

The European Union and Memory

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Introduction

This chapter engages with the under-explored knots of European memory politics both theoretically and empirically, linking theories of European Union (EU) integration with the study of collective memory at transnational, EU level. Collective memory¹ is a deeply political phenomenon: it is politically embedded, reflecting political visions, and enacting social and political worlds. Traditionally studied in Sociology and History, Nationalism and Cultural Studies, the politics of manifold memory practices has more recently emerged as an object of academic interest for International Relations (IR), International Law, Peace and Conflict Studies, Political Theory, Comparative Politics and the transdisciplinary field of Memory Studies proper. However, only recently has the study of collective memory overcome the boundaries of methodological nationalism² to question and analyse the impact the EU has had on nation-state memories, and vice versa.³

The past is central to the ‘imagining of community’.⁴ How people experience the past is intrinsic to their perception of the present⁵ and their awareness of continuity with the past.⁶ The scholars of nationalism

¹ See M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, Félix Alcan, 1925).

² C. De Cesari and A. Rigney (eds.), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2014); A. Wimmer and N. Glick Schiller, ‘Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences,’ *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301–34.

³ A. Milošević and T. Trošt (eds.), *Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans* (New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, Verso, 1983).

⁵ P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992); B. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2003).

emphasise this quite strongly: shared territory, language, common experiences, memories and myths are unifying elements of nation-building.⁷ The very coming into existence of the nation-state, at the turn of the twentieth century, 'depended on a process by which existing societies used representations to turn themselves into new wholes that would act immediately upon people's feelings, and upon which they could base their identities – in short, to make them into groups that individuals could identify with'.⁸ Yet, if the nation-state is a 'natural' outlet for production and consumption of memory, what role did the past play in defining and narrating European unification?

Over time, the role assigned to the past in constructing the European project has changed dramatically: from a struggle to reconcile, to the making of consensus over the past (as a precondition for a future in togetherness), to transnational memory wars to defend national monopoly over interpretation of the past. The genesis of EU memory politics since its earliest days, how memory becomes a political question, who mobilises it and what effects Europeanisation of memory has, are the central queries underpinning this chapter. The EU has been relying on the existence of shared memories and identities as one of the key elements for fostering legitimacy. Similarly to the nation-building projects, at the EU level there were a number of policy attempts to craft and define what a European identity is and what it should entail. Yet, imagining Europe as a community of shared memory posed and continues to pose a significant challenge both for scientists and for policy-makers. In this chapter, I take a closer look at the key premises around which the EU politics of memory was built over time and the roads which were (not) taken.

Tracing the evolution of the use of the past across time, the chapter suggests that *EU memory politics* emerged gradually as a by-product of political attempts at hitting moving targets: from building self-legitimacy and European identity, to supporting restorative justice efforts. First, the chapter examines the emergence of the unification project, arguing that the past of the Second World War was imbued with transformative values. Thus, post-war Europe was constructed in antagonistic relationship with itself: the past and its violent ways were rejected, opening paths to a different future. Secondly, the gradual development of the Union and its own competences

7 A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986).

8 D. Levy and N. Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory,' *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 87–106, 90.

The European Union and Memory

meant that its institutions grew powers diversifying their own roles and agendas. It is in this period of acute enthusiasm for an ever growing, deepening and widening Union after the Cold War that we can trace the first cross-institutional coordinated efforts at EU identity policy building. Facing the constant challenge of self-legitimacy and the primacy of the national over the European, significant efforts were invested in fostering a shared feeling of belonging to Europe. Thirdly, the chapter examines how the EU enlargement in the 2000s reactivated disagreements on the past by challenging and ultimately refuting the notion of EU identity defined on historical grounds. Before providing a conclusion, the chapter reflects upon amnesiac aspects of the historical narrative of Europe's past suggesting that EU memory politics, *a sine qua non* of the EU's future, is selective and deeply politicised.

A Future without a Past

Instead of the past, the future was the dominant time-category for the pioneers of the European Community (EC).⁹ That future was based on consensus about the past Europeans had left behind. The foundational myth of the Community draws precisely on the consensus on rebuilding Europe from the ashes of the Second World War, best illustrated in the promise of 'never again'. Envisioning a future in which Germany regained trust, reconciliation became the main knot and strength of the European project – 'a victory of [that] time over history'¹⁰ and its own '*mythe originaire*'.¹¹ Former enemies, now partners, would use the Community as a new learning platform to bridge their differences and overcome the past by tying their economies together, making 'war not only unthinkable but materially impossible'.¹² This was the future that the founding fathers such as Jean Monnet and Konrad Adenauer pleaded for: a future without the burdens of the past – a future in which reconciliation and solidarity, mutual trust and respect would prevent future cultures of violence.

9 O. Calligaro, 'Legitimation through Remembrance? The Changing Regimes of Historicity of European Integration,' *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 3 (2015): 1–14.

10 H. C. Deutsch, 'The Impact of the Franco-German Entente,' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 348, no. 1 (1963): 82–94.

11 C. Guisan, *A Political Theory of Identity in European Integration: Memory and Policies* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2011).

12 'Schuman Declaration May 1950', https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en.

