

Sharing a Divided Memory. The First Half of 20th Century History in the Cultures of Remembrance in Post-Cold War Germany and Poland

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Abstract

The relationship between Germany and Poland in the first half of the 20th century had been mostly one of aggressive territorial competition and resettlement of people. After the collapse of the communist regimes in Poland and East Germany, followed by German reunification, the history of this relationship has been reconceptualised within the framework of European integration. Despite overall progress, there are still numerous obstacles that need to be overcome. Thus, seen from the perspective of cultures of remembrance, it becomes obvious how fragile the re-established neighbourly relationship and both countries' quest for internal and bilateral normalization still are. Ever since 1945, there has been an "on-going saga of competitive victimhood" between people in both countries, where the wrongs one has done to the other have to be minimized or delegitimized in order to build a national identity on a sense of being deeply wronged. Reconciliation efforts quickly reached a short-lived

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peak in 1994/5 but this rapid rapprochement was derailed around the millennium when both sides realized that there were still a number of unresolved issues concerning the recent past. These incidents signalled a return to more re-nationalized approaches to historical memories. Another ten years later, both sides became more and more aware that a more pragmatic approach to the opposite side was needed in order to further develop the bilateral relationship despite remaining differences concerning the views of the past. Thus, we can see over the past three decades a succession of different emphases in German and Polish approaches to the memory of central aspects of their entangled 20th century history, which were alternately based on trends towards Europeanization, contested cosmopolitanisation or reflexive particularism.

Keywords: First half of 20th century history, Germany, Poland, Culture of remembrance, Reconciliation

1. Introduction:

The relationship between Germany and Poland in the first half of the 20th century was mostly one of aggressive territorial competition and resettlement of people. Be it restrictions for Polish migrant labourers in the German Empire, the restored Polish nation-state reluctantly accommodating the ethnic German minority during the interwar years or Germany unleashing the murderous violence of World War II. After World War II, with Germany being divided, Soviet supremacy prescribed socialist friendship between East Germany and Poland. West Germany and Poland started a fragile rapprochement in the 1970s after a period of severed diplomatic relations immediately after the war.¹ After German reunification, this rapprochement has been reconceptualized within the framework of European integration, but progress has often been hit by setbacks or has been reverted. Looking at these developments from the perspective of the cultures of remembrance, it becomes obvious how fragile the re-established neighbourly relationship and both countries' quests for internal and bilateral normalization still are.

For quite some Poles, Polish-German history has started either in 1225 when the Teutonic Order started its conquest along the coast of the Baltic Sea or in 1772 when Prussian king Frederick II actively participated in the first partition of Poland. There are still voices in Poland that refer to these events as the "German push eastward,"²

¹ This was achieved through the Social Democratic/ Liberal government's "New Eastern Policy" under chancellor Willy Brandt, who sought reconciliation with states in Eastern Europe by guaranteeing the inviolability of borders and territorial integrity, especially for Poland.

² Cf. Philipp Ther, "Der deutsche Imperialismus in Polen," *Edition Le Monde Diplomatique*, 18 (2016), pp. 103-107, here p. 104. For very helpful comments on this and other aspects of an earlier version of this article, I am grateful to Piotr Filipkowski.

which has continuously fuelled anti-German resentment within the Polish public, something that especially the current Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, abbreviated as PiS) government has tried to exploit. It forms the basis of their claim to permanent victim status vis-à-vis the western neighbour. On the other hand, for quite some Germans, German-Polish history has started only in 1945 when many of them or their ancestors were forced to leave Poland after the Red Army had ended Nazi Germany's wartime occupation of the country. Trying to blank out what had happened before this enforced mass migration (and what the role of quite some of those German expellees – a term that Poland officially still largely rejects – in that previous history had been),³ this loss of home has become the basis for expellees' claim to permanent victim status caused by Poles.⁴ Thus, ever since 1945, we can observe an “on-going saga of competitive victimhood” between both countries, where the wrongs one has done to the other have to be minimized or delegitimized in order to build a national identity on a sense of being deeply wronged.⁵ There is ample evidence for this in Polish-German post-Cold War relations. However, existing scholarship has so far usually focused on individual issues of remembrance or on one side of the commemorative

³ Cf. Jan Friedmann, “Heikle Kapitel,” in Annette Großbongardt, Uwe Klußmann and Norbert F. Pötzl (eds.), *Die Deutschen im Osten Europas. Eroberer, Siedler, Vertriebene* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2011), pp. 263-269, here p.265.

⁴ Cf. Norbert Pötzl, “Hitlers letzte Opfer,” in Annette Großbongardt, Uwe Klußmann, Norbert F. Pötzl (eds.), *Die Deutschen im Osten Europas. Eroberer, Siedler, Vertriebene* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2011), pp. 235-247, here p. 240.

⁵ Cf. Bill Niven, “German victimhood discourse,” in Eric Langenbacher, Bill Niven and Ruth Wittlinger, *Dynamics of Memory and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (Oxford/New York: Berghahn, 2013), pp. 180-194, here p. 184ff. See there also on the following. On competitive victimhood, also cf. Lars Breuer, “Europeanized Vernacular Memory: A Case Study from Germany and Poland,” in Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (eds.), *The Transcultural Turn. Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 83-101, here p. 91.

relationship between Poland and Germany. What is still missing is an assessment of the entangled dynamics of the interrelationship between the two cultures of remembrance in its development over time.

2. State of Research

One has to be aware that there are significant imbalances in the mutual historical relationship as well as within the two respective societies. Poland's political and economic liberalization over the past twenty years has helped to create a better image of Germany among younger, urban, well-educated people. Those who have guided the post-communist transition as elites nowadays also promote a more Europeanized outlook on history. This contrasts sharply with the conservative mainstream, which was boosted by the accession to power of the nationalist-conservative PiS party between 2005 and 2007 and again in 2015.⁶ Their strongly conservative politics of history turned against a more "critical patriotism" that has come into being in Poland since the 1990s.⁷ Germany, on the other hand, saw a differentiation and pluralization of its culture of remembrance through the integration of the former GDR in 1990 that brought with it its own commemorative traditions. The country also underwent the strong but contradicting influences of Europeanization and re-nationalisation after unification.

The end of the Cold War initially resulted in a greater acceptance

⁶ Cf. Eric Langenbacher, "Twenty-first Century Memory Regimes in Germany and Poland: An Analysis of Elite Discourses and Public Opinion," *German Politics and Society*, 26: 89, 4 (winter, 2008), pp. 50-81, p. 75.

⁷ Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, "Der sogenannte Polenfeldzug 1939 und der Zweite Weltkrieg in der deutschen und polnischen Erinnerungskultur," in Wolfgang Form, Kerstin von Lingen and Krzysztof Ruchniewicz (eds.), *Narrative im Dialog. Deutsch-polnische Erinnerungsdiskurse* (Dresden: Neisse, 2013), pp. 29-49, here p. 34.

of the Holocaust as the defining event of Europe's recent past, at least, as far as Western governments were concerned. In Germany, this growing acceptance coincided with the need to deal with East Germany's culture of remembrance of World War II and the Nazi era more general as well as East Germans memories of the communist post-war regime, all of which had to be incorporated into the reunified state and society after 1990.⁸ Initially, a Holocaust-centred memory seemed to prevail, symbolized by the decision to erect a monument to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin in 1999.⁹ Simultaneously, Germany's centre-right government until 1998 had made strong efforts to shift funding and attention towards the remembrance of the GDR. When this started to take effect around 2000, German victim memories of flight and expulsion experienced a strong revival,¹⁰ not least as a reaction to widespread societal acceptance of German perpetration during the Nazi era, which resulted from acrimonious debates over the so-called "Wehrmacht Exhibition" and Goldhagen's book "Hitler's Willing Executioners" in the mid-1990s. In the early 2000s, German victim memory took centre stage but ever since a peak of memory discourses around 2005, there were increasing signs of a "memory fatigue".¹¹ This shows that Germany has at least partly positively integrated its negative past into

⁸ Cf., also on the following, Christoph Thonfeld, *Normalisierung des Außergewöhnlichen. Der Wandel der Erinnerungskultur des Zweiten Weltkriegs und des Holocaust in Deutschland 1990-2010* (Taipei: Sunny Books, 2015), p. 29ff.

