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Europeanising memory: the European Union's politics of memory

Citation for published version (APA):

Sierp, A. (2023). Europeanising memory: the European Union's politics of memory. In M. Mälksoo (Ed.), *Handbook on the Politics of Memory* (pp. 81-94). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800372535.00012

Document status and date:
Published: 25/04/2023

DOI:
10.4337/9781800372535.00012

Document Version:
Version created as part of publication process; publisher's layout

Please check the document version of this publication:

• A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
• The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
• The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

Link to publication

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Download date: 15 May. 2024

6. Europeanising memory: the European Union's politics of memory

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INTRODUCTION

The last ten years have not only seen a proliferation of memory-related activities – the unveiling of monuments, the introduction of remembrance days and the expression of public apologies – but they have also been marked by a profound shift in locus. Had memory and identity politics been considered for a very long time almost exclusive prerogatives of the nation state that exerted symbolic power over its implementation, in more recent times one could observe a clear shift away from the national towards both the local and the transnational. On the local level, the involvement of civil society in memory issues is certainly not an entirely new phenomenon. Already in the 1950s, social movements challenged and often took over public institutions of memorialization (Wüstenberg 2017). On the supranational level, however, the active participation of international organisations can be considered a novel development.

This chapter provides a comprehensive yet concise overview regarding the trajectory from a national to a European memory framework. It traces the development of the increasing involvement of the European Union in memory politics, starting with the development of a felt need for a European founding myth and ending with the EU's active formulation of policies dealing with memory issues. It highlights the role the memory of the Holocaust played in creating a shared consciousness, and the difficulties EU actors faced when trying to enter an area that until then had been considered an exclusive prerogative of the nation state. It focuses in particular on the disputes between East and Western European countries regarding memories and discusses how the EU deals with those conflictual questions. In analysing initiatives of the EU aimed at creating common ground for debates on history and memory, it also highlights the blank spots in the development of a shared European consciousness of the past. The central thesis of this chapter is that the 'Europeanisation' of memories in the EU has been subject to power balances within its member states. It accounts for the initial focus on the Holocaust, the subsequent shift towards all totalitarian regimes and the exclusion of other elements of collective memory, namely Colonialism, in its wake.

While memory issues are being discussed not only on the EU level but also within the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (see Mälksoo 2014), this chapter concentrates on European Union politics given its ever-increasing prominence in the memory field with tangible repercussions on both the national and the local level across the region. The concept of 'Europeanisation' is thus used in the sense of 'EU-isation', implying the transfer of ideas across time and space within the different European institutions and among their actors (Flockhart 2010).

MEMORIES AND EARLY EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Memories have played an important role in the establishment of many international organisations. One only needs to think about the founding years of the European Union and its prominent focus on what later was termed 'the EU founding myth' (Beattie 2007; Guisan 2011). Born – not exclusively but to a large extent – as a peace project in response to the experiences of war and dictatorship made during World War II (WWII), the memories of the first decades of the 20th century were ever present in the early years of European integration. This was already the case at the 1948 Hague summit and ran like a red thread through most thinking of supranational organisations of that time: the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), the Council of Europe (CoE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The determination to avoid another war among European nations has since the Schuman declaration on 9 May 1950 been central to the master narrative of what would become the European Union. Being repeatedly evoked in official documents and political speeches, the memories of intra-European conflict and aggression markedly influenced the set-up of the Union's institutions (Sierp 2014).

It is therefore fairly surprising that EU activism remained for many decades exclusively on the level of symbolic politics. One needs to keep in mind, of course, that European competencies were also extremely limited in this sector. The first European institutions developed some sort of European narrative, which was referring vaguely to a distant past: Charlemagne and the myth of Europa (Foret 2015). However, no active attempt was made to devise concrete EU policies dealing with questions of memory and remembrance until the 1970s. Triggered by the oil crisis and the ensuing loss of confidence in the European integration project, policy makers understood that 'one could not fall in love with a common market' – as famously noted by former Commission president Jacques Delors (1996: 6). Instead, they started to concentrate their efforts on devising strategies aimed at fostering popular support for European integration. The perceived legitimacy crisis pushed the European Commission in particular to demonstrate actively that there were new *raisons d'être* to European integration that went beyond pure economic growth (Commission of the European Communities 1972: 14–16). This concern was first expressed at the political level in 1972, in the final communiqué of the Paris Summit (19–20 October 1972) and then made its way into almost all other communications by the EU institutions. In this context, culture and cultural policies acquired a new meaning, as glue that could hold Europeans together in times of crisis (Calligaro 2013: 79–87). Efforts of the European political elites consequently concentrated initially on activities promoting a common European heritage. Its flagship programme, the European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) programme, set up in 1985, tried to establish more than any previous EU initiative the idea of a common European memory and identity going beyond abstract political principles (Patel 2013).[1]

THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND THE ROLE OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY

In the early years of ECOC, the focus was put exclusively on positive heritage. After having concentrated in the early integration years on the Middle Ages and the idea of Europe being epitomized by 'European' rulers such as Charlemagne, the focus shifted in the 1970s. The

history of European integration itself became the focus of commemoration. By directing its commemorative efforts to the Founding Fathers of Europe (i.e., the European Council awarded Robert Schuman the title of 'Father of Europe' and Jean Monnet the one of 'Honorary Citizen of Europe' in 1976), a teleological narrative was created that is still present in many ways in today's EU (see e.g. the section on the Founding Fathers in the House of European History) but did not prove to be very successful with European citizens (Cohen 2007; Verovšek 2020). The idea of Europe as the cradle of democracy and as the birthplace of the Renaissance and modernity gained ground in the 1980s (also due to the enlargement to Greece, Spain and Portugal in 1981–86). It was exemplified by choosing Athens and Florence as first Capitals of Culture. The willingness to include negative elements too (i.e., concentration camps) in the list of heritage sites that warranted attention and protection developed rather slowly. It took until the 1990s before the role that especially WWII, with its experience of suppression and dictatorship, had played in the early years of European integration came back to the fore.[2] It slowly superseded the teleological narrative of European integration that had dominated the EU discourse until the 1970s (Calligaro 2014).

This development had its origin in developments on the national level. The slow recognition in many European countries of their role played during WWII in the deportation of European Jews on the one hand, and on the other the international circulation of ideas about the Holocaust in the 1980s (e.g., due to the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel in 1986 or the publication of the documentary *Shoa* by Claude Lanzman in 1985, to name just two), created a lot of public awareness, leading to open discussions both on the national and on the EU level. The end of the Cold War exacerbated those developments further. The previously clear division into East and West, Soviet Union and European Community, Capitalism and Communism, had created a sense of community and had directed attention towards common interests rather than divergences (Thum 2004). As a result, many of the real existing differences (including divisions concerning memories of the past) between the Western European states were covered.

This changed radically with the fall of the Iron Curtain. The breaking open of the bipolar world led to an eruptive return of memory and a reawakening of history. The crumbling of national myths in the wake of the successive radical political transformations in Central and Eastern Europe made a new confrontation with questions of guilt and responsibility for the WWII events necessary in both East and West. This included in particular an aspect that had been silenced until then in most countries – the Holocaust.[3] The memory of the genocide of the Jews had played no role for early European integration, and was certainly not considered to be a point of reference. Similarly to what had happened at the national level, where the Holocaust had not permeated national public discourse and where its commemoration had not been institutionalized until the 1980s, the European level had been characterised by a pronounced form of silence. Political and intellectual debates during the first four decades following the war at both the national (with the exception of Germany) and the European level focused more on the role of the Resistance and the reconstruction and future of the on-going process of the European integration project than on questions of responsibility and accountability connected to the genocide (Chaumont 1997). Neither in public speeches nor in the EU founding treaties is reference made to the role the Holocaust might have played in defining the original values or the political goals of the European Union (Probst 2003). Andrew Beattie might therefore be right when he says, 'recent attempts to transform the Holocaust into the EU's foundational myth […] rewrite and distort the historical record' (2007: 16).

The interpretation of the Holocaust as founding act is, of course, only plausible from an ex-post perspective. It nevertheless has to be understood within a certain context, namely as an attempt to create an overarching political identity beyond the institutional framework of the EU by adding a transnational layer to national identities and memories. The EU debate in this context is part of a much larger debate that takes place transatlantically and beyond the narrow boundaries of the EU (i.e., within the Council of Europe with its forty-seven member states). Dan Diner (2000) argues in this context that the commemoration of the Holocaust is increasingly becoming the core of a unifying European memory, giving constitution building in Europe the necessary symbolic foundation: 'The ethical imperatives of this founding act constitute a catalogue of values which are of normative importance for a political Europe.' In other words, the Holocaust turned into the central point of reference for defining the values and political goals of the European Union.