Just like the pioneers of the European project, the pioneers of scholarly research in post-war IR focused on the future of Europe, including the evolution of European identity. European integration theorists such as Ernst W. Haas¹³ and Karl W. Deutsch,¹⁴ despite articulating different theories in the 1960s, concurred that Europe's would-be polity was compatible with the reconsolidation of the nation-state after the horrors of the Second World War. While the argumentative lines between the neo-functionalist and communication theories of European integration were clearly drawn, neither view offered a well-developed perspective on the role of the past in building European identity and memory.¹⁵ The question of what a European identity is and how it could be supportive of the Community's legitimacy building became salient only in the 1970s political discourse and in response to key challenges of that time: the economic crisis and the future of European integration. Following an Arab–Israeli war in October 1973, Middle East oil-producing nations imposed big price increases and restricted sales to certain European countries, which created economic problems throughout the Community.¹⁶

The initial success of political and economic integration needed to be reinforced with public support. At the Copenhagen European Summit in 1973, the heads of state and government of the nine member states affirmed their determination to introduce the concept of European identity into their common foreign relations. They affirmed that the Nine 'might have been pushed towards disunity by their history and by selfishly defending misjudged interests. But they have overcome their past enmities and have decided that unity is a basic European necessity to ensure the survival of the civilization which they have in common.'¹⁷ The main assumption of early research on European identity revolved around the question of a possible

13 E. B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1958); E. B. Haas, 'International Integration: The European and the Universal Process,' *International Organization* 15, no. 3 (1961): 366–92.

14 K. W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, MA, Technology Press, 1953); K. W. Deutsch, *France, Germany, and the Western Alliance: A Study of Elite Attitudes on European Integration and World Politics* (New York, NY, Scribner, 1967).

15 See, for example, J. T. Checkel and P. J. Katzenstein, *European Identity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

16 For a detailed analysis of the multifarious crises of the 1970s and their impact on the process of European integration, see, for example, S. M. Ramírez Pérez, 'Crises and Transformations of European Integration: European Business Circles during the Long 1970s', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 26, no. 4 (2019): 618–35.

17 'Declaration on European Identity', *Bulletin of the European Communities* no. 12 (1973): 118–22.

The European Union and Memory

shifting of loyalties from the national to the supranational level, with particular attention accorded to the European political elites said to be the engines of transnationalism.¹⁸ It is precisely in this period that we start to observe the diversification of EU actors and their divergent power roles in supporting a common agenda on EU identity, most notably in the case of the European Parliament (EP).

While the formal powers of the EP before the first direct elections (in 1979) were marginal,¹⁹ the elected members of the EP (MEPs) became crucial activists for deeper political as well as institutional integration. Predominantly driven by pro-integrationist ideas of an 'ever closer union' – and of an ever-stronger EP, MEPs' convictions are clearly visible in their behaviour, which reflected their self-perception of being European rather than national delegates of a consultative assembly.²⁰ Their level of activity and involvement in Community policy-making significantly surpassed, at that time, quite narrow EP-related treaty provisions²¹ to enlarge its powers. The success of this parliamentary quest for more powers is often analysed as a budgetary fight as well as the result of the parliamentary bargain on the budget of key European policies such as the common agricultural policies and regional policies. Importantly, the legitimacy of the EP and the EC was also used to call for action in the framing of new narratives of Europe.

This early period of the EP is characterised by the proactive role taken by the MEPs and their visions of a united Europe. This was possible partially due to more direct forms of citizens' participation (elections), but also due to the opening towards new members. What narratives and underlying ideas drove the EP's activism? MEPs sought to involve young people in the project of ever closer integration, notably through attempts at creating a collective memory of the Communities as guarantor of peace and

18 Deutsch, *France, Germany, and the Western Alliance*; Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*; Haas, 'International Integration'; J. Caporaso, 'Fisher's Test of Deutsch's Sociocausal Paradigm of Political Integration: A Research Note,' *International Organization* 25, no. 1 (1971): 120–31.

19 R. Corbett, *The European Parliament's Role in Closer EU Integration* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); R. Corbett, *The European Parliament*, 8th ed. (London, John Harper, 2011).

20 A. Milošević and P. Perchoc, 'Le Parlement européen et la politique de la mémoire: Explorer la constellation des acteurs,' *Politique européenne* 71, no. 1 (2021): 6–27, 17–18.

21 A. Cohen, 'L'autonomisation du "Parlement européen": Interdépendance et différenciation des assemblées parlementaires supranationales (années 1950–années 1970),' *Cultures & Conflits*, no. 85–86 (2012): 13–33.

prosperity, and as a space of shared cultural heritage supposedly connecting – even if subconsciously – all citizens of the member states. This was particularly visible in the area of youth policy. Noticing a lack of public support for and identification with the Community project, MEPs invested considerable time and effort in creating a youth policy, hoping to forge pro-European generations willing to become actively involved in the pursuit of closer integration.²² A major part of this endeavour was the creation of a collective memory of Europeanness: they invoked a common cultural heritage and built their appeals for young people's engagement in and identification with Europe on the member states' more recent collective memories of war, followed by a peace guaranteed by the Communities.²³

For the promoters of a more politically integrated Community, it was necessary to find new *raison d'être* for European integration, beyond economic growth. To this end, an increasing weight has been attributed to memory through heritage – a sign of the emergence of a new regime of historicity: presentism. In this regime, the official discourses and initiatives attempted to (re-)enact a common European past in the citizens' present. One such example is *European cultural policy*²⁴ that centred around heritage substantiating the efforts at enacting EU identity. The concept of *European cultural heritage* introduced in a resolution of the EP in 1974 was largely inspired by the Council of Europe's (CoE's) approach, strongly connecting heritage with values. European cultural heritage is a pivotal concept of the CoE's Cultural Convention (1954). The resolution addresses tangible and intangible aspects of heritage referring both to 'objects of European cultural value' and to 'language or languages, history and civilisation' of the different European nations that are part of the Convention.²⁵ As Calligaro²⁶ explains, in the 1970s, the EU integration process had lost its momentum. The economic crisis of the 1970s and the internal impact of the first enlargement of

22 M. Roos, 'The European Parliament's Youth Policy, 1952–1979: An Attempt to Create a Collective Memory of an Integrated Europe,' *Politique européenne* 71, no. 1 (2021): 28–53.

