

- DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HISTORY -  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND  
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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**The  
EU Politics  
of  
Remembrance**

by  
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WORKING PAPERS  
in  
INTERNATIONAL HISTORY

No. 9 / October 2011

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Working Papers

in

International History

Editor: Jaci Eisenberg

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Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

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<http://www.graduateinstitute.ch/history-politics>

## **Abstract**

Over the last few years, EU institutions have taken up the task of promoting a 'European active remembrance' of Europe's 20th century totalitarian experiences. At stake in this process is the possibility of constructing an EU-wide historical narrative. However, EU-level debates on the commemoration of the past are permeated by competition between two conflicting interpretations of the past, the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' versus the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' narratives. This paper explains why these memory narratives have changed over time and what determines their chance to become the dominant discourse on the EU's political agenda.

## THE EU POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE

Over the last few years, European elites have come to the task of promoting an 'active European remembrance'<sup>1</sup> of the past. Since 2007, projects dealing with the memory and the fostering of reflection about the causes and consequences of Nazism and/or Stalinism (European Commission 2007) can benefit from EU financial support. Being able to cope with the crimes of the past has also become, in the words of Tony Judt, 'Europe's entry ticket' for candidate EU states (Judt 2005). 'Memory' has moved its way at centre stage of EU-level policies, as a new vector of identity policies and a soft EU-membership criterion.

The 'Active European Remembrance' action, set in place in 2007, aims for the preservation of the main sites associated with the mass deportations, former concentration camps, as well as the archives documenting the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism, and in so doing hopes to keep alive the memory of the victims of the two totalitarian regimes (European Commission 2007: 89). At stake in this process is the possibility of constructing a Europe-wide historical narrative, which could act as identification-marker for European citizens. Former attempts at creating EU-level remembrance processes had concentrated on European heritage and on the history of European integration itself as reservoirs of common myths for European citizens. However, facing the failure of such policies to act as vectors of identification to the EU, EU elites understood the need to promote new 'memory frames' - defined here as shared interpretative lenses through which the past is made sense of by certain actors.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Active European Remembrance' is the name of the European action which has been set in place by the European Commission in 2007. It is part of the 2007-2013 Europe for Citizens Programme.

<sup>2</sup> A more extensive definition will be given below.

The decision was therefore taken to focus on ‘hot’ memories,<sup>3</sup> already present in domestic memory cultures, and better able to appeal to the minds of European citizens. From the late 1990s onwards, references to the Holocaust as the ultimate evil against which Europe itself was defined became increasingly present in the EU’s discourse. Defining the Holocaust as *unique* in its monstrosity became the only acceptable way of referring to the event. However, if the EU’s discourse was able to resonate well with the domestic memory cultures of Western European states, it became more problematic in the context of the Eastern enlargement. Therefore, EU policy-makers acknowledged the need to find another memory frame which could appeal to new EU citizens, and shifted the core of their action towards Europeanising the remembrance of both Nazi and Stalinist crimes. However, the very nature of mechanisms of recollection of the past, as ideal tools of political tactics in the hands of political elites at local, domestic and more recently European levels, did not lend itself well to being a vector of collective consciousness building. Rather than exemplifying an Europeanization process of collective remembrance processes, EU-level debates are permeated by competition between different memory frames, upheld by opposing coalitions of actors.

The term ‘remembrance’, rather than ‘memory’, is used here, not because it was desirable to adopt the European Commission’s terminology, but in order to stress the role of agency, either individual or institutional, in bringing the past back to life (Winter and Sivan 1999). Using insights from the agenda-setting and framing literature,<sup>4</sup> this paper examines the role of institutional and political actors in order to understand why new memory frames emerge at the European level and the conditions under which they are able to become prominent or, rather, lose ground in the EU’s discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> Maier (2002) differentiates between the hot memory of Nazism and the cold memory of Communism in Western Europe.

<sup>4</sup> See the theoretical section below.

The research conducted shows that changes in the constellation of actors in place was indeed a key factor in explaining fluctuations of the EU's remembrance discourse. However, the weight the arguments brought up by policy actors could bear also depended on how well their discourse resonated with existing memory cultures, at both the domestic and the EU levels. Thus, the entrance of Eastern European states in the EU has allowed for a competing interpretation of the past, that of 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil', to gain ground. New member states and some sections of the political Right, particularly within the European Parliament, have challenged the dominant frame, at the EU level and in most old EU states, of the *uniqueness* of the Holocaust experience. The European Commission, in an attempt to use the realm of remembrance as a vector of identification and participation to the EU as a polity, has also endorsed the new discourse. Obstacles to a complete challenge of the dominant interpretation were, however, many. In a political context in which the uniqueness of the Holocaust has been erected to the status of founding myth in European societies; when the survivors of Nazi crimes are increasingly few; and where a strong mobilisation for an active remembrance of the Holocaust exists at the civil society level, the dominant portrayal of the past could not be fully overthrown. If the Eastern enlargement, by changing the constellation of actors in place, has allowed for the incorporation of the remembrance of Soviet crimes into EU discourse, the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame is still dominant. The nature of the discourse itself, its heuristics, and its status as 'solution' to the perceived lack of founding event or 'myth' in the history of European integration, make it a very powerful identification-marker.

