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Annabelle Littoz-Monnet

To cite this article: Annabelle Littoz-Monnet (2012) The EU Politics of Remembrance: Can Europeans Remember Together?, West European Politics, 35:5, 1182-1202, DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2012.706416

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2012.706416>



Published online: 22 Aug 2012.



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The EU Politics of Remembrance: Can Europeans Remember Together?

ANNABELLE LITTOZ-MONNET

Over the last few years, EU institutions have taken on the task of promoting an ‘active European remembrance’ of Europe’s twentieth century totalitarian experiences. At stake in this process is the possibility of constructing an EU-wide historical narrative. However, EU-level debates on the remembrance of European history are permeated by struggles between policy actors who vie for control over the telling of Europe’s past. Using insights from the agenda-setting and framing literatures, the article examines the conditions under which memory narratives are able to become prominent or, conversely, lose ground in the EU’s overall discourse. It concludes that, although the constellation of actors in place was a key factor in explaining fluctuations in the EU’s remembrance discourse, the weight of their arguments also depended on how well their discourse resonated with existing memory cultures at the domestic and the EU levels.

Over the last few years, European elites have begun to promote an ‘active European remembrance’ of the past.¹ Since 2007, projects that foster reflection about the causes and consequences of Nazism and/or Stalinism and the memory of these events (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 (2005), ‘Europe’s entry ticket’ for candidate EU states. ‘Memory’ has moved to the centre stage of EU policies as a new vector of identity policies and as a soft EU membership criterion.

The ‘Active European Remembrance’ action, established in 2007, aims to preserve the main sites associated with mass deportations and former concentration camps, as well as the archives documenting the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism, and to keep the memory of the victims of the two totalitarian regimes alive (European Commission 2007: 89). At stake in this process is the possibility of constructing a Europe-wide historical narrative,

Correspondence Address: annabelle.littoz-monnet@graduateinstitute.ch

which could act as an identification-marker for European citizens. Previous attempts at creating EU-level remembrance processes 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 have understood the need to promote new ‘memory frames’ – defined here as shared, interpretative lenses through which certain actors make sense of the past. The decision was therefore made to focus on ‘hot’ memories² already present in domestic memory cultures that appeal more 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 common 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 resonated well with the domestic memory cultures of Western European states, it became more problematic in the context of Eastern enlargement. Therefore, EU policy-makers acknowledged the need to find another memory frame that could appeal to new EU citizens, and shifted their action towards Europeanising the remembrance of both Nazi and Stalinist crimes. However, the very nature of the mechanisms of the recollection of the past, as ideal tools of political tactics in the hands of political elites at the local, domestic, and more recently European levels, did not lend itself to being a vector of collective consciousness-building. Rather than exemplifying a Europeanisation 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 to life (Winter and Sivan 1999). Using insights from the agenda-setting and framing literature, this article examines the role of institutional and political actors to illustrate how new memory frames have emerged at the European level and specify the conditions which account for their increasing or decreasing prominence in the EU’s discourse.

The research conducted shows that changes in the constellation of actors in place was a key factor in explaining the fluctuations of the EU’s remembrance discourse. However, the weight of the arguments brought up by policy actors also depended on how well their discourse resonated with existing memory cultures at both the domestic and EU levels. Thus, the accession of Eastern European states has allowed for a competing interpretation of the past – that of ‘Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil’ – to gain ground. Moreover, new member states and some sections of the political Right within the European Parliament have challenged the dominant frame of the *uniqueness* of the Holocaust experience, both at the EU level and in most old EU states. The European Commission, in an attempt to use the realm of remembrance as a vector of identification with and participation in

the EU as a polity, has also endorsed the new discourse. However, there were many obstacles to challenging the dominant interpretation. In a political context in which the uniqueness of the Holocaust has gained the status of founding myth in European societies, at a time when the survivors of Nazi crimes are increasingly few, and where strong mobilisation for an active remembrance of the Holocaust exists at the level of civil society, the dominant portrayal of the past could not be fully overthrown. If Eastern enlargement, by changing the constellation of actors in place, has allowed for the incorporation of the remembrance of Soviet crimes within EU discourse, the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame is still dominant. The nature of the discourse itself, its heuristics, and its status as the 'solution' to the perceived lack of a founding event or 'myth' in the history of European integration, make it a very powerful identification-marker.

