

Double Degree Programme

Master's in International Relations

Master's in European Union Studies

**The European Union Enlargement and the legacy of history:
How memory clashes and historical revisionism shape the future of
European integration and its supranational identity.**

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“For century Europe, has been an idea, holding out hope of peace and understanding. That hope has been fulfilled. European unification has made peace and prosperity possible. It has brought about a sense of community and overcome differences. Each Member State has helped to unite Europe and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Thanks to the yearning for freedom of the peoples of central and eastern Europe the unnatural division of Europe is now consigned to the past. European integration shows that we have learnt the painful lessons of a history marked by bloody conflict. Today we live together as was never possible before”

Berlin Declaration, 25 March 2007.¹

¹ Jointly signed by European Commission President: José Manuel Barroso, European Parliament President: Hans-Gert Pöttering, the Council of the European Union President: Angela Merkel. Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE “Berlin Declaration, 25 March 2007”, 19.12.2013. [Berlin Declaration \(25 March 2007\) - CVCE Website](#)

Introduction

The European Union emerged as project of peace, driven by the aspiration and desire to unite what, before then, has always been divided. The path that led to a European Union as we know it today, has been long, complex, and fraught with arduous challenges. This current level of integration has been achieved through considerable effort, nonetheless it stands as a unique model on the global stage. The fall of the Berlin Wall accelerated the process, providing a significant momentum to the European project, which, over the last thirty years has acquired its own autonomous strength and resilience. In order to legitimize itself and to gain independence from its member state, the Union has tried to acquire its own mission and *raison d'être*. It has expanded well beyond the initial circle of the six founding members, reaching its peak, before the painful United Kingdom departure, with 28 member states. It has opened its doors to the post-authoritarian countries of southern Europe, setting itself up as a bastion of democracy and progress. It welcomed the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, helping to heal a wound opened for more than fifty years and uniting more than 300 million citizens under a single flag.

However, the reality showed us that uniting people only under a common institutional umbrella is clearly not enough. Fostering a sense of cohesion and unity appears vital. A shared identity which is able to binds individuals with different cultures, traditions and, above all, histories, seems essential. The European project was born precisely from “*a history marked by bloody conflicts*”², from a reconciliation that, until a few years earlier, would have seemed unthinkable. The Union has made possible what appeared impossible. Despite the foresight of the Union founding fathers, such as Schuman, Spinelli, Adenauer, Spaak and Monnet, if one had asked any German, French or Italian soldier on the front lines, whether in less than seventy years, his grandson could have worked, studied, moved freely across borders and, with a “pinch” of ambition and fortune, even sit next to the grandson of his former enemy, in a common European Parliament, he would have probably not believe it. And a similar reaction would have been expected from a Polish, an Estonian, or a Hungarian if had such a scenario been presented, during the Cold War years. Although the past seventy years, have been made this possible, the other side of the coin reveals that, despite the many successes, a real sense of European belonging is still lacking, and unfortunately, this is not merely a perception. To address this critic challenge, the European Union have looked at its common tragic past. It has sought to leverage the Holocaust memory, the narrative of the success of post-war reconstruction, the founding principles of democracy and the protection of fundamental freedoms and rights. The aim was to create a

² Ibid.

profound collective sentiment toward a project that should not be perceived solely as geopolitical or economic. This narrative has been effective for many countries, especially those that have seen in the Union an opportunity for emancipation and progress. However, grounding European identity on historical memory has proved to be a double-edged sword. While, on the one hand, this memory represented, during enlargement, an element of attraction, on the other hand it generated conflicts. Most of the new member states were coming from a different historical background compared to the six founding countries and often from a past even more “traumatic”. Europe, in his long history has always been a terrain of confrontation and bloodshed. Thus, it is not surprising, that when the integration project is expanded, conflicts emerge between the different national memories. Indeed, the new member have tried to have their history recognized at the European level, where often this memory, contrast with either the EU or its member states, narrative. Consequently, the European Union, especially the European Parliament, has become an arena for memory disputes.

The Union is currently facing a paradox, because while enlargement has been a means of self-legitimacy and reinforcement of the European project; the accession of new states has made an already fragmented identity even more fragile. The integration of countries with different identity and historical legacy has created fractures that are difficult to heal. To date, the Union is perhaps more united than ever, yet it remains deeply internally divided, with various actors undermining its stability from within. The future appears uncertain because if expanding the European project means strengthening it, especially in a context of growing geopolitical tension, the prospect accessions such as those of the Balkans, or Ukraine, risks further fragmenting the Union, wearing it down from inside.

In the light of the above, this thesis aims to examine the role of historical memory and its contested narratives in the different rounds of European Union Enlargement, highlighting its consequences and repercussions on European integration and identity. Furthermore, it will explore current historical revisionism, and their impact on the Union cohesion. Finally, it will offer a perspective on the potential dynamics and clash that may arise with the accession of new member states.

Research Design

In everyday political debate, it is common to resort to identity narratives based on memory, as well as to political instrumentalizations of it, giving us the impression and illusion of being fully aware of the significance of memory, its specific weight, its political and social implications, and the dynamics governing its narration. Whether it is collective memory, or the dynamics related to the politics of memory, the truth is that it is not always immediate to recognise its presence and role. Even the

relevant academic literature often finds it difficult to define a clear dimension or an absolute value of memory. Regarding collective memory, Verovšek emphasizes that the lack of conceptual clarity regarding the various phenomena that fall under the umbrella of collective memory, deeply complicate the research and study over memory.³ In this regard, it is crucial to emphasise and be fully aware that using memory as an explanatory variable, represents a complex challenge. This is due to a lack of conceptual clarity and the difficulty of distinguishing the actual influence of memory, as material factors often intervene and complicate the analysis.⁴ Indeed, memory is by nature a social product, intrinsically linked to social contexts, symbols and rituals that communities use to construct and transmit their historical experiences.⁵ This theory makes memory fertile ground for constructivist approaches, which see memory as a product shaped by “social frameworks”. That idea results deeply in contrast with the essentialist approach that rigidly define memory as a set of shared identifications without concrete relations to social and institutional framework.⁶

The relationship between memory and politics has been explored by various political scientists, who have analysed their mutual influences. The debate has often highlighted the role of memory in shaping political decisions and, conversely, the ability of political elite to appropriate historical memory in order to manipulate, reinterpret it or even silencing the past.⁷ Hence Derrida's renowned phrase, who keenly observed that “*there is no political power without control of archives, if not of memory*”⁸.

However, in my view, what still seems to be under-explored in the European context, is the power of memory conflicts. Numerous theories have highlighted the propulsive role of memory in reinforcing the European integration project from its origins, nonetheless, minor attention has been paid to the impact of the past and the resulting memory clash during the expansion of the European Union, and in the building of a shared supranational identity.

³ Verovšek, P. J. “Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm.” *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 4 (3), 2016. p. 529–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1167094>.

⁴ Kansteiner, W. “In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz” Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 2006. [In pursuit of German memory : history, television, and politics after Auschwitz : Kansteiner, Wulf : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

⁵ Collingwood, R.G. “*The Idea of History*”. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994. [Review: \[Untitled\] on JSTOR](#)

⁶ Halbwachs, M. “*The Collective Memory*”, Harper & Row, New York, 1980. and Leichter D. “Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur” *Ricoeur Studies*, 3(1), 2012 : p. 114-131. [\(PDF\) Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur \(researchgate.net\)](#). The “Pacto de Olvido”, or Pact of Forgetting, as we will analyse in the case of Spain during the first round of enlargement, is an agreement of silence. It was a political agreement made during the transition to democracy in Spain in the late 1970s. This pact provided for a kind of collective amnesia about the crimes and atrocities committed during Franco's regime, with the aim of promoting unity and stability in the new democratic Spain.

⁷ Hobsbawm E., Ranger T. “The Invention of Tradition”, Cambridge Univ. Press Howard-Hassmann, Cambridge, 1983. Zubrzycki G., A. Wozny “The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory”, *Annual Review of Sociology*. 46, 2020: p. 175-194

⁸ Derrida, J. “*Aporias*” Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1993.

Therefore, the main objective of this thesis includes mapping memory, and its conflicts, analysing their influence in the process of European integration, with an emphasis on the Enlargement processes. It is intended to show how memory played a crucial role in defining the relations between existing member states and those that were or are in the process of joining the Union.⁹ Furthermore, it will analyse how differences in national historical memories have threatened and continue to threaten the creation of a supranational identity and shared memory at the European level. However, despite these difficulties, the past continues to act as a pull factor, a force that brings states closer to the “orbit” of the European Union.¹⁰ This phenomenon is not only evident in the previous enlargement processes, but also in the recent negotiations with countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, where memory acts as a sounding board and a catalyst factor for accession dynamics. Among the main obstacles to the expansion of the European Union in terms of memory, the eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007, define as the “big bag enlargement” is a case in point. Differences in historical narratives between new and already integrated member states have generated tensions that persist to this day, as evidenced by attempts at historical revisionism by countries such as Hungary, Poland and Croatia, which the thesis will define as “Trojan Horses” inside the EU fortress.¹¹ These tensions were also reflected in heated debates in the European Parliament, as we can see, for instance, in the case of the 2019 resolution, which was accused of equating Nazism and Communism.¹² This resolution underscores the ongoing debate regarding the role of communism in Europe and the persistent divergence of positions, which continues to obstruct a reconciliation between East and West. Beyond that, other rounds of EU enlargement, although they consolidated the Western alliance and a communion of values that emerged from the war, also raised several challenges and issues. Prominent among these are the strong British identity politics, driven by British exceptionalism,¹³ and the policy of forgetting implemented by Spain, aimed at securing amnesty for the crimes

⁹ Verovšek, Peter J. "Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past." *Millenniums*, 43 (2), 2015: p.531-550. [Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past - Peter J. Verovšek, 2015](#) [Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past - Peter J. Verovšek, 2015](#)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Laczó F. "Outrageous History: Historical Visions, Emotional Regimes, and Right-Wing Populist Hegemony in Hungary." *Südosteuropa Gesellschaft*, 6, 2021: p.65-72 [CEEOL - Article Detail](#).

¹² European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (2019/2819(RSP)) (2021/C 171/06). [European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe \(2019/2819\(RSP\)\)](#)

¹³ Fligstein, N. "For Queen and Country! National Identity and British Post-War Use of Military Power." *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 3(1), 2020: p.274-287. [For Queen and Country! National Identity and British Post-War Use of Military Power](#)

perpetuated under Franco's regime.¹⁴ The policy of forgetting resulted in a failure to make a complete break with Franco's regime after the war, in stark contrast to the anti-fascist narrative promoted at the time by the European Community. While this facilitated the democratic transition and the subsequent enlargement of the Union, in the long run it generated tensions, with Spain having to come to terms with its past in the 2000s, precisely in relation to the growing memory policies promoted by the EU.¹⁵ Moreover, it is necessary to point out that studies on collective memory, when connected to the discipline of International Relations, still reflect a predominantly Western-centred narrative of European history.¹⁶ This order of things has been progressively challenged since the European Union eastward enlargement, making a critical rethinking of the ways in which collective memory is studied and used to interpret the dynamics of European integration increasingly interesting. Through an analysis which considers and takes into account these elements, this thesis attempts to highlight the fundamental role of memory as cause of both, conflict and cohesion. It aims to contribute towards an enhanced understanding of the mechanisms that influence the evolution of supranational identity and the process of European Union Enlargement.

National collective memories continue to exert a significant influence in the context of collective memory and European identity. The question of European identity, however, has not yet found a well-defined theoretical position, remaining a subject of academic debate. Spohn W. has summarized three main theoretical strands that explain the relationship between European memory and national memories. A first perspective which is inspired by a confederal and intergovernmental understanding of the European Union, argues that European identity is a weak appendage of strong national identities. In this model, the national identity retain primacy and leading role, relegating European identity to a marginal and subordinate level.¹⁷ A second perspective, namely the federalist and functionalist approach, on the other hand, tends to suggest that European identity can gradually develop to the point of restructuring national identities, transcending the traditional boundaries of the nation-state.¹⁸ Finally, a third position emerged. It assumes an active and interchanging equilibrium

¹⁴ López Fuentes, J. "A Forgetting for Everyone, by Everyone? Spain's Memory Laws and the Rise of the European Community of Memory 1977–2007" *94(1)*, 2022: p.127-162. ["A Forgetting for Everyone, by Everyone"? Spain's Memory Laws and the Rise of the European Community of Memory, 1977–2007* | The Journal of Modern History: Vol 94, No 1](#)

¹⁵ Humlebaeck, C. "The Pact of Olvido: Problem of Memory in Transition Regime." In Muro D., Alonso G., *The Politics and Memory of Democratic Transition: The Spanish Model*, Routledge, New York, 2010. [The Politics and Memory of Democratic Transition](#)

¹⁶ Mälksoo, M. "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe" *European Journal of International relations*, 15(4), 2009: p.653-680. [The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe - Maria Mälksoo, 2009](#)

¹⁷ Spohn, W. "National Identity and Collective Memory in an Enlarged Europe." In Spohn W., Klaus E., *Collective Memory and European Identity*. Routledge, New York, 2005. [Collective Memory and European Identity](#)

¹⁸ Ibid.

of European and national identifications and attachments. It recognizes the coexistence and interaction between both layers of identity.¹⁹ National collective memories continue to exert a significant influence in the context of collective memory and European identity. All these perspectives agree in emphasizing the current weakness of European identity if compared to national one but diverge in their predictions regarding its evolution. The federalist position, in the author's view, become particularly interesting when it suggests that evolving social and cultural processes may contribute to the gradual integration of identities within Europe. In this context, the functionalist approach emerges as an important interpretive tool to analyses the research question guiding this study, that state as follow:

“To what extent and through what mechanisms have memory and memory conflicts influenced the process of European integration and the construction of a shared supranational identity?”

In my opinion, the functionalism provides an excellent framework to understand how memory can act as either a disintegrating or unifying element force in the process of European integration. This approach is able to highlight the role of social and institutional forces in the creation of shared and common meanings. However, the analysis cannot ignore some intergovernmental elements, since the interstate dimension still characterizes the European Union and its governance. Many key decisions, especially those in relation to enlargements, are still made by member states and their officials, making it crucial to consider the role of national memories in intergovernmental negotiations as well.

National collective memories and historical narratives often emerge as determining factors in setting up different positions in negotiations and shaping the path of European integration. Intergovernmentalism thus provides a useful lens for analysing tensions and challenges generated by memory conflicts, highlighting how those can influence decision-making at the European level. Another decisive element that cannot be overlooked, however, is the social dimension of memory, which is a foundational aspect of any analysis of its function in the context of European integration. Collective memory is not a static or static and immutable element, but a social construction, product, shaped by cultural, symbols and social framework and rituals through which communities construct and transmit their historical experiences.²⁰ This aspect emphasizes the constructivist theories approach validity, which reads and interpret memory as a negotiated and ongoing, dynamic process rather than something a once and for all settled entity. In this view, memory not only reflects and

¹⁹Spohn, W., *National Identity and Collective Memory in an Enlarged Europe*, cit.

²⁰ Ibid.

symbolizes collective identities but also helps shape them, becoming a central element in the dialogue among European nations.

Methodology

The process tracing method proves to be particularly suitable for analysing the causal relationship between memory and memory clashes, understood as independent variables, and their impact on European integration and European identity, considered as the outcome variable. This relationship constitutes the starting point for addressing the research question. This method appears appropriate as it allows for an in-depth investigation of the mechanisms and process linking the variables at stake, towards the aim of explaining cause-effect processes and not merely identifying simple relationships between the variables under study.

Memory is understood and theorised, in this analysis, as a complex construct comprising both the member states national memory and the conventionally European memory, together with the resulting conflicts, particularly during the enlargement phases of the EU. European integration and supranational identity, on the other hand, are defined in terms of belonging, cohesion and the perception of unity based on common memories and values. The main objective of this research is to develop a mapping exercise that clarifies the causal mechanism between X and Y, allowing us to conceptualise and understand the processes through which memory and related memory clashes (X) influence European integration and consequentially supranational identity (Y). The analysis will include both the national dimension of memory, encompassing historical narratives, founding myths and traumas specific to each member state, and the European dimension of memory, which is based on both treaty values and transnational memories of central historical events, such as the Holocaust, World War II, the Cold War or even more recent one. A crucial aspect that this method highlights is the analysis of the mechanisms through which the two levels of memory clash, those between national memories and those between national and European memories, interact and influence the process of European integration. This process, thus, directly relates to European identity, which as established above, is being considered as the dependent variable in this analysis. Indeed, specifically, European identity is understood both as an expression and manifestation of the development and creation of a sense of belonging to the European community, and in the perceived level of cohesion between member states. Another feature's variable identity, as it is understood in this passage, is the ability to cooperate despite cultural and historical differences. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the contexts characterised by the EU enlargement processes, during which the entry of new member states has introduced different and divergent historical narratives and historical traumas into the Union.

These elements, however, have not always proved compatible with either established European narratives or the pre-existing national memories of the other member states. These moments have the tendency to “reshuffle the cards”, challenging seemingly established dogmas and opening doors for debate and conflict. In these circumstances, we have also witnessed the rise of discordant narratives and, in some cases, historical revisionism. These phenomena have been particularly strong at the times of political crisis and tensions, thus contributing to the intensification of memory clashes. Such dynamics not only highlight the disharmonies between national and European memories, but also reveal the contradictions within national memories themselves, which are further amplified by the transnational context and the interaction between member states. These dynamics represent a significant obstacle to constructing a strong and, above all, clearly defined European identity. They de-empower the Union, undermining its ability to consolidate a common narrative, necessary to foster a shared sense of belonging among European citizens.

Methodology Development

The first phase of the work will consist of delving into the existing literature, with the aim of identifying the main concepts useful to define the relationship between memory, history and identity, and the different theoretical perspectives currently in the field. It will be essential to investigate how the concepts of memory and history intertwine and, more particularly, how memory may be politicized, used for political purposes, contributing to the formation of national and collective identities. This theoretical approach will then be implemented, lastly, to the context of the European Union case and its member states, in order to better understand the specificities of this example and to highlight the implication of memory in the process of integration and supranational identity construction.

An important part of the research will be to deepen and explore, existing studies on collective memories, its power of influence political decision, and memory clashes. The literature suggests that memory clashes may emerge from divergences in the national historical narratives of different countries. In parallel, it will be necessary to take into account the funding roots of European memory, focusing on central elements such as the transnational memory of the Holocaust or the effects of the Second World War. These aspects are crucial to understand how European memory has been constructed and used over time as a tool for promoting integration and strengthening the sense of common belonging among member states. Once the thesis has clarified the key concepts and the reference theories that aim to explain them, it will be crucial to “operationalise” the identified causal mechanisms, making them measurable and empirically observable. This step will make it possible to

translate theoretical reflections into concrete analysis tools. At this stage, it becomes essential to gather empirical evidence to verify the links between memory, memory clash and European Integration.

Among the historical contexts that will be investigated, particular attention will be paid to the moments of greatest expansion of the European Union, such as the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, without neglecting earlier moments of expansion. Indeed, case studies will be presented on the first enlargement, the so-called “Northern Enlargement”, the second enlargement, known as the “Mediterranean Enlargement” or “Post-Authoritarian Enlargement”, and the fourth and fifth enlargement process, known as the “Eastern Enlargement” or the “Big-Bang” Enlargement. These moments represent key cases to observe the occurrence of memory clashes and their impact on European identity. Official declarations of political leaders, member states, EU institutions, debates in the European Parliament, treaties and official documents, as well as commemorative events organised by both the European Union and member states will be analysed. This approach will allow investigating how these elements have contributed to strengthening or, on the contrary, weakening the sense of European cohesion and belonging.

The thesis will propose to analyse the current historical revisionist tendencies and their impact on the European Union cohesion. In this regard, the case studies of Orbán's Hungary and PiS's Poland will be examined. The thesis will define them the “Trojan horses”, as they contribute to destabilize and wearing the Union down from inside. The success strategy adopted by Orbán and PiS demonstrates the real threat that this model may be replicated by other states, driving a rise trend of Euroscepticism that would undermine the integration process. Finally, the thesis will offer a perspective on the possible dynamics and tension that can be expected with a new accession. In particular, it will examine the Balkan states and Ukraine's historical legacy, highlighting its implications for the European integration process.

The collection of empirical data will require an in-depth analysis of different types of sources, including primary archival sources and secondary literature. In order to construct a systematic mapping of the conflicts and contradictions that emerged. Finally, an attempt will be made to assess whether, despite the tensions, there is room for the construction of a common narrative capable of strengthening European integration and promoting a shared supranational identity.

PART I

The thesis initial first section, provide the theoretical framework upon which the entire research is grounded and established. It aims to build a solid foundation in order to better comprehend the central themes and issues of the analysis. This part represents the cornerstone on which the study is built, laying the bases for a more in-depth exploration of the topic. The first part, which precedes the empirical analysis (second part) of the cases examined, is divided into two chapters. The first chapter will delve into the concept of memory, distinguishing it from the concept of history, and will analyse the role of memory in the creation of identity. It will then focus on the theoretical analysis of the use of memory as a political means and the processes of formation and construction of national identity. These sections are structured in a comparative manner, seeking to highlight parallels with the European Union. The second chapter of the first part, by contrast, is intended to examine the foundations roots of the European collective memory, an essential element for understanding the dynamics of cohesion and the tensions that emerged with the enlargement of the Union. It will analyse the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust, considered as European *lieux de mémoire* of identity, as well as the Schuman Declaration of 1950 and the preamble of the ECSC, which represented a new model for European cooperation.

Understanding memory clash of EU Integration

CHAPTER I

1. Theoretical foundation on the concept of Collective Memory and the strategic use of the past

1.1 Chapter Introduction

In order to analyse the impact of memory on the EU integration process and the tensions arising from the different assimilation and interpretation of historical narratives among member states, it is crucial to understand the role of memory as a political tool and its contribution to the integration process and in the construction of a shared identity.

This first chapter of the thesis will examine the concepts of history, memory and identity. It, therefore, starts from the foundations. It will attempt to show how they are intertwined with each other, highlighting their dynamic relationship. Memory, as distinct entity from history, appears a more flexible and subjective phenomenon. While history aspires to a rigorous and objective analysis based on verifiable facts and evidence, memory is based on a social and emotional construction, influenced by the demands of the present and vulnerable to political and cultural manipulation. However, it is emphasised that collective memory is not so easy to control and manipulated by the ruling classes, as it requires time and especially social recognition to set itself in the collective consciousness and, thus, consolidate. It emerges that memory, conceptualised and understood as a social phenomenon, plays a crucial role in the construction of individual and collective identity. This process, however, is complex and often generates conflicts and tensions, as demonstrated in the case of European integration and enlargement. In this context, divergent narratives of historical memory and different national identities have created and still create unresolved tensions. These dynamics also clearly emerge in the historical revisionisms promoted by some states, further complicating the creation of a common European identity. Emphasis is also placed on the fact that memory not only reflects the past, but also becomes an active tool, capable of influencing the present and the future.

The second part of the chapter focuses instead on the analysis of the use of memory as a political tool and the crucial role it plays in the construction of a collective identity. A central element of the analysis concerns the process through which memory can be transformed into collective identity, a transition that requires its evolution from a political tool to a shared cultural heritage, rooted

in the collective consciousness.¹ In the case of the European Union, however, such stability and continuity seem to be missing. Because of the coexisting of a plurality of conflicting national memories, the European memory shows up fragmented and fractured. This fragmentation is even more visible when looking at the ongoing challenges that are related to the constant enlargement, which involve the development of different historical narratives and cultural sensitivities. Through an examination of historical and contemporary cases, namely the positioning of Germany and Austria or the narratives promoted by the European Union, Russia and Ukraine, the chapter attempts to highlight how memory can be employed to legitimise specific political and identity constructions. Still, as it has been shown by recently strategies adopted by both Orbán's Hungary and PiS' Poland, historical reinterpretations can be used to reinforce a nationalist narrative. Those attitude leads to a divisive rhetoric and hinders efforts to create a sense of common European identity and belonging. Furthermore, a comparative study of the European case combined with other historical experiences, such as the United States and the Soviet Union is presented.

1.2 Theories and perspectives of Memory as a social construction, its relationship to identity and political power

1.2.1 Memory and History

In order to understand and shed light on the mechanisms through which differences in the interpretation of historical narratives and memory determine tensions and conflicts among EU member states, it is essential to first delve into the concepts of history and memory. These elements, in fact, are essential for analysing the context of historical clashes within the European Union. When it comes to define the concept of memory, an initial intuitive association tends to identify memory with the concept of history. However, the two terms, as well as the concepts they represent, do not overlap. What appears true, tough, is that the relationship between memory and history constitutes a subject of complexity, which their boundaries tend to be thin and dynamic.

Collingwood, in his work "*The Idea of History*"², suggest that memory, is a social construct, that is intrinsically shaped by the demands of the present.³ Memory tends to respond to the emotional impulses and simplified, often polarising, constructions that divide events and interpretations into dichotomous categories.⁴ From this perspective, what it is perceived is that memory is vulnerable to

¹ Through stability and temporal continuity.

² Collingwood, R.G., *The Idea of History*. cit.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Collingwood, R.G., *The Idea of History*, cit.

political and cultural manipulation of the present, often resulting in the mythologisation of events. History, on the other hand, is traditionally conceived as a scientific and objective enterprise, in which the accurate reconstruction of the past is guided by critical analysis and verifiable evidence.⁵ Indeed, without the methodological anchoring of history, memory risks being bent to political and ideological interests, thus losing its ability to faithfully represent the past⁶

History and memory, memory, and history. The real question that emerges, after clarified that the two concepts are distinct, is questioning who writes the one and who creates the other? And in what way? The renowned statement “History is written by the victors” tends to let us believe that the victors, of wars, of power struggles, of majority factions, have almost unlimited power in handing down the past and, by writing history, influencing a certain kind of memory. However, this is not entirely the case. Or rather, what the victors attempt to do is to exert influence, proposing narratives that suit their interests. However, as will be shown in this paper, these narratives often fail to consolidate as universal truths. Rather than writing history, the victors seek to impose a new deal and new rules, supported by hegemonic and dominant propaganda. This guarantees neither exclusive control over the past nor dominance over collective memory. This occurs according to Schudson, since collective memory is not just the result of political elites’ ad hoc constructions. The ruling class, indeed, do not have complete freedom to manipulate history.⁷ For an intentional construction to become embedded in society, it must take root in the collective consciousness.⁸ This process is not immediate but required time, and gradual phases.

Furthermore, memory can also be seen as a means to provide voice to those who are silenced by the dominant historical narrative.⁹ From this perspective, memory is presented as an alternative, a vehicle for the experiences of subaltern groups that are often excluded from the main historical narratives. Where history strive to standardise and unifying narratives, often consolidating the views of dominant elites, memory usually embraces fragmentation and diversity, creating space for multiple and even conflicting interpretations. In this sense, memory is not just a mirror or a reflection of history, but an active and dynamic process, potentially capable to challenge official narratives and to construct new meanings.¹⁰ This perspective addressed also reveals what is the most commonly criticism moved against memory. Memory, indeed, is accused of unreliability due to its intrinsically

⁵Minarova-Banja C., *Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion*. cit. p.11

⁶ Judt T., Snyder T., “Thinking the Twentieth Century”. Random House, New York, 2012.

⁷ Schudson, M. “Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget and Reconstruct the Past”. New York. 1993. Online [Review: \[Untitled\] on JSTOR](#)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Judt T., Snyder T., *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, cit.

¹⁰ Cubitt, G. “History and Memory” Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013. [\[PDF\] History and memory by Geoffrey Cubitt | Perlego](#)

subjective nature.¹¹ This critique is supported by the phenomena of false memory, which demonstrate the extent to which memories can be constructed, invented, deflected or manipulated. This critique tends to highlight the fallibility of memory as a vehicle and source of historical truth.¹² However, it would be equally serious to believe that history is also completely immune to such mechanisms of distortion and manipulation processes.¹³ In this regards Peter Burke argues that “*neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer.*”¹⁴ Indeed, even history, which claims and aspire to objectivity, is inevitably influenced by cultural, political and ideological factors. Doing history ultimately means reconstructing the past in a rigorous manner, aware of both, the complexity of memory, its implications and the cultural, political and ideological factors. It is not simply report what happened, but interrogating the past, distinguishing between narratives constructed to manipulate and knowledge that aspires, as far as possible, to impartiality and truth.

Astrid Erll, for instance, points out how, even the most rigorous historical analyses is conditioned through and is shaped by, the cultural context and the historian's perspectives, ideology and background, which implicitly orient the narrative.¹⁵ In this view and light, both memory and history emerge as selective and inherently narrative processes, whose role in the construction of collective memory is complementary. Memory, with its emotional and subjective dimension, offers a deep and immediate connection with the past, while history, through methodological rigour, reworks and contextualises this raw material.¹⁶ By recognising this interdependence, societies can use memory and history as synergetic tools to understand the past, face the challenges of the present and imagine the future.

1.2.1.1 The Social dimension of Memory

Following a philosophical approach to memory, as explored by David J. Leichter and based on the reflections of Paul Ricoeur¹⁷, memory is not a static, fixed element belonging and confined to the past, but is an integral part of our present identity, who we are and how we behave as a community. Memory shapes us, directing our social attitudes.¹⁸ Individuals, but especially groups, project

¹¹Minarova-Banja C., *Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion*, cit., p.15.

¹² Armaly, Miles T., M. Enders. "Filling in the Gaps: False Memories and Partisan Bias." *Political Psychology*, 44(4) 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.1284>. And Davis, E. "Victim Narratives and Victim Selves: False Memory Syndrome and the Power of Accounts." *Social Problems* 52(4), 2005: p.529–548. [Victim Narratives and Victim Selves: False Memory Syndrome and the Power of Accounts | Social Problems | Oxford Academic](#)

¹³Minarova-Banja C., *Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion*, cit., p.28.

¹⁴ Quoted in Butler, T. "Memory: History, Culture, and the Mind" Blackwell, New York, 1989.

¹⁵ Erll, A. "Memory in Culture", Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan. 2011 [\[PDF\] Memory in Culture by A. Erll | Perlego](#)

¹⁶ Minarova-Banja C. *Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion*, cit., p.12.

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005). He was French philosopher known for his work in phenomenology and hermeneutics. Ricoeur wrote extensively on memory, identity, and history, notably in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 2000.

¹⁸ Leichter D., *Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, cit., p.116.

themselves into the past to understand themselves and the world around them.¹⁹ This narrative is essential for the social animal that is the human being because it allows them to construct both their own and a collective history.²⁰ This process makes memory dynamic, alive in the present, transforming it into a tool through which individuals and communities define themselves. Memory continues to evolve by mixing past with present in the form of unbroken and continuously ongoing relationship. Memory continues to evolve by fusing past with present in the form of unbroken and continuously ongoing relationship.²¹

Maurice Halbwachs', one of the founding fathers of collective memory theories, further enhances this understanding by emphasising the social aspect of memory.²² According to Halbwachs, memory is not a matter of an isolated individual, but rather a social collective process conditioned and determined by social frameworks, rituals, symbols and public discourses.²³ Collective memories are created by community, they endure beyond the experiences of its members, transcending generations. Those memory provides a sense of belonging rooted in the past, while is projected to the present and future.²⁴ Through this memory which transcend generation and time, collective identities are formed which are the space where different groups can connect their histories and experiences. The philosophies by Halbwachs became highly relevant when we look at how institutions and societies construct collective memory for wider purposes.²⁵ Throughout its long and complex history, the European Union has consistently sought to construct a narrative which defines it as a supranational entity based on a shared memory, which serve as a pillar of a common European identity. The EU's approach toward memory exemplifies how common historical references can be mobilized in the name of unity and a shared purpose. Unity and a sense of belonging rooted in symbols, rituals and public narratives are part of the collective memory construction, which contributes to a community self-identification and aspirations.

1.2.2 Memory and Identity: recognition, interaction, and the dynamics of collective and cultural memory

The relationship between memory and identity goes beyond a simple temporal connection between past and present. Memory is not only a legacy to the past but represents an active way in which

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Zerubavel E., *Time Maps "Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past"*, University of Chicago Press, 2003. [Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past \(researchgate.net\)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312111111)

²¹ Leichter D. "Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur", *cit.*, p.119.

²² Halbwachs, M. "The Collective Memory" New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

individuals and groups constitute their perception of themselves, ensuring continuity and coherence over time, as emphasised by Paul Ricoeur with the concept of “narrative identity”²⁶ It serves as an essential tool in the construction of identity, both individual and collective.

Collective memory is one of the most powerful tools through which societies construct and consolidate their identity. It is understood as how communities or their elites choose to select, preserve, forget and reinterpret the past. Memory is fundamentally a social phenomenon, shaped and restructured through interaction with other group members.²⁷ This makes memory not exclusively a passive archive, but an alive dynamic reality which through the interaction between individuals and social groups, responds to the needs of the present.²⁸ Aleida Assmann further elaborates on this concept. She, indeed, described cultural memory as the system through which societies create a sense of continuity and transmit values and traditions to future generations by forming identities.²⁹ This process emphasises the crucial role of memory in promoting social cohesion and ensuring the intergenerational transmission of identity.

Moreover, the use of memory can be extensive. Thus, memory can be used to consolidate specific identities, often in relation to nationalism the mobilisation of the past is used to legitimise cultural or territorial claims.³⁰ This phenomenon, as will be analysed in the context of historical revisionism and the rise of nationalism in Eastern European countries, highlights the fragility of memory policies. Memory policy, find themselves to tackle and balancing frequently conflicting identities and historical interpretations. The process of European integration is, to all intents and purposes, an emblematic case of this complexity. The EU has attempted to use shared memories to promote a transnational collective consciousness. However, this attempt is not without tensions and contrasts that persist as this thesis sets out to analyse. The entry of new member states with often divergent national historical narratives further complicates this project. Memories related to experiences such as the two World Wars, totalitarian regimes and colonialism are experienced and remembered in profoundly different ways in different European countries. These differences make the task of constructing a common and shared historical narrative complicated, hindering the cohesion necessary for the unification project. Despite this, the European Union aims to use historical memory as a tool to create a sense of temporal continuity, anchoring the present to a meaningful past and orienting towards a shared future, regardless of structural difficulties. This interweaving of past,

²⁶ Leichter D. *Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, cit., p.121.

²⁷ Halbwachs, M., *The Collective Memory*, cit.

²⁸ Weiler, J.H.H., and Carlos Closa. *Dealing with the Past: Memory and European Integration*, cit., p.11-15.

²⁹ Assmann, A. “Transformations between history and memory” *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 75(1) 2008: p.49-72. [Transformations between History and Memory](#)

³⁰ Minarova-Banja C. *Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion*, cit, p.13.

present and future is designed to provide communities with a frame of reference that helps them to understand their present condition and outline common paths.

A further relevant aspect and concept of the relationship between memory and identity is the concept of recognition, emphasised in particular by Honneth.³¹ Recognition of an identity is an indispensable element in the development of identity, whether individual or collective. In the context of memory, this implies that no narrative of the past can become part of a group's identity without first being recognised by others.³² This kind of transition requires time and a period of maturation, with recognition that play a crucial role. Collective memory cannot overlap immediately with collective identity but needs a significant time interval. As we shall see in the next section, the transition from a memory used as a tool and means to construct identity to a memory that becomes identity is long and gradual.³³ Identity, in order to consolidate itself from memory, must be able to stand the test of time, overcoming social changes. It is not easy to modify or transform an identity, since it represents something deeply rooted in society.³⁴ Although memory is an instrument capable of founding and imprinting identity on a given entity, the transition from memory to identity creation is not immediate. It is also for this reason that, in the case study of this thesis, the European Union, struggles to create a common identity.

Building an identity is a complex process, involving several actors and requiring more than just a shared memory, which in itself is a particularly difficult challenge. We are aware of this difficulty, as demonstrated by the results of the European enlargement and integration process, in which the entry of new states with different narratives, memories and, above all, identities have made and continues to make the creation of a common identity an even more complex undertaking. The entry of the ex-Soviet bloc into the Union has further complicated this path, already impervious, as the early stages of enlargement have shown us. Without necessarily reference the 2004-2007 “Big Bang” Enlargement, the United Kingdom's accession to the EC and the corresponding French reaction is an adequate and explicative example. The inability to resolve or reconcile conflicting memories, has generally generated tensions and conflict in post-war contexts or decolonisation processes. The future of the Union appears to be at risk due to the persistent presence of identity and cultural conflicts that, from within, undermine its stability and strength. Memory, therefore, and especially in such a context, is not simply a tool for understanding the past, but also a ground for negotiation,

³¹ Weiler, J.H.H., and Carlos Closa. *Dealing with the Past: Memory and European Integration*, cit., p.13.

³² Ibid, p.14.

³³ Bachleitner K. “Collective Memory in International Relations” Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2021. [Collective Memory in International Relations | Oxford Academic](#)

³⁴ Ibid.

confrontation and conflict between different or even opposing identities.³⁵ Moreover, what emerges is that memory is never neutral. Selections, omissions and reinterpretations often take place along lines dictated by power. Derrida keenly observed that “*There is no political power without control of archives, if not of memory*”.³⁶ This highlights how control over memory is one of the most important tools for maintaining identity and political power. Political elites manipulate and control historical memory in the attempts to legitimise their actions and to consolidate consensus marginalising oppositional voices. Michel Foucault has defined these alternative narratives as “counter-memories”. However, they often fail in their scope, as they are typically suppressed or neutralized in order to maintain the social order imposed by the government.³⁷ These dynamic forms the theoretical foundation to understand the use and implications of memory in the exercise of political and social power. The following section aims to explore this in more detail.

1.3 Theoretical analysis on the strategic use of collective memory and identity construction

In the light of Ricoeur philosophical approach, the politics of memory assume crucial importance when it comes to understanding how the control of the past can become a means of shaping the identity and social context of a community. The “appropriation of history,” in the sense of manipulating it in order to bring out some features at the expense of others, becomes a way to legitimize and strengthen new political institutions or government actions. In this regard, one of the goals of this thesis will be to analyse exactly how historical memory and its use have influenced the process of European integration, legitimizing a new political entity, shaping its identity, and giving it a context and framework for its action.

George Orwell, in his famous novel 1984, states: “*Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.*” Although this statement stems from a dystopian context relevant to totalitarian regimes, its conceptual core can also be applied to the understanding of memory in modern democracies. Memory, in fact, is a powerful weapon.³⁸ The political science literature on memory and the politics of memory often tends to attribute a particularly prominent role

³⁵ Weiler, J.H.H., and Carlos Closa. *Dealing with the Past: Memory and European Integration*, cit.p.13.

³⁶ Derrida, J., *Aporias*, cit.

³⁷ Foucault, M. "What is an Author?" In Donald F. B. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Cornell University Press, 1977: 113-138. In Minarova-Banja C. *Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion*, cit.

³⁸ Zubrzycki G., A. Wozny “The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory”, *Annual Review of Sociology*. 46, 2020: p.175–94. Online annurev-soc-121919-054808.pdf (annualreviews.org) annurev-soc-121919-054808.pdf (annualreviews.org)

of politics in the process of collective memory formation, observing it as a phenomenon and process particularly susceptible to manipulation and instrumentalization. It is a process in which political elites decide what and how to remember certain events in order to gain political advantage. As we shall see later, however, this process is neither so linear nor so immediate.

The power of memory lies in its ability to build a collective identity, not only by linking the past to the present, but also by uniting individuals through shared narrative, a “we-identity”.³⁹ It acts as a “social glue”, reinforcing a sense of belonging and cohesion, and creating a common foundation of experiences and values. In this way, memory does not merely recall the past but becomes an active element in shaping the present and orienting social and political dynamics.⁴⁰ Therefore when a political power manages to control or direct memory, it provides itself with a powerful tool to consolidate its legitimacy.

1.3.1 The use of Memory for political purposes and strategies.

Memory, as Paul Ricoeur emphasises, is susceptible to political manipulation and it often can turn into a highly efficient tool of domination. It is not a coincidence that in totalitarian and illiberal authoritarian systems, which aspire to a cultural hegemony, there are processes of falsifying history and mythologizing controversial political figures, with the aim of controlling the mass and silencing the dissent.⁴¹ However, it is notably true that even in democracies, memory can be used to strengthen political consensus, legitimise the power or even respond to geopolitical pressures. A cultural hegemony, happens, for instance, whenever memory laws impose a unified official version of history on the mass.⁴² The use of memory as a political strategy is an effective instrument of legitimisation and manipulation, capable of influencing and be influenced from both national-home and international dynamics. The influence of memory on politics is thus universal, but the way in which it is mobilised varies according to historical and political context. The analysis of historical and contemporary phenomena shows how the construction of collective memory responds to political and geopolitical incentives, functioning as a means of shaping identities, consolidating powers, and orienting relations between states.