⁹ For the context of the "Holocaust Memorial," see Claus Leggewie and Erik Meyer, «Ein Ort, an den man gerne geht.» *Das Holocaust-Mahnmal und die deutsche Geschichtspolitik nach 1989* (Munich/Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2005).

¹⁰ For the historical context of the memories of German flight and expulsion see Norbert Pötzl, "Hitlers letzte Opfer."

¹¹ Cf. Eric Langenbacher and Friederike Eigler, "Introduction. Memory Boom or Memory Fatigue in 21st Century Germany?" *German Politics and Society*, 23: 76, 3 (autumn, 2005), pp. 1-15.

its current identity, which makes the deployment of the past for the needs of the present more flexible. That seems to be reflected in the German remembrance map, which contains many monuments emphasizing responsibility for World War II, whereas Poland's remembrance map is still dominated by monuments commemorating martyrdom.¹²

For Poles, occupying themselves with German history and the impact Germany has had on Poland over the centuries is still a rather common phenomenon. While for the longest part this mutual awareness was rather focusing on infringements on the territory and crimes against the people, more recently there was a surprising degree of empathy for German (post-) wartime suffering among Poles. This sympathy exceeded even Germans' own degree of affirmation of a victim memory and showed how much Poles actually have rediscovered the German previous history of their western and northeastern national territory.¹³ However, the same cannot be said of the Germans. On the contrary, Germans' consciousness of Poland and its history has repeatedly been found "lacking in depth" and their awareness of Polish memories has likewise been found wanting.¹⁴

After the end of Communist Parties' control of cultures of remembrance in 1989, Eastern European societies experienced a

¹² Cf. Marcin Zaborski, "Monuments and Memorial sites in Poland and Germany," in Klaus Ziemer (ed.), *Memory and Politics of Cultural Heritage in Poland and Germany* (Warsaw: Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, 2015), pp. 68-91, here p. 89.

¹³ Cf. Adam Krzeminski, "Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 40-41 (2003), pp. 3-5, here p. 4.

¹⁴ Cf. Basil Kerski, "Geschichte und Erinnerung in den aktuellen politischen Debatten zwischen Deutschen und Polen," *Jahrbuch Polen*, 14 (2003), pp. 1-20, here p. 15, for the quote. In this regard, see also Adam Krzeminski, "Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik." On lack of awareness of memories, see Lars Breuer, "Europeanized Vernacular Memory," p. 12.

heightened awareness of their own suffering during and after World War II. Now there was a possibility to publicly voice long-suppressed grievances. This was also the case in Poland. While it took some time to take effect in Germany, it quickly led to a focus on past national victimhood in Poland, where it went together with an almost collective denial of responsibility for the post-war Communist regime. This common focus on a collective state of victimhood can be found in popular memory discourses on either side of Oder and Neisse, where it is popularly underscored by the idea of a national trauma.¹⁵ Polish society now had the opportunity to come to terms with the loss of its own Eastern territories to what are now various successor states of the former Soviet Union.¹⁶ It took roughly a decade for Poland to also revisit its troubled relationship with its (former) Jewish population and Polish-Jewish relations during and after World War II. However fierce this debate has been ever since, it still left room for a major commemorative project in the shape of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, which opened its doors in 2013/14. Polish-German relations have loomed largest over Poland's culture of remembrance for a long time and this emphasis has been strongly refracted through the forty years of politics of history of the previous communist government in Poland, which presented Germany as the revanchist enemy only biding its time before striking the vulnerable Polish nation again. This is the formative background to understand why there still is a "high degree of negative consensus in the Polish political and media elite on issues of memory pertaining to Germans and Germany." Actually, this "anti-German complex" was what mostly held the people and their government together during the era

¹⁵ Cf. Lars Breuer, "Europeanized Vernacular Memory," p. 10.

¹⁶ Cf. Eric Langenbacher, "Twenty-first Century Memory Regimes in Germany and Poland: An Analysis of Elite Discourses and Public Opinion," p. 60ff, see also on the following. For the quote below, see *ibid.*, p. 63.

of Poland's People's Democracy.¹⁷ The culture of remembrance promoted a Polonocentric account of the history of suffering and death at Auschwitz while appeals to anti-Semitism were supposed to cover the gap between popular (Catholic) nationalism and official Sovietized communism as ideological bases.

The revival around the millennium of German memories of (post-) World War II flight and expulsion and the concomitant initiative to build a German "Centre Against Expulsions" have triggered a strong historico-political backlash from Poland with regularly renewed claims for appropriate compensation for German war crimes and own museum initiatives to promote Polish points of view. As far as Poland is concerned, there is simply not much room for negotiation when it comes to the history and memory of German wartime occupation of 1939-1945, which has the status of an "enshrined history".¹⁸ Thus, every attempt by the League of Expellees – their most vocal, self-declared main representative – or official German institutions to reopen the debate about this era is seen – and comprehensively rejected – as an attempt to rewrite history. However, there is also only a little legal room for regularly renewed calls for renegotiation of Poland's claims for German compensation as Poland had already forfeited those claims in 1953,¹⁹ albeit in a treaty with East Germany

¹⁷ Cf. Adam Michnik, "Trauma, Memory, and Justice. A Few Notes on Polish-German Historical Memory and its Prospects," in Justyna Beinek and Piotr Kosicki (eds.), *Re-mapping Polish-German Historical Memory: Physical, Political, and Literary Spaces since World War II* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2012), pp. 207-15, here p. 209.

¹⁸ Cf. Robert Bard, "Historical Memory and the expulsion of ethnic Germans in Europe, 1944-1947," (PhD Thesis, University of Hertfordshire, 2009), p. 144. See there also on the following.

¹⁹ Cf. Olga Barbasiewicz and Justyna Turek, "Memory in the Process of Polish-German Reconciliation. Theory, History, and Reflections," in Klaus Ziemer (ed.), *Memory and Politics of Cultural Heritage in Poland and Germany* (Warsaw: Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, 2015), pp. 13-43, here p. 20f.

and under Soviet pressure. Apart from the confrontation with Germany, this debate also includes the domestic Polish controversy about the legitimacy of the communist government to represent the Polish nation and to enter legal responsibilities in its name.

Around 2010, the Polish backlash has somewhat abated due to the German government's moderation of the League's historical claims, coupled with a firm insistence to go ahead with its commemorative projects of a "Visible Sign" for flight and expulsion and a Day of Remembrance for Victims of Flight and Expulsion. Thus, indignation and outrage, though far from having completely faded away, have gradually given way to disillusion and a more pragmatic approach to pursue national (historico-political) interests. In addition, it should still be pointed out that there is a gap between governments' politics of history and popular memories of the events in question. While in Germany pluralization of the culture of remembrance seems to have closed that gap somewhat, it seems to be a more urgent issue within Polish society.²⁰ Very recently, both countries have seen strong nationalist upsurges in politics, which will most likely also have repercussions on the respective cultures of remembrance. However, as these developments are still evolving, they are beyond the scope of this article.

