Thinking through Transition

Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989

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On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance?

ZOLTÁN DUISIN

Following the accession of eight Central and Eastern European countries into the European Union in 2004, some harbored expectations that these fresh democratic polities would soon integrate into the broader political culture of the EU. That would include embracing its regime of remembrance, that is, the institutionalized rituals that express a polity’s approach to providing a framework for citizens to relate to their own histories. This supranational regime of remembrance is defined as much by the content of “collective memories”—their mnemonic substance—as it is by the manner in which these memories are constructed and sustained—their modes of remembrance. Most of the literature has argued Europe has based its memory regime on a “politics of regret,” involving increasing admission of national guilt, the pluralization of previously marginalized memories and the uniqueness of the Holocaust as Europe’s negative founding formula.

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4 S. Troebst, “Halecki Revisited: Europe’s Conflicting Cultures of Remembrance” in A European Memory?, ed. Pakier and Strath, 56–63; D. Rupnow, “Transforming the Ho-
Instead, post-communist political elites have used the political opportunity structures provided by European membership to challenge the memory regime hitherto promoted by Brussels, deploying a state-driven institutional apparatus to pursue the establishment of a mnemonic regime based on the equalization of communist and Nazi crimes and on the externalization of the communist experience. While it is tempting to dismiss this supposed “clash of memories” as the result of a natural urge from the East to have its own narrative of the past recognized by Europe, I will argue that a closer look at the institutions and actors involved in this “challenge from the East,” as well as to their sources of political support, shows otherwise. Applying a method of process tracing, whose conclusions are confirmed by elite interviews, I argue that rather than reflecting societal consensus, this narrative, loosely based on theories of totalitarianism, has achieved a high degree of institutionalization thanks to considerable political investment by the post-communist Right. Politicians support memory politics as a crucial competitive political dimension, legitimating their actions at home and abroad by aligning interests with similarly oriented actors across borders and, domestically, with those sectors of the scholarly community that endow the aforementioned narrative with academic authority. This alignment allows memory actors to present on European platforms a discourse that implicitly claims consensual backing, in sharp contrast to their concerted efforts at home that are geared towards modifying mental frameworks allegedly damaged by communist socialization in a highly polarized mnemonic environment.

**Collective Memory as Institutionalized Narratives**

In any treatment of the topic of “collective memory,” the dangers of reification loom large, requiring a careful consideration and problematization of the concept. In the context of a collectivity, memory cannot be taken in its literal sense in the same manner as psychiatrists or social psychologists understand it in the individual sense. Only individuals remember.

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Collectivities at most agree on a cultural and social construct\(^6\) that binds them in a common identity that may or may not be related to personal recollections of a particular, often multifaceted event. J. W. Müller, aware of the all too many facile analogies between collective and individual memory in the literature, distinguishes between what is variously called a "collective" or "national" memory on the one hand and a mass individual memory on the other. The two are more often than not in contradiction with each other since mass-individual memory pertains to the individual's own recollection of events as experienced more or less directly, whereas "collective memory" describes the "social framework through which nationally conscious individuals can organize their history,"\(^7\) a category of individuals that includes public intellectuals, historians, journalists and politicians, and who can be termed as "memory makers" or "memory builders."

Whereas mass-individual memory bases itself on the heterogeneous recollections any historical event or period produces in individuals, "collective memory" is based on an arguably conscious drive to create a minimal consensus as to how the period in question should be recalled and what significance should be attached to it. This memory is to be internalized by citizens as their own at the expense of more informal, communicative forms of memory\(^8\), and while it lacks the rigor and dispassionate analysis of historiography, it is certainly based on more than mere myths. To these reflections, fundamental to what lies ahead, I add a tentative definition of "collective memory," understood here as a relatively coherent discourse, which backed by a set of political rituals and commemorations, is promoted by specific social groups (memory makers) who seek wider recognition and adoption of their own interpretation of the past. This interpretation is always contingent on broader power relations and cannot be deemed to emerge naturally from a series of events whose reading is undisputed.

Questions about history are thus never truly only about the past itself. In contrast to anthropological and cultural approaches to collective memory, political approaches focus essentially on how memory is deployed in the struggle for control and influence over the state\(^9\) and how these strug-
gle involve negotiations around societal understandings of history.\(^{10}\) Collective memories often serve to strengthen particular interpretations of national identity, but cannot be considered to speak in the name of the nation or to represent it in any way. It is always a smaller group or network that promotes a particular narrative of the past with the hope of reifying it, that is of having a national population recognize it as its own. At the same time, we must avoid a second “national” trap and realize collective memories are increasingly adopting a global dimension: even if the ultimate goal is to instill such memory on a national population, the legitimacy gained by international recognition and global sharing of a memory is extremely powerful. An analysis of collective memory dynamics is therefore much more than a mere study of history, it is also a way to unearth hidden power dynamics. As Max Paul Friedman points out, ultimately “whether an interpretation flourishes in the public sphere is determined not by guardians of an academic discipline but by the broader political context of the society in which it appears.”\(^{11}\)

Collective memories are therefore not the memories of a national collectivity. Rather, they are a narrative of the past through which memory-makers, such as public intellectuals, historians, journalists and politicians, select what should be remembered and how we should remember it. Both the “what” and the “how” of memory politics are essential in defining the prevailing regime of remembrance. These are understood as a set of formally or informally institutionalized rituals that embody the manner in which a specific, national, or regional political culture provides opportunities for citizens to relate to established interpretations of the past. Regimes of remembrance should be dissected into three components, the first of which should answer the question of “what memory” we observe, while the other two ought to illuminate the fashion in which that same memory is constructed and sustained, allowing us to approximate the agents of memory. These components are: a) their mnemonic substance, that is, of the content of collective memory, its founding myths and historical interpretations; b) the regime’s modes of remembrance, which revolve around the terms under which the injunction to remember is cast on the population: is there a moral imperative to remember? Do we remember an event by honoring victims, by promoting dialogue or by enumerating crimes? Is guilt placed on the in-group or is it externalized? Which goal takes prece-

\(^{10}\) H. Uhl, “Culture, Politics, Palimpsest: Theses on Memory and Society” in *A European Memory?*, ed. Pakier and Strath, 83.

dence, justice or forgiveness? And finally c) the memory practices that characterize a given regime, meaning the techniques employed by memory-makers to institutionalize a narrative of the past and transmit the injunction to remember, whether they involve setting up research institutes, museums, changing school curricula, pursuing international cooperation, organizing awareness campaigns and so on.

To conclude this small theoretical introduction, it should be noted that the transnational scope of this paper presents additional challenges. The trends noted in what follows should not be understood as a perfect, totalizing fit to all the cases included: obviously in order to transcend the national framework certain generalizations are necessary but these should be understood as attempts to set ideal-typical categories that, depending on the dimensions analyzed, some national cases will approximate more than others. Due to space limitations, not all exceptions to the transnationally defined dimensions can be pointed out extensively, but an effort will be made to hint at the most noteworthy subtleties that can enrich the overall understanding of the phenomenon at hand. This is perhaps a necessary shortcoming that will allow us to grasp the more transnational and unexplored aspects of post-communist memory politics.

The EU’s Memory Regime

During the second half of the twentieth century Europe developed as the region of collective memory par excellence, traumatized by the brutality of the Second World War and of Nazi crimes, and ever since called upon to come to terms with its own past. The Holocaust became the referential locus for any endeavor to “collectively remember” the past, but the recognition of its centrality to European political culture was a long and uneven process whose general contours can only be briefly described here.

