



Russia and the Forging of Memory and Identity in Europe

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Introduction

This article investigates the role played by Russia in collective memory and national identity construction in European states. Three case studies have been selected for investigation, namely France, Germany and Poland. These countries are representative of the narratives that characterise respectively Western, Central and Central Eastern European memory discourses on the twentieth century, particularly the year 1945 (Troebst, 2008: 69-70).² This date, which marks the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the postwar order, plays a pivotal role in all European memory discourses. The analysis intends to shed light on the historical and political roots of current discourses on Russia in the countries under investigation. By comparing memory discourses in the case studies, it attempts to explain why radically different perceptions of Russia exist in European countries and how such discourses affect prospects for the emergence of a shared European memory of the twentieth century. Thus, the main research question is: how did historical interactions with Russia affect national memory in the selected countries? A cross-country

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² In this classification, „Western Europe” includes France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, namely the Western European countries that fought against Nazi Germany or were liberated by the Anglo-American armies; “Central Europe” refers to Germany and Austria, the losers in the Second World War; “Central Eastern Europe” includes the states that were taken over by the Red Army during the conflict and fell under the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) or were directly annexed to the Soviet Union (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). A classification along the same dividing lines was adopted by Konrad Jarausch (2010: 310-311) and Wolfgang Schieder (Nützendadel & Schieder, 2004: 7-24).

comparison of the results of the investigation spurred by the main research question allows the examination of a second research question: how do representations of Russia in national memory discourses affect the prospects for a shared European memory of the twentieth century?

The article hypothesises that Russia plays a significant role in all national memory discourses under investigation due its deep impact on European twentieth century history. Whether this role is portrayed positively or negatively in national memory depends on the nature of Russia's historical interactions with the countries in question. Since France, Germany and Poland had radically different relations with Russia during the twentieth century, we can expect that the representation of Russia in their respective national memory discourses varies significantly. This would constitute a significant obstacle to the emergence of a shared European memory of the last century, as national memories would not be reconcilable in their representation of a key actor.

The analysis starts with the definition of "collective memory" and "collective identity" and an investigation of how these concepts are constructed at national level. The relationship between memory and identity is explored to explain why and how questions of historical memory have played a central role in the rise of identity politics. This conceptual framework is applied to the study of memory politics in the selected countries and Russia. The examination of Russia's memory discourse is functional to the final comparative analysis, which highlights the relationship among Western, Central, Central Eastern European and Russian memory discourses.

Collective memories, collective identities and the construction of the nation

Memory and identity are closely interrelated concepts. The term "collective memory" refers to the shared memories held by a community about the past (Hunt, 2010: 97), an image of the past constructed by a subjectivity in the present (Megill, 2011: 196). Collective memory is a discourse about historical events and how to interpret them based on a community's current social and historical necessities (Arnold-de Simine, 2005: 10; Pakier & Stråth, 2010: 7). According to Andreas Huyssen, collective memory is essential to imagine the future and give a strong temporal and spatial grounding to life (Huyssen, 2003: 6). As Maurice Halbwachs argued, collective memories are 'socially framed': they form when people come together to remember and enter a domain that

transcends individual memory (Halbwachs, 1992). The concept of “collective identity” refers to a group’s sense of sameness over time, sustained by memory (Spohn, 2005: 2). The perception of a communal past is a defining element of collective identity. Without shared narratives of the past, collective identities do not develop or are only ephemeral (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy, 2011: 177; Hunt, 2010: 107; Smith, 1992: 58; Lebow, 2006: 3; Bell, 2006: 5).³

The study of collective memory is of particular relevance at institutional level (Lebow, 2006: 13-14). Political elites adopt selective discourses of past events to forge national identities that ensure social cohesion. National identities are a type of collective identities combining the attachment to a territory with ethnic, cultural, economic and legal-political elements. Common historical memories, myths and traditions are also essential components of national identity (Smith, 1991: 9-14). In the process of national identity construction, political elites attempt to rearrange such memories, myths and traditions in an order that suits their political objectives.

National memory is a type of collective memory shared by people who regard themselves as having a common history and are bound by what they remember and forget (Gillis, 1994: 7).⁴ It is a social framework through which nationally conscious individuals organise their history and justify national statehood (Müller, 2002: 3; Snyder, 2002: 50; Lebow, 2006: 16). National memory is disseminated via political leaders’ official discourses and commemorations in “realms of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*), namely historical or pseudo-historical sites that are reminiscent of selected events in national memory (Nora, 1992: 7).⁵ Political leaders play a fundamental role in the construction and diffusion of national memory because they have easier access to mass media, which makes them authoritative and persuasive. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu call the selection and dissemination of discourses on a country’s past “the politics of memory”. It involves actors who use their public prominence to propagate narratives about the past that are functional to their political goals (Lebow, 2006: 26).

³ This study does not explore the relationship between collective and individual memories and identities, nor the theoretical dispute on whether identities and memories can be “collective” or are only intrinsically personal. For a discussion of these issues, see Bell (2006). The analysis is based on the findings of previous studies, according to which collective and individual memories and identities co-exist and influence each other (Lebow, 2006: 28).

⁴ As Maja Zehfuss has noted, remembering always entails forgetting: discourses about the past are selective and leave out elements that cannot be reconciled with the dominant narrative (Zehfuss, 2006: 213).

⁵ Larry Ray calls such places “chronotopes” – landscapes and monuments where time has been ‘condensed in a space symbolically arranged and invested with myth and identity’ (Ray, 2006: 139).