3. The Continued Presence of the Past in Bilateral Relations Since 1989

The end of the Cold War has had profound consequences on the ways the history of German-Polish relations is remembered on both sides and it starts with different time frames. During the Cold War, all

²⁰ Cf. Stefanie Kowitz, "Der lange Weg zurück. Ausprägung einer europäischen Erinnerungskultur in Deutschland und Polen – Ansätze zu einem Vergleich," *Inter Finitimos: Jahrbuch zur deutsch-polnischen Beziehungsgeschichte* 1 (December, 2003), pp. 78-92, here p. 81.

sides had shown a narrowed understanding of the past. West German public memories during the 1950/60s had been mostly occupied with Germany's own victims of flight and expulsion from Eastern Europe around 1945, which has only changed to a greater awareness especially of Jewish victims since the 1970s. On the Polish and East German sides, the emphasis had been firmly on the merits of the Soviet Union, the Red Army and respective domestic communist movements for relentlessly fighting against Fascism, while Jewish and nationalist Polish victims had been neglected throughout the era of Communist rule. For Poland, a new stage in the relationship was reached in late 1989 with German chancellor Kohl's and Polish new Prime Minister Mazowiecki's demonstration of cordiality at their meeting in Krzyżowa. However, at least within the Polish academic community, the relationship had already taken a new turn with old West Germany's so-called 'Historians' Dispute' in 1986. Back then, conservative West German historians had tried to reinterpret the Nazi era as a mere reaction to Bolshevik atrocities after the Russian Revolution of 1917. This led to an outcry among left-wing and liberal intellectuals who saw this as a blatant attempt to exonerate Nazi atrocities, especially the Holocaust. Critical observers in Poland perceived it as an attempt at re-launching the FRG's revisionist historiography of the Nazi era with a special focus on German victimhood.²¹ Reunited Germany, however, sees the German-Polish Border Treaty of November 1990 – when Poland's western border was officially acknowledged by reunited Germany – as the new beginning. But the border had not only been acknowledged, it had also been opened up as a result of waning Soviet supremacy over Eastern

²¹ Cf. Adam Michnik, "Trauma, Memory, and Justice," p. 211. See also Adam Krzeminski, "Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik," on the long-term impact of the 'Historians' Struggle' from a Polish perspective.

Europe. Thus, many Germans' nostalgic relationship to what they called the 'German East', which now was no longer behind the Iron Curtain, gained renewed topicality.²²

Developments were complicated further in 1991 by Germany's 500 million D-Mark lump sum payment for Polish Nazi victims who had not been compensated before due to the Cold War. The Polish side deemed that amount way too little,²³ given that the country had had just short of six million dead – a rate of ca. 18%,²⁴ which is one of the highest of all countries in relation to the overall population. For Poland, opening and acknowledging the border was rather seen as an opportunity to voice as yet unacknowledged grievances towards Germany as the end of the communist rule made it possible again to draw Germany's attention to Polish World War II suffering. Domestically, this suffering was also emphasized as a common denominator to help Polish society overcome the internal divisions caused by the legacy of more than 40 years of Communist dictatorship.²⁵ However, both sides decided to continue working towards the improvement of bilateral relations to prove that the greater goal of peacefully overcoming Europe's Cold War divide was, indeed, attainable. Reconciliation efforts quickly reached a short-lived peak when former Federal President Herzog in 1994 asked Poles

²² Cf. Karl Schlögel, "Europa und der" Deutsche Osten" – eine Neuverhandlung," in Karl Schlögel (ed.), *Marjampole. Oder Europas Wiederkehr aus dem Geist der Städte* (Frankfurt on the Main: Fischer Publishing House, 2009), pp. 287-305, here p. 288.

²³ Cf. Olga Barbasiewicz and Justyna Turek, "Memory in the Process of Polish-German Reconciliation. Theory, History, and Reflections," p. 26f.

²⁴ Cf. Michael Sontheimer, "'Am Leben bleibt niemand,'" in Annette Großbongardt, Uwe Klußmann and Norbert F. Pötzl (eds.), *Die Deutschen im Osten Europas. Eroberer, Siedler, Vertriebene* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2011), pp. 173-182, here p. 173.

²⁵ Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, "The memory of World War II in Poland," *Eurozine*, [5 September 2007], URL: <https://www.eurozine.com/the-memory-of-world-war-ii-in-poland/> (2018/5/30), p. 2.

for forgiveness for the war crimes German soldiers had committed during the devastating defeat of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944,²⁶ while then Polish Foreign Minister Bartoszewski officially acknowledged the suffering of German expellees in the German Parliament in 1995.

This rapid rapprochement was derailed in 1998 when Germany started to use the memory of its World War II crimes as symbolic support for NATO intervention policy in former Yugoslavia.²⁷ Germany's "war of annihilation" in Eastern Europe, but also the Holocaust in particular provided the main reason why the country's new army had had constitutional restrictions on its scope of action since its inauguration in 1955. After reunification, there was a significant shift from using "Auschwitz" as a reason to prevent German soldiers from being deployed abroad to using it as quite its contrary, as a moral imperative to deploy German soldiers abroad for so-called humanitarian interventions. While this alarmed quite some survivors of the Holocaust,²⁸ it was also a matter of concern for Poland as it smacked of re-interpretation of the basic lessons to be drawn from World War II. On top of that, a government resolution called for a reopening of the issue of compensation for Germans' post-war forced resettlement by Poland prior to its accession to the European Union.²⁹ And as if that was not already enough in itself, the

²⁶ With the German army in full retreat on the eastern front in the summer of that year, the Polish underground resistance movement tried to seize control of their country from the hands of the Germans instead of leaving it to the advancing Red Army. However, the German army and SS brutally suppressed the uprising. Cf. Norman Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (New York: Viking Press, 2004).

²⁷ Cf. Basil Kerski, "Geschichte und Erinnerung in den aktuellen politischen Debatten zwischen Deutschen und Polen," p. 17f, refers to the controversy about the use of the slogan "Never again Auschwitz" and the function of the so-called "Operation Horseshoe" in this controversy.

²⁸ Cf. "Es gibt keine Erlösung," *Der SPIEGEL* (Hamburg), 3 May 1999, pp. 194-196.

²⁹ Cf., also on the following, Olga Barbasiewicz and Justyna Turek, "Memory in the Process of Polish-German Reconciliation. Theory, History, and Reflections," p. 30f.

German League of Expellees started its project of a “Centre against Expulsions” as a national site of remembrance for German post-war victims of flight and expulsion, which, according to historian Heidemarie Uhl, tended to “isolate its subject” from its historical contexts.³⁰ Although the project as such already invited some controversy, there can also be no doubt that many Poles find the organisation in itself already objectionable. The main accusation is that the League, despite being actively engaged in politics of history, not only from a Polish point of view distinctly lacks awareness of its own previous history and of that of some of their former leading members during the Nazi era.

These incidents signalled a return by Germany to a more re-nationalized approach to historical memories. Around 2000, the country got caught up in a massive revival of the memories of German wartime suffering. This part of German memories had been a prominent feature of West German culture of remembrance until the 1970s and its return can be ascribed to overlapping biographical, generational and political reasons. In a biographical perspective, those who had suffered flight and expulsion as young adults were passing away in growing numbers, thus triggering efforts to preserve their memories. This, in turn, made many of those who have experienced it during their childhood speak up publicly about it only at this relatively late stage of their (professional) lives.³¹ On the generational level, especially those former child expellees with a political left-wing orientation regarded giving the issue greater public

³⁰ Cf. Adam Krzeminski, “Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik,” See there also on the following.

³¹ Cf. Annette Großbongardt, “Neue Schlüssel zur Geschichte,” in Annette Großbongardt, Uwe Klußmann and Norbert F. Pötzl (eds.), *Die Deutschen im Osten Europas. Eroberer, Siedler, Vertriebene* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2011), pp. 17-28, here p. 20 and 25.

profile as a way of doing justice to their parents as during their adult life they rather highlighted the suffering inflicted on others by Germans than Germans' own suffering. On a political level, the images of and discourse on the civil war in Yugoslavia also contributed to the renewed awareness for Germans' flight and expulsion around 1945.³² The civil war in the Balkans not only signaled the return of warfare to Europe for the first time after 1945, the televised reports of thousands of refugees who were forced to leave their homes as a consequence could also be immediately linked to elderly Germans' experiences fifty years earlier.