In the decade that followed World War II, EU founders placed the Holocaust at the core of a new project to build a united and peaceful Europe, even as national leaders were often unenthusiastic about embracing a consensual and transnational narrative of the recent past. Instead, domestic political considerations often called for the denial of the extent of popular collaboration with Nazi occupying forces, accompanied by the glorification of domestic resistance and an exaggeration of its extent. These roles began to be questioned only in the 1970s, after a generational change had occurred, leading to a globalization of a Holocaust discourse and kicking off what would be known as a new European “politics of regret.”
A decisive impetus for the affirmation of the Holocaust as the central element of European “collective memory” came with the events of 1989, when the countries emerging from state socialism began their own process of coming to terms with the past and the wider European significance of the Holocaust became more obvious. Prominent Western European leaders decisively embarked on institutionalizing a new European “politics of regret” in a process which initially saw post-communist leaders participating mostly as abiding observers, eager to comply with both formal and informal requirements for membership in organizations such as NATO and, above all, the EU.

Confronting a country’s historical responsibility for Nazi collaboration had developed into a test of its commitment to a liberal-democratic political culture. This decisive shift in the EU’s culture of remembrance was not restricted to the sphere of informality, and the new millennium witnessed decisive measures aimed at the institutionalization of a regime of memory based on “politics of regret,” resulting in what Sorin Antohi calls “a putative European memory” being “crafted in the offices of the European Commission by means of official lieux de mémoire.” What had been mostly restricted to uncoordinated yet converging national political rituals of regret became increasingly the object of a coordinated attempt at institutionalizing and formalizing a transnational and official “collective memory” through various days of commemoration, museums, monuments, and initiatives to harmonize history textbooks and teaching. The European Parliament proved its continuing commitment to this process with a resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and racism passed on January 27, 2005. The EU also engaged in funding historical research and in establishing a House of European History with the goal of integrating particularistic narratives of the past into a European “collective memory.” Rather than pretending to be the ultimate arbiter of history, the EU has presented its role in these initiatives as one of a moderator who brings a plurality of parties to the negotiating table in the hope that European partners learn from each other’s often contrasting historical experiences.

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Nevertheless, this pluralistic approach has a non-negotiable item: the Holocaust’s referential quality as humanity’s “absolute evil.” This inherent tension between pluralism and an unquestionable founding formula highlights vulnerabilities in the political culture of the EU, vulnerabilities that can be exploited by memory-makers who wish to challenge the institutionalized memory regime.

Until recently the memory of the Holocaust had stood out as the one and only consensual element of remembrance among EU-builders and national leaders in what is still an unfinished project of European “collective memory.” The reason for such consensus was partly that the significance of the Holocaust went well beyond the institutional borders of the EU: the Holocaust embodied a global imperative as to the political-normative considerations that should prevail in tackling past injustices, functioning as an extremely powerful, albeit informal mechanism to command remembrance, at times through comparisons that seek to capitalize on its powerful symbolism. Daniel Levy claims the Holocaust “evolved from a European concern into a universal cipher primarily via the related legal codification of crimes against humanity” resulting in constant references to it in the public sphere, references aimed at legitimizing everything from “humanitarian interventions” to Europe’s politics of multiculturalism. The West’s commitment to upholding the global centrality of the Holocaust was reaffirmed by such events as the “Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust: A conference on education, remembrance, and research” in 2000, a gathering repeated yearly until the EU’s eastward enlargement in 2004. The forum was inspired by prominent Western leaders such as Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, and Goran Persson, and constituted another important step in affirming the Holocaust’s global significance.

Holocaust vs. Totalitarianism

The mnemonic standards that Western leaders developed and that the EU institutionalized as part of its political culture were quickly transmitted to the post-communist countries eager to join Western European and North Atlantic political, economic and military structures, above all NATO and

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the EU. In an arguably hesitant fashion, applicant countries responded to informal requirements from Brussels to come to terms with their own Nazi pasts. EU expectations that the East takes a stance towards the Holocaust constituted an opportunity for accession countries to prove their commitment to liberal and democratic values, and these indirect European requests often resulted in concrete action on the part of post-communist candidate countries. Yet, just as often these same requests became mired in controversy in a region where an alleged Western insensitivity to its suffering under communism caused irritation in some circles.

Moreover, but not necessarily related to the phenomenon mentioned above, Western pressure to set the Holocaust record straight was at times met with defensiveness in a region where high-profile political and intellectual actors exhibited a preference for externalizing national responsibility. Michael Shafir notes a particular form of externalization of guilt that he describes as deflective negationism, a phenomenon that consists in transferring “the guilt for the perpetration of crimes to members of other nations,” especially Germany, or in minimizing “own-nation participation in their perpetration to insignificant ‘aberrations.’” This tendency was visible even in such Holocaust-centered events as the First Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, during which Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga condemned the Holocaust and its perpetrators but underlined that “Latvia as a country having ceased to exist at the time, the Nazi German occupying powers bear the ultimate responsibility for the crimes they committed or instigated on Latvian soil.”

While Eastern Europe witnessed the establishment of various Holocaust memorials and museums, the fall of the Iron Curtain did not generally lead to a public reevaluation of the role of pre-communist regimes in collaborating with Nazi rule. Meanwhile, the post-communist region had been busier dealing with the recent historical experience of communism since the very onset of transition, hardly waiting for the EU to spur it into action. Yet the process of coming to terms with the past was quickly hi-

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jacked by political competition, with attitudes towards the past becoming the most widespread political cleavage line in the entire region. The limited choices available for political entrepreneurs to carve identities in the first years of transition put the spotlight on “collective memory,” and the resulting interpretations of the socialist past, adapted to serve political competition, never reflected elite or societal consensus, instead buttressing the polarized nature of post-communist politics. Due to the Left’s ideological and often institutional association with a discredited past, these identity and memory politics were predominantly a prerogative of the post-communist Right. Its proponents drew symbolic legitimacy from a claim to higher moral authority, at times based upon past heroic deeds such as resistance to the communist regime, while promoting a public perception that the many leftist parties that emerged from the ruins of discredited communist parties are the rightful inheritors of a defunct, “criminal” regime.

In the last five years, this has ceased to be a mostly domestic story, and post-communist memory politics have gone European in a seeming convergence between the national and the regional. While it would be easy to see this simply as an initiative of a part of the continent that wants to strengthen its voice in Europe by obtaining wider recognition of its own “collective memory,” memory makers’ ambitious initiative is taking place before post-communist societies have proven their own ability to negotiate, resolve and close their national processes of coming to terms with the past. What we see in Central and Eastern Europe is a struggle to institutionalize, both domestically and in Europe, a version of the past that is generally inspired in theories of totalitarianism and places almost exclusive stress on the criminal features of the communist regime. This is done at the expense of the more comfortable memories of large swaths of the population that did not directly experience oppression and may have enjoyed the economic security and social predictability of life under communism, particularly in its later stages. In order to stress the alleged centrality of terror and oppression in

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communism, the comparison with Nazism has been consistently pursued by memory-makers through both formal and informal mechanisms, causing a subversion of the hitherto unquestioned standing of the Holocaust as the darkest chapter in European history.

This “usable totalitarianism” and more broadly the crime-centered narrative it is intimately tied with was deployed by a coalition of memory-makers including politicians and intellectuals who have aligned interests and who are characterized by a “predominant tendency not to problematize” their own countries’ “role in the process of the communist takeover” or of war-time collaboration by right-wing authoritarian regimes, ultimately externalizing both fascism and communism. Memory-makers have thus unsurprisingly promoted a characterization of the socialist past as a historical aberration, while simultaneously reaching out to a more distant past in a paradoxical quest for historical continuity that will legitimate their position. They thus reach out to the entire mnemonic community of the nation, reframing history by stressing common suffering and rejecting the “alien” communist experience until a new national memory has been constructed.