Memory matters politically because it can be used by the political establishment as a source of legitimacy for its power. For instance, policy-makers can make reference to events that play an important role in national memory and construct plausible historical analogies to obtain support for their policies (Müller, 2002: 26-27; Gildea, 2002: 59; Olick, 2007: 122; König, 2008: 27-34; Berger, 2002: 80; Bell, 2006: 20; Koczanowicz, 1997: 260). The inherent ambiguity of collective memories, which are in constant flux, facilitates their manipulation and mobilisation in the service of national identity formation (Müller, 2002: 21-22; Berger, 2002: 81; Ray, 2006: 144). As Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan have noted, political elites have manipulated the past on a massive scale during the twentieth century (Sivan & Winter, 1999: 6).

Manipulations of national history took place in particular after wars and regime changes, when states and new political elites attempted to restore social cohesion. In these circumstances, political elites tend to formulate and propagate official narratives that reflect their view of history and exclude all events and elements that do not fit therein (Hunt, 2010: 110). Furthermore, they construct national histories as triumphant narratives, a selective retelling of the past based on accounts that stimulate identification with the nation and are thus functional to a selected type of national identity construction (Eder, 2005: 214-5).

Due to the constant influence of a multiplicity of political, historical and social factors, collective memories and identities are not fixed; they undergo a process of gradual change and adaptation. As Pierre Nora argues, national memories are constantly constructed and reconstructed in a selective way; they are “in permanent evolution, a perpetually present phenomenon” (Nora, 1989: 8). During the last 20-30 years, this process has been fuelled by a drastic upsurge of public memory debates in North American and European societies (Huysen, 2003: 12-15). Politicians have attempted to intervene and guide these debates in a way that suited and served both their political aspirations and their conception of national identity (Gillis, 1994: 3; Müller, 2002: 23; Smith, 2011: 235).

A widespread use of the politics of memory to forge the national identities of the new states took place in almost all European countries immediately after the Second World War and again after 1989 in most Central Eastern European countries, following the collapse of the Soviet bloc (Assmann, 2006: 260; Evans, 2003: 5; Judd, 1992: 96). Both in 1945 and 1989, the new political elites that emerged from the ordeal of war and from regime changes needed

founding myths and collective memories to strengthen social cohesion at a time of economic dislocation and transition from authoritarian to democratic forms of government (Müller, 2002: 7-9). This political necessity led European countries to search a “usable past” in national history and reframe it in narratives that propped present political goals (Moeller, 2003a; Torbakov, 2011: 215).

The national memories and myths that were constructed in the post-1945 period in Central and Western Europe and in the post-1989 years in Central Eastern Europe constitute the core of current national identity discourses in European countries. This is due to the fact that most of the founding myths of today’s national political systems in Europe date back from these two historical moments. The images of Russia that crystallised in national memories during these periods, partly in continuity with previous perceptions of the country and partly based on new elements, influenced the process of national identity construction. Thus, a specific perception of Russia has become enshrined in national consciousness and still affects European countries’ attitudes to Moscow.

The article analyses perceptions of Russia in national rather than European memory and identity because national memories and identities are still much stronger than any type of European memory or identity. As Anthony Smith argues, national identities are ‘vivid, accessible, well-established, long popularised and still widely believed – all aspects in which European identity is deficient’ (Smith, 1992: 62).⁶ Andreas Huyssen concurs with this view and argues that memory discourses are tied at their core to the history of specific nations and states (Huyssen, 2003: 16; Jarausch, 2010: 312-313). To become stronger, European identity would need a shared European collective memory. However, European institutions do not have the resources to reach a sufficiently wide public and sustain a dominant European collective memory (Eder, 2005: 215). Most importantly, the task of constructing a shared narrative of Europe’s past is made extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, by the conflicted and controversial nature of European history. Crucial historical events of the twentieth century have been interpreted and internalised in different, at times overtly conflicting ways at the national level.

The analysis will now turn to national memory and identity construction in the selected countries, with a focus on the role played by discourses on Russia.

⁶ A comparative analysis of European and national identities is beyond the scope of this article. For a relevant discussion see (Spohn, 2005).

National memories in Europe

France: la grande nation and its Russian partner

Of the three countries under analysis, France is the most remote from Russia. Geographical distance has resulted in limited geopolitical clashes between the two countries.⁷ Russia is thus a marginal factor in French memory discourses. It plays a role mainly as an allied or partner country that was functional to the perpetuation of France's grandeur – an element which dominates the way the French perceive their national history.

The discourse on France's grandeur is based on the country's revolutionary origins and republican tradition. The year 1789, marking the beginning of the French Revolution, features prominently in the current memory discourse. Every year, on 14 July, the French celebrate the storming of the Bastille with a grandiose military parade on the Champs-Élysées in Paris (Hewitt, 2003: 1). Focusing on this historical period allows portraying France as a great power that exported progressive ideas and values to the rest of the modern world. Devotion to the revolutionary tradition and its three key values – liberty, equality and fraternity – are inculcated in the minds of French citizens from young age (Nora, 1992: 171). It is therefore no surprise that the Revolution is the only event predating the twentieth century that features in the Presidency of the Republic's webpage on the topic of "national memory".⁸

The other events referred to in the website – anti-Fascist Resistance, the country's liberation from the Nazis, the armistice at the end of the First World War and the commemoration of Charles de Gaulle's death – took place between 1918 and 1970. This half-century left a deep impact on France's self-perception and role in the global arena. German occupation in 1940-1944, the loss of the colonial empire in Indochina, the 1956 Suez crisis, the Algerian war of independence and the subaltern role played in the US-USSR Cold War confrontation exposed the loss of great power status unambiguously. France's self-portrayal as a major power risked becoming anachronistic (Sonntag, 2008: 77-78). To preserve its prestige and capability to act as an independent power in

⁷ During the nineteenth century, Russia and France fought each other in the Napoleonic Wars and during the Crimean War (1853-1856); in the twentieth century, direct armed clashes occurred only when French troops intervened in the Russian civil war.