Also around the millennium, Poland saw the eruption of the long-delayed debate of the relationship between Catholic Poles and Polish Jews during and after World War II. The immediate cause had been the publication of Polish-American historian Jan Gross' book "Neighbours" on the murder of Jews by native Poles in the town of Jedwabne in 1941.³³ During the 1990s the relative neglect of Jewish suffering within the Polish culture of remembrance had been kept beneath the surface. This was also a legacy of official remembrance under the communist rule which had emphasized the need for strong Polish-Soviet friendship in order to counter German aggression. However, there were also signs like the Ghetto Heroes' Monument in Warsaw since 1948 which remembered Polish Jews – albeit officially framed as part of the communist-led struggle for Poland's liberation – whereas a – similarly government-commissioned and re-interpreted –

³² Cf. Karl Schlögel, "Nach der Rechthaberei: der europäische Vertreibungskomplex," in Karl Schlögel (ed.), *Marjampole. Oder Europas Wiederkehr aus dem Geist der Städte* (Frankfurt on the Main: Fischer Publishing House, 2009), pp. 261-86, here p. 269.

³³ Cf. Stephanie Kowitz, "Der lange Weg zurück. Ausprägung einer europäischen Erinnerungskultur in Deutschland und Polen – Ansätze zu einem Vergleich," p. 85. Gross' study was seen by many as implicating Poles into the perpetration of the Holocaust, while official Polish memories of World War II usually insist on Poland's exclusive victimization at the hands of the Germans.

monument for the Warsaw Uprising was only inaugurated in 1989.³⁴ In the 1990s, there had already been eruptions of Polish-Jewish competitive victimhood like on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1995 when then Polish president Walesa attracted international criticism for not addressing the Holocaust in his commemorative speech. It highlighted a rift over the alleged emphasis of the official program of the 50th anniversary on Polish suffering, which had led to a separate commemoration by Jewish representatives at Auschwitz a day earlier.³⁵

Those big issues have kept both countries engaged in navel-gazing for a couple of years without leading to any comprehensive solution. Recently Poland has opened a museum in the unassuming southeastern countryside, which is dedicated to ethnic Poles' rescue efforts for Jews during World War II. While the museum's creation and its content are without a doubt laudable, in the current political climate it also serves the less laudable purpose of blanking out Polish crimes against Jews during and immediately after World War II as the general wartime attitude of Poland's population towards Jews is still overshadowed by accusations of widespread ideological stereotypes and deep-seated anti-Semitism.³⁶ As an escapist strategy, a member of the Polish government has recently suggested referring to Poles who

³⁴ Cf. Florian Peters, "Polens Streitgeschichte kommt ins Museum. Wie neue Museen in Danzig und Warschau die polnische Geschichtskultur verändern," *Zeitgeschichte-online* [17 March 2015], URL: <http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/geschichtskultur/polens-streitgeschichte-kommt-ins-museum> (accessed 24 March 2017), p. 1ff.

³⁵ Cf. "Bei Gedenkfeier zum 50. Jahrestag der Befreiung von Auschwitz: Präsident Walesa erwähnt den Holocaust nicht. Kontroverse zwischen Polen und Juden geht weiter," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Munich), 27 January 1995, p. 1.

³⁶ Cf. Florian Peters, "Towards a Balanced Tribute to the Polish Righteous?" *Cultures of history Forum*, [8 December 2016], URL: <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/poland/towards-a-balanced-tribute-to-the-polish-righteous-the-ulma-family-museum-of-poles-saving-jews-in-markowa/> (accessed 30 May 2018), p. 3ff. See there also on the following.

participated in anti-Jewish activities not as “Poles” but simply as “anti-Semites.”³⁷ And aside from immediate involvement in crimes, the ambivalent role of Polish bystanders during the Holocaust is also part of the on-going controversy.³⁸ In Germany, German-Jewish relations with regard to dealing with the Nazi past had arrived at a pretty stable level with the inauguration of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in 2005. The simultaneously re-occurring voices for greater recognition of German victimhood were regularly flanked by German governments’ repeated assurances of support for Israel, especially around the anniversaries of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the FRG and Israel in 1965. In Poland, on the other hand, views of the World War II relationship between Catholic and Jewish Poles have continued to occupy the attention of Polish politics and the public alike, to the point that this currently seems to be the overriding concern of Polish politics of history. Within Polish society, this issue has even at least temporarily pushed aside the otherwise still omnipresent occupation with Polish-German history. This shows just how much the controversy, which started with the Jedwabne debate, has continued to shake the basis of the Polish victim identity.³⁹

In Germany, buoyed by the growing attention for memories of flight and expulsion, the League of Expellees, conservative historians and journalists had become actively engaged in politics of history since the millennium, demanding a day of remembrance and a

³⁷ Cf. Winson Chu, “Ethnic Cleansing and Nationalization in the German-Polish and German-Czech Borderlands,” *German Studies Review*, 41: 1 (February, 2018), pp. 143-152, here p. 150.

³⁸ Cf. Joanna Stimmel, “Between Globalization and Particularization of Memories: Screen Images of the Holocaust in Germany and Poland,” *German Politics and Society*, 23: 76, 3 (autumn, 2005), pp. 83-105, here p. 89f and 99f.

³⁹ Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, “The memory of World War II in Poland,” p. 7.

monument in Berlin, and commissioning a big exhibition on the topic to push their claims. Despite attempts by the ruling Red-Green coalition to soften the historico-political stance of these initiatives and to prod them into a more palatable Europeanized direction, the League showed no signs of compromise while Polish irritation and opposition to its activities were constantly growing.⁴⁰ The main concern over locating a monument for the victims of flight and expulsion in central Berlin was that it would create a commemorative competition with the Holocaust Memorial, which was still under construction at the time after a protracted and acrimonious decision-making process. Once the League's exhibition had taken shape under the title "Forced Paths", it led to fierce reactions from Poland, although obviously more for political reasons and the supposed agenda behind it, while its content actually showed a surprising degree of multi-perspectivity. The main problem lay rather on a discursive level where the suffering of flight and expulsion appeared to be lined up alongside various incidents of genocide and especially the Holocaust,⁴¹ which was an open attack on the official German remembrance consensus at the time. Nevertheless, after the government in Germany changed in 2005 from moderate left to a grand coalition, the insistence on a separate German centre of remembrance of flight and expulsion gained even greater domestic political legitimacy. In the same year, elections in Poland saw the government turn even stronger towards the conservative right-wing, which increased the potential for tensions and aggravated existing

⁴⁰ Cf. Eric Langenbacher, "Moralpolitik versus Moralpolitik: Recent Struggles over the Construction of Cultural Memory in Germany," *German Politics and Society*, 23: 76, 3 (autumn, 2005), pp. 106-134, here p. 114.

⁴¹ Cf. Michael Wildt, "Erzwungene Wege. Flucht und Vertreibung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts," Kronprinzenpalais Berlin. Bilder einer Ausstellung, *Historische Anthropologie*, 15: 2 (August, 2007), pp. 281-295, here p. 291ff.

conflicts between the two neighbours.⁴²

The German government seized the initiative and promoted a so-called “Visible Sign” as a government-supervised version of the “Centre against Expulsions”, thus aiming to give the whole commemorative undertaking a broader political base by reducing the focus on the League. In practical terms, this led to the creation of the foundation “Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation”, which took up its work in 2008, to make it clear that German victim memory was no longer the exclusive domain of the League.⁴³ At the same time, the League and its then chairperson, Erika Steinbach, who was one of those parliamentarians who voted against Germany’s acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line as German-Polish border in 1991, have kept stirring up controversies with Poland. Some of its members had founded the so-called Prussian Trust in 2000 to press legal claims against Poland for the restitution of possessions of former expellees despite the two countries having waived territorial and financial claims against each other already some time ago. Accordingly, successive German governments refused to back the Trust’s claims, even the former chairperson Steinbach – otherwise no stranger to controversy – obviously considered the disruptive potential of this initiative for German-Polish relations too great to actually support it. The Polish government, however, had already threatened to renew its own claims for reparations for World War II despite previous agreements to the contrary.⁴⁴ The European Court of Human Rights

⁴² Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, “Der sogenannte Polenfeldzug 1939 und der Zweite Weltkrieg in der deutschen und polnischen Erinnerungskultur,” p. 33.