Collective Memory-Building as Locus of Memory Frames Competition

The constructed nature of national identities (Anderson 1983) is widely, and increasingly, accepted by scholars of nationalism. Collective identity has been at the centre of attention in studies of nation-building. The nation, however, has not been an exclusive focus. Collective identity can equally refer to cities, regions, or groups such as political parties or even social movements (Eder 2005). Thus, debates over the definition (and the existence) of a European identity have been at the heart of debates on post-national attempts at European political integration. For some, the roots of European identity are to be found in the specific historical and cultural foundations of Europe. The concept of civilisational framework, from which perspective civilisations have specific structural and cultural characteristics, has been put forward in this context. For Eisenstadt (1987), civilisational frameworks are constructed and reconstructed over time and what defines European civilisation is a specific form of structural and cultural pluralism, which has multiple institutional, cultural, and religious sources at its source. For Huntington (1993), the definition of the European civilisation is less fluid; he sees the European Community as based upon the shared foundation of European culture and Western Christianity. As a way of escaping never-ending debates about the nature of European identity, some voices evoke, rather, the possibility of a collective identity defined by some reciprocal expectation to abide by norms. Habermas' '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 criticised for artificially disaggregating citizens' shared sense of adherence to democratic values and the emotional components of group identity construction. Elites at the subnational, national, and supranational levels are well aware of 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 (1992: 38), 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories'. 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 (2009: 350) warns us, however, that although we are 'the products of our past', memory is operated in different ways across different scales and contexts. Depending on the scale of analysis, memory may function in different ways to constitute collective identities.

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.³ In the words of Schwarz (1982: 374), 'to remember is to place the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present'. This implies that processes of collective identity and collective memory construction are embedded into social struggles between actors, who 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 with regard 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 the actors and mechanisms involved in the recollection of the past (Wolfrum 1999). Using the 'memory regime' framework, Languenbacher (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 competing memories' (Languenbacher 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 to control 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.

This analysis brings in the concept of ‘memory frame’, defined as shared interpretative lenses through which certain actors make sense of the past. 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-definition literature helps us identify the conditions whereby certain interpretative frames make their way onto political agendas. The process of framing is indeed central to much of the agenda-setting literature, which looks at why issues appear, remain or disappear from 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 proponents of the new frame (Princen 2007). Second, the nature of the frame itself matters. 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. The claim is a simple one: depending on how policy issues are portrayed, their appearance on political agendas is more or less likely. Studies on framing also explain that in order to gain ground on political agendas, new frames must refer to ‘meta-cultural frames’ which already 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 examine 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 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). Furthermore, the institutional and political framework within which politics operate favours the consideration of some issues while discouraging the consideration of others (Bachrach and Baratz 1962).

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 a layer of 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 the 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 involved the EU concretely with the politics of the European past for the first time. 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 to protect European cultural heritage (European Parliament 1974). The European Commission also became involved with the politics of remembrance via the vector of cultural heritage policies. Since 1995, the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG Culture) was responsible 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 number of diverse projects related to the promotion of architectural heritage as the deposit of 'European memory' have benefited from EU financial support. The creation of the label 'European heritage' in 2007 follows 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 'European Cultural Month' similarly attempt to point 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'.⁴ 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, in moral terms, went beyond the ills of previous and comparable military conflicts. Again via the heritage path, in the early 1990s the European Parliament proposed that Nazi concentration camps be defined as European historical monuments.⁵ 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 European-level collective remembrance processes were limited to actions concerning 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 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 9 May, in celebration of the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950. In its communication *A People's Europe*, the European Commission also proposed making the anniversary of 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 per cent of people who live in Europe see themselves as exclusively European, while another 8.8 per cent 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 in 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 the 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.