⁸ <http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-dossiers/memoire-nationale/memoire-nationale.9035.html>, accessed 15 May 2012.

the international scenario, Paris made political and military choices that also shaped its relations with and perception of Soviet Russia.

At the onset of the Cold War, France found itself anchored in the Western camp. However, its ambition to be on a par with Washington was frustrated by the United States' economic and military superiority, as well as by its refusal to share its nuclear deterrent with Paris. Tensions between the two transatlantic partners became particularly evident during Charles de Gaulle's Presidency (1959-1969). France developed its own nuclear deterrent and withdrew from NATO's integrated command structure. In addition, Paris established a unique relationship with the Soviet Union; De Gaulle travelled to the Eastern bloc and denounced American imperialism. Later French Presidents, including Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, maintained a very friendly and pragmatic approach to Moscow throughout their time in office (Gildea, 1996: 201-205; Sutton, 2007: 102-104).

The partnership with Russia was not a novelty in historical terms. France was in a political and military alliance with the Tsarist Empire from 1894 until 1917 and fought the First World War on the same side. After the proclamation of the Soviet Union (1922), France was one of the first countries to recognise the Bolshevik government (in October 1924). The Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935 partially restored the anti-German alliance between Paris and Moscow for four years (until the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939), and from 1941 until 1945 both countries found themselves fighting a common enemy, Hitler's Third Reich (Gildea, 1996: 131). The friendly relationship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War allowed Paris to retain at least a semblance of its past grandeur by having a policy toward the Soviet superpower which differed from that of other Western countries and highlighted its independence from the United States. France perceived the USSR as a relatively good factor in the international scenario. The collapse of the Soviet empire and the subsequent reunification of Germany greatly reduced both France's leverage to stand up to the United States and its relative power in Europe (Chafer & Jenkins, 1996: 2-4; Gildea, 1996: 201).

Due to the changed political scenario, France has shifted toward a more Atlanticist course, as exemplified by Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to rejoin NATO's integrated structures.⁹ In French foreign policy, Russia no longer plays the pivotal role that it had during the Cold War. Nevertheless, Franco-

⁹ *Washington Post*, 12 March 2009.

Russian relations are still very good. French national memory does not constitute a hindrance to bilateral relations: Russia's role therein is only marginal and partly positive, as the two countries have had common enemies or competitors for most of their recent history. Paris' and Moscow's spheres of influence have hardly ever overlapped, which prevented clashes and facilitated the compatibility of their respective national memory discourses. As evidence of the current Franco-Russian partnership, in 2010 former French President Nicolas Sarkozy defined France 'Great Russia's great friend' (Delcour, 2012: 44-45).

'Bitter enemies have become friends': Russia in German memory

Memory politics in Germany focuses primarily on the twentieth century, with the Holocaust playing a dominant role (Fulbrook, 1999: 153). This is reflected by the numerous monuments that commemorate the Shoah in the German capital, Berlin. The Holocaust memorial, the Jewish Museum and the Topography of Terror – just to name some of the main buildings devoted to the commemoration of Nazi crimes – are all in the new centre of the reunified city (Berger, 2004: 252-256; Ward, 2005: 291-297). Close to these sites, the scattered remnants of the Berlin Wall and especially the large architectonic heritage of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) are reminiscent of what is arguably the second most important theme in German national memory today: the division of the country between 1945 and 1990 (Fulbrook, 1999: 25-47).¹⁰ Recently, a memory discourse emphasising German suffering during the Second World War and its aftermath has also emerged. It focuses in particular on the agony of German civilians during Allied bombing and the expulsion of 12 million ethnic Germans from the territories east of the Oder and Neisse rivers after 1945 (Moeller, 2003b: 147-181).

Soviet Russia was a significant actor in the events that shape the three dominant narratives in German memory politics. The Holocaust started in the context of the war against the Soviet Union, which Nazi leaders considered as a Fascist crusade against "Judeo-Communism". After the war, Germany was divided due to the presence on its soil of the Soviet military, which also provided a guarantee for the existence of the East German regime until the 1980s.

¹⁰ For an analysis of the effects of reunification on German national memory, see the essays in Arnold-de Simine (2005). On the consequences of the country's division for Holocaust remembrance, see J. Herf (1997). On German national symbols, see Parr (2005: 27-48).

On the other hand, in 1990 Germany could be reunified mainly thanks to the support of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the 12 million ethnic Germans who left Central Eastern Europe after 1945 had either run away from the advancing Soviet army or had been expelled by the authorities of Soviet satellite states. Thus, the USSR is simultaneously the country to which Nazi Germany inflicted the worst crimes during the war, the authoritarian regime that sanctioned the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Central Eastern Europe and the great power that allowed both the division of Germany for forty years and its reunification in 1990.

The diversity of roles that Soviet Russia played in German history during the twentieth century has generated different views in German collective memory. This multiplicity of opinions is consistent with the way Russia was traditionally perceived by Germans. As Hans-Henning Schröder has shown, the perception of a backward state, inferior economically, technologically and in terms of civilisation co-existed with the admiration of Russian literature, music, art and of the allegedly deeper nature of the Russian soul. However, in the realm of politics the predominant German view of Russia during the last century was that of a threatening great power ruled with a despotic system (Schröder, 2010: 99-100).