⁴³ Cf. Norbert Pötzl, “Versöhnen oder verhöhnen,” in Annette Großbongardt, Uwe Klußmann and Norbert Pötzl (eds.), *Die Deutschen im Osten Europas. Eroberer, Siedler, Vertriebene* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2011), pp. 248-249, here p. 248.

⁴⁴ Cf. Olga Barbasiewicz and Justyna Turek, “Memory in the Process of Polish-German Reconciliation. Theory, History, and Reflections,” p. 20.

eventually dismissed the Trust's lawsuits in 2008, which showed how far Europeanized perspectives on conflicted histories among EU member states have been established at the judicial level in the meantime. This closure on the European level of a bilateral conflict over the proper way to deal with historical issues within the contemporary framework of regional integration certainly helped to defuse a row that had again overshadowed Polish-German relations since the millennium and boosted Poland's then newly established liberal-conservative government's more conciliatory approach to politics of history.

However, the new phase of instability since 1998 had definitely turned for the worse with the start of the German initiatives for a "Visible Sign" of remembrance of flight and expulsion after World War II.⁴⁵ It has also found expression with the inauguration of a German Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Flight and Expulsion in 2014. While this emphasis on suffering and victimhood of Germans has also met with some criticism within Germany and the Day's observance has so far been somewhat subdued,⁴⁶ it nevertheless shows the current German resolve to give greater visibility to this part of memories of 20th Century history. For Germany, these projects signified a reflexive-particularistic adjustment of its national culture of remembrance after a decade-long trend towards Europeanization of its memories in the 1990s. For Poland, these projects rather appeared as a German relapse into a nationalistic insistence on one's own

⁴⁵ Cf. conference report "Strategien der Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989. Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen im internationalen Vergleich," 08-10 November 2007, Berlin, H-Soz-u-Kult [30 January 2008], URL: <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-1858> (accessed 30 May 2018).

⁴⁶ Cf. Marco Dräger, "Ein Hoch auf Flucht und Vertreibung? Zur Einführung des neuen Gedenktages am 20. Juni," *Federal Agency for Civic Education*, URL: <https://www.bpb.de/apuz/208013/zur-einfuehrung-des-neuen-gedenktages-am-20-juni?p=all> (accessed 23 May 2018).

suffering – something Poland was still struggling to overcome with regard to its own past.

Within the fragile Polish-German relationship, patterns of accusation and counter-accusation have gradually become an automatism that can function independently from any concrete interaction between the two sides. This can be derived from the fact that the Polish government in August 2017 has again brought up the issue of reparations from Germany, this time – according to observers – mainly to distract the public’s attention away from Polish judiciary’s refusal to give in to the government’s repeated political interference. However, it has also to be said that the immediate confrontation over the Centre project had been brought to a temporary conclusion in the late 200s. First, the Polish government changed towards a moderate liberal-conservative direction under Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s Civic Platform in 2007, then the German-Polish textbook commission resumed its bilateral work in 2008 and after that German Chancellor Angela Merkel attended the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the beginning of World War II in Gdansk in 2009.⁴⁷ There, Merkel prominently – as the first of a number of groups explicitly mentioned – remembered all Poles who had suffered under German occupation, and she explicitly referred to the current “close and trusting” cooperation between Poland and Germany as the greatest example of the peacetime achievements after World War II. Merkel’s appearance and speech had

⁴⁷ Cf. Olga Barbasiewicz and Justyna Turek, “Memory in the Process of Polish-German Reconciliation. Theory, History, and Reflections,” p. 38f. For the quotes from Merkel’s speech, see “Speech by Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel at the memorial event on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the beginning of World War II on 1st September 2009 in Gdansk,” *Die Bundesregierung* [1 September 2009], URL: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Bulletin/2009/09/90-1-bk-danzig.html> (accessed 2 June 2018), translated by the author.

been under especially close scrutiny back there and then. Only a week earlier she had had a much-publicized appearance at the annual gathering to commemorate Germans' flight and expulsion in connection with World War II, where she had referred to the memory of German victimhood as a "truth that cannot be denied in the long run" and had demanded a "commemoration according to standards of truth and clarity".⁴⁸ Her formulations had been strong enough to satisfy the expectations of the expellees who had been present but also vague enough not to immediately offend any of Germany's eastern neighbours. Nevertheless, it certainly raised the temperature in the build-up for the commemorative gathering at Gdansk's Westerplatte on 1 September. From the Polish side, irritations were officially calmed down when Foreign Minister Sikorski in a speech in 2011 explicitly called for German leadership in Europe, thus prioritising the strategic partnership in the present over the unresolved controversies of the past.⁴⁹

When the German-Polish Textbook Commission started talks again in 2008, it could also look back on a troubled history. The commission is an on-going concerted attempt of both sides to actively adjust the respective cultures of remembrance at the grassroots level by working on joint history textbooks.⁵⁰ Despite all its internal difficulties, the project has found international acclaim,⁵¹ which has

⁴⁸ Cf. "Es gibt keine Umdeutung der Geschichte," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Munich), 24 August 2009, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Cf. Rafal Ulatowski, "German-Polish Relations. Political and Economic Aspects," *UNISCI JOURNAL/Revista UNISCI*, 40 (January, 2016), pp. 43-56, here p. 50.

⁵⁰ Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, "The History of the German-Polish Textbook Commission," conference paper presented at international seminar 'Textbook Revision and Peace Education Revisited. Past Experiences – Present Expectations – Future Concepts,' Beijing, 3-6 October 2008 (unpublished manuscript).

⁵¹ Cf. Adam Krzeminski, "Erinnern für die Zukunft – Deutsche und Polen gemeinsam in Europa," lecture held at the commemoration ceremony on the occasion of the 70th

given it a kind of role model status, even in regions as far away as East Asia.⁵² Being a symbol of attempts at cooperation, its twisted history can also serve as a barometer of German-Polish relations. Originally, talks on a joint history textbook began already after the ill-fated German-Polish Non-Aggression pact of 1934 had been signed. Within a few years, though, the work was suspended for obvious reasons. When talks were re-launched in 1972 in the wake of the 1970 Treaty of Warsaw, the newly established commission could immediately have an impact by removing expressions of a sense of superiority that German textbooks were still oozing with regard to Poland.⁵³ Ever since, it has become a more or less continuous bilateral effort to align historical education in both countries. However, the Commission was negatively affected in the late 1990s when the revival of German victim memory began and then hit a major snag due to the Prussian Trust claims in 2004.⁵⁴ But it also foreshadowed the reconciliation of the Westerplatte when talks were resumed in 2008 and it was a sign of successful cosmopolitanisation of memories when a textbook covering German-Polish history until the Middle Ages arrived in classrooms on both sides of the border in 2016.

4. Germany, Poland and European Integration

During the 1990s, the relationship between Poland and Germany has been reframed by the process of European integration. However,

anniversary of the beginning of World War II, Frankfurt on the Main, 31 August 2009 (unpublished manuscript), p. 6.

⁵² Cf. East Asia Institute – Center for Values and Ethics, 2nd Center for Values and Ethics Roundtable, “A Bridge Too Far? Comparing Postwar German-Polish and Sino-Japanese Reconciliation,” Korea University, Seoul, 12 March 2009 (conference transcript), pp. 1-6.

⁵³ Cf. Jan Friedmann, “Heikle Kapitel,” p. 266.