Frame Competition: 'The Holocaust as Unique' vs. 'Hitler and Stalin as Equally Evil'

In response to the previous failures of EU remembrance policies, EU elites have developed new memory frames, which resonate with the existing memory cultures of EU states and, as such, better appeal to European citizens. But precisely because the new memory discourses echo domestic memory cultures, the EU has become a terrain of contest between competing frames. The struggle essentially centres on the right way of condemning the two European totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. The paradigm of the distinctiveness of the Holocaust is contrasted 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.⁶ At the time, a proposal from a German MEP concerning the inclusion of sites related to Stalinist crimes was rejected (Calligaro 2010), showing the dominant status of the 'Uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame at the EU level. In 1995, the Parliament also proposed the establishment of a European Holocaust Remembrance Day.⁷ 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 made 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, the 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'.⁸ Over the last 10 years, European Holocaust remembrance activities have been placed at the top of the EU agenda.

With the Eastern enlargement, however, a competing discourse focusing on Stalinist crimes also gained ground in EU institutions' memory policies. With the 2005 European Parliament resolution *The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War*,⁹ the suffering endured by Eastern nations under Communism entered the EU's agenda for the first time. 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'.¹⁰ 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'.¹¹ In April 2009, the Parliament also called for 23 August to be proclaimed a Europe-wide Remembrance Day for the victims of both Nazism and Communism (EurActiv 2009b). 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 at historical phenomena that already belonged to the realm of domestic memory cultures. In this attempt, however, the necessity of encapsulating the diversity of the memory cultures of all EU states was acknowledged. DG Culture recognised that 'Europe needs to accept that its constitutive nations want to make their history a part of the collective European memory'.¹² 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 twentieth 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'.¹³ This discursive shift was noted by observers of EU politics. Holocaust scholars and groups that were particularly concerned with 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' (Liphshiz 2010). Incontestably, the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame has become increasingly institutionalised at the 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.

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 promoting the Europeanisation of remembrance processes. Jàn Figel, the Education and Culture Commissioner at the time of the launch of the 'Active European Remembrance' action, was personally committed to bringing remembrance issues to the fore.¹⁴ 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 of '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 in strategy was reflected in the institutional transfer of memory issues from DG Culture to DG Communication. With the creation of a new portfolio in 2010 named 'Fundamental Rights, Justice and Citizenship' directed by Commissioner Viviane Reading,¹⁵ 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' action, 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. Within the European Parliament, a group of Spanish and Portuguese MEPs had suggested that their own experiences with Fascism under Franco and Salazar be considered as objects of European remembrance.¹⁶ The European Commission, however, judged those experiences with Fascism as too national in their nature.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ Over the last 10 years, the European Parliament has become the central arena where different portrayals of the past and their proponents 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 EPP group, and provoked a strong resistance from the Left. Giusto Catania, from the European United Left Group (GUE/NGL), for instance, complained that ‘by 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’.²¹ 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’.²²

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).²³ 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 explained that for the PSE, the resolution was an attempt to rewrite history.²⁴ Estonian centre-right MEP Tunne Kelam, one of the initiators of the 2009 resolution, also explained that the

resolution overwhelmingly benefited from the support of the EPP-ED group (EurActiv 2009a). 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

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 establishment of dictatorial regimes.²⁵ 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 and their views have 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.²⁶

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 a democratic statehood in the absence of former experiences with democratic regimes. In Eastern European states, the recovery of Holocaust memory is at a nascent stage, and uncovering these histories is often highly 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 victims of Stalinist crimes might also be a way of avoiding discussion of their own responsibilities.²⁷ Struggling for the promotion of their own collective memories is also about the recognition, symbolically, of Eastern states' full membership status in the EU. New member states use the history agenda as a way to achieve their place and gain equality of status within the EU.²⁸ 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.²⁹