The idea of a threatening Russia is also one of the key concepts behind the attempt of some German historians to portray the country as the actual instigator of the Holocaust. In the context of the *Historikerstreit*, a dispute among West German historians on the interpretation of the Holocaust that occurred in the late 1980s, Ernst Nolte argued that Nazi concentration camps were a defensive reaction to the mass murder that had taken place in the gulags of Stalinist Russia a few years earlier. According to Nolte, the gulags constituted the original and worse evil; Germany's turn to National Socialism was thus a rational reaction to the greater Bolshevik threat (Nolte, 1986). Nolte's argument has not influenced the dominant memory discourse on the Holocaust in Germany (Berger, 2004: 233). Nevertheless, it is significant because it shows how a prominent part of the German academic establishment perceived Communist Russia and its influence on their country during the last century.

The arguments of Nolte's camp in the *Historikerstreit* were also functional to the memory politics advocated by a substantial part of German conservative elites. According to this line of thought, Germans would not identify with their country if no positive memory of national history existed; hence, without a collective memory the forces of social integration would disappear. Both this

political interpretation of collective memory and Nolte's arguments met with very harsh criticism from other German historians and intellectuals. Jürgen Habermas stated that Nolte and his followers used spurious historical arguments in the attempt to re-habilitate the neo-conservative heritage (Habermas, 1988: 45-48). The controversy highlighted diverging eminent views on the essence of German collective memory and Russia's role therein.

The latter has remained disputed also after the *Historikerstreit* petered out in the late 1980s.¹¹ In the 1990s and 2000s public debate on German-Russian historic relations focused primarily on German crimes in the Soviet Union during the Second World War. The exhibition on the Wehrmacht's crimes on the Eastern front organised by the Hamburg Institute of Social Research sparked an unprecedented public debate, as a result of which German public opinion became aware of the massive involvement of German soldiers (and not just of SS and police battalions, as previously assumed) in war crimes in the Soviet Union. The sixtieth anniversary of the German aggression of the USSR (in 2001) and of the war's end (in 2005) were marked by joint commemorations, which culminated in Chancellor Schröder's plea for apology at the 9 May 2005 celebrations in Moscow (Morina, 2011: 243-252). An atmosphere of reconciliation has prevailed ever since in German and Russian memory politics concerning the war, which is epitomised in Schröder's 2005 statement that 'bitter enemies have become friends and partners'.¹²

Russia omnipresent: Polish memory discourses

Poland's official memory discourse stresses the country's grandeur during the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795), its subsequent partition by neighbouring great powers (Austria, Prussia and Russia) in the late eighteenth century and the long periods of foreign occupation and tutelage during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The contemporary political relevance and power of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth provide a founding myth and a source of pride. However, current Polish memory discourses focus primarily on the subsequent periods of foreign occupation, particularly the Nazi and Soviet domination during the Second World War.

¹¹ Similarly, the debate on German national memory and identity and the role of intellectuals in shaping it continued thereafter; on this, see Huyssen (1995) and Geyer (1996, 2001).

¹² *Spiegel*, 8 May 2005.

Even today, the Second World War and the people involved in it are constantly present on Polish press, radio and television. The topic is often addressed by literature, theatre, art, films and in the political debate. Only in Warsaw, 300 monuments, memorial stones and plaques – what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire* – are devoted to the Second World War (Orla-Bukowska, 2006: 177). Surprisingly, the older and the younger generations share the same perception of the war period: 73% of Poles believe that it is still very relevant to today's Poland (Ruchniewicz, 2007: 19).

Dominant and official narratives about the Second World War stress Poland's martyrdom and heroism. According to these narratives, Poland was the first country to oppose Hitler; Poles never collaborated with the Nazi occupiers, despite being abandoned by the Allies in 1939, and kept fighting fiercely both in their country and abroad until the end of the war (Loew, 2008: 87-90). Polish narratives also emphasise that Poland proportionally suffered the greatest human and economic losses in the conflict and was confronted with the tragic fate of being chosen by the Nazis as the main site for the extermination of European Jews (Orla-Bukowska, 2006: 179-180). The martyrdom argument gained further popularity after 1989, when the Red Army's occupation of Eastern Poland in 1939-1941 and the ensuing repression could be discussed openly. The question of the mass murder of more than 20,000 Polish officers by Stalin's secret police at Katyn in 1940 became the central theme in the debate on Polish-Soviet relations between 1939 and 1941, particularly after the Gorbachev government admitted that the crime had been committed by the Soviets and not by the Wehrmacht (Ruchniewicz, 2007: 19-20, 43-56). Post-Soviet Russia's reluctance to apologise and give full access to the relevant archives has caused controversy in Polish-Russian bilateral relations until today.

The 1939-1941 occupation and the Katyn massacre are only two episodes in the long history of Polish-Russian conflicts. Tsarist Russia's occupation of most of Poland in the nineteenth century, the brutal suppression of the 1830 and 1863 Polish uprisings, the 1920 Soviet-Polish war and, above all, tight Soviet control over Poland's domestic and foreign affairs in 1945-1989 constitute a *continuum* in Polish perceptions of their country's relations with Russia. Dominant memory discourses stress particularly the fact that the Red Army did not free Poland, but merely installed a new occupation regime in 1945. Accordingly, the end of the Second World War is seen as the beginning of a new yoke, from which the Poles bravely sought liberation in a series of uprisings in 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1981 (Loew, 2008: 87-95).