The result was a flurry of activities, starting in the 1990s on the institutional level with the aim to anchor its memory firmly to the institutional setting. Within a few years the European Parliament (EP) passed several resolutions specifically addressing WWII and the murder of the European Jews (EP 1993; 1995; 2000; 2005; 2006; 2009). Following the example of some EU member states, the second EP resolution in 1995 declared 27 January European-wide day to commemorate the Holocaust, making it, together with 'Europe-Day', one of the few European commemoration dates that are being celebrated transnationally.[4] All following resolutions make reference to the importance of the Holocaust in defining the main goals and values of the European Union. A simple search in the EUR-Lex repository indicates that the Holocaust has occupied more space in EU documents since 1990 than most other events in European history. Similarly to what had happened in most EU member states at the national level, where the Holocaust had begun to become identified with the ultimate evil against which to define the identity of liberal democratic societies, within the EU a similar identity-defining process started to take place. The Holocaust has become the yardstick with which many other political developments are being measured and evaluated. This was very visible during the Balkan crisis and the unsuccessful NATO intervention in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995, when military involvement in Kosovo was primarily framed as a moral obligation largely in response to previous European failures to intervene on behalf of innocent civilians. Similar lines of argument could be perceived during the more recent disputes on military interventions in Rwanda, Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan (Sierp 2014). As Aleida Assmann puts it: 'The Holocaust has not become a single universally shared memory, but it has become the paradigm or template through which other genocides and historical traumas are very often perceived and presented' (2007: 14).

To what extent the Holocaust has started to play a role as catalyst for the definition of values that have the power to unite the peoples of Europe, became evident during the Stockholm International Forum in the year 2000 (Kroh 2008). Heads of state from forty-five countries agreed that Europe ends where the 'unprecedented character of the Holocaust' and its 'universal meaning' as a 'touchstone in our understanding in the human capacity for evil' are not actively admitted (IHRA 2000). From that point, EU memory policies started to revolve around the idea that the experience of war and dictatorship had changed Europeans' understanding of civil liberties and individual human rights and that the EU embodies a unique historically grounded conception of democracy. The best indicator for this development is the fact that a nation's ability to face up to its national past has become a 'soft' entrance criterion for joining the EU (Droit 2009). At the same time, this unspoken rule has become one of the

lynchpins of the more recent debates on memory politics on the European level, because it has had profound implications for the accession of the Central and Eastern European states in 2004.

MEMORY TENSIONS BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE

From the very first sitting of the European Parliament, many of the newly admitted EU member states – especially Poland and the Baltic States – challenged the Western European representation of WWII and the Holocaust (Perchoc 2014). For them, the end of the Second World War had meant the beginning of a new period of repression by the Soviet Union, with the result that this newer experience of Communist dictatorship had in many cases superseded the memory of what had happened before. Most Central and Eastern European countries saw themselves as victims of authoritarianism and foreign rule for centuries, and simply reconnected with this tradition after the binding socialist image of history had been lifted (Jaworski 2004).

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, this narrative of victimhood and suffering was suddenly challenged by a memory framework that stood in stark contrast to their chosen historical self-image and the narrative that had prevailed during Communism. The requirement to accept the EU-endorsed narrative as part of the accession process was consequently perceived as an imposition. On top of that, memory debates on the EU level are closely entangled with competitive domestic politics in the region. Given that, for the more nationalist groups in the EP, discussions about the experience of Communism are part and parcel of a political game against 'the left' in general and anticommunism in particular (Dujisin 2021), it is not surprising that discussions in the European Parliament preceding the 2005 'Resolution on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War' were very heated. MEPs from the new member states questioned the 'Western' interpretation of history and used the EP as a platform to put forward an alternative memory narrative, according to which the experiences of suffering under Nazism and Stalinism are comparable and should as such receive equal recognition (Sierp 2017).