### **1. Collective Memory Building as Locus of Memory Frames Competition**

The constructed nature of national identities (Anderson 1983) is widely, and increasingly so, accepted by scholars of nationalism. Collective identity has been at the centre of attention in societies that were formed in the course of the making of the

nation-state. The nation, however, has not been an exclusive focus. Collective identity can equally refer to cities, to regions, or to groups such as political parties or even social movements (Eder 2005). It has more recently been at the heart of debates on post-national attempts at political integration. Some voices, especially in the context of post-national identity construction attempts at the European level, evoke the possibility of a collective identity defined by some reciprocal expectation to abide by norms. Habermas's 'constitutional patriotism' conceives the creation of a supranationally shared political culture based on the rule of law, separation of powers, democracy and respect for human rights (Habermas 2001). Post-national models of citizenship have, however, been criticized for artificially disaggregating citizens' shared sense of adherence to democratic values and the emotional components of group identity construction. Elites at the sub-national, national and supra-national levels have well perceived the intricacy of constructing collective identities in the absence of any dimension of shared memory within the group.

Processes of collective memory construction have indeed been an essential element of identity-building processes in modern and post-modern societies. Whereas identity refers to the definition of who is really a member of a group, memory is what this group shares in terms of past experiences (Eder 2005: 202). Thus collective memory preserves or reconstructs the knowledge of one group's past experiences. Memory is collective because, following Halbwachs, 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories' (Halbwachs 1992: 38). Thus, group memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Collective memory can manifest itself in a variety of forms. It exists as objectified memory in the form of museums, memorials, statues, spaces of memory famously termed *lieux de mémoire* by Nora (1989), as institutionalised memory in school *curricula*, and finally in rituals of remembering the past, which might be called the 'public

commemoration' of a group. As such, collective memory provides a foundation from which a group 'derives an awareness of its unity or peculiarity' (Assman 1995: 130). Bell warns us, however, that although we are 'the products of our past', memory is operated in different ways across different scales and contexts (2009: 350). Depending on the scale of analysis, memory constitutes collective identities via different mechanisms.

As a vector of collective identity-building, processes of remembrance of the past have been the object of attention of different actors who vie for the control of policy. Most scholars would concur that recollecting the past is an active process, rather than a simple recollection of historical facts.<sup>5</sup> In the words of Schwarz, 'to remember is to place the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present' (Schwartz 1982: 374). This implies that processes of collective identity and collective memory construction are embedded into social struggles between actors, which pursue specific interests via the shaping of collective memory for a given group. At the national level, power relations regarding past legacies have been the object of extended discussion, especially as pertains to post-authoritarian democratic states where perceptions of the past are a key factor in the shaping of new social and political structures (see for instance Barahona de Brito *et al* 2001).

Scholars of memory politics have also been concerned with better conceptualising dynamics of agency and process, focusing on actors and mechanisms involved into the recollection of the past (Wolfrum 1999). Using the 'memory regime' framework, Langebacher (2003) shows that because control over memory confers power over political outcomes, elites compete for maximum diffusion and acceptance of a preferred memory. He further explains that a particular memory becomes dominant when 'representatives of this memory have succeeded in de-legitimising and defeating

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<sup>5</sup> There is however a debate between absolutist and relativist theories (Schwartz 1982).



competing memories' (Langenbacher 2003: 50). If such conceptualisations have clearly pointed to how the interpretation of the past is at the heart of political struggles between political actors who aim at controlling policy decisions, they have not provided systematic analysis of the conditions in which given interpretations of the past become dominant or, *vice-versa*, lose ground, in public discourses.

Our analysis brings in the concepts of 'memory frame', defined as a shared interpretative lens through which the past is explained by certain actors. As a realm in which interpretative processes are key, the politics of remembrance can gain in conceptualisation if looked at as the locus of struggles between different possible 'portrayals' of the past, held by competing actors. The agenda-setting and agenda-definition literature helps us identify the conditions whereby certain interpretative frames make their way onto political agendas. First, new frames can emerge when the *circle of actors* involved in a policy debate changes and the line between opponents and proponents of a frame evolves in favour of the tenants of the new frame (Princen 2007).

Second, the *nature of the frame* itself is taken to matter. Whether authors refer to the ability of the frame to create a convincing link between 'problem' and 'solution' (Kingdon 1995; Rochefort and Cobb 1994), or to the necessity for the frame to refer to a familiar and tried strategy, or to the heuristics of the frame itself (Kohler-Koch 2000: 521), the nature of the discourse is considered a component of its success. Studies on framing also point to the need, in order for new frames to gain ground on political agendas, to refer to 'meta-cultural frames' which operate at a broader level (Schön and Rein 1994). The influence of specific ideas is indeed related to their resonance with broader values. Such insights are particularly relevant to help us examining the role played here by 'memory cultures', which can be defined as meta-narratives founded on a set of shared founding myths and shared terminological assumptions. When the past

is narrated, certain concepts indeed become key in the terminology used in public spaces of communication, such as the media, academic spheres, political discourses and educational tools (Carrier 2005: 182). The concept differs from that of 'memory frames', which are much more specific discourses, applying to a given historical event or period. Memory frames may, as such, resonate well or clash with the existing memory cultures of a given society.

Third, attention has been directed to the *political and institutional context* within which frames are proposed. Political events may shift the balance of power in the political system (Princen 2007). Besides, the institutional and political framework within which politics operate favours consideration of some issues while discouraging consideration of others (Bachrach and Baratz 1962).

## **2. First Attempts at Developing EU-level Memory Frames**

Since the early years of European integration, EU elites have attempted to transform and reconstruct national collective memory by adding layers of a transnational European memory. Until recently three memory frames were promoted by EU policy-makers: EU remembrance policies focused on the 'rediscovery' of European heritage, the Second World War as founding event of the European project, and the history of European integration itself.