The use of the terminology of totalitarianism is particularly obvious in the international endeavors of memory-makers, a phenomenon with roots in the various strains of dissidence that developed beginning in the 1970s, precisely as the theory began to be discredited in the West on the basis of its theoretical and methodological shortcomings. Even those dissidents who identified with the liberal Left deployed the term with a more activist than intellectual intent, adapting its definition to the various roles the concept could fulfill in domestic and international arenas. Domestically, describing the communist regimes as “totalitarian” helped draw a clear line between supporters and opponents of the regime and mobilize the population via binary oppositions such as “us” vs. “them,” “truth” vs. “lies” or “democracy” vs. “totalitarianism.” The common struggle against the dictatorship and the need to counter state propaganda glossed over divisions between its more liberal sectors who advocated a doctrine of human and civic rights, consensual politics and civic patriotism and the more conservative dissidents who privileged an ethnic

understanding of the nation and used an alleged “national memory” as a narrative to lure broader sectors of society.  

In international circles the term was equally useful at a time when Western politicians showed growing willingness to engage with Eastern European leaders based on the belief that communist regimes had embarked on the path of reform and could be treated as rational political and economic partners. Dissidents such as Adam Michnik feared that such coziness between communist leaders and particularly the Western Left came at the expense of support for independent social organizations. Supporters of these organizations claimed to be opposing a regime that had in some cases taken a conservative turn, rather than liberalize, pointing particularly to Poland after the imposition of martial law in 1981. Dissidents thus employed the term “totalitarianism” when meeting German interlocutors, well aware of its connotations with the Nazi regime, to convey a more negative assessment of state socialism. Similarly, the emergence of an unorthodox French Left that denounced the Soviet Union as totalitarian allowed dissidents to use the same terminology to transmit their concerns to the public of another key Western European country.

Many dissidents were aware of the poor fit between the reality of East European societies and totalitarian theory, and would simply argue for the term’s appropriateness in describing the ambitions of those in power as well as the totalitarian origins of state socialism. In the narrative of liberal dissidents, this “totalitarian spirit” and its ambition to control all aspects of everyday life had been countered by independent social groups and partly explains why intellectuals like Adam Michnik cautioned Western leaders against engaging with and, thus, implicitly supporting the “totalitarian” power structures.

Yet the intricacies of liberal dissident thought failed to mobilize the domestic opposition as effectively as the dichotomizing narratives of more conservative-leaning dissidents. While the former came to embrace something closer to the soul-searching repentance advocated by the EU’s “politics of regret,” the binary categories that characterized the latter’s under-

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24 Brier, “Adam Michnik’s Understanding of Totalitarianism and the West European Left,” 204.
standing of totalitarianism found greater continuity in the post-communist politics of the past. Through official pronouncements and state institutions, citizens have been increasingly encouraged to perceive themselves as belonging to the clear and often mutually exclusive categories of “perpetrators,” “collaborators,” “victims,” or “dissidents.”

Thus, while former dissidents of diverse orientations decisively shaped debates over recent history, either to adopt staunch anti-communist positions or to criticize the excessive zeal of anti-communists, it was the conservative dissident historical approach and its particular understanding of totalitarianism that found more consistent political backing. It was this same group that during communism argued for historical memory to be cultivated to counter the ostensible historical amnesia and falsification promoted by communist rulers, and it is this same group that has fed contemporary memory-makers’ belief that the effects of such falsification remain pervasive and require counteraction.

Institutionalizing an Official Memory

As was argued before, the institutionalization of the usable totalitarian paradigm does not correspond to an acceptance of its crimes-centered narratives among the political class, the scholarly community, former dissidents or the public at large. Neither could it: its appeal and effectiveness has always been partial and its institutionalization relates to the considerable political support the political right granted to anti-communist discourse. In it, the Right identified a politically expedient ability to cuddle national feelings by pitting a small group of externally backed and “criminal” communist cadres against a helpless majority population, hence minimizing the nation’s responsibility for the inception and subsistence of communism while shifting guilt towards the political forces framed as representing continuity with the past.

Memory-makers’ ability to institutionalize a crimes-centered discourse relates to their capacity to align the interests of similarly engaged actors originating in the formally separated spheres of politics and academia. This strategy, increasingly pursued beyond borders, involves the services of a substantial community of historians committed to memory building and who see their priorities as converging with those of the state.25 The

revitalized mnemonic role of sections of the post-communist historiography occurs in a particularly delicate situation for universities and research institutions in the region. Their dependence on the state, frequent centralization and financial weakness makes local historiography more vulnerable than its counterpart in established democracies, while also increasing the state’s temptation to engage those scholars more friendly to official, nation-building narratives.

The most widespread instance of this process involves influential portions of the political elite, committed to memory-making, providing similarly oriented historians with the appropriate financial and institutional resources in exchange for endowing politicians’ crimes-centered narratives of the past with scholarly legitimacy. While these narratives have for over two decades played a central role in the region’s competitive politics, it is only in recent years that we witness energetic efforts at institutionalizing an official collective memory through consistent research and public education activities, which more often than not are based on theoretical precepts drawn from totalitarian theory.

The institutional apparatus upholding the narratives of memory-makers and symbolizing the interest alignment between sectors of academia and politics is embodied by a novel and transnationally connected lieu de mémoire here defined as state-sponsored memory institutes. First appearing in the mid-1990s, only in the last five decades have state-sponsored memory institutes become ubiquitous in the region, and while there are some differences in their size, funds, and in the number of practices they accumulate, their nature and objectives remain strikingly similar. Backed by state officialdom and claiming scholarly legitimacy from the pursuit of historical research, they constitute the most powerful and novel institution established in the region with the purpose of reflecting on the past. Often, they have departments also dealing with the Nazi era as a way to fundamentalize the comparison with communism and to preempt, or as a result of, domestic and foreign criticism. They are funded by the state—in some cases very generously—and governments have shown their ability to politicize their activities if deemed necessary. They are generally run by hybrid actors experienced both in politics and academia, actors who are able to negotiate the inherent tensions between these two formally separated fields, to conduct their activities transnationally, linking their institutes with sister organizations in the region by means of cooperation agreements and membership in common umbrella organizations. Their superior funding in countries with generally weak university and research structures, their frequent access to abundant archival material and their collec-
tion of victim testimonies allow them to make claim to constituting the most encompassing centers for grasping the past and to then instill its interpretation on the wider population.

These hybrid bodies concentrate an unusual number of memory practices, including: 1) producing and diffusing a crimes-centered discourse on the past, one that tends to be inspired on theories of totalitarianism but can also take the vocabulary of occupation and resistance, as tends to be the case in Poland and the Baltic countries; 2) organizing seminars and conferences for both academic and wider audiences; 3) awareness-raising activities, particularly aimed at younger generations; 4) scholarly research inspired on theories of totalitarianism and dominantly concerned with the early periods of communist history and the “criminal” activities of the state; 5) publishing of scholarly and non-scholarly books and journals, as well as magazines; 6) engagement in international co-operation, including cooperation agreements and intellectual exchanges and conferences in which best practices are shared; 7) organization of permanent or temporary exhibits; 8) educational outreach, which involves various activities aimed at affecting the educational system, such as drafting textbooks, giving “methodological” formation to school teachers or offering staff for university lectures; 9) collecting victim testimonies; 10) offering space for memorials or organizing visits to memorial sites; 11) setting up libraries; 12) media outreach to sensitize journalists on the activities and goals of the institute; 13) judicial activities such as assisting public prosecutors in investigating “communist crimes” or proposing legislation; 14) centralization of archival sources of the communist regime, for some institutes an ambition, for others a reality: Institutes promote the opening of communist-era secret service files and dismiss critics’ concerns about possible problems regarding their authenticity and/or possible misinterpretation; 15) lustration, that is the vetting of state officials; 16) digitalization of archival sources.