Considering the above-mentioned importance that the Holocaust had acquired in Western European states as a catalyst for the expression of values on which to build a European identity, it is not surprising that the aggressiveness with which Eastern Europeans put forward their image of Europe's past, was met with considerable resistance by Western MEPs (Members of the European Parliament). The moment that representatives of several Central and Eastern European countries proposed to introduce a Day of Remembrance for the victims of Communism in the European remembrance calendar, the differences between the consolidated Western narrative and the Eastern request for recognition of their experiences as part of the pan-European normative verdict on twentieth-century totalitarianisms erupted in open parliamentary debate (Mälksoo 2014). The sought-after equation of all totalitarian regimes (including not only Nazism and Stalinism but also the fascist regimes in Greece, Spain and Portugal) came in the minds of many politicians close to a falsification of the historical record (Perchoc 2014). Since the debates surrounding the installation of this new day of remembrance can be seen as the most emblematic and exemplary incident of developments on the European level characterising the past ten years, it is worth having a closer look.[5]

The idea to create a European day that would commemorate the victims of Communism, appeared for the first time during the Slovenian presidency in April 2008.[6] The Council had asked the Commission to organise a European Parliament hearing on 8 April 2008, after requests by Lithuanian representatives (backed up by their Polish and Latvian counterparts) in the Justice and Home Affairs Council to include the denial of Communist crimes in the 2007 Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia fell through (Neumayer 2015). It is thus very likely that the organisation of an EP hearing was the attempt by the Council and the Commission to signal their willingness to continue considering the requests by representatives of Central and Eastern European Countries to deal with the recent legacy of totalitarian regimes in Europe.

In June 2008 the Czech government, which held the Council presidency at the time, sponsored a conference on 'European Conscience and Communism' organised by the 'Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes' – a Czech government agency and research institute. Two months later, the European Parliament adopted a declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as 'European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism'. Out of all the possible dates, ~~the~~ 23 August was chosen, referring to 23 August 1939, the day the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed, paving the way for Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 and Stalin's occupation of the Baltic States and parts of Romania and Poland in 1940. On 25 March 2009 the Czech presidency of the Council organised the promised hearing in the European Parliament on 'European Conscience and the Crimes of Totalitarian Communism: Twenty Years After', with the aim to come up with an official EP resolution. After two plenary sessions, held on 25 March and on 2 April 2009, a final resolution was adopted on 2 April 2009 with an overwhelming majority of 554 to 45 (33 abstentions), making 23 August the official Europe-wide 'Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes'. To date, it is arguably, together with the latest EP resolution of 19 September 2019, the most explicit positioning of the EP towards the issue of memory in the EU (Sierp 2017).

The debates during the two plenary sessions distinguished themselves from the usual debates in the European Parliament in two important ways. Discussions typically take place along national ('newcomers' versus 'older' member states) as well as ideological lines (right-wing versus left-wing political groups). On the surface, it looked as if this was the case also in the 2009 debate. A closer look, however, reveals a much more complex picture: there were clear splits within political groups that depended on the different interpretations of the nature of Communism present within them. There were also ruptures within national delegations. The Greek MEPs, for example, voted against the perceived equalization of Communism and Nazism because of the specific role played by Communists during the Greek civil war. A similar voting pattern can be observed for the German MEPs.

The two plenary debates clearly cut across existing lines of division reflecting the partisan nature of voting patterns – a development that appears to be increasingly typical for memory issues on the European level, blurring the previously clear-cut separation into East and West. The fact that during the debate the focus shifted from the exclusive concentration of Nazism versus Communism to a more differentiated vision distinguishing Communism from Stalinism and Bolshevism, speaks for the greater differentiation that has started to permeate memory discourses. The definition of totalitarian regimes was at the same time broadened to include also the Southern European dictatorships, diffusing the previously stark opposition between former Eastern bloc countries versus the other European states and indicating the development

of a more politicized conception of anti-totalitarianism at the EU level (Dujisin 2021; Sierp 2017).

This means neither that the amount and intensity of debates has diminished, nor that the division into an Eastern and a Western narrative has receded. On the contrary, looking at the more recent incidents of memory clashes that took place on the European level, it becomes clear that memory and remembrance continue to be used as political tools to underline differences. One needs only to remember the moment during the European constitutional debate, when the Polish head of state demanded that the number of Polish Nazi victims needed to be counted as well when assessing correctly Poland's proportional votes in today's Europe (DW 2007). Similar arguments dominated the conflicts surrounding the recently opened House of European History (HEH) in Brussels.