23 Milošević and Perchoc, 'Le Parlement européen'.

24 For an analysis of the European policy on culture and an instrumental use of culture in the pursuit of broader objectives of economic development, intended to encourage social, or even democratic, development, see, for example, O. Calligaro and A. Vlassis, 'La politique européenne de la culture: Entre paradigme économique et rhétorique de l'exception', *Politique européenne* 56, no. 2 (2017): 8–28.

25 CoE, 'European Cultural Convention, December 1954', <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/018.htm>.

26 O. Calligaro, 'From "European Cultural Heritage" to "Cultural Diversity"? The Changing Core Values of European Cultural Policy', *Politique Européenne* 45, no. 3 (2014): 60–85.

The European Union and Memory

the EC ‘undermined this non-democratically rooted legitimacy and significantly decreased public support for European integration’.²⁷

In the 1970s, the EU expanded from the original six to nine countries, and in the 1980s it expanded from nine to twelve countries. In the latter enlargement the Community went Mediterranean, including Spain, Portugal and Greece – countries that had recently exited dictatorships. Spain’s accession, for instance, was dictated by a domestic demand to consolidate democracy and the rule of law, as well as economic interests: the necessity of modernisation and the attraction of foreign investments.²⁸ The position of the Community in relation to the membership of Spain was based exclusively on political reasons, namely the need for democratic reforms. The issues of past divisions in Spain, related to Franco’s regime, were not a topic in the negotiations. Dealing with the past, transitional justice or truth-telling were, at best, regarded as national matters, and not treated as issues that concerned the whole of Europe. A source of commonalities, among old and newly welcomed members of the first enlargements, was their willingness to invest efforts in the future rather than in tackling issues of past divisions.

Only in 1986 did the European Commission, the Council and the EP issue a joint declaration on antisemitism, racism and xenophobia²⁹ that marked the turn in the EU’s attitudes towards the past. Reactive rather than proactive, the birth of a joint approach towards the past as an educational tool and a negative template came amidst the trial of former Nazi Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie, ‘the butcher of Lyon’. Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the Front National and an MEP, gave a shocking interview saying: ‘I don’t say that the gas chambers did not exist. I was not able to see them myself. But I believe this is a mere detail in the history of the Second World War.’³⁰ Le Pen was heavily criticised by his EP peers, who instantly adopted a declaration to condemn him.³¹ Many of them, like Simone Veil – the first president of the directly elected EP, had suffered in and survived concentration camps, or had fought on the frontlines in the Second World War. They were outraged

27 Ibid., 65. See also D. H. Handley, ‘Public Opinion and European Integration: The Crisis of the 1970s,’ *European Journal of Political Research* 9, no. 4 (1981): 335–64.

28 S. Royo and P. C. Manuel, ‘Some Lessons from the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Accession of Portugal and Spain to the European Union,’ *South European Society and Politics* 8, no. 1–2 (2003): 1–30.

29 ‘Declaration against Racism and Xenophobia’ (1986), pp. 1–3, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A41986X0625>.

30 As cited in K. S. Stern, *Holocaust Denial* (New York, NY, The American Jewish Committee, 2013), 34.

31 EP, ‘Written Declaration on the Holocaust, the European Parliament and Le Pen’ (1987), <https://op.europa.eu/s/vKEU>.

by his words, but also aware that the horrors from the past will continue to haunt Europe unless political leaders, in a united front, condemn and discourage statements like these. As one of the first instances of Holocaust denialism within the EU's own institutions, this example shows the reactivity of the EP via soft laws and its determination 'that the lessons of the Holocaust should never be forgotten'.

Yet the recognition that the negative dimensions of European history are an integral part of European heritage was triggered only at the end of the Cold War when debates about the past became a salient issue. Until the collapse of communism across central and eastern Europe, the EU's joint approach towards remembering the past had been manifested through commemorating occasional anniversaries such as the end of the Second World War. In the 1990s, however, the EP took over institutional leadership in the role of fulfilling 'the duty of memory'³² and intensified the use of soft laws – resolutions – in dealing with historical matters. Two major resolutions were adopted to include the negative heritage in the EU's identity: in 1993 the former Nazi concentration camps were designated European Historical Monuments and in 1995 the European Holocaust Remembrance Day was adopted.³³ The extension of European heritage began being reflected also in EU cultural programmes, guided by the European Commission, which since then has funded projects dealing with European wars and authoritarian regimes.³⁴

As we can observe, between the 1950s and the 1990s, the role assigned to the past shifted multiple times, serving a wide variety of political purposes. Across multiple self-narrations, the past has served the EU as a 'negative template', a rationale for deeper and wider integration, and as an instrument to support general objectives such as legitimacy building. To this end, answering the question of what binds Europeans together and what kind of future the EU ought to have has been translated into addressing specific objectives: fostering citizens' ownership over the European project by promoting the notion of European identity based on cultural and historical heritage.

32 See O. Laliou, 'The Invention of the "Duty of Memory"', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 1, no. 69 (2001): 83–94.

33 See A. Wæhrens, 'Shared Memories? Politics of Memory and Holocaust Remembrance in the European Parliament after 1989–2009' (2011), DIIS working paper, http://subweb.diiis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2011/WP-2011-06_Anne-W%E6hrens_Shared%20memories_web.pdf.

34 O. Calligaro and F. Foret, 'La mémoire européenne en action. Acteurs, enjeux et modalités de la mobilisation du passé comme ressource politique pour l'Union européenne,' *Politique Européenne* 37, no. 2 (2012): 18–43.