It is worth noting that an often-cited source of inspiration for post-communist state-sponsored memory institutes is the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives (BSiU), admired for its swift capacity to collect and organize enormous amounts of secret police files.26 However,

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26 Žáček, Pavel; Former and First Director of the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (2008–2010), Current Advisor to the Director, Interview with Zoltan Dujisin in Prague, Czech Republic, December 2012; Wilkemann, Neela; Director of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, Interview with Zoltan Dujisin in Prague, Czech Republic, December 2012
a look at the practices and discourse of post-communist state-sponsored memory institutes highlights considerable differences with the German institute and signals far more comprehensive goals. Unlike its sister-institutes in Central and Eastern Europe, the BStU does not seek to act as a body of historical research beyond understanding the role and nature of the Stasi secret police, nor is it involved in broader identity-building projects, although it has put its weight behind transnational initiatives that equalize communism and Nazism. In contrast, state-sponsored memory institutes are usually run by political appointees who have increasingly felt the need to stress the independence and apolitical nature of their enterprise, often explaining criticism as the result of attacks by former communists fearful of their revelations. Also, unlike the German trend-setter, state-sponsored memory institutes assess communist-era secret services as the principal symbol of the fundamentally “criminal” nature of state socialist regimes and, accordingly, promote an understanding of secret-service files as the most credible source for understanding the past. Their critics do not necessarily oppose the existence of the institutes as such, as many find the structures they put in place as potentially attractive to the sort of methodologically innovative and impartial historical research carried out in Germany, yet undoubtedly, the Central and Eastern European memory institutes have shown themselves to be more vulnerable to political pressure.

The foundation of the first state-sponsored memory institute was approved by the Lithuanian Senate in 1993. Its institutional predecessors were founded in 1992 and consist of a state research center and a state museum that were fused into a single institution, creating the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania. The creation of the Centre did not lead to its immediate emulation elsewhere and four years had to pass for a true example-setter in the region to emerge. The internationalization of this process with the set-up of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (INR), the largest and most generously funded memory institute in the entire post-communist region, began in 1998.

The INR was established by the Polish parliament as a research institute of crimes committed under Nazism and Communism, defining itself by the nation-centered motto, “Our history creates our identity.” The INR

was crucially granted prosecution powers and works under the legal concept of “communist crimes,” a term introduced in Polish law in 1998 and revised several times. The state-sponsored institution has attracted controversy over its perceived political nature since the very onset, although this claim became more obvious under the government of the conservative Law and Justice Party, which won the elections in 2005: the Party then took a clearly pro-active stance in deploying the institute’s resources for political purposes. In response to previous controversies over the selective release of secret service files, the institute had attempted to prevent access to its archives to persons suspected of harboring a political agenda, but soon after the elections its former directorate was replaced and all its central positions purged. Jarosław Kurtyna, a man who towed the government’s line, was selected as the new head of the office and the activities of the institute began receiving even more generous financing, turning it into one of the richest state institutions and one of the most respected ones among the rightist public and politicians.

We must wait until 2003 for the founding of another such organization, Slovakia’s Nation’s Memory Institute, which would become, together with the Polish Institute of National Remembrance that inspired it, an important example-setter for similarly oriented memory-makers in neighboring Czech Republic. Similar to its Polish counterpart, Slovakia’s state-sponsored memory institute was created by right-wing ruling parties in 2003 with a commitment to “promote ideas of freedom and defense of democracy against such regimes as Nazism and Communism.” The Institute’s research orientation stresses the repressive activities of the regime and signals the former Czechoslovak secret services as the key to understanding the nature of the communist regime, defined as totalitarian. In spite of difficulties in obtaining all the files requested, the institute has released tens of thousands of names of collaborators and was given powers to cooperate with the prosecution of crimes committed under fascist and communist regimes. However, the institute is now relatively isolated from its sister organizations ever since the death of its first director Ján Langoš, replaced by Ivan Petranšký in 2007. The new director, appointed

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28 The term currently defines “communist crimes” as crimes committed by the functionaries of the communist apparatus and is inspired by the similar concept of Nazi crimes, also present in Polish legislation.

29 M. Gómy, “From the Splendid Past into the Unknown Future: Historical Studies in Poland after 1989” in Narratives Unbound, ed. in Antohi, Trencsényi and Apor, 103.

30 Žáček, interview with Z. Dujisin.
as part of a deal between the new ruling coalition, composed of the leftist Smer party and the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS), instilled a new orientation on the institute, which began focusing less on condemning the communist past—the preferred orientation of the previous director and government—and more on Hungarian past atrocities and on sanitizing the Slovak pro-Nazi puppet regime.\footnote{Willemann, interview with Z. Dujisin.}

Both the Slovak and the Polish examples pointed to the potential for politicization of the activities of state-sponsored memory institutes, and yet, perhaps precisely for this reason, their set-up was an inspiration to similarly oriented memory-makers and their political allies on the Right throughout the region. In December 2005, the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania was founded, and its stated aims are “to scientifically investigate and identify crimes, abuses and human rights infringements that took place during the entire communist period in Romania, and to petition the judiciary when crimes are revealed” and to publicly promote particular views of the past to a supposedly uninformed public. Its research adopts the totalitarian terminology and overwhelmingly stresses the role of state security services and other repressive apparatus in explaining the nature of the communist regime. In 2009 the Institute merged with the National Institute for the Memory of Romanian Exile, a public research institution created in 2003, which addresses topics related to the Romanian exile community under communism, to create the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile. Between 2010 and 2012 its scientific council was headed by renowned U.S.-Romanian scholar Vladimir Tismaneanu.

The period between 2007 and 2009 sees a fundamental acceleration in the process of transnational co-operation between memory-makers in the region. This is facilitated by a string of electoral victories of the post-communist Right in the region and its active participation in EU affairs through the EU Council presidencies, which leads to growing networking activities among regional memory-makers, including in countries where such institutes still did not exist. What is currently the most active memory institute in pursuing an international condemnation of communism was created in 2007, the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. The Institute was created by a right wing, liberal-conservative majority parliament and officially charged with weighing the consequences of “the two totalitarian ideologies” that, at different times, dominated Czech lands: communism and Nazism. It quickly became an active part-
ner of the Czech liberal-conservative government during the country’s EU presidency. The organization is staffed with historians who work with the totalitarian label and use its theories to filter and interpret their sources, while most dissenting historians who could not adapt to the dominant narrative or had issues with what they perceived as the politicized nature of the institute’s activities have since left it. The state-sponsored institution, funded by a special chapter of the state’s budget, has been accused by its critics of using its research for influencing Czech politics and of targeting political opponents through the selective release of communist-era secret service files, while it was also criticized for not disclosing its operating budget in spite of multiple requests.