### *The 'Common Heritage' Frame*

On a first level, European elites designed policies aimed at highlighting what can be seen as shared historical experiences and values amongst European societies. From the very early years of European integration, European institutions and European Heads of State perceived the conscious rediscovery of European heritage as a prerequisite to any sort of political unification. At the Copenhagen Summit of October 1973, Heads of State

adopted the *Declaration on European Identity* (European Council 1973), in which they concluded that special attention had to be given to intangible values, underlining the role of culture as one of the fundamental elements of European identity (European Council 1973). It was the European Parliament, in the 1970s, which for the first time concretely involved the EU with the politics of the European past. The Parliament tackled the subject via the 'heritage door' – with a sole focus on the role of specific architectural or historical sites as embodiments of European memory (Calligaro 2010). In 1974, a group of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) adopted a resolution, in which they suggested different measures meant to protect the European cultural heritage (European Parliament 1974). The European Commission also became involved with the politics of remembrance via the vector of cultural heritage policies. The Directorate General Education and Culture ('DG Culture') had been responsible since 1995 for the Raphaël Programme dealing with European heritage, until the programme was integrated into the Culture Framework Programme in 2000 (Littoz-Monnet 2007). Under the Culture Framework Programme, a great diversity of projects related to the promotion of architectural heritage as the deposit of 'European memory' has benefited from EU financial support. The creation of the label 'European heritage' in 2007 responds to a similar logic. The Acropolis in Athens, the Capitol in Rome, or the Court of Honour of the Papal Palace in Avignon are only a few examples of sites chosen as 'European' places of memory by the European Commission. Symbolic initiatives, such as the 'European City of Culture' and the 'European Cultural Month' are part of the same attempt at pointing to the existence of a common European heritage.

### *The 'Founding Event' Frame*

On a second level, EU decision-makers endeavoured to define European integration against its 'founding event', the Second World War. The background of the War was central to the *raison d'être* of the European Community project. In the Schuman

Declaration of May 1950, it was hoped that the Community would 'lead to the realisation of the first concrete foundation of a European federation indispensable to the preservation of peace'.<sup>6</sup> The Second World War was perceived by federalists and European elites more generally as the ultimate consequence of states' nationalist impulses. The European project was therefore presented as an institutional experiment which would render similar conflicts impossible in the future. Though the War was the explicit background against which the European project was initiated, European institutions did not become involved in promoting the active remembrance of the Holocaust until the 1990s. It was also not until then that EU elites analysed the Second World War as a unique event which produced the Shoah, and thus went, in moral terms, beyond the ills of former and comparable military conflicts. Again via the heritage path the European Parliament proposed in the early 1990s to define Nazi concentration camps as European historical monuments<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, projects related to the remembrance of the Second World War and the contribution of minority groups to European culture also benefited from increased support under the cultural heritage section of the Culture Framework Programme (Calligaro 2010). If the representation of war as a European site of memory already indicated a turn in EU collective memory building strategies, attempts at creating Europe-wide representations of the past were still conceived as part of European cultural policies and, more specifically, of the preservation and valorisation of chosen historical and cultural *sites*. The selection of the sites was of course related to a certain definition of European history, and hence, of European identity. But endeavours to construct a European-level collective remembrance process was limited to actions concerning

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<sup>6</sup> Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, available at: [http://www.ena.lu/declaration\\_robert\\_schuman\\_paris\\_1950-022500006.html](http://www.ena.lu/declaration_robert_schuman_paris_1950-022500006.html) (last accessed 2 October 2011).

<sup>7</sup> European Parliament Resolution on European and International Preservation of the Sites of Nazi Concentration Camps as Historical Memorials, 11 February 1993, OJEC C 72, 15.3.1993.

specific cultural and historical symbols. It was only in the 2000s that the Holocaust became more central to the EU's discourse, as will be explained in further sections below.

### *The 'Grand Moments of European Integration' Frame*

On a third level, European institutions have attempted to create a new terrain of collective memory centred around the 'grand moments' of European integration history itself. In the wake of the low turnout in the 1979 European elections, European Commission policy strategists became convinced of the need to 'sell Europe' more effectively to the European public (Shore 2000). In June 1984, the Fontainebleau European Council decided to appoint an *ad hoc* Committee whose task was to promote the European Community and its image (Shore 1993: 788). The notion of a 'People's Europe' was a fairly well-established one within the European Community of the late 1980s. The two 1985 *Adonnino Reports on a People's Europe* contained specific sections devoted to culture and communication, which concentrated on the image and identity of the Community, and suggested, amongst other measures, the introduction of concrete 'European' symbols to which citizens could relate. In June 1985, when approving the proposals made by the Adonnino Committee, the European Council adopted the European flag, the European anthem and Europe Day as the official symbols of the European Community. Europe Day was decreed to be the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, in celebration of the Schuman Declaration adopted on 9 May 1950. In its communication *A People's Europe*, the European Commission also proposed to make Jean Monnet's birthday another ritual affirmation of Europe's history (European Commission 1988: 9), but the proposal was not adopted.

In short, none of these memory frames were able to foster EU citizens' awareness of their 'European belonging'. According to research conducted by Fligstein (2009), only

3.9% of people who live in Europe see themselves as exclusively European, while another 8.8% combine a European and national identity. The 'common heritage' frame and the 'founding event' frames were promoted mainly via the use of cultural policy instruments. The 'grand moments of European integration' frame was advanced via the vector of citizenship policies and was part of a more far-fetched project aimed at fostering citizens' participation to the EU as a political project. But the history of European integration was not sufficiently appealing material to European citizens. First, attempts at dealing with the politics of remembrance at EU level pointed to two failures: EU policies were either too narrowly restricted to cultural policy instruments, or employed memory frames which did not resonate well with European societies' existing memory cultures.