In recent years the 'Law and Justice' party has constantly made use of memory politics in Poland, both when it was in power (2005-2007) and as main opposition party after 2007. The party leadership harbours a deep-seated hostility toward Germany and Russia, which it seeks to justify with historical arguments (Reeves, 2010: 519). In 2007 former foreign minister Anna Fotyga publicly called both countries Poland's "historic enemies" (cit. in Reeves, 2010: 522). Occasionally, a similar anti-Russian and anti-German attitude was adopted by representatives of the leading Centre-Right party 'Civic Platform'. For instance, in 2006 former defence minister (and current foreign minister) Radek Sikorski dubbed the Nord Stream gas pipeline connecting Russia to Germany a "new Molotov-Ribbentrop pact" (cited in Castle, 2006), alluding to a hypothetical German-Russian alliance that allegedly threatened Poland.

Domestic public opinion's receptiveness to historical or pseudo-historical arguments encourages Polish political leaders to use memory politics in domestic debates about Russia. Surveys made in 2006 and 2007 showed that a majority of Poles drew a very negative assessment of the Polish-Russian historic relationship. They argued that Russia should feel guilty for its past policies concerning Poland. To justify their reasoning they quoted, in order of frequency, the 1939-1940 events (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet invasion and Katyn), the Soviet imposition of Stalinism in Poland after 1945, the Tsarist Empire's participation in the partitions of Poland and the Soviet annexation of Poland's former eastern territories in 1945 (Levintova, 2010: 1357). In this context, anti-Russian statements and historical parallels such as those quoted above find fertile ground and constitute a powerful instrument to gather political support.

Memory of empire(s): Putin's Russia

The 2000s have witnessed an upsurge of memory politics in Russia. This is due to the country's attempt to consolidate its national identity and deal with the historical legacy of the Tsarist and Soviet empires. Russia's construction of its post-Soviet national identity has drawn on selected elements of both the Tsarist and the Soviet period. Putin's decision to adopt the double-headed eagle as Russia's official emblem and the reinstatement of the Soviet-time anthem (albeit with different lyrics) exemplify this policy (Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 2011: 212). The decision to emphasise the myth of the imperial

past has inevitably led the country to construct an imperialistic identity, namely one that glorifies the grandeur of the Tsarist and Soviet empires and takes their international standing in the past as a model to emulate for today's Russia. It is in this context that Putin's description of the Soviet Union's collapse as 'a major geopolitical disaster' (Putin, 2005) has to be understood: Russia shall recover the status and prestige that was lost with the end of the Soviet superpower.

In particular, post-Soviet Russia has inherited part of the Communist-time patriotic commemorations and official historical discourse, clearing them of the Socialist rhetoric and emphasising nationalistic elements. The removal of Socialist rhetoric from the official historical discourse is also a response to the aversion of today's Russians toward ideology, which results from previous experiences in the hyper-ideological Soviet world (Greene, Lipman & Ryabov 2010, p. 5). This "de-ideologisation" emerges with clarity in the way most Russians view two key dates of the Communist period, 1917 (the year of the Bolshevik revolution) and 1945 (the Soviet victory in the Second World War). The myth of the Bolshevik revolution had already lost its appeal during the Soviet period and has declined further in recent years. In 2004 the celebrations for the anniversary of the October Revolution (on 7 November) were replaced by those for the Day of People's Unity (4 November), the commemoration of a popular uprising that expelled Polish-Lithuanian occupation troops from Moscow in 1612.

Conversely, the 'Great Patriotic War' (the term Russians tend to use to refer to the Second World War) has survived from the Soviet time as the main national myth and source of international prestige. In its own view, Russia – as successor of the Soviet Union – can claim a fundamental contribution to the defeat of Nazism and the construction of post-war Europe (Mälksoo, 2009: 666; Kirschenbaum, 2010: 67-78). The memory of the immense war sacrifice and suffering is still central in the historical view of many ordinary Russians, who are proud of their country's victory over Nazi Germany and carry on the myth of Soviet heroism and endurance during the war. The current Russian leadership has turned Victory Day (9 May) into the main national holiday and has attempted to portray the event as a symbol of unity for the countries that are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. This approach to history serves geopolitical aims, as it attempts to forge a shared memory and identity with the countries that Mos-

cow considers as its sphere of influence (Trenin, 2011: 216; Merridale, 1999: 416).¹³

The official Russian narrative of the Second World War praises the unity of the people and a strong state, implying that this is the model to be followed in today's Russia. This narrative underplays Stalin's crimes against the citizens of the Soviet Union and of its satellite states (Koposov, 2011). It has been propagated through television programmes and popular school textbooks, such as Alexander Filippov's *History of Russia 1945-2007*, and has thus reached a very broad audience. Stalin's figure is closely associated with the war myth, which explains why numerous Russians have a relatively good opinion of the Soviet dictator. They see Stalin as a successful war leader and as an empire-builder that created a strong state and kept it in quasi-perfect order. His crimes are relativised with references to the historical context of the 1930s and the argument that they do not overshadow his presumed achievements (Sherlock, 2011: 103-104; Trenin, 2011: 213).