The European Union and Memory

Consensus-Making on the Past: Blurry Lines
of History

Attempts at adding a transnational layer to existing national identities have been made by European political elites ever since the beginning of European integration. Yet, the single market (1993), completed with the ‘four freedoms’ – the free movement of goods, services, people and capital – radically transformed the Community – in particular with the ‘Maastricht’ Treaty (1993) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999). These developments induced the writing of a vibrant literature, particularly by historical institutionalists, who introduced a time dimension to theorising EU identity. Most of the early works, however, were more normative than empirical in orientation, drawing from several different theories, such as, for example, the social theory of Habermas, postulating an EU identity that is post-national and non-malignant.³⁵ Another group of scholars sketched the EU identity as a civilian and normative power.³⁶ What these various arguments on the nature of the EU identity have in common is not only the discrepancy between the normative ideal and empirical reality, but also the superficial consideration of the complexity of historical experiences and collective memories at EU level.

A case that supports the view of two realities – Europeanness as pursued by the EU and on-the-ground accepted forms of Europeanness – is the history of the EU’s symbols themselves. As Bieber and Bieber point out, it is ‘an illustration of the gap between their de facto acceptance over time based on their gradual introduction and the rejection of their formal and symbolic recognition, embodied by the failure of the 2005 ‘Constitution for Europe’.³⁷ The referendum was taking place a year after the ‘big bang’ enlargement when ten new members joined the EU. In the Maastricht Treaty an attempt was made to consolidate the formal symbols of the EU: the flag, the anthem, the motto, the currency and the EU Day. Except for the motto ‘united in diversity’, this provision did not contain anything novel or particularly formidable. The EP had already in 1983 adopted a flag for the European

35 See S. Susen, ‘Jürgen Habermas’, in P. Kivisto (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Social Theory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 369–94.

36 See I. Manners, ‘Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235–58; I. Manners, ‘Symbolism in European Integration’, *Comparative European Politics* 9, no. 3 (2011): 243–68.

37 F. Bieber and R. Bieber, *Negotiating Unity and Diversity in the European Union* (Berlin, Springer Nature, 2020), p. 137.

Community,³⁸ and the European Council was supportive of taking further steps at creating a visual identity of the EU. As confirmed by the heads of state and government in 1984, they strongly endorsed the need for a distinct EU symbolism – by ‘adopting measures to strengthen and promote its identity and its image both for its citizens and for the rest of the world’.³⁹ The 2005 referenda showed that some member states did not, however, wish to constitutionally ‘upgrade’ the status of the EU symbols.

Ultimately, the rejection of the European Constitution suggested the primacy of national self over European self. In retrospect, we could safely argue that the enthusiasm of the unification of Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the lifting of the Iron Curtain was met with underestimation of the importance that national self-affirmation on the international stage had for the eastern members. Importantly, such rejection signalled a challenge to the historical grounding used for further integration as it demonstrated the lack of understanding by European bureaucrats of the historical complexity and divisiveness of Europe’s past.⁴⁰ The formerly communist countries from the Baltics to the Balkans sought to reaffirm their own national identities and histories. The interrupted continuity of the nation-state, due to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in the post-war period, was perceived as one of the most important consequences, the other one being the high human loss due to gross violation of human rights. New members, returnees to Europe, brought their own interpretation of European history that suited their needs to come to terms with their respective communist pasts.⁴¹

The broad scholarly consensus is that before the EU’s enlargement to the east, western Europe had little doubt about the nature of the past which had been left behind. Mass atrocities, gas chambers and the horrors of Nazi concentration camps became symbols of the Holocaust. However, after the Cold War, as Neumayer demonstrates,⁴² a new constellation of

38 EP, ‘Report Drawn Up on Behalf of the Political Affairs Committee on the Adoption of a Flag for the European Community’ (1983), <https://aei.pitt.edu/90617/1/1982-83.83.1194.pdf>.

39 ‘European Council Fontainebleau, 25 and 26 June 1984, Conclusions’, *Bulletin of the European Communities*, suppl. 7 (1985), p. 5

40 M. Pakier and B. Stråth, *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York, NY, Berghahn, 2010).

41 M. J. Prutsch, ‘Research for CULT Committee – European Identity’ (2017), [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/585921/IPOL_STU\(2017\)585921_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/585921/IPOL_STU(2017)585921_EN.pdf).

42 L. Neumayer, ‘Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: the Mobilizations around the “Crimes of Communism” in the European Parliament’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 3 (2015): 344–63; L. Neumayer, *The Criminalisation of Communism in the European Political Space after the Cold War* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2018).

The European Union and Memory

actors challenged the prevailing western European narrative constructed on the uniqueness of the Holocaust as 'the epitome of evil'.⁴³ The memory of Europe's past became an object of politicisation paving the path to intense policy-making at both national and EU level. To achieve pacification of tensions and reconciliation, the EU resorted to policy-building to find the lowest common denominator on historical experiences that bind Europeans together.

While the traditional Europeanisation theory has been applied practically on all levels of policy, from environmental to refugee issues, research has been hesitant to engage with the question of whether Europeanisation affects memory politics. Scholars of the past have situated Europeanisation of memory between transnationalisation and 'cosmopolitisation' of domestic discourses and remembrance practices.⁴⁴ Yet, an increasing number of studies explore and demonstrate the multitude of ways in which Europeanisation of memory is manifested, who its key actors are and what its effects are.⁴⁵

The literature makes clear the causal relationship between the EU's enlargement policy and memory politics.⁴⁶ The ambitions of the Union for deepening and widening triggered the politicisation of memory, especially in the EP – which became the main 'memory entrepreneur'.⁴⁷ The process of Europeanisation of discourses on the past and their political use in the EP is carried out by a number of actors such as individual and like-minded MEPs, formal and informal political networks, committees and political parties.⁴⁸ For instance, the first informal group of MEPs that sought to find the lowest

43 See M. Kucia, 'The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe', *East European Politics and Societies* 30, no. 1 (2016): 97–119 for an in-depth analysis of the impact of transnationalisation of discourses on the Holocaust in eastern Europe.