### **3. Frame Competition: 'The Holocaust as Unique' vs. 'Hitler and Stalin as equally Evil'**

In response to former failures of EU remembrance policies, EU elites have developed new memory frames, which resonate with the existing memory cultures of EU states, and can, as such, better appeal to European citizens. Precisely because the new memory discourses echo with domestic memory cultures, the EU has become a contested terrain for competing frames. The struggle centres, essentially, on the right way of condemning the two European totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, opposing the paradigm of the distinctiveness of the Holocaust to the view that Nazism and Stalinism were two equally barbaric regimes in a longer history of organised state terror.

It is in this context that the Holocaust became central to the discourse of EU elites. The specificity of the European experience with Nazism, as a 'never to happen again' historical occurrence, entered the EU's discourse in the early 1990s with the European

Parliament resolution defining Nazi concentration camps as historical monuments.<sup>8</sup> At the time, a proposal from a German MEP concerning the inclusion of sites related to Stalinist crimes had been rejected (Calligaro 2008), showing the dominant status of the 'Uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame at EU level. In 1995, the European Parliament also proposed the -creation of a European Holocaust Remembrance Day.<sup>9</sup> With the 2000 Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, the significance of the Holocaust in the EU's discourse gained further ground. EU politicians hoped that the 2000 Stockholm Declaration would signal the recognition of the Holocaust as the cornerstone of the edifice of a common European identity (Challand 2009: 399). In 2000, in the wake of the Forum, sanctions were adopted against Austria after a coalition was forged between the Austrian's People's Party (ÖVP) and the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ). Thus, the freeze of all high-level diplomatic contacts with Austrian officials was taken on behalf of moral imperatives derived from the memory of the Holocaust in Europe, rather than the concrete policies of the newly elected coalition (Seidendorf 2005). In June 2005, Beate Winkler, former director of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, explained at an OSCE Conference: 'The Shoah is the traumatic experience of Europe's recent history. It has driven the EU's founders to build a united and peaceful Europe and thus been at the very root of European integration'.<sup>10</sup> Over the last ten years, European activities of Holocaust remembrance have been placed at the top of the EU agenda.

With the Eastern enlargement, however, a competing discourse focusing on Stalinist crimes gained ground in EU institutions' memory policies. The 2005 European

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<sup>8</sup>European Parliament Resolution on European and International Preservation of the Sites of Nazi Concentration Camps as Historical Memorials, 11 February 1993, OJCE C72, 15 March 1993.

<sup>9</sup>Debates of the European Parliament, Sitting on 15 May 1995, Holocaust Remembrance Day and European Parliament.

<sup>10</sup> Beate Winkler's address at the OSCE Conference on Antisemitism and other forms of Intolerance, Cordoba, 8-9 June 2005, <http://www.osce.org/cio/16526>, 99-103 (last accessed 2 October 2011).

Parliament resolution *The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War*<sup>11</sup>, marked the first time that the suffering endured by Eastern nations under Communism was put on the EU's agenda. The Parliament then recognised 'the magnitude of the suffering, injustice and long-term social, political and economic degradation endured by the captive nations located on the eastern side of what was to become the Iron Curtain' and confirmed 'its united stand against all totalitarian rule of whatever ideological persuasion'.<sup>12</sup> In its 2009 resolution on *European Conscience and Totalitarianism*, the European Parliament stated even more forcefully that Europe will not be united unless it is able 'to form a common view of its history, and recognises Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy'.<sup>13</sup> In April 2009, the European Parliament also called for the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August to be proclaimed a Europe-wide Remembrance Day for the victims of both Nazism and Communism.<sup>14</sup> Ten years earlier, such a move would have been inconceivable.

A similar turn has taken place within the European Commission. The 'European Active Remembrance' action launched in 2007 focuses on both Nazi and Stalinist crimes. Given their concerns with the need to build a common transnational memory, officials from DG Culture decided to direct EU-level remembrance efforts on historical phenomena that already belonged to the realm of domestic memory cultures. In this attempt, however, the necessity to encapsulate the diversity of memory cultures of all EU states was acknowledged. DG Culture recognized that 'Europe needs to accept that its constitutive nations want to make their history a part of the collective European

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<sup>11</sup> P6-TA(2005)0180, Official Journal C92 E/392, 20 April 2006.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> P6-TA(2009)0213, Official Journal C137 E/05, 27 May 2010.

<sup>14</sup> *EurActiv*, 'Parliament backs totalitarian 'remembrance day'', 3 April 2009, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/culture/parliament-backs-totalitarian-remembrance-day/article-180973> (last accessed 2 October 2011).



memory'.<sup>15</sup> Thus the Commission departed from its previous emphasis on the crimes of the Holocaust as the sole historical 'other' of the European Union, and started developing a new memory frame focused on the need to condemn Nazism and Stalinism, the two main European experiences of Totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as equally evil. The guidelines of the 'Active European Remembrance' action state that 'the remembrance of Nazism and Stalinism is necessary to fully appreciate the meaning of the Community's fundamental values [...] the understanding of these values demands that Europeans preserve the memory of the past, including its dark sides'.<sup>16</sup> This discursive shift was well perceived by observers of EU politics. Holocaust scholars and groups that were particularly responsive to the Jewish cause have accused the EU of striving to create a historical and intellectual infrastructure 'to undermine and eventually cancel the current status of the Shoah as a unique case of genocide'.<sup>17</sup> Incontestably, the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame has become increasingly institutionalised at EU level. It has, nevertheless, not replaced the discourse on the centrality of the Holocaust. Rather, the two frames have developed in parallel and compete for prominence. At the heart of the struggle are institutional and political actors who take part in the remembrance debate with specific policy interests.