Although the emphasis on the role of narratives and social constructions, as analysed above in relation to collective memory, is clearly part of a constructivist theoretical framework, the reference

³⁹ Calhoun G. “Nationalism and Ethnicity”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1993: p. 211-239. [Nationalism and Ethnicity | Annual Reviews](#)

⁴⁰G. Zubrzycki, A. Wozny, *The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory*, cit.

⁴¹ Ricœur P. “*Memory, History, Forgetting*”, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2003.” Translated by Pellauer D. and Blamey K. In Leichter D., *Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, cit. In Leichter D., *Collective Identity and Collective Memory in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*

⁴²Ibid.

to the conditioning exerted by geopolitical incentives also introduces elements of political realism. This is because following a realist approach, the manipulation or use of historical memory is one of the strategies states adopt to maximise their influence and strengthen internal consensus. Referring also to Waltz's theory, it is shown how the international anarchic system, forces state to use all available means to ensure their own survival. In this perspective, memory become a powerful instrument of soft power, which contribute to strengthen and reinforce a country's position within the international arena.⁴³ This phenomenon highlights a dynamic interaction between constructivism and realism approach. Then applying both theories, although it may constitute a complex challenge, appears necessary to fully understand the role of memory as a strategic tool in international politics. In this context, theoretical reflections, and recent concrete examples, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the rise of populist governments in Europe, highlight the extent of this dynamic.⁴⁴

Bachleitner, in her book "Collective Memory in International Relations", proposing a new perspective for understanding how states deal with and construct memory in the early years following traumatic events, argues that, at the international level, it is external pressures and the need for legitimacy that drive states to strategically confront their past.⁴⁵ The examples of West Germany and Austria after the Second World War, together I would add with the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, clearly illustrate how historical memory can be used both as an instrument of reconciliation and as a weapon of division, prompting states to confront their past strategically. West Germany guided by the wise leadership of Konrad Adenauer adopted a narrative of guilt to ensure its reintegration into the Western order.⁴⁶ While reparations to Israel in 1952 were definitely a gesture of moral responsibility, they were also a geopolitical strategy in order to build credibility as a modern democracy in the Western World.⁴⁷ Austria, on the other hand, adopted a different strategy, presenting itself as a victim of Nazism.⁴⁸ West Germany thus placed itself as cooperative player to join the Western group, whereas Austria employed a victim image to assert strategic neutrality. West Germany, thus, placed itself as a contrite and cooperative player to join the Western group, whereas Austria employed a victim image to assert strategic neutrality.⁴⁹ This narrative allowed Austria to avoid a critical examination of its

⁴³ This reasoning is based on the theories of realism, particularly those of classical and structural realism, which have attempted to explain the behaviour of states in international relations. Among the seminal works in this field are Hans J. Morgenthau, ("Politics among nations, the struggle for power and peace". 1985) which emphasises the central role of power in international politics, and Waltz, ("Theory of international politics".1979), which analyses the dynamics of the international anarchic system and the behaviour of states as a function of their survival.'

⁴⁴ Petrović N. Bilić J. "Why History Matters? Populist Radical Right Governments in the EU and Their Foreign Policy." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 30(5) 2024: p. 1-21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2405153>.

⁴⁵ Bachleitner K. *Collective Memory in International Relations*, cit. p.1-11.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 37-64.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Bachleitner K. *Collective Memory in International Relations*, cit., p. 37-64.

role in the war, while constructing and consolidating a national identity based on innocence.⁵⁰ By overturning traditional sociological and political theories that locate the origin of collective memory within domestic public discourse, these divergent approaches highlight how collective memory is often shaped by external pressures before being internalised at the national level. The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s are another emblematic example of the strategic use of memory.⁵¹ In that context, the past was reinterpreted and instrumentalised to promote ethnic nationalism, justifying divisions and fomenting conflicts. Instead of being used as a means to cement a shared identity, historical memory became a powerful instrument of fragmentation and violence.⁵² The case of the Balkans dramatically demonstrates the devastating consequences that emerge when the management of the past is subordinated to ends.

These cases demonstrate how collective memory is often formed under international pressure even before it is internalised at the domestic level as we have seen in previous cases. The division of Germany and the beginning of the Cold War further polarised these narratives, pushing countries to adopt versions of the past that were functional to geopolitical alliances.⁵³ Thus, it is also through interaction with external actors that a form of identity is constructed, using memory in order to fulfil strategies in the international dimension.⁵⁴ However, in order for it to actually become part of a nation's identity, memory must take root within the country and become part of the collective narrative shared by the population. And in order for it to actually become a founding element of national identity, it is necessary for a given narrative to gradually evolve over time and from a mere political strategy devised by an elite, it must become a conception that can be widely shared and internalised by society as a whole and not just sectorial. This is because at first, memory selectively constructed for international purposes has a limited impact on domestic audiences, as it is conceived according to a logic that is merely instrumental and purely realist.⁵⁵ According to this conception, in fact, memory is a mere reflection of immediate political objectives dictated by international needs and interests. It is only when memory returns to the domestic dimension and begins to be assimilated by the people, that it can begin to serve as a pillar for national identity.

The manipulation of memory also extends to the contemporary European context, where the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Todorova M., "Balkan Identities, Nation and Memory", New York University Press, New York, 2003. In Pistan C., *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*. *De Europa* 3(2) 2020: p. 21-38. [Collective Memory in the context of European integration processes: some critical reflections on the EU politics of remembrance | Carina Pistan - Academia.edu](#)

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bachleitner K. *Collective Memory in International Relations*, cit., p.65-86

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

past is often mobilised to justify national policies or reinforce collective identities, as this thesis will attempt to touch upon. For instance, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 highlighted how historical narratives can be used to reinforce or destabilise political consensus.⁵⁶ In Russia, Vladimir Putin's regime has leveraged a nationalistic memory of the Second World War.⁵⁷ This narrative has been instrumentalised to legitimise the invasion and consolidate domestic consensus.⁵⁸ In parallel, Ukraine has reformulated its historical discourse, distancing itself from the Soviet legacy and emphasising historical figures and moments that reinforce an autonomous and anti-Russian national identity, also in anticipation of a possible entry into the EU family.⁵⁹

At the same time, the European Union was confronted with the impact of this war on its internal identity and cohesion.⁶⁰ The pressures resulting from the conflict prompted member states to redefine their integration and security policies and to consider enlargement to Ukraine as morally necessary. The collective memory of European peace, built on the legacy of World War II, as well as the apparent cultural-identity affinity, was mobilised to justify assistance to Ukraine and the adoption of sanctions against Russia.⁶¹ However, this process has not been without contradictions, as evidenced by the divergences between member states on their approach to the war, confirming the lack of unity not only of interests but precisely of a different historical anchorage.

Another emblematic case that this thesis sets out to analyse is that of Hungary under the leadership of Viktor Orbán. The Hungarian government has skilfully exploited key episodes in national history, such as the Treaty of Trianon and the Miklós Horthy regime, to construct a nationalist narrative functional to the consolidation of domestic power and the justification of Eurosceptic policies.⁶² Orbán narrative focused on the Hungarian territorial loss occurred in Trianon in the aftermath of the WWI, on an anti-communist rhetoric and alleged betrayal by the liberal West. It portrays the West betrayal as the symbol of historical injustice perpetuated against the country, depicting Hungary as a victim of history.⁶³ This narrative has allowed the government to counter international criticism which have regarded its illiberal policies, presenting the globalist and Brussels

⁵⁶ Siddi M., "The Ukraine Crisis and European Memory Politics of the Second World War." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 18(4), 2016: p.465-479. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2016.1261435>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Orenstein A. "The European Union's Transformation after Russia's Attack on Ukraine." *Journal of European Integration* 45(3), 2023: p.333-342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2183393>.

⁶¹ Genschel P., Leek L., Weyns J. "War and Integration: The Russian Attack on Ukraine and the Institutional Development of the EU." *Journal of European Integration* 45(4) 2023. p. 343-360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2183397>.

⁶² Laczó F. *Outrageous History: Historical Visions, Emotional Regimes, and Right-Wing Populist Hegemony in Hungary*, cit., p.65-72 And Petrović N. Bilić J. "Why History Matters? Populist Radical Right Governments in the EU and Their Foreign Policy." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 30(5), 2024: p.1-21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2405153>.

⁶³ Ibid.

elites as an enemy of the nation which attempts to undermine the country's holy independence. Orbán's approach demonstrates how historical memory can be manipulated to construct national identity which aspire to be exclusively, by opposing an enemy in the classic "us" vs "them" rhetoric. It thereby legitimises authoritarian control and reduce, if not annul, internal dissent. This case which emerges in the Hungarian example, clearly shows how historical memory is used to build ontological security at the state level.⁶⁴ Orbán has consolidated a coherent narrative that offers identity stability to the country, through a narrative that emphasises national victimisation and resistance to external interference and enemies, including the European Union. In other CEECs, memory has also been politicised to reinforce nationalist and conservative narratives with Poland and Croatia representing the most prominent examples.⁶⁵ In Poland, the PiS government promoted a view of history very much similar to the one adopted by the Orbans-Fidezs in Hungary. Polish government indeed, portrayed the country as a victim of both Nazism and communism, while ignoring or minimising controversial episodes in its history, as well as its complicity of its citizens in the Holocaust. This strategy has allowed ruling party to strengthen internal consensus and counter EU pressure on the rule of law.

The link between memory and politics is further strengthened by the ability of memory to build a collective 'we-identity'. This process is also evident in the European context, where memory of the past has been used to promote integration. The European Union, for instance, has built much of its identity on the memory of World War II, presenting itself as a project of peace and cooperation. However, the historical narratives that fuel European integration are often contested by member states whose memories often collide, creating conflict and disunity. The various stages of the enlargement of the European Union highlight, this conflict and clash, which the union has to deal with, underling how distant the creation of a common identity is.

1.3.2 The use of Memory and identity construction in the National arena as a yardstick for the EU.

In the light of the paragraphs above, it is evident that the identity of a nation or membership of a social or political group can hardly develop spontaneously and autonomously. The prevalent idea is that identity is a construct, which is intentionally shaped by the ruling classes through a series of instruments aimed not only at legitimising their power, but also at providing a solid ideological basis

⁶⁴ Among the scholars who have contributed to the ontological security literature which can be applied here are Anthony Giddens, who initially introduced the concept in sociology, relating continuity of identity to existential stability (Modernity and Self-Identity, 1991); Steele, who applied it to states, emphasizing the narratives that help assuage insecurity (Ontological Security in International Relations, 2008); and Mitzen, who studied its impact on state behavior and coherence (Ontological

⁶⁵ Petrović N. Bilić J. "Why History Matters? Populist Radical Right Governments in the EU and Their Foreign Policy.", *cit.* p.1-21

for the community to perpetrate it.⁶⁶ However, it is not entirely true that collective memory is the exclusive product of ad hoc constructions created by the political elite. Indeed, as I anticipated before, following the approach of Schudson, political actors do not have complete liberty to manipulate history and construct narratives entirely as they wish.⁶⁷ It seems important to recognise that for a construct deliberately created and to become an integral part of society, it must take root in society's collective consciousness.⁶⁸ And the transition from a strategically designed memory to a memory that becomes an identity occurs as it spreads from the top to the bottom of society, becoming part of the shared cultural heritage.⁶⁹

In the construction of national memory, the primary purpose is to strengthen the sense of collective belonging, promote social cohesion and, at the same time, legitimise existing institutions. As Hobsbawm and Ranger show us in their study on the "*Invention of tradition*", many of the national memories we perceive today as authentic and rooted in the past are in fact deliberately created complex creations that over time have become anchored in society.⁷⁰ These identity processes were particularly intense in the late 19th and early 20th century, when nation-states, born out of recent unifications, were in most cases culturally fragmented, with conflicts between different internal communities.⁷¹ In this context, the need to establish symbolic roots in the past became crucial to ensure the loyalty of citizens with different backgrounds and, above all, the stability of the nation. This need for stability can also be analysed through the lens of ontological security, which highlights how individuals and states need a coherent narrative to maintain a sense of continuity and consistency in their identity. The symbolic roots established in the past not only served to legitimise the present, but also provided a framework capable of reducing collective "anxiety" in the face of cultural fragmentation and uncertainty.⁷²

However, this process is not immediate, because it requires a long period of assimilation. This is because, as we stated earlier, collective memory does not immediately overlap with collective identity, because it is a result of different processes. In this regard, the constructivist approach becomes extremely useful to what the previous paragraph sought to explain, because it allows us to

⁶⁶Minarova-Banja C. *Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion*. cit.

⁶⁷ Schudson, M. "Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget and Reconstruct the Past" New York. 1993. [Review: \[Untitled\] on JSTOR](#)

⁶⁸ Bachleitner K., *Collective Memory in International Relations*, cit., p.65-86

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Zubrzycki G., A. Wozny, *The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory*, cit., p.175-194

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Among the scholars who have contributed to the ontological security literature are Anthony Giddens, who initially introduced the concept in sociology, relating continuity of identity to existential stability (*Modernity and Self-Identity*, 1991); Steele, who applied it to states, emphasizing the narratives that help assuage insecurity (*Ontological Security in International Relations*, 2008); and Mitzen, who studied its impact on state behaviour and coherence (*Ontological Security in World Politics*, 2006).

give an answer to this transition from memory as a means of legitimising and consolidating authority to memory as the identity of a political and social community. In this transition, memory undergoes a transformation that changes it from being an active and deliberate opportunity to a passive and implicit constraint.⁷³

Thus, according to the constructivist perspective, the identity of a state, which serves as a yardstick for drawing conclusions about the Union, has two main characteristics that distinguish it.⁷⁴ First, according to Alexander Wendt, what characterises the identity of a state is stability. In this context, identity refers to a set of relatively constant understandings and expectations that develop and consolidate over time.⁷⁵ This is because for a memory to succeed in becoming an identity, it must acquire a certain continuity and stability over time, surviving and perpetuating political and social change.⁷⁶ This process of consolidation is, as anticipated above, also closely linked to the theoretical framework of ontological security, as stability and continuity of identity provide a basis for individuals and communities to cope with change without experiencing existential disorientation. States, like individuals, rely on these stable narratives to function effectively and to strengthen both their internal cohesion and their position in the international system.⁷⁷ Continuing on Wendt's reasoning, that is, the further characteristic and the fact that identity, according to constructivist academics, influences actors indirectly and not entirely intentionally. It is as if individuals experience and practice it on a daily basis without really being aware of it. In light of this reasoning, identity, although while it can be influenced to some extent, is not a tool that can be used at will by decision-makers.

Identity is rather, according to this theory, a mental framework that orients preferences and actions without a real conscious awareness of this influence. As mentioned earlier, for a historical memory or a deliberately constructed narrative to become an integral element of identity, it needs to become deeply rooted in the collective mindset of individuals and communities. Only then can it influence the way individuals perceive and interpret the society they live in, as well as the dynamics of internal and external relations. As a consequence, turning our reasoning back to the European Union, what is evident is the lack of the first element of stability. What appears clear is that the EU's

⁷³ Bachleitner K., *Collective Memory in International Relations*, cit., p.1-11

⁷⁴ Here, for constructivist perspective, I refer to the work of Lebow, R. N. "National Identities and International Relations" Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Wendt, A. "Social Theory of International Politics" Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Katzenstein, P. J., "The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996

⁷⁵ Wendt, A. "Social Theory of International Politics". Cambridge University Press, 1999. [Social Theory of International Politics](#)

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Among the scholars who have contributed to the ontological security literature are...

memory is not stable and is not continuous over time. That occurs since it is constantly being challenged by the plurality of national memories that coexist within it. Each Member State brings with it its own historical narrative, its own interpretation of events and its own cultural sensitivity, often at odds with those of the other members. These differences prevent the formation of a truly cohesive and shared collective memory at supranational level.

A further element of destabilisation is the continuous expansion of the Union, with the entry of new member states not only geographically distant, but also culturally, politically and in their assimilation and perception of European historical events. Each new entry introduces new historical memories, new founding myths and narratives that intertwine or conflict with existing ones, constantly calling them into question. Although it can be argued that the enlargement of the union has increased its economic and ‘geopolitical power’ capacities, it is also true that it seems to have weakened it entirely. This process not only reshuffles the ‘cards in play’, but also makes the consolidation of a unified narrative that can serve as a foundation for European identity even more complex. The competition between national memories and the inclusion of new perspectives also makes it difficult to establish a consensus on which and how historical events should be commemorated throughout the European project.

On the contrary, these national memories and their clash often tend to reinforce state identities rather than contribute to the European one, thus creating a kind of tension between the national and supranational levels by increasing their differences rather than uniting them. This permanent conflict is self-feeding. The Union struggles to create the ‘mental framework’ capable of guiding the preferences and actions of its citizens. This makes it vulnerable to internal disaffection, as its citizens cannot fully identify with a project they perceive as distant and lacking a common cultural and historical basis.

However, what is evident, not only in the case of the EU, is an identity, a culture or a political system cannot be imposed or created without a common basis on which to base them. Imposing an artificial identity in the absence of shared elements is bound to lead to tensions and conflicts. There are cases of successful national identity constructions, but history is full of examples where these attempts failed and created further divisions between people instead of uniting them, as for example the Soviet Union case show us. For what is equally true, despite the time it takes to consolidate it, is that collective historical memory can be manipulated for political and ideological purpose, turning from a means of building unity into an instrument of control and oppression.

1.3.2.1 National identity construction in various historical cases: Germany, Italy, the U.S., and the Soviet Union

In order to fully understand the complexity of constructing a strong national identity and a sense of unity from a situation of fragmentation and plurality, this section proposes to analyse different processes of national identity formation. This section will attempt to compare these examples with the case of the European Union, with the aim of creating an organic link with the following chapter. Looking at Italy and Germany, these two states contrast with France as emblematic examples of late-formed nations that faced extreme obstacles in their attempt to construct a clear and coherent conception of national identity.⁷⁸ In both cases, the idea of nationhood preceded the establishment of the territorial state, although this identity was largely ideological rather than based on clear territorial or political boundaries.⁷⁹

Until the unification in 1861, the new Italian state faced acute internal fragmentation, not only geographical but above all social, economic, cultural and linguistic. The various Italian regions had very different histories and identities, and a large part of the population felt more attached to their cities or regions than to the nation. The famous phrase attributed ⁸⁰ to statesman Massimo d'Azeglio⁸¹, *“Fatta l’Italia, bisogna fare gli italiani”*, *“We have made Italy; now we must make Italians.”* perfectly sums up the challenge of unifying a population as heterogeneous as the Italian one. After the birth of the young Italian state, a process was undertaken to build a collective memory, a fundamental tool for shaping a unified national identity.⁸² This process included the erection of monuments, the celebration of the heroes of the Risorgimento, such as Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the establishment of national holidays. The most influential works of patriotic Risorgimento literature often depicted key historical episodes⁸³, turning them into heroic metaphors for national redemption.⁸⁴ Although more than 160

⁷⁸ Fabbrini S. “Differentiation in authority structures: state, nation, and democracy in Europe and America”. In Fabbrini S. *Compound Democracies: Why the United States and Europe Are Becoming Similar*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007: p.80-117 [Differentiation in authority structures: state, nation, and democracy in Europe and America | Compound Democracies: Why the United States and Europe Are Becoming Similar | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](#)

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ As explained in Hom S. in "On the Origins of Making Italy: Massimo D’Azeglio and 'Fatta l’Italia, bisogna fare gli Italiani'." *Italian Culture* 31(1) 2013. p. 1-16. [Full article: On the Origins of Making Italy: Massimo D’Azeglio and ‘Fatta l’Italia, bisogna fare gli Italiani’](#) The phrase is erroneously attributed to D’Azeglio, who writes in his *Ricordi*: "I thought (as I still do) that we must concern ourselves with the national character, that we must make Italians if we want to have Italy; and that once they are made, then Italy will indeed take care of itself."

⁸¹ Massimo d’Azeglio (1798–1866): He was an Italian statesman, writer, and painter, d’Azeglio served as Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia from 1849 to 1852. He was influential in the Italian unification movement.

⁸² Mineccia F. "Fare gli italiani: la divulgazione della storia nazionale nel primo cinquantennio post-unitario." In Rizzo M.M., *L’Italia è. Mezzogiorno, Risorgimento e post-Risorgimento*, Roma, 2013. [\(14\) Fare gli italiani: la divulgazione della storia nazionale nel primo cinquantennio post-unitario | Francesco Mineccia - Academia.edu](#)

⁸³ Episodes such as the Battle of Legnano, the Sicilian Vespers and the Siege of Florence.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

years have passed since unification, cultural and regional differences remain so strong that the process of building national cohesion appears rather complex in Italy. Not only Italy experienced this phenomenon but also Germany experienced something very similar. We can say this because before the unification of 1871, the country was divided into many principalities and kingdoms, each with its own history and tradition. Again, the construction of a shared national memory was a construct, engineered by social elites, was induced, by a government in search of a common identity. The main driving force of unification, the figure of Otto von Bismarck, would soon take on mythical dimensions and military triumphs, such as the one against France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, are celebrated as founding moments of the new German national identity. Monuments commemorating these victories were erected to seal the idea of a united and strong Germany.

This needs to construct "places of remembrance," *lieux de mémoire* in the words of French historian Pierre Nora, responds to the need to strengthen a common narrative that renews and solidifies national identity.⁸⁵ These places, as monuments, museums, or national festivities, serve as signs through which a community remembers, forgets, or reinvents its past, putting the pressure of adapting to present needs upon it. They are moments of unity in which the nation shares a common history at least and gives the individual a sense of community.⁸⁶ The ruling classes manage symbols, commemorations, and historical narratives with such care and calculation because every common memory builds up a national identity that needs to be promoted and solidified. By doing so, there is the creation of an emotional and symbolic link between past and present. In this sense, figures like Garibaldi and Bismarck often turn out to be subjects of a process of mythologizing, that is, of creating a myth to be idolized, a symbol that unites and binds a community. Indeed, the concept of myth within political life is essential here, since it is not simply a story, but a narrative to get an intention across. The purpose is to solidarize and legitimize political power. As Anthony Smith points out, myth, memory, symbol and tradition are all key elements in the process of shaping contemporary national identities.⁸⁷ Indeed, while myth provides a foundational explanation for the emergence of a political community, it also legitimizes, transposing historical facts into heroic and mythic narratives with the goal of creating a symbol that unites and empowers, tracing the character and destiny of a nation.⁸⁸

Constructing this common memory that can provide a sense of national unity while

⁸⁵ Nora P. « Les lieux de mémoire » Gallimard, Paris. 1993. In Rothberg M. "Between Memory and Memory: from *Lieux de mémoire* to *Noeuds de mémoire*." *Yale French Studies* 3(12), 2010: p.3-12. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/41337077>.

⁸⁶ Rothberg M. "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Noeuds de mémoire*." *Yale French Studies* no. 118/119 (2010): 3-12. Yale University Press. Online <http://www.jstor.com/stable/41337077>.

⁸⁷ Smith, A "Myths and the Memories of the Nation" Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999. In La Sala, V. "Europe's odyssey? Political myth and the European Union" *Nation and Nationalism*, 22(3), 2016: p. 524-541. [Europe's odyssey? political myth and the European Union \(wiley.com\)](http://www.wiley.com)

⁸⁸ Ibid.

strengthening institutions, as I tried to introduce earlier, is an extremely complex task and the result of a long and complex process. The European Union has tried and is still trying to build its legitimacy and identity, aiming at the creation of a unified narrative that can go beyond national borders, facing the complex challenge of forming a supranational identity. This is an undertaking that has no historical precedent, because it is effectively without a historical model that is truly comparable. Examining entities that were born supra-state as the Soviet Union was and the United States is, allows us to understand important facets that can lead, alternately, to failure or success in building a common identity.

Soviet Union attempted to create a unified process for its multiple republics through a project that merged communist ideology with the use of soft and hard power mechanisms.⁸⁹ This was an attempt at political and social cohesion among the different state entities, which rested on the imposition of a centralized and authoritarian regime supported by strict political and military control.⁹⁰ However, history has shown that this project would not succeed partly because of the failure to develop an effective cultural bond between the different republics and the repressive nature of the regime itself.⁹¹ The Soviet Union was highly centralized, in which the satellite republics were subsidiary and subordinate in nature to Moscow, with little room for real autonomy.⁹² The consequence of this approach and constituting one of the reasons that contributed to the collapse of the entire USSR system was precisely the lack of a supranational identity that would have legitimized the Soviet institutions in the eyes of the citizens.

On the other shore of the Atlantic, the United States represents one of the successes story in creating a national identity from a position of state plurality. Although burdened with a complex legacy, we must think of the tensions created by the civil war, the racism, the residuals of British colonialism, the United States has been able to unite 50 different states into a solid and cohesive institutional entity.⁹³ This may be due to a number of historical and social facts, but more importantly to the country's ability to create and consolidate an efficient national identity based on a shared constitution.⁹⁴ Indeed, the United States has the distinction of being a nation that grew out of a series of founding political acts that are still the backbone of the American political system and American identity today. The Declaration of Independence, The Federal Constitution, The Bill of Rights, are all are acts that created and modelled the America we know today.⁹⁵ They are acts that forged the

⁸⁹ Cammarano F. Piretti M., Guazzaloca G. "Storia Contemporanea dal XIX al XXI secolo" Le Monnier, 2015.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Fabbrini S. "Differentiation in authority structures: state, nation, and democracy in Europe and America" *cit.*, p.80-117

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

idea of an America being a “republic of many republics” an idea that allowed previously separate territories to be united, with their sovereignty and autonomy recognized within a common institutional framework.

Another difference with the old continent resides in the secularization of the state. In Europe, there often seems to be an inability to distinguish between the sphere of the secular and the religious. On the other hand, the United States, this separation is clear and still helps to define American identity. It is necessary to state that the construction of U.S. identity was not a self-generated, spontaneous process but the result of work by the political elites who deliberately sought to build a single nation while recognizing the diversity of each state.⁹⁶ The U.S. Constitution, among the longest-lived and most difficult to amend,⁹⁷ became the pillar around which Americans' patriotism and sense of belonging developed.⁹⁸

1.3.1.2 Comparing the European Union

If we extend this kind of reasoning to the European Union, it became evident how arduous and complicated the path it has ventured down is. Established immediately after the Second World War, at a rather delicate and fragile moment in history, the EU set out to reconcile the two old rivals, France and Germany, fostering economic integration, to prevent past mistakes and exhumed conflicts and tensions.⁹⁹ Unlike the United States, the EU lacks a federal constitution to fund its political legitimacy, nor can it aspire to regulatory and linguistic unification. The effort to create a constitution has also been made several times but so far defeated, as witnessed by the France and Netherlands rejection of the European Constitution, in 2005.¹⁰⁰ The EU, on the other hand, is based on a series of treaties that are legally binding but lack the potential to provide its members with a rich sense of belonging and tradition as a constitution can.¹⁰¹ Thus, European integration is a very complex project, as all 27 member states have their own unique cultural and social identities deeply rooted in centuries of individual histories. This makes the elaboration of a common collective memory capable of producing a supranational sense of belonging very complicated. What seems necessary is the Union's need to

⁹⁶ Klein C., Sajó A “Constitution-Making: Process and Substance” in Roselfed M.Sajó A, *The Oxford Comparative and Constitutional Law*, 2012: 419-441. [The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law \(crossref.org\)](https://doi.org/10.1017/9780198755894.014)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Fabbrini, S. “From Rome to Lisbon”. In Fabbrini, S. *Which European Union? Europe after the Euro Crisis* Cambridge University Press. 2015. [Which European Union?: Europe after the Euro crisis | Sergio Fabbrini - Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu/10111111/Which_European_Union?_context=book)

¹⁰⁰ Fabbrini, S. *From Rome to Lisbon*, cit. In 2005, the proposed European Constitution was rejected in two referendums. In France, 54.7% of voters opposed it on May 29, followed by 61.5% of Dutch voters rejecting it on June 1. This setback prompted EU leaders to draft the Lisbon Treaty in 2007 as a revised approach to EU reform, which was later ratified and came into effect in 2009.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

resort to a shared history and memory if it wishes to hope to build the sense of community and identity, that is vital for its political legitimacy. It appears clear the Union has come to the realisation, as will be explored in the following sections, that institutional and political mechanisms alone are insufficient.

It appears necessary for the Union, in order to succeed in this challenge to forge narratives that can give citizens a sense of cohesion and a reason to fight for, a reason that make it worth to be European rather than citizens of a single member state. In this regard, The European Union has tried to construct a “founding myth”, a story that describes its origin and its mission for Europe.¹⁰² This myth seems to be necessary to unite different historical legacy; however, it cannot be considered as a mere idealisation, but rather an essential tool to legitimise the European project and consolidate the common identity of a continent that, for centuries, has been scene of wars and divisions.¹⁰³ Moreover, it seems clear that only by building a shared sense and understanding of its own history can the European Union aspire to become a true supranational entity, capable of overcoming internal divisions and strengthening its role on the global stage.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² La Sala, V. “Europe’s odyssey? Political myth and the European Union” *cit.*, 524-541.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER II

2. The founding roots of European Memory

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to analyse the foundations of European collective memory, an essential element in understanding the dynamics of cohesion and tensions emerging from the enlargement of the Union. Before exploring, in the following chapters, the differences between European memories and the possible conflicts that may undermine unity, it seems essential to question what constitutes the common ground on which the European Union has sought to build its identity. Central to this analysis is the idea that every collective identity is based on a narrative and shared values. Even the European Union, in order to give itself legitimacy and a *raison d'être* by virtue of its supranational nature, has sought to construct an identity based on a shared historical narrative. Although it was born with economic aims, the Union has always aimed at establishing a sense of common belonging, capable of legitimising its political and cultural project. The chapter examines how the memory of the Second World War, and the Holocaust represented a founding *lieux de mémoire* of European identity, but also how its primacy was challenged by alternative narratives with the accession of new member states. The shared awareness of wartime atrocities prompted the leaders of the time to seek innovative and concrete solutions to avoid a repetition of past conflicts. The chapter also analyses both the Schuman Declaration of 1950 and the preamble to the ECSC, which represented a model of cooperation that could transform the symbolic resources of war into instruments of peace and unity. This approach emphasised the concept of “de facto solidarity” as a pillar of integration.

Finally, the chapter reflects on the founding myths of the Union and on the role of emblematic figures such as Schuman, Spinelli and Adenauer, who transformed the experience of conflict into a narrative of reconciliation, standing up as a bulwark against nationalisms, as fearsome today as they were then for the European project. What emerges is that collective memory is not only a reference to the past but finds its justification in the ability to guide the future. The challenge remains to build a mosaic of memories in which different historical experiences are interwoven, strengthening a sense of common belonging that respects diversity, the pillar of European richness.

2.2. Is there a European Memory? A conceptual exploration of its foundations and challenges

Continuing logically what was discussed above in relation to the examples of the United States, Italy and Germany, a concept emerges that can be applied particularly extensively, in fact any collective identity, be it national or supranational, based on a cultural or political matrix, presupposes a shared vision of the future and a common set of historical references that legitimise its existence. The construction of a European collective memory has long been considered an essential ingredient in forging a European identity.¹⁰⁵ However, as history teaches us, Europe is a continent marked by centuries of conflict and diverse and distinctive cultural traditions, which makes the achievement of a shared collective memory particularly complex. Since the dawn of its history, the European Union, in its various forms¹⁰⁶ has aimed not only at economic integration but has also sought to self-validate itself by instilling in its citizens a sense of common belonging.¹⁰⁷ This translated into an attempt to build a transnational identity that transcended national borders. However, in a traumatic post-war context, in which countries and their citizens were on opposing sides, it was understandably difficult to establish even a sense of trust, let alone unity.

Building a collective memory in a period marked by division and mutual distrust presented an unprecedented challenge. The attempt to construct this European memory was conventionally performed on the traumatic events of World War II.¹⁰⁸ The memory of the war served as a catalyst for the construction of collective identity, the founding moment of which was the Holocaust. Taking up the concept of *lieux de mémoires* elaborated by Pierre Nora, historian Dan Diner defines the Holocaust as a founding “place of memory,” recognized as a common European tragedy and placed at the origin of the construction of a shared memory.¹⁰⁹ The Holocaust thus becomes the symbol of the terror produced by totalitarianism and the failure of humanity, assuming the role of the ethical basis of European identity.

However, with the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of the East Europe, the “absolute value” and centrality of the Holocaust in European memory has been challenged because of different historical experiences.¹¹⁰ In Eastern countries, for example, the

¹⁰⁵ Assmann A., “The Future of Memory” Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010. [Assmann_Europe.pdf](#)

¹⁰⁶ Here, I am referring to the different institutional structure developed during the European Union integration process. (ECSC, EEC, EC, EU),

¹⁰⁷ Assmann A., “The Future of Memory” *cit.*

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Diner, D. “Restitution and Memory: The Holocaust in European Political Cultures.” *New German Critique*, 90(2), Taboo, Trauma, Holocaust. 2003: 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3211106>

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

common collective memory refers to the period of Soviet domination and the crimes committed by communist regimes, which are considered no less traumatic than the Holocaust. This perspective has sometimes led to downplaying or reevaluating local participation in crimes against Jews during the Nazis, as well as creating a heated debate between the use of the term “Soviets” or “communists” in relation to the crimes perpetrated by the USSR. Moreover, the term “double genocide,” in this context, attempts to balance Nazi and Communist crimes and argues that both should be considered equal European tragedies, fuelling, to this day, the debate.¹¹¹ This controversial terminology is an attempt by many Eastern European countries to have their suffering under Soviet rule, which often felt undervalued compared to the crimes of National Socialism, officially recognized.¹¹²

However, this approach has generated significant tensions between Eastern and Western countries, highlighting the gap that exists in collective memories and their narrative. The experience of ‘dual’ dictatorships, under Nazism and the Soviet regime, has left Eastern European countries with a complex legacy of intertwined memories, where victimhood and collaboration are often inseparable. Since 1945, European memory has been shaped by experiences in both Western and Eastern Europe, which have followed different trajectories and paths.¹¹³ The Cold War period, in particular, has crystallised historical memories along strong ideological lines, creating political, social and economic rifts that are difficult to overcome as they are deeply embedded in societies and their systems. In Western Europe, too, national myths that once fuelled hostility have been progressively revised, developing a more nuanced view of history that incorporates the perspectives of both perpetrators and victims. However, after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, long-suppressed memories resurfaced across the continent, highlighting the divergence of national narratives. Due to the reemergence of these narratives, new confrontation between member states raised, revealing not only differences in interpretation, but also deep tensions related to the politics of memory¹¹⁴

The principle of “unity in diversity” has become another pillar of the European Union, that promotes the idea that the continent's internal diversity, based on linguistic, cultural and historical differences, should be celebrated rather than erased. The EU has sought to instil the idea of a Europe that values its differences, promoting mutual understanding rather than forced homogenisation between nations. Examples of this philosophy can be initiatives such as the idea of a European museum or the creation by the Commission of a “Europe space” in European capitals, with the aim

¹¹¹ Tismaneanu, V. “The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century”. University of California Press, Berkeley: 2012. [The Devil in History](#)

¹¹² Himka, J.; and Michlic J. “Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Post communist Europe”. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln: 2013. [Bringing the Dark Past to Light](#)

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. and Assmann A., “The Future of Memory” *cit.*

of promoting knowledge and debate on issues of European interest, particularly for the younger generation.¹¹⁵ The intention of these projects is to visually represent a common history and to make the past tangible, while projecting it towards a future of shared participation. However, projects like the European museum bear the risk of oversimplifying the complexity of history. Therefore, memories that do not fit perfectly with a pan-European conception of historical narrative could be excluded.¹¹⁶ As will then be discussed in more detail in one of the following sections, the EU still has to come to terms with some parts of its past. Although the EU has achieved much in promoting transnational historical memory, the EU has “uncomfortable past,” represented on all by the issues concerning imperialism and colonialism, which have been omitted in the narrative of European memory and on which the EU remains most silent.¹¹⁷ In this sense, the neglect of colonialism imperialism in official EU narratives is not an unfortunate accident, but a real case of “institutional amnesia.” This underscores deep political tensions based on the need to maintain an unstable balance among member states.¹¹⁸ As will be discussed in later chapters, while some periods have been idealized as symbols of Europe's collective memory, others have been pushed to the periphery, making it at best incomplete or highly fragmented.¹¹⁹ While the European Union has laboriously engaged in a process of confrontation with its troubled and bloody past, centred on the Holocaust, National Socialism, and Communist Regimes, much remains to be done regarding the contradictions related to colonialism and imperialism. This past, which has had a major impact on the entire continent, has not been brought together into an integrated narrative; instead, a vacuum has been created that prevents Europe from representing itself as an ethical and coherent reality.

A truly inclusive European memory requires a critical and in-depth confrontation with all its historical legacies. However, a central question that Müller posed, is whether it is indeed possible to build a common and shared memory capable of strengthening European identity. While the overcoming of national memories is important from the perspective of mutual recognition, it appears clear that transnational dialogue on memory, however necessary, must be pursued with the utmost care and context sensitivity. Each nation must have the right to process its past independently, without

¹¹⁵ Spohn, W. and Klaus E, *Collective Memory and European Identity*, cit.

¹¹⁶ Müller W. “On “European Memory”: Some Conceptual and Normative Remarks.” In Pakier M., Stråth B. *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, Berghahn Books, New York: 2010: 25–37 [A European Memory?](#)

¹¹⁷ Sierp, A. “EU Memory Politics and Europe’s Forgotten Colonial Past”, *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 22(6), 2020: p.686-702 [\[PDF\] EU Memory Politics and Europe’s Forgotten Colonial Past | Semantic Scholar](#) and Ejodus, F., “Anxiety, Dissonance and Imperial Amnesia of the European Union,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 19(73), 2022: p.45-60. [Anxiety, Dissonance and Imperial Amnesia of the European Union | Semantic Scholar](#)

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

interventions from outside being seen as acts of imposition or interference.¹²⁰ The author analyses these issues through examples that reveal the complexity of the process of building a shared memory.

“Is it legitimate, for example, for Germans to judge France's course of reconciliation with the Vichy regime? Or for the French to comment on the British treatment of the Irish? And could the Spanish really apologise for Portuguese colonialism?”¹²¹

These questions shed light on the tensions and pressure that can arise when one nation exposes itself under the external judgement and scrutiny of others. This intended or intended process, can easily turn into a perception of interference in national narratives.¹²² Overcoming and achieving a reconciliation of these divisions requires a delicate balance between recognising the histories of others without making external judgments; and preventing that the autonomy granted to individual nations in dealing and addressing with their own past not become pretext for manipulation or revisionism.¹²³ This tension underlines the need for a profound cultural shift. It follows that national narratives should not be seen as isolated or in competition with each other, but rather as complementary parts of a common European history. However, it is far from clear that memories can or should be integrated into a single homogeneous narrative. Indeed, the process of creating a uniform European memory seems problematic, given the selectivity and contradictory nature of collective memories.¹²⁴ This would be to the detriment of a homogeneous memory, with the consequent risk of suppressing narratives that are incompatible with any pre-established vision. The author also argues that it would also marginalise national and regional experiences that might be perceived as “incompatible” with the dominant narrative. However, it could also be true that, if we leave states complete freedom to confront their past, as we will see in the following chapters, it could happen that this “autonomy” leads to divergent and sometimes manipulated interpretations of history, with the risk of prolonging conflicts and fuelling fragmentation. At the same time, imposing a uniform memory is oppressive, as it suppresses diversity and reduces a complex and plural history to a one-dimensional and simplified view.¹²⁵

The question therefore revolves around what the author framed as a dilemma: how to create a shared memory without annulling national differences? Respect for local specificities is crucial, as these remain deeply rooted in the identity of European individuals and peoples. The European Union is in a continuous search for a common identity, and the debate on how to deal with history to achieve

¹²⁰ Müller W. “On “European Memory”: Some Conceptual and Normative Remarks.”, *cit.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

this goal remains quite open. A shared memory seems to be an essential element in strengthening the sense of belonging to the European project. However, it is equally essential to preserve and enhance national differences, as these constitute the very fabric of European diversity. It seems important to understand, in the light of the reflections that will emerge in the course of the paper, whether an inclusive memory, therefore, can not only be synonymous with homogeneity, but rather as a mosaic in which different experiences can interweave, contributing to the construction of a common identity without annulling historical and cultural singularities. This is what the Union must ask itself and will have to ask itself in the future.