MEMORIES IN THE HOUSE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

Ever since the first ideas about a museum that would host an exhibition about Europe became public, debates have abounded about both the possibility of exhibiting European history and the process of choosing the content of the museum. Several projects competed for recognition (the most advanced in planning being the 'Musée de l'Europe' with its exhibition 'C'est notre histoire!').[7] Hans Gerd Pöttering voiced the idea of a European Museum in his inaugural speech as EP President in 2007 (Pöttering 2007), after none of the previous projects saw the day of light. From then it took more than ten years before the envisaged House of European History opened its doors. Being initially a political (European Parliament) initiative, the project faced criticisms from the outset.[8] The Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists Group, for example, called the HEH a 'house of ideology' (ECR Group 2017), accusing it of presenting a 'German point of view' and neglecting smaller member states in the process. A similar argument was put forward in British media reports, which describe the HEH as 'a temple of selfcongratulations' (Hardman 2017), leaving out most glorious British achievements in its narrative. The biggest challenge for the museum makers was, however, to reconcile the often-contrasting memories of Western and Eastern Europeans to create one transnational narrative (Hamar 2016).

The result is in many ways a compromise typical for most memory initiatives of the European Union. While the initiators of the HEH (including Pöttering) had a vision based on constitutional patriotism for the museum, the Eastern European members of the Academic Project Team were particularly interested in introducing the Eastern experiences of Communism to the narrative. This influenced the museum's memory frame, moving from a special emphasis on 'the crimes of National Socialism, primarily the Holocaust, to a museal didactic of totalitarianism' (Kaiser et al. 2014: 125). In this sense, we can observe the same move away from a Western European narrative of the uniqueness of the Holocaust towards a common narrative of human rights abuses under totalitarian regimes that had manifested itself already in 2009, with the debates surrounding the introduction of 23 August as European-wide Remembrance Day.

Ironically and despite the fact that the Academic Project Team of the HEH consisted to a large extent of Eastern and Southern European historians and museum specialists who were mostly concerned about shifting attention away from the North/West-European-centrism often present in EU history initiatives, most public disapproval of the HEH came from Central

and Eastern European countries. It was in particular the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (an EU-funded and state-sponsored anticommunist memory institute) that accused the House of European History of hosting an 'ideological, neo-Marxist exhibition which grossly misrepresents particularly the history of the Cold War and the fall of Communism' (Platform 2017). Paweł Ukielski, Deputy Director of the Warsaw Rising Museum and member of the Executive Board of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, published an extremely critical article on the House of European History in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on 6 November 2017. In addition to pointing out a number of factual errors, his main criticism was that far too little attention had been given to Europe's Christian roots. The criticism followed an open letter by the Polish Minister of Culture Piotr Glinski sent to EP president Antonio Tajani on 25 September 2017, in which he claims to speak for the whole of Central Europe when criticising the Brussels conception of history in general and the presentation of Polish history in particular (Council of the EU 2017).

More often than not, resorting to history is an expression of identity politics. The EU in this context provides a formidable forum for national political actors who make ample use of the additional EU arena to push forward their claims. The impression of a tension- and conflict-free European memory policy, as might be suggested by the resolutions of the European Parliament, is thus certainly deceptive. This does not mean, however, that EU memory politics is ineffective because of the inherent impossibility to create a conflict-free policy. Indeed, a closer look at the initiatives of the European Commission reveals that debate and conflict are welcomed. They are seen as elements that can contribute to the formation of a European public sphere if a forum is created in which differing opinions can be expressed and listened to.