The use of parts of the Soviet past in current Russian national identity construction, together with Russia's status as the USSR's legal successor, have pushed Moscow to take up the role of defender of the entire Soviet legacy. In particular, Russia rejects the equation between Communism and Nazism that was discussed in the Council of Europe in 2008 and enshrined in resolutions passed by the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2009 (Torbakov, 2011: 211).¹⁴ According to former president Dmitry Medvedev, accepting this equation would have meant making Russia morally, legally and materially responsible for Soviet crimes. Moreover, it would have undermined the domestic discourse that presents the Soviet Union as Europe's liberator from fascism, which Russian leaders consider important for their country's claim to participate in European affairs (Laruelle, 2011: 239).

¹³ For instance, in his 2005 address to the Russian Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin argued that Russia is 'bound to the former Soviet republics – now independent countries – through a common history [...] It is clear for us that this victory [in the Great Patriotic War] was not achieved through arms alone but was won also through the strong spirit of all the peoples who were united at that time within a single state' (Putin 2005).

¹⁴ European Parliament's resolution 'European Conscience and Totalitarianism', 2009, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0213+0+DOC+XML+V0 //EN>, accessed 26 June 2012; OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's resolution 'Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century', 2009, available at: http://www.oscepa.org/images/stories/documents/activities/1.Annual%20Session/2009_Vilnius/Final_Vilnius_Declaration_ENG.pdf, accessed 26 June 2012.

Therefore, Moscow acknowledges that the Baltic States were “annexed” in 1940, but not “occupied”; it talks of Soviet “crimes”, but not of “genocide”, in order to avoid legal and material liabilities. Russia sees any attempt to revise the significance of the Soviet victory in the Second World War as a hostile act. This approach led to the establishment of a Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests in May 2009.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Russian government dismissed the criticism of countries whose national memory clashes with Russian official historical discourses, most notably Latvia and Estonia, and condemned their lenient attitude toward Nazi collaborators and war criminals (Trenin, 2011: 215-219; Assmann, 2006: 263).

European or national memories and identities?

National narratives of the Second World War epitomise the lack of a shared interpretation of the past in Europe (Fogu & Kansteiner, 2006: 294). Since narratives of the Second World War provide a founding myth for many European countries, their impact on any attempt to create a European identity is particularly strong. Assessments of the role of Soviet Russia in the conflict arguably constitute the most divisive issue across European memory discourses.

The main topic of disagreement concerns the significance of 1945. In Western Europe (France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg), this date symbolises primarily the defeat of Nazi Germany and the final liberation of Europe from Nazi occupation; the Soviet Union is seen as an important contributor to this struggle. The Russian perception of 1945 is very similar, except for its even more intense glorification of the anti-German struggle and the Soviet/Russian role therein. In Central Europe (Germany, Austria), the year 1945 is reminiscent of defeat, but also of the end of dictatorship, the beginning of democracy and rapid economic recovery. A vast literature on German civilian suffering during the Red Army’s advance has been published and the topic is mentioned in official discourses.¹⁶ However, the Soviet Union’s positive contribution to ending the conflict and defeating Nazism is not questioned. Conversely, in Central Eastern Europe (the former Soviet satellites and the Baltic States) 1945 is seen mostly as the end of an

¹⁵ However, the Commission was disbanded in February 2012, most probably due to its lack of effectiveness; see Kantor, I. (2012) ‘Without falsification’.

¹⁶ Norman Naimark’s, (1995) *The Russians in Germany: a history of the Soviet occupation zone 1945-1949* provides the most comprehensive account of the Soviet occupation of Eastern Germany.

occupation and the beginning of another one, the transition from Nazi to Soviet dominance. Accordingly, the division of Europe in spheres of influence at the Yalta conference in February 1945 epitomises the beginning of a new occupation (Troebst, 2008: 69-70; Torbakov, 2011: 214-215). This view is hardly compatible with the Western European perception of 1945 and totally incompatible with the Russian narrative, which claims that the Red Army liberated, and not occupied, Central Eastern Europe.

The Moscow celebrations for the sixtieth anniversary of the Soviet and Allied victory over Nazi Germany (on 9 May 1945) clearly illustrated the different views that European states hold on the significance and symbolic value of 1945. Russian President Vladimir Putin invited world leaders to join the celebrations, which included a Soviet-style military parade on the Red Square. The event also provided Russia with an opportunity to reaffirm its importance in the international scenario and strengthen its national identity (Onken, 2007: 32). Western European leaders decided to participate without much domestic discussion; French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder flanked Putin during the celebrations. However, Putin's invitation stirred a heated debate in the Baltic States and Poland, where memory politics of the Second World War matters more than anywhere else in Central Eastern Europe. The debate focused on whether it was appropriate to attend the celebration of a date that had been stigmatised as symbol of Soviet occupation and brutality. Eventually, the Estonian and Lithuanian presidents (Arnold Rüütel and Valdas Adamkus) declined the invitation, while their Polish and Latvian counterparts (Aleksander Kwasniewski and Vaira Vike-Freiberga) decided to attend, arguing that their participation would draw attention to their countries' view of events (Mälksoo, 2009: 665-667; Levintova, 2010: 1351).

The clash between the dominant Russian and Baltic-Polish narratives of the Second World War became one of the dominant topics in the debate that preceded and followed the celebrations. Positions were too different to be reconciled. What Russia sees as glory and victory against Fascism, the Baltic States and Poland consider as humiliation, loss of independence and identity. On the one hand, Russian memory politics focuses on the "Great Patriotic War", which started with the Nazi aggression of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 and ended with the Red Army's conquest of Berlin. On the other hand, narratives of the war in the Baltic States and Poland focus on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939 and the subsequent invasion of their territory by the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. According to this view, if Stalin had not made

an alliance with Hitler, the Second World War might not have started; thus, the two totalitarian tyrants share responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict and for the crimes against humanity that were perpetrated during the war (Mälksoo, 2009: 666).