Slovenia’s conservative government took heed of examples in the region and established the Study Centre for National Reconciliation in April 2008, months before facing an election it would lose to the Social Democrats, justifying its set up with “an objective need for increased state activity” in establishing historical facts about 20th century history. The same year sees the establishment of the similarly oriented Estonian Institute of Historical Memory, although this organization shows important continuities with the international commissions created in all three Baltic countries in 1998 and tasked with investigating both the Nazi and Communist periods. These continuities are noticeable in the Institute’s staff and in its focus on historical research at the expense of the public education and awareness raising activities privileged by its East Central European counterparts, also a result of the more consensual nature of memory politics in Estonia.

This left Latvia, Bulgaria and Hungary as the only post-communist EU member states without a state-sponsored memory institute, although in the case of Latvia it is worth mentioning that a state commission researching the Communist and Nazi eras shut down its activities due to budget cuts related to the country’s severe economic recession. Nevertheless, there is more to this transnationally-linked family of institutes, with several other museums, foundations and memorials that, while not fully fledged historical research institutions officially charged with establishing a historical

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32 Žáček, interview with Z. Dujisin.
truth, perform very similar practices. The most prominent of these institutes are memory-building museums, particularly the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (1993), the House of Terror Museum in Hungary (2002), and the Warsaw Uprising Museum in Poland (2004). Similarly to state-sponsored memory institutes, these museums engage in producing a crimes-centered discourse, awareness raising activities, historical research, publishing, collecting victim testimonies, organizing conferences and seminars, educational outreach and the pursuit of international cooperation with state-sponsored memory institutes across national borders.

Converging the Politics of “Truth”

The striking institutional similarities among institutes carrying out very similar practices are not coincidental: a process of institutional replication began in the 1990s following and subsequently adapting the German (BStU) model, but the considerable acceleration of this institutional diffusion in the region in the mid to late 2000s derives from a concerted effort on the part of memory-makers who have shared a sense of dissatisfaction with what they perceive as the incomplete nature of the transitions in the post-communist region. This dissatisfaction variously relates to the continued presence of former members of communist parties in the region’s political, economic and judicial life, which for memory-makers assumes an unacceptable scale to the supposed long-term damage caused by communism on the mentalities, habits and values of the citizenry and to an alleged threat posed by a lack of commitment to democratic values which, in the view of memory-makers, is intimately tied to an insufficient rejection of the totalitarian ethos. The realization among memory-makers that they share the same concerns and goals, coupled with the dynamics of European integration, has led to an increasing alignment of interests across borders, to the point that memory-makers actively work to replicate best practices across the region. This institutional convergence obviously has consequences that are more than technical, implying a convergence of memory regimes along all three dimensions that define it: mnemonic substance, modes of remembrance and memory practices. This convergence crucially facilitates the goal of presenting a common front when pursuing a “politics of truth” in European arenas and helps legitimate the claim to speak in the name of the region, which can also ultimately assist in strengthening the domestic legitimacy of these narratives.
In terms of mnemonic substance, there is often an attempt at streamlining a common discourse of the past that is simple enough to enjoy acceptance across post-communist countries, whereas in other cases we observe a mismatch in the terminology and interpretations upheld by memory-makers depending on whether they address an international or a domestic audience. The transnational discourse tends to excuse the local population or minimize its responsibility for the inception and length of communist rule by assigning blame to external others and a few internal aliens, while pitting communism as an evil comparable to Nazism. The latter is achieved by implicitly minimizing the ostensible uniqueness of the Holocaust and maximizing the significance of victims’ numbers, stressing that what matters is not the ideology in whose name crimes are committed, but the outcome of the crimes themselves.35 The unifying theory of the transnational narrative is totalitarianism, employed to different degrees, more subtly and hesitantly appearing on the narratives of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, ubiquitous in the case of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile or of the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, which claims it "contributes to social discourse concerning totalitarian regimes." The texts produced by the Czech state body invariably add the adjective "totalitarian" after each use of the "communist" adjective (i.e. "communist totalitarian power," "communist totalitarian regime," "communist totalitarian ideology," etc.). The adoption of the term is not strictly correlated to the severity of the previous regime: the Study Centre for National Reconciliation, the better-funded memory institute in the former Yugoslavia, claims one of its goals is examining the country's experience with "three totalitarian systems: fascism, communism and Nazism." On the other hand, the Baltic countries, which witnessed the brutal experience of mass deportations, place more stress on the terminology of occupation in their domestic dealings, but place great stress on the language of totalitarianism in those international platforms where they align interests with sister organizations.

Also implicitly in line with totalitarian theories, there is a dominant tendency to pit local populations (or "the nation") against a small group of communists who employ the secret police to control citizens through terror and intimidation, hence reducing or externalizing national guilt. The few who resist communist rule are depicted as heroes who risked their lives for democracy, freedom or the national good. For instance, the

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35 Wilkemann, interview with Z.Dujisin.
Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania cites among its objectives "to investigate the physical and spiritual genocide of Lithuanians" and to "immortalize the memory of the freedom fighters and the genocide victims." The latter center organizes a summer camp named "Postwar History for Young People," whose objectives are "to instruct young people about the resistance, its ideology, structure, and forms as well as about the postwar years," "to show the resistance participants' love for their homeland, and their understanding of justice, the free world and democracy" and to "to instill civic duties and patriotism in young people."

We find a similar tone in the Institute of National Remembrance, which states its commitment to research "Polish citizens' efforts to fight for an independent Polish State, in defense of freedom and human dignity" or "patriotic traditions of resistance against occupation," while also containing an investigative department called the "Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation." Little or no emphasis is placed on temporal or spatial differences between communist regimes, thus advancing the theory of communism's indivisibility, and the equalization of communist and Nazi rule is a frequent conclusion of the assessments of the past promoted by the institutes.

Nonetheless, the narratives officially upheld by memory institutes, while clearly conditioning their overall orientation, are not automatically reproduced by their research and public education activities, which is indicative of the fact that they should not be treated as monolithic organizations. Official documents of the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania exhibit the tendencies for externalization previously described, but the Centre has also produced some scholarly work that addresses the extensive role Lithuanians played in assisting Nazi forces in the extermination of the local Jewish population. Some of the investigations by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance have also addressed sensitive historical topics that demonstrate local collaboration in the Holocaust, as shown by the three-year inquiry into the Jedwabne massacre (2000–2003).

As regards the modes of remembrance, a simultaneous injunction to remember is cast on the various populations of post-communist countries, with the agents of such injunction speaking from a position of officialdom. This position is reinforced by the activities of state-sponsored memory institutes, which, claiming to provide a historical “truth” on behalf of the state, accumulate much of the memory work in their countries. Scholarly research on behalf of these institutes is particularly geared towards substantiating such an official and centralized national memory. Many of
the papers are an enumeration of "communist crimes" rather than a historical, economic, or sociological survey of the period. By way of illustration, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania cites as one of its main objectives "to establish historical truth and justice" and "to investigate the physical and spiritual genocide of Lithuanians." Similarly, the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania is committed to influencing the "formulation of the objective official position" on "historical questions." The set-up of Slovenia's Study Centre for National Reconciliation in April 2008 was justified with "an objective need for increase of state activity" to work towards the goal of objectively examining "historical facts." Among the main objectives of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile we find the need "to administer and analyze, in a rigorous and scientific manner, the memory of the communist regime in Romania."