#### **4. Protagonists: who Recounts Europe's Past?**

##### *The European Commission: Europeanising Memory as Integration Method*

The European Commission, acting as a successful agenda-setter, played a crucial role in

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<sup>15</sup> Confidential document from the Commission services, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Website of the Executive Agency Education, Audiovisual, Culture, Programme Guide 'Europe for Citizens', 2007-2013, [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/about\\_citizenship\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/about_citizenship_en.php) (last accessed 5 October 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Liphshiz, C. 'Holocaust scholars slam EU for backing Nazi-Communist comparison', *HAARETZ*, 26 January 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/holocaust-scholars-slam-eu-for-backing-nazi-communist-comparison-1.262074> (last accessed 5 October 2011).

promoting the Europeanization of remembrance processes. Jàn Figel, the Education and Culture Commissioner at the time of the launch of the 'Active European Remembrance' initiative, was personally committed to bringing remembrance issues to the fore.<sup>18</sup> Officials from DG Culture also perceived the current 'memory boom' (Winter 2000) as a window of opportunity for constructing new European spaces of communication around common remembrance actions. Therefore, the decision was made to tackle memory issues via the path of communication policies, rather than cultural policies. The Commission clearly states that the aim of the 'Active European Remembrance' action consists in 'bringing Europe closer to its citizens by promoting Europe's values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past' (European Commission 2007: 89). A couple of years after the creation of the 'Active European Remembrance' action, the shift of strategy was reflected in the institutional transfer of memory issues from DG Culture to DG Communication. With the creation in 2010 of a new portfolio named 'Fundamental Rights, Justice and Citizenship' directed by Commissioner Viviane Reding,<sup>19</sup> actions related to Europe's past were directly connected to the theme of citizens' sense of belonging to the European community as a political project. The 'Europe for Citizens' programme, which comprises the 'Active European Remembrance' initiative, was therefore moved under the remit of DG Communication.

In their endeavour to Europeanise remembrance mechanisms, Commission officials have also been wary of focusing European remembrance efforts on historical events perceived to have a European dimension. In the European Parliament, Spanish and Portuguese MEPs had suggested that their own historical experiences with Fascism under Franco and Salazar be part of the 'Active European Remembrance' action. The

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<sup>18</sup> Interviews with several officials from DG Culture, Brussels, June 2010.

<sup>19</sup> The portfolio is administered by three different DGs: DG Justice, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and DG Communication.

European Commission, however, judged those experiences with Fascism as too national in their nature.<sup>20</sup> For the Commission services, the support of projects related to the remembrance of the past is designed to achieve no less than the ‘grass roots construction’ of European collective memory.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the strategy signals a genuine attempt by DG Culture to use the realm of remembrance as a mechanism of identity building and public sphere formation at the European level.<sup>22</sup>

### *When Ideologies still Matter*

Remembrance debates have been overtly political ones. Not only national affiliations, but also traditional ideological divisions on the Left-Right spectrum have determined the position of EU elites in the memory frame struggle.<sup>23</sup> The European Parliament has become, over the last ten years, the central arena where different portrayals of the past and their promoters have competed for prominence on the EU agenda. Thus, the struggle over remembrance politics was initiated by a group of MEPs composed mainly of Eastern European and European People’s Party (EPP) representatives. The drive clearly came from the new member states, and from the Right.

During the debates that preceded the adoption of the 2005 resolution *The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War*, attempts to condemn the crimes of Stalinism on an equal footing with those of Nazism were criticized by some MEPs as sheer revisionism. The resolution was proposed by MEPs from the European People’s Party (EPP) group, and provoked a strong resistance from the Left. For instance, Giusto Catania, from the European United Left Group (GUE/NGL), complained that ‘by

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Pavel Tychtl, European Commission, DG Communication, 10 June 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Confidential working document produced by the Commission services, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Habermas defines the public sphere as ‘a network of communicating information and points of view’ (see Habermas 1996: 360).

<sup>23</sup> See for instance Kreppel (2000) for a presentation of the debate on the determinants of MEP positions.

indistinctly muddling 8 May 1945 with the crimes of Stalinism, we do a disservice to the commemoration of the Liberation of Europe [...] in this debate, people are seeking to surreptitiously bring to life the theories of Nolte, which equate Nazism with Communism, and not only with Stalinism'.<sup>24</sup> In the same vein, Pedro Guerreiro, also from the GUE/NGL Group, said that this 'resolution seeks to silence and defame the glorious and heroic role played by the communists in the anti-fascist struggle.'<sup>25</sup>

In 2009, the resolution on *European Conscience and Totalitarianism* was tabled by a majority of representatives of the European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED).<sup>26</sup> Katrin Saks, from the European Socialist Party (PSE) pointed to the fact that she supported this resolution in contrast to many others from her political faction. Attesting to the Left-Right cleavage over the issue, she explains that for the PSE, the resolution was an attempt to rewrite history.<sup>27</sup> Estonian centre-right MEP Tunne Kelam, one of the initiators of the 2009 resolution, also explains that the resolution overwhelmingly benefited from the support of the EPP-ED group.<sup>28</sup> For the Left, communists ultimately have to their credit the fight they led against Nazism, the ultimate evil. Every attempt at condemning Stalinist crimes on an equal footing with Nazi crimes is therefore perceived as an attempt to rewrite history. The fact that Stalin led the Soviet assault on Nazism also implies that it is indeed very difficult to locate the two regimes in the same memory discourse.