44 Levy and Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound'; A. Assmann, 'Transnational Memories', *European Review* 22, no. 4 (2014): 546–56; M. Mälksoo, 'The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe', *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 653–80; S. Gensburger and M.-C. Lavabre, 'D'une "mémoire" européenne à l'europeanisation de la "mémoire"', *Politique européenne* 37, no. 2 (2012): 9–17; A. Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2014); P. J. Verovšek, 'Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 531–50.

45 Kucia, 'The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory'; B. Törnquist-Plewa and K. Kowalski, *The Europeanization of Heritage and Memories in Poland and Sweden* (Kraków, Jagiellonian University Press, 2016); C. De Cesari and A. Kaya, *European Memory in Populism: Representations of Self and Other* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2020); Milošević and Trošt (eds.), *Europeanisation and Memory Politics*.

46 Milošević and Trošt (eds.), *Europeanisation and Memory Politics*, p. 13.

47 E. Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minnesota, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

48 Milošević and Perchoc, 'Le Parlement européen'.

common denominators of the past was 'Reconciliation of European Histories' (REH) – composed of members from both old and new member states. This group gave the initial impulse for policy-building on what have become key political answers to divergent views of the history of the Second World War and its aftermath.

These answers are to be found in EP resolutions, most notably in the proclamation of 23 August as a day of remembrance for victims of Stalinism and Nazism in 2008⁴⁹ and a 2009 resolution on 'European Conscience and Totalitarianism'.⁵⁰ Contrary to the 'multi-perspective history' advocated by European institutions, the REH group pursued a single 'historical truth' at the EU level: 'the task of true reunification of European history based on truth and remembrance is not completed. We have to continue work on converging the views of all the Europe about the history of the 20th century. [...] We aspire to develop a common approach regarding crimes of totalitarian regimes, inter alia totalitarian communist regime of the USSR, to ensure continuity of the process of evaluation of totalitarian crimes and equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all totalitarian regimes.'⁵¹ REH – an informal group of MEPs – provided a platform for the MEPs to play an active role in bringing about a convergence of the European historical narratives.

Building upon joint commemorations and synchronising with regulations proposed by the European Commission, over the past two decades, the EP has contributed significantly to the emergence of EU memory politics. This is reflected in particular in the 'EU memory framework' – 'a number of legally non-binding, soft laws and decisions made by the EP – that delineates shared attitudes towards the past through the rejection of anti-semitism, xenophobia, racism and all forms of non-democratic, authoritarian regimes'.⁵² While the Holocaust remains a key pillar of the EU's attitudes towards the past, the EU memory framework also communicates rather equivocal, blurry lines concerning otherwise quite different historical experiences of its member states, formulating an equivalence of red and black totalitarianisms. That the EU possess its own memory politics, however, is not merely reflected in its

49 EP, 'European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism' (2008), www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2008-0439_EN.html.

50 EP, 'European Conscience and Totalitarianism' (2009), www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2009-0213_EN.html.

51 REH, <https://eureconciliation.wordpress.com/about>.

52 A. Milošević and H. Touquet, 'Unintended Consequences: The EU Memory Framework and the Politics of Memory in Serbia and Croatia', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018): 381–99, 382.

The European Union and Memory

ever-growing soft laws about the past. On a par with soft laws, new EU commemorative days were created, monuments built and European commemorations organised. The objective of this effort lies in 'political mobilisation of symbols and narratives, by the EU, to awaken and preserve beliefs and feelings about transnational past of Europe'.⁵³

The post-2004 enlargement was followed by an important 'rupture' in the ways in which the past has been used at EU level. Integrating the negative aspects of the past into the self-narration became an objective in the post-enlargement period and a tool to achieve reconciliation in pursuit of an ever-closer Union. As the EP's 2009 resolution on 'European Conscience and Totalitarianism' suggests, there will be no unity – and hence no future – unless Europe 'is able to form a common view of its history, recognises Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy and brings about an honest and thorough debate on their crimes in the past century'.⁵⁴ Such a common view on the past – embodied in the EU's memory framework – became a *sine qua non* of the EU's future.

European Memory Wars

While for decades the informal model of Western democracies has been dialogue promotion and reconciliation as main vehicles to address the burdens of the past, the mid 2000s politically institutionalised European memory canons and therefore an *EU memory policy*. As the EP's memory framework continued to expand in relation to national histories of its member states, a significant effort has been invested also by the European Council in promoting and practising 'a common European history'.⁵⁵ A careful examination of the contents of the EU memory framework suggests that the Holocaust and anti-totalitarianism are at its core. Other elements such as 'Solidarność day'⁵⁶ or 'Holodomor remembrance'⁵⁷ are elevated only to the status of key dates of European history. A number of funding instruments, such as the European Commission's Europe for Citizens programme,

53 A. Milošević, 'European Commemoration of Vukovar: Shared Memory or Joint Remembrance?', in V. Pavlaković and D. Pauković (eds.), *Framing the Nation and Collective Identities* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2019), pp. 223–39.

54 EP, 'European Conscience and Totalitarianism', item K.

55 Council Regulation (EU) no. 390/2014 of 14 April 2014 establishing the 'Europe for Citizens' programme for the period 2014–20, OJ L 115, 17.4.2014, pp. 3–13.

56 EP, '25th Anniversary of Solidarity and Its Message for Europe' (2005), www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2005-0357_EN.pdf.