The recognition of past crimes is therefore part of a bilateral agenda between the Baltic states and Russia, in which the stakes consist of obtaining compensation for past suffering, on the Baltic side, and 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 for all as the rationale upon which the EU itself found its legitimating narrative (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 took centre stage in the 1980s with the so-called *Historikerstreit*, where conservative historians debated 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 twentieth 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 (1999). It criticised the single-minded focus on the Holocaust by 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 (Lamy 1998; Thorez-Vermeersch 1998; Weill 1999).

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

actors (i.e. Eastern European states) allowed for the legitimisation of the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame in 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.

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 per cent of the funding was allocated to projects focusing on the crimes committed during the Second World War and related to the Holocaust, 17 per cent was allocated to projects concerning the crimes of Stalinism, and the remaining 8 per cent was allocated to projects dealing with totalitarian regimes, which can relate to both Nazism and Stalinism.³⁰ In April 2007, EU justice ministers also passed the Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia.³¹ This allows public condemnation, denial, or trivialisation of 'genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes' to be declared a criminal offence – provided such crimes were recognised as such by the Nuremberg Tribunal of 1945 or the Statute of the International Criminal Court of 2002 (Lobjakas 2008). 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, in 2010 the European Commission launched 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' (World Jewish Congress 2010). Such an unprecedented level of funding for research on Nazi crimes signals the unchallenged nature of the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame and its prevalence on the European agenda.

Obstacles to overturning the 'uniqueness of the Holocaust' frame are located at different levels. First, the constellation of actors in place has not sufficiently changed to overthrow 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.³² Organisations of children of survivors of the crimes of Nazism systematically apply for funding under the 'Active European Remembrance' action.³³ 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 his personal network and high media profile in order to create momentum around the memory of the Holocaust.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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 deeply anchored anxieties, amongst European elites, of the risk of forgetting.³⁶

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 have shown their willingness to engage in a more direct confrontation with their past. Whereas the first 20 post-war years were characterised by near silence on European countries' responsibilities and solely focused on Hitler and party elites as perpetrators in Germany (Judt 2005), signs of broader awareness appeared in the late 1960s and 1970s with the screening of the *Holocaust* television series in 1978 in Germany as a particular 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). Thus, the 'Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil' frame was faced with an already well-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 his supporters, on the one hand, and the political Left, on the other. For the Left, the Holocaust had become the cornerstone of German collective national identity since the 1970s, as symbolised by Chancellor Willy Brandt falling to his knees in 1970 at the Warsaw memorial to the Jewish Ghetto Uprising (see Motyl 2010). Because the Holocaust has been embraced as a national catastrophe by the victims *and* the victimisers, collective guilt was 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 to place 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, at both the domestic and 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 resistance from a 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 within the European Community. If this only sends us back to the broader problem of constructing public spheres at the supranational 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 cement for the construction of a European identity. The grand moments of the history of European integration did not appeal to a wider circle than the already Europeanised elite. Focusing on 'hot' historical memories was therefore a skilful attempt on the part of EU institutions to transform remembrance processes into a genuine vector of identification with 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 in the definition of memory narratives changed. Whereas in Western Europe the debate had been one between left-wing intellectual and political elites and the proponents of a more conservative political agenda, at the EU level it also became 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 no longer solely be labelled as a conservative attempt to play down the responsibilities of Germany and other Western European states that collaborated. The change of participants in the remembrance politics debates also changed the perception of what was considered an acceptable discourse. A ‘memory’ frame is therefore able to gain recognition on the agenda when the constellation of participants in the debate changes in favour of the new frame, but also when its proponents benefit from legitimacy that is equal to that of the supporters of the opposed frames.