#### *'Old' vs. 'New' Member States*

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<sup>24</sup>Speech of Guisto Catania, Debates of the European Parliament, 15 May 2005.

<sup>25</sup>Speech of Pedro Guerreiro, Debates of the European Parliament, 15 May 2005.

<sup>26</sup>Some representatives of the Verts-Alliance Libre Européenne (Verts-ALE), the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN), and the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) also took part.

<sup>27</sup>Speech of Katrin Saks, Debates of the European Parliament, Oral explanations of vote, 2 April 2009.

<sup>28</sup>Europe ponders 'remembrance day' for Communist, Nazi Past, *Euractiv*, 31 March 2009, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/culture/europe-ponders-remembrance-day-communist-nazi-past/article-180794> (2 October 2011).

It is with the Eastern enlargement, that the EU's sole focus on the crimes committed by the Axis powers during the Second World War came under attack. New EU states, with Poland and the Baltics at the vanguard of the remembrance politics struggle, have challenged the EU-endorsed view of the Second World War as essentially a 'good war' fought for the common cause of anti-Nazism (Mälksoo 2009, Onken 2007). To them, the end of the Second World War also implied the beginning of a long-term occupation of their territories, with mass deportations and the foundation of dictatorial regimes.<sup>29</sup> Thus, as evidenced above, both the 2005 and the 2009 Parliament resolutions were tabled by a majority of MEPs from Eastern European states. Since 2009, Eastern European parliamentarians have become better organised in order to give their views a higher profile within the European Parliament. Under the leadership of Sandra Kalniete, a Latvian MEP from the EPP group, the 'Reconciliation of European Histories' informal parliamentary group was created. Its agenda focuses on the remembrance of Stalinist crimes, and it lobbies the European Commission in order to obtain better resources for remembrance actions.<sup>30</sup>

For new member states, obtaining recognition of the barbarity of the crimes of Stalinism at the EU level is very much about their domestic political desires to build democratic states in the absence of former experience with democratic regimes. In Eastern European states, the recovery of Holocaust memory is in a nascent stage, and the uncovering of those histories is often very contentious. There are variations across countries, with Poland being very sensitive about its international image as anti-semitic, Bulgaria claiming less complicity with the Nazis than other countries, and Romania still attempting to confront its own complicity. In general, however, pointing to their role as

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Pavel Tychtl, *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> See website of the 'Reconciliation of European histories' group:  
<http://eureconciliation.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 2 October 2011)

victims of Stalinist crimes might also be a way of avoiding discussion on their own responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> Struggling for the promotion of their own collective memories is also about the recognition, symbolically, of Eastern states' full membership status at the EU level. New member states use the history agenda as a way of conquering their place and equality of status in the EU.<sup>32</sup> The politics of interpretation of the past, finally, fulfil a specific political agenda towards Russia. Already during debates over the 2005 Resolution *The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War*, a Latvian MEP commented that

Russia is keeping the problem of non-citizens in Latvia in the public eye and exaggerating it, but at the same time it is continuing to violate the human rights of victims and casualties of the totalitarian Soviet regime, and their immediate families, by denying their suffering and losses. Genuine condemnation of the crimes of Communism and a resolution of their consequences are needed in the name of Europe's future stability.<sup>33</sup>

Recognition of past crimes is therefore part of a bilateral agenda between Baltic states and Russia, the stakes of which consist in obtaining compensation for past sufferings, on the Baltic side, and on recognition of minorities' rights, on the Russian one. For old member states, the Holocaust remains central to their memory cultures, as a more direct historical experience for some, and as the rationale upon which the EU itself found its legitimating narrative, for all (see also Challand 2009). Presenting the crimes of Stalinism as morally equivalent to those committed under Hitler challenges the memory frame of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, against which some EU states and Europe have been defined so far (Probst 2003). At the domestic level, the debate over the status of the Holocaust was already a well-established one in some of the old EU states. In Germany, it came centre stage in the 1980s with the so-called

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Michael Privot, President of European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Brussels, 23 August 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Pavel Tychtl, *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis (UEN), Debates of the European Parliament, 15 May 2005.

*Historikerstreit*, which opposed conservative historians to some public intellectuals, led by Jurgen Habermas, over the place of National Socialism and the Holocaust in the narrative of German history (Friedlander 1988). At the heart of the controversy was the question of the uniqueness of the 'Final Solution' over other forms of state terror. Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber provided two of the most important contributions to the controversy, which, though divergent in tone and argumentation, both stressed the comparability of the Holocaust to other experiences of mass extermination in the 20th century. Habermas denounced both the politically charged intentions of the historians' writings and their rejection of the singularity of Auschwitz (Moeller 1996).

A similar debate occurred in France in the late 1990s with the publication of *The Black Book of Communism* edited by Stéphane Courtois, which criticised the single-minded focus on the Holocaust from the part of intellectual and political elites. French intellectuals and politicians, especially those affiliated with or sympathetic to the Communist Party, argued that Courtois had gone too far in drawing a parallel between Stalinism and Nazism as systems that relied on violent terror (Torpey 2001). Reprising the central arguments of the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s, a series of heated and emotional exchanges ensued in the press, between Courtois and his followers on one side, and those who did not want to accept the parallel between the two forms of totalitarianism on the other<sup>34</sup>.