57 EP, 'Commemoration of the Holodomor, the Artificial Famine in Ukraine (1932–1933)' (2008), www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2008-0523_EN.html.

enabled EU memory policy to invest millions of euros in strengthening remembrance of recent European history. The Europe for Citizens programme 2014–20 had an overall budget of €167.2 million, of which 16 per cent has been allocated for projects on ‘European Remembrance’ whose annual call for proposals has identified key dates in European history reflecting the contents of the EU memory framework. By highlighting the Union’s role in facilitating, sharing and promoting European memory politics, direct links between remembrance and European identity have been established.

The EU memory framework became a cornerstone of EU memory politics and an important anchor of many of the EU’s other policies, strategies and programmes. This is particularly visible not only in subsidies for European remembrance, but also in the creation of European monuments such as a memorial for victims of totalitarianisms in Brussels and the House of European History (HEH) – the EP’s own museum. The Platform of European Memory and Conscience, created through the EP 2009 resolution on ‘European Conscience and Totalitarianism’ is the main actor behind the Brussels monument, which has also been endorsed by the European Commission and the EP.⁵⁸ The project to establish the HEH was initiated by the former President of the EP Hans-Gert Pöttering – one of the main actors of the pivotal REH group. In the words of its creator, the HEH ‘should be a place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union’.⁵⁹ By the time of the official inauguration in 2017, however, the objective of ‘European identity’ building via historical reference had been abandoned in the political discourse and in conceptual documents of the HEH’s curators. The permanent exhibition of the museum reflects the positionalities of the EU memory framework, accusing nationalism of being the root cause of conflicts and wars in Europe. ‘With its strong focus on the similarities between National Socialism and Stalinism as regimes of oppression, moreover, it tells a story of Europeans as victims of abstract oppressive regimes,’ as Kaiser argues.⁶⁰ Paradoxically, this suggests that the HEH employs the narrative tools of nationalism for overcoming nationalism.⁶¹

58 ‘Pan-European Memorial for the Victims of Totalitarianism in Brussels’, <https://memoryandconscience.eu/memorialbrussels>.

59 H. G. Pöttering, interview with the author, 1 April 2014.

60 W. Kaiser, ‘Victimizing Europeans: Narrating Shared History in the European Parliament’s House of European History’, *Politique européenne* 71, no. 1 (2021): 54–78, 54.

61 Ibid.

The European Union and Memory

While the mid 2000s saw the revival of discourses on the past that have centred around competition in victimhood,⁶² true ‘memory wars’⁶³ were ignited by the proliferation of memory laws at both national and EU level.⁶⁴ The experience with the post-2004 enlargement suggests that the EP accommodated the historical experiences of new member states⁶⁵ and endorsed collective reinterpretation in older member states due to new historiographical debates or memory dynamics at the national level. In this process of ‘uploading’ national politics to the EU level, various memory entrepreneurs (political parties, formal and informal groups of MEPs, individuals, external actors) sought to influence the construction, institutionalisation and diffusion of EU memory politics. Although it is not legally binding, the EU memory framework is selectively ‘downloaded’ by (potential) members that seek to align with EU norms of remembrance, display their belonging to Europe, affirm their national narratives of the past at (trans)national level⁶⁶ or deploy memory as a foreign policy tool.

Importantly, the very existence of EU soft laws on memory prescribes a ‘template’ for dealing with the past – the model that has been emulated, copied and adopted in many non-EU countries – yet with different motivations. Each resolution of the EP ends with provisions/instructions on to whom the resolution is directed and who the direct recipients should be, for example, ‘instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Government and Parliament of Ukraine, the Secretary-General of the UN, the Secretary-General of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe’.⁶⁷ The major field of application of EU memory policy relates to the EU’s anti-totalitarian stance towards history that often serves as a vocabulary to narrate and explain a wide variety of non-affiliated or

62 P. Vermeersch, ‘Victimhood as Victory: The Role of Memory Politics in the Process of De-Europeanisation in East-Central Europe’, *Global Discourse* 9, no. 1 (2019): 113–30.

63 J.-M. Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes: Génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris, La Découverte, 1997); P. Blanchard and I. Veyrat-Masson, *Les Guerres de mémoires: La France et son histoire: Enjeux politiques, controverses historiques, stratégies médiatiques* (Paris, La Découverte, 2008); G. Mink and L. Neumayer, *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

64 U. Belavusau and A. Gliszczyńska-Grabias, ‘Memory Laws: Mapping a New Subject in Comparative Law and Transitional Justice’, in U. Belavusau and A. Gliszczyńska-Grabias (eds.), *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017).

65 P. Perchoc, ‘Les députés européens baltes et les débats mémoriels, entre stratégie politique et engagement personnel (2004–2009)’, *Revue internationale de politique comparée* 22, no. 4 (2015): 477–503.

66 Milošević and Touquet, ‘Unintended Consequences’.

67 EP, ‘Commemoration of the Holodomor’.

non-related historical events. For instance, in the countries of former Yugoslavia the adoption or endorsement of the EP resolution on totalitarianism has sparked controversy and still ongoing political and scholarly debate on the nature of Yugoslav communism. As a result of this overarching stance towards red and black totalitarianisms, not only is a return to the past encouraged by political elites with the excuse of endeavouring to redress past injustices, but also efforts are made to symbolically paint the ideological divisions of the Second World War grey for the sake of present-day political objectives.⁶⁸

Rather than promoting the initially advocated cosmopolitan forms of remembrance, the EU policy on the past inspires a partisan view of the past. Recent research suggests that the adoption of cosmopolitan memory cannot ensure positive outcomes for victims: its tenets are nationalised and its discourse distorted to assist the national interest.⁶⁹ Cosmopolitan memory, as Ryan argues in her study on Austria and Ireland,⁷⁰ is open to interpretation, semblances of adherence and, sometimes, outright manipulation. Mälksoo⁷¹ argues that 'attempts to forge certain mnemonic consensus as a higher ideal of a cosmopolitan nature are not necessarily a more benign version of securitizing historical memory than the parochial nationalist variants' that exist/existed elsewhere. In other words, when the EU serves exclusively as a political opportunity structure to protect national monopoly over the past, national political elites transform themselves into transnational memory populists.