2.3 The memory of the war as base of legitimacy: the early stage of the EU integration

Europe was, after World War II, devastated, both materially and morally. In this wasteland, although there were clear winners and losers, the reality was that some states were only slightly less defeated than others. In fact, by the end of the war an entire continent was truly in ruins, scarred by atrocities and violence that would affect not only a generation but an entire century. It was from the ashes of this catastrophe that European integration was born, a revolutionary project for the time, destined to completely transform relations between states and overcome centuries of conflict and rivalry. The memory of the prewar years and the war itself was a profound driving force behind Europe's postwar transformation, the "Great Transformation" as Polanyi defined it.¹²⁶ In the deeply shared consciousness of political leaders across the continent. The elites of postwar Europe, guided by a new and more cautious Western liberalism, realized how unsuccessful prewar diplomatic relations had been.¹²⁷

Unlike the boundless optimism of 19th century liberalism, this new liberalism presented itself to the world humbled by recent history, aware of its own fragility and inadequacy.¹²⁸ It was the collective memory of the failures of the 1930s, and especially the collapse of liberal democracy that had paved the way for the disaster of 1940, that produced a pragmatic approach with "realist" traits that many European leaders in exile developed during the war years. Determined to put into practice


¹²⁶ Ruggie, J.G. "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order." *International Organization* 36(2) 2009: p.379-415. [International regimes, transactions, and change: embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order | International Organization | Cambridge Core](#)

¹²⁷ Orsina, G. "European Liberalism in the Age of Totalitarianisms". In Orsina, G. *Totalitarian Societies and Democratic Transition*, Central European University Press, Budapest 2017: p.109-13 [European Liberalism in the Age of Totalitarianisms](#)

¹²⁸ Ibid.

the solutions developed during their exile, some members of Europe's political elites did not wait for perfect conditions but strove for what was possible to achieve in the immediate term.¹²⁹ According to historian Pierre-Henri Laurent, this dedication to effective action rather than perpetual postponement was the ultimate success of European integration after the war.¹³⁰ The shared memory of the war's atrocities acted as a catalyst, pushing leaders to envision constructive alternatives, especially in social and economic spheres. In countries like Belgium and the Netherlands both founders of the European Coal and Steel Community the brutal Nazi occupation had spurred a deep reflection on how society and the economy could be reorganized.¹³¹ In Belgium, for instance, the government in exile in London created a Commission for the study of postwar problems, which drafted plans for a more just society, laying out ideas that would later inspire Europe's reconstruction efforts.¹³² This reform movement sought to overcome what was seen as a failed past, painfully exposed by the war's aftermath, and aimed to strike a balance between state intervention and economic liberalism a model later termed "embedded liberalism" by scholar John Ruggie.¹³³

In the Netherlands, too, there was a growing awareness of the need for change. Many saw the war as an opportunity to break away from the compromised prewar socio-economic structures that had failed to prevent conflict. Memories of the unstable prewar period, with its conflicts and internal divisions, reinforced a commitment to creating a new foundation of stability. Laurent notes that the years of exile in London offered a unique moment for the Belgian and Dutch governments to reflect together, breaking down old suspicions and clearing a path to the Benelux agreement¹³⁴. This regional cooperation between Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg would become an important precursor to wider European integration. In the postwar political scenario, the leadership of the Christian Democracy, founded on Catholic principles, played an important role. Political scientist Michael Burgess has argued that the Christian Democratic parties exemplified a concept of Europe driven by democracy, justice and respect for individual right and dignity that contrasted with both fascism and communism.¹³⁵ The wartime Resistance, organized in small self-managed and egalitarian groups would become an inspiring model for postwar society. It was this ideal of small cooperative

¹²⁹ Smith, M.L., "Making the New Europe: European Unity and the Second World War", Pinter Publishers, London, 1990.
[Perlego | Your Online University Library](#) 

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ruggie, J.G. *International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order*, cit. p.379-415

¹³⁴ The Benelux Economic Union was officially established in 1958, formalizing years of cooperative efforts among Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Key agreements included the 1944 Customs Agreement, eliminating internal tariffs, and the 1943 monetary framework to bolster economic ties.

¹³⁵ Smith, M.L., *Making the New Europe: European Unity and the Second World War*, cit.

communities among Christian Democrats that would become the starting point from which a new European order of solidarity and collective organization would emerge against the growing threat from the Soviet Union.¹³⁶

Therefore, the shared memory of how the prewar period had been characterized by instability and the trauma of war became the driving force, carrying with it the aspirations and efforts of European leaders of the new postwar European order. This memory sparked the feeling of the need to create a cooperative Europe, but more importantly, a Europe that was inherently peace-oriented and would not repeat the disastrous failures of the past.

2.2.1 The Schuman Declaration and the Preamble of the ECSC

This spirit of cooperation later took concrete form in the Schuman Declaration, one of the acts we can consider foundational to European integration. On May 9, 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman advanced a plan for the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community¹³⁷, a structure that would place these resources symbolic of the military industry, under common control.¹³⁸ This proposal laid the foundation for a new Europe, rooted in cooperation and peace, transforming elements of division into bonds of unity and effectively marking the beginning of a new chapter in European history. The related project had a twofold objective, on the one hand, it was to make war “*not only unthinkable but materially impossible*” among European nations and on the other hand to ensure progressive economic integration of the founding states.¹³⁹

We will incur in a historical error by thinking that the Schuman Declaration was a mere economic proposal, as it can be considered in all respects a political manifesto for a new Europe. In support of this thesis, scrolling through the lines of his declaration, we see how Schuman understands peace as a fundamental value and then economic cooperation as a factor that could prompt a first step toward a European federation. One of the key passages of his speech, reads, “*World peace cannot be safeguarded without making creative efforts proportionate to the dangers that threaten it*”.¹⁴⁰ This sentence sums up in itself the essence of the European project, namely the need to give a common and joint response to the threat of new conflicts, in a word based on cooperation among nations.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Founded by the Treaty of Paris in 1951 and entering into force in 1952, the ECSC united France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, regulating coal and steel industries to prevent future conflicts.

¹³⁸ Sierp, A. "Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945." In Bond L., Rapson J. *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders*, 2021.: p.104-118. [Integrating Europe integrating memories \(1\).pdf](#)

¹³⁹ European Union, “Schuman Declaration, May 1950”, European Union official website, principle, countries, and history. [Schuman declaration May 1950 | European Union](#)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Schuman was also aware of the need to overcome the age-old rivalries between France and Germany, whose wars had torn Europe apart, in fact he adds: “*The union of European nations requires the elimination of the age-old opposition between France and Germany.*”¹⁴¹ He affirmed, making it clear that the first step toward a united Europe would be to overcome its deepest divisions. In this sense, the ECSC represented a model for a new relationship between states, no longer based on competition and the struggle for resources, but on cooperation and the sharing of common interests.¹⁴² Schuman's vision was ambitious: to unite nations through “*concrete achievements*” that would create “*de facto solidarity*” among the European peoples.¹⁴³ It is precisely the notion of solidarity, which recurs incessantly in his speech, which lies at the heart of the European integration project. The vision of a new Europe made it possible to reject the nationalism that had emerged in the pre-war era, considered one of the primary causes of the world conflicts and centuries of fratricidal wars that had ravaged the continent.¹⁴⁴ Schuman, through those symbolic words, moved away from that nationalism, the handmaiden of hatred and war, and envisioned a Europe of solidarity, based on peace and cooperation. His speech is still highly relevant today because even today nationalism, in its new forms and new protagonists, is still one of the main enemies of democracy and peace.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the statement emphasized that a united Europe could not be built in a single day or with a single act because it will be the result of a multifaceted process.¹⁴⁶ The reason for the great significance that the narrative and rhetoric the Union attaches to that declaration clearly did not lie in the albeit innovative economic proposal per se, but rather the extraordinary scope that message conveyed. Schuman was able, implicitly and explicitly, to make the most of the memory of the conflict. It drew on the sensitivity that that historical period carried with it and that it required to catalyse the desire for peace. This memory of the atrocities of the war had to be remembered and not forgotten, but it had to be transformed into a tool to help build another future. In this sense, memory became a key element in the establishment of a distinct European identity, using this past as a warning not to repeat the mistakes of the past, with the purpose to build lasting peace. This vision was further reinforced in the preamble to the 1951 Treaty of Paris, which established the European Coal and Steel Community. In the preamble, the signatories expressly state, “*Europe will be built through concrete*

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*. cit. p.686-702

¹⁴³ European Union, *Shuman Declaration*, May 1950” cit.

¹⁴⁴ Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.686-702

¹⁴⁵ Sierp, A. *Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945*, p.104-118.

¹⁴⁶ Indeed, he declared: “Europe will not be made all at once, nor according to a single plan; it will be built through concrete achievements that first create de facto solidarity.” European Union, *Shuman Declaration*, May 1950” cit.

achievements that will first create de facto solidarity."¹⁴⁷ The goal outlined in the preamble of the treaty that established the European Coal and Steel Community was simple and hopeful, as it spoke of "*steering a shared destiny.*"¹⁴⁸

Once again, the memory of the war was central; the intention was not to forget, but to remember the past so as not to repeat it. The devastation of the war made clear the need for something common, and the ECSC was a first step toward creating a new political and economic order based on cooperation and interdependence. The establishment of the ECSC marked, undoubtedly, the beginning of European economic integration. However, the Treaties of Rome also represented the emergence of a new form of international politics, in which states surrendered some of their sovereignty in the name of a wider collective project. Through the signing of the ECSC treaty, European countries gave up control of military resources in order to prevent or be involved in further armed conflicts.¹⁴⁹ In this sense, the memory of the conflict became a warning and in particular a driving force for change. Nonetheless, despite the symbolic significance of Schuman's speech and the subsequent treaty, European integration was a complex process fraught with obstacles.¹⁵⁰ As I will analyse in the following chapters, the memory of certain historical events has not always been interpreted in the same way, and this has created fractures and dissent, as well as stagnation. Behind Schuman's goals and the establishment of the ECSC, rooted in the rejection of war, it was the struggle to forge a sense of common belonging among European citizens. The first European institutions, such as the ECSC, were an essentially economic instrument and proved ill-suited to fostering a common European consciousness. The idea of a common European home was in fact very distant, and for many years the European project remained focused on economic and commercial aspects, making limited use of memory, and obscuring many truths. Despite the difficult supranational challenges of the European Union, the link between memory and integration has continued to play a fundamental role in the European process. Indeed, if we consider the peace and stability that has persisted for over seventy years, the history of the EU can be read as a long 'success story'. In this European narrative from 1945 to the present, the rhetoric of peacekeeping has never died down.¹⁵¹ The memory of the war and its atrocities has never really faded, every time European leaders reiterate the need to maintain peace through the strengthening of EU institutions, they implicitly recall memories of a past

¹⁴⁷ Preamble of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community. Eur-lex, Paris, 1951 [EUR-Lex - 11951K/TXT - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.686-702.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Bottici C. Benoît C. "*Myths of Europe*", Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013. [Myths of Europe \(Chapter 4\) - Imagining Europe](#)

marked by conflict and disunity, emphasising how necessary it is to keep the continent united in its diversity. In an optimistic light, what we could say is that the memory of the war has thus taken on a founding value, becoming a constituent element of the new European identity and a powerful engine pushing towards unification while respecting individual national. The devastation of the war had made the need for a common project evident, and the ECSC represented the first step toward creating a new political and economic order founded on cooperation and interdependence.¹⁵²

2.3 The European Union founding myths.

It is this legacy of war that inspired visionary leaders of the Union such as Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Altiero Spinelli, Alcide De Gasperi and Jean Monnet, who became mythical figures and founding fathers of the integration process¹⁵³. Each, with their own background and perspective, gave face and voice to a founding narrative that transformed Europe from a theatre of war and rivalry to a project of collaboration and rebirth. An example of how far-sighted and, at the same time, extraordinarily relevant this vision was the Ventotene Manifesto, drafted by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi during the Second World War.¹⁵⁴ The Manifesto called for the creation of a 'European Federation' or 'United States of Europe' as a buffer against the extreme nationalists and conflicts that had torn the continent apart.¹⁵⁵ Today, these ideals not only remain highly topical, but are ambitious when one considers how many steps still need to be taken to get closer to these goals, assuming there really is the political will to achieve them. The ideas of the Manifesto, however, frequently resurface in the election campaigns of pro-European parties, testifying to their extraordinary innovative power and ability to inspire new generations of Europeans.

The peace achieved and maintained for more than seventy years is to all intents and purposes one of the founding myths of the European Union, a success narrative that has succeeded, at least in part, in overcoming the nationalist logics that for centuries have torn the continent apart. However, despite this apparent achievement, it is worth asking whether this is enough. The recent war in Ukraine has brought the conflict back to the heart of Europe, highlighting how incomplete and

¹⁵² Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.686-702

¹⁵³ Calligaro O., Foret, F., "La mémoire européenne en action" » *Politique Européen*, 37(2), 2012: p.18-43. [\(PDF\) La mémoire européenne en action](#)

¹⁵⁴ D'Auria, M. "The Ventotene Manifesto: The Crisis of the Nation State and the Political Identity of Europe" In Spiering M. Wintle S., *European Identity and the Second World War*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2011: 151-158 [European Identity and the Second World War](#)

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

complex the process of building a common and solid identity still is. Although the EU has ensured a long period of peace, it does not yet seem to have built a shared European identity, capable of engaging its citizens emotionally as well. Over the past two decades, Europe has been shaken by one crisis after another, which have challenged its ability to emerge strengthened from difficulties.¹⁵⁶

These crises have revealed how urgently needed is a narrative that gives meaning and legitimacy to the European project, which can guide citizens and create a consensus that can endure. Unlike national narratives, which often present a linear path with defined protagonists and antagonists, the founding myth of the EU is nuanced and complex.¹⁵⁷ While it is true that nationalism can be considered the antagonist of this project, it is equally true that there is no single figure or narrative that fully embodies European identity.¹⁵⁸ Even the idea of an ‘ever closer union’ aspired to in the founding treaties of the EU appears to be a particularly abstract concept and far from having a clear purpose.¹⁵⁹

One aim of this paper, especially in the chapters that follow, is to examine how the EU, despite the powerful narratives at its foundation, such as European peace, the "founding fathers," community solidarity, the memory of past wars, and, as will be discussed, the integration of Holocaust memory, continues to face challenges in fostering a genuine sense of belonging among its citizens, largely due to the absence of a shared collective memory. The EU often remains perceived as a bureaucratic and distant entity, more concerned with the economic dimension than with its own cultural identity. This perception of detachment is perhaps one of the main obstacles to the construction of a common European identity. So far, the matrix of the European integration process has been purely economic, from the single market to monetary union, which has meant that the legitimacy of the EU has been mainly based on material benefits, while references to a symbolic or cultural dimension appear weak and fragmented. A common European identity, despite many efforts, still seems far away, as does a truly shared historical memory capable of uniting citizens beyond their national peculiarities and differences.

What emerges is that the idea of a European cultural identity is closely linked to the construction of a collective imagination rooted in a set of values and myths capable of representing not only the unity of states, but also that of the European peoples. In his book *“Intellectuals and the Nation: Collective Identity in the German Axial Age”*, Bernhard Giesen, introduced three models of assimilation of collective memories. In particular, he proposed a “reflexive model”, a model which

¹⁵⁶ La Sala, V. “Europe’s odyssey? Political myth and the European Union” *cit.* p. 524-541.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

focuses on the critical revaluation of history by individuals.¹⁶⁰ This approach seems remarkably interesting for the present research, as it can be applied to the process of European integration. The reflexive model, in fact, requires a constant rethinking and re-examination of one's roots, which would be particularly useful insofar, would enhance the diversity of the Europe historical memories and experience.¹⁶¹ A reflexively constituted European identity would be based not on homologation, but on mutual recognition, conducive to a collective consciousness aware of its own historical facets and contradictions.¹⁶²

As Hannah Arendt points out, the legitimacy of an entity, especially a supranational one, is built through the reference to a common past, but its justification lies in its ability to guide the future.¹⁶³ In this sense, a founding myth that crystallises exclusively in the past cannot be the central point, what matters is the strength of the myth in giving collective and symbolic meaning to European history and in offering a unified vision oriented towards the future. Although the path towards a true European identity is still evolving, it seems important that the use of historical memory as a foundation for integration is a pillar for building a Union that can finally be perceived as the home of all European.

¹⁶⁰ Giesen, B. "The Intellectuals and the Nation: Collective Identity in the German Axial Age". Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998. [Intellectuals and politics - GIESEN - 2011 - Nations and Nationalism - Wiley Online Library](#). In Sierp. A. *Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: Myths of Europe*. cit. p.104-118.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Arendt, H. "On Violence" Harcourt, Brace & World, New York. 1970. [On Violence](#)

PART II

Based on the theoretical foundations developed in the first part of the thesis, the second part represents the core of the research, which is developed through the analysis of several case studies. This section is divided into four chapters, each for a specific phase of the EU enlargement. The analysis focuses on the tensions related to the accession of the new members. It examines how historical memory and conflicting national narratives influenced policy orientations, European integration, and identity. The empirical investigation rests on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources refer to parliamentary debates, speeches of political leader, interviews, and newspaper articles. The sources are found in the archives of research institutes, journals, EU website, international organisations, or through the relevant literature.

The first chapter of the empirical part deals with the first northern enlargement in 1973, and it takes up the United Kingdom as a case of study. This section will try to explain how Britain's strong national identity, rooted in a distinctive historical narrative connected to its imperial heritage, its victory in WWII, and its self-perception as exceptional, shaped the UK's complex and often reluctant relationship with the European integration process. It describes how historical memory was a determining factor in conditioning and delaying the engagement of Great Britain in the EC project, ultimately contributing to the Euroscepticism that led to Brexit.

The fourth chapter deals with the post-authoritarian enlargement of the 1980s, with the accession of Spain, Greece, and Portugal. All three countries, coming out from decades of dictatorship, saw European integration as a means to stabilise democracy and pursue progress. The analysis focuses on the role of the policy of oblivion in Spain, implemented through the “Pacto de Silencio”. Furthermore, it highlights how this enlargement represented an opportunity for the EC not only in terms of economic expansion, but also as a means of legitimising its political and identity role. In particular, the Mediterranean enlargement was able to reinforce a European identity narrative founded on democratic pluralism, individual freedoms and anti-fascism.

The Central-East enlargement was, definitely, the most significant and complex, in terms of its impact and consequences on the European historical narrative. Therefore, this section is analysed in two chapters. The first examines Germany's and Spain's support for the CEECs¹⁶⁴ accession, motivated by a historical responsibility for Germany, and by a special “sensitivity” of Spain. It is emphasised that this enlargement was conceptualised as an act of historical compensation, aimed at healing the “debt of history”. Moreover, the enlargement offered to the European Union the

¹⁶⁴ Abbreviation for Central and Eastern European countries.

opportunity to consolidate itself as a promoter of democracy and pan-European reconciliation. The last chapter analyses the memory conflicts that emerged with the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. In particular, it examines the asymmetry between western and eastern member states in the historical interpretation of the Holocaust, the crimes of Nazi-fascism, Stalinism and communism. The thesis explores the reasons for the debate on the equivalence between Nazi and Communist crimes, which continues to create ideological and political rifts, remaining one of the most contentious issues in contemporary Europe

The First Northern Enlargement

CHAPTER III

3. Challenges in reconciling a strong national identity with European integration: The British Case.

3.1 Introductory Remarks

This first chapter of the empirical part paved the way for an analysis that aimed at offering a perspective on the weight and impact of memory, and its divergences, in European integration and identity construction. The first chapter will focus on the first enlargement of the Union, the so-called northern enlargement, which involved the United Kingdom, Denmark and Ireland. The chapter takes the United Kingdom as a case study, analysing its peculiar attitude towards the European project.

What emerges is that it is important to emphasise first and foremost that the states that joined in 1973 did not question the historical narrative or the legitimacy of the founding justifications of European integration, accepting them as an integral part of the common project they joined. Thus, there was no ‘battle’ or claims on memory as the thesis will attempt to highlight in the eastward enlargement. Indeed, these countries shared an anti-fascist rhetoric that certainly facilitated the integration process. However, this aspect was less pronounced compared to the case of the accession of the Mediterranean countries in 1985. In Spain, Greece and Portugal, anti-fascist rhetoric, closely linked to the achievement of democracy, played a decisive role in attracting these countries to the Union.

For a country like the United Kingdom, however, these elements were less relevant because of its different history. London did not suffer an occupation, did not lose sovereignty, did not experience a fascist dictatorship, and had a consolidated democracy on the parliamentary model par excellence, Westminster. In the specific case of the first phase of accession, the historical founding memory of Europe analysed in the previous chapter proved to be more useful as a tool to hold the Community together than as an attraction for entry, as it had been for the founding countries and the Mediterranean countries in 1985. Indeed, in the British case, the past played a significant role, but paradoxically in the opposite direction, contributing, along with other factors, to delaying entry into the Union first and to determining a consistently defensive attitude towards the progressive growth of the European project later. Indeed, the United Kingdom is a striking case of how a strong national

identity, based on a collective memory, can influence political choices in the international arena. Its relationship with the past, rooted in both its self-conception as a colonial power, the exceptionalism of its empire and its victory in the war, the so-called '*finest hour*', has had an active and profoundly decisive influence in shaping British political choices towards Europe in the post-war period.

This process is evident, as the thesis will illustrate, in Churchill's statements before accession and in Johnson's identic words during Brexit fifty years later. This demonstrates the persistence of a rhetoric of identity that created, albeit less strikingly than in the Soviet bloc, the first real memory clash between the UK and continental Europe. In this sense, Tony Judt's provocation that the Holocaust is the ticket to European enlargement does not seem to fit particularly well with the British case.¹ The memory of the Holocaust and the ensuing narrative has been accepted in a profound way, but it has not been the driving force behind the UK's accession. For London's reasons for joining the European Community lay rather in the empire's loss of economic and geopolitical influence. The EU appeared to be the last train the UK could cling to in order to maintain the privileges and prosperity of the now defunct "Victorian era".

3.2 Imperial legacy and British exceptionalism inside Churchill narrative: An obstacle to integration?

As mentioned above, United Kingdom accession into the European Economic Community was the result of a complex process with several obstacles. Initially, the United Kingdom adopted an isolationist stance, influenced by the ideas of Winston Churchill. Although in his renowned Zurich speech, Churchill launched the idea of a united Europe under the umbrella of a federal system, effectively giving rise to the concept of a "United States of Europe"², he preferred to keep the country detached from European political developments. This position was also rooted in British historical memory. The United Kingdom, indeed, unlike many countries in continental Europe, had never lost its national sovereignty, suffered occupation or dictatorship.

The glorious history of the empire, the "special relationship" with the United States and the dominant role of the Commonwealth were further elements that held back European integration.³ Churchill himself described the United Kingdom as a "friendly other" to Europe, emphasising its independence and rooting this position in the memory of the Second World War, celebrated through As Taylor points out, the United Kingdom self-perception as a "world power", inheriting the legacy of an

¹ Judt, T. "Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945", Penguin Books, New York. 2005

² Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE "Les États-Unis d'Europe, unique garantie de paix" 20 septembre 1946. "[Les États-Unis d'Europe, unique garantie de paix](#)" dans [Il nuovo Corriere della Sera \(20 septembre 1946\) - CVCE Website](#)

³ Fligstein, N. *Queen and Country! National Identity and British Post-War Use of Military Power*, cit. p. 274–287

"exceptional" history and an glorious imperial past profoundly influence the relationship between the UK and Europe.⁴ Not having experienced the Nazi occupation or the loss of national sovereignty contributed to a different approach of the United Kingdom towards the European integration process. Analysing historical documents and Churchill's own statements, it appears clear that he was in favour of European collaboration based on the principles of solidarity and reconciliation that characterised the Schuman Declaration. He fully agreed on the need to reconcile France and Germany, in order to ensure peace and stability on the continent. Indeed, during the renowned speech at the University of Zurich he clearly affirmed that *"the first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany"*.⁵ Churchill was in fact one of the pioneers of the need for a form of European integration in response to the traumas of the Second World War. At the end of the conflict, he called as a first step for reconciliation the creation of a Council of Europe.⁶ However, in response to the Schuman Declaration, Churchill excluded the United Kingdom from a political merger or direct reconciliation, believing that these concepts were primarily relevant to France and Germany, whose good relations he considered essential for the stability of the continent. This position marks a clear departure from the founding moment *par excellence* of the European Union, demonstrating a British reluctance to submit to a supranational entity which it meant to sacrifice the British holy national sovereignty. Indeed, Churchill declared:

"We help, we dedicate, we play a part, but we are not merged with and do not forfeit our insular or Commonwealth character. [...] It is only when plans for uniting Europe take a federal form that we ourselves cannot take part, because we cannot subordinate ourselves or the control of British policy to federal authorities"⁷

Moreover, during a parliamentary debate reported by the Hansard UK parliamentary archives, when Churchill, turning to the members of the House of Commons declared:

"Where do we stand? We are not members of the EDC, nor do we intend to be merged into a federal European system. [...] Our attitude can be expressed by

⁴ Taylor, G. "Understanding Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union" Emerald Publishing, Leeds, 2017. [Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union | Political Science Quarterly | Oxford Academic](#)
[Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union | Political Science Quarterly | Oxford Academic](#)

⁵The International Churchill Society (ICS) "Churchill speech at the University of Zurich" September 19, 1946. [United States of Europe - International Churchill Society](#)

⁶ European Commission, "Winston Churchill: calling for a United States of Europe Winston Churchill: calling for a United States of Europe". [eu-pioneers-winston-churchill_en.pdf eu-pioneers-winston-churchill_en.pdf](#)

⁷Courts R. "Churchill and Europe", *Review*, International Churchill Society (ICS), 2019 15.04.2018. [Churchill and Europe - International Churchill Society](#). And Courts R. "Finest Hour 180-Spring 2018", *Review, Books, Arts and Curiosities-European Unity*, International Churchill Society (ICS), 08.2018. [Books, Arts, & Curiosities - European Unity - International Churchill Society](#)

prepositions, by the preposition "with" but not "of" We are with them, but not of them. We have our Commonwealth and Empire".⁸

An incisive speech, underpinned by equally persuasive rhetoric, which highlights the strong identity of a country like the United Kingdom. This identity is based on a clear distinction between the British 'we' and the 'they' represented by Europe, perceived as a fundamentally different entity, reflecting the will to maintain an autonomous role on the international scene. This global vision, centred on a foreign policy that privileged international relations over continental ones, also emerges clearly in one of his renowned speeches⁹, where Churchill stated the United Kingdom have its own dream and its own task. According to Churchill the UK is "*with Europe, but not of it*", and it is "*linked, but not comprised*" and finally, "*interested and associated, but not absorbed.*"¹⁰ This attitude, characterised by a balance between participation and independence, has marked the UK's relationship with Europe for decades and, not surprisingly, was also one of the factors that contributed to the Brexit decision. Boris Johnson himself, during the election campaign in favour of Brexit, strategically exploited the words of Winston Churchill to justify his vision of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. However, in my opinion, this is an inappropriate adaptation that distorts the historical context. The European Union, as it stands today, is profoundly different from what Churchill envisioned and experienced in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. While his statements had their relevance the time, it is a historical mistake to use them to understand the situation EU faces today, especially without considering the profound changes in both the European project and in the different geopolitical dynamics in which the EU is embedded. In his electoral campaign manifesto for Brexit, Boris Johnson, quoting Churchill, described the UK's relationship with Europe as that of a country that is still, even 50 years later, "*interested, associated, but not absorbed*".¹¹ This view reflects a historical legacy deeply embedded in British identity, or rather the perception of itself as an exceptional and unique nation. Campaigns for Brexit precisely leveraged this idea of "British exceptionalism" emphasising cultural, identity and regulatory differences from continental Europe.¹²

The same reasons for British exceptionalism, political, economic, and military independence drove Churchill to avoid excessive involvement in European affairs, preferring a direct relationship with the United States. This is not the place to delve into the many reasons that led to the 2016

⁸ UK Parliament, Hansard, House of Commons, 11 May 1953. Debate in the House of Commons. Foreign Affairs, HC Deb 11 May 1953 vol 515 cc883-1004. [FOREIGN AFFAIRS \(Hansard, 11 May 1953\)](#)

⁹ Published on the *Saturday Evening Post* article in the 1930.

¹⁰ Courts R. *Churchill and Europe*, cit. and Courts R. *Finest Hour 180-Spring 2018*, cit.

¹¹ Klos F, "Churchill on Europe: The Untold Story of Churchill's European Project", Tauris, London, 2019.

¹² Fligstein, N. *Queen and Country! National Identity and British Post-War Use of Military Power*, cit. p. 274–287.

referendum result, but it is crucial to emphasise how certain historical and cultural traits do not disappear easily. On the contrary, they persist and continue to influence the course of events over time. As discussed in the previous chapter, historical memory is not a static element but an entity that evolves and transforms, while maintaining crucial relevance!



Churchill gives the 'V' for victory sign during a speech at the European Congress in The Hague in 1948.

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3.3 The decline of the empire: Macmillan and Heath catch the last train to post-war reconciliation.

The UK's accession to the European Economic Community in 1973 was mainly a consequence of the country's economic and political decline. The Suez crisis of 1956, the gradual decline of the British Empire and the inability to continue to rely on the Commonwealth for economic and political success had gradually eroded the UK's position of strength on the international stage. The real motive of this accession lay in fear, in the fear of irretrievably losing the British's glorious past. The decline of the empire, crumbling at the hands of even the most ardent supporters of British independence, brought along the risk of irreversible global downsizing. Paradoxically, the accession to the European Community represented a way to save the myth of Great Britain. Joining the European Community was a pragmatic and forced choice aiming to maintain a relevant role on the international stage, even

¹³ European Commission, *Winston Churchill: calling for a United States of Europe* Winston Churchill: *calling for a United States of Europe*, cit.

at the cost of sacrificing some of Britain's historic and holy independence. As Allen indicates the EEC membership was chosen "*more by process of elimination than by any real political will.*"¹⁴

A further determining factor was the demise of Charles de Gaulle, a long-standing opponent of British entry, who saw the United Kingdom as an extension of the United States in Europe. Subsequently, Edward Heath's government published a "White Paper" in which it openly declared its pro-entry position.¹⁵ Heath, in a televised speech on July 8, 1971, explained the reasons for this decision, emphasizing that EEC membership represented an opportunity to regain a position of prestige and a "*chance of becoming a greater Britain*".¹⁶ Heath's words reflect the awareness of a nation that had recognized it could "*no longer occupy the place*"¹⁷ it once held in the world, therefore, appeared necessary to look at Europe as an opportunity to reverse the trend of decline. Heath did not exclusively talk about economic or geopolitical opportunities. He also appealed to the shared traumas of both world wars, emphasising the value of the European project as a guarantor of peace and stability. This appeal to historical memory was consistent with the principles of solidarity and reconciliation embodied in the Schuman Declaration. Heath, addressing, in a very emotional speech, the British citizens, said:

"Many of you have fought in Europe, as I did, or lost fathers, brothers or husbands who fell fighting in Europe. I say to you now, with this experience in my memory, that joining the Community, working together for our common security and prosperity, is the best guarantee we can give ourselves for lasting peace in Europe."¹⁸

The call for peace and prosperity, therefore, was also central in the Heath's argument. He reaffirmed the idea of a Britain seeking to align itself with a project of solidarity and reconciliation born of the Schuman Declaration. The great fear of the public opinion, which shows how deeply attached Britain was to its strong national identity, was precisely that of losing its "Britishness" by joining the European Union. This also becomes clear in the continuation of Prime Minister Heath's speech to the citizens, in which, faced with criticism about the possibility of losing one's British identity, he

¹⁴ Allen, D. 'Britain and Western Europe', in M. Smith, S. Smith, and B. White *British Foreign Policy Tradition, Change, and Transformation*, Cambridge University Press. 1988. [British Foreign Policy: Tradition, Change, and Transformation. Edited by Michael Smith, Steve Smith, and Brian White. London: Unwin Hyman, 1987. 287p. \\$49.95 cloth, \\$16.95 paper. | American Political Science Review | Cambridge Core](#)

¹⁵ Stuart B., Seldon A., "The Heath Government, 1970–1974: A Reappraisal". Routledge, London, 1996. [The Heath Government 1970-74](#)

¹⁶ The Times & The Sunday Times, Archives, 9 July 1971. [Sunday Times, 1971, UK, English: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#) Quoted in. Jáuregui, P. "National Pride and the Meanings of 'Europe': A Comparative Study of Britain and Spain" Ph.D. thesis, European University Institute, Florence. p.92. and Jáuregui P. "National Pride and the Meaning of 'Europe': A Comparative Study of Britain and Spain." *The Sociological Review*, 48(1), 2000: p.257-287. [National Pride and the Meaning of 'Europe': A Comparative Study of Britain and Spain - Pablo Jáuregui, 2000](#)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.93.

addresses that within the community, *“the French are no less French, the Dutch no less Dutch for being members of the community for 20 years. [...] Nor shall we be any less British”*¹⁹ This attachment to the UK identity, traditions and, above all, one's history was emphasised not only in parliamentary speeches or in statements addressed to citizens, but also, demonstrating its importance to the British government, at the signing of the Accession Treaty in Brussels on 22 January 1972. With determination, Heath demonstrates the UK's willingness to work together to ensure prosperity, following what he describes as a “common European destiny” and recognising the existence of a shared cultural heritage. However, at the same time, he distances himself, strongly reiterating the centrality of UK's identity, historical and national peculiarities.²⁰

“Clear thinking will be needed to recognise that each of us within the Community will remain proudly attached to our national identity and to the achievements of our national history and tradition. [...] Imagination will be required to develop institutions which respect the traditions and the individuality of the Member States.”²¹

The case of the United Kingdom represents what could be described as the first, albeit timid, “clash” with the process of European integration. The memory of the war, although less weighty than the other EC countries, it was of a different kind of memory, rooted in victory and not tragedy. Even the Holocaust, central to the historical narrative of many member states, seems to occupy a less prominent position in the construction of British collective memory. This highlights how historical and cultural differences can influence the dynamics of European integration in the long term. Unlike many other European countries, which based their commitment to integration on shared resources and memories linked to the past, British support for the European Union was very much based on economic and geopolitical calculations.

Although the entry of some countries, including the United Kingdom, was largely for economic reasons and geopolitical stability, it also reflected a historical period in which a true cultural and identity “common ground” in the Union was lacking. Until the 1980s and 1990s, in fact, the European Union was perceived primarily as an economic project. This view was shared not only by the population, which, following the oil crisis, had begun to lose faith in the European project, but also by the ruling class. Emblematic in this respect is the statement of former European Commission

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE, “Speech by Edward Heath, in occasion of the e United Kingdom Delegation signature on the Treaty of Accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in Brussels, 22nd of January 1972”. [Speech by Edward Heath \(Brussels, 22 January 1972\) - CVCE Website](#)

²¹ Ibid.

President Jacques Delors: “*One cannot fall in love with the single market*”.²² This phrase highlights a community purely focused on the economic matrix. However, it also highlights the absence of a shared and deep-rooted identity ground, a void that the community will try hard to fill from the second enlargement and in the years following the fateful 1989. With the geopolitical transformations of the end of the Cold War and a more values-based and cultural approach to the European project, the EC began to strengthen its identity foundations. A crucial role in this process was also played by the activism of an increasingly influential Parliament, which helped to promote a vision of Europe not only as an economic space, but also as a community of values and culture. The European Union enlargement also highlights how the post-war founding myths have not had a uniform impact but have adapted to the historical and geographical specificities of the different member states.



The prime minister of the U.K. signs the Treaty of Accession, in Brussels, on 22nd of January. CVCE Archives

²² Fligsten N., “Jacques Delors and European Integration. *“Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews,”* 25(3) 1996: p.359-360 ([PDF](#)) [Jacques Delors and European Integration](#)

The post-Authoritarian Enlargement

CHAPTER IV

4. The politics of forgetting and the strengthening of European identity through the idea of democracy: The Case of post-Franco Spain

4.1 Introductory remarks.

The fourth chapter examines the second round of EC enlargement, the so-called Mediterranean or post-authoritarian enlargement. The second wave of accession once again saw memory and the past as determining factors in the political choices and ideological approaches of the leaders of the time, further reinforcing the thesis on the centrality of memory in the integration process. Enlargement to the Mediterranean countries concerned Spain, Greece and Portugal, countries emerging from authoritarian regimes that had lasted over thirty years. For this reason, this phase represented the first real challenge for the Community in dealing with a recent and controversial past, as well as with a complicated memory management. The 1981-86 enlargement took place in a different context than the first wave of accessions. While the first enlargement, despite initial difficulties related to the British attitude, had involved the UK, Denmark and Ireland, all countries with a consolidated democratic tradition and a strong anti-fascist rhetoric dictated by the outcome of the Second World War, the entry of the Mediterranean countries had profoundly different historical assumptions.

Spain, Portugal and Greece were nations that, until a few years earlier, had lived under fascist-style dictatorial regimes that were in stark contrast to the European values and ideals of the time. The regimes of Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal and the Colonels in Greece had been consolidated over time and, in some cases, had even been accepted by a significant part of the population. Moreover, both Portugal and Francoist Spain had not actively participated in the Second World War, despite Franco's "sympathy" for the Axis powers. In the Spanish case, there had been no real break with the Francoist period. Moreover, in order to facilitate the democratic transition and avoid falling back into the "general madness" of the 1936 civil war, the political class decided, through the *Pacto*

de Silencio ²³, to conceal the crimes of the Franco period.

The European Community was faced with an accession process in which the new members did not share the same memories of the war, the Holocaust and democracy as a response to totalitarianism, elements that had been central to the construction of the European Community among the founding states. Despite these adaptation difficulties, the second enlargement process helped to consolidate and strengthen the EC as a bulwark of democracy, fostering the construction of a European identity based on the idea that being “Europe” meant pluralism, freedoms, modernity. For the EC, enlargement represented an opportunity for legitimisation, since standing as democratic transition guarantor of these countries allowed it to give itself a broader mission than a mere economic purpose.

Through the analysis of the speeches and statements of the protagonists of the Spanish democratic transition, the chapter traces the dynamics that emerged in relation to the country's troubled past and the perception of Europe as a guarantee of a peaceful transition and a future aimed at progress and social justice. Furthermore, the chapter examines the politics of oblivion dynamics, with an analysis of the Pact of Silence legally formalised by the *Ley de Amnistía*.²⁴ In the final part, the statements of major European leaders are also examined.

4.1 The political landscape of post-Franco Spain: "Europeanizers" vs. Franco nostalgists

The analysis of the European Union's enlargement process with reference to the second round of Mediterranean countries shows how the Spanish case represents a particularly interesting and peculiar study, especially with regard to the use of memory with political purpose. After the death of Francisco Franco and the subsequent fall of the Franco regime, Spain was, as we have seen above, in a situation of economic backwardness, with a profoundly conservative society, strongly tied to religion and

²³ The Pacto de Silencio or Pacto de Olvido, was a political and social agreement adopted in Spain during the democratic transition after the end of the Franco regime. It provided for avoiding public debate on the crimes of the dictatorship in order to favour a peaceful transition without reopening the wounds of the Civil War. This policy of oblivion was legally sanctioned by the 1977 *Ley de Amnistía*, which prevented the prosecution of crimes committed during Francoism.

²⁴ The legislative concretisation of the “Pacto de Silencio” was the 1977 “*Ley de Amnistía*”, which granted immunity to those who had committed crimes during the Franco regime. Spain, following the “memory boom” in the late 1990s and early 2000s, will be called upon to come to terms with its past. Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, *Ley 46/1977, de 15 de octubre, de Amnistía*. BOE núm. 248, 17 de octubre de 1977. Jefatura del Estado. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/1977/10/15/46/con>

isolated from a geopolitical point of view.²⁵

The peculiarity of the Spanish transition, compared to the Portuguese one, its geographical neighbour, lies in the different historical context that led to the political change. Whereas in Portugal the democratic drive was triggered by the “*Revolução dos cravos*” the end of the Franco regime in Spain did not come about through a dramatic revolution. Although a significant part of the population criticised the regime and looked favourably on a democratic transition, another part continued to support the system.²⁶ This dualism, however, should not make us overlook the importance, in the transition process, of Catalan and Basque independence demands in the Spanish context of the time.