However, despite the growing acceptance at the EU level of the ‘Nazism and Stalinism as equally evil’ frame, strong resistance persists. The nature of the ‘uniqueness of the Holocaust’ frame makes it a very powerful identification-marker. Its status as the ‘solution’ to the perceived lack of a founding event or ‘myth’ in the history of European integration gives the frame a very powerful position in EU memory debates. At a time when the last survivors of Nazi crimes are increasingly few, the proponents of the ‘uniqueness of the Holocaust’ frame, amongst both 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 explained solely 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 played the role of powerful meta-narratives and have determined the chance of new portrayals of the past to make it onto political agendas.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank André Liebich, Wolfram Kaiser, Katarzyna Stoklosa, David Berliner, Lisa Komar, Pavel Tychtl as well as two anonymous referees for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

Notes

1. ‘Active European Remembrance’ is the name of the European action put in place by the European Commission in 2007. It is part of the 2007–2013 Europe for Citizens Programme.
2. Maier (2002) differentiates between the hot memory of Nazism and the cold memory of Communism in Western Europe.
3. There is however a debate between absolutist and relativist theories (Schwartz 1982).

4. Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, available at http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/decl_en.htm.
5. 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 March 1993.
6. European Parliament Resolution on European and International Preservation of the Sites of Nazi Concentration Camps as Historical Memorials, 11 February 1993, OJEC C72, 15 March 1993.
7. Debates of the European Parliament, Sitting on 15 May 1995, Holocaust Remembrance Day and European Parliament.
8. See http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2005/06/16402_en.pdf, 99-103.
9. P6-TA(2005)0180, Official Journal C92 E/392, 20 April 2006.
10. Ibid.
11. P6_TA(2009)0213, Official Journal C137 E/05, 27 May 2010.
12. Confidential document from the Commission services.
13. Website of the Executive Agency Education, Audiovisual, Culture, Programme Guide 'Europe for Citizens', 2007–2013.
14. Interviews with officials from DG Culture, Brussels, June 2010.
15. The portfolio is administered by three different DGs: DG Justice, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and DG Communication.
16. Today, however, MEPs from Portugal and Spain refer to their own experiences with Fascism as just another instance of twentieth century totalitarianism and do not seek to distinguish their experience from that of states that directly experienced Stalinism and Nazism (Debates of the European Parliament, 25 March 2009).
17. Interview with Pavel Tychtl, European Commission, DG Communication, 10 June 2010.
18. Confidential working document produced by the Commission services.
19. Habermas (1996: 360) defines the public sphere as 'a network of communicating information and points of view'.
20. See for instance Kreppel (2000) for a presentation of the debate on the determinants of MEPs' positions.
21. Speech of Guisto Catania, Debates of the European Parliament, 15 May 2005.
22. Speech of Pedro Guerreiro, Debates of the European Parliament, 15 May 2005.
23. 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) groups also took part.
24. Speech of Katrin Saks, Debates of the European Parliament, Oral explanations of vote, 2 April 2009.
25. Interview with Pavel Tychtl.
26. See website of the 'Reconciliation of European histories' group: <http://eureconciliation.wordpress.com/>.
27. Interview with Michael Privot, President of European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Brussels, 23 August 2011.
28. Interview with Pavel Tychtl.
29. Girts Valdis Kristovskis (UEN), Debates of the European Parliament, 15 May 2005.
30. Interview with Jean Barth, policy officer, Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, Brussels, 8 July 2010.
31. Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.
32. 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).

33. Interview with Jean Barth.
34. Interview with Pascale Charrhon, former director of ENAR, Brussels, 28 September 2001.
35. Interview with Pavel Tychtřl.
36. See for instance the Facebook group 'Shoah, Holocauste, Auschwitz n'oubliez jamais!', which begins 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 of one of the most important event of the 20th century' [author's translation] (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=112834080465>).

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