MEMORY INITIATIVES BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The most emblematic memory initiative introduced by the European Commission is the 'Europe for Citizen' programme. Even through it is a Commission programme, it was actively instigated and shaped by the European Parliament through the budgetary procedure. It was subsequently launched in December 2006 by a joint Decision 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and the Council. During the funding period 2007–2013 it was mainly through Action 4, 'Active European Remembrance', that concrete efforts were made to actively frame the emergence of European-wide memory initiatives. The next generation of the programme (2014–2020) distinguishes only among two strands: 'Remembrance and European Citizenship' and 'Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation'. The Commission commits itself to funding projects that 'keep alive the memory of the victims of Nazism and Stalinism and improve the knowledge and understanding of present and future generations about what took place in the camps and other places of mass-civilian extermination, and why' (Commission 2008: 89). Believing that an open memory culture thrives only with citizens' engagement, the aim of Action 4 is to mobilize grassroots action by research institutes, museums, human rights organisations and civil society associations. Through the promotion of citizens' initiatives – and thus targeting a level that lies below the official state level – a civil understanding of history is being aimed at that allows for an active exchange between different memory cultures facilitating in that way processes of transmission and convergence in the wider European context.

In contrast to those ambitious ideas stands the amount of funding that is actually available. In the first programme cycle, only 4% of the overall financial envelope of EUR 219 million was spent on Action 4. The share was substantially increased in the second programme cycle (to 20% of the global programme budget of EUR 187 million), but considering the importance that has been attached by European policy makers to memory and identity issues in the past years, the discrepancy between aims and financial means remains striking. What the programme did do, however, was openly address the existence of different memories within Europe. Its funds are reserved for 'initiatives reflecting on causes of totalitarian regimes in Europe's modern history (especially but not exclusively Nazism and Stalinism) and commemorat[ing] their victims' (European Parliament 2013). The Holocaust and WWII are still clearly playing a major role but are put on an equal footing together with the experience of Stalinism and other totalitarian regimes, thus following the trend in EU memory politics already highlighted above.[9]

In a sense, recent EU policies seem to closely adhere to the considerations of scholars who have postulated the idea that 'there is no such thing as collective memory', but that there can very well be 'collective conditions for memories' (Koselleck 2000: 30). The attempts of the Commission to support initiatives aimed at creating a democratic culture of discussion that opens the possibility of exchanging different opinions and confronting disagreements over historical narratives, need to be understood in this context.

The deeper-lying reasons, however, for European institutions to foster exchange over such a sensitive subject as history, probably lie in the fact that memory conflicts are, generally speaking, seen as damaging for the integration project. This becomes particularly clear if we look at the latest resolution on memory by the European Parliament: the 19 September 2019 'Resolution on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe' (European Parliament 2019). Individual motions had been put forward by the European People's Party (EPP), the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the Renew Europe (Renew) group. The joint motion that turned into the final resolution after several amendments, is a common initiative of all four groups, covering 67% of all MEPs in the EP and receiving large amount of support. Tabled on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the start of WWII, it calls for 'a common culture of remembrance which rejects the crimes of fascist, Stalinist, and other totalitarian and authoritarian regimes of the past' (European Parliament 2019: 4). After referring to European integration as the response to the experiences of two world wars, it stresses that 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' to democracy (European Parliament 2019: 3). It furthermore calls for a new Remembrance Day to be established as International Day of Heroes of the Fight against Totalitarianism, in order to 'provide future generations with a clear example of the correct attitude to take in the face of the threat of totalitarian enslavement' (European Parliament 2019: 5). The importance of remembering the past is thus clearly linked in both European Parliament resolutions and European Commission initiatives to what is perceived as threats to the current state of democracy and the basic values lying at the heart of European integration.[10]

GAPS IN EUROPEAN MEMORY: COLONIALISM

The way in which the EU tries to connect past, present and future certainly says a lot about the self-image it wants to convey and the vision it wishes to foster among its citizens. Equally telling, though, is what is being overlooked, namely elements in Europe's history that neither its member states nor the EU as an institution has been willing to face so far, i.e. the memory of colonialism and imperialism. The EU has remained curiously quiet about both, even though the history of colonialism is intrinsically linked to the history of European integration. One only needs to remember that the first ideas of 'Paneuropa'[11] included large chunks of colonial Africa and that Schuman in his speech on 9 May 1950 mentioned 'the development of the African continent' as one of Europe's essential tasks (Schuman 1950). Nevertheless, if the acknowledgement of responsibility for colonial crimes is already largely insufficient at the national level, it is all the more so at the pan-European level. In comparison to its reaction to the consequences of other wars and genocides in Europe, the EU has done little in terms of symbolic as well as factual atonement. It has neither addressed the restitution of cultural artefacts that today decorate the museums of the Western metropolises, nor considered reparation payments to the descendants of the original inhabitants of colonised regions who suffered as a result of slavery or the countless massacres carried out in the course of imperial wars.