Thus, EU-level remembrance debates were only the replication, at the supranational level, of domestic struggles over the interpretation of the past. However, while EU-level debates repeated old arguments, the presence of new actors, i.e. Eastern European

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<sup>34</sup> Weill, N., 'Crimes et châtements; Pour lire Le Livre noir du communisme hors polémiques', *Le Monde*, 8 January 1999. Lamy, J-C., 'Après la sortie du 'Livre noir du communisme'; Thorez-Vermeersch, J., 'Je n'ai pas de gros regrets', *Le Figaro*, 6 January 1998.

states, allowed for the legitimisation of the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame in the official EU discourse more than had ever been possible in old EU member states and in the pre-enlargement EU. With the Eastern enlargement, new actors have entered the policy debate and changed the line between opponents and proponents of the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame. As argued by Princen (2007), the circle of actors in place played a crucial role in the definition of the problems at stake.

## **5. Resistance of the 'Uniqueness of the Holocaust' Frame**

Attempts to overthrow the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' memory frame have, however, not fully succeeded (see also Onken 2007). When looking at the projects funded under the 'Active European Remembrance' action, it appears that, in 2009, 75% of the funding was allocated to projects focusing on the crimes committed during the Second World War and related to the Holocaust, 17% to projects concerning the crimes of Stalinism and the remaining 8% to projects dealing with totalitarian regimes, and which can relate to both Nazism and Stalinism.<sup>35</sup> In April 2007, EU justice ministers also passed the Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia,<sup>36</sup> which allows to declare as a criminal offence the public condemnation, denial, or trivialization of 'genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes' – provided such crimes were recognized as such by the Nuremberg Tribunal of 1945 or the Statute of the International Criminal Court of 2002'.<sup>37</sup> As neither of these juridical settlements include communist crimes in the definition of crimes against humanity, the law still upholds the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame. Finally, the European Commission launched, in

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Jean Barth, policy officer, Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, Brussels, 8 July 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.

<sup>37</sup> Lobjaskas, A., 'EU: Bloc Debates Crimes Of Communism, Revealing 'Old,' 'New' Divisions', *Radiofree Europe Radio Liberty*, April 23, 2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1109620.html>. (last accessed 2 October 2011)



2010, the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI), a major project designed to help the study of the Holocaust. Avner Shalem, the head of Yad Vashem, one of the participating organisations, explained that 'the establishment of EHRI is especially important as different historical narratives are competing in Europe'.<sup>38</sup> Such unprecedented level of funding for research on Nazi crimes signals the unchallenged nature of the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame.

Obstacles to the overturn of the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame are located at different levels. First, the constellation of actors in place has not *sufficiently* changed for the overthrow of a narrative long-established in old EU states and at the European level. If the entry of new EU states has given some legitimacy to the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame, the proponents of the uniqueness of the Holocaust narrative are still more powerful. Civil society organisations involved with the remembrance of Nazi crimes are well organised and very active in promoting the memory of victims.<sup>39</sup> Organisations of children of survivors of the crimes of Nazism systematically apply for funding under the 'Active European Remembrance' action.<sup>40</sup> The European Jewish Congress (EJC), in particular, became extremely involved in the politics of remembrance from the late 1990s onwards. The president of the EJC, Jean Khan, used its personal network and high media profile in order to create a momentum

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<sup>38</sup> World Jewish Congress News, 'European project linking Holocaust archives from 13 countries launched', 16 November 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Amongst the most important organisations supported under the 'Active European Remembrance' action since 2007 are the following: Clovek v Tisni (People in Need Foundation) (the Czech Republic), Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance (Belgium), Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (the Czech Republic), Holocaust Educational Trust (Ireland), Mauthausen Komitee (Austria), Mémorial de la Shoah (France), Swedish Committee against Antisemitism, Occupation Museum (Latvia), Lidice Memorial Institute (the Czech Republic), Yahad - In Unum (France), Jewish Museum in Prague (the Czech Republic), Krzyzowa Foundation (Poland), Forum Voix Etouffées (France), Comité International de Dachau (France), Holocaust Memorial Centre (Hungary), and Aktion Sühnezeichen e.V. (Germany).

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Jean Barth, *Ibid.*

around the memory of the Holocaust.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, if Holocaust remembrance groups mainly come from within the EU, there are also outside pressures. The State of Israel, in particular, reminds the EU that it has obligations in terms of education and remembrance.<sup>42</sup> At a time when the last survivors of Nazi crimes are increasingly few, mobilisation for an active remembrance of the Holocaust at the civil society level is particularly strong and echoes with deeply anchored anxieties, amongst European elites, of the risk to forget.<sup>43</sup>

Second, the nature of the frame proposed by new EU states and the EPP, within the European Parliament, does not resonate well with formerly established narratives in old EU states and at the EU level. Since the 1970s, old EU states had showed their willingness to engage in a more direct confrontation with their past. Whereas the first 20 post-war years were characterised by a near silence on European countries' responsibilities and a sole focus on Hitler and party elites as perpetrators in Germany (Judt 2005), signs of broader awareness appeared in the late 1960s and 1970s, with, in particular, the screening of the 'Holocaust' television series in 1978 in Germany as a turning point (Rosenfeld 2009). Nazi crimes were integrated into popular culture and became identified with the ultimate evil, in the identity definition process of liberal societies (Friedlander 2001). The Holocaust became the founding myth for European societies, 'not only as a source of symbolic legitimacy but also of political action and values, such as the rejection of racism, anti-semitism and xenophobia' (Probst 2003: 53). The 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame was faced with an already well-

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Pascale Charrhon, former director of ENAR, Brussels, 28 September 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Pavel Tychtl, *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> See for instance the Facebook group 'Shoah, Holocauste, Auschwitz n'oubliez jamais!', which starts the presentation of its activities by saying: 'More than 60 years after the Shoah, at a time when witnesses' words become seldom, it is necessary to reflect on the memory one of the most important event of the 20th century' [author's translation].

