germany with a growing number of citizens with a 'migrant background' pose the question about the centrality of the topic of the Holocaust in German education. For the moment however, the Holocaust is broadly employed as a tool teaching civic rights in Germany. A critical approach towards one's own past has been adopted also by other states (very presently in Scandinavia) and institutions, including those of the European Union.

As indicated earlier, the position granted to the memory of the Holocaust within the European Union became an unexpected hurdle contributing to the divisions inside the community after 2004–2006. Differing past experiences and later developments of memory cultures in the East and West of Europe called for a very nuanced handling of the memory policy in Brussels.²⁹ The first attempts from European institutions to create some common ground for memory development

²⁷ T. Berger, "The power of memory and memories of power: The cultural parameters of German foreign policy-making since 1945", [in:] *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. J.W. Mueller, New York 2002, p. 94.

²⁸ J. Habermas, "Historical consciousness and post-traditional identity", [in:] *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*, ed. J. Habermas, Cambridge 1994, p. 233.

²⁹ A. Littoz Monnet, "The EU politics of remembrance: Can Europeans remember together?", *West European Politics* 35, 2011, no. 5, pp. 1182–1202.

failed to overcome the national and regional differences in Europe. The results of these attempts were twofold. On the one hand, there is a large number of East Europeans who approve of the ‘Western’ vision of the Second World War as seen mostly through the prism of the Holocaust.³⁰ On the other hand, the ‘asymmetry of memory’ felt in Eastern Europe led some milieus to the crystallisation of confrontational attitudes and to the backlash against what is seen as the EU-ropean narrative. The growing distance of some East European actors towards the past as understood in Brussels began to affect other apparently non-historical EU affairs, such as the so-called refugee crisis.

New faces of crises

Diverse East and West European responses to the ‘refugee crises’ may be seen also partly as the after effect of the memory split within the European Union. This argument will be developed in the conclusions to this text. At the same time, those different responses have shown that the memory conflict had already reached its climax and was now surpassed by the affairs of a more immediate character. A careful observer may already try to put that memory conflict in a short but viable historical perspective. It would be hard not to notice that the EU institutions have not been the main arena for the East European commemoration initiatives in recent times. The memory competition within the European institutions subsided around 2015. We may also speak about some signs of rapprochement between Eastern and Western memory agents. Hence the question, if memory consensus within Europe has been reached and the Stalinist crimes established as a legitimate part of the EU-ropean memory.

Among the signs of rapprochement are instances of de-nationalisation in Eastern European memory of the Holocaust, the Gulag and in general the Second World War. In Budapest “The March of Life” commemorating ‘non-Hungarian’ victimhood — the Holocaust has been rising in popularity with every year. The organisers of “The Siberian March” in Białystok have been inviting representatives of other nationalities as well. In Gdańsk the newly-opened exhibition in the Museum of the Second World War has been accused by the Polish conservative government of presenting precisely not enough of a national perspective. From the ‘Western side’, on the other hand, the European Commission’s remembrance programmes and the Fundamental Rights Agency have been steadily preparing the ground for the accommodation of a wider spectrum of memory issues into the European agenda since at least 2006. These issues would go beyond the competitive

³⁰ The lines of division between memory actors in Europe are not and never were fully determined by geography. The example of European politicians from the Baltic States, both born in Siberia and concerned with the topic of European memory, Kalniete and Andriukaitis shows that the line of division separates not only East from West, but also goes through the regions themselves.

duet and include other important landmarks in a problematic European history, such as colonialism (France, Belgium etc.) or civil wars (Spain, Greece). So again, does it mean that the memory consensus within Europe is soon to be reached? Certainly, it means that the initial cultural shock from encountering 'the other' and valid for both (Eastern and Western) partners is over, the memory sensitivities and divergences in this respect are not such an eyebrow-raising novelty or controversy anymore.