The conservative component of Spanish society, while recognising in some cases the obsolescence of the Franco regime, remained attached to the traditional values promoted by Franco. The European Union, perceived as a symbol of progress and modernity, was seen by this segment of the population as a threat to Spain's traditional values, as it implied the surrender of national sovereignty and independence.²⁷ During the same period, supporters of European integration, often referred to as “Europeanisers” were stigmatised as enemies of the homeland.²⁸ For the defenders of the Spanish tradition, the national greatness was essentially based on the maintenance of conventional social hierarchies and Catholic values.²⁹ From this perspective, the European modernisation project was considered anti-Spanish.³⁰ Despite this component being present in part of the Spanish population, the adhesion to the European project and the annexation of the country was supported by all political and institutional forces, including the *Rey*. The monarch symbolically opened the door to Spain's entry into the European Union already on the occasion of Franco's death, recalling the common identity of the European peoples to which Spaniards naturally belong. On that occasion the King stated that “*Spaniards are Europeans*”, emphasizing that the momentum for Spain's integration had been created, making it necessary, “*for both Spain and Europe to recognize this reality and act accordingly.*”³¹ The call to European identity underscored the sovereign's desire to lead the country

²⁵ Magone J. M. "The Role of the EEC in the Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek Transitions." In Muro D. e Alonso G In *The Politics and Memory of Democratic Transition: The Spanish Model*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2009: p.215-235 [The Role of the EEC in the Spanish, Portuguese and Greek Transitions](#) | And Cavallaro M. E. e Kornetis K. *Rethinking Democratisation in Spain, Greece, and Portugal*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019 [\(5\) Rethinking Democratisation in Spain, Greece and Portugal](#)

²⁶ Ibid. They occupied prominent positions in the mechanisms and ranks of the regime itself occupying prominent positions in the mechanisms and ranks of the regime itself.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Preston, P. Smyth, D. “Spain, the EEC, and NATO”, Routledge, London. 1984. In Jáuregui P., “Spain's ‘Special Solidarity’ with the East: The Influence of Collective Memory on Spanish Attitudes to EU-Enlargement”. In Spohn, W. and Klaus E, *Collective Memory and European Identity*. Routledge, New York, 2005: p. 109-121 [Collective Memory and European Identity](#)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ABC, Archivo Web, 23 Novembre, 1975. [Buscador - Archivo ABC](#), Translation of Jáuregui, P. “*National Pride and the Meanings of 'Europe'*”, cit.

towards Europe through the achievement of freedom and modernity. It was a speech that reflected a precise political strategy aimed at aligning Spain with the democratic values of Western European countries. Adolfo Suárez, centrist leader and key figure in the Spanish transition, constantly emphasised the link between modernisation, democratisation and Spain's aspiration to “become European”. The support for enlargement towards the EEC was (almost) unanimous between all the political forces. In the first democratic elections of June 1977, the main political parties, including Suárez's UCD, *Unión de Centro Democrático*, and Felipe González's *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE, adopted election slogans that closely linked their political vision to the European project, emphasising integration as an essential element for the country's progress.³² European integration made possible a unanimous consensus around all political forces because joining the EC was seen as an imperative necessity to guarantee stability to Spain's weak new democracy.³³

4.2 The “*Pacto de Silencio*” and the memory of the Civil War: a push towards accession, but at what cost?

The conflicts between national Catholic values and European modernity are linked to the deep divisions that had already marked the 1936 Civil War. During that period, the tension between tradition and modernity took on an extremely violent ideological dimension. Even during the post-Francoist democratic transition, these tensions derived from the Civil War, continued to influence the main political debate, underlining the crucial role of memory and trauma in this uncertain transition process.³⁴

In particular, the memory of the Civil War, defined in Spain as an event of general madness character, pushed the political elite to promote the *Pacto de Silencio* or *Pacto de Olvido*. This pact later found formalisation in the *Ley de Amnistia*, aimed at creating a solid foundation for democracy and preventing a return to the lacerating divisions that had characterised the 1936 Civil War. The Amnesty Law stemmed from the prevailing common conviction that Spain should not fall back into the instability of the Civil war, which was seen collective tragic memory of the past.³⁵ Avoiding it,

³² Desfor-Edles, L. “Symbol and Ritual in the New Spain”, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

³³ Magone J. M. “The Role of the EEC in the Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek Transitions.”, cit.p.227.

Pereira Castañares J. C., Moreno Juste A. “Il Movimento per l’Unità Europea e il processo di transizione e di consolidamento democratico in Spagna (1975–1986).”

³⁴ Ramon Arango. E. “Spain: Democracy Regained”, Routledge, New York, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494604>.

³⁵ Aguilar P. “Collective Memory of the Spanish Civil War: The Case of the Political Amnesty in the Spanish Transition to Democracy.” *Democratization* 4, 1997: p.88-107.

was necessary during the delicate process of the democratic transition.³⁶ In this context, the idea of “Europe” become a symbol and assumed a goal for the Spanish people, a quasi-mythical role to project Spain into the future. In a context marked by fear and uncertainty after the death of an authoritarian figure like Franco, the EEC was perceived as a bulwark of democracy, a guarantee to prevent a return to a turbulent past.³⁷ The democratic transition process in Spain, led mainly by the political élite³⁸ reflected a society still tied to traditional social structures and not fully aware of the need for radical change. The foresight of the new political class, more progressive and open to renewal, was decisive in guiding the country towards European integration, recognising the delay and the gap that Spain had to bridge with the main European member states.

A further element that testifies to the complexity of this transition is the fact that, for a long time, Franco's regime was not commonly defined as a dictatorship. This highlights a deep reluctance to acknowledge the Caudillo's negative role in Spanish history. It is emblematic that it was only in May 2018 that the term “dictator” was used for the first time in the entry dedicated to Franco in the *Diccionario Biográfico Español*.³⁹ This reticence is further confirmed by the composition of the first post-Francoist government, which largely included politicians from the ranks of the regime, albeit with more moderate or progressive positions.⁴⁰ This represents a clear difference from other former dictatorial countries. For example, Italy had its Constituent Assembly composed exclusively of political forces that had participated in the Resistance against the fascist regime.⁴¹ A similar process occurred in Germany, where years of denazification sanctioned a clear break with the Nazi past.⁴²

A symbolic image of this lack of rupture in Spain is represented by a photograph, preserved in the historical archives of the newspaper ABC, which shows a square packed with people who flocked to pay homage to the *Genèralissimo* on the day of his death. This episode highlights a marked divergence at the time from the European historical narrative, firmly rooted in the rejection of totalitarianism.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cavallaro M.E. “The Persistence of the Myth: Europeanism in Spain from the Late Francoism to the Outbreak of the 2008 Economic Crisis”. In Cavallaro M. E. e Kornetis K. *Rethinking Democratisation in Spain, Greece, and Portugal*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019:123-149 [Rethinking Democratisation in Spain, Greece and Portugal](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-68349-0_5)

³⁸ Encarnación O. M. “Democracy without justice in Spain: The politics of forgetting”, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2014. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjm9c>. In Cavallaro M.E. *The Persistence of the Myth: Europeanism in Spain from the Late Francoism to the Outbreak of the 2008 Economic Crisis*

³⁹ Morales, M. “El ‘Diccionario Biográfico Español’ se enmienda en la Red,” El País, May 3, 2018, https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/05/03/actualidad/1525342688_349008.html.

⁴⁰ Magone J. M. “The Role of the EEC in the Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek Transitions.”, *cit*, p.215-235

⁴¹ Although the Italian Social Movement, considered the heir of fascism, was included in the Italian political landscape, the institutional and political discontinuity with fascism in Italy was clear.

⁴² Fulbrook M., “History of Germany, 1918–2014: The Divided Nation” Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, 2014. [A History of Germany 1918 - 2014](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118445111)



The ABC, Archivo Web, 23 Novembre, 1975, [Buscador - Archivo ABC](#)⁴³

This divergence that emerged, represented a crucial challenge for the integration of Spain in the European Community, where the collective memory was oriented towards the condemnation of the dictatorial past.⁴⁴ The legacy of Franco regime, that was still present in Spanish society during the transition, made the path towards full adherence to European values a more complex process compared to the first enlargement member states. The real keystone of the Spanish democratic transition process was the so-called *Pacto de Olvido* a political and social agreement to avoid a direct confrontation with the Francoist past.⁴⁵ This pact constituted a kind of great collective omission of the controversial past, with the aim of turning the page and building a different future. The legislative concretisation of this agreement was the 1977 *Ley de Amnistía*, which granted immunity to those who had committed crimes during the Franco regime.⁴⁶ On one hand, this law did not mark a clean break with the regime, avoiding an explicit condemnation of the atrocities and human rights violations perpetrated under Franco.⁴⁷ On the other hand, however, it allowed the country to avoid further divisions, strengthening social cohesion and laying the foundations for peaceful coexistence. As mentioned above, Spain was trying hard to avert the risk of falling back into the chaos of a new civil war. Too often, in assessing the Spanish democratic transition process, we tend to overlook the crucial role of the memory of the civil war. This memory represented, in fact, a powerful motor towards

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴³ *The ABC*, Archivo Web, 23 Novembre, 1975, [Buscador - Archivo ABC](#)

⁴⁴ Aguilar P., *Collective Memory of the Spanish Civil War: The Case of the Political Amnesty in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, cit.

⁴⁵ Encarnación O. M., *Democracy without justice in Spain: The politics of forgetting*, cit.

⁴⁶ Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, *Ley 46/1977, de 15 de octubre, de Amnistía*. BOE núm. 248, 17 de octubre de 1977. Jefatura del Estado. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/1977/10/15/46/con>.

⁴⁷ Encarnación O. M., *Democracy without justice in Spain: The politics of forgetting*, cit.

democracy and, above all, towards European integration.

The first two articles of the law established an amnesty for all acts of a political nature, regardless of their legal or penal consequences, provided they were committed before 15 December 1976, the date of the referendum that approved the *Ley para la Reforma Política*. This law, in turn, was the first institutional step towards the adoption of a democratic system.⁴⁸ The legislative and political framework that emerges from the Spanish case shows how the Spanish transition was not only a process of democratisation, but also a delicate balancing act between the necessity to look into the future and the weight of a past that was still loomed over society.⁴⁹ Although the choice to forget, did, indeed, allow for a peaceful transition and to the European community accession, however it left numerous contradictions unresolved. This is because while on the one hand, it allowed the release of political prisoners and encouraged the reintegration of those who had participated in anti-regime activities. On the other, it offered a generalised amnesty that prevented the prosecution of crimes committed during the dictatorship, contributing to an “institutionalised oblivion” towards the victims of the Franco regime's violence. Paradoxically, although the law helped to give “immunity” to those responsible for Franco's crimes, the amnesty was strongly supported by many anti-Franco political forces. In particular, the PSOE and the entire opposition to Franco's regime demanded an *amnistía total*, with the aim of also annulling the legal effects of the previous Francoist legislation. Such a measure was fully in line with the logic analysed above, the desire to close with the past to ensure a peaceful and effective democratic transition.⁵⁰ However, the supporters of Francoism, including the *Alianza Popular*, the political heir of the regime, were firmly opposed to the amnesty, fearing that it might call into question the legitimacy of the authoritarian system that had just been overcome.⁵¹

The *Pacto de Silencio* did not address the issues of historical memory, the impunity of the regime and its atrocities, creating a rupture with the path taken until then by the major European powers.⁵² This fracture was never fully healed, forcing Spain, in the following years, to confront its past. This was demonstrated by the waves of protest and the process of historical re-enactment that,

⁴⁸ Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, Ley 52/2007, de 26 de diciembre, por la que se reconocen y amplían derechos y se establecen medidas en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura, BOE núm. 310, 27 de diciembre de 2007, Jefatura del Estado, [BOE-A-2007-22296 Ley 52/2007, de 26 de diciembre, por la que se reconocen y amplían derechos y se establecen medidas en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura.](#)

⁴⁹ Davis M. "Is Spain Recovering Its Memory? Breaking the 'Pacto del Olvido'." Human Rights Quarterly 27(3) 2005: p. 858-880 [Is Spain Recovering Its Memory? Breaking the "Pacto del Olvido" on JSTOR](#)

⁵⁰ Molinero, C. La Ley de Amnistía de 1977 : la reivindicación antifranquista y su lectura treinta años después" Molinaro C. *30 años de la Ley de Amnistía, 1977-2007*, in *Jornadas Interdisciplinarias de Estudio de Relaciones Laborales*, 2009 : p. 41-45.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Davis M. *Is Spain Recovering Its Memory? Breaking the 'Pacto del Olvido'*, cit. p. 858-880.

in 2007, led to the approval of the *Ley de Memoria Histórica*.⁵³ This law, that was adopted more than thirty years after the end of the regime, represented the biggest attempt by Spain to deal with its own history. However, while adopting the language of memorisation and reparation in line with emerging European memory laws, the process has not been without difficulties. Between 1990 and 2010, the European Union experienced a boom in memory policies, during which both member states and European institutions began to confront their past more openly. This context has also prompted Spain to embark on a path of historical revision.

The cover-up of civil war crimes and the *Pacto del Olvido* were perceived at the time by Spanish and European elites as a necessary solution to start the process of European integration. The unanimous support for integration from Spanish political elites further strengthened the *Pacto del Olvido*. The Pact was able to consolidate the democratic transition, and it marked a new beginning for Spain as a member of the European Community.⁵⁴ This link between democracy, amnesty and Europe was also emphasised by foreign political representatives.⁵⁵ The *Ley de Amnistía* and the *Pacto del Olvido* not only facilitated a peaceful transition, but also became instruments of legitimisation for democratic Spain in the eyes of European institutions. This intertwining of memory, justice and European politics profoundly influenced Spain's path towards integration.⁵⁶

4.3 Spain's accession to the EC: An opportunity to strengthen European identity and legitimacy.

The theme of Europe as a symbol of democracy and progress was recalled repeatedly during the Spanish accession, becoming an integral part of European identity. Enlargement to include former totalitarian countries certainly have represented and represents one of the fundamental pillars of this narrative. At that moment in history, two profoundly different realities contrasted, on the one hand, the founding countries, which had lived more than 30 years of democracy and experienced a period of economic boom and postwar growth under the EEC umbrella; on the other hand, three countries that, until the 1970s-1980s, had remained backward economically, isolated geopolitically, and lacking solid democratic foundations. The Spanish sociologist Víctor P. Díaz has described this dualism in Spain's democratic transition as a period that witnessed the emergence a new sense of

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Pereira Castañares J. C., Moreno Juste A. *Il Movimento per l'Unità Europea e il processo di transizione e di consolidamento democratico in Spagna cit*, p.337–362.

⁵⁵ As an example, Bruno Friedrich, a socialist member of the German Bundestag and during the Spanish Enlargement, Member of European Parliament. In one of his speeches, Friedrich pointed out that the amnesty had been an important step forward, increasing the possibilities of rapprochement between Spain and Europe.

⁵⁶ Cavallaro M.E. *The Persistence of the Myth: Europeanism in Spain from the Late Francoism to the Outbreak of the 2008 Economic Crisis, cit*, p.123-149.

belonging and what he calls a new Spanish identity.⁵⁷ Throughout this process, the idea of modernity became closely intertwined with the ideal of a democratic Spain and consequently to the idea of Europe.⁵⁸ During the transition, it emerged clearly how the concept of a Spain pursuing modernity and progress contrasted with Spain rooted in traditional values or the backwardness of its economy. More importantly, what became clear was the opposition between the new European Spain opposed the historically isolated Franco Spain.⁵⁹

The European Community Membership represented for these countries not only the closure of a dark chapter in their recent history, but an opportunity to embrace democracy, modernity, and progress. This desire for change found expression in the words of the leaders of the time. During Spain's accession ceremony into the European Community, the Spanish prime minister, Felipe González Marques, declared that for an “*overwhelming majority*” of Spanish citizens, “*Spain's entry into Europe was identified with its adherence to the ideals of freedom, progress and democracy*”⁶⁰ and that the Treaty of Accession to the EC, would have put to an end to “*the centuries-old isolation of Spain*”.⁶¹ At the time, Spain and Portugal were coming out from years of what the Spanish PM, described as secular isolation and backwardness.

The EEC was particularly attractive, a powerful symbol of political stability, economic growth, and social progress. For González Marques, entering the EEC represented not only the end of secular isolation but the conclusion of a path, marked by the struggle for freedom and democracy and the democratic factor was crucial to Spain's accession into the European Community. To confirm that, even Foreign Minister Marcelino Oreja repeatedly stressed that entry into the EC required the installation of a democratic system. FM Oreja has been a key figure during the democratic transition and head of the ministry during the Suarez government responsible for signing the accession treaties, Moreover, according to FM Oreja, Spain's entry into the EC was not only an economic matter, but also represented an adherence to Europe's founding values rooted in a common history.⁶² This enlargement helped to redefine the EC role not only as an economic project for Europe but as a promoter of democratic and inclusive values. The accession of Spain and Portugal highlighted

⁵⁷ Diaz V. “The Return of Civil Society: The Emergence of Democratic Spain”, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1993. [The Return of Civil Society — Harvard University Press.](#)

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE, “Speech by Felipe González Márquez, Madrid, 12 June 1985” [Speech by Felipe González Márquez \(Madrid, 12 June 1985\) - Historical events in the European integration process \(1945–2009\)](#)

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe,”Transcription of the interview with Marcelino Oreja Aguirre (Madrid, 24 March 2010), 04.06.2016. [Transcription of the interview with Marcelino Oreja Aguirre \(Madrid, 24 March 2010\) - CVCE Website](#)

Europe's ability to overcome historical divisions with the aim of building a solid and cohesive political community. The Enlargement to the Mediterranean countries has paved the way for an integration more closely linked to a dimension of European solidarity, based on shared values rather than purely economic interests. The mobilisation towards European ideals in this enlargement process is also evident when analysing the European Parliament resolution of the 9th of July 1982, adopted during the accession negotiations.⁶³ In this resolution, the European Parliament urged the Commission to speed up the pace of negotiations for Spain and Portugal⁶⁴, emphasising that this enlargement was a natural extension of the European ideal.⁶⁵ The appeal to the European ideals in order to strengthen the democratic process clearly reflected a desire to clearly counter the recent totalitarian past of Spain and Portugal. The integration of Spain, Portugal and Greece, in fact, was neither a simple nor automatic step, but nevertheless a process strongly desired by all European institutions. This was not only because of the obvious economic benefits, but also to provide the Community a deeper *raison d'être*. In the light of the totalitarian regimes collapse and the expressed desire for democracy in these states, the European Community, by virtue of its own past, could not exempt itself from responding positively to this demand. This enlargement represented a unique opportunity to reinforce its legitimacy. Strengthening its legitimacy through a historical narrative that justified policy choices was an essential aim that EC was pursuing. As discussed in the first part of this thesis and now observed empirically, the dynamics of this process were deeply rooted in an ideal vision. Indeed, 1945 marked for the founding states not only the end of the war, but also the rejection of dictatorships and the consolidation of a progress-oriented democratic system.

The Spanish and Portuguese integration represented a further step toward the reinforcement of these historic ideals, giving continuity to a European project that was gradually being endowed with a shared and well-defined identity. This element was also emphasized by the speech of the then Italian Foreign Minister, Giulio Andreotti, during the ceremony of Spain's accession into the European Community, held in Madrid: *"The European ideal takes on the symbolic value of a choice in favour of democracy and freedom."*⁶⁶ The Italian Foreign Minister appeal to the European ideal,

⁶³ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE, "European Parliament resolution on the European judicial area, 9 July 1982. https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2005/9/21/2a135bb3-681b-48fb-95c8-760196e43aac/publishable_en.pdf.

⁶⁴ Despite this statement, Parliament called on the Commission to proceed with caution, making concrete proposals so that enlargement would not weaken the Community, but rather provide an opportunity to deepen common policies and strengthen decision-making.

⁶⁵ Ibidem. The resolution stated: "The European Parliament is convinced that the enlargement of the EEC to include Spain and Portugal is a logical extension of the European ideal and will contribute to strengthening democracy in the applicant countries.

⁶⁶ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE, "Address by Giulio Andreotti (12 June 1985)" [Address by Giulio Andreotti \(12 June 1985\) - Historical events in the European integration process \(1945–2009\)](#)

embodied by the enlargement to include the Mediterranean Countries, emphasised how this process contributed to the strengthening of democracy and freedom within the European project, consolidating the EC as a political and moral entity. This perspective is further highlighted by the words of *Rey Juan Carlos's* speech⁶⁷:

“Spain is proud to receive the most illustrious dignitaries of the European Communities and the nations which integrate them. You represent what the Spanish people understand by Europe: the principles of liberty, equality, pluralism, and justice, which also preside over the Spanish Constitution.”⁶⁸

These speeches show how the integration of Spain, Portugal and Greece, not only helped consolidate the political legitimacy of the European Community but strengthened its identity as a promoter of democratic values and protection of fundamental freedom and rights. The Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, wrote on January 2nd, 1986, on the day of Spain's official accession into the EC, that the integration of Spain will allow the country to “*finally end [its] interior isolation and [to] participate fully in the construction of the modern world*”.⁶⁹ The accession of Spain and Portugal was strongly desired and supported by both the European institutions and the major leaders of the member states. Both the Parliament and the European Commission were pushing hard for the entry of these countries.⁷⁰ Statements by the President of the European Commission, the French President, and the Italian Prime Minister stressed the importance of Spain's accession into the European Community, motivating it with a strong appeal to a common historical and cultural identity. Spain was thus being recognized by European leaders, not only as an economic asset but as an integral part of Europe's historical heritage. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing called Spain one of the “founders” of Europe, and because of its history and civilization defined it as a part of it.⁷¹ At the time, integrating Spain was seen from d'Estaing as a crucial step towards “*the political unification of Europe*.”⁷² Even Bettino Craxi, on the ceremonial day of Spain's official accession into the European Community, addressing to the King, stated that Italy have always considered Spain, “*an essential part of Europe, not only because of its geographical location but because the Spanish history, culture, and art*.”⁷³ The president of the

⁶⁷ The speech was during the inaugural ceremony of Spain accession. 12 June 1985

⁶⁸ *El Pais*, Archivo Web, 13th June 1985, [Noticias del día 12 de junio de 1985 | EL PAÍS](#). In Jáuregui P., *Spain's 'Special Solidarity' with the East: The Influence of Collective Memory on Spanish Attitudes to EU-Enlargement*, cit.

⁶⁹ *El Pais*, Archivo Web, 2nd, January 1986. [Noticias del día 02 de enero de 1986 | EL PAÍS](#). In Jáuregui P., *Spain's 'Special Solidarity' with the East: The Influence of Collective Memory on Spanish Attitudes to EU-Enlargement*, cit.

⁷⁰ The European Commission as early as November 29, 1978, on the accession of Spain despite emphasizing to the anticipated difficulties, concluded its analysis with a favourable judgment.

⁷¹ ABC, Archivo Web, 28 Novembre 1975, [Buscador - Archivo ABC](#), Translated by Jáuregui, P. *National Pride and the Meanings of 'Europe': A Comparative Study of Britain and Spain*, cit., p.223.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Senato della Repubblica Italiana, Patrimonio dell'archivio, “Discorso 6, Cerimonia per la firma del trattato di adesione della Spagna alla Comunità europea (12 giugno 1985). [Patrimonio dell'Archivio storico Senato della Repubblica](#)

European Commission himself, Jacques Delors, in one of his speeches, emphasized how the European Union needed Spain and its integration to pursue the goal of peace, guaranteed by the European project officially born in Rome. He pointed out that despite their differences, the destiny of European nations was common and closely intertwined:

"Spain is, therefore, now going to be one of us. May I say to you quite simply: we needed you. The building of Europe, and the hopes of Europe, would have remained partial and incomplete without your membership and your participation. [...] You are not just joining an economic club. "⁷⁴

Spain's European Community accession not only represented adherence to a political or economic project, but embodied confirmation of a broader idea of Europe. This accession symbolised a willingness to take up the legacy of a common past and use it to build a shared future. It is true that, on the one hand, Spain's entry could have destabilized the European balance in the long run, precisely because of the way the past had been handled and interpreted during the post-Franco transition. However, at that moment, its integration strengthened the European project, giving the Union an identity mission. European identity thus emerged consolidated and well-defined.

However, the most significant resistance occurred only at an early stage, especially from the French delegation. During the discussions on the British budget contribution François Mitterrand adopted a particularly rigid approach during the negotiations, helping to generate uncertainty about the accession path of Spain and Portugal. This position was confirmed in a recent interview by the then Minister for European Affairs, Catherine Lumière.⁷⁵ The minister stressed that resistance stemmed from the need to protect national economic interests, pressure from trade unions and the agricultural sector, and the fear that the Union might become less politically cohesive.⁷⁶ The main concerns focused on the agricultural sector. As pointed out in the Commission's opinion of November 29, 1978, the annexation of Spain and Portugal would add a significant contribution to European agricultural production, amounting to 30 percent of the total.⁷⁷ Despite these difficulties, the integration of Spain and Portugal represented a crucial moment in the history of the European Union.

⁷⁴ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE, "Address by Jacques Delors (12 June 1985)", 20.02.2014. [Address by Jacques Delors \(12 June 1985\) - Historical events in the European integration process \(1945–2009\)](#). The end of Delors' speech is a call to peace and prosperity, fundamental roots of the European project: "Our coming together will be a source of peace and will point the way towards prosperity"

⁷⁵ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE, "Interview with Catherine Lalumière: reservations in French society towards the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Communities (Paris, 17 May 2006)" [Interview with Catherine Lalumière: reservations in French society towards the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Communities \(Paris, 17 May 2006\) - CVCE Website](#)

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE. "Commission Opinion on Spain's application for membership (29 November 1978)" [Commission Opinion on Spain's application for membership \(29 November 1978\)](#)

This enlargement helped strengthen the European project, defining it not only as a democratic space but also as a political entity capable of overcoming historical divisions and promoting a common vision for the future.



CVCE, Juan Carlos I during the formal signing of Spain's Treaty of Accession to the European Communities, Madrid, 12.06.1985 ⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, CVCE, "Juan Carlos I during the formal signing of Spain's Treaty of Accession to the European Communities (Madrid, 12 June 1985)" [Juan Carlos I during the formal signing of Spain's Treaty of Accession to the European Communities \(Madrid, 12 June 1985\) - Historical events in the European integration process \(1945–2009\)](#)

The Eastern Enlargement

CHAPTER V

5. Negotiating the Eastern Enlargement: The German and Spanish “special” responsibility and sensibility

5.1 Introduction

Before examining the differences and conflicts in the historical memory related to the EU’s eastern enlargement, it is crucial to assess how the past has influenced and shaped the positions of European leaders, institutions, and member states on the expansion. This first chapter of the section on Eastern Enlargement aims to provide an overview of the role of memory in the negotiation debate. In particular, it analyses how it influenced the support of some member states and how the EU used this opportunity to strengthen its legitimacy. Indeed, the EU has tied its identity to the values of democracy, freedom, and human rights. The chapter examines the advocacy approach of two member states, in this case Germany and Spain.

Through the analysis of the respective leaders' speeches and parliamentary debates, an attempt is made to reconstruct the motivations for these positions. Attempts will be made to highlight the sense of moral debt and the strong perceived responsibility of European states. These feelings stem from a collective sense of guilt related to the choices made during the Second World War. The Munich Treaty as well as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Yalta Conference, referred to as the black trinity, sealed the fate of many countries, which felt betrayed and abandoned by the West. In this context, Europe perceived the need to compensate for these historical mistakes and to “make up for history”. Enlargement, as we shall see, was therefore interpreted as a form of historical compensation, based on the admission of the West's responsibility.

5.2 The Enlargement as a chance to amend and compensate history.

5.2.1 The black trinity as a source of division and western guilt

The memory of the past has left deep scars in Eastern countries, often marked by historical claims and a sense of injustice after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Ainius Lasas refers to the so-called “Black

trinity” composed by the Munich Agreement of 1938, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Yalta Conference, which deeply affected the history of these states, imposing territorial and political decisions without their direct involvement, condemning them to a 50-year subordination.⁷⁹ These episodes created in them a sentiment of betrayal and injustice toward the West, which was perceived as responsible for having left them behind the Iron Curtain for almost half a century. Polish President Lech Wałęsa, speaking on the slow pace of enlargement negotiations, underlined that “*the West betrayed us during the war, imposing Yalta on us*”⁸⁰, highlighting, again, the feeling of betrayal felt by Eastern countries. This sense of historical responsibility was reflected in the speeches of Western leaders at the time, who recognized the need to compensate for the unjust decisions of the past through enlargement. During his visits to Hungary, Czech Republic, and Poland, French President Jacques Chirac openly acknowledged the historical responsibility of France and the West for the Munich Agreement, describing that episode as an act of which Europe cannot be proud.⁸¹ Chirac called it a true Western betrayal that imposed a moral obligation on Europe to repair the mistakes of the past. In one of his speeches, he affirmed that “*One entire generation, my generation, will consider this shameful failure of democracy its biggest mistake. [...] The Munich Pact was understood as a betrayal by Europe.*”⁸² Moral responsibility stemmed from historical mistakes that had created a sense of collective guilt among Western states. Enlargement of the European Union was, therefore, a historic opportunity to transcend episodes such as the Munich Agreement, to “*amending history*” and to compensate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This sentiment is expressed in strong tones in the parliamentary debate on “Agenda 2000 and Enlargement” by the Spanish rapporteur, Bàron Crespo, who stated that “*Central and Eastern Europe were abandoned.*”⁸³

“The first is that as citizens of the European Union we now have the historic opportunity to transcend Munich, to reverse the events of 1939 when the people of central and eastern Europe were abandoned. [...] I think it is a question of amending history, and we should welcome the opportunity to do so.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Lasas A. "Restituting Victims: EU and NATO Enlargements through the Lenses of Collective Guilt." *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15(1) 2008: p.98-116 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760701702249>.

⁸⁰ Polish News Bulletin “I am Looking for a Place for Myself: Interview with President Lech Walesa” 8 April. In Lasas A. *Restituting Victims: EU and NATO Enlargements through the Lenses of Collective Guilt*, cit, p.98-116.

⁸¹ Lasas A. *Restituting Victims: EU and NATO Enlargements through the Lenses of Collective Guilt*, cit, p.98-116.

⁸² Associated Press Worldstream “President Chirac Supports Czech Bid to Join NATO, EU” 3 April 1997. In Lasas A. *Restituting Victims: EU and NATO Enlargements through the Lenses of Collective Guilt*, cit, p.98-116

⁸³ European Parliament, “Speech by Bàron Crespo” *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*. Debate on "Enlargement and Agenda 2000.", Plenary Session on Wednesday, 3 December 1997, Brussels. [Verbatim report of proceedings - 5. Enlargement – Agenda 2000 - Wednesday, 3 December 1997](#)

⁸⁴ Ibid.

The president of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, described enlargement as a form of repayment of an “*historical debt*” to those states that had been “*less fortunate*” since Yalta. He also presented it as a moral and historical act of great significance. “*I consider we have a debt toward them from a historical point of view. Not in terms of negotiating the body of Community law, but in terms of history.*”⁸⁵ According to O'Brennan, the attitude of the European Commission was driven by a long-term vision based on the security and stability of Europe, oriented toward peace, rather than based on short-run economic calculations.⁸⁶ Indeed, while enlargement has generated considerable benefits, it has also created significant costs for the member states, with a marked difference between beneficiaries and contributors.⁸⁷

5.2.2 The German “special” responsibility towards the Central-East countries

In some cases, the weight of the past has been a driving force in advocacy toward enlargement. The support of Germany, as well as that of Spain during the fifth enlargement are an explanatory example of that. Such a support can be explained not only through economic and geopolitical considerations, but also through the recognition of an historical and moral debt towards the CEECs. However, is clear, from an economic point of view, as Sjursen points out, enlargement represented an extraordinary opportunity for a country as Germany. Expanding to countries such as Poland has opened up a market of about 100 million consumers, creating favourable conditions for investment in an area characterized by cheap skilled labour.⁸⁸ It is estimated that about one-third of the economic benefits from enlargement fell precisely on Germany. In this regard, the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, stated that the Easter “*Enlargement will bring tremendous benefits for German companies and for employment. Germany must therefore continue its advocacy for a rapid eastern enlargement*”.⁸⁹ In addition to the economic aspects, the integration of neighbouring countries has helped to strengthen regional stability by expanding Germany's security “belt.”⁹⁰ Geopolitically,

⁸⁵ Delors J., “An Ambitious Vision for the Enlarged Union” Speech delivered to the Notre Europe Conference, Brussels, 21 January 2002. In O'Brennan J. “The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union” Routledge, London. 2006.: p. 96-101 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203008706>.

⁸⁶ O'Brennan J. *The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union*, cit. A concept that is also addressed by Spohn W. Klaus E *Collective Memory and European Identity*, cit.

⁸⁷ Baldwin, R.E., Francois J., and Portes R. “The Costs and Benefits of Eastern Enlargement: The Impact on the EU and Central Europe” *Economic Policy*, 24, 1997: p.127-177 [The Costs and Benefits of Eastern Enlargement: The Impact on the EU and Central Europe](#)

⁸⁸ Sjursen, H. “Why expand? The question of justification in the EU’s enlargement policy” *Arena Working Papers* 1(6), 2001. http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/wp01_6.htm. In Mestres L. “The Franco-German Motor Before the Eastern Enlargement: The Causes of Its Decline” *Observatori de Política Exterior Europea: Working Paper* 33. 2022: p.1-14 [Microsoft Word - wp332002.doc](#)

⁸⁹ Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe, “Speech by Joschka Fischer at the Humboldt University: from Confederacy to Federation – Thoughts on the Finality of European Integration (Berlin, 12 May 2000)” https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2005/1/14/4cd02fa7-d9d0-4cd2-91c9-2746a3297773/publishable_en.pdf.

⁹⁰ Mestres L., *The Franco-German Motor Before the Eastern Enlargement: The Causes of Its Decline*, cit. p.1-14

enlargement has transformed Germany's role within the European Union, moving it from a peripheral position in Western Europe to a geographic and strategic centre of the Union.⁹¹ This positioning has given Germany an advantage, not only in political influence but also as a pillar of European stability.⁹² But besides these geopolitical-economic motives, which no doubt played a significant role, we will make another mistake instead by ignoring the historical and moral weight of collective memory in this process. The feeling “being in debt” has been especially powerful in Germany, which was very supportive of eastward enlargement. First and foremost, Germany's proximity to Eastern European countries emanates from the shared past marked by Cold War-related divisions and injustices. Being a country that felt the scars of division directly, it could not have turned its back on countries that, like itself, suffered under the consequences of walls and iron curtains. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, referring to the Bundestag on outcomes of the European Summit held in Brussels, emphasized this common historical connection as a basis for the enlargement, highlighting Germany's sensitivity to these countries.

“The enlargement of the Union to 25 states represents the unification of a Europe that, like our country, has been separated for more than five decades by the Iron Curtain. [...] However, for things not to disintegrate, it is imperative that all actors in the European Union recognize the need for this European enlargement to require an appropriate historical response.”⁹³

Fischer himself, speaking at the University of Berlin, focusing on the ultimate purpose of Europe, stressed the historical and moral weight of the European unification project. Also recalling Robert Schuman's words from 1963, he stressed that Europe “owes” something morally to the Eastern European countries because of the historical divisions inflicted by the black trinity.⁹⁴ Fischer concluded his speech by emphasizing the sense of moral responsibility by Germany and the European Union, stressing that it is their duty to pave the way for a united Europe:

“Robert Schuman saw this quite clearly back in 1963: ‘We must build the united Europe not only in the interest of the free nations, but also in order to be able to admit the peoples of Eastern Europe into this community if, freed from the constraints under which they live, they want to join and seek our moral support. [...] We owe them the example of a unified, fraternal Europe.’⁹⁵

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe. “Address given by Joschka Fischer on the European constitutional process in the Bundestag. (Berlin, 24 February 2005)”. Translated. Original version in [Address given by Joschka Fischer on the European constitutional process \(Berlin, 24 February 2005\) - CVCE Website](#).

⁹⁴ Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe, *Speech by Joschka Fischer at the Humboldt University: from Confederacy to Federation – Thoughts on the Finality of European Integration (Berlin, 12 May 2000)*, cit.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

In this speech, the awareness of the historical and moral bond that unites Germany with the Eastern European countries and the conviction that enlargement is not only a political and strategic necessity, but also an imperative and a historical and ethical duty, emerges clearly. In this regard, even then Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt described enlargement as an “*Act of fairness.*”⁹⁶ A fairness that for far too long had been denied.⁹⁷ Germany's historical responsibility to the Eastern European countries, particularly its role during World War II and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, has been a key element in the German position in favour of EU enlargement. In this regard, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, in 1991⁹⁸, after the ceremony recognizing the Baltic states following the collapse of the Soviet Union, stated that “*Germany is aware of its historical responsibility toward the Baltic States. Hitler’s Germany, through the Hitler–Stalin pact, contributed to the destruction of the Baltic States, in violation of international law.*”⁹⁹

It should also not be forgotten that German reunification and the fall of the Berlin Wall were made possible by revolutions in Eastern European countries. The collapse of the Iron Curtain was, in fact, the result of the revolutions of 1989, which led to the overthrow of communist regimes and the advent of reforms in those countries inspired precisely by Western values. These movements for change promoted democracy, economic freedom and the protection of human rights, acting in the name of those ideals, considered European, for which the EC stood. It is a vision which was underlined as well during the debate on enlargement and Agenda 2000 in the European Parliament by the then German EPP MEP Hans-Gert Pöttering, who later became president of the European Parliament. The citizens of Central and Eastern Europe, recalled Pöttering, paved the way for historical change in the continent.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Verhofstadt G., “The Enlargement of the European Union: A Unique Opportunity to Restore the Unity of Europe” Speech to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 13 March 2001. Quoted in O'Brennan J. *The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union*, cit., p.73.

⁹⁷ Here the speech by Verhofstadt G: “For me, enlarging Europe is a question of fairness. Peoples and nations in this part of Europe have suffered most of the greatest enemies of European progress in the twentieth century, Nazism and Communism.”

⁹⁸ His successor, Klaus Kinkel, also confirmed this commitment: “The time between 1940 and 1991 was a nightmare for the Latvian nation and the Baltic area. Out of its responsibility that comes from the past, today’s Germany vouches for the future of the three Baltic States. Financial Times “Promises of Support, but Tempered by Self-Interest: the German Neighbour”, 11 June 1999. In. Lasas A. *Restituting Victims: EU and NATO Enlargements through the Lenses of Collective Guilt*, cit., p.98-116.

⁹⁹ Washington Post “EC Nations Recognize Independence of Baltic Republics; Ministers Make Arrangements for New Soviet Aid Package”, 27 August. 1991. ". In Lasas A. *Restituting Victims: EU and NATO Enlargements through the Lenses of Collective Guilt*, cit., p.98-116. Genscher also reiterated that the German government would support their entry into the European Community: “If they wish so, the German government will plead for their association with the EC.

¹⁰⁰ European Parliament, “Speech by Hans-Gert Pöttering” *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*. Debate on "Enlargement and Agenda 2000.", Plenary Session on Wednesday, 3 December 1997, Brussels. [Verbatim report of proceedings - 5. Enlargement – Agenda 2000 - Wednesday, 3 December 1997](#)

“The people of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania would like to belong to the European Union because they share our convictions and ideals for Europe in the 21st Century. [...] Let us not forget that in 1989-90 it was the people of the states of central and eastern Europe who by their desire for freedom, their struggle for democracy, their desire for a market economy made possible the change in our continent, and we must not disappoint these people, who engendered the peaceful revolution in Europe, by the decision which we take now.”¹⁰¹

These statements are the proof that the European Union enlargement represented an act of recognition and support for those countries that, through their efforts and sacrifices, had helped to realize the dream of a free and united Europe, from which Germany benefited.¹⁰² Therefore the European Community had a moral obligation not to disappoint those who had fought exhaustingly to realize the ideal of a united Europe. The historical contribution of CEECs, which battled for freedom and democracy, was decisive and undoubtedly provided the European project with significant momentum. This factor was an incentive for Germany, but also for other Western countries, to promote the integration into the European Union. This sense of gratitude and profound respect extends, for example, to countries such as Poland, due to the role of Solidarnosc.¹⁰³ The example of Germany is particularly emblematic, but this historical responsibility and moral duty also regards other member states and European institutions.