Finally, and in a development that has considerably accelerated within the last five years, these same institutes are increasingly active in transferring and harmonizing memory practices across the region. This is done through the signing of bilateral agreements, the organization of various conferences in which best practices are shared and the set-up of platforms and informal groups that facilitate the transfer of knowledge on these practices. Sometimes this process involves contacts with potential partners in countries where state-sponsored memory-institutes are lacking with a view to help them replicate local or regional examples. The transfer of knowledge on practices is ultimately useful in that it enhances memory-makers' ability to fight mnemonic battles domestically and internationally by providing them with a palette of previously tested practices that may help institutionalize their narratives.

The urge to establish a historical "truth" is palpable in many of the memory practices being shared among state-sponsored memory institutes. Namely, their mission statements typically include a commitment to educate the public, and particularly younger generations, regarding the crimes committed under communist regimes. This can be done through lectures, expositions, and reforms of the education sector or awareness raising campaigns. The latter take a variety of shapes, consisting of everything from campaigns, petitions, media interventions, public speeches and talks. The overwhelming perception from the actors developing these activities is that the public is gravely, and in some cases deeply ignorant of the

36 Žáček, interview with Z. Dujisin.
“true” nature of communism, often falling into a dangerous nostalgia that is considered a threat to democratic values and to the avoidance of future resurrections of totalitarian forms of government. For instance, the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes says in its website "one of its key missions” is to "remedy the public's, and especially schoolchildren's, acute ignorance of their recent turbulent history.” A parallel assessment is made by the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory, whose “mission also fulfills an obligation to the citizens of Estonia, so that they may better understand what they themselves or their parents and grandparents endured under Soviet rule.” The strong emphasis placed on affecting educational systems is thus unsurprising. This is done through the production of textbooks, classroom talks or "methodological" formation for school history teachers. While the past is often contested among older generations, the goal appears to be to bring up the younger generation in unanimity. As way of illustration, the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile wishes “to support the setting-up of educational tools destined to analyse the memory of the communist period,” whereas the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes engages in professional co-operation with schools to "enrich the supply of educational materials and teaching aids to facilitate the teaching of modern history, and to help teachers orient themselves in issues of contemporary history and its presentation to pupils and students.” Members of its staff also lecture in a number of Czech universities.

This convergence of domestic memory regimes is not only relevant to the post-communist region, as the same institutional apparatus that is crystallizing post-communist memory regimes is also the means through which post-communist memory-makers are ambitioning to reform the EU’s official regime of remembrance. State-sponsored memory institutes are being deployed by their political supporters for Europeanizing a vision of the past that upholds communism and Nazism as equal evils, a support which is explained by the ability of memory institutes to endow the narratives of the post-communist Right with scholarly legitimacy. Moreover, their unusual concentration of memory practices allows them to monopolize much of the memory work in their countries and to present themselves on European platforms as the carriers of a neglected Eastern European voice demanding to be heard in the continent. As memory institutes have intensified cooperation and gained a regional dimension, their European visibility has grown to the point where they are offering a comprehensive alternative to the EU’s memory regime.
The Europolitics of Truth

Officially, the goal of post-communist memory-makers, that is the politicians and intellectuals who are active and organized in their endeavor to instill particular views of the socialist past, is to convince Brussels to accommodate in its historical narrative the supposedly all-European but neglected experience of communism, one that should stand alongside Nazism as the darkest chapter in European history. Memory-makers consistently espouse the argument that Europe has suffered from two comparable forms of totalitarianism, but while it has accounted for the consequences of Nazism, it is turning a blind eye to the still palpable effects of communism.

This discourse is the product of decades of dialogue between memory-makers from the scholarly/intellectual and political fields in post-communist Europe and as it continues to institutionalize domestically and regionally, it increasingly clashes with the mnemonic substance of the European Union, centered on the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Indeed, memory-makers are advocating the equalization of Nazi and communist crimes with the ultimate aim of unconditionally condemning the latter and of diffusing a crimes-centered narrative of the communist past, one inspired on a usable theory of totalitarianism.

Nevertheless, this mnemonic dispute should not be dismissed as amounting to a “clash of memories” that could be resolved by negotiating a more consensual mnemonic substance between the two halves of Europe. Firstly, this would assume that the mnemonic substance that has been institutionalized in post-communist Europe is consensual which, as was argued above, would be a grave misconception in view of its politically competitive role. The institutes which have been charged with assessing the past have been accused of serving political competition in a variety of forms, namely by making public appearances consistently accompanied by members of selected political parties, by selectively releasing secret service files that discredit political opponents and, crucially, by upholding a discourse of the past that is aligned with that of the political forces backing them. These elements support the view that post-communist makers are proceeding to transnationalize a memory of communism before any sense of normalization of the past has taken root in the region, with the possible exception of the Baltic countries where the parties representing the dominant nationalities (i.e. those parties not representing the Russian community) broadly converge on their memory politics.
Secondly, it would be misguided to assume that the incompatibilities between post-communist memory-makers and the EU are a mere matter of substance, since a close look at the actions and discourse of the actors involved in the “challenge from the East” indicates additional divergences with regards to the modes of remembrance promoted by the European Union. Western European countries, albeit at times hesitantly, are increasingly on the path of desacralization and democratization,\(^7\) opening their national narratives of collective memory to previously unheard or neglected voices, in what can be described as a pluralization of collective memory. By contrast, post-communist memory-makers have gone to great lengths to create institutions which centrally administer a “national memory” and, while indeed integrating the previously neglected voices of the victims of communist repression, these same voices have become increasingly hegemonic and unchallenged in their interpretation of the past. Finally, the lack of domestic consensus among historians, the public or politicians, when it comes to pitting Nazism and Communism as equal evils, would hardly provide an accurate description of the relation between Western European polities and the view of Nazism as an absolute evil in line with the interpretation officially upheld by the EU.

Thus the EU’s pre-accession hope that its culture of remembrance would exert a demonstration effect on Central and Eastern European political cultures has seen an unexpected twist of events, in which it is the new members of the European Union who challenge Brussels’ memory regime by deploying highly centralized memory institutes claiming an ability to establish a historical truth and questioning the privileged standing of Nazism as the worst chapter in European history. This clash thus amounts to more than different historical experiences and lack of mutual understanding: the situation at hand is better described by a clash between regimes of remembrance—one promoted by Brussels on the basis of a developing Western European consensus and which is based on a “politics of regret,” the other one pushed forth by a transnational alliance of post-communist memory-makers and based on a “politics of truth.”

This political-scholarly alliance has crystallized into two groups that work closely together: the de facto political arm of this alliance is an informal group of forty members of the European Parliament, overwhelmingly members of the European People’s Party, who work under the name of “Reconciliation of European Histories.” Their scholarly allies are represented by the “Platform of European Memory and Conscience,” a Europe-

\(^7\) Müller, Memory & Power in Post-war Europe, 9.
level umbrella organization for coordinating and expanding the activities of memory institutes that act as the political “think-tanks.” The two are in constant communication, sharing ideas for policies and memory practices and negotiating a common discourse. While initially the political arm of the movement was most active, recent developments show state-sponsored memory institutes as the core apparatus of mnemonic convergence. Following EU resistance to the perceived politicization of memory by the post-communist Right, a new consensual strategy seems to be emerging, one presenting state-sponsored memory institutes as representative voices of the region. This strategy involves apparently more autonomous initiatives on the part of the Platform, which nevertheless continues to use the political support of sympathetic post-communist governments and MEPs to strengthen the domestic and international presence of its members.