But the fact that East European memory agents are now less active in Brussels does not mean that their goals have been reached. Rather their battlefield has moved elsewhere. Many of the Eastern advocates of the perspective of national suffering happen to belong to the conservative and eurosceptic wave within Eastern Europe's political spectre.³¹ Putting anyway the EU in its current form into question, they may have lost part of their interest in achieving recognition for their issues in Brussels. They are still very active, but the geographical focus of their commemorative activities was redirected almost solely to their home region. Therefore the hypothesis of a turn or better a re-turn to national public spheres. Some institutions still try to win some regional dimension for their activities, such as the Prague-based Platform of European Memory and Conscience. However, most East European memory agents have retreated to their public spheres at home.

Perhaps European recognition is not such a stake to fight for anymore. And if so, then why not? Around 2010 history was one of the few bones of contention between the East and West of the European community. Five years later with the acute problems caused above all by the so-called refugee crisis, the divisions were expressed on other — seemingly beyond historical — fields. So the debate about history was overshadowed by other conflicts that emerged in Europe. But even in these new conflicts arguments taken from history play a role and refer again to the claim about 'Western hegemony'. According to some influential discourses in the region, European welcoming policy towards refugees is the result of the colonial past of the Western part of the continent on the one hand, and of the German dominant position in the EU, on the other. German reactions to the 'refugee crisis' are supposed to be indirectly determined by the Holocaust — the moral guilt that obliges Germans to host the refugees in need. As understood by the conservatives in some East European states, driven by their own difficult past, Germans try now to oblige others to the same moral amends. They were to succeed in doing so already previously by 'rewriting history of the Holocaust' and by Europeanising their own guilt, sharing it, among others with East Europeans. The welcoming policy towards refugees is a strong argument for loosening EU ties in some states of the region. The policy of solidarity with Syrian refugees goes against traditional East European understanding of the relationship between the new and old member states. Along those lines, old members states were supposed to make up for the

³¹ But more, e.g., in Poland or Hungary than in the Baltic States, where the proponents of the Gulag memory on the EU level (e.g., Sandra Kalniete) do not demonstrate a Eurosceptic strand.

postwar ‘treatment’ of Eastern Europe, after having left this region to the caprices of Stalin and its Gulag. It was not the new member states who were supposed to pay for the past mistakes of the old Europe, be it Nazism or colonialism.

Conclusion

The article sketched out the uneven development of the Holocaust and Gulag memory cultures in Europe and ensuing memory conflicts within the continent. The concluding remarks place the last conflict over ‘the asymmetry of memory’ in the historical perspective. They are based on the hypothesis that this EU-ropean memory conflict in its original phase, centred around Brussels, had already achieved its climax. Nowadays the problems of history and memory are administered again mostly within the regional and, even more, national public spheres. This may be connected to the general turn to national audiences and growing eurosceptic sentiment in the present-day European community of nations. As the main point of European dispute, new — seemingly beyond historical — topics have emerged. Among them — the cultural problem sparked by the mass influx of immigrants to Europe.

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THE EBBS AND FLOWS OF THE HOLOCAUST AND THE GULAG
MEMORY IN EU-ROPE. MEMORY DYNAMICS IN THE NATIONAL
AND TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS

Summary

In spring 2017 the long-awaited House of European History in Brussels was opened. Its exhibition tries to tackle not only the tumultuous history of 20th-century Europe, but also the diverse cultures of memory that surround this topic. The article touches upon the problem of co-existence and mutual relationship of the two important, if not the most crucial, topics on the European mnemonic map: that of the Holocaust and that of the Gulag. The uneven and changeable development of these memory cultures has been presented in the historical perspective and analysed through the way they have functioned at the national (with Poland and Germany as examples) and transnational (EU) levels.

The concluding statement encapsulates the thesis that the EU-ropean memory conflict in its original phase, centred around Brussels, achieved its climax some years ago. Nowadays the problems of history and memory are administered mostly within the regional and, even more, national public spheres. As the focal point of European dispute, on the other hand, new — seemingly beyond historical — topics emerged. Among them is the cultural problem sparked by the mass influx of immigrants to Europe.

Keywords: Memory, Holocaust, Gulag, EU, refugee crisis.

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