5.2.3 The Spanish “special” sensibility towards enlargement

Similarly to Germany, Spain is also a clear example of how historical motivations helped make the enlargement of the European Union possible. Only two decades earlier, as analysed in the previous chapter, Spain had experienced a situation similar to that of the eastern states, characterized by a past marked by international isolation and dictatorship. In that context, the European Community represented a path to democratic consolidation for Spain after half a century of authoritarian rule. If the European Union, then the European Community, had played a crucial role in supporting Spain's democratic transition, how could the latter, now a full member, have shied away from supporting a similar process vis-à-vis Eastern European country? This perspective was present during the parliamentary debate on EU enlargement in the Spanish Parliament in Madrid. Luis de Grandes, a member of the Popular Party led by José María Aznar, referred to the common historical legacy and memory of isolation as a reason for supporting the Eastern countries accession: “*We still have fresh in our memory the feeling of isolation of those years in which Spain attempted to recover its*

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Mestres L. “The Franco-German Motor Before the Eastern Enlargement: The Causes of Its Decline”, *cit.*, p.1-14

place in Europe and to participate with the rest of the countries of the free Europe in the project of progress, peace, and social justice."¹⁰⁴ A political view confirmed by Aznar, during the debate in which he outlined the results of the 1997 Luxembourg European Council, where it clearly emphasized the Spanish government's special sensitivity towards the CEECs.¹⁰⁵ These statements reveal how Spain, recognizing the support it had received in the past for its democratization, adopted a consistent and sympathetic stance toward the Eastern European states. Spain interpreted enlargement with a moral duty coming from a common history of transformation and integration. However, this vision was not limited to Aznar's party but involved all Spanish parliamentary forces. Joaquín Almunia, leader of the opposition to Aznar, emphasized the European Union's duty to welcome the CEECs. *"The European Union now had a duty to open their doors 'to welcome those countries which aspire, just as we aspired in the past [...] to fully integrate themselves and to cooperate in the common project."*¹⁰⁶ It is no coincidence, then, that the European Parliament's rapporteur for Agenda 2000 and Enlargement, Enrique Barón Crespo, was Spanish. His words, quoted above, recalled the West's abandonment of the eastern countries and the historical responsibilities related to the events in Munich. However, several other Spanish parliamentarians intervened on the issue. Among them, Colom i Naval expressed particular support for the Central and Eastern Europe countries, recalling again on their common past of isolation and dictatorship. According to MEP Colón Naval, the Spanish people can well understand the aspirations of the citizens of CEECs, as they too endure a *"fascist dictatorship, were not liberated by the Allies, and had no Marshall Plan at all"*.¹⁰⁷ The Western powers recognized this moral responsibility, understanding the importance of repairing the deep divisions caused by the Cold War. Also, in Hans-Gert Pöttering's speech quoted earlier, it becomes clear how the enlargement process has helped to confirm and strengthen the European identity, founded on the principles of freedom, democracy and the fight against totalitarianism. In this context, reference to the founding myths of the European Union and its founding fathers, who built a "common home," became central to the narrative. The political class of the time was urged to seize this historic opportunity, to demonstrate the courage needed to lead Europe toward an even deeper unity inspired

¹⁰⁴ Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados, VI Legislatura, 1997. [VI Legislatura - Congreso de los Diputados](#). In Jáuregui P., *Spain's 'Special Solidarity' with the East: The Influence of Collective Memory on Spanish Attitudes to EU-Enlargement*, cit.

¹⁰⁵ Aznar, indeed, stated that the CEECs "truly anchor themselves in the Europe of liberties, to which they have every right to belong by virtue of their values, culture, and history." In Jáuregui P., *Spain's 'Special Solidarity' with the East: The Influence of Collective Memory on Spanish Attitudes to EU-Enlargement*, cit.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ European Parliament, "Speech by Colom i Naval" *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*. Debate on "Enlargement and Agenda 2000.", Plenary Session on Wednesday, 3 December 1997, Brussels. [Verbatim report of proceedings - 5. Enlargement – Agenda 2000 - Wednesday, 3 December 1997](#)

by its founding principles. Pöttering expresses this vision with a direct reference to Europe's founding fathers, in the debate on the Enlargement and Agenda 2000:

“A generation of politicians in the fifties: “Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Alcide De Gasperi, Paul-Henri Spaak and others” had the courage and the vision to establish a European Community that would overcome a thousand years of antagonism between Germany and France and begin the unification of Europe in the West. [...] We, the present political generation, have the opportunity, for the first time in a thousand years, to bring the continent together by peaceful means and on a voluntary basis into a European Union, a union of freedom, peace and prosperity.”¹⁰⁸

In this discourse, the enlargement process is presented as an act of reconciliation and responsibility. Reconciliation aimed at unity and peace, the same principle that gave birth to the European project.¹⁰⁹ The responsibility to complete what the founding fathers had started is a direct call to build a Europe capable of realising the values that inspired its foundation. This responsibility also extended to the opportunity to strengthen the continent as a bastion of democracy, spreading Western values and models on a pan-European scale. The eastward enlargement represented another opportunity to increase the legitimacy of the mission and to consolidate the European Union's *raison d'être*. A process that as this thesis highlighted in the previous chapter intensified after the Mediterranean enlargement, where the association between Europe and democracy acted as a magnet, an attractive force for entry, strengthening and legitimising the European Union. This enlargement was more than a reaction to the historical circumstances, but also the expression of a desire for completion of an integrating process that began in 1951, fulfilled with this ideal of unity which had seemed unreachable just a few years before.

The EU's strong commitment to support the transformation process of the CEECs was already evident in the aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Already during the European Council in Strasbourg in December 1989, the EU and its member states publicly declared their full support, recognising their common responsibility in that crucial phase of European history.¹¹⁰ On that occasion, it was emphasised that the European Community was the main point of reference for the countries of the region. Member states pledged to develop closer and more substantial relations in every area, reaffirming the importance of building lasting ties. This commitment not only charted the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. And in De Angelis M. “the EU’s historical narrative and enlargement to Eastern Europe”, *The Review of International Affairs*, 62(1145), 2012. [Project1 Layout 1](#)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ European Council. “Conclusions of the Presidency, 8-9 December SN 441/2/89.”, Strasbourg 1989. [1989_december - strasbourg_eng_.pdf](#)

course towards political and economic integration, but also reinforced the European identity as a symbol of peace, stability and democratic progress for the entire continent.



Eine Brücke in die Zukunft

CVCE, Cartoon by Sakurai on the enlargement of the EU, 1 May 2004 ¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe Cartoon by Sakurai on the enlargement of the EU, 1 May 2004. [Cartoon by Sakurai on the enlargement of the EU \(1 May 2004\) - CVCE Website](#)

CHAPTER VI

6. East vs. West: The memory clash of the fifth and sixth Enlargement

6.1 Introduction

This second chapter analyse the consequences of the Eastern Enlargement on the EU historical narrative. The Eastern enlargement is the most significant EU expansion considering its impact on the European historical narrative. The sixth chapter is divided into two main sections. The first chapter section emphasizes the role of the Holocaust in Europe's collective memory and the process of Europeanization of the tragedy, which made the Holocaust, and the crimes perpetrated by Nazi-Fascism central to the politics of European memory, building a solid foundation for Western European identity. The trauma of the Holocaust and the Auschwitz paradigm have been progressively integrated into the popular culture and identity through their identification as the “absolute evil”. On this conception, the European Union has built part of its identity, and the Holocaust has been used as a warning, and both as a reference to respond to the re-emergence of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia, and it has been employed as an element of interpretation and mobilization in contemporary tragedies. However, the first section does not limit itself to this general analysis but deepens the topic through the study of parliamentary debates and speeches by political leaders. In particular, the first test case after enlargement in 2004 is examined, namely the 60th anniversary of the end of the war on May 8, 2005. Both the celebration held in Moscow and the debates in Parliament on the related resolution are analysed. The thesis shows how this event was not only a symbolic occasion, but also revealed a real conflict over the interpretation of the war and its consequences. This divergence challenged the centrality and universality of Holocaust remembrance, with CEECs. representatives emphasizing the suffering under Stalinist and communist totalitarian regimes.

In this regard, the second section precisely explores this aspect of dualism, questioning the interpretation of the role of communism in Europe. The tendency to equate communism and Nazism, as we shall see, constitutes a conflict that is still unresolved today, leading us to ask whether the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a missed opportunity for reconciliation. The reluctance of left or centre-left parties with a socialist-communist past and legacy, rooted in resistance to fasci-Nazism, clashes with the aspirations of condemnation coming from these

countries¹¹², which see communism as a totalitarian regime equal to the National Socialist regime. Often, this narrative is intertwined with the rhetoric of European far-right neo-nationalisms and the CEECs. themselves, which exploit such views to legitimize and reinterpret the history of World War II. This, as we will see in the next chapter led to a reinterpretation of the involvement and complicity of countries such as Hungary and Poland in the Holocaust and in the WWII conflict itself. In this part, special emphasis will be given to the parliamentary debate on the European Parliament Resolution on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (2019). Finally, the chapter closes with an analysis of the very recent EP Resolution on Russian historical forgery of 23 January 2025. Once again, this west-east dividing line does not seem to have been healed.

6.2 Challenging the centrality of the Holocaust and Nazi-Fascist crimes.

6.2.1 The Holocaust centrality in the European narrative, the Europeanisation of the Nazi-Fascist crimes

Chapter two of the first part delved into the genesis of European memory, a collective memory rooted in the rejection of pre-1945 events, the need for reconciliation between Germany and France, the Holocaust and in the solidarity among the founding countries of the Union. For the first phase of European enlargement, many scholars agree that the “entry ticket” of the Community, as Jundt defines it, was the Holocaust and the memory of the war.¹¹³

Since World War II, European political integration has been based on the assumption of a common cultural heritage and the memory of the Holocaust.¹¹⁴ This element profoundly united the six founding countries of the Union, countries that had directly suffered the devastating impact of the war, with territories marked by battles, deportations, roundups, and mass slaughter. Emblematic locations such as Putten, Oradour-sur-Glane and Sant'Anna di Stazzema, along with many others, represent symbolic sites of the Nazi murderous madness that could not be forgotten.¹¹⁵ These traumas helped to establish a common identity based on the tragedies of World War II. The “Auschwitz paradigm” became the reference point for defining a new European identity, based on the rejection of totalitarianism.¹¹⁶ In this context, the Holocaust has been elevated to a unique and universal event, representative of the failure of Western civilization and, at the same time, a warning to prevent future

¹¹² Condemnation came from both side of political spectrum in these countries.

¹¹³ Judt, *T. Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, cit.

¹¹⁴ Laarse R. “Archaeology of memory: Europe's Holocaust dissonances in East and West”, EAC occasional paper. 2013. [121952_Laarse_ArchaeologyMemory_EAC2013_def.pdf](#)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

genocide, racially or ethnically based discrimination. The centrality that has been attributed by the political elite to the Holocaust in the process of European integration is evident not only in foundational documents, such as the Schuman Declaration and the preamble to the Treaties of Rome, but also in the process of institutionalizing these memories that has followed in the subsequent years. The European Parliament, in particular, played an active role in promoting this memory. In support of this between 1989 and 2014, the European Parliament issued a total of twelve documents, including nine resolutions and three declarations, which can be considered fundamental to the Europeanization of Holocaust remembrance.¹¹⁷

In the period prior to the accession of the Central-East European countries to the Union, in connection with the process of Europeanizing the memory of the Holocaust as an element of European identity, it is important to mention several resolutions that represent the pillars of European memory policy after the fall of the Wall. These include: the “*Resolution on European and international protection for Nazi concentration camps as historical monuments*” (1993)¹¹⁸, the “*Resolution on the return of the plundered property to Jewish communities*” (1995)¹¹⁹, la “*Resolution on Auschwitz*” (1996)¹²⁰, and finally the “*Declaration on the remembrance of the Holocaust*” (2000)¹²¹

This interest in the Holocaust finds a logical explanation in the desire to legitimize the European Union and strengthen the sense of belonging of its citizens, who are often disillusioned with the political life of the Union, as evidenced by low turnout rates in European elections. This context has prompted policymakers to leverage a tragedy that has deeply affected all Western Europe by developing a strategy to consolidate identification with the EU. After the failure of numerous, often ineffective programs aimed at building a shared European identity, the process of Europeanization of memory, initiated intensively after the fall of the Berlin Wall, represented a unique and significant attempt to promote greater identification with the European Union. As Friedlander also points out, the Holocaust has been progressively integrated into popular culture and identity through its identification as the “absolute evil” in the construction of 20th century liberal and

¹¹⁷ The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe Marek Kucia Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland

¹¹⁸ European Parliament, “Resolution on European and international protection for Nazi concentration camps as historical monuments” *OJ C* 72, 15.3.1993, p. 118, [EUR-Lex - 51993IP0208 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

¹¹⁹ European Parliament, “Resolution on the return of plundered property to Jewish communities” *Official Journal C* 017, 22/01/1996 P. 0199, [EUR-Lex - 51995IP1493 - EN](#)

¹²⁰ European Parliament, “Resolution on Auschwitz” *Official Journal C* 141, 13/05/1996 P. 0209. [EUR-Lex - 51996IP0501 - EN](#)

¹²¹ European Parliament, “Remembrance of the Holocaust (Rule 51) 3/2000 European Parliament declaration on the remembrance of the Holocaust” [Inhaltsverzeichnis](#)

democratic society.¹²² The literature identifies several key moments in this process. Prominent among these are the aftermath of the Eichmann trial held in Israel in 1961-62, which brought the Holocaust to the centre of global attention, and the broadcast in Germany of the Holocaust television series in 1978-79, which had a profound impact on German and European public opinion.¹²³

The culmination of this path of Europeanization and universalization of the Holocaust, elevating it to a pivot of collective memory and European identity, was represented by the Stockholm International Holocaust Forum and its outcome, the Stockholm Declaration.¹²⁴ This event not only reinforced the paradigm of Auschwitz as a symbol of Holocaust memory, but also brought out how Hitler's National Socialism, irreversibly changed the European perceptions of human rights, democratic pluralism and fundamental freedoms. In the wake of this forum, which was a milestone in the formation of European identity, the European Union took a firm stance toward situations that threatened its founding values, especially in relation to respect for human rights and democracy. An emblematic example of this firmness can be seen in the measures taken by the European Union in 2000 in relation to the political situation in Austria, where a coalition government backed by the extreme right-wing Austrian Freedom Party, FPÖ, a party “winking” at neo-Nazis movements. The Union, aware of the sensitivity offered by the Stockholm Forum, reacted decisively by imposing diplomatic sanctions against Austria, isolating it politically.¹²⁵ In light of this precedent, it is interesting to analyse how, 25 years later, the European Union will behave in the face of the results of the recent elections in Austria, which sanctioned a further rise of the FPÖ, with very high percentages.¹²⁶ A further aspect to consider is the role of the Holocaust as an “entry ticket” for European integration, especially with reference to the enlargement of the Eastern countries, such as Poland and Romania. The Romanian case was quite emblematic, since during negotiations with the European Union, the government was “forced” to officially acknowledge its responsibility in the Holocaust, an acknowledgement that included admitting the crimes committed against Jews during

¹²² Friedlander, S. “History, Memory and the Historian: Facing the Shoah”, 2001. Quoted in Littoz-Monnet, A. “Explaining Policy Conflict across Institutional Venues: European Union-Level Struggles over the Memory of the Holocaust.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51(3), 2013: p.489–504. [\(PDF\) Explaining Policy Conflict Across Institutional Venues: European Union-Level Struggles Over the Memory of the Holocaust](#)

¹²³ Rosenfeld, G.D. “A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory “Industry””, *Journal of Modern History*, 81(1) p. 122–58. [\(PDF\) A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory “Industry”](#) and Littoz-Monnet, A. *Explaining Policy Conflict across Institutional Venues: European Union-Level Struggles over the Memory of the Holocaust*, cit., p. 489–504.

¹²⁴ The declaration was the outcome of the International Forum convened in Stockholm between 27-29 January 2000 by former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson. The Forum was attended by the representatives of 46 governments including 23 Heads of State or Prime Ministers and 14 Deputy Prime Ministers or Ministers. Source: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, IHRA, “Stockholm Declaration” 28.01.2000. [Stockholm Declaration - IHRA](#)

¹²⁵ Littoz-Monnet, A. *Explaining Policy Conflict across Institutional Venues: European Union-Level Struggles over the Memory of the Holocaust*, cit., p. 489–504.

¹²⁶ Moens B. Nicholas V. “The far right won Austria’s election. Brussels doesn’t care” Politico, 1.10.2024. [The far right won Austria’s election. Brussels doesn’t care. – POLITICO](#)

the pro-Nazi dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu.¹²⁷ The Holocaust has been considered the most atrocious event in recent Western European history, and as I stated earlier numerous attempts have been made to elevate it to a founding myth of the European Union.¹²⁸ However, the Holocaust has not only served a founding function, but it has also served as both a warning and a “yardstick of comparison.” It has been recalled as a reference in various contexts, becoming a real policy tool when the European Union has been confronted with the resurgence of anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.¹²⁹ This role is evident, for example, in the declaration Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism, adopted by the European Parliament on January 27, 2005, which states that the Holocaust, represent “*a wider lesson about the dangers of victimising people on the basis of race, ethnic origin, religion, political or sexual orientation, or social classification.*”¹³⁰

Even in the European Parliament's previous resolutions on the phenomena of racism and xenophobia, reference to the Holocaust and the tragedies of World War II is always present. Among the most significant examples, we find significant passages on the *Resolution on the communication from the Commission on racism, xenophobia and antisemitism*.¹³¹ As Assmann notes, the Holocaust has been used as a “*template*” or comparison paradigm to justify EU or UN intervention in response to contemporary genocides.¹³² Let's consider, for example, the intervention in the Balkans during the Kosovo war, or the international response to the genocide in Rwanda. These events saw some activism by European states, which used the Holocaust as a model for understanding and acting in the face of the humanitarian tragedies of the present.¹³³

¹²⁷ Mutler, A. “Outgoing President Hopes Romania Will Stay on Course to Join EU after Elections”. Associated Press Worldstream, 9 November. 2004 [Outgoing Romanian president hopes nation will join the EU](#). In Littoz-Monnet, A. *Explaining Policy Conflict across Institutional Venues: European Union-Level Struggles over the Memory of the Holocaust*, cit., p. 489–504.

¹²⁸ Törnquist-Plewa B. “After All These Years, Still Divided by Memories? East Central Europe and European Union Politics of Memory Twenty Years after the Enlargement”, 38(4) 2024: p.1080-1092..[After All These Years, Still Divided by Memories? East Central Europe and European Union Politics of Memory Twenty Years after the Enlargement - Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, 2024](#)

¹²⁹ Sierp, A. “*Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945*” cit., p.104-118.

¹³⁰ European Parliament, “Resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, anti-semitism and racism”, 27.01.2005. [RC-B6-0069/2005. Texts adopted - The Holocaust, anti-semitism and racism - Thursday, 27 January 2005](#)

¹³¹ European Parliament, “Resolution on the communication from the Commission on racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism” (COM(95)0653 - C4-0250/ 96) [EUR-Lex - 51996IP0135 - EN](#). *The Resolution reads*: “The history of Europe has on a number of occasions fallen into the grip of racism and ethnic hatred, with terrible consequences: genocide against Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and the disabled, millions of casualties among military personnel and particularly among civilians, deportation of population groups, persecution, ethnic cleansing, and mass displacements and uprooting of people...” and “...Whereas the development of European integration in the post-war years was the principal answer to National Socialism, fascism and the totalitarian communism into which the peoples of European countries allowed themselves to be manipulated and whereas in this connection the establishment of a democratic and European legal order founded on protection of human rights is fundamental...”

¹³² Assmann, A. “Europe: A Community of Memory.” Spring, 2007. The Holocaust, indeed, “has become the paradigm or template through which other genocides and historical traumas are very often perceived and presented”

¹³³ Sierp, A. “*Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945*” cit., p.104-118

6.2.2 Challenging the centrality of the Holocaust and Nazism in action.

With the entry into the European Union of new member states carrying different memories and historical experiences than those of Western European countries, there has been a significant transformation in the way European history is interpreted and understood. These states have sought to integrate their own narratives into the collective European memory. This effort has essentially taken the form of fighting for the inclusion of references to the crimes of the Stalinist regime in various parliamentary resolutions and in lobbying the European Commission for greater support in commemorating activities for Soviet crimes.¹³⁴ According to Laarse R., this process has represented a challenge to the centrality and supremacy of Holocaust memory. It has “reshuffled the cards” of European memory and, consequently, European identity.¹³⁵ Moreover, the memory of the Holocaust is not unified or homogeneous, but, indeed, there are significant differences between Western and Eastern Europe in the way these events are approached and interpreted. This highlights the complexities and tensions that characterize a fragmented European memory and identity.¹³⁶ The reasons for this clash seem obvious and lie in the profound differences in their historical experiences. The CEECs, in fact, suffered under both Nazi and Communist dictatorships, and the memories of both are inextricably intertwined in their collective memory. This dual historical experience has inevitably influenced the way in which these states have sought to represent their memories within the European context, contributing to a more nuanced narrative and consequently to a further fragmentation of European identity. Moreover, what appears observable is the absence of the typical Western European end WWII and liberation narrative, which has been the symbolic foundation of the European reconciliation process. In this regard, the new CEECs have sought to bring the communist regime crimes to the attention of the European agenda. As mentioned earlier, they were pursuing the elevations of the latter to the same level of the Holocaust and the other Nazi crime. In this regard, Hungarian MEP József Szájer (EPP), during a debate on a proposal to ban the use of the swastika and other Nazi symbols, provocatively declared that:

"If the Union wishes to propose a ban on the swastika, I suggest adding the symbols of the hated and bloody communist dictatorship as well. No, more Nazism in Europe, no more communism in Europe!"¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Littoz-Monnet, A. *Explaining Policy Conflict across Institutional Venues: European Union-Level Struggles over the Memory of the Holocaust*, cit., p. 489–504.

¹³⁵ Laarse R., *Archaeology of memory: Europe's Holocaust dissonances in East and West*, cit.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ European Parliament, One-minute speeches on matters of political importance, *Verbatim Report of Proceedings*: 27 January 2005. [Verbatim report of proceedings - One-minute speeches on matters of political importance - Thursday, 27 January 2005](#)

This statement clearly reflects the intention of some new member states representatives to obtain recognition of communist crimes as equivalent to Nazi crimes. This highlights, at the same time, the need to overcome what was perceived as a double standard in the European narrative.¹³⁸ This resolution was harshly criticized by Central and Eastern European leaders, who accused the European Union of forgetting millions of victims and blurring a part of history, even in the years after its approval.¹³⁹ These statements highlight how, for some Eastern European countries, the memory of Soviet crimes was considered just as central as that of Nazi crimes. Eastern leaders argued that, at the European level, not enough political and academic attention had been paid to the consequences of communist totalitarianism, nor an equivalent commitment to institutionalizing and commemorating these crimes. This position is confirmed in the Council of Europe resolution, which stresses the need for international condemnation and thorough investigation of the communist totalitarian regime's crimes, as was done for the Nazi one:

“The fall of totalitarian communist regimes in central and eastern Europe has not been followed in all cases by an international investigation of the crimes committed by them. Moreover, the authors of these crimes have not been brought to trial by the international community, as was the case with the horrible crimes committed by National Socialism.”¹⁴⁰

A significant point emerged in 2009, during the European Parliament's resolution on European consciousness and totalitarianisms. In this context, Slovak European Commissioner Ján Figel, at the time, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, stated that Western European had a duty to become “*more aware of the tragic history of the East, which is also part of our shared,*

¹³⁸ European Parliament. "The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War." Speech by József Szájer (PPE). *Verbatim Report of Proceedings: Wednesday, Strasbourg OJ Edition*. 11 May 2005. [Verbatim report of proceedings - The future of Europe sixty years after the Second World War - Wednesday, 11 May 2005](#). Here the speech by József Szájer “Dear Parliament, we must not think with a double standard. Auschwitz, the Katyn forest massacre, the Nazi and the two-time Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, unjust dictatorships dismembering Europe's spheres of interest, borders drawn by force and pacts, deportation of whole nations, murdering, torturing, crippling of people, disenfranchising population exchanges, walls dividing nations, trampling on human and minority rights, these are all gross injustices, regardless of who committed them.”

¹³⁹ European Parliament. Debate on “European conscience and totalitarianism” *Verbatim report of proceedings*, 25 March 2009. [Verbatim report of proceedings - European conscience and totalitarianism \(debate\) - Wednesday, 25 March 2009](#). Here the speech of MEP, Jana Hybášková, “In 2005 we adopted a resolution on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. We discovered that the European Parliament and the EU lacked the political will to pursue a common understanding and evaluation of European history. While the victims of Fascism and Nazism have received decent compensation, millions of victims of Communism have been forgotten”

¹⁴⁰ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly. “Resolution n°1481 on the Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes” Assembly debate on 25 January 2006 (5th Sitting).2006 [Res. 1481 - Resolution - Adopted text](#). He follows: “The Assembly is convinced that the awareness of history is one of the preconditions for avoiding similar crimes in the future. Furthermore, moral assessment and condemnation of crimes committed play an important role in the education of young generations. The clear position of the international community on the past may be a reference for their future actions.”

common, *European history*.¹⁴¹ He pointed out how this lack of sensitivity was an obstacle to the creation of a united Europe.¹⁴² From the other perspective, it was felt in the Western political classes that the fact that the crimes of communism had obscured the memory of Nazi atrocities posed a threat to the European identity built around the paradigm of the Holocaust and the crimes of National Socialism. Simone Veil, the first woman sitting as President of the European Parliament and one of the few Auschwitz survivors, addressed this issue in a speech to the Bundestag, highlighting how the Holocaust was still not fully recognized in some Eastern European countries. Due to manipulation by the communist regimes, that remained in power for a long length of time, the memory of the sufferance inflicted on peoples by the Communist occupiers often took priority, eventually obscuring the memory of the persecution suffered by Jews, sometimes even with the tacit consent of local populations. What also Simon Veil points out, is the necessity to *“integrate the different memories not as a source of conflict, but as a tool for dialogue and mutual understanding.”*¹⁴³ The difference between Western and Eastern memories also lies in the interpretation of the sides and outcomes of the war. On the one hand, the West has generally been inclined to remember the Soviet Union as an ally whose sacrifice contributed decisively to the liberation of the continent, including the eastern countries. Because of this connection, communism has often been perceived as an acceptable reality. However, for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as analysed in the previous section, the focus of war memory is more on what has been referred to as the “black trinity”, with particular attention to the consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939. After their accession to the European Union, the Eastern European countries have long fought for recognition of the Soviet Union's co-responsibility in the initiation of World War II and the subsequent partition of the lands east of the Iron Curtain, which remained subject to a regime of oppression for decades. This claim is concretely reflected in official speeches made by Eastern European leaders, which this thesis will analyse.

¹⁴¹ European Parliament. Debate on “European conscience and totalitarianism”, Speech by Ján Figel, *Verbatim report of proceedings*, 25 March 2009. [Verbatim report of proceedings - European conscience and totalitarianism \(debate\) - Wednesday, 25 March 2009](#)

¹⁴² Ibidem.

¹⁴³ Veil, Simone. "Rede von Frau Simone Veil vor dem Bundestag, Berlin, 27. Januar 2004." Translation from the official website of the Deutscher Bundestag. [Deutscher Bundestag - Rede von Frau Simone Veil vor dem Bundestag, Berlin, 27. Januar 2004](#). Here a key part of the Simone Veil speech: “In addition, there are other collective memories that act as shields and prevent adequate memory work related to the Shoah. For the peoples of Eastern Europe, who were subjugated to Soviet rule for nearly half a century, the victims of communism overpowered and, in part, overshadowed the victims of National Socialism. In time when Europe is opening up to the East, these distortions are extremely troubling, as historical disputes touch the heart of European future identity.”

6.2.2.1 Reactions to the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War

The first phase of the actual debate, which highlighted the conflicts of memory, concerned the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War on the 8th-9th May 2005. The debate was articulated both in relation to the European Parliament resolution and the event celebrations which were hosted in Moscow. First, this date, May 8 for Western countries represent the V-E Day, or Victory in Europe, symbolizing the end of the Nazi occupation, just as May 9, represents Europe Day, the celebration of the Schuman Declaration and the beginning of the reconciliation process between France and Germany, as examined in the second chapter of the first part of this thesis. However, for Eastern European countries, this date does not symbolize real liberation or even reconciliation. For them, in fact, the war and, more importantly, the occupation did not end on May 8, 1945, but lasted until 1989-1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁴ The 60th anniversary celebrations were held in the symbolic setting of Red Square, with a military parade of the Russian Army, the direct heir of the Red Army. This context precisely Moscow, Red Square, Red Army, powerfully highlighted the paradox and conflict of memory between the Russian historical narrative, with the complicity of the West, and that of the former Soviet bloc countries. For the latter, having to celebrate victory and freedom in a city symbolic of the Soviet regime, listening to the words of leader Vladimir Putin, some passages of which I quote below, represented a profound humiliation.¹⁴⁵

“We will never forget that these enormities bring people nothing but fear, humiliation and death.”¹⁴⁶

“In the war on Nazism, people’s rights to freedom were won back, their rights to life itself, to an independent choice of the path of development. [...] Now, when together we honour the anniversary of the Victory over fascism, we mark the Victory over a criminal regime.”¹⁴⁷

For the Eastern states, what Putin proudly states instead represents what they had to endure during the fifty years of the Iron Curtain precisely at the hands of the Soviet Union. From the perspective of the Eastern European states, the USSR perpetuated those very forms of oppression that it claimed to

¹⁴⁴ Probst, L. ‘Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust’. *New German Critique*, 90(45), 2003: p.1-12 [Accept Terms and Conditions on JSTOR](#)

¹⁴⁵ Maalkso “The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 15(4), 2009: p.653-680. [The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe - Maria Mälksoo, 2009](#)

¹⁴⁶ Putin V., “Speech at the Military Parade in Honour of the 60th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War” [Speech at the Military Parade in Honour of the 60th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War • President of Russia](#)

¹⁴⁷ Putin V., “Speech at a Formal Reception Dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of Victory Speech at a Formal Reception Dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of Victory” Official web site of the *President of Russia, Kremlin*. [Speech at a Formal Reception Dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of Victory • President of Russia](#).

have defeated. Clearly, the intent of the Russian narrative was to emphasize, before the whole world, the central role played by the Soviet Union in the liberation of Europe and the restoration of peace, as evidenced by Putin's words, *“winning back freedom, rights to life, development.”* However, if this was the result for Western Europe, the same cannot be said for Eastern Europe. In those territories, *“winning back freedom, rights to life, development”* was only possible after fifty years of Soviet domination. During the celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Russian President invited all the major world leaders, including US President George W. Bush, the leaders of European powers such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, as well as the President of the Spanish government José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Political leaders of former Axis powers were also invited, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. In addition, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, attended. Lithuania and Estonia prime ministers chose to decline Putin's invitation, thus refusing to legitimize the official Russian narrative. In contrast, the leaders of Poland and Latvia decided to attend, using the event as an opportunity to draw global media attention to what they saw as the “other outcome” of the end of the war. The intent of these two leaders was to highlight an alternative interpretation of history, showing the “dark side” of the Soviet victory. For while the Red Army liberated a large part of Europe from Nazism, it is equally true that it opened an era of oppression for the other half of the continent. The victory over a *“criminal regime”* mentioned by President Putin, marked the beginning for the eastern states, of a new era dominated by another criminal regime, characterized by the same *“fear, humiliation, and death”* that the Kremlin leader refers to. The Latvian president expressed this view during the Council of Europe held in Warsaw, just a few days later. Commenting on the May 9 celebrations in Moscow, she stated:

"This was however only a partial victory, for at the end of the terrible conflict, the western democracies 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."¹⁴⁸

Analysing Parliament debate in occasion of the World War II 60th anniversary commemoration, it becomes clear how, for many Central and Eastern European states, that date represents anything but freedom. This view has been expressed by several political representatives, indeed the Hungarian EPP MEP, whom the thesis reported earlier, was not the only one to denounce the “double standard”

¹⁴⁸ Vīķe-Freiberga. “Address by the President of Latvia at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe”, Warsaw, 16 May 2005. [Address by H.E. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, Warsaw, May 16, 2005 | LNB Digitālā bibliotēka - DOM PIEEJA](#)

in the historical narrative of the two Europe. Polish MEPs from different factions, including Józef Pinior (PSE), Maciej Marian Giertych (IND/DEM), and Jan Jerzy Kułakowski (ALDE), also pointed out that the end of the war did not lead to true liberation or independence for all European peoples. They emphasized the need to give greater prominence to the consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939, an event that, according to the Polish representatives, the West does not place sufficient emphasis, and which must be remembered:

“We are remembering that the end of the war did not bring true liberation, independence and democracy to all the nations of Europe. The end of the war meant new forms of oppression and a lack of sovereignty and democracy for Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. [...] We won the war against Germany, but we lost the war against Russia.¹⁴⁹

Pinior's words as well as Giertych's, highlight, if there is still a need, the deep divide in collective memory between Western and Eastern Europe. This dichotomy and the clash in historical perception remain central themes in European debates on shared memory, placing in light how complex the integration process is, in a Europe still marked by conflicting visions of its past.



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¹⁴⁹ European Parliament. "The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War." Speeches by Józef Pinior (PSE), Maciej Marian Giertych (IND/DEM) e Jan Jerzy Kułakowski (ALDE), *Verbatim Report of Proceedings: Wednesday, Strasbourg OJ Edition*. 11 May 2005. [Verbatim report of proceedings - The future of Europe sixty years after the Second World War - Wednesday, 11 May 2005](#). He continues: "Another date Poles remember is 17 September 1939. Although this date unfortunately has less resonance in Western Europe, we find it both distressing and highly significant, as it is the date when the Soviet Union attacked Poland. This attack took place following the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Hitler and Stalin, which provided for another partition of Poland

¹⁵⁰ The military parade during the celebrations, symbols of the Soviet Union are used, the red flag, the 5-pointed red star. Mukhin D. 9.05.2005. Pressphotos. [299 60th Anniversary Of Allied Victory In Wwii Stock Photos, High-Res Pictures, and Images - Getty Images.](#) "

6.3 A hope for many, a condemnation for others: What role for communism in Europe?

After World War II, many national memories were rooted in the memory of the resistance, the struggle against Nazism and the victory against dictatorship. These elements were used to legitimize new democratic structures and strengthen institutions. This collective narrative was often built on a dichotomous opposition between “good” and “evil”, and “us versus them”, between democrats versus Nazi-fascists, a dynamic which has been illustrated in the first part of the thesis. This rhetoric has also significantly involved left-wing political forces, inspired by the values of communism and socialism, a vision that contribute to shape Western democracy’s identity in the postwar period. This involvement of European leftists in values traceable to communism was, as we shall see later in this section, one of the factors that alimented the memory conflict with Eastern European states. The experiences in Eastern Europe, marked by both Nazi and Communist dictatorships, created a rift in the narrative of European memory. This has given rise to a heated debate on how those memories should be integrated into a unified European perspective that takes into account the different historical experiences, without reducing the complexity of the events.

The debate between the West and the East has thus developed around the role that has to be attributed to communism in Europe, as historical views and interpretations on the subject are multiple and closely linked to the historical experiences of individual countries. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, a transition similar to the one experienced in the West was lacking. For while Western Europe was able to embark on the most important peace project in its history, Central and Eastern Europe was the scene of violence, deportations, repression, and bloodshed. These events deeply marked its past and its relationship with communist ideology, and its identity.¹⁵¹

As the new member states joined the European Union, starting in 2004, the European Parliament became a prominent platform for these countries to shape the European historical narrative debate. In this institution, they enjoyed greater political clout than the EU Council and used this opportunity to promote a rebalancing of collective memory, often perceived as dominated by a Eurocentric perspective.¹⁵² Numerous debates took place in the European Parliament, because, as noted earlier, the Parliament arena had become, especially in the previous 15 years, a central place to discuss memory and European identity. Here, Central and Eastern European representatives claimed the right to remember their history and past. Emblematic is the statement by József Szájer (EPP),

¹⁵¹Törnquist-Plewa B. *After All These Years, Still Divided by Memories? East Central Europe and European Union Politics of Memory Twenty Years after the Enlargement*, cit. p.1080-1092

¹⁵²Perchoc, P. “Negotiating Memory at the European Parliament After the Enlargement 2004–2009”. *European Review of International Studies*, 2(2), 2015: p.19-39 [Negotiating Memory at The European Parliament After the Enlargement \(2004–2009\) in: European Review of International Studies Volume 2 Issue 2 \(2015\)](#)

“*Our history is your history.*”¹⁵³ One of the main demands made by these countries was to equate Nazi crimes with those committed by communist regimes. Eastern European states challenged the centrality attributed to the Holocaust in the European narrative, pointing out that the crimes of communism also deeply marked their historical and cultural identity. This confrontation, in which the Eastern countries took a united stand ¹⁵⁴, highlights not only the tensions between Europe's historical memories, but also the continuing difficulty in constructing a common narrative and identity in a European Union that must come to terms with a complex and articulated past.

Although the Cold War divided the world into two opposing blocs and the Western world has largely condemned the Stalinist regime, there has been, clearly, for the reasons stated above, a reluctance, especially from left and centre-left forces, to equate Nazism with Communism. This position is based on the idea that associating the Stalinist dictatorship with communist or socialist ideology, leads to ignore the positive contribution of these ideologies in the anti-fascist struggle and in democracy building process in Western Europe. It is not a coincidence that, at an early stage in the Eastern memory integration process, the resolution establishing the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Nazism and Stalinism did not refer directly to communism in its title, but to the Stalinist regime.¹⁵⁵

Left-wing parties in Europe, are deeply linked to an anti-fascist and anti-Nazi rhetoric. They have often claimed the crucial role they played in the Resistance and in liberation their countries during the WWII. There are numerous examples in Western Europe, with the Italian example stands out among them, alongside the Portuguese, French, Greek and Spanish ones. If we take Italy as an example, the Italian Communist Party, distinguished itself during the partisan struggle, representing one of the most significant forces in the Resistance. Its role was not limited to the liberation of the country, but also extended to the constituent phase, where it actively contributed to the Italian Constitution drafting, where it was able to incorporate principles inspired by socialist and communist philosophy¹⁵⁶. After 1956, following the Soviet intervention in Hungary, the PCI gradually distanced itself from the Soviet Union. This detachment culminated with the breakthrough imparted by Enrico Berlinguer, who promoted a progressive and modern variant of communism, the so-called Eurocommunism, a democratic and autonomous interpretation of communism that distanced itself from the oppressive policies of the Stalinist regime. Under Berlinguer's leadership, the PCI became a key player in the Italian democratic system and in the dialogue with moderate forces, consolidating

¹⁵³ European Parliament. *The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War*, cit.

¹⁵⁴ This because the claims came from different political forces.

¹⁵⁵ European Parliament, “Declaration of the European Parliament on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism”, 23 September 2008. [Texts adopted - European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism - Tuesday, 23 September 2008](#)

¹⁵⁶ Senato della Repubblica Italiana, “La Costituzione”. [La Costituzione - Articolo 3 | Senato della Repubblica](#)

itself as an integral part of the Italian political and social fabric.¹⁵⁷ Also in France, as well as in Spain and Portugal, socialist and communist forces took on a profoundly different meaning than the totalitarian or authoritarian communist regimes¹⁵⁸, as USSR, the People's Republic of China or North Korea.

In Western Europe for millions of people, communism and socialism represented the hope for emancipation of the lower classes and the struggle for social rights in a profoundly unequal world. Communism, as an ideology, embodied a worldview based on equality and social justice, values that were profoundly distant from the practices of dictatorial regimes that used communism as a tool of oppression and control. Associating communism with Nazism therefore constitutes a historical error, this is what the European left affirms by opposing the narrative of Eastern European countries. The resistance of left-wing parties to equating communism with Nazism lies precisely in this distinction while the crimes of totalitarian regimes must be condemned, communist ideology cannot be reduced to such experiences because it represented, for many, a struggle for dignity.