Memory-makers’ call to reunite Eastern and Western memories are not new, yet substantial action aimed at affecting Europe’s regime of remembrance on the basis of a “politics of truth” was made possible only once a favorable political and institutional constellation was in place. Firstly, the absence of socialist or social-democratic parties in most government coalitions across Central and Eastern Europe in the last half decade provided memory-makers with the political opportunity structure to further institutionalize their narratives by imitating available examples in the region. State-sponsored memory institutes were created in many of the countries from which they were missing, and together with their previously existing sister organizations they have been allowed to use regional political structures such as the Visegrad Group or the European Union to deepen international co-operation. Which takes us to a second, crucial political opportunity structure, involving the EU Council presidencies of Slovenia (2008), Czech Republic (2009), Hungary and Poland (2011), all of them coordinated by right-wing governments, which due to their proximity, were successfully used by memory-makers to maintain the momentum of “politics of truth” in the European agenda and create a semblance of unanimity in continental platforms.

It took little more than five years of EU membership for the transnational interest alignment between politicians and scholars to find various institutional expressions at the European level. Paradoxically, the same European political structures that institutionalized “politics of regret” have graced memory-makers with the political opportunity structure within which to pursue their “politics of truth.”

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38 Wilkemann, interview with Z. Dujisin.
Foreign ministers of post-communist countries first attempted to use this political opportunity structure in April 2007 when a European law against Holocaust denial was approved, leaving to member states the choice to enforce it or not. Representatives of Baltic countries proposed a similar provision against the denial of Stalinist crimes and there were parallel calls from other post-communist countries to punish the denial of “communist crimes.” While the proposal was rejected, EU justice commissioner Franco Frattini committed to organizing EU-level public hearings on Stalin-era crimes, introducing the topic into the EU agenda.

In 2008 post-communist memory-makers began aligning their interests across borders and, through a collaborative effort, produced the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, which to this day remains the fundamental set of principles and objectives for memory-makers. The document suggests a set of measures that, if applied, would imply a fundamental shift in the dominant regime of remembrance in Western Europe, and was signed by high-profile European politicians. Among them we find former Czechoslovak President Václav Havel, former Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis, Vice-President of the Liberal International Asparoukh Panov, Former Minister for Education, Youth and Sport and Vice-president of the Slovenian Democratic Party Milan Zver, Former Romanian Minister of Justice Valeriu Stoica, members of the European Parliament from Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Germany, Latvia, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, Finland, United Kingdom and the Netherlands as well as other prominent dissidents and historians. It was meant to summarize the findings of an international Conference which took place in Prague by the same name, one organized by a Czech Senate Committee, the Czech deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Alexandr Vondra, the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the European People’s Party’s Robert Schuman Foundation, among others. The conference also received a letter of support from notable political figures such as Margaret Thatcher, Nicolas Sarkozy, Canadian Secretary of State Jason Kennedy, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the main theorists of totalitarianism who also happens to be a former U.S. National Security Advisor. The final declaration was signed over the following years and months by various members of con-

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40 Willemann, interview with Z. Dujisin.
ervative and right-liberal parties and other European MPs, mainly from East-Central Europe, by representatives of state-sponsored memory institutes, museums and historical commissions, and even by such unexpected supporters as the government-in-exile of Belarus and the representative of the Dalai-Lama.

The text\(^{41}\) is a faithful reflection of totalitarian theories and concepts, founded on the comparison between communism and Nazism and with concrete steps aimed at an overhaul of Europe’s memory regime. It seeks the recognition of communist and Nazi ideologies as inseparable from the extermination and deportation of “whole nations and groups of population,” describes communist regimes as “an integral and horrific part of Europe’s common history” and point to “pan-European responsibility for crimes committed by communism,” advocating an assessment of “communist crimes” following the Nuremberg Tribunal formulation. The declaration firstly calls for an international day of remembrance for the victims of Nazism and communism to be established, but also recommends national governments and European bodies to take concrete steps such: a) having parliaments “acknowledge Communist crimes as crimes against humanity, leading to the appropriate legislation, and to the parliamentary monitoring of such legislation,” b) the set-up of committees tasked with collecting information on “violations of human rights under totalitarian Communist regimes at national level with a view to collaborating closely with a Council of Europe committee of experts”; c) the “establishment of an Institute of European Memory and Conscience”; d) organizing an international conference on the crimes of these regimes “with the results to be largely publicized world-wide”; and e) “adjustment and overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the Nazi crimes.” These proposals are justified by an alleged Western European ignorance of the horrors of communism, with memory-makers openly suggesting the East’s acknowledgement and awareness of Nazi crimes is not being reciprocated by a Western effort to recognize the horrors of communism.

The call to establish a day of remembrance for the victims of communist and Nazi regimes was partly heeded by both the European Union and the OSCE in 2008, which approved it with a large majority after replacing the terms “Totalitarian” and “Communist” with the less controversial “Stalinist.” The act was a concession to post-communist memory-makers

but also included an implicit rejection of the totalitarian narrative by signaling Stalinism as an exceptional form of communism. A similar message could be read from the OSCE’s adoption of the Vilnius Declaration, condemning Nazism and Stalinism as Europe’s two major totalitarian regimes, after some of its proponents attempted a clear condemnation of all forms of communism as totalitarianism. Ever since, memory-makers have insistently pushed for the totalitarian formulation that stresses the indivisibility of communism.42

In September 2008 the European Parliament staged a public hearing explicitly inspired by the Prague Declaration and organized by the Greens-European Free Alliance with the title “Totalitarian Regimes and the opening of the secret files archives in Central and Eastern Europe.” In the official program the organizing MPs named the Prague Declaration as “the common basis for the research on and evaluation of communist regimes” while arguing that “objective comprehensive information about the communist totalitarian past leading to a deeper understanding and discussion is a necessary condition for future integration of all European nations.” The hearing resulted in the establishment of the “Reconciliation of European Histories” working group with the declared intention to reconcile “different historical narratives in Europe” and “consolidate them into a united European memory of the past” that will include “the experience of the post-communist nations.” The informal group of MEPs, which has organized various public hearings and meetings on totalitarianism, also externalizes the communist experience by calling on Europeans to understand that the “Iron Curtain not only excluded the captive nations from our common European home, but it also excluded 50 years of our true history from European history.”

EU presidencies from former communist countries actively promoted memory-makers’ “politics of truth.” The 2008 Slovenian presidency of the EU organized a hearing and compiled a report titled “Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes,” aimed at improving knowledge and public awareness of totalitarian crimes. During March 2009 the Czech presidency of the EU, backed by MEPs from the “Reconciliation of European Histories” group and in the presence of the vice-president of the EP, Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca, hosted another public hearing on “European Conscience and Crimes of Totalitarian Communism: 20 Years After,” with the stated goal of establishing a European platform of memory and conscience

42 Valic Zver, Andreja: Director of the Study Centre for National Reconciliation, Interview with Zoltan Dujisin in Ljubljana, Slovenia, November 2012.
and of providing support to the various state-sponsored memory institutes in the region. A year later, on February 25, 2010, another international conference on “Crimes of the Communist Regimes” took place, organized by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the Czech government in cooperation with the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, among others. The conference ended in calls to bring justice to “perpetrators of communist crimes” and called for the “creation of a new international court with a seat within the EU for the crimes of communism.” In March 2011 the European Parliament was once again chosen to host a hearing organized by the European People’s Party and the Hungarian presidency of the EU on “What do Young Europeans know about Totalitarianism?” whereas on August 2011 the Polish presidency organized a conference to celebrate the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarian Regimes.