The centrality of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was denied by the Soviet Union, which refused to acknowledge the existence of the secret protocol on the partitioning of Eastern Europe until August 1988, and relativised by post-Soviet Russia. Current Russian leaders consider the Pact of the same nature as and no more deplorable than the 1938 Munich agreement (Troebst, 2009; Trenin, 2011: 216). In 2009, Putin condemned the Pact at the commemoration for the start of the Second World War in Gdansk. However, he also argued that British and French behaviour at the Munich conference, which took place before the Pact was signed and without the participation of the USSR, had already undermined efforts to build an anti-Nazi alliance.¹⁷

The controversy between Baltic/Polish and Russian narratives of the Second World War is further complicated by the fact that many Soviet/Russian *lieux de mémoire* (cemeteries and monuments of the Red Army) are located in Central Eastern Europe, while some Polish and Baltic memory sites (work camps, mass graves) are located on Russian territory (Greene, Lipman & Ryabov, 2010: 7). Two recent episodes exemplify this: the clash between the Estonian and Russian governments over the relocation of a Soviet war monument in Tallin in 2007 and the debate following the death of former Polish president Lech Kaczyński near Smolensk in April 2010. The relocation of the Soviet war monument from central Tallin to a military cemetery in April 2007 led to clashes between ethnic Russians and ethnic Estonians in Tallin and to a one-week-long siege of the Estonian embassy in Moscow by Russian demonstrators. The dispute concerned the interpretation of the monument's significance: for Russia and ethnic Russians, it was a symbol of liberation from Nazi occupation, while for many ethnic Estonians it stood for Soviet occupation and repression after 1945. The fact that the monument, a Russian *lieu de mémoire*, was on the territory of a state which has adopted a different war narrative caused a diplomatic crisis between Moscow and Tallin, 62 years after the end of the conflict (Ehala, 2009: 139-156; Lehti, Jutila & Jokisipilä, 2008: 393-413).

In the debate following the death of Polish president Lech Kaczyński, who perished in a plane crash in April 2010 while flying to a commemoration of the

¹⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8230387.stm>, accessed 25 May 2012.

Katyn massacre, many representatives of the main Polish (right-wing) opposition party 'Law and Justice' blamed Russia for the accident (*New York Times*, 2011). Diverging Russian and Polish narratives of the 1940 Katyn massacre constitute the background of this accusation. The 'Law and Justice' leaders constructed a narrative connecting events in 1940 and the death of Kaczynski in 2010, arguing that Russian authorities had orchestrated the accident, emulating the policies of the Soviet NKVD 70 years earlier. The fact that the Katyn site is on Russian territory and that the plane crash took place in Russia served to corroborate the conspiracy theory propagated by the Polish Right. Although the Centre-Right Polish government seems to have opted for pragmatism and reconciliation with Moscow on the Katyn issue (*The Guardian*, 2008), the debate following the accident shows that prominent political forces in Poland base their current posture toward Russia on strongly anti-Russian memory politics.

The alleged lack of focus on events such as the Katyn massacre, the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Yalta conference in Western political discourse constitutes the main source of conflict also between the Western and the Central Eastern European narratives of the Second World War. One of the main critiques made by Vike-Freiberga in May 2005 was addressed to the Western democracies, that in 1945 'accepted without protest the renewed subjugation of over a dozen countries in Central and Eastern Europe by the totalitarian Communism of the Soviet empire and its satellites'. Due to this, she argued, the Allied victory over Nazi Germany was only a 'partial victory' (cited in Mälksoo, 2009: 666). Dominant Western European political discourses do not accept the argument of a 'partial victory' and marginalise the suffering of Central Eastern European states during and after the war. Their main focus is on the glorification of domestic resistance movements and the suffering of Western European civilians (Onken, 2007: 30). In addition, Western European discourses reject the equation between Nazi and Communist totalitarianism, which is a leitmotiv in Central Eastern European memory politics, not least because Communists constituted a considerable or dominant force in the French, Italian and Belgian resistance movements (Kattago, 2009: 12).

The Communism-Nazism equation is based on the argument that the Communist and Nazi ideologies were equally criminal and murderous (Onken, 2007: 30). This interpretation enables Central Eastern European politicians to relativise their countries' responsibility in the Holocaust and other war crimes by focusing on domestic suffering, first under Nazi occupation and then under

Soviet domination. Central Eastern European nations' self-description as victims of both the Nazi and Soviet totalitarianisms allows them to externalise both experiences and present their own crimes as defensive actions in the context of "national liberation struggles" (Torbakov, 2011: 215-216). In addition, the emphasis on Communist crimes finds a receptive audience in Central Eastern European societies, where suffering under Communist regimes and in Soviet gulags tends to be a livelier and more personal memory than the Shoah (Karlsson, 2010: 42).

The equation Communism-Nazism also challenges the singularity of the Holocaust as *the* crime against humanity of the twentieth century, which constitutes a central paradigm of current Western and Central European narratives about the Second World War (Mälksoo, 2009: 656; Onken, 2007: 30). The reluctance of Central Eastern European leaders to discuss their countries' participation in the Holocaust resulted in several verbal clashes between the local elites and Western historians, politicians and Jewish organisations (Onken, 2007: 33-36).¹⁸ At European level, the conflict between different interpretations of the significance of the Holocaust and of Stalinist crimes became particularly evident when Central Eastern European politicians, supported by conservative political groupings, presented resolutions condemning Communist and Nazi totalitarianism in the European Parliament. These resolutions caused heated debates, especially between their proponents and the Western European Centre-Left. Eventually, they were either rejected or adopted in modified versions that maintained the uniqueness of the Holocaust (Kattago, 2009: 11-12).