6.3.1 The political framework of the debate

In this regard, the European Left statute, drafted in the occasion of 2004 elections, clearly distanced itself from Stalinist practices and the crimes. The statute stated that these were in contradiction with the values of socialism and communism. The European Left defended its historical legacy, based on principles that, through the millions of people sacrifice and suffering, had helped to ensure social certainties for European citizens:

“We defend this legacy of our movement which inspired and contributed to securing the social certainties of millions of people. We keep the memory of these struggles alive including the sacrifices and the sufferings in the course of these struggles. We do this in unreserved disputation with undemocratic, Stalinist practices and crimes, which were in absolute contradiction to socialist and communist ideals.”¹⁵⁹

The association between communism and Stalinist dictatorship was thus perceived as unfair and simplistic. It is an equation that ignores the fundamental contribution of left-wing forces in the

¹⁵⁷ Orsina, G, “Party democracy and its enemies: Italy, 1945–1992” *Journal of Modern European History*, 17(2), 2019: p.200-233. Sage Journal. 2019. [Party democracy and its enemies: Italy, 1945–1992](#)

¹⁵⁸ Or better, that define their self as “communis”.

¹⁵⁹ Statute of the European Left. Revised version after the 3rd EL congress in Paris 03-05.12.2010 http://www.european-left.org/nc/english/about_the_el/documents/detail/zurueck/documents/artikel/statute-of-the-party-of-the-european-left-el/ in Weiler, J.H.H., and Carlos Closa. “Dealing with the Past: Memory and European Integration.” *Jean Monnet Jean Monnet Program*. 2011 [Microsoft Word - JMWP 01 Closa.docx](#)

liberation of Europe, in the democratisation process and in building the values of post-war Europe. Member of Parliament Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), speaking on the Future of Europe during the end of World War II 60th anniversary commemoration, expressed concern that Eastern Europe had downplayed or ignored the role of communism in the Resistance. He affirmed that this Resolution “*silence and defame the glorious and heroic role played by the communists in the anti-fascist struggle.*”¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, it appears unfair to ignore the CEECs. perspective, for whom communism is synonymous of dictatorship, oppression, deprivation of fundamental freedoms, absence of the rule of law and almost total alienation of the individuality. During the same debate, József Szájer (EPP) emphasized one more time, this view, comparing the symbol of the five-pointed red star to the Nazi swastika: “*Many people in Western Europe do not understand either why the five-pointed red star, like the swastika, has become the symbol for hatred and oppression.*”¹⁶¹

This divergence has turned into a real political debate, in which CEECs MEPs have often allied themselves with western European centre-right MEPs. The latter used the opportunity to construct a political rhetoric critical of the communist and socialist parties in their respective countries. The influences of this narrative also extended to the European Commission, particularly the Directorate General for Culture, which had to deal with the complexity of these contrasts in an attempt to promote a shared European memory.¹⁶² This represents, and continues to represent, one of the most significant memory conflicts in Europe, that keep undermine its identity unity. This tension persists nowadays, as evidenced by the European Parliament's 2019 resolution on the Importance of European Remembrance for the future of Europe, which reignited and intensified the debate.

Although the intent of the resolution was to reconcile and try to unify memories between East and West, the Resolution outcome has been criticized. The Resolution seems to have further highlighted the divergent views of the two parts of Europe, further politicizing historical memory and making it an ideological battleground. The resolution has stirred controversy for essentially equating Nazism and Communism, receiving criticism not only from an ideological perspective, but also from a historical one.¹⁶³ Analysing the debate on its approval, the opposition of the European left, became The Left, clearly emerges, as it has on previous occasions. This opposition was manifested among MEPs from countries such as Portugal, Spain, and Greece, where leftist forces, also inspired by those values, played a decisive role in the struggle for freedom from authoritarian/dictatorial regimes.

¹⁶⁰ European Parliament. *The Future of Europe Sixty Years after the Second World War*, cit.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Littoz-Monnet A. *Explaining Policy Conflict across Institutional Venues: European Union-Level Struggles over the Memory of the Holocaust*, cit., p.489–504.

¹⁶³ Barile, D. "Memory and the Integration: The European Parliament's 2019 Resolution on European Remembrance as a Case Study." *Journal of European Integration* 43(8),2021: p.989-1004 <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.1903890>.

Among the most significant interventions, the Greek MEP Georgios Georgiou (GUE/NGL), underscore, firstly, the role played by Greek communists in the liberation of Greece, then denounce the politicization of the debate, where some political parties, he accused, took positions out of political expediency rather than true conviction.¹⁶⁴ On the same wavelength, Spanish parliamentarian Sira Rego (GUE/NGL), called attention to the importance of both recognizing the role of communists in the “*anti-fascist struggle*”, and avoiding historical manipulation.¹⁶⁵ Even Sandra Pereira, from Portugal, defined the equation between fascism and communism “*deplorable*”, pointing out how this association erases the contribution of communists and socialists, in the Portugal Carnation Revolution. Moreover, she also denounced that this “formula” would foster the persecution of communist parties in Europe.¹⁶⁶

The resolution passed with a large majority thanks to the coalition led by the main political forces. Opposition mainly came from *The Left* group. However, some parties belonging to the S&D group were criticised, in their countries, for supporting this “equation”, voting favourably. In Italy, for example, the “*Partito Democratico*”, technically the direct heir of the Italian Communist Party, has received criticism. The Partito Democratico, despite its increasingly gradual shift towards the centre, which in practice positions it as a centre-left party, its roots reside in the communist principles and the legacy of the Resistance. The resonance within the party was wide, although some PD¹⁶⁷ members distanced themselves from the S&D group vote, a large majority voted in favour of the

¹⁶⁴ European Parliament, Debate on the “Resolution on the Importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe” Speech by Georgios Georgiou, 18 September 2019. ([Verbatim report of proceedings - Importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe \(debate\) - Wednesday, 18 September 2019](#)). Here the intervention of Georgios Georgiou “Madam President... Even from the Honourable Commissioner, who is of Greek descent, I would have expected to hear that Greek communists were the ones who contributed greatly to our country being free today. Others, however, from other political factions, collaborated with the enemies. Do you want to hear some truths? The first truth is that it was the Soviet army that liberated the peoples of Europe, allowing us to be here today. The second truth is that twenty million communists sacrificed their lives so that we could be free. The third truth is that those who today seek to impeach communists or make communist parties illegal do so out of self-interest”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. Here the speech by Sira Rego: “Therefore, we take this opportunity to call for a directive on remembrance and reparation that enhances the anti-fascist struggle, as well as adequate funds for the exhumation of the pits of Francoism in Spain. Memory is inescapable in today's Europe, invaded by new fascisms. It is necessary to recognize the role of those who gave their lives to fight them”

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Here the speech by Sandra Pereira: “It is a deplorable attempt to equate fascism and communism, absolving and silencing the crimes of Nazi-fascism, with the Munich Treaty and other actions, paved the way for the start of World War II and the invasion of the Soviet Union. This complicity persists to this day. Attempts are being made to erase the decisive contribution of the Communists in the defeat of Nazi-Fascism and the liberation of peoples, as happened in my country, Portugal, with the Carnation Revolution that ended the fascist regime. You want to erase their role in improving the living conditions of workers “

¹⁶⁷ Partito Democratico

resolution.¹⁶⁸ The ANPI, the National Association of Italian Partisans, also expressed concern over the resolution, believing it to be a confusing trivialization of history.¹⁶⁹

6.3.2 The historical matrix of the debate

Turning the focus away from the political matrix, the critical aspects of this resolution also involved an historical angle. Equating Nazism and communism on the severity of crimes has led to a simplification that identifies both as totalitarian regimes. However, from the perspective of political science, this identification is not entirely accurate. There is evidence that both Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union were totalitarian regimes. However, the different variants of communism in power in Europe have not always shared the characteristics that history and scientific research ascribe to the definition of a totalitarian regime. Indeed, Central and Eastern Europe, have been different experiences in the regime features. The USSR itself has undergone evolutions, transforming from a totalitarian Stalinist regime to a system with different and "more open" characteristics (particularly under Gorbachev's leadership). In some contexts, as in Yugoslavia since the 1970s, a more liberal communism has developed, which on a scientific level cannot be compared to totalitarianism.¹⁷⁰ Communist regimes, therefore, have presented different nuances. Although the simplification "Communism = Totalitarianism" was intended to unify and integrate different European memories, the use of "Stalinism" and "Communism" in an interchangeable way reduced the communist experience, whatever it may have been, to a mere totalitarian regime.¹⁷¹ Another point of criticism from the historical point of view is the claim that the cause of the outbreak of World War II can be attributed to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, thus implying Soviet co-responsibility in the beginning of the conflict. This contrasts with the prevailing narrative that the war began with the breaking of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the subsequent German aggression, supported by the Axis powers.

"80 years ago on 23 August 1939, the communist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a Treaty of Non-Aggression, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and its

¹⁶⁸ La Repubblica, "Comunismo e nazismo uguali per il Parlamento europeo: polemica sulla risoluzione approvata a Strasburgo." *La Repubblica*, September 22, 2019. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/09/22/news/comunismo_nazismo_parlamento_europeo_risoluzione-236628451/.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit, p.21-38.

¹⁷¹ European Parliament, Resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (2019/2819(RSP)). [Texts adopted - Importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe - Thursday, 19 September 2019](#). This association emerges in several passages of the resolution, including the following: "Whereas remembering the victims of totalitarian regimes and recognising and raising awareness of the shared European legacy of crimes committed by communist, Nazi and other dictatorships is of vital importance for the unity of Europe and its people and for building European resilience to modern external threats"

secret protocols, dividing Europe and the territories of independent states between the two totalitarian regimes and grouping them into spheres of interest, which paved the way for the outbreak of the Second World War”¹⁷²

A further critical issue that emerged is the resolution's reference towards the fact that “*communist and Nazi ideologies are prohibited by law.*”¹⁷³ This, once again, raises the question of the different interpretation of communist symbolism, which was analysed above. This resolution passage appears to be an invitation to legally prohibit communist ideology in the other member states as well. All these criticisms turned a resolution that aimed at universalising remembrance through giving a voice to both the victims of Nazism and totalitarian regimes into something that, instead, fuelled further divisions. Paradoxically, the equally evil association between communism and Nazism paved the way, as we shall see in the next chapter, for World War II historical revisionisms by right-wing nationalist parties, particularly in Hungary, Slovenia, Poland, and Croatia.¹⁷⁴ These countries have used the European Union, and especially the European Parliament, as a theatre for nationalist claims about their past. This approach has often obscured their complicity in both the Holocaust and in supporting Nazi Germany, painting them exclusively as victims of both Western betrayal and communism.

The conflict of memories, highlighted in this passage, represents the wider cleavage in the European memory, which appears not yet to be fully resolved. The European Union, however, has tried to work to unite these memories, trying to find a common foundation for a shared European identity. We can take as an example the numerous European Parliament resolutions and Commission initiatives to safeguard both Western and Eastern memory, making it a pillar of European identity. These include both the “*Resolution on the commemoration of the Holodomor, the Ukraine artificial famine (1932-1933)*” (2008)¹⁷⁵ and “*Declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism*” (2008)¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.21-38.

¹⁷⁵ European Parliament, “Resolution of 23 October 2008 on the commemoration of the Holodomor, the Ukraine artificial famine (1932-1933)” 23 October 2008. [Texts adopted - Commemoration of the Holodomor, the artificial famine in Ukraine \(1932-1933\) - Thursday, 23 October 2008](#)

¹⁷⁶ European Parliament, “Declaration of the European Parliament on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism”, 23 September 2008. [Texts adopted - European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism - Tuesday, 23 September 2008](#)

3.3 Still unresolved: The Resolution on Russian historical falsification of January 23, 2025.

It is tremendously interesting how dynamic and ever-changing politics is, and how memory is permanently relevant, constantly remaining at the centre of political debate. Academic studies and research often struggle to keep pace with the rapid evolution of politics. This is precisely what happened with this thesis, where a comparable situation of 2019, just analysed in the previous paragraph, resurfaced as this research attempts to explain the dynamics. On January 23, 2025, thus only a few days ago, the European Parliament, near the Holocaust Remembrance Day, passed a resolution on Russia's disinformation and historical falsification to justify its war of aggression against Ukraine.¹⁷⁷ While the resolution shows a commitment to promoting rhetoric that includes the memory of Eastern European countries, it also reopens old wounds that had already surfaced with the 2019 resolution.

Regarding the inclusion and understanding of CEECs memory, this resolution, passed exactly two decades after the commemoration for the 60th anniversary of World War II, shows a total transformation in the European Union attitude. It appears clear how the war in Ukraine has “shuffled the cards” and how integration has moved forward. Today it seems unthinkable that the Member States would still turn to Moscow to celebrate victory in World War II, after 20 years of CEECs presence in the EU, and the war in Ukraine. The 60th anniversary celebrations held in Moscow, in fact, were nothing but a glorification Russian people sacrifice and exaltation Soviet Union strength, with a misleading and paradoxical rhetoric considering the crimes inflicted by the Soviet regime to CEECs. Indeed, this resolution frames the end of the war as a partial victory, and explicitly condemns Russia's attempt to instrumentalize the liberation from Nazism narrative, while ignoring the subsequent Soviet occupation of the CEECs. A narrative that is not merely self-referential but has a strategic purpose to reframe the narrative Nazism liberation as a tool to justify its aggression against Ukraine. In this regards Russia has developed a disinformation campaign of historical revisionism for the purpose of denying Ukraine its national identity.¹⁷⁸ The below Resolution passages, clearly condemn of Russian revisionism, and aim to put emphasis on Soviet crimes, underscoring the necessity to preserve access to historical archives. This aims to prevent a key part of what became European history from falling into oblivion. The Resolution reads as follow:

¹⁷⁷ European Parliament, “Resolution of 23 January 2025 on Russia's disinformation and historical falsification to justify its war of aggression against Ukraine (2024/2988(RSP))” [Texts adopted - Russia's disinformation and historical falsification to justify its war of aggression against Ukraine - Thursday, 23 January 2025](#)

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

“[The EP], condemns the Russian Federation’s failure to establish accountability for Soviet crimes and its deliberate obstruction of historical research by denying access to and closing Soviet archives, and has glorified Stalinist totalitarianism and re-created its methods; maintains that impunity and the lack of factually accurate historical and public debate and education has contributed to the current Russian regime’s ability to revive imperialist policies and instrumentalise history for its criminal purposes.”¹⁷⁹

This attempt to include diverse European memories, is evident, and will likely represent another key step in the attempt to create a shared memory narrative. On the other hand, the resolution did not fail to raise criticism, once again repeating the same mistake as in 2019. The direct association between Nazism and Communism, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, is not unanimously shared. On this occasion, the resolution received less support, although it was nevertheless passed by a large majority. The outcome of the vote shows a drop in the number of those in favour, from 535 to 480.¹⁸⁰ In addition to the opposition of The Left Group, where some resistance also came from some of the S&D Group party and members, including the Partito Democratico. The PD did not to participate in the overall vote on the resolution, aware of the critics which received for the vote in favour on the 2019 resolution. It participated in the vote on paragraph 14, voting against.¹⁸¹ The paragraph 14 which was the controversial part calls on member states to condemn and ban the use of Nazi symbols as well as Soviet Communist symbols. The contented paragraph calls for a “*ban on the use of both Nazi and Soviet communist symbols as well as symbols of Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine*”.¹⁸² Not surprisingly, the retort of the Partito Democratico members was not long in coming and had quite harsh connotations. In an official note from the parliamentary group, it was stressed that history should not be rewritten in an instrumental way and especially this should not happen in parliamentary hall. For the PD Parliament are forums for representation, confrontation and political battle. They are not places in which history can be rewritten by majorities.

“Yes, to the condemnation of Putin and to the fight against disinformation, but no to instrumental initiatives that want to rewrite history in parliaments by majorities.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. It continues: “Russia has developed a growing disinformation campaign of historical revisionism for the purpose of denying Ukraine its national identity, statehood and very existence, and with the aim of justifying its claims to exclusive spheres of influence, which is reminiscent of how the Soviet Union agreed with Nazi Germany to invade and occupy parts of Poland and Romania as well as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact”

¹⁸⁰ European Parliament. “Resolution on the Importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe” *Document Summary*: 2023/1234(COD). Legislative Observatory (OEIL). 19.09.2019. <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/document-summary?id=1592277>.

¹⁸¹ It should be noted that the text is voted on paragraph by paragraph before proceeding to a separate final vote.

¹⁸² European Parliament, *Resolution of 23 January 2025 on Russia’s disinformation and historical falsification to justify its war of aggression against Ukraine*, cit.

The responsibilities of Putin and of all totalitarianisms, present and past, are a political fact, for us a certainty to be condemned.”¹⁸³

What emerges is that this gap proves difficult to bridge, partly because, as the thesis has tried to point out, there is often a tendency to fall into politicization and conflict, which instead of uniting ends up dividing.

¹⁸³ La Repubblica, “Vietare uso simboli nazisti e sovietici. Pd non vota: non si cambia storia a colpi di maggioranza” Redazione politica, 23 gennaio 2025. [“Vietare uso simboli nazisti e sovietici”. Pd non vota: non si cambia storia a colpi di maggioranza - la Repubblica.](#) It continues “It’s not for Parliament to rewrite the history of Europe, and for this reason we have decided not to participate in the vote on an initiative that has become instrumental”

PART III

The third part of the thesis directs the empirical analysis towards its conclusion. This section aspires to be the connecting link between past, present and future. Gathering the legacy of the past enlargement rounds dynamics, it analyses the current revisionism tendency and, finally, aims to provide a prediction on memory conflicts of potential EU future accessions. Currently, the European Union has nine candidate states. The EU had a long dormant period defined as "enlargement fatigue" following the "big bang" of 2004-2007 where, except for Croatia, the EU did not expand its borders. Perhaps too absorbed by a constant state of crisis that has modified its priorities, the Union has, in fact, frozen the enlargement process for more than 15 years. However, Russia's aggression against Ukraine seems to have reshuffled the cards, speeding up the accession negotiations, with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia gaining candidate status in a record time. The thesis, therefore, in Chapter nine, aims to analyse the possible consequences of these enlargements, highlighting the difficulties of an entry of the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Türkiye.

The accession of the Western Balkans appears particularly complex due to a troubled history and memory, marked by both internal conflicts and tensions with current EU Member States. The region triples historical legacy, rooted in the Second World War, in Tito's communist Yugoslavia and in the recent wars in the Balkans with ethnic cleansing and unrecognized genocide episodes, makes the picture extremely complex and fragmented. It is not hard to imagine how difficult it would be to integrate these memories into the European narrative. The risk that these memories might have a destabilising effect on an already fragmented European identity seems inevitable. This could, indeed, fuel centrifugal forces that, acting from inside, undermine the stability of the Union.

Chapters seven and eight focus precisely on this, analysing what the thesis will define as the two "Trojan horses" within the Union, namely PiS's Poland and Viktor Orbán's Hungary. These two states have consolidated their power through a strong nationalist, populist, and identity-based narrative, implementing illiberal policies that undermine the rule of law and distorting the Union fundamental principles, such as democratic pluralism, independence of the judiciary, freedom of information and speech. A crucial aspect underlined by these chapters, is the historical revisionism promoted by these governments. The revisionist narrative aims to de-responsibilise the country's involvement in the WWII, in the collaboration with Nazism and in the co-responsibility of Holocaust massacres. This rhetoric also emphasizes their soviet-communist past in a demagogic key to obscure responsibility, depicting their populations exclusively as a victim of history. Both governments have exalted and mythologized historically controversial figures, such as Admiral Horthy in Hungary and the Arrow Cross in the Polish case, elevating them to national heroes. These revisionist tendencies

have not only undermined the European narrative of memory, but have also fuelled a rising tide of Euroscepticism, which in turn undermines the Union's integration and enlargement processes.

Historical Revisionism Tendencies

CHAPTER VII

7. Orbán's Hungary: The trojan horse inside the European Union

7.1 Introductory remarks: Understanding Orbán Fidesz rise to power.

Viktor Orbán's rise to power and his political and institutional revolution, represent one of the most academically interesting phenomena on the European political scene. Understanding the dynamics through how he consolidated his government become an extremely useful tool to comprehend the impact and effects of the Hungary historical revisionism on European integration and identity.

Before his turn to the right-wing aisle, Orbán was politically born as a communist dissident, founding Fidesz, the party of the Alliance of Young Liberals, in 1988, a year before the fall of the Wall.¹ Orbán became central to Hungarian politics because of his emotional, unconventional and radical speech, which he gave, still very young, at the second burial of Nagy. Imre Nagy was the prime minister during the entry of Red Army tanks into Budapest, following the wave of anti-Soviet protests in 1956.² In his speech delivered in front of a square filled with more than 250,000 people, Orbán presented himself as a figure who serves as a historical bridge between the present times and the heroes who fought during the 1848 revolution against the Habsburg and the 1956 revolution against the USSR oppression.³ His speech was strongly critical towards the communist political elite of the time. Orbán, indeed, called for the withdrawal of Moscow's troops from Budapest and free democratic elections.

His turn to the right side of the political spectrum, originated from the emergence of new essential factors that allow him, in a very opportunistic way, to start an evolution of both, his political figure and Fidesz. Firstly, it is important to underline that Orbán has always been critical not only to the communist elite, but also to a generation of the liberal ruling class, who were, as himself, former

¹ Rupnik J., "Senza il muro: le due Europe dopo il crollo del comunismo", Donzelli editore, Roma, 2019. [Senza il muro](#)

² Szilágyi, Anna, and András Bozóki. "Playing It Again in Post-Communism: The Revolutionary Rhetoric of Viktor Orbán in Hungary." *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 18(1) 2015: 153–166. [Playing It Again in Post-Communism:](#)

³ Sükösd, M. "Victorious Victimization: Orbán the Orator-Deep Securitization and State Populism in Hungary's Propaganda State." In Kock C., Villadsen L. *Populist Rhetorics*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2022: p.165–185. [Victorious Victimization: Orbán the Orator—Deep Securitization and State Populism in Hungary's Propaganda State | SpringerLink](#) Hungary, he declared, had to reach the objectives articulated in 1848, namely the national independence and political freedom.

communist dissident. The occasion for the fateful detachment from the old dissident leaders came in 1994, when the Hungarian government was formed through an agreement that culminated in a coalition between the socialists, the former communist elite, and the liberals, the former dissidents. Orbán opportunistically denounced this political alliance as a moral scandal and an outright betrayal of the Hungarian people, who had founded the 1989 revolution on the memory of '56.⁴ This detachment from the liberal elite, morally corrupt in its fundamental principles, allowed Orbán to acquire his own political autonomy.⁵ On the other hand, his political acumen becomes evident, along with his awareness of the unwritten law of politics, according to which power is gained by filling the gaps left by others. The political vacuum emerges in December 1993, with the death of the former conservative prime minister, József Antall, which allowed him to expand his consensus pool. This death has left the right-wing conservative electorate without a clear leadership figure, and Orbán positioned himself as its primary political reference point.⁶ The turn to the right was born here and will become more and more radicalized these current days in which that liberal-democratic thrust seems to have come to an end. Orbán himself criticize it, placing himself at the head of a counterrevolution. It is a reaction to an idea of progress that appears to be dormant, both in its liberal and socialist versions, and which seems to be replaced by a reactionary logic, in which the return to cultural and national roots is seen as the only answer to the crisis of the contemporary world. This is not a question of simple conservatism, but of a real cultural counter-revolution project. One of the main reasons of the wide support for Orbán and Kaczyński is their rejection of the liberal paradigm of the 1990s, which considered the link between political and economic liberalism to be indissoluble, aimed to build a "market democracies". This process in 1989 transition created wide inequality between large cities, with the more educated elite which the liberal revolution brought great benefit , and the less educated and older rural electorate, for whom liberal democracy has not led to inclusive economic prosperity.⁷ Orbán also managed to exploit the wave of scandals that hit the Hungarian Socialist Party between 2002 and 2010 to his advantage, presenting himself as the only alternative to a communist past and a corrupt present.⁸ Its political consolidation was based on a highly radicalizing and a polarizing strategy. Gradually, Orbán transformed Hungary into a political system increasingly

⁴ Rupnik J., *Senza il muro: le due Europe dopo il crollo del comunismo*, cit.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fabry, A. "Neoliberalism, Crisis, and Authoritarian-Ethnicist Politics: The Consolidation of the Orbán Regime in Hungary." In *The Global Rise of Authoritarianism in the 21st Century*, 20(3),2020: p.318-330. [Neoliberalism, Crisis, and Authoritarian-Ethnicist Politics | 17 | The](#) and Attila, A. "The Rise of Hungarian Populism: State Autocracy and the Orbán Regime" Emerald, 2019. [The Rise of Hungarian Populism](#)

controlled by the central power, progressively reducing its status as a democracy.⁹ It is not yet clear what is the most appropriate definition for the Hungarian regime, and several scholars have tried to label it with evocative terms. Laczó, in his essay, reports different interpretations on the type of regime that could be associated with the Hungarian one. The most striking is the definition of "democratatorship" which perfectly recalls a fusion between democracy and dictatorship.¹⁰

Beyond definitions, what emerges clearly is that Hungary under Orbán can be considered an "illiberal democracy", which can be summed up into a system characterized by a strong centralization of power, increasing control over institutions, media and judicial power with a clear departure from the democratic values of the European Union.¹¹ In particular, Orbán's party, Fidesz, has obtained an overwhelming majority in the last four elections, relegating other political forces, whether far-right, liberal or socialist, to the margins.¹² Orbán easily regained power in 2010 with a two-thirds parliamentary majority, claiming that his voters had thus "*made a revolution*".¹³ Once in office, he made extensive use of populist rhetoric, portraying the Socialist Party as a corrupt elite that exploited the Hungarian people.¹⁴ This speech helped to strengthen his consensus and justify his reforms, which progressively eroded democratic principles and the rule of law in the country.¹⁵ This wide majority, almost soviet, enable Fidesz to rewrite the Hungarian Constitution in 2012. This wide Constitution amendment allowed Orbán to overturn the country's entire institutional set-up and further consolidating its power. The constitutional reform centralizes more and more the powers in the party and consequentially in the leaders' hands, considering the pyramidal hierarchy of the party. It drastically reduced the independence of the judiciary and gradually replaced magistrates with figures loyal to and close to the government. Furthermore, Orbán changed the electoral law, which permit him to transform the mixed system, based on majority and proportional constituencies, into a purely majoritarian system that unequivocally favours the ruling majority, placing the opposition at a clear disadvantage.¹⁶ Given his party's broad support, this reform has helped to strengthen Fidesz's dominance, further reducing the chances of an opposition return. Another key element of Orbán's

⁹ Attila, A., *The Rise of Hungarian Populism: State Autocracy and the Orbán Regime*, cit.

¹⁰ Laczó, F. *Victims and Traditions: Narratives of Hungarian National History After the Age of Extremes*, cit.

¹¹ Attila, A., *The Rise of Hungarian Populism: State Autocracy and the Orbán Regime*, cit. p.65-72.

and Sükösd, M. *Victorious Victimization: Orbán the Orator, Deep Securitization and State Populism in Hungary's Propaganda State*, cit. p.165–185

¹² Palonen, E., "Performing the nation: the Janus-faced populist foundations of illiberalism in Hungary" *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 26(3), 2018: p.308-321. [Full article: Performing the nation: the Janus-faced populist foundations of illiberalism in Hungary](#)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sükösd, M. *Victorious Victimization: Orbán the Orator, Deep Securitization and State Populism in Hungary's Propaganda State*, cit. p.165–185

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

control, which distances him further and further from the principles that regulate Western democracy, is the manipulation of the national media. The government's interference is almost total, both through direct state control over public broadcasters, and through entrepreneurs close to Fidesz who also manage private networks.¹⁷ This mechanism has created a huge sounding board for the party's propaganda, progressively reducing the plurality of information.¹⁸ Independent media have been limited or marginalized, subjected to targeted restrictions that have undermined their autonomy.

The question that may come spontaneously in this scenario is how it is conceivable that, in the heart of a Europe based on the values of democracy, plurality, and freedom of expression, a state that contradicts the principles established in the treaties has emerged? If, as seen in the previous chapter, the EU has consolidated its identity as a bastion of democracy, the development of an authoritarian and illiberal regime within itself, risks to undermine its cohesion and identity. The confrontation between Brussels and Budapest is still open and, despite the sanctions imposed on several occasions, especially in the field of the rule of law, Hungary does not seem to want to change its course. Over the past twelve years, Orbán has built his rise on a strongly nationalist and identity-based rhetoric, presenting himself as the heir of "Greater Hungary" and the defender of Hungarian national interests and sovereignty against the "conspiracy" orchestrated by Brussels and the West. This rhetoric evokes a feeling of victimhood typical of the CEECs narrative.

His rhetoric has been heavily focused on the protection of national borders. During the migration crisis, Orbán closed the borders, not cooperating and opposing the policy of redistribution and relocating migrants. The European Union, in fact, to deal with the crisis, introduced a quota system for the redistribution of refugees among member states. In response, Orbán adopted ethno-populist rhetoric, arguing that Hungarian national identity was threatened by both UN and EU elites, accused of flooding the country with millions of migrants.¹⁹ This shift towards a xenophobic narrative became particularly evident during the 2018 election campaign which further strengthening his wide support.²⁰ The migration crisis also offered Orbán a political opportunity to consolidate his image and counter the rise of the even more far-right segment, in large part the *Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom* party electorate.²¹ In the mid-2010s, Orbán needed a new cause to mobilize the electorate,

¹⁷Fabry, A. *Neoliberalism, Crisis, and Authoritarian-Ethicist Politics: The Consolidation of the Orbán Regime in Hungary*, p.318-330.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Palonen, E., *Performing the nation: the Janus-faced populist foundations of illiberalism in Hungary*, cit. p.308-321. In Erin K. "Populism, Nationalism and Revisionist Foreign Policy." *International Affairs*, 97(2), 2021: p.323-343. [\(PDF\) Populism, nationalism and revisionist foreign policy](#). The migrants are usually from the Middle East and North Africa.

²⁰ Agnes Batory, "Populists in government? Hungary's "system of national cooperation"", 23(2), 2016: p. 283–303 [Populists in government? Hungary's "system of national cooperation": Democratization: Vol 23 , No 2 - Get Access](#) in Erin K. "Populism, Nationalism and Revisionist Foreign Policy" cit. p-283-303.

²¹ Ibid.

and the migration issue proved to be an effective tool.

In foreign policy, it has also taken a controversial line, often at odds with most EU and NATO member states. Both for the war in Crimea and for the Russian aggression in Ukraine, Orbán has maintained a rather ambivalent approach. In 2014, he joined the international condemnation of Russia's annexation of Crimea, but avoided strong anti-Russian rhetoric, aware of the close economic and energy relations with Moscow and political proximity to the Kremlin. In 2022, following Russia's aggression of Ukraine, the European Union imposed sanctions and initiated a substantial embargo on Russian gas. Orbán repeatedly strongly criticized these measures, arguing that they only hurt Europe economically without having a significant impact on Russia. Orbán's contraposition was not limited to that, but Hungary has also opposed sending weapons to Ukraine, justifying this position with the need to protect the Hungarian minority in the Ukrainian region of Transcarpathia, a former Hungarian territory lost with Treaty of Trianon. The region, located in western Ukraine, is home to about 150,000 Hungarians, many of whom hold dual citizenship thanks to Orbán's new citizenship policies.²² The government instrumentalized the territorial issue of Transcarpathia to justify a less aggressive stance toward Russia, both from a nationalist perspective regarding territorial claims of the region and, especially, considering Hungary's strong economic and energy interest with Russia.

7.2 The foundations of Hungarian historical revisionism

The Hungarian case helps us to outline more clearly the relationship between political power and memory, highlighting the decisive role that the latter can assume. This process takes place through a specific revision of history and the establishment of a regime that appeals to the Hungarian people's emotivity.²³ Orbán's nationalist rhetoric is based, according to Laczó, on three main pillars: the historical revisionism linked to the Treaty of Trianon, the mythologization of the figure of the regent Miklós Horthy and the theory of double occupation, as well as a strong anti-communist and anti-socialist rhetoric aimed at demonizing Hungary's communist past.²⁴

Orbán elevated the Treaty of Trianon as a symbol of an historical injustice and betrayal

²² Marchaud, C. "The linguistic rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine at the heart of the dispute between Kyiv and Budapest", EURACTIV, 27.06.2024. [The language rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine at the heart of the dispute between Kyiv and Budapest – EURACTIV](#)

²³ Laczó F. *Outrageous History: Historical Visions, Emotional Regimes, and Right-Wing Populist Hegemony in Hungary*. p.65-72

²⁴ Toomey, M. "History, 'Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary'" *Nationalities Papers* 26(1), 2018: p.1-23 . [PDF\) History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary'](#) and Laczó F. *Outrageous History: Historical Visions, Emotional Regimes, and Right-Wing Populist Hegemony in Hungary*. p.65-72

suffered by Hungary inflicted by the elites of Western Europe. The treaty of Trianon, signed at the end of WWI, redrew the borders of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, resulting in an amputation of Hungarian territories and the various Magyar-speaking communities that still live beyond the borders in the surrounding territories. In his attacks on the previous socialist government, which positioned him as the sole protector of the nation, Orbán accused it of having submitted to the European elite, complicit in that betrayal. Orbán, on the other hand, seeks to oppose the Brussels bureaucratic elite that undermines Hungarian sovereignty and independence.

"We will not be a colony! Hungarians will not live under the dictates of foreigners; they will not give up their independence or their freedom!"²⁵

The government's narrative presents the Trianon trauma as a real obstacle that the Hungarian people managed to overcome through their strength and national cohesion.²⁶ Orbán promoted a narrative of "national reunification" of Hungarians descended from former citizens who remained outside the borders established by Trianon, in order to reverse the imposed injustice and attempting to change the course of history.²⁷ To this end, the Hungarian government amended the Citizenship Law in 2011, allowing descendants of Hungarians and those who demonstrate ties to Hungarian culture to obtain dual citizenship.²⁸ This reform has benefited Hungarian minorities residing in neighbouring countries, such as Slovakia, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine, where significant Hungarian communities still live. The measure had a clear strategic value, strengthening the ties between the Fidesz government and the non-resident Hungarian population, thus consolidating the party's electoral consensus.²⁹ Trianon's memory has therefore been used as an instrument of cohesion and consensus. This rhetoric, based on a past of social injustice, has also fuelled an ethnocentric vision of the nation, excluding those who do not belong to the Magyar ethnicity, creating a sense of detachment from the European Union and its identity.³⁰ This approach was functional to Orbán's political narrative, which thus justifies his confrontational attitude towards Brussels. This strategy is part of a broader dynamic that the thesis has already analysed in several points, namely the opposition rhetoric that place "us" against "them". At the national level, Fidesz contrasts the corrupt elites, identified with the corrupt and Brussels-subservient socialist party, with the "authentic people", identified with the true nationalist Hungary,

²⁵ Traynor, I. "Hungary prime minister hits out at EU interference in national day speech", Guardian, 15 March 2012. In Erin K. *Populism, Nationalism and Revisionist Foreign Policy*. cit, p.283-303. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaa230>.

²⁶ Toomey, M., *History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary'*, cit, p.1-23.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sükösd, M. *Victorious Victimization: Orbán the Orator, Deep Securitization and State Populism in Hungary's Propaganda State*, cit. p.165-185

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Laczó F. *Outrageous History: Historical Visions, Emotional Regimes, and Right-Wing Populist Hegemony in Hungary*. p.65-72

independent from external interference.³¹ In Fidesz rhetoric this "authentic people" is often associated with the Hungarian population who adheres to traditional-Christian values, a population who largely residing outside the major urban centres. This legacy stems from the post-communist transition of 1989, defined in the literature as a process that divided society into winners and losers.³² According to this perspective, the benefits of economic growth have not been equally distributed, creating a rift between large cities, the more educated and the young, who have supported the prevailing liberal order for two decades, and the less educated and older rural electorate, for whom liberal democracy has not led to inclusive economic prosperity.³³ From this dynamic emerges the thesis two Hungary which opposes the "people" to the cosmopolitan urban elites, in continuity with deep historical divisions in political culture.³⁴ At the European level, Fidesz plays on anti-Brussels rhetoric, presenting EU bureaucrats and liberal elites as promoters of unfair laws, pro-immigration and the protection of minorities, as opposed to the "true Hungarians", patriots of a nation with a glorious past.

As for the figure of Admiral Miklós Horthy, regent of Hungary between 1920 and 1944, Orbán has implemented a mythologization of his figure, despite his highly controversial role in Hungarian history. Orbán elevated him to a national hero and patriot, describing him as a leader who fought strenuously until the inexorable German occupation.³⁵ However, what is not said in the government's narrative is that, although Horthy's regency brought relative stability after the territorial amputation enshrined in the Treaty of Trianon and the turbulent period between the two world wars, his rule was markedly authoritarian, defined by discrimination against ethnic minorities and by collaboration, at least initially, with the Axis powers.³⁶ This aspect, of course, is omitted in Orbán's narrative. A significant example of this rhetoric is the museum of the House of Terror, which equates the two regimes of terror, but dedicates only two rooms to the period of the fascist Arrow Crosses³⁷ and over twenty to communism. This narrative depicts the Hungarian nation exclusively as a victim, excluding the Arrow Crosses from the narrative and describing the communists as "Soviet conquerors".³⁸ In this way, the idea that the "real" Hungarians were exclusively victims is reinforced.

³¹ Rupnik J., *Senza il muro: le due Europe dopo il crollo del comunismo*, cit

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Toomey, M., *History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary*, cit, p.1-23.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The Arrow Crosses (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt - Hungarista Mozgalom*) was a Hungarian fascist political party and paramilitary movement, active mainly in the 1930s and 1940s. Founded in 1935 by Ferenc Szálasi, the party was inspired by German Nazism and Italian fascism, promoting a nationalist, anti-Semitic and ultra-conservative ideology.

³⁸ Gerner, K. "Between the Holocaust and Trianon: Historical Culture in Hungary" Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2006. In Peto A., "Non-Remembering' the Holocaust in Hungary and Poland" *Studies in Polish Jewry*, 31, 2018: p.471-480. [\(PDF\) 'Non-Remembering' the Holocaust in Hungary and Poland](#)

Horthy's mythologization has also led to another significant omission, which will be discussed in more detail in the next paragraph, namely the Hungarian responsibility on the Holocaust, which the current government seeks to downplay. The true reality is that under the Horthy government, Hungary promulgated anti-Jewish laws as early as 1938.³⁹ After the German occupation of March 19, 1944, in less than two months, with the active collaboration of Hungarian officials, 424,000 Jews were deported, in the fastest deportation in the history of the Holocaust.⁴⁰ Through this narrative, Orbán seeks to stand as heir to that nationalist interventionism embodied by the figure of Horthy. This allowed him to attract the support of the Hungarian nationalist right, which already considered the regent a positive figure.⁴¹ Moreover, a concept that emerges from Orbán's rhetoric, as well as in many other CEECs, is the theory of double occupation. This narrative reinforces the sovereigntist ideology, as it aims to deprive the country responsibility. It aims to erase the co-responsibility of the Hungarian population and political elite in the Holocaust.⁴² Anti-Semitism was already present during Horthy's regime, and the Jews marginalization was evident with the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws we previously mentioned. Indeed, between 1938 and 1941, Hungary enacted a series of racial laws that hit hard the Jewish community, restricting their access to various professions and banning mixed marriages.⁴³ The narrative of victimhood, based on the theory of double occupation finds concrete confirmation in the amendment of the Fundamental Law, which rewrote a large part of the Constitution, as already highlighted in the previous paragraph. Analysing the preamble, this approach clearly emerges. In fact, the text establishes that the reconquest of national self-determination, lost on March 19, 1944, began on May 2, 1990, with the inauguration of the first freely elected Parliament:

"We date the restoration of our country's self-determination, lost on the nineteenth day of March 1944, from the second day of May 1990, when the first freely elected organ of popular representation was formed."⁴⁴

This dual occupation approach has often had as its objective the recognition of a historical compensation, which for many countries has taken the form of entry into the EU or NATO, thanks to the so-called "special responsibility" of several European states. As can be seen, the populist rhetoric of the Orbán government appeals to the emotionality of a nation marked by a complex and troubled

³⁹ Peto A., *Non-Remembering' the Holocaust in Hungary and Poland*, cit. p.471-480

⁴⁰ Yad Vashem, "Murder of Hungarian Jewry" [Murder of Hungarian Jewry](#) and Peto A., *Non-Remembering' the . Holocaust in Hungary and Poland*, cit. p.471-480 And Yehuda D., "The Economic Effect of Antisemitic Discrimination: Hungarian Anti-Jewish Legislation, 1938- 1994," *Jewish Social Studies* 48(1), 1986.