These instances go to show the divisive rather than uniting potential ascribed to collective memory on the transnational, EU level. The EP resolution in 2019 clearly prescribes the future of Europe's past: the shared European legacy of crimes committed by communist, Nazi and other dictatorships is of vital importance for the unity of Europe.⁷² It follows from this that a common culture of remembrance based on shared values (respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for

68 See J. Đureinović, *The Politics of Memory of the Second World War in Contemporary Serbia: Collaboration, Resistance and Retribution* (London, Routledge, 2020); J. Subotić, *Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance after Communism* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2019).

69 L. Ryan, 'Cosmopolitan Memory and National Memory Conflicts: On the Dynamics of Their Interaction', *Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 4 (2014): 501–14.

70 *Ibid.*

71 M. Mälksoo, "'Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonic Security', *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (2015): 221–37, 228.

72 EP, 'The Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe' (2019), www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.html.

The European Union and Memory

human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities) shall help EU citizens reject the crimes of fascist, Stalinist and other totalitarian and authoritarian regimes of the past as a way of fostering resilience against modern threats to democracy, particularly among the younger generation. This resolution, however, was primarily directed not at EU member states, but rather at Russia in its twofold role both as victim and as a perpetrator. The EP expressed concerns 'about the efforts of the current Russian leadership to distort historical facts and whitewash crimes committed by the Soviet totalitarian regime and considers them a dangerous component of the information war waged against democratic Europe that aims to divide Europe, and therefore calls on the Commission to decisively counteract these efforts'.⁷³ This suggests that the EP's memory laws are part of the mnemonic war via foreign policy that seeks to apply soft pressure and induce reactions from its recipients. In response, the Russian President Putin dismissed the resolution as utter 'nonsense', explaining national positionalities on the basis of Russian 'historical truth'.⁷⁴ In Russia, the revisions of the constitution carried out in 2020 have become a fight over history, suggesting that the state has the right and obligation to 'protect historical truth' from others, including the EU and individual member states of the EU.⁷⁵

Given the complexity of history of the Second World War and its aftermath, it comes as no surprise that the most intensive memory work in the EP is carried out in (in)direct relation to Russia, with a prominent role being played by the countries that were once part of the Soviet Union. As early as in 2007, the EP intervened in the memory conflict between Estonia and Russia. The announcement of the Estonian government's plan to relocate the Soviet 'monument to the liberators of Tallinn' from the centre of the Estonian capital to a military cemetery a few kilometres away was followed by two nights of violence, which started with demonstrators attacking the police and resulted in widespread vandalism in the centre of Tallinn. The conflict over memory in Tallinn not only became a diplomatic matter between Estonia and Russia but also placed the EP in a position to pass legislation and 'call on the Russian Government to engage in an open and unbiased dialogue with the Eastern and Central European democracies

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷⁴ TASS, 'Putin Slams European Parliament Resolution on WWII Outbreak as "Complete Nonsense"' (2019), <https://tass.com/politics/1103075>.

⁷⁵ Duma, 'What Changes Will Be in the Constitution of the Russian Federation?' (2020), <http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/48039>.

on the history of the 20th century and the crimes committed then against humanity, including by totalitarian Communism'.⁷⁶

Roads Less Travelled

An examination of the role of history is vital in order to better understand why the grand design of a common memory for a united Europe – with a single market and a common foreign policy yet enough diversity to encompass cultural and social differences – posed and continues to pose challenges to its citizens. Collective memory on a transnational level is an amalgam of different and divergent views and experiences of the past. Given the volatile and often malleable character of such a collective memory, the collectivising potential of EU memory policy seems to be rather weak. Some member states effectively share a past, such as, for instance, Slovenia's and Croatia's post-1945 Yugoslav history. Yet, Spain and Portugal, while having been through ideologically similar dictatorial experiences, have had different historical trajectories. The blurring effect of EU memory politics in relation to the totalitarian and authoritarian history tends to wash out those differences and appears to have a stronger appeal and hence unifying potential only when constructed in relation to 'the Other'. These conflictual memory constellations at the European level explain why European memory politics is characterised by a sustained focus on specific time periods on the one hand and amnesia on the other.⁷⁷

While the focus on the Holocaust and anti-totalitarianism remains central for some and a major knot of European memory for others, the EU's memory politics presents itself as a rather selective narrative of its own past. A retrospective gaze into the early days of EU integration is very valuable in understanding the origins of the amnesias in the EU's self-narrations and the ways in which memory canons continue to perpetuate such a narrow reflection of more than 70 years of unity. The founding fathers and reconciliation myths have turned out to be immutable and have remained unchallenged over the course of time and across the EU's various self-narrations and contours. Certainly related to the political reality of those times is the fact that the elitist, founding fathers myth has failed until recently to successfully integrate gender in the fundamentals of the EU.

⁷⁶ EP, 'Estonia' (2007), www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2007-0215_EN.html.

⁷⁷ A. Sierp, 'EU Memory Politics and Europe's Forgotten Colonial Past', *Interventions* 22, no. 6 (2020): 686–702, 686.