On top of that, within the EU, some Central and Eastern European countries refuse to take part in debates on the legacy of colonialism. They see themselves as colonised countries rather than linked to any colonisation process, despite the fact that large numbers of Central Europeans migrated to the colonial world and provided personnel to occupy, administer and police colonial empires (Huigen et al. 2018). By concentrating its remembrance efforts for decades almost exclusively on the experience of Nazism, Fascism, National Socialism and Stalinism, it has excluded the memory of Europeans as perpetrators of colonial crimes from this shared past. It looks as if the initial focus on 20th-century totalitarianisms had reduced incentives to critically examine previous historical periods that are essential for the understanding of contemporary Europe. The problem of wars fought and crimes committed in the name of radical nationalism seem to have been erased in the face of the seemingly bigger problem of the memory of the post-WWI period (Sierp 2020).

At the same time, metaphors of the 'dark continent' and 'the white man's burden' are back in circulation since the onset of the so-called European migration crisis. In the past eight years, both within the European Parliament and the Commission the idea that the memories of colonialism and imperialism – in the wide sense of the meaning – are no less 'European' than the Holocaust, started to gain ground. Since the beginning of the 2000s in particular the European Parliament repeatedly issued calls to the European Commission to make funding available for research relating to the history of slavery and colonialism (European Parliament 2007). The Remembrance strand of the Europe for Citizens programme indeed deals with memories related to totalitarian regimes but aims at 'providing space for remembering also other cases of ~~the~~ controversial pasts' (Commission 2008).

While a general realization of the importance of this history in all its facets seems to have albeit late and slowly entered public consciousness, the ambitions of the EU at the level of memory politics appear to stay behind concrete efforts to actively commemorate the crimes and atrocities committed during the colonial period. A real paradigm shift can thus only be discerned on the level of intentions as exemplified by the debates in the different policy forums, and less on the level of substantial policy initiatives (i.e., the introduction of a day

of remembrance for the victims of colonialism). Ironically, it has been the argumentative back-and-forth, aggressive resistance, conflict, and need for consensus-making in the different policy forums dealing with the next generation of EU funding programmes that hampered a more vigorous inclusion of colonialism in the European memory landscape, going beyond a mere demonstration of intention. It remains to be seen how the EU will deal with this new challenge concerning the future of its memory policies.[12]

NOTES

1. See the first mention of this in the 1973 Copenhagen Declaration on European identity (Commission of the European Communities 1973: 118).
2. WWI began to be seriously commemorated only around 2008.
3. Debates about the Holocaust started earlier in some countries, among them Germany and the US.
4. Even though Europe was the stage for the Holocaust, the memory of it is no longer specifically European but extends far beyond Europe's boundaries (see also Levy and Sznaider 2002, 2005). On 24 January 2005, the United Nations for the first time in its history commemorated the Holocaust in a special session; and on 1 November 2005, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 27 January as 'International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust'.
5. For a complete analysis, see Sierp (2017).
6. Discussions had already started in the Council of Europe in the 1990s and have their origin in the *Historikerdebatte* (historians' debate) in Germany.
7. See https://www.touteleurope.eu/societe/c-est-notre-histoire-une-exposition-pour-les-citoyens-europeens-a-bruxelles/ (accessed 22 July 2022).
8. It should be mentioned that the project, despite going back to an initiative by the EP, is run by a team of independent curators.
9. One should note here that the terms 'Stalinism' and 'Nazism' are problematic, as each lacks a clear definition. In the EU context, Nazism refers to Hitler's rule between 1933 and 1945, and Stalinism to Stalin's totalitarian communism in the Soviet Union and its satellite states.
10. Mentioned are xenophobia, nationalism, disinformation campaigns, violent radicalisation, the financial crisis, migration, terrorism, Brexit (Avramopoulos 2019; Tuppurainen 2019).
11. The idea of 'Paneuropa' – a region that included Europe, Africa and parts of the Middle East, was first introduced by Count Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi in 1923. It was one of the first ideas of a unified European State.
12. For a complete discussion of this topic, see Sierp (2020).

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