⁵⁴ Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, “The History of the German-Polish Textbook Commission,” p. 15 ff.

the beginning and the actual course of this process have been perceived differently in Poland and Germany. For Poland, the “return to Europe” has started in 1989 by peacefully overcoming Soviet-backed Communist rule. Poland’s emphasis on 1989 highlights the role of the trade union “Solidarity” in the process of overcoming the communist regime and, thus, providing the groundwork to overcome the division of the continent soon after, initiating a process of Europeanization for Poland.⁵⁵ Already before 1989, the reference to Europe had been a discursive pattern to voice criticism of the communist government and express distance towards the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ Ever since, there is a lively on-going discourse within Poland, whether or not there was, indeed, any need for Poland to “return” to Europe, as according to some political actors, the country had never left it in the first place. As evidence, they quote Poland’s geographical position in what they see as the centre of the continent as well as Poland’s long-standing contribution to the (Catholic) Christian heritage of Europe.⁵⁷ While Poland’s Europeanness seems to be beyond doubt in those discussions, the exact nature of its past and future relationship with the continent has been up for debate. For Germany, Poland’s European ambitions were taken seriously only from 1992 onwards, after Poland had signed a treaty of association with the European Union in 1991 and France, Germany and Poland

⁵⁵ Cf. Paulina Gulinska-Jurgiel, “Zwischen Peripherie und Zentrum: Europabilder und Selbstverortungen des polnischen Parlaments nach 1989,” in Frank Bösch, Ariane Brill and Florian Greiner (eds.), *Europabilder im 20. Jahrhundert. Entstehung an der Peripherie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), pp. 279-302, here p. 284 and 296.

⁵⁶ Cf. Frank Bösch, “Entstehung an der Peripherie. Europavorstellungen im 20. Jahrhundert,” in Frank Bösch, Ariane Brill and Florian Greiner (eds.), *Europabilder im 20. Jahrhundert. Entstehung an der Peripherie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), pp. 7-24, here p. 18.

⁵⁷ Cf. Paulina Gulinska-Jurgiel, “Zwischen Peripherie und Zentrum: Europabilder und Selbstverortungen des polnischen Parlaments nach 1989,” pp. 285 f and 301.

had started loose consultations within the framework of the so-called “Weimar Triangle” in that year. The foreign ministers of the three countries had met in the East German city to facilitate Poland’s post-socialist transition. Conveniently drawing on Weimar’s image as an icon of the culture of the Enlightenment, this was meant to further what at least many politicians in (Western) Europe saw as crucial for a new East-West integration of the continent, i.e. Polish-German reconciliation, in a conscious effort to replicate the French-German reconciliation of the 1960s.⁵⁸ The difference in perception of Poland’s integration into the EU appears marginal but it is still very telling in terms of which of the two countries played the active part in overcoming the division of the continent and who raised Poland’s political profile with a view to continental integration.

On the European level, it appears that the German perception has prevailed. Initially, the revolutionary developments of 1989 certainly possessed a Europeanizing quality. However, due to the long and winding accession process of the Eastern European states to the EU and the eroding trust of peoples across Europe in Brussels’ rule since the millennium, 1989 as a historical point of reference will rather be remembered for triggering a drive towards re-nationalization. Consequently, the chance to create a new European foundation myth out of the peaceful revolutions of 1989 was missed;⁵⁹ or rather, it has resulted mainly in focussing on greater recognition for Germany as its reunification in 1990 symbolized the desired merging of Europe’s East and West on a national level. This view found its official

⁵⁸ Cf. Annika Frieberg, “Reconciliation Remembered: Early Activists and Polish-German Relations,” in Justyna Beinek and Piotr Kosicki (eds.), *Re-mapping Polish-German Historical Memory: Physical, Political, and Literary Spaces since World War II* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2012), pp. 127-157, here p. 142.

⁵⁹ Cf. Adam Krzeminski, “Erinnern für die Zukunft – Deutsche und Polen gemeinsam in Europa,” p. 5.

expression in 2009, when the European Union celebrated the 5th anniversary of its eastward extension and the 20th anniversary of the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe with a video that largely ignored the simultaneous anniversary of Poland's round table talks and the path-breaking elections in the summer of 1989. These events had been milestones on the country's way towards democratization. This negligence sparked fears that Poland's democratic achievements would be overshadowed by the remembrance of the symbolically more evocative fall of the Berlin Wall.⁶⁰

In 2004, when Poland was finally able to join the EU, it was still wary of a renewed "German push eastward" as it insisted on an initial 12-year-ban for fellow EU members – basically targeting Germans – to purchase land in Poland. This was part of tough negotiations in which Poland eventually had to accept a seven-year transitional period before it could fully benefit from the free movement of labour to EU member states while it had to lower the duration of the ban on purchasing land from the originally planned eighteen years.⁶¹ Ever since joining the European Union, Poland is actively trying out where and what its place in Europe might be and what role historical memory might play in there as its need to gain more international recognition and renew national self-confidence after the end of forty years of communist rule are still obvious, especially in the country's culture of remembrance.⁶² This can also be gauged from a host of

⁶⁰ Cf. Stefan Auer, "Contesting the origins of European liberty. The EU narrative of Franco-German reconciliation and the eclipse of 1989," *Eurozine* [10 September 2010], URL: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2010-09-10-auer-en.html> (accessed 9 January, 2017), p. 4.

⁶¹ Cf. Philipp Ther, "Der deutsche Imperialismus in Polen," p. 107; Olga Barbasiewicz and Justyna Turek, "Memory in the Process of Polish-German Reconciliation. Theory, History, and Reflections," p. 30f.

⁶² Cf. Christian Gudehus, "Germany's meta-narrative memory culture. An Essay on sceptic narratives and minotaurs," *German Politics and Society*, 26: 89, 4 (winter,

recent museum projects that have either already been finished or are in the process of realisation. The founding stone was a very imposing museum on the Warsaw Uprising. Inaugurated in 2004, it actually took up the function to define for the foreseeable future the outcome of an extended period of debate and conflict over Poland's recent past that had started already in the mid-1980s and to bring at least temporal closure to what had been one of Poland's great historical sore spots during the Cold War era.⁶³

Another major part of these efforts is the Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk that opened only in 2017. There, visitors could find a pretty Europeanized version of World War II, emphasizing the combined influences of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union in bringing about the global conflagration.⁶⁴ This emphasis, on the one hand, has strengthened Poland's historical identity of a victim caught in between the forces of the two big neighbours. On the other, this perspective enables a re-reading of the half-century between 1939 and 1989 as the fateful bracket of Polish 20th century as a counter-conception against the Western European narrative of the epochal turn towards peace and prosperity on the continent after 1945. The content and presentation in the Gdansk museum were meant to present a Europeanized pluralistic, dialogical approach to Polish history. Already before its inauguration, this museum had raised the incumbent government suspicion due to what it perceived as the museum's neglect of a distinctly Polish perspective. Therefore, the permanent exhibition was expected to receive a stronger national

2008), pp. 99-112, here p. 108.

⁶³ Cf. Florian Peters, "Polens Streitgeschichte kommt ins Museum. Wie neue Museen in Danzig und Warschau die polnische Geschichtskultur verändern," p. 2f.

⁶⁴ Cf. Joachim von Puttkamer, "Europäisch und polnisch zugleich. Das Museum des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Danzig," *Osteuropa*, 67: 1-2 (May, 2017), pp. 3-12, here p. 12.

profile.⁶⁵ Thus, the museum has immediately been slated for revision and a candidate who vowed to strengthen the official view of Polish history in the exhibition replaced its director.

The former director of the museum, Pawel Machcewicz, has been a vocal critic of the current government's politics of history for years. In 2012, he diagnosed that historical views from within Poland's civil society were subdued by the government's interventions and that Polish memories were still largely dominated by official narratives.⁶⁶ In the present confrontation, Polish courts had initially upheld the defence of the museum and its director against political intervention. Thus, the government's simultaneous initiatives for the politics of history and legal reform have to be interpreted as being interconnected.⁶⁷ This simultaneity points towards the close interrelation between domestic politics and external relationships when historical issues are concerned. While this is the case in both countries, in Poland the scope for controversy still appears bigger in this respect, whereas in Germany domestic consensus over historical issues seems to be broader, which is helped by its larger political clout on the European continent.