⁴¹ Toomey, M., *History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary*, cit, p.1-23.

⁴² Pető, A. "The Illiberal Memory Politics in Hungary." *Journal of Genocide Research* 24(2), 2022: p.241-249. [Full article: The Illiberal Memory Politics in Hungary](#)

⁴³ Yehuda D., *The Economic Effect of Antisemitic Discrimination: Hungarian Anti-Jewish Legislation, 1938- 1994*, cit.

⁴⁴ Pető, A. "The forgotten Massacre: Budapest in 1944", De Gruyter-Oldenburg, Berlin/Boston, 2021: p.7 [content](#)

past, which aimed to rewrite and adapt to his narrative. The national sovereignty is presented as the only guarantee against new foreign impositions. This legitimizes the government's Eurosceptic posture and fosters an ethnocentric view of the nation, which tends to exclude those who do not belong to ethnic Hungary.

7.3 Revisiting history in action, how Orbán omitted Hungarian guilt in the Holocaust.

Hungarian revisionism, has been essential to build around Orbán an aura of nation saviour, identifying him as the only possible solution to reaffirm Hungary's greatness on the international stage. However, his narrative also sought to rewrite the European memory of the Holocaust. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the entry of the states of the former Soviet bloc into the European Union has led to a fracture in European memory, with a progressive loss of the centrality of the Holocaust in the politics of remembrance. However, while it is right to acknowledge the atrocities perpetrated by both totalitarian communist regimes of the twentieth century and integrate them into the shared European memory, it is crucial that one narrative does not prevail over the other, nor that a given memory is used to hide or omit an inconvenient past. The latter is exactly what occurred in Hungary. During the Orbán government, there was a widespread tendency to blame the Holocaust exclusively on Germany, as if Hungary had played no active role in the persecutions. Robert Rozett, director of the libraries at *Yad Vashem*, The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, where expresses all his fears regarding Hungarian revisionism:

"Today in Hungary there is a strong tendency to present the destruction of Hungarian Jewry during the Holocaust as an exclusively German crime and, with the exception of a small group of Hungarian criminals, to ignore the role and responsibility of the Hungarian authorities and society."⁴⁵

Rozett is not the only one to denounce this distortion of history. The *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)* and the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* in Washington have also expressed concern about the narrative promoted by the Hungarian government.⁴⁶ To confirm this tendency, in 2014, Viktor Orbán supported the construction of German Occupation

⁴⁵ McKenzie S., "This Holocaust Museum cost millions and still hasn't opened. But that's not what worries historians." CNN. [House of Fates: Hungary's controversial Holocaust museum - CNN.com](https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/09/europe/hungary-holocaust-museum/index.html) and Yad Vashem, *Murder of Hungarian Jewry*, cit. [Murder of Hungarian Jewry](https://www.yadvashem.org/eng/education/curriculum/Murder_of_Hungarian_Jewry.html). He continues: "Visitors to the House of Fates are led to believe that, except for a tiny criminal and fanatical minority, Hungarian citizens were essentially innocent of what happened to their Jewish neighbours"

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Memorial, a monument that portrays Hungary exclusively as a victim of the Nazi invasion, without recognizing the country's active role in the persecutions and the promulgation of anti-Jewish laws.⁴⁷ This project not only omits Hungarian responsibilities in the Holocaust, but also reinforces a nationalist narrative aimed at exalting national pride. What the government attempted to do was drawing a line under those events, turning the page permanently, burying its past and sending it into oblivion. However, this approach totally contrasts with what memory is supposed to represent. Memory is something that persists in the present and which, in this case, serves as a warning for future generation. In this regard, on April 28, 2014, Tibor Navracsics, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Public Administration and Justice, said: "*Having processed the tragedy of the twentieth century and learned from it, we should turn the page and enter the twenty-first century.*"⁴⁸ This statement marks a reversal of the principles that govern European memory. Here, in the minister words, in fact, the idea of memory as a warning and of the Holocaust as a tragedy that imposes the "never again" is rejected. This principle underpins not only the European narrative on the Holocaust, but also the European human rights paradigm itself. The idea that the Holocaust can be considered a closed event relegated to the past is totally opposed to the concept of continuity of memory.⁴⁹ To understand the implications of this narrative, the case of Sándor Szakály, director of the *Veritas Institute for Historical Research*, an historical entity directly funded by the government, is significant. Szakály tried to introduce the phrase "*police action against foreigners*" to refer to a 1941 Nazi-raid, in which hundreds of Jews were massacred with the active participation of the Hungarian authorities during the German occupation.⁵⁰ What it appears through this analysis is that the Hungarian control over the History and the memory appears almost total.⁵¹

7.4 Orbán Rise a threat for European Union Integration and identity?

Many academics warn that this all-encompassing strategy adopted by the Fidesz government over the past 15 years could prove unsustainable in the long run and crumple in on itself. What is clear is that the growing and constant radicalization and monopoly of power are not only eroding democratic

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Pető, A. "Paradigm Change in Holocaust Remembrance: Instrumentalizing Conservatism," in Miklóssy K., Kangaspuro M. *Conservatism and Memory Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*, 2021: p.160-168. [\(PDF\) Paradigm change in Holocaust remembrance. Instrumentalizing Conservatism.](#)

⁴⁹ Peto" A. "'Bitter Experiences' Reconsidered Paradigm Change in Holocaust Memorialisation", Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 1 July 2019. [\(PDF\) "Bitter experiences" reconsidered: paradigm change in Holocaust memorialisation](#)

⁵⁰ Ibidem, Andrea Pető, *Paradigm Change in Holocaust Remembrance: Instrumentalizing Conservatism*, cit, p.160-168.

⁵¹ It is also important to point out that the once diverse Hungarian history book market, as Peto notes, has been reduced to a single state-approved textbook. The Hungarian Association of History Teachers is trying to oppose this decision but is being thwarted in all fora. Pető, A. *The Illiberal Memory Politics in Hungary*, cit. p.241-249

institutions but are also undermining the credibility and effectiveness of populist discourse, which seems to lack regenerative force.⁵² Although Fidesz has consolidated its control over the political system in a capillary and total way, the party risks alienating increasingly large segments of the electorate, which could in the long run become wary of its authoritarian tendencies. Furthermore, the repression of political pluralism and the absence of real democratic competition could, over time, weaken its ability to maintain consensus.⁵³ This scenario can exacerbate discontent and pave the way for potential crises of political instability.

What appears evident is that Orbán's illiberal and revisionist regime has brought out a growing Eurosceptic trend in Europe, which undermines the integration and enlargement of the Union. It seems clear that the European Union will take a more cautious approach to integrating new states when these outward pressures arise, just a few years after the accession. Despite Petò highlight the risk of the regime collapsing in on itself, the truth is that Orbán has managed to obtain a broad consensus, rooted in the rejection of what is, to all intents and purpose, the European identity based on the values of democracy, the rule of law, pluralism and solidarity among European peoples. Orbán has reinforced a narrative focused on protecting national sovereignty and Hungary's "true identity". Although, it has reached its peak even with instruments that, in Western democracies, are considered "illiberal", his is a large success, given that he seems to enjoy great consensus. The great danger for the Union is that this rise will be taken as a model by other states as well. The emergence of Eurosceptic forces has taken hold throughout Europe and the European Union now finds itself having to counter centrifugal forces, with Hungary being the Trojan horse inside the Union. This rise, as we will also see in the next chapter on Poland, strengthens national identity at the expense of European identity.

⁵² Laczó F. *Outrageous History: Historical Visions, Emotional Regimes, and Right-Wing Populist Hegemony in Hungary*. cit., p.65-72

⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

8. The PiS's Poland: the second Trojan horse in the EU fortress

8.1 Introductory remarks: Understanding the Law and Justice (PiS) party rise to power.

The other European Union member state that has implemented a program of history revision, clashing with the EU memory narrative, is Poland. The beginning of Polish historical revisionism occurred in parallel with the rise of the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party, led by Jarosław Kaczyński. As Orbán, Kaczyński has managed to consolidate the PiS power by exploiting a strong nationalist, populist and conservative rhetoric, opposing both liberal elites and the European Union. The model with which PiS has strengthened its power is very similar to Orbán's. The PiS rhetoric tends to strengthen national sovereignty and identity, defending traditional Polish-Christian values. Moreover, PiS places its focus on the need to protect the country from external threats and interference. The outright rejection and delegitimization of propaganda and the communist past are also central components of PiS ideology and narrative.

It is not a secret that Kaczyński's party is inspired by Orbán's Fidesz. Kaczyński himself has repeatedly stated that he follows his example. In 2018 he declared: *"The day will come when we have Budapest in Warsaw"*, openly expressing his desire to build an illiberal alliance with his Hungarian counterpart.⁵⁴ The constitutional reforms initiated by PiS have caused concern in European circles, since they threatened the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. In 2019, the European Union launched infringement procedures for rule of law violation in the Polish National Council of the Judiciary (*KRS*) reform. This body, established in 1989 after the independence from the Soviet communist regime, is constitutionally responsible for safeguarding the independence of the judiciary.⁵⁵ The *KRS* has the function of appointing judges and is responsible for all matters relating to the judiciary, including the assessment of the conduct of judges. With the mentioned reform, the

⁵⁴ The Economist "Drinking from the Same Glass, Viktor Orbán's visit to Warsaw showcased an illiberal alliance." Economist, May 17, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/05/17/viktor-orbans-visit-to-warsaw-showcased-an-illiberal-alliance>. In Di Vizio T, "Rewriting the Past to Right the Present: Historical Revisionism in Hungary and Poland" *Living Histories A Past Studies Journal*, 1, 2022: p.67-76. (PDF) [Rewriting the Past to Right the Present: Historical Revisionism in Hungary and Poland](#)

⁵⁵ Regalsky P. "The Reform of the Polish Judicial Council and the independence of the Judiciary", The European centre for Law and Justice, 2020. [The Reform of the Polish Judicial Council and the Independence of the Judiciary \(ecij.org\)](#)

KRS has de facto passed under the control of the ruling party.⁵⁶ This has allowed the inclusion of figures loyal to the political leadership in key roles of justice, seriously compromising the principle of independence of the judiciary, undermining the rule of law in the European Union.⁵⁷ The Court of Justice of the EU, upholding the appeal of the European Commission, found a serious violation of EU law in Polish legislation.⁵⁸ It also reiterated that, although the organisation of judicial systems falls within the competence of the Member States, they are nevertheless required to respect the obligations deriving from EU law and the founding values of the Union, including the rule of law, as enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.⁵⁹ The Polish Constitutional Court responded by emphasizing national sovereignty, reinforcing the PiS narrative, stating:

"The effort by the Court of Justice of the European Union to interfere in the Polish justice system violates the principle of rule of law, the principle of the primacy of the Polish constitution as well as the principle of retaining sovereignty in the process of European integration."⁶⁰

This position visibly highlighted the strong contrast between the Polish interpretation, of Kaczyński Kaczyński's party, in relation to national sovereignty and European Union law. In addition, the conflict between Poland and the European Union has involved numerous aspects of the rule of law, not only in relation to the independence of the judiciary. Since the rise to government of PiS Poland has repeatedly violated EU Law, undermining the rights of women, LGBT+ community, religious and ethnic minority.⁶¹ PiS's rise to power also took place in an international landscape marked by the European migration crisis. Poland, as well as Hungary, has rejected the EU's proposed quota system for the redistribution of refugees among member states. The government has adopted a strongly anti-

⁵⁶ Wanat, Z. "Court ruling puts Poland on a collision course with the EU's legal order" Politico, 07.10.2021 [Court ruling puts Poland on a collision course with the EU's legal order – POLITICO](#)

⁵⁷ Ibid. And Regalsky P., *The Reform of the Polish Judicial Council and the independence of the Judiciary*, cit.

⁵⁸ In its appeal to the European Court of Justice, the Commission identified a violation of Union law and stated that this norm "... allows KRS (National Council of the Judiciary), whose independence is not guaranteed, to take decisions with a direct impact on judges and their way of exercising their functions, seriously undermining the independence of the judiciary..."

⁵⁹ European Court of Justice "Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 24 June 2019. European Commission v Republic of Poland. Failure of a Member State to fulfil obligations- Second subparagraph of Article 19(1) TEU — Rule of law — Effective judicial protection in the fields covered by Union law — Principles of the irremovability of judges. and judicial independence — Lowering of the retirement age of Supreme Court judges — Application to judges in post — Possibility of continuing to carry out the duties of judge beyond that age subject to obtaining authorisation granted by discretionary decision of the President of the Republic" Case C-619/18. [EUR-Lex - 62018CJ0619 - EN - EUR-Lex](#) in Apice Europa, "La legge sulla corte suprema polacca viola i principi del diritto Europeo", Apice Europa, 2019. [La Legge sulla Corte Suprema polacca viola i principi del diritto europeo: la sentenza della Corte di Giustizia - Apiceuropa](#)

⁶⁰ Kucina, I. "Polish Constitutional Tribunal's Judgement Regarding Supremacy of the Polish Constitution Over EU Law: The Next-Level Debate on the 'Last Word.'" *Law: Journal of the University of Latvia* 15, 2022: p.204-214. <https://doi.org/10.22364/jull.15.14>. And Wanat, Z. *Court ruling puts Poland on a collision course with the EU's legal order*, cit.

⁶¹ Ibid. and "Lasek-Markey, M. "Poland's Constitutional Tribunal on the status of EU law: The Polish government got all the answers it needed from a court it controls", European Law Blog, 2024. [Poland's Constitutional Tribunal on the status of EU law: The Polish government got all the answers it needed from a court it controls · European Law Blog](#).

immigration rhetoric, arguing that the reception of refugees, particularly Muslims, would put the country's highly Christian identity at risk.

8.2 The pillars of Polish revisionist narrative

As well as his counterpart Orbán and the Fidesz party, Jarosław Kaczyński's PiS has also built its nationalist rhetoric by drawing on specific historical symbols. If in Hungary the legacy of Admiral Horthy was taken up as a symbol of resistance against the injustices of the Treaty of Trianon and the German occupation, in Poland, the PiS has chosen not to identify itself with the key figures of the post-communist democratic transition, such as the Solidarity movement, nor with the protagonists of the democratic Constitution born after the fall of the USSR. On the contrary, he preferred to present himself as the heir of the so-called "cursed soldiers" (*Żołnierze Wyklęci* in Polish), an armed anti-communist resistance groups active between 1945 and 1954 in the occupied Polish territory.⁶² These fighters opposed the pro-Soviet communist government through armed guerrilla warfare, suffering persecution, arrest and killing. For decades, their figure remained controversial since some considered them patriots, other criminals.⁶³ The PiS-led Polish government rehabilitated and glorified the cursed soldiers, turning them into national heroes and victims of communist oppression. The government installed, in their honour, monuments and memorials throughout Poland, establishing a national day to commemorate their sacrifice and resistance.⁶⁴ This strategy consolidated the nationalist identity, reinforcing PiS role as an entity aiming to defend Polish sovereignty. In this way, the government legitimised its power and strengthened consensus among its most patriotic and conservative voters, driving out the rise of the Jobbik party.⁶⁵

As in Hungary, Poland has adopted a policy of de-marginalizing Nazism memory occupation, seeking to de-blame the country and minimize its co-responsibility for the Holocaust and the atrocities of World War II. The government's goal was to reinforce the narrative of a Poland victim of double occupation, due to alleged Western betrayal. Historian Kacper Szulecki defines this strategy as a reaction to the so-called "pedagogy of shame", an approach that invites countries to critically confront their past. According to PiS, however, this kind of self-criticism, which implies that the Polish people

⁶² Harper J. "Poland's memory wars" in Harper J *Essay on illiberalism*, Central European University Press, Vienna. 2018. [\[PDF\] Poland's Memory Wars by Jo Harper | Perlego](#)

⁶³Kończal K. "The Invention of the "Cursed Soldiers" and Its Opponents: Post-war Partisan Struggle in Contemporary Poland" 34(1) 2020: 67-95 [CEEOL - Article Detail](#)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

should be ashamed and guilty of their history, would undermine the national strength of the country.⁶⁶ Conversely in the party perspective, it is the West that should bear the shame for its past actions.⁶⁷ The government's official political line was clearly expressed by the Deputy Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Jarosław Sellin, who, referring to Poland's politics of memory, stated that “*wise historical policies should maintain pride in [Poland's] past achievements.*”⁶⁸ This highlights the most critical point of PiS's strategy, namely the desire to control the historical narrative, avoiding a political confrontation on the negative aspects of the past and promoting a patriotic and celebratory vision of national history.

8.3 Polish revisionism in action: undermining the "Never Again" Holocaust warning narrative.

Poland's program of historical revisionism first materialized in 2016 with a law⁶⁹, known as the "Law on the de-communization of public spaces."⁷⁰ This legislation prohibits the dissemination and circulation of communism and other totalitarian regimes reference, through the naming of buildings, objects and public services, based on a list drawn up by the Institute of National Remembrance IPN.⁷¹ The IPN, established in 1998, is a research body with judicial powers, charged with investigating crimes committed by the Nazi and Soviet regimes.⁷² In recent years, it has acquired an increasingly central role in the politics of remembrance in Poland, becoming a de facto "Ministry of History". It has obtained quasi-legislative powers and a budget five times greater than that of the Polish Academy

⁶⁶ Cadier D., Szulecki K. “Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland’s Law and Justice government”, *International Politics*, 57(6) 2020: p.990-1011. [Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government](#). In Siddi M., Klymenko L. “Historical memory and foreign policy” Palgrave, London, 2022. [Populism, Historical Discourse and Foreign Policy: The Case of Poland's Law and Justice Government | SpringerLink](#)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Żuk, Piotr. 2018. Nation, National Remembrance, and Education—Polish Schools as Factories of Nationalism and Prejudice. *Nationalities Papers* 46(6): p. 1046–1062. [Nation, national remembrance, and education – Polish schools as factories of nationalism and prejudice: Nationalities Papers: Vol 46 , No 6 - Get Access](#) In Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit.p.990-1011.

⁶⁹ That came into force in 2017.

⁷⁰ Law No. 744 of 1 April 2016 – On the Prohibition of Propagation of Communism or Any Other Totalitarian System through the Names of All Public Buildings, Structures and Facilities [O zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego ustroju totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej] [Pozycja XXX sygnatura](#). Quoted, in Belavusau U. “The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?” *Security and Human Rights*, 29(1-4), 2019:36-54 ([PDF](#)) [The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland](#)

⁷¹ Belavusau U. *The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland*, cit., p.36-54

⁷² Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.686-702

of Sciences.⁷³ This shows the attention that the Polish government pays to the historical narrative and, above all, the way in which the IPN has been used to support the rhetoric of PiS.

However, the most significant breakthrough in the politics of remembrance and the revision of Polish history came with the so-called "Holocaust Law", an amendment to the 1998 IPN Law, which was adopted on January 26, 2018.⁷⁴ This law has drawn strong criticism not only from the internal opposition, but also from many European and world leaders. Among the main opponents were Israel, the United States and certainly the European Union.⁷⁵ The amendment made claims attributing responsibility to the Polish state for the crimes of World War II, criminalizable by prohibiting any reference to Poland's complicity in Holocaust atrocities.⁷⁶ The main problem with this law is that, paradoxically, it could have criminally prosecuted even Polish origin Jews who survived the Holocaust, if they had denounced episodes of Polish collaboration with the Nazis. Indeed, the Article 55a, paragraph 1 of the 2018 Law states:

“Whoever publicly and contrary to the facts attributes to the Polish Nation or to the Polish State responsibility or co-responsibility for the Nazi crimes committed by the German Third Reich, [...] or for any other offences constituting crimes against peace, humanity or war crimes, or otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the actual perpetrators of these crimes, shall be liable to a fine or deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years. The judgment shall be communicated to the public.”⁷⁷

The article wording raised several concerns in relation to the freedom of speech. What appears clear is the risk of falling into censorship in addressing the involvement Polish in the Holocaust and Nazi atrocities. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki expressed his satisfaction with the reform, strongly arguing that it was the necessary step to counter the spread of misinformation about Poland's involvement in the atrocities of World War II.⁷⁸ In particular, the law aimed to avoid the use of expressions such as "Polish extermination camps" or "Polish concentration camps", which would

⁷³Kocejko, 'We convert the state budget into the Institute of National Remembrance', *Oko.press*, 12 January 2018. [We are converting the state budget into the Institute of National Remembrance. How many right-wing historians does it take to protect Polish nature? - OKO.press](#) in Belavusau U. *The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland*, cit., p.36-54

⁷⁴ Wierczynska K. "Act of 18 December 1998 on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation as a Ground for Prosecution of Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Crimes against Peace" *Polish Yearbook of International Law*, 37, 2018: p275-286. [Act of 18 December 1998 on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation As a Ground for Prosecution of Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Crimes against Peace by Karolina Wierczynska :: SSRN](#) in Belavusau U. *The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?* cit.p.36-54.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ [Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości](#), "Law from 26 January 2018 amending the Law of 18 December 1998 on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation" [Nowelizacja ustawy o IPN – wersja w języku angielskim - Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości - Portal Gov.pl](#). In Belavusau U. *The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?* cit.p.36-54.

⁷⁸ Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.686-702

wrongly attribute responsibility for such Nazi structures to Poland.⁷⁹ The revisionism promoted by PiS emerges clearly in the prohibition of these expressions, considered contrary to the "established historical facts" (by the government).⁸⁰

However, this law does not limited itself only to regulate the public language, it appears clear that it has direct implications on the way the Holocaust and the aftermath of World War II history is taught in Polish schools and University ⁸¹ As well as, consequentially, it will have repercussion on the academic literature. Morawiecki celebrated the approval of the law with a video message addressed to Polish citizens, aimed at clarifying the official position of the government. ⁸² The main goal which Morawiecki stated was to combat disinformation about the actions of the Polish population during the conflict and to reiterate, polish alleged innocence in relation to the Holocaust. As Belavusau notes, the video has a dramatic tone with a dark background, dark music and images that alternate the heroic deeds of Polish soldiers with harrowing scenes from Nazi concentration camps.⁸³ During the speech, Morawiecki states:

“Poland [...] was under a dual German and Soviet occupation. Practically every Polish family mourned the loss of loved ones who perished at the hands of these occupying powers [...] Holocaust denial is not only a denial of German crimes, but also other ways of falsifying history. One of the worst types of this lie occurs when someone diminishes the responsibility of real perpetrators and attributes that responsibility to their victims.”⁸⁴

Also, in this passage from the Polish PM emerges the desire to de-responsibilise Poland from the Holocaust crimes, ascribing itself to victims of history. Morawiecki's words quickly move on to justifying the law, arguing that it will serve to prosecute anyone who spreads erroneous information about Poland's involvement in Nazi crimes or denies the suffering endured by Poles under Nazi terror.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Ibidm.

⁸⁰ Verovšek, P.J., "Trapped between 1945 and 1989: collective memory and the rise of illiberal democracy in post-communist Europe", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(6), 2020: 840-857. [Trapped Between 1945 and 1989: The Collective Memory and the Rise of Illiberal Democracy in Post-Communist Europe: Journal of European Public Policy: Vol 28, No 6 – Get Access](#)

⁸¹ Belavusau U. *The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?* cit.p.36-54

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Republic of Poland “The Statement by the Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki” Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland, 3 February 2018. [Statement by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki in the European Parliament - The Chancellery of the Prime Minister - Gov.pl website](#)

⁸⁵ Belavusau U. *The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?* cit.p.36-54

"Let's remember the tragic history of the Polish nation. [...] we were the most murdered victims here during WWII and for this reason we will never agree to any compensation for anyone".⁸⁶

The rhetoric of "double occupation" recurs frequently in Morawiecki's speeches as a central element of the PiS narrative. However, the reality that history place before us appears more complex when compared to the Prime Minister's perspective and the PiS narrative. Indeed, although Poland was occupied and the Polish government was not directly involved in Nazi crimes, it is important to remember that some Poles were complicit in the Jewish persecutions.⁸⁷ A case in point is the 1941 Jedwabne massacre, in which Polish citizens resulted co-responsible of Jewish people pogrom.⁸⁸

The President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, also defended the law. He affirmed that the Holocaust Law was necessary to protect the "*dignity and historical truth*" of the country, preventing Poland's name from being "*offended and defamed*".⁸⁹ The statements of Polish leaders seem to be based on the principle that the victims cannot also be responsible, but only heroes.⁹⁰ Since Poland suffered enormously during the conflict, the government rejects any connection between the country and Nazi crimes.⁹¹ This position is part of a broader strategy of PiS, aimed at strengthening nationalism and consolidating a historical memory that exalts Polish suffering, excluding any responsibility for past crimes. International attention was again focused with great concern on Polish revisionism in February 2021, when a court ordered two historians who are experts on the Holocaust to publicly apologize for spreading "*inaccurate information*" in their recent book.⁹² The work analysed the involvement of some Polish citizens in Nazi atrocities, a particularly sensitive issue in the context of

⁸⁶ Prime Minister: there will be no consent to the payment of damages on our part', PolskieRadio24, 05/05/2019. <https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/Artykul/2303654,Premier-nie-bedzie-zgody-na-wyplate-odszkodowa-n-from-our-side>. In Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

⁸⁷ Belavusau U. *The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?* cit.p.36-54

⁸⁸ Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.686-702. Pogroms were violent riots against religious minorities, often accompanied by massacres and looting. The term, of Russian origin (devastation), initially referred to anti-Semitic attacks in the Russian Empire between 1881 and 1921. Often, they took place with the support of the authorities, hitting the Jewish communities in the "area of residence".

⁸⁹ Mazzini M. "Poland's right-wing government is rewriting history-with itself as hero," Washington Post, February 27, 2018. [Poland's right-wing government is rewriting history — with itself as hero - The Washington Post](#), in Di Vizio T., *Rewriting the Past to Right the Present: Historical Revisionism in Hungary and Poland*, cit. p.67-76

⁹⁰ Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Andrew Higgins, "Polish Court Orders Scholars to Apologize Over Holocaust Study," New York Times, February 9, 2021, [Polish Court Orders Scholars to Apologize Over Holocaust Study - The New York Times](#) and Andrew Higgins, "A Massacre in a Forest Becomes a Test of Poland's Pushback on Wartime Blame," New York Times, February 8, 2021, [A Massacre in a Forest Becomes a Test of Poland's Pushback on Wartime Blame - The New York Times](#). In Di Vizio T., *Rewriting the Past to Right the Present: Historical Revisionism in Hungary and Poland*, cit. p.67-76.

the government's policy of remembrance.⁹³ The Polish court forced the two academic professors to retract their arguments. This, de facto, censorship, which threatens freedom of speech, has raised strong criticism from the international academic community. Paradoxically, the Polish government defended the court's decision, arguing that it was necessary to protect the reputation of the Republic of Poland and the Polish citizens.⁹⁴ This episode highlights the government's increasing control over the historical narrative and the restrictions of public debate on an "inconvenient" and controversial past.

Polish historical revisionism, promoted through the 2018 law, was also reflected in Poland's approach to foreign policy and relations with the European Union. President Andrzej Duda and the PiS have supported the need to "*correct*" the country's foreign policy and to "*fight for historical truth in relations with neighbors*" through an "*active historical policy*".⁹⁵ This approach influenced Poland's international relations, making historical memory a central element of its diplomacy.⁹⁶ As in the Hungarian case, the Polish example has also highlighted the internal threats that the European Union is facing. These two historical revisionisms have undermined the integrity of the already fragile and fragmented European narrative on memory. Poland and Hungary have emphasized their history, which is described as "different" from the European one. This narrative has fomented a strong identity bond with the nation at the expense of a European common sentiment. This has created a strong gap with the European Union and its member states. The EU is faced with a propaganda that portrays it as accusing and blaming actor, towards countries that picture themselves as victims of history and demand compensation from the latter. The lack of unity which emerge in this scenario undermines Europe's aspiration for a shared memory and a common identity.

⁹³ Specifically, they wrote that the mayor of a small Polish village had collaborated with the Nazis, contributing to the murder of eighteen Jews after revealing their refuge in a nearby forest.

⁹⁴ Di Vizio T., *Rewriting the Past to Right the Present: Historical Revisionism in Hungary and Poland*, cit. p.67-76

⁹⁵ Duda, A. "Speech of the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda before the National Assembly" Speech by the President of Poland. 6 August 2015. [Speech of President Andrzej Duda at Pilsudski Square \ News \ Statements of the President of the Republic of Poland \ Speeches \ Official website of the President of the Republic of Poland](#) "Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

⁹⁶ Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

CHAPTER IX

9. Memory conflicts and future Enlargements: towards an even more fragmented Union?"

9.1 Introductory Remarks: Understanding the political landscape of EU Membership candidates.

As the last chapter of the thesis, an analysis aimed at predicting the possible role and potential conflicts arising from a future European Union expansion, is proposed. However, it is not simple to determine or predict which countries will effectively join the Union. After the “big bang” enlargement of 2004-2007, in fact, the only entry recorded was that of Croatia in 2013.⁹⁷ Since then, for over 15 years, the European Union has not expanded its borders. Between 2013 and 2022, the EU's enlargement policy proved to be ineffective and lacking a real momentum, to the point of becoming almost non-existent. In this multiple-crises context the European Union has opted for hesitation and prudence, with a clear intention to slow down new potential members integration process. There was a lack of decisive political will and impetus, and this contributed to slowing down the negotiations.⁹⁸ After the great enlargement of the 2000s, what the literature calls “enlargement fatigue” spread. This phenomenon has prompted the EU to look for alternative solutions to promote stability, democracy and European integration in neighbouring countries, without necessarily guaranteeing them membership.⁹⁹ In this scenario, instruments such as the European Neighbourhood Policy¹⁰⁰ and different Association Agreements have been developed, with the aim at strengthening the ties between the EU and its neighbours without moving towards enlargement.¹⁰¹ These agreements have certainly laid the foundations for a future enlargement, which, though, seems to be delayed.

Several causes may have contributed to the slowdown in the EU enlargement process. On one hand, the Member States have been confronted over the past 15 years with an extremely complex

⁹⁷ Economides, S. “From Fatigue to Resistance: EU Enlargement and the Western Balkans.” *Dahrendorf Forum IV*, Working Paper No. 17, March 20, 2020: p.1-17. [Economides from fatigue to resistance published.pdf](#)

⁹⁸ It should also be remembered that the European Union is not obliged to accept new members. Karjalainen, T, “EU Enlargement in Wartime Europe: Three Dimensions and Scenarios.” *Contemporary Social Science* 18 (5), 2023:p.637–656 [Full article: EU enlargement in wartime Europe: three dimensions and scenarios](#)

⁹⁹ O’Brennan, J. “Enlargement Fatigue and Its Impact on the Enlargement Process in the Western Balkans.” In Brunet L.A. The Crisis of EU Enlargement, Research Report, 2013: p.36-44. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/LSE>

¹⁰⁰ ENP

¹⁰¹ Karjalainen, T, *EU Enlargement in Wartime Europe: Three Dimensions and Scenario*, cit. p.637–656

international arena defined by a continuous state of crisis. First, the debt crisis, followed by the migration crisis, Brexit, tensions in the Middle East, the fight against climate change and finally the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis.¹⁰² Against this backdrop, governments shifted their priorities and focused on internal stability and ongoing crisis management, relegating EU enlargement to a secondary issue on the political agenda. Although, as seen in the previous chapters, enlargement has brought significant benefits, it has also raised numerous difficulties, especially in managing the authoritarian and illiberal drifts that have undermined the rule of law and the very legitimacy of the Union. The cases of Poland and Hungary, which are among the latest additions to the EU, are a clear and glaring example of this. Before proceeding with new accessions, it appears therefore essential to strengthen internal cohesion and consolidate relations between the Member States, seeking to resolve and stem the persistent conflicts between the Union and certain governments, such as the example of the Hungarian government. This awareness was already present in the European leadership following the Big-Bang Enlargement. In this regard, the former President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, explicitly stated in 2014 that he wanted to prioritise the internal strengthening of the EU over further expansion.¹⁰³ While this choice was understandable in a crises scenario with growing Eurosceptic tensions after the imperfect handling of the debt crisis, it turned out to be far from right, especially in the light of the Brexit referendum that took place only two years later.¹⁰⁴ Further complicating the picture is the constant growth of Euroscepticism in many member states, accompanied by the rise of anti-establishment political forces and a growing distrust by the population of European elites.¹⁰⁵ Such a phenomenon has manifested itself both at the European institutional level, with the entry into national parliaments of large Eurosceptic forces, and among citizens, who perceive pro-European leaderships as distant and disconnected from everyday reality. This general malaise has been reflected either in the high abstention of the last European rounds or in the vote for these parties.¹⁰⁶ It appeared clear, though, that the political ground has not been particularly fertile for a concrete EU enlargement in the last fifteen years. In addition, another fundamental aspect must be considered. It is, namely, that many of the candidate countries, both in the Balkans and in the

¹⁰² Ferrara, F, “Crisis pressures and European integration”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(9), 2021: p. 1351-1373
[Full article: Crisis pressures and European integration](#)

¹⁰³ Juncker, J. “A New Start for Europe” Speech delivered on July 15, 2014. European Commission.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_14_567. In Karjalainen, T, *EU Enlargement in Wartime Europe: Three Dimensions and Scenario*, cit. p.637–656

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Shebalina E. Kotok M “The Rise of Euroscepticism in Europe in Time of Crisis in World”. In Lebedeva. M., _Morozov V. *Turning Point of World Transformation*. 2022: p.231–249 [Turning Points of World Transformation: New Trends, Challenges and Actors | SpringerLink](#)

¹⁰⁶ The frequent reference to “Brussels bureaucrats” underlines this perceived lack of representation and alienation from the real needs of the population.

Caucasus area, as we shall see, have not yet achieved the levels of democratic, political and economic stability required by the Copenhagen criteria, further slowing down the negotiation process. In this regard, the literature has highlighted a phenomenon known as the "golden carrot" which tries to explain the progressive "disenchantment" of the candidate countries with the European project. At the time of their candidacy, these states were incentivised to carry out reforms in exchange for the prospect of EU membership.¹⁰⁷ However, over time, the lack of concrete and real incentives has led to this mechanism.¹⁰⁸ As a result, in many of these countries, particularly in the Western Balkans, there are both signs of democratic backsliding and, above all, a growing resistance to reforms. It has been determined both by the perception that EU membership is an unattainable goal, and by the obvious structural limitations that prevent the implementation of the necessary transformations for accession.¹⁰⁹

The Russian aggression of Ukraine have radically changed the geopolitical landscape, reshuffling the cards on the table and altering the calculation between costs and benefits of EU enlargement. This way, the conflict has shown the urgency of strengthening the stability and security of the continent, creating a new strategic incentive to relaunch the accession process. The presence of the war and recent geopolitical developments implies strongly that enlargement will be one of the key issues on the EU's agenda over the next ten years. What emerge in this scenario is that the integration of new members is no longer seen only as an economic or geopolitical opportunity, but as a necessity, in order to be able to guarantee security in Europe and consolidate its position of influence in the region. As the thesis shows, due to offering a prospect of peace and democracy in stark contrast, in that case, to the spectre of either new Spanish civil war or authoritarianism, the Mediterranean and also the Eastern Enlargement have strengthened the European Union legitimacy and its *raison d'être*. It therefore becomes strategic to strengthen stability in neighbouring countries and consolidate EU identity, in line with what the literature calls the "transformative power" of the Union.¹¹⁰ This refers not only to the EU's ability to promote political and institutional changes in neighbouring countries in particular in the field of democratisation and the rule of law¹¹¹. Perhaps also to its ability to positively influence conflict dynamics, helping to stabilise regions marked by ethnic, political, social

¹⁰⁷ Börzel, T., A., Lebanidze B. "The Transformative Power of Europe beyond Enlargement: The EU's Performance in Promoting Democracy in Its Neighbourhood." *East European Politics* 33 (1), 2017: p. 17–35. [“The transformative power of Europe” beyond enlargement: the EU’s performance in promoting democracy in its neighbourhood*: East European Politics: Vol 33 , No 1 - Get Access](#)

¹⁰⁸ Bechev, D. "What Has Stopped EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans?" *Carnegie Europe*, June 20, 2022. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/06/20/what-has-stopped-eu-enlargement-in-westernbalkans-pub-87348>.

¹⁰⁹ Economides, S. *From Fatigue to Resistance: EU Enlargement and the Western Balkans.*, cit. p.1-17.

¹¹⁰ Börzel, T., A., Lebanidze B., *The Transformative Power of Europe beyond Enlargement: The EU's Performance in Promoting Democracy in Its Neighbourhood.*, cit., p. 17–35.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

and economic tensions.¹¹² Although the war in Ukraine has a very different scope than these conflicts, the EU can still play a leading role in managing the crisis and in trying to stabilise the area. On Russian attack on Ukraine sideline, Georgia and Moldova the "Association Trio" with Ukraine applied for EU membership. Their requests were examined at record speed, revitalizing an enlargement process that had been stalled for a decade.¹¹³ In June 2022, Ukraine and Moldova were granted official candidate status, while Georgia was granted membership prospects, the first preliminary step towards obtaining candidate status. Currently, nine countries are aspiring to join the EU and have been granted official candidate status: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia, North Macedonia, Turkey, Montenegro and Ukraine, while Kosovo is currently a potential candidate.

9.2 The Balkan Enlargement: The European Union as a stage for unresolved historical controversies?

In terms of memory and memory conflicts, the Balkans Enlargement would represent an enormous challenge for the Union. It would be probably even more complex than the CEECs accession, which still appears unresolved today. The accession of these states could turn the EU into a veritable arena for the recognition of historical disputes, not only between candidate countries, but also between them and existing member states. The risk is to build a more marked fragmentation of EU identity, accompanied by a politicization of history and memory, with the danger of reopening wounds that have not yet fully healed. The integration of post-war Yugoslavia countries memories would likely create growing conflict in the EU memory narrative. The Balkan countries, therefore, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, have experienced a particularly complex and traumatic history. If we refer to the CEECs as countries that experience a "double occupation", in the case of the Balkans we could refer to a triple historical legacy.

Firstly, like other CEECs, the Balkans suffered occupation during World War II. In this context, many of the considerations made for the other EU Member States apply in terms of memory relating to war crimes, the divisions between communist, partisans, nazi-collaborators, and ethnic

¹¹² Hughes, J. "Introduction: The Making of EU Conflict Management Strategy-Development through Security?" *Ethnopolitics* 8 (3-4), 2009: 275–285. [\(8\) Introduction: The Making of EU Conflict Management Strategy—Development through Security?](#) Quoted in Ker-Lindsay J., Armakolas, I., Balfour R., Stratulat. C., "The National Politics of EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17 (4), 2017: p.511–522 [Full article: The national politics of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans.](#)

¹¹³ Sapir, A. "Ukraine and the EU: Enlargement at a New Crossroads", Springer, Heidelberg, 57(4), 2022: p. 213-217 [Ukraine and the EU: Enlargement at a New Crossroads](#)

tensions. Secondly, as in other parts of Eastern Europe, the end of the WWII in 1945 did not mark the end of the conflict in those countries. Tito's regime, for many, represented an extension of violence, occupation and suppression of freedoms, despite a more liberal turn in the 70s of the last century.¹¹⁴ Marshal Tito tried to maintain Yugoslav unity through a mix of repression and concessions to different ethnic groups, creating conflicting narratives that still tend to influence the varied Balkan societies today. For some, socialist Yugoslavia represented a period of stability and unity; for others, however, it was an era of oppression and limitation of national freedoms. For example, in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, part of the population remembers that period as an era of coexistence while in Kosovo, Croatia and Slovenia a memory national identity repression prevails, with particular attention to the regime's harsh response to independence uprisings.¹¹⁵ Finally, in order to complete this complex historical picture, there are to take into account the tragic Balkans wars and ethnic cleansing of the recent 90s. The conflicts that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia have left open wounds in different societies, and the hatred for war crimes is still alive and, understandably, determines relations between these states. Indeed, the lack of mutual recognition responsibility for war crimes, the difficulties in prosecuting war criminals and the nationalist narratives promoted by governments and the media, often contribute to maintaining a climate of mistrust and “revenge” among Balkans populations. It hinders a process of reconciliation and consequently integration into the EU.