This favorable constellation of political factors culminated in the establishment of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience in October 2011, following an agreement between the four East-Central European countries that form the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland). At the time all four countries were, for the first time since the transition, ruled by conservative or right-liberal parties, allowing them to culminate the work done since the drafting of the Prague declaration. The action was part of an initiative of the Polish presidency of the EU, which enjoyed the support of the European Parliament and the EU Council as well as of Czech and Polish memory institutes and other institutions concerned with researching, documenting and raising awareness on the “Communist totalitarian” past. Funded by the International Visegrad Fund, which in its turn receives its funding from Visegrad states, and coordinated by the Prague-based Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, the platform set as its main aim to further support the activities of memory institutes as part of its stated educational objectives. Platform members use it mostly as a source of logistical support in organizing the various workshops, meetings and conferences that facilitate the transfer and harmonization of practices across countries.

**Reacting to Mixed Signals from Brussels**

The reaction to this “challenge from the East” on the part of Brussels has been ambiguous and hesitant. The EU’s dilemma has been apparent in some of the statements from its officials when commenting on the activi-
ties of post-communist memory-makers. In response to a 2008 hearing on crimes committed by totalitarian regimes, organized under the Slovenian EU presidency, Jacques Barrot, a French center-right politician who at the time held the position of Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, tried to reconcile the need to acknowledge the voices of memory-makers, without compromising the modes of remembrance that define the EU’s memory regime:

Member States in Western Europe should be more sensitive to the tragic past of the Member States in eastern Europe. Taking this into account, the Commission is examining how existing Community programmes, notably in the field of education and citizenship can be further used to raise awareness of these issues across Europe. Finally, the Commission underlines that the Union has very few powers in this area. All countries must find their own way of coming to terms with their past, of meeting the expectations of victims and their descendants, and of achieving reconciliation. The role of the EU can only be to facilitate this process by encouraging discussion, fostering the sharing of experience and best practices, and bringing the various players together.43

On the one hand, and at the risk of appearing to disregard Eastern Europe’s historical experience and political voice, the EU cannot reject the historical representation put forward by Central and Eastern Europe, where legislative and other state bodies have, in the first years of transition as well as in more recent years, endorsed official interpretations of the past.44 On the other hand, the European Commission is aware of the partisan nature of memory-makers’ representations of the past, as well as of the contradiction between post-communist “politics of truth” and the evolving EU’s culture of remembrance focused on the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Funding patterns confirm this picture: memory-makers’ state-sponsored research institutes do not receive any direct funding from Brussels, whose grants are made available to them only for specific projects under initiatives such as the Active European Remembrance Fund, a part of the EU’s Europe for Citizens Program promoting commemorative projects. While the program’s guidelines stress the centrality of Nazism and Stalinism to European memory, the EU is confirming its reluctance to

abandon the core of its mnemonic substance through an overwhelming preference for Holocaust-related projects at the expense of initiatives geared towards a clear-cut condemnation of communism.\textsuperscript{45}

With memory-makers aware of such reluctance, their strategies currently involve putting more indirect pressure on the commission by demanding support for the main institutional apparatus of mnemonic convergence, state-sponsored memory institutes. This support is deemed vital by memory-makers in view of the vulnerability of such institutes to political contingency. While it is unlikely they would be scrapped, since this could controversially signal an attempt to cover up past crimes by whichever political force opposes its activities, they are still susceptible to more subtle changes that may question their original mission, in view of their vulnerability to political whims.

This was the rationale behind the exhortations of MEPs from the “Reconciliation of European Histories” Group in parliamentary debates, calling for EU funding and support for state-sponsored memory institutes\textsuperscript{46}, a tactic that has meanwhile been abandoned in view of the difficulties involved in securing funding for institutes legally defined as state organizations. Currently state-sponsored memory institutes are trying to shield themselves from domestic political contingency by obtaining European legitimacy, and the set-up of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience in 2011 with the approval of the European Parliament and the EU Council was part of this strategy. Moreover, memory institutes seek EU funding for remembrance and educational projects with other European partners\textsuperscript{47}, which may create legally binding agreements that would deter attempts to scrap them or substantially alter the nature of their activities. The Platform also works to obtain additional funding for its activities, recently focusing more on private foundations than on governments due to the current financial difficulties faced by Europe. Another strategy which may legitimate a handful of these institutes is an application on behalf of the platform to obtain status of European Heritage, granted by the European Commission to “heritage sites that celebrate and symbolize European integration, ideals and history” to archives of communist-era files.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Žáček, interview with Z.Dujisin; Wilkemann, interview with Z.Dujisin; Valic Zver, Interview with Z. Dujisin.
\textsuperscript{47} Žáček, interview with Z.Dujisin.
\textsuperscript{48} Wilkemann, interview with Z.Dujisin.
Finally, state-sponsored memory institutes have also shown an ability to learn and evolve, partly through their own experience and partly due to the influx of new staff, although their main weakness still lies in their structurally-determined potential for politicization. Memory institutes are reacting to the criticisms of previous years over excessive politicization by attempting to stay out of political struggles, with many of them now appointing less political and more scholarly figures to head the institutes. Moreover, the institutes have responded to accusations of neglecting the Nazi past at the expense of the politically expedient study of Communist repression by dedicating additional attention to the Holocaust or the interwar era. Whether this will have an effect on the international pursuit of a condemnation of Nazi and communist “totalitarianism,” and whether as a result of external criticism and staff changes the latter notion moves closer to that upheld by the liberal dissidents of the 1970s and 1980s, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

The Europeanization of a crimes-centered regime of remembrance ultimately results from the actions of specific governments who, by aligning their interests with sectors of the scholarly community and with similarly oriented political elites across borders, have created a novel institutional apparatus that can push their agenda in Europe. Paradoxically, the same structures through which Europe’s hitherto prevailing memory regime had evolved are being used by this coalition of memory-makers to have their voices heard in Europe. This constitutes a partial reversal in the flow of mnemonic substance between west and east, one that is unlikely to proceed smoothly.

The EU is still lacking a clear strategy as to how to absorb and accommodate the narratives coming from post-communist officialdom. These narratives are put forward as bringing reconciliation between east and west, pluralizing and completing Europe’s master mnemonic narrative and aiding the process of European integration, but the EU perceives them as minimizing the significance of the Holocaust, overly politicized and emerging from excessively centralized structures. The EU cannot fully reject such narratives without risking accusations of insensitivity and hegemony, but seems reluctant to abandon the principles of European remembrance that have been built over decades.

As memory-makers continue to lobby Brussels to accommodate their narrative and take a clear stance on the issue of “communist totalitarian-
ism,” one may ask for how long will the EU be able to sustain its ambiguous position. Moreover, memory-makers are showing an ability to rapidly adapt their strategies to prevailing conditions, and shifting tactics whenever deemed necessary, implying that we might witness new forms of organization and co-operation in the future with a view on enhancing their legitimacy and forcing Brussels to adapt. Nonetheless, the crucial mnemonic apparatus of memory-makers, the state-sponsored memory institutes, remain vulnerable to domestic political contingency, which adds a sense of urgency to memory-makers attempts’ to legitimize them in European platforms.

Brussels might just prefer to wait, in the meanwhile, and the European Left will not oppose, as a European-level legitimation of the totalitarian interpretation of the communist past could provide the Right with a permanent symbolic advantage. This is more likely a fear of the Left in post-communist Europe, where for over two decades all polities without exception have witnessed how a crimes-centered memory of communism provided the Right with a competitive political advantage. While it would be simplistic to dismiss the motivations of memory-makers as purely political, what is important to retain is that such large-scale overhauls in a polity’s culture of remembrance will have abundant unexpected consequences, many of which are bound to remain outside the control of any particular actor, institution or state.