In a recent attempt to win back the initiative in the domestic, European and international conflicts over the past, the Polish government has enacted a new law, officially called the "Amended

⁶⁵ Cf. Florian Peters, "Lokales Holocaust-Museum oder nationalistische Geschichtsfälschung?" *Zeitgeschichte-Online* [22 March 2017], URL: <http://www.zeitgeschichteonline.de/geschichtskultur/lokalesholocaustmuseumodernationalistischegeschichtsfalschung> (accessed 30 May 2018), p. 1. See also Joachim von Puttkamer, "Europäisch und polnisch zugleich," p.4.

⁶⁶ Cf. conference report "Strategien der Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989. Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen im internationalen Vergleich."

⁶⁷ Cf. conference report "Geschichtspolitik und neuer Nationalismus im gegenwärtigen Europa," 10-11 October 2017, Berlin, *H-Soz-Kult* [25 November 2017], URL: <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-7411> (accessed 30 May 2018).

Act on the Institute of National Remembrance” that makes it a crime to implicate the Polish state and/or nation in the perpetration of the Holocaust. Apparently meant to prevent the incorrect reference to Nazi extermination camps on Polish territory as “Polish camps,” it also serves to criminalize allegations against Polish institutions or representatives as having collaborated with the Nazis in the extermination of the Jews. This was decreed despite available evidence of individual as well as some institutional involvement in the persecution of Jewish people in Poland during World War II.⁶⁸ However, the original cause of this delicate legislation had been Poland’s understandable displeasure with a certain international carelessness in terminology where even high-ranking politicians would refer to German concentration camps on Polish soil as “Polish camps”. When former US president Obama referred to extermination camps as “Polish death camps” in 2012, it caused a serious row with the Polish government. In 2005, this had led to a controversy in the European Parliament when the resolution to introduce 27 January as European Holocaust Memorial Day had been debated. German parliamentarians had argued to remove the reference “German” from the extermination camp at Auschwitz to avoid invoking any idea of collective guilt of all Germans. While there was some support from non-German parliamentarians, there was opposition from others. Especially Polish MEP.s argued that the removal could blur the responsibilities for the Holocaust. Eventually, the denomination as “Nazi Germany’s death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau” was adopted. There had certainly been no lack of willingness among parliamentarians to accommodate the German view, thus at least the historically and

⁶⁸ Cf. Menachem Z. Rosensaft, “Poles and the Holocaust in Historical Perspective,” *Tablet Magazine* [22 February 2018], URL: <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/256053/peles-and-the-holocaust-in-historical-perspective> (accessed 28 February 2018).

politically qualifying addition “Nazi” went together with the national signifier. However, in the interests of cosmopolitanisation, the symbolic representation of the victims still seemed more vital, so that Polish concerns could ultimately prevail. The reference to concentration camps as “Polish” kept appearing in German newspapers and even in German textbooks, too.⁶⁹

Another attempt at Europeanizing national memories of suffering concerned about the issue of flight and expulsion. Ever since it had become a topic in the 1998 German election campaign, this part of German collective memory had gained renewed attention, and, due to the involvement of a number of Eastern European countries in the issue had an inherent European dimension. The corresponding discourse in Germany especially alerted Polish observers, who were afraid of a revival of German revanchism. In line with the trend around 2000 in Poland towards Europeanization of conflicted collective memories, soon Polish intellectuals and politicians came up with ideas to commemorate flight and expulsion in a European context and at an authentic site like Wrocław / Breslau in Poland, which had seen a high degree of forced migration of diverse ethnic groups during the 20th century. Another suggestion brought up the idea to build a museum to commemorate the vicissitudes of Polish-German relations, which could even be located in Berlin.⁷⁰ Historians, publicists, politicians and writers on both sides of the border soon took to the idea and started a debate on the possible form and content

⁶⁹ Cf. “EU tilgt Wort ‚deutsch‘ in Auschwitz-Resolution,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Munich), 27 January 2005, p. 6; “Kein polnisches Lager,” and “Erinnerung ist ein Prozeß und sie wird niemals abgeschlossen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Frankfurt on the Main), 28 January 2005, p. 3; see also Adam Krzeminski, “Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik.”

⁷⁰ Cf. Adam Krzeminski, “Wo Geschichte europäisch wird,” *Die ZEIT* (Hamburg), 20 June 2002, no page reference.

of this commemorative undertaking.⁷¹ These initiatives eventually led to the foundation of the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (abbreviated as ENRS) in 2005, which can be described as a German-Polish elite project to promote a Europeanized approach to controversial memories and their museumization. In its programmatic platform, the Network explicitly addressed the Europeanization of the ways and practices of accounting for difficult pasts as an overarching trend.⁷² Though following a different political agenda – pushing for the equal recognition of Nazi and communist crimes within the European landscape of remembrance – also the “Platform of European Memory and Conscience”, an initiative mostly carried by politicians from Eastern Europe, dating back to the 2008 “Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism”, definitely furthers the trend of Europeanization of cultures of remembrance with regard to memories of World War II.⁷³ According to the political standpoint, it can be seen as either a counter-initiative or a supplement to the ENRS.

As far as national cultures of remembrance are concerned, the European Parliament has played a crucial role for their Europeanization. A major outcome of corresponding efforts was a one-sided tendency to highlight the negative role the Soviet Union played in the first half of Europe’s history. Backed up by Russian president Putin’s current risk-taking in Eastern Europe, this negative

⁷¹ Cf. Basil Kerski, “Geschichte und Erinnerung in den aktuellen politischen Debatten zwischen Deutschen und Polen,” p. 13ff.

⁷² Cf. Paulina Gulińska-Jurgiel, “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung Made in Europe,” *Zeitgeschichte-online* [March, 2012], URL: <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/kommentar/vergangenheitsaufarbeitung-made-europe> (accessed 30 May 2018). See also on the following.

⁷³ Cf. Stefan Tröbst, “Eckstein einer EU-Geschichtspolitik? Das Museumsprojekt „Haus der Europäischen Geschichte“ in Brüssel,” *Deutschland Archiv Online*, No. 10, 2012, URL: <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/144616/eckstein-einer-eu-geschichtspolitik> (accessed January 9 2017).

commemorative focus on the former Soviet Union has been instrumental for the political rapprochement between Poland and Germany.⁷⁴ The European Parliament's 2009 resolution to inaugurate a "European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian Regimes" on 23 August, the day the infamous Hitler-Stalin-Pact had been signed in 1939, was echoed by an open letter from German intellectuals and politicians. This letter attempted to reframe 20th century history in a way very similar like the corresponding recent trend in Poland as being bracketed by the years 1939 and 1989 as beginning and end of what is now commonly consolidated as totalitarian oppression in Europe.⁷⁵ Despite remaining Polish anxieties over German-Russian energy cooperation in the Nord Stream pipeline project, this renewed anti-totalitarian consensus is quickly emerging as a common denominator of German-Polish politics of history, which enables both countries to utilize the growing political distance with Russia. Germany can integrate the former GDR with a negative emphasis on the communist totalitarian legacy, whereas Poland can adjust to the post-Cold War geopolitical reality of being reunited Germany's neighbour and one of its junior partners within the European Union.

On surface level, the new European Day of Remembrance has been an attempt to integrate the cultures of remembrance of Eastern and Western Europe, giving historical experiences of suffering of the countries of Eastern Europe greater presence. Thus, this initiative is part of the cultural and political deepening of the extension of the

⁷⁴ Cf. Adam Krzeminski, "Erinnern für die Zukunft – Deutsche und Polen gemeinsam in Europa," p. 2.

