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# Challenging the Notion of the East-West Memory Divide\*

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## Abstract

Recent scholarly works on memory practices in Europe often appeal to the notion of the East-West memory divide or, more dramatically, to the European memory wars which have been allegedly raging at least since the Eastern enlargement of 2004. These terms are supposed to stand for the heated debate between the East and the West, between the countries on the opposing sides of the former Iron Curtain, about what the appropriate memory for Europe should be. In this article, I challenge this simplistic division and I argue that it completely disregards the role of agency. In contrast, I conduct an agent-centred empirical analysis and show that the social actors involved in the debate are far more diverse, the fault lines are far less clear and the sides of the debate are far more heterogeneous than the carelessly used notion of the East-West memory divide would have us believe.

**Keywords:** collective memory; European memory; agency; eastern enlargement

## Introduction

Recent scholarly works on memory practices in Europe often appeal to the notion of the East-West memory divide or, more dramatically, to the European memory wars that have been allegedly raging at least since the Eastern enlargement of 2004. These terms are supposed to stand for the heated debate between the East and the West, the countries on the opposing sides of the former Iron Curtain, about what the appropriate memory for Europe should be. At the heart of this conflict is the question about the extent to which the Holocaust and other historical atrocities, such as Stalinist terror and communist oppression, can be mentioned on the same page. In this article I challenge this simplistic division of European memory practices between the East and the West.

The lively debate about the concept of European memory is usually centred on two questions. Does the EU as an organization need to develop a more united approach to historical narratives? If yes, what should this common approach be? The matter of a European memory is far from being a merely symbolic issue with no political consequences. Imagining Europe and its past in different ways will lead to different and real political outcomes. What is at stake in answering these questions is nothing less than the future direction of the EU. As visions for the future of the organization are intimately connected to historical accounts of the continent's past, determining the common European approach to the past is a highly influential decision for the EU's future.

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The mental frame of the continental divide relies on a metaphor that conceals more about the social world than it reveals, and on an outdated, totalizing conception of collective memory that completely disregards the role of agency in social processes. In contrast, I follow an agent-centred approach. I identify the most important actors involved in the political struggle over European memory and these actors' political themes and arguments, which gives a more nuanced picture of the dynamics of the debate. I demonstrate that the proponents of the supposed memory divide's 'Eastern side' are a relatively clearly identifiable interest group that adopts a consistent anti-communist theme, so I feel justified in naming them the anti-communist group. This group of politicians and intellectuals operate at the European level and argue for acknowledging more widely and for paying more attention to the crimes of communism in diverse forums, most importantly, in educational, cultural and research projects. The metaphor of the continental divide is correct to the extent that this group is mostly constituted by East European political figures, but what seems to be at least equally important is that almost all of them come from the right or the far right of the political spectrum. The Western side, on the other hand, is much more diverse and consists of political groups that are so loosely connected that it is difficult to label them an interest group. The most vociferous opponents of the anti-communist group are consistently the Western European left and far left, but they do not have the same degree of institutional organization and the whole memory debate does not seem to figure very highly on their agenda anyway. Based on this analysis, I conclude that the recent debate in European institutions about the idea of European memory should be thought about as a political struggle between certain interest groups rather than as a war between the collective memories of the West and East sides of the continent, and the most far-reaching generalization that we can make is that it is mostly a debate between West European left-wing and East European right-wing politicians. The problem with the metaphor of the continental memory divide is therefore that it equates the theme of a small but loud interest group with the collective memory of half a continent, and it draws our attention to only one dimension of the debate (East versus West), while it conceals a dimension which is at least as important (right versus left). By implying that the continental difference is somehow a natural consequence of different historical experiences, the metaphor of the divide also reinforces antagonistic social arrangements, which offers little hope that the different sides may come to understand each other better. These results are not in themselves surprising nor particularly novel. Neumayer (2015, 2017), for instance, has emphasized the importance of focusing on agency in studying memory politics at the European level, analyzing anti-communist networks empirically, and remarking that 'a binary opposition between "Western" and "Eastern" interpretations of the past (...) would downplay the ideological dimension of the conflicting assessments of the former Communist regimes' (2015, p. 346). Littoz-Monnet (2012, 2013) and Bernhard and Kubik (2014) also put political actors at the centre of the analysis of European memory politics. However, to my knowledge this article is the first comprehensive empirical analysis based on agency and themes about the entirety of the debate, and whose main objective is to put the notion of the of the East-West memory divide itself to the test. In the end, it clearly shows the inadequacy of this simplistic assumption.

The main sources of evidence used in the empirical part of the study are publicly accessible documents adopted by the organizations under investigation, public statements made by the political actors in question, and the transcripts of the European Parliamentary

(EP) debates on the topic of European memory. Many actor-centred analyses rely on a vast number of interviews conducted with political decision-makers. I myself conducted interviews in 2015 with the most important political figures named later in the text, but these sessions did not yield any new information that I could not already gather from primary and secondary sources. For this reason, these interviews will not be used in this study.

The evidence thus gathered was analyzed using holistic textual analysis. Given all the ambiguities and the subtle differences in the European memory debate, paying attention to the context of the arguments is crucial. For this reason, I found the critical discourse analysis of Wodak and Meyer, based on the concept of context, particularly inspiring. The triangulatory approach produces interpretations by looking at the following levels: the text-internal co-text of the utterance, intertextuality, the context of the situation, and 'the broader socio-political and historical contexts' (Meyer 2001, p. 29). Moreover, triangulation is necessary not only between the different contextual levels, but also between different types of sources of information. This means that the research was a continuous cross-referencing between and within primary and secondary sources.

### **I. Theoretical Objections to the Notion of the 'East-West Memory Divide'**

The debate in European institutions about European memory has been accompanied, and often informed, by related discussions in academia (see, for instance, Bottici and Challand, 2013; Müller, 2010; Sznajder, 2013). Many of these works put the notion of the East-West memory divide at the centre of their argument (Jarusch, 2010; Leggewie and Lang, 2011; Levy *et al.*, 2011; Mälksoo, 2009, 2015; Sierp, 2014; Stone, 2012; Troebst, 2010; Welzer and Lenz, 2011). My intention in this article is not to engage with this vast literature in its entirety but only to criticize this often-repeated notion.

The notion of the continental memory divide itself is not a monolithic concept; it is not always used in the same overly simplistic and naturalizing way. Just as there are many divisions of Europe's memory map there are many interpretations of this concept. Nevertheless, the underlying mental image that is common to most of these scholarly works, the divide between halves (or parts) of the continent, is a metaphor. Like any metaphor, it is useful in bringing an unknown phenomenon closer to us by connecting it to something we already know. However, like any metaphor it reveals certain aspects of the social world while it conceals others, it is enlightening as well as misleading. This means that we need to question periodically whether the metaphor of the continental divide is still useful to us, whether it still enables our thinking more than it constrains it. The argument put forward in this article is that the metaphor of the continental divide is misleading and does not serve its purpose. We should approach the debate about European memory using more careful terms that are less naturalizing and take into account the heterogeneity of the actors involved.

My intention in this article is thus to deconstruct the notion of the East-West memory divide and not to outline the 'correct map' of European memory. This internal critique takes the sharp distinction between Eastern and Western actors