In the Balkan countries, a strong nationalist sentiment which tend to deny or minimize responsibility for war crimes, persist. In Serbia, the 1995 Srebrenica massacre is still not recognized as genocide, despite the rulings of the International Court of Justice Tribunal in The Hague and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ICTY.¹¹⁶ The Serbian government has tried to downplay the seriousness of the facts. It spread the narrative that the Serbs as well were war crimes victim to an equivalent extent of Srebrenica.¹¹⁷ This denial not only fuels tensions with Bosnia and

¹¹⁴ Sindbæk Andersen T., Törnquist B. “Disputed Memory. Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe” De Gruyter, Boston-Berlin, 2019 [Andersen, Tea Sindbæk and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa: Disputed Memory: Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe](#) Pistan C. *Collective Memory in the Context of European Integration Processes: Some Critical Reflections on the EU Politics of Remembrance*, cit. p.686-702

¹¹⁵ Bešlinm., Žarković.P., “Serbian Liberals and the Croatian Spring: Croatian-Serbian Relations and New Concepts of Yugoslavia in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 53(3), 2021: p.791-820 [Serbian Liberals and the Croatian Spring: Croatian-Serbian Relations and New Concepts of Yugoslavia in the Late 1960s and Early 1970s](#).The reference is to the repression of the uprisings of the protest movement known as the Croatian Spring (*Hrvatsko proljeće* in Croatian) in 1971.

¹¹⁶ Šarić, S. Subotić J, "The Denial of Genocide in Srebrenica in the Context of Strengthening Neo-Fascism and Relativization of the Holocaust in Europe." *Journal of Genocide Research* 24 (1), 2022: p.71-90 ([PDF](#)) [The Denial of Genocide in Srebrenica in the Context of Strengthening Neo-fascism and Relativization of the Holocaust in Europe](#)

¹¹⁷ Sorguc, A. "Bosnian Serbs' War Commissions: Fact-Seeking or Truth-Distorting?" *Balkan Insight*, February 25, 2019. <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/25/bosnian-serbs-war-commissions-fact-seeking-or-truth-distorting>

Herzegovina but would also clearly conflict with the European narrative based on Holocaust remembrance. This Serbian view is based on the memory of the massacres perpetrated by the Croatian Ustasha¹¹⁸ during World War II.¹¹⁹ Serbian deniers have exploited the revisionist climate to spread theories that present the Srebrenica massacre as a necessary act of self-defence. Furthermore, the role of the communist Yugoslavia legacy, in the construction Second World War memory should not be underestimated. As for Serbia, another big question mark¹²⁰ would not exclusively be related to the recognition of its responsibility in the Srebrenica genocide, but also on Kosovo. Serbia, in fact, has not yet recognized Kosovo's 2008 unilateral declaration of independence, which could represent a significant obstacle in the process of European integration.¹²¹ Even though other countries, currently members state, such as Spain and Greece, have not yet done so. Other potential reasons for conflict in the Balkans would concern the relations between North Macedonia and Greece. Despite the Prespa Agreement ratification, which led to the change of the country's name from "Republic of Macedonia" to "North Macedonia", tensions have not completely subsided.¹²² In exchange for this change, Greece recognized Macedonian identity as distinct from Greek identity, accepting that the citizens and language of North Macedonia were referred to as "Macedonians". However, national sensitivities remain and may re-emerge in the future.¹²³

The historical complexities of the region are so profound that it is difficult to predict with certainty the prospects of possible enlargement. The legacy of the Balkan war has left indelible marks. What appears clear is that several memory conflicts remain unresolved between those candidate states. The European Union must consider those factors, as the accession of these countries could

¹¹⁸ Axis Allies

¹¹⁹ A further element of distortion that emerges that could collide in a possible enlargement of the Union is the instrumental use of the Holocaust to deny the Srebrenica genocide. Some Israeli historians and intellectuals, such as Gideon Greif, have argued that Srebrenica cannot be considered a genocide, claiming that only the Holocaust fully fits this definition. Greif, close to the Serbian government, has emphasised the suffering of Serbs in Croatian death camps, while downplaying the crimes committed in Srebrenica. The Jasenovac concentration camp has often been presented as the 'Serbian Auschwitz', with a narrative that, in some cases, overstates the number of victims in order to reinforce the idea of the Serbian people as historical victims. This approach was used to counter accusations of genocide against Serbs during the Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s. The parallel with the Holocaust would be particularly delicate. Placing this memory in the European context could strengthen neo-fascist and far-right movements, contributing to the denial or relativisation of the Holocaust itself. Greif, G. "Interview on *Radio Television of Republika Srpska*" June 15, 2021. <https://youtu.be/UrgDpspq4QU>. Subotić J., "In Holocaust and the Meaning of the Srebrenica Genocide: A Reflection on a Controversy Holocaust and the Meaning of the Srebrenica Genocide: A Reflection on a Controversy" *Journal of Genocide*, 24(1), 2022: p.71-82. [Holocaust and the Meaning of the Srebrenica Genocide: A Reflection on a Controversy: Journal of Genocide Research: Vol 24 , No 1 - Get Access](https://doi.org/10.54648/ceerr2019036)

¹²⁰ Related to its accession to the European Union

¹²¹ The problem could arise in the moment that a member state vetoes such recognition.

¹²² Markou, G. "The Prespa Agreement Between Greece and North Macedonia and the Discordancies of EU Foreign Policy." *European Foreign Affairs Review* 24(4), 2019: p.428- 446. <https://doi.org/10.54648/ceerr2019036>.

¹²³ Ibid.

introduce latent tensions into the Union which, with the right trigger, could turn into crises difficult to manage, especially in an unstable geopolitical landscape.

9.3 The “Accession Trio”: Is still the EU attractive as a bulwark of democracy and stability?

The Russian aggression against Ukraine in its dramatic nature has certainly had the positive effect of reactivating the dialogues on the enlargement of the European Union, that till then seemed dormant. It appears clear that the conflict has highlighted the urgency of strengthening the continent's stability and security, creating a new strategic incentive for the EU to relaunch the accession process.¹²⁴ Countries directly or indirectly affected by the war have applied for EU membership precisely because of the guarantee of peace and stability. However, to date, an enlargement towards Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, is not fully feasible for several reasons. In the first place, Ukraine is currently engaged in the defence of its borders, and the uncertainty about its territorial future makes the prospects and modalities of accession equally uncertain. Tyyne Karjalainen, analysing the possible future war scenarios, argues that, in the event of Ukraine's total victory, its membership prospects would improve exponentially. It would be possible thanks to a reconstruction process similar to that of Western Europe after the WWII, supported by an aid plan comparable to the Marshall Plan.¹²⁵ However, if the victory were only partial, consequentially many questions would arise, because would EU member states really be willing to take in a country that does not have full control of its territory and that may not even have a final peace treaty with Russia?¹²⁶ It is hard to believe that the Union would accept another Cipro case.

As far as Georgia is concerned, the main country's problem is its political instability and the strong Russian interference in the country, which constitute a significant obstacle to its accession to the EU. Over the past 15 years, political polarization has reached extreme levels, with a constant confrontation between the two main parties, namely the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement. Georgian politics has been dominated by a heated rivalry between the founders and de facto leaders of these parties, Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili. The last elections in Georgia were particularly turbulent due to possible fraud and interference by Russia. The ruling Georgian Dream party, pro-Russian in orientation, obtained 54% of the vote with the opposition

¹²⁴ Karjalainen, T, *EU Enlargement in Wartime Europe: Three Dimensions and Scenario*, cit. p.637–656.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

which denounced electoral irregularities.¹²⁷ The President of Georgia, Salomé Zourabichvili, accused Russia of manipulating the results and called on citizens to demonstrate.¹²⁸ The event has brought to light the serious problems of democracy that Georgia is currently facing with the ruling party which exercises a strong control over many institutions. The squares of Tbilisi were filled, united in protest, with European Union flags, to confirm, once again, that the Union is vision as an actor that can possibly guarantees democracy and freedom.¹²⁹ In addition to Russian interference, Georgia is coming off an unresolved territorial dispute concerning South Ossetia and Abkhazia, regions that are currently enjoying great autonomy and independence from Tbilisi. The second war in these regions ended less than twenty years ago, but the conflict remains far from frozen.¹³⁰ In this conflict Georgia is supported by Western powers, while South Ossetia is supported by Russia.¹³¹ It seems clear that Georgia's eventual accession to the EU could further complicate the geopolitical situation, increasing the already numerous tensions with Moscow.

Since the Russian aggression in Ukraine, Moldova has also faced several challenges. As underline by a report from the European Commission, Moldova is currently confronting a massive influx of refugees, high inflation, threats to energy supplies, violations of its airspace, and a range of hybrid actions, such as disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks.¹³² As in the case of Georgia, the country is characterized by strong political polarization and internal conflict with the Transnistria region, a separatist and independent territory supported by Russia. In February 2024, the authorities in Tiraspol asked the Russian Duma to take measures to defend Transnistria, justifying the request with the increasing pressure exerted by Moldova and the presence of more than 220,000 Russian citizens in the region.¹³³ This situation clearly undermines the stability of the country and contribute to the rise of tensions.¹³⁴ Further concerns were heightened when an opposition party leader in Tiraspol report that a local demonstration in Transnistria could be used to announce a request to join

¹²⁷ EuroNews, "Thousands protest in Georgia to denounce election results" 29.10.2024. [Thousands protest in Georgia to denounce election results | Euronews](#)

¹²⁸ Barigazzi J., "Protest in Georgia as poll commission confirm pro-Russia ruling party's win", Politico, 16.11.2024. [Protests in Georgia as poll commission confirms pro-Russia ruling party's win – POLITICO](#)

¹²⁹ Kirby P. "Gergians join mass rally as president urger protest at "rigged vote" BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjr424zvv2po>

¹³⁰ Markedonov S. "The South Ossetia conflict", In Bebler A., "Frozen conflict Europe", Budrich Barbara Publishers, Toronto, 2015: p. 111-125. [1004290.pdf \(oapen.org\)](#)

¹³¹ König M., "The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict" IFSH, OSCE Yearbook 2004, Baden-Baden, 2005: p. 237-249. [The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict](#)

¹³² European Commission, "Moldova" *Enlargement and Eastern Neighborhood*. [Moldova - European Commission](#)

¹³³ Internazionale, "La regione separatista della Transnistria chiede la protezione della Russia" 28.02.2024. [La regione separatista della Transnistria chiede la protezione della Russia - Internazionale](#)

¹³⁴ Cicinelli. I, "High Tension between Moldova and Transnistria, Tiraspol calls for Russian intervention over tariffs" EuroNews. 20.02.2024. [High tension between Moldova and Transnistria, Tiraspol calls for Russian intervention over tariffs | Euronews](#)

Russia.¹³⁵ The Moldovan government promptly denied these claims, calling the event a "propaganda operation" and assuring that there was "no risk of escalation".¹³⁶

9.4 Ukraine's Accession: between the “double identity” myth and its controversial historical past with Poland

Beyond political and geopolitical considerations, which are a determining factor in the orientation towards enlargement, it is important to return to the central theme of this thesis. From the accession perspective of these three countries, the implications in terms of historical narrative and memory would constitute a non-negligible challenge. As the Union expands and moves away from its natural geographical centre of gravity, the memories multiply and intertwine, as do the different interpretations of history and conflict that have marked the past of these countries. Ukraine's accession, particularly after the end of the war, would pose a significant challenge to the integration of its historical memory into the European narrative.

The recent aggression memory will inevitably lead to a unanimous condemnation of the crimes committed by modern Russia, a position that is likely to be shared by all current Member States. Moreover, Ukraine's past of oppression under the Soviet Union would place it within the historical narrative of Eastern European countries, an aspect that this thesis sought to analyse and discern various connotations. In the wake of this, Ukraine will try to leverage the recognition of the victims of communism, with particular attention to the Holodomor, the famine induced by the Bolsheviks between 1932 and 1933, which caused about 7 million victims.¹³⁷ This event has already been the subject of a resolution by the European Parliament in its process of integrating the memory of the countries of Eastern Europe.¹³⁸

Another Ukraine¹³⁹ feature which could potentially create a challenge, lies in its "double identity", which feeds a divided culture of memory.¹⁴⁰ However, there have been attempts to build a national memory around the 1989 break, emphasizing the freedom won with the end of dependence

¹³⁵ The New York Times “A Breakaway Region of Moldova Asks Russia for Protection”, Russia-Ukraine War, 28.02.2024. [Transnistria, Breakaway Region of Moldova, Asks Russia for Protection - The New York Times](#)

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ European Parliament, “Resolution of 23 October 2008 on the commemoration of the Holodomor, the Ukraine artificial famine (1932-1933)” 23 October 2008. [Texts adopted - Commemoration of the Holodomor, the artificial famine in Ukraine \(1932-1933\) - Thursday, 23 October 2008](#)

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ukraine should still be territorially intact and not amputated at the end of the war

¹⁴⁰ Verovšek, Peter J. *Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past*, cit., p.531-549.

from the USRS. The country, however, remains marked by the so-called "myth of the two Ukraine."¹⁴¹ On the one hand, we find western Ukraine, which fought for independence against Nazi and Soviet rule; on the other, eastern Ukraine, where the presence of the Russian-speaking minority and the close relation with Moscow is a factor not to be underestimated.¹⁴²

Although this narrative was also based on the 2004 presidential election results and the ensuing Orange Revolution, where Ukraine appeared divided between a pro-European West, which supported Viktor Yushchenko, and a pro-Russian East, which supported Viktor Yanukovich. The same dynamic recurred with the 2010 elections and the Maidan Revolution or Revolution of Dignity, after the government's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union.¹⁴³ The truth is that numerous EuroMaidan demonstrations in favour of European integration were also held in Crimea, Donetsk and in the Donbass area.¹⁴⁴ This makes emerge that the concept of the "two Ukraine" is actually a simplification, often used for propaganda purposes, where is not taken into account the complexity of the Ukrainian identity. This narrative has often been instrumentalized by Russia to present Ukraine as a naturally divided country and therefore destined to fracture, justifying its territorial aspirations.¹⁴⁵ This phenomenon is easily visible in what happened with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the support for the separatists of Donbas, as well as the consequent aggression of 2022. The Kremlin's narrative appeals to the will and desire of Russian-speaking populations to establish closer relations with Moscow.¹⁴⁶ However, the reality appears remarkably different, because despite linguistic and cultural differences, many eastern, Russian-speaking cities demonstrated a strong adherence to Ukrainian national identity during the war.¹⁴⁷ This phenomenon appears true even in the southern regions, where in cities as Odessa, the widespread use of the Russian language did not automatically translate into pro-Russian sentiments.¹⁴⁸ The Russian invasion of 2022 brought important elements that deny the "myth of two Ukraines".

¹⁴¹ Zhurzhenko, Tatiana. "The Myth of Two Ukraines." *Transit-Europäische Revue*, 23, 2002. In Verovšek, Peter J. *Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past*, cit., p.531-549

¹⁴² Verovšek, Peter J. *Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past*, cit., p.531-549

¹⁴³ Reznik, O. "From the Orange Revolution to the Revolution of Dignity: Dynamics of the Protest Actions in Ukraine" *East European Politics and Societies*, 30(4), 2016: p.750-765 [From the Orange Revolution to the Revolution of Dignity: Dynamics of the Protest Actions in Ukraine - Oleksandr Reznik, 2016](#)

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Khodunov, A. "The Orange Revolution in Ukraine." In A. Goldstone, Grinin L., Korotayev A. *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century*, 2022: 501–515. [The Orange Revolution in Ukraine | SpringerLink](#)

¹⁴⁶ Cicinelli, I. "High Tension between Moldova and Transnistria, Tiraspol calls for Russian intervention over tariffs" EuroNews. 20.02.2024. [High tension between Moldova and Transnistria, Tiraspol calls for Russian intervention over tariffs | Euronews](#)

¹⁴⁷ The New York Times "A Breakaway Region of Moldova Asks Russia for Protection", Russia-Ukraine War, 28.02.2024. [Transnistria, Breakaway Region of Moldova, Asks Russia for Protection - The New York Times](#)

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

9.4.1 Poland and Ukraine or Poland vs Ukraine?

A possible fault line which should not be underestimated by the EU in Ukraine's future accession, relies in its complex historical past with Poland. Although today the two countries have established good diplomatic relations and Warsaw continues to strongly support an independent and Western-oriented Ukraine as an essential element for its national security, some historical tensions remain.¹⁴⁹ The reasoning also stemmed by virtue of Ukraine role as a geopolitical bulwark against the Russian threat. This support has translated and reflected in Poland's continued support for Ukraine's membership for NATO and the EU accession.¹⁵⁰ However, with the rise of the PiS, as we saw in the previous chapter, a strongly nationalist and revisionist memory policy was implemented, which rekindled old controversies. This has opened a rift that, in the future, could intensify and create significant problems in bilateral relations between the two countries.¹⁵¹

The main point of tension in the relations between Poland and Ukraine concerns the interwar period between the First and Second World Wars, and particularly the Volhynian massacre. The Volhynian massacre represents an episode of ethnic cleansing of the Polish population in Ukrainian territories.¹⁵² In 2016, the PiS-led Polish government enacted a law defining the Volhynian massacre as genocide, establishing a National Day of Remembrance.¹⁵³ However, this commemoration does not include incidents of violence perpetrated by Poles against Ukrainians, such as the 1945 Pawłokoma massacre. Although the Ukrainian government no longer denies the Volhynian massacre, in which between 60,000 and 100,000 Polish civilians were killed, PiS's rhetoric refuses to acknowledge Ukrainian pain over Polish repression, thus contributing to an escalation of tensions.¹⁵⁴ The PiS has developed a historical narrative that tends to equate Ukrainian nationalists with Nazis, emphasizing Poland's victim role and focusing exclusively on the Volhynian massacre of 1943-1944. Tensions between the two countries were further heightened after the removal of a monument dedicated to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.¹⁵⁵ On that occasion, the deputy director of the Institute

¹⁴⁹ Szulecki, K. "Towards liberal geopolitics" In Szulecki K. *Cracking Borders, Rising Walls: The Crisis of the European Order*, Kultura Liberalna, Warsaw, 2016: p.11-37 ([PDF](#)) [Towards a liberal geopolitics](#)

¹⁵⁰ Zwolski, Kamil. *European Security in Integration Theory: Contested Boundaries.*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018. [European Security in Integration Theory: Contested Boundaries | SpringerLink](#)

¹⁵¹ Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

¹⁵² Bateson, I. Ukraine and Poland's History Wars are a Gift for Putin", *Foreign Policy*, 2017. [Ukraine and Poland's History Wars Are a Gift For Putin – Foreign Policy](#)

¹⁵³ Sejm "Resolution of the Sejm on paying tribute to the genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists on the citizens of the Second Republic of Poland in the years 1943–1945" 22 July 2016.

¹⁵⁴ Belavusau, U. "Polish Memory Laws and Historical Identity in Europe: Analysing the Defence of 'Disinformation'" University of Milano-Bicocca School of Law Research Paper No. 20-01, 2020. [Polish Memory Laws and Historical Identity in Europe: Analysing the Defence of 'Disinformation' by Uladzislau Belavusau :: SSRN](#).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

of National Remembrance reiterated opposition to any celebration of the UPA in Poland.¹⁵⁶ In the context of nationalist propaganda, PiS has also winked at nostalgic groups for the former Polish Eastern regions in Ukraine (Kresy), resurfacing historical revisionism and increasing the weight of territorial issues in Polish foreign policy.¹⁵⁷ During a visit to Lviv, Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski accused Ukraine of anti-Polonism and a lack of goodwill in bilateral relations, referring to the management of the Defenders of Lviv cemetery, a symbolic place for Polish wars against Ukraine and Soviet Russia.¹⁵⁸ Paradoxically, according to Kacper Szulecki, the rhetoric used by PiS to demonize Ukrainian nationalist figures, particularly those linked to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), follows Soviet propaganda. During the communist period, in fact, the USSR exploited the figure of the Ukrainian nationalist rebel to delegitimize Ukrainian independence.¹⁵⁹ In 2018, the PiS government further escalated tensions with the introduction of an amendment to the IPN law. This measure included in the legislation the category of crimes committed by "Ukrainian nationalists" against Polish citizens, generating a real crisis in relations between the two countries.¹⁶⁰

What emerges in this analysis is that the conflictual past, in this scenario, has been used by Polish propaganda to nurture a sense of national cohesion, in the most classic of "us vs them" rhetoric. However, the confrontation with Ukraine is not a founding element of Polish politics, which is why relations between the two countries are rather stable. Also, considering the recent war, those frictions are not expected to become a destabilizing factor, given Ukraine's strategic importance, nor to preclude Polish support for it. Possibly in a future enlargement, clashes could emerge in parliamentary debates, but relations between the two countries are ruled out of a rupture.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

¹⁵⁸ Gazeta Prawna, "Witold Waszczykowski in Ukraine: Who was bothered by these lions? Who Starts the Problems?", 05.11. 2017. [Udzielenie urlopu zdrowotnego to obowiązek, a nie dobra wola szefa. Ważne orzeczenie SN dla nauczycieli - GazetaPrawna.pl](#) Quoted in Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

¹⁵⁹ Cadier D., Szulecki K. *Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland's Law and Justice government*, cit., p.990-1011

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. The nationalist wing of the right-wing populist Kukiz'Movement suggested the modification to Article 2, which passed the Sejm with the support of the PiS majority.

9.5 Turkey's eternal wait: The Armenian genocide recognition as a new accession entry ticket?"

The other major country, along with Ukraine, which could potentially access the European Union is Turkey. However, although Ankara has not formally withdrawn its candidacy, the Turkish accession can now be considered particularly unlikely, and negotiations are, probably, not going to be resumed. This is due to both, the illiberal and authoritarian drift of the Turkish government, in stark contrast to the principles of the European Union, and to its growing proximity to Moscow. The history of Turkey's possible accession is long, as early as 1963, the president of the European Commission, Walter Hallstein, stated that "*turkey is part of Europe*".¹⁶¹ However, the last real Turkish effort to join the Union dates to about 15-20 years ago. In 2008, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared: "*our goal is full membership*."¹⁶² The complications related to Turkish accession are neither limited only to geopolitical aspects, such as the dispute over the northern part of Cyprus¹⁶³, or to the possible repercussions on the single market or even on the European rule of law. This because the historical and identity point of view, in Turkey's accession, would have a significant impact.

Firstly, like Ukraine, Turkey has a double identity, geographically located between Europe and Asia, it is also deeply affected by this position at the level of identity, not to mention the role of religion, which is a relevant component especially in its East Asian part. On a historical level, a first element that emerges is that Turkey did not directly experience the EU founding myths, such as the Second World War and the subsequent reconciliation process. But, above all, the most critical point concerns the Turkish government's failure to recognize the Armenian genocide. This refusal signals a reluctance to adhere to a "European style" model of elaboration of historical memory, based on the recognition of the faults and traumas of the past.¹⁶⁴ During the negotiations, which were subsequently interrupted, when Erdoğan was asked for clarification on these issues, and in particular after the request by French Presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy to officially recognize the massacre of Armenians, the Turkish leader replied diplomatically: "*We want to be treated in the same way as the other candidate countries*."¹⁶⁵ As Verovšek points out, this position reflects the reluctance of some

¹⁶¹ Hallstein W., "Europäische Reden, eds Thomas Oppermann and Joachim Kohler", Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979. In Verovšek, Peter J. *Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past*, cit., p.531-549

¹⁶² Langenbacher, E. "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations", in Langenbacher E. Shain Y. *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, Georgetown University Press, 2010. [Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations on JSTOR](#)

¹⁶³ That is currently an EU territory. Cyprus is divided in two territories, since the Turkish invasion in 1974, which followed a Greek-backed *coup d'état* aimed at unification with Athens. Türkiye occupied the northern part of the island, declaring it the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognised only by Ankara. Since then, the UN Line separates the Greek-Cypriot community in the south from the Turkish-Cypriot community in the north.

¹⁶⁴ Verovšek, Peter J. *Expanding Europe through Memory: The Shifting Content of the Ever-Salient Past*, cit., p.531-549

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

non-Western countries to accept moral lessons from European states. Clearly, if negotiations were to resume in the future, albeit unlikely, after the increased awareness in Europe in recent decades about the Holocaust and the crimes of communism, Turkey's recognition of its bloody past would become an essential criterion for its eventual accession to the EU.

Conclusions

This thesis aimed to analyse the role of historical memory and the conflicts it generates in the different phases of the European Union Enlargement, highlighting the dynamics and mechanisms that influence the European integration and the construction of a shared supranational identity. The thesis also aspires to serve as a connection between past, present and future. Drawing on the legacy of previous enlargements dynamics, it also analyses current revisionist trends and, finally, proposes a forecast of memory-related clash that could potentially emerge in a context of future EU accessions. This research aims to fill a gap that emerges in the academic literature, which, until now, has neglected an in-depth analysis of the specific weight of memory and the tensions arising from different historical interpretations in the EU Enlargement process. The study highlighted how the different national narratives of the past have represented, and continue to represent, an obstacle to the construction of a collective identity and memory at the European level. While focusing on the role of memory and the conflicts it generates, the thesis does not merely describe these phenomena. Rather, it seeks to offer an interpretative framework to understand how political choices and orientations are influenced by these variables. However, it neither claims to provide a universal explanation nor to completely fill this gap in the existing literature. Through a methodology aimed at reconstructing the mechanisms that regulate these dynamics, the research sought to outline a clearer mapping of the interactions among the variables at play. Nonetheless, much remains to be explored in order to fully understand the transformative value of historical memory and its impact on European political dynamics. Indeed, the literature on EU enlargement has often focused on economic and geopolitical factors, overshadowing the more socially relevant aspects. This thesis does not mean to deny the importance of these elements, which undoubtably play a crucial role in promoting integration, but shows how the past and the different member state historical legacy, also continue to influence these processes. This reinforces the idea that memory is a continuous, dynamic and undoubtedly determining variable in the relationships between states.

The European Union Enlargement, since its first expansion, has highlighted the challenges related to the integration of new member states. This is because the Union was born on the ashes of a history shared by the six founding countries, experience that were not equally perceived by all the subsequent entrants. The integration into the European narrative of divergent memories and interpretations of the past, has posed significant challenges to the EU's cohesion and unity, showing how, in many cases, it is easier not to integrate than to remain united. The 1973 enlargement, with the

accession of the United Kingdom are the example of these dynamics. Therefore, the Britain's strong national identity, deeply rooted in a distinct historical narrative, influenced the country's complex and often ambivalent relationship with the European project. British identity has traditionally been anchored in its imperial past, its victory in World War II, and in a self-perception of exceptional nation. The thesis highlights how a strong nationalist sentiment has undermined effective adherence to the European project. A rhetoric adopted firstly by Churchill, taken up almost 50 years later by Boris Johnson during the Brexit campaign, and by the British government at the accession time as well. Unlike other states, the United Kingdom neither ascribe the same weight on the European narrative associated to reconciliation and the "never again" of the Holocaust nor did it represent a decisive factor of attraction. This can be attributed to the distinct trajectory of British history which followed a peculiar path. It is important to remember that London was never occupied, did not lose its sovereignty and did not experience a fascist dictatorship. In addition, the U.K. possessed a long-established democracy, with the parliamentary model par excellence: Westminster. During this first phase of accession, the founding historical memory of Europe proved to be more useful as an instrument of internal cohesion for the Community than as an attractive factor for new members accession, as was the case for the Mediterranean countries in 1985. In the British case, indeed, the past played a significant role, but paradoxically it did so in the opposite direction. In fact, rather than facilitating integration, it contributed, together with other factors, to delaying the entry of the United Kingdom and subsequently determining a constantly defensive attitude towards European integration and the erosion of national sovereignty.

The case of the United Kingdom demonstrates the persistence of an identity rhetoric which, although less evident than in the accession of former Soviet countries, represented one of the first real memory clashes of European project. The memory of the Holocaust was accepted and recognized, but it was not the main motivation for the United Kingdom's accession, which was instead driven by economic and geopolitical reasons, linked to the inexorable decline of its empire. The EU appeared as the last train that London could hold on to maintain a position of influence and prosperity. Although the United Kingdom shared a strong anti-fascist rhetoric with the other member states, its entry did not strengthen the sense of European identity and cohesion. On the contrary, the challenges related to its accession, the ongoing friction with France and the subsequent path towards Brexit, marked by an ever-present Euroscepticism in its political forces in Parliament, made the United Kingdom a constant destabilizing variable in the integration process.

The Mediterranean or the so-called post-authoritarian enlargement showed us a completely different picture. Indeed, the premises for the accession of these countries, were profoundly different

from those of the first wave of enlargement. While the first northern enlargement, despite the initial difficulties related to the British attitude, involved countries with a consolidated democratic tradition and a strong anti-fascist rhetoric deriving from the outcome of the Second World War, the accession of the Mediterranean countries responded to a different historical assumption. Firstly, it is important to remember that Spain, Portugal and Greece were nations that, until a few years earlier, had been ruled by fascist dictatorial regimes, in stark contrast to the European values and ideals of the time. The regimes of Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal and the Colonels in Greece had been consolidated over time and, in some cases, had even been accepted by a significant part of the population. Moreover, both Portugal and Francoist Spain had not actively participated in World War II, despite Franco's "sympathy" for the Axis powers. This second wave of adhesions has once again demonstrated the central role of historical memory in the political choices and ideological approaches of European leaders. The analysis shows how, through this enlargement, the European Union has consolidated its democratic identity and legitimacy, giving itself a more defined *raison d'être*. This process strengthened EU political-identity role, and establishing itself as an attractive force, a bulwark of democracy and anti-fascism.

However, this enlargement has also highlighted new tensions and contradictions. The European Union had to deal with a deeply divided Spain, marked by significant economic backwardness, a conservative society strongly attached to religion and a political arena which did not completely break with its past, as well as geopolitically isolated. Part of the population, particularly rural, was still firmly anchored to the figure of Franco and to what he perceived as the "true Spanish identity". The accession into Europe was not so viewed a synonymous of progress and modernity, but rather a loss of traditional values. During this period, the supporters of European integration, the *Europeanizers*, were stigmatized as enemies of the nations. For the defenders of the Spanish tradition, national greatness was based on the preservation of conventional social hierarchies and Catholic values. In this perspective, the European modernization project appeared as an "alien" or even an anti-Spanish element. However, during the democratic transition, the idea of modernity was progressively intertwined with a vision of a democratic Spain and, consequently, with European membership. Thus, a sharp contrast was drawn between "modern Spain" and "traditional Spain", between "European Spain" and the "isolated Spain" of the past. A further issue that emerged, concerns precisely how Spanish democratic transition was managed. It was characterized by an almost total suppression of the crimes of the Franco period through the implementation of an "institutionalized oblivion, concretized in the *Pacto de Olvido*. This implementation of the policy of forgetting was in open contradiction with the European memory framework, which instead, requires a clear

confrontation with its own past, to overcome it and transform it into a warning and a lesson for the future. Although at the time this choice was perceived by Spanish and European elites as a necessary solution to start the integration process, *the skeleton in the closet*, resurfaced forcefully in the 2000s, coinciding with the so-called memory boom in Europe. The *Pacto de Olvido*, still fuels a debate that appears still open in Spanish society.

The enlargement of Central and Eastern Europe was undoubtedly the most significant and complex, both in terms of its impact and its consequences on the European historical narrative. What emerges first from this analysis is that one of the main prerogatives that guided the integration of these states was the desire for historical compensation. Enlargement was conceived as an act of reparation, aimed at settling the "debt of history" those Western countries felt they had towards Eastern ones, in particular Germany. The so-called "black trinity", composed of the Munich Pact, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Yalta Conference, has left deep wounds in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, generating a strong feeling of betrayal towards the West, accused of having abandoned them behind the Iron Curtain for more than fifty years. In this context, once again, enlargement has represented an opportunity for the European Union to strengthen its role as a promoter of democracy and the pan-European reconciliation mission. This prospect strengthened the legitimacy of the Union, which could not avoid opening the doors of Europe, given what was perceived as a moral duty. This enlargement was not only a reaction to historical circumstances, but also the expression of the desire to complete a process of integration initiated in 1951, realizing an ideal of unity that until a few years earlier seemed unattainable. While the accession of these states, strengthened the European Union as a symbol of peace, stability and democratic progress, it represented a real earthquake in the European memory narrative. The CEECs have, in fact, requested the recognition Soviet regime crimes, believing that the Western-Eurocentric narrative had privileged the memory of the Holocaust while marginalised the persecutions suffered under communism. The thesis also highlighted the frictions regarding the different historical interpretation of the end of the Second World War. While for Western Europe, the 8th of May 1945 marks the liberation from Nazism and the beginning of reconciliation, for the CEECs the end of the war did not represent the end of oppression, but rather the beginning of decades of Soviet rule. This interpretive gap emerged prominently during celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the end of the war in 2005, when Eastern European leaders attempt to challenge the Russian narrative. The invitation to commemorations, paradoxically held in Moscow, was perceived as a tacit legitimization of Soviet memory at the expense of the suffering endured by these countries. Some leaders, such as those from Lithuania and Estonia, refused to attend, while others, such as those of Poland and Latvia, took the

opportunity to attend denouncing Putin's narrative. A rhetoric which aimed to exalt the Red Army sacrifice while omitting the oppression of the Stalinist regime. Just a year after the accession into the EU of the former Soviet bloc countries, all the leaders of Western Europe took part in Moscow, demonstrating a lack of sensitivity that only in the following years, thanks to the efforts of CEEC's will be partially filled. Their position was based on the double experience of dictatorship which has marked their history, and on the perception of a double standard in the condemnation of totalitarianism by Western countries. This generated several tensions and political debates, which reached their peak in the European Parliament's 2019 resolution on European remembrance which was accused of equating Nazism and communism. The contrast between these two perspectives has turned into a full-fledged political battle, with Eastern European MEPs finding in many of the Western right-wing parties a strong ally to promote a clearer condemnation of communism. The European Parliament's 2019 resolution reignited the debate. Part of the Western left forces criticised the resolution by denouncing this equalization. Many parliamentary forces have defined this equation as propagandistic, revisionist and simplistic. Members of the Greek, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese left tried to defend the role that communists played in the resistance from fascist regimes, emphasizing that communism in Europe not only symbolized a hope of emancipation for many but also contribute to the integration of social rights into several of the Western constitutions. On the other hand, the Eastern countries representative reaffirmed their view of communism as a matrix of oppression and dictatorship. Some parliamentarians have even compared the communist red star to the Nazi swastika. This ongoing tension reflects the EU's constant struggle to reconcile divergent national memories within a unified identity narrative. The balance between acknowledging the suffering endured by Eastern Europe and defending the contribution of communism to Western democracies remains one of the open challenges in building a cohesive European identity, as underlined by the very recent resolution of 23 January 2025. The thesis extends attention to contemporary challenges related to memory, highlighting the danger posed by historical revisionism, a phenomenon that is currently undermining the integrity of the European Union. The historical revisionism and illiberal nationalism that the EU experiences in Hungary and Poland are key elements of an identity narrative that questions the founding principles of the EU.

The thesis extends attention to contemporary challenges related to memory, highlighting the danger posed by historical revisionism, a phenomenon that is currently undermining the integrity of the European Union. The historical revisionism and illiberal nationalism that the EU experiences in Hungary and Poland are key elements of an identity narrative that questions the founding principles of the EU. Both governments consolidated their power through polarizing political strategies and a

progressive erosion of the rule of law, limiting the independence of the judiciary, political pluralism and freedom of the press. At the same time, revisionist rhetoric aims to rewrite its own national history, emphasizing the Soviet past and depriving itself of any responsibility for involvement in the WWII crimes and the Holocaust. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán's government has built a consensus based on the defence of national sovereignty and the "authentic Hungarian identity", instrumentalizing historical events such as the Treaty of Trianon, considered a historical injustice. This revisionism has led to the mythologization of controversial and collaborationist figures as Miklós Horthy in Hungary and the paramilitary group of the Arrow Crosses in Poland. This historical memory manipulation has contributed to exacerbate tensions within the European Union. By reinforcing a sense of national exceptionalism, the Hungarian and Polish rhetoric stands in direct opposition with the creation of shared memory. The political success of Orbán and PiS's demonstrates the tangible risk that this model could be adopted by other states, alighting a growing wave of Euroscepticism across the old continent. Hungary and Poland, thus, become the "Trojan horses" within the Union, actively undermining the European integration project from inside. Currently, the EU faces a crucial challenge, as it must be able to counter the propaganda that portrays it as a punitive actor against countries, who perceive themselves, as victims of history and demand recognition of their suffering.

The thesis also aimed to offer a prediction on the memory related conflicts that could emerge with future accessions to the European Union. Currently, nine states are candidates for membership, but the enlargement process has suffered a dormant phase after Croatia's accession in 2013, due to "enlargement fatigue", a phenomenon driven by constant state of crisis that EU'S has face in the last 15 years, which has shifted political priorities. However, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has reignited the debate, speeding up the accession process for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, which have been granted candidate status in record time. With a view to future accession, the complexities of a potential entry of the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Turkey into the Union raises significant concerns. Enlargement to the Western Balkans appears particularly problematic due to their troubled history, characterised by both internal conflicts within the region but also tensions with the current Member States. The historical legacy of the region is threefold. The weight of the past, in fact, is reflected in three levels, namely the memory of the Second World War, the period of Tito's communist regime in socialist Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars of the 90s. During the Second World War, as in other parts of Western Europe, the Balkan states experienced occupation and divisions between communists, partisans and Nazi collaborators and ethnic tensions. However, the conflict conclusion in 1945 did not mark a process of true reconciliation and pacification. Instead, Tito's regime imposed forced cohesion between the different Yugoslav ethnic groups, generating contrasting historical

narratives that continue to influence the different Balkan societies today. While some remember the socialist period as an era of stability, others see it as a phase of national repression. The third level of historical complexity is related to the 1990s wars, which were marked by ethnic cleansing and war crimes, many of which have not been fully recognized by the respective governments, despite various international judicial proceeding. Nationalist narratives, often fuelled by governments and local media, obstructing reconciliation and integration into the EU. A case in point is Serbia, where the 1995 Srebrenica massacre is not officially recognized as genocide, despite the rulings of the Hague Tribunal. The Serbian government has tried to downplay its responsibilities by spreading the narrative that the Serbs were victims of equally serious war crimes. This position not only fuels tensions with Bosnia and Herzegovina, but clashes with European memory centred on the Holocaust. The failure to accept historical responsibilities could represent an obstacle to Serbia's accession to the EU, as well as the issue of Kosovo, whose unilateral independence of 2008 is not yet recognized by Belgrade. Other possible conflict point concern the relations between North Macedonia and Greece, where, despite the 2018 Prespa agreement, national sensitivities could likely re-emerge in the future. These events make integrating the Balkan historical memory into the European narrative a hard challenge, which and risk to destabilize an already fragmented European identity. The accession of these states could transform, even more, the Union and the Parliament, into an arena for historical disputes. The politicization of memory could exacerbate divisions and reinforce centrifugal forces that threaten the cohesion of the Union from inside. In addition to the Balkans, the accession of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia could also lead to several issue. Although these countries portrait the EU as a guarantee of stability and democracy, their integration remains uncertain. Especially for Ukraine, the future clearly depends on the outcome of the conflict. A total victory would favour membership, but partial Russian control on either the government or part of territory, would raise questions about a possible repetition of the "Cyprus case". Moreover, a possible integration of Ukraine would also raise many questions about the complicated relationship with Poland due the unresolved historical disputes. Despite the current good diplomatic bilateral relations and the Warsaw's support for the Ukrainian cause, some historical wounds remain opened. Most notably the Volhynia massacre of 1943-1944, in which Ukrainian nationalists killed tens of thousands of Polish civilians remains at the centre of the debate. The Polish government led by PiS has emphasized this story through laws that recognize the massacre as genocide, without considering the violence suffered by the Ukrainians. This generated tensions, especially after the removal of a monument dedicated to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, believed by many Poles to be a collaborator of the Nazis. Polish rhetoric, in some cases, has taken up stereotypes of Soviet propaganda, used to delegitimize Ukrainian nationalism. However, these frictions, while

present, do not seem to compromise Polish support for Ukraine's membership, seen as a bastion against the Russian threat.

What is clear is that the future enlargement of the EU is likely to reignite tensions related to historical memory, undermining the future of the European integration project. The integration of countries with conflicting national narratives could increase the fragmentation of European identity, with the risk of internal conflicts. The challenge for the Union will be to find a balance between historical reconciliation and political stability, preventing the wounds of the past from becoming crisis factors in the future European order.

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