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=112834080465> (last accessed 5 October 2011)

established frame, upon which some EU states and the EU itself had been defining their identity.

Presenting Stalinist crimes as 'equally evil' to those of the Holocaust was also perceived, by left-wing political elites at the domestic and EU levels, as an attempt to play down the responsibility of Germany and other European states which collaborated, such as France under the Vichy Regime. In Germany, the *Historikerstreit* had been pervaded by political overtones and a debate over German identity, involving Chancellor Kohl and its supporters on the one hand, and the political Left on the other. For the left, the Holocaust had become, since the 1970s, the cornerstone of German collective national identity, as symbolised by Chancellor Willy Brandt's falling on his knees in 1970 at the Warsaw memorial to the Jewish Ghetto Uprising (see Motyl 2010). This was made possible, the Holocaust being the only instance of a genocide that has been embraced as a national catastrophe by the victimizers (as well as the victims), allowing collective guilt to be integrated into the official version of German national identity. For left-wing political elites, the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust is therefore a narrative bearing crucial significance in the definition of European identities, and every attempt at placing Nazi crimes within a broader context of state-led terror is still perceived as the emanation of a conservative political agenda.

Old EU states, the Left, and civil society organisations dealing with the memory of the Holocaust have, so far, dominated the remembrance struggle. They could do so not only because they were active and well-organised, but also because they benefited from the presence of a powerful meta-narrative in Europe, which laid the emphasis on the role of the Holocaust in the very definition of European identities, both at the domestic and at the European level.

## **Conclusion**

The construction of 'grass-roots memory' on a European scale has not yet taken place. EU attempts at Europeanising memory, although pressed by the process of EU enlargement itself, were rendered particularly problematic in this very context. The 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame faced the resistance of a formerly well-established and competing narrative and the EU became a terrain of debate over the status and nature of the two totalitarian experiences. Collective memory is indeed a particularly sensitive domain as a possible basis for building new vectors of identification to the European Community. If this only sends us back to the broader problem of constructing public spheres at the postnational level, in a context of linguistic and cultural diversity, the remembrance of the past is an intricate vector of identification for citizens – as its agitation by nationalist elites at the domestic level has too often proved a reminder.

EU institutions were faced with the problem of finding memory frames which could appeal to all European societies. Early supranational narratives were not sufficiently appealing to European citizens. References to European heritage referred to 'cold' memories, which could not act as cements for the construction of a European identity. The grand moments of the history of European integration could not appeal to a wider circle than that of an already Europeanised elite. Focusing on 'hot' historical memories was therefore a skilful attempt from the part of EU institutions to transform remembrance processes into a genuine vector of identification to the EU. However, by using memory frames which referred to already existing narratives at the national level, EU institutions prepared the ground for the EU to become a new locus of conflict over the interpretation of the past. Finding a common 'European memory' of recent European history was particularly intricate in the context of the confrontation of divergent Eastern and Western memory cultures.

Along with the shift of the locus of remembrance politics to the supranational level, the constellation of actors taking part to the definition of memory narratives changed. Whereas, in Western Europe, the debate had been one between Left-wing intellectual and political elites and the tenants of a more conservative political agenda, it also became, at EU level, a debate between old and new member states. Eastern European states, with the Baltics at the vanguard of the remembrance struggle, succeeded in giving legitimacy to the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame, which could not anymore be solely labelled as a conservative attempt to play down the responsibilities of Germany and other Western European states which collaborated. The change of participants to remembrance politics debates also changed the perception of what was considered an acceptable discourse. A 'memory' frame is therefore able to gain recognition when the constellation of participants to the debate changes in the favour of the new frame, but also when its proponents benefit from legitimacy equal to that of the tenants of opposed frames.

However, despite the growing acceptance at EU level of the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame, strong resistance persists. Old EU states and Jewish organisations have, so far, succeeded in maintaining the dominance of the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame. The nature of the frame also makes it a very powerful identification-marker. Its status as 'solution' to the perceived lack of founding event or 'myth' in the history of European integration give the frame a very powerful position in EU memory debates. At a time when the last survivors of Nazi crimes are increasingly few, the tenants of the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame, both amongst political elites and civil society actors, have an especially powerful place in memory politics. Their discourse resonates with deeply-anchored anxieties, amongst European elites, that the ultimate evil could ever be forgotten, or, denied. The 'uniqueness of the Holocaust'

frame therefore still acts as an essentially unchallenged discourse in the EU context.

EU remembrance politics point to the way interpretative frames are used by policy actors in order to further specific interests. What determines the success of a frame, however, cannot be solely explained by referring to the constellation of actors in place. The institutional and political context within which debates take place gives legitimacy to certain discourses, and discredits others. Existing memory cultures, as powerful meta-narratives, have determined the chance of new portrayals of the past to make it onto political agendas. More broadly, institutions, understood as established discourses, pull their weight on the games actors play.

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