The European Union and Memory

Women, invisible in this narration, worked in the shadows of the High Authority and the other institutions established since the 1950s. Despite this, Europe, an imagined community, has been narrated as an elite-led and elite-practised form of (men's) politics.⁷⁸ Gendering of EU memory politics and its practical application across related policies and programmes became a priority only recently.⁷⁹ The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) has as one of its key priorities raising awareness of the common European history while paying attention to equality between women and men.

The early days of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) too can help us identify some of the other roads not taken in narrating EU history as they show the earliest proofs of truly entangled collective memories in Europe. The 15 years of independent existence of the ECSC illustrate the shortage of memory the EU continues to have in relation to the past. The first non-elite-led and -practised forms of Europeanness were made possible by the first border movers – the blue-collar labour force. Millions of workers and their families migrated during the first 5 years of the Common Market before the white-collar generations of 'Eurostars' were hatched in the Erasmus programme. During the years 1958–62, net emigration from Italy alone reached 716,000, with the greatest influx of foreign workers (as *Gastarbeiter*) in the Federal Republic of Germany. In the first 5 years of the Common Market, there was a net immigration of 1,600,000. These workers were largely citizens of Spain, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece.

Finally, while European integration was born after and in contrast to the Second World War, it was born during and in connection with the colonial experience. When the EC was first established, four of its six member states were still in control of colonial territories – which were regularly associated with the incoming common market, while Algeria was even made fully part of it.⁸⁰ Although it has largely been forgotten, the early association between colonialism and European integration has made it hard for the EC/EU to

78 A. Milošević, 'Does Europe Prefer Her Sons over Daughters? Adding the Gender Perspective to European Memory', LSE Engenderings (2018), <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2018/04/05/does-europe-prefer-her-sons-over-daughters-adding-the-gender-perspective-to-european-memory>.

79 'Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)', <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv>.

80 L. Ferrari, 'Missing Memory: The European Parliament in Face of Europe's Imperial and Colonial Past' (2019), unpublished manuscript.

claim an anti-colonial character and to present itself as being in opposition to the European colonial powers.⁸¹ Recent and very shy attempts at integrating those memories into the EU memory framework were carried out on the initiative of a group of like-minded MEPs and with the support of mediating (f)actors such as the European Network Against Racism and European Network of People of African Descent. In 2019 a resolution on ‘Fundamental Rights of People of African Descent’⁸² was adopted. While the attempts at addressing the colonial history of Europe have focused solely on the anti-discriminatory angle of people of African descent, citizens of Middle Eastern and Asian descent, who often suffer from discrimination as well, are not addressed by these mnemonic efforts.

These examples show the extent to which existing EU memory politics and accompanying policies have been shaping a rather selective narrative of Europe’s past, omitting histories and memories that do not fit the classical East–West dichotomy. In other words, the emphasis on the significance of the Second World War has primacy over the pursuit of the EU’s own history – the one that has been shared, although in different configurations, by nation-states, the members of the Union. The attempts at ‘uploading’ views, narratives and representations of the past to the EU memory framework that have been made reflect national positionalities. Yet, as, for instance, the experience with colonialism shows, even amnesia is part of the EU’s memory politics. Ultimately, the evidence suggests that, even when resolutions are adopted in the name of all member states, such soft laws tend to be monopolised by those who effectively can identify with and benefit from them. For instance, the resolution installing the EU’s ‘Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Terrorism’ (2004) was an important token of recognition for those who suffered such violence, either as individual victims or states proper. However, this EU remembrance day has weak reach as it is observed only in a handful of countries that suffered terror attacks, making this resolution and similar types of resolution ‘European only by its name’.⁸³

81 P. Hansen and S. Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

82 EP, ‘Fundamental Rights of People of African Descent’ (2019), www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0239_EN.html.

83 A. Milošević and G. Truc, ‘(Un)shared Memory: European Parliament and EU Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism’, *Politique européenne* 71, no. 1 (2021): 142–69, 150.

The European Union and Memory

Conclusion

The history of the EU is fundamentally a history of self-narrations that sought to underpin a number of shifting objectives over the decades: from self-legitimation to foreign policy. A socio-historical analysis of the European institutions' attempts to promote a memory of European integration since the 1950s demonstrates how the European institutions and their representatives referred to and symbolised various pasts in order to historically ground the European project. The past has served as a 'negative template', as a rationale for deeper and wider integration and as an instrument to support general objectives such as legitimacy building. To this end, answering the question of what binds Europeans together and what kind of future the EU ought to have has been translated into addressing specific objectives: fostering citizens' ownership over the European project by promoting the notion of European identity based on cultural and historical heritage – including its dark sides. During the period between the end of the Cold War and the post-2004 enlargement there was an important 'rupture' in the ways in which the past has been used at EU level. Integrating the negative aspects of the past into the self-narration became an objective of the post-enlargement period and a tool to achieve reconciliation in pursuit of an ever-closer Union. Importantly, such mnemonic efforts have supported the emergence of proper EU memory politics, enabled through the intense memory work of the EP and its EU memory framework, supported by the European Council and made practically possible through the work of the European Commission. The intended effects and produced consequences of Europeanised forms of memory and its practices posed and continue to pose a significant challenge both for scientists and for policy-makers as 'memory wars' have made it increasingly difficult for Europe to have a proper conversation about the past, in particular of the Second World War.

Recommended Reading

- De Cesari, C. and A. Kaya (eds.). *European Memory in Populism: Representations of Self and Other* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2020).
- Neumayer, L. *The Criminalisation of Communism in the European Political Space after the Cold War* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2018).
- Milošević, A. and T. Trošt (eds.). *Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans* (New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
- Pakier, M. and B. Stråth. *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York, NY, Berghahn, 2010).
- A. Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (New York, NY, Routledge, 2014).