⁷⁵ Cf. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, "Der sogenannte Polenfeldzug 1939 und der Zweite Weltkrieg in der deutschen und polnischen Erinnerungskultur," p. 48f. See also Winson Chu, "Ethnic Cleansing and Nationalization in the German-Polish and German-Czech Borderlands," p. 150.

European Union, which has started with its eastward enlargement in 2004. However, despite the substantial backing the introduction of a new day of remembrance has received within the European Parliament, critics have pointed out that this initiative puts emphasis on national suffering under what is presented as an interconnected succession of totalitarian oppression. Thus, it overshadows any ambition to self-reflection on individual and collective collaboration with the Nazi occupation regime in Europe and the concomitant preservation of “negative memory,” which had been initiated by the inauguration of 27 January as Holocaust Remembrance Day.⁷⁶

On another level, the House of European History,⁷⁷ which was commissioned by the European Parliament in 2007 and opened its permanent exhibition in Brussels in 2017 to represent the European significance of the Holocaust, of Western Europe’s unification, of its reconciliation with its Eastern neighbours and of their eventual admission to the Union, also aroused Polish indignation. Although being initiated with the aim of bringing the various cultures of remembrance in Europe into closer contact with each other, critics in Poland considered their country’s history being misrepresented in the Guidelines for its permanent exhibition despite a historian from Poland heading the Academic Committee, which had authored those Guidelines.⁷⁸ According to the Guidelines, Polish resistance against the Nazis during World War II had already ended in 1939, while in fact this only concerned the immediate military confrontation, while

⁷⁶ Cf. Ljiljana Radonic, “Europäische Erinnerungskulturen im Spannungsfeld zwischen ‘Ost’ und ‘West,’” in Forum Politische Bildung, *Informationen zur Politischen Bildung* 32 (Innsbruck/ Wien/ Bozen: Studien-Verlag, 2010), pp. 21-30, here p. 29.

⁷⁷ Cf. Stefan Tröbst, “Eckstein einer EU-Geschichtspolitik? Das Museumsprojekt” Haus der Europäischen Geschichte “in Brüssel.”

⁷⁸ Cf. Claus Leggewie and Anne Lang, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt*, (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2011), p. 184.

the paramilitary, political and cultural resistance movement had only just started to gather momentum. Eventually, Poland's "Underground State" existed during the entire duration of the war and has become a major source of national identification for Poland again after 1989.⁷⁹ Turned positively, Poland also fills the new interpretive framework of the half-century between World War II and the Polish roundtable as another proof of Poland indefatigable struggle for freedom, which emphasizes a strictly national Polish narrative and downplays the importance of the country's otherwise hitherto successful integration into Europe.⁸⁰

5. Conclusion

Interacting dynamics of politics of history concerning Germany, Poland and the former Soviet Union appear as the major forces behind recent changes in the cultures of remembrance in both, Germany and Poland.⁸¹ In the aggressor group, there can be victims. Moreover, in the victim group, there is room for perpetrators. In quite some individual biographies, we might find elements of both, either as successive experiences in changing historical circumstances or even within the same historical phase. These are hardly revolutionary insights. However, to acknowledge them on a bilateral political and social level is, nevertheless, a big challenge that needs sustained efforts over decades. The corresponding processes have unfolded according to different temporal orders. The victims' need for

⁷⁹ Cf. Committee of Experts, "House of European History: Conceptual Basis for a House of European History," *European Parliament* [19 October, 2008], URL: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf (accessed January 9, 2017), p. 18.

⁸⁰ Cf. conference report "Geschichtspolitik und neuer Nationalismus im gegenwärtigen Europa."

⁸¹ Cf. Eric Langenbacher, "Twenty-first Century Memory Regimes in Germany and Poland: An Analysis of Elite Discourses and Public Opinion," p. 50.

acknowledgement, the perpetrators' admission of guilt and both sides' attempts at restoring normality operate at varying speeds and are, therefore, difficult to coordinate. All of these aspects are also contested domestically and internationally.

We can roughly identify time spans of ten years within which the respective cultures of remembrance in Germany and Poland underwent significant transitions. In the 1990s the growing focus on the Holocaust as the basis of the culture of remembrance in Germany showed a prevailing impact of Europeanization. That was a way to actually establish common commemorative ground with other countries in the European Union, which was back then still largely a Western European affair. Poland, on the other hand, experienced a quick opening up of its previously state-dominated culture of remembrance, which led to a contested cosmopolitanisation seemingly destined to create sustained historico-political harmony with Germany. With Poland's accession to the European Union drawing closer and the simultaneous upswing of the German victim memory around the millennium, we can see a distinct turn towards reflexive particularism in Germany with regard to Poland. Poland's politics of history, on the other hand, showed a strong tendency towards Europeanization in the run-up to actually joining the EU what also included a steadfast rejection of Germany's renewed insistence on its own wartime suffering as being out of step with commemorative rapprochement across the continent to overcome the previous east-west division of the continent. Eventually, Germany again re-adjusted its approach to the past around the 70th anniversary of the beginning of World War II in the direction of a contested cosmopolitanisation. This was an attempt to integrate the main strands of the memory of victimisation by the Eastern neighbours and the SED dictatorship after World War II and of German perpetration during the Nazi era within society.

Poland, on the other hand, turned towards reflexive particularism as the country came under the influence of a distinct post-millennial backlash against a Holocaust-dominated European culture of remembrance. This backlash has intensified domestic confrontations over Poles' attitudes towards Jews during German occupation and resentment against Germany's proactive remembrance of own victimhood, all of which has led to a certain reluctance on the Polish side to face up to own historical wrongs.⁸² This periodization is echoed in recent research by Polish political scientist Rafal Ulatowski who pointed out the conclusion of Poland's EU membership application in the early 2000s and the pragmatic rapprochement around 2010 after roughly a decade of bilateral irritations as important turning points of German-Polish relations.⁸³

To sum up, in both states we can see antagonistic forces at work with a view to current cultures of remembrance. On the one hand, there is a pull towards cosmopolitanisation of memories, i.e. a readjustment of the spatial scope of memories while aligning them with competing memories of others, especially victims of one's own actions. On the other hand, there is a push towards reflexive particularism, i.e. a renewed emphasis on the national view of the past while considering internationally established standards of cultures of remembrance.⁸⁴ German governments have tried to strike a fine balance between supporting claims of expellees, while also politically allaying Polish fears of resurging German revanchism.

⁸² Cf. Eric Langenbacher, Bill Niven, and Ruth Wittlinger, "Introduction: Paradigm Shift? Dynamics of memory in 21st Century Germany," *German Politics and Society*, 26:89, 4 (winter, 2008), pp. 1-8, here p. 6.

⁸³ Cf. Rafal Ulatowski, "German-Polish Relations. Political and Economic Aspects," p. 49f.

⁸⁴ Cf. Lars Breuer, "Europeanized Vernacular Memory," p. 12, for definitions of cosmopolitanisation and reflexive particularism with reference to memories.

This signifies Germany's currently growing inclination towards cosmopolitanisation. Poland, on the other hand, is caught in the middle of a fight between supporters of cosmopolitanisation and those of particularism, where – given the priorities of the current government – particularistic insistence seems to prevail for the time being. Ultimately, any successful reconciliation rests with the victims' readiness and resolve to forgive and to declare a restored state of normalization. This is often forgotten among those groups or societies, which represent the perspectives of perpetrators that it is not up to them to decide upon the speed and finalisation of any process of reconciliation, however much they seem to strive for it. This is one of the lessons to be accepted especially by Germany that even its overall laudable efforts at coming to terms with the past still do not create a substitute for the inevitably dialogical process of bringing historical suffering to at least a temporary closure.⁸⁵

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⁸⁵ Cf. Basil Kerski, "Geschichte und Erinnerung in den aktuellen politischen Debatten zwischen Deutschen und Polen," p. 19f.

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