Furthermore, Central Eastern European narratives of the Second World War and its aftermath became increasingly challenged by developments in Central European historiography and memory politics. In the last 10-15 years the debate on German suffering and victimhood during the Second World War acquired unprecedented relevance in German society and academic research.¹⁹ Since post-war Central Eastern European states bear responsibility for the

¹⁸ One of the liveliest debates took place in Poland when the Polish-American historian Jan T. Gross published a book blaming the Polish inhabitants of the small town of Jedwabne for the mass murder of their Jewish 'neighbours'. The study prompted the Polish parliament to order an investigation of the Jedwabne pogrom. See Gross (2001) and Zimmermann (2003, ed.).

¹⁹ For an analysis of the recent public debate on the flight of Germans from Eastern Europe, see Ohliger, R. (2005) 'Menschenverletzung oder Migration? Zum historischen Ort von Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen nach 1945', *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, 2; Völklein, U. (2005) "Mitleid war von niemand zu erwarten". *Das Schicksal der deutschen Vertriebenen* (Munich, Droemer); H. Bömelburg, R. Stössinger & R. Traba (eds.) (2006) *Vertreibung aus dem Osten: Deutsche und Polen erinnern sich* (Osna-brück, Fibre Verlag).

expulsion of ethnic Germans from their territory at the end of the conflict, the debate portrays them as perpetrators, thereby challenging discourses that focus exclusively on victimhood. This challenge proved particularly irritating for Central-Eastern European states, as previously all European narratives had portrayed the Germans as perpetrators and culprits of all evils in the years 1939-1945. The question of German victimhood remains highly disputed²⁰ and has also transcended the boundary of memory politics, as shown by the Czech opt-out from the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights in order to prevent potential German expellees' claims for compensation (*The European Voice*, 2009).

Conclusion

The analysis has shown that Russia's significance in memory discourses in the three selected European countries varies considerably. Russia plays an important role in Polish national memory, which is profoundly influenced by the hostile historical relationship between the two states. Conversely, Russia is not a major factor in French memory discourses. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union constituted an important partner for France to perpetuate a semblance of its past grandeur. However, other narratives are much more important in French national memory, most notably the anti-Nazi Resistance and the revolutionary tradition. Russia's role is more substantial in German memory discourses, particularly those concerning the Second World War and the division of Germany. In spite of the largely antagonistic German-Russian historical relationship, Russia does not feature as a significant foe in German national memory. This is due to the prevailing German sense of responsibility for Second World War crimes, as well as to the process of reconciliation that took place between two countries following the reunification of Germany. Thus, the hypothesis formulated at the beginning applies fully only to the Polish case, in which the historical relationship with Russia shaped most decisively and most negatively national memory.

The comparative section of the article has shown that Russia's representations in the three national memories under analysis are hardly reconcilable. In particular, the negative role of Russia in Polish national memory has no equiv-

²⁰ See for instance the dispute that followed the German government's proposal in February 2011 to introduce a commemoration day for the German victims of expulsion from East and Central Europe; *Spiegel*, 15 February 2011.

alent in German or French memory discourses. Post-1989 memory discourses in Poland and other Central Eastern European countries have been functional to the construction of national identities with a strong anti-Russian connotation: Russia is portrayed as a non-European country, as Europe's constitutive 'other' (Torbakov, 2011: 215-216). This constitutes an obstacle to the emergence of a shared European memory. Moreover, differing perceptions of Russia are not the only hindrance in this respect. Central Eastern European memories cannot easily be reconciled with Western and Central European memories on key events of the twentieth century such as the Second World War and its aftermath, the singularity of the Holocaust and the significance of ethnic cleansing in the late 1940s.

Thus, it is improbable that national narratives will converge toward an integrated and harmonised European collective memory. The lack of a shared memory will continue to be an obstacle to the emergence of a common European identity (see also Jarausch & Lindenberger, 2007: 1; Fried, 2001: 561-593).²¹ In spite of the continent's increasing economic and political integration, the 'frontiers of memory' (Judt, 1992: 112) have remained firmly in place, particularly with regard to perceptions of Russia's role in European history during the twentieth century. Although certain historical periods feature prominently in most European national memories, their representation is considerably different from country to country (Bell, 2006: 16). As Klaus Eder argues, a European collective memory could probably be built only around a feeling of collective responsibility concerning Europe's 'murderous past', focusing on the crimes perpetrated by Europeans during the twentieth century (Eder, 2005: 218). However, it is highly unlikely that any political group will attempt to construct a European collective memory based on shared controversial experiences such as colonialism or the Holocaust.²² (Pakier & Str ath, 2010: 12; Jarausch, 2010: 316).

Furthermore, a European memory of responsibility would also conflict with stronger national narratives, where negative or shameful experiences have been marginalised to make room for those that encourage pride and identification with the nation.

²¹ Johannes Fried, former chairman of the Association of German Historians, argued that Europeans will not develop a collective identity as long as their national images of memory diverge (Fried, 2001: 561-593).

²² The attempt to turn commemorations of the Shoah into a foundation myth of the EU, most notably at the 2000 Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, was not successful. Discourses on colonialism do not play an important role in the national memories of the former colonising countries and are ambivalent, combining admissions of guilt with pride about the alleged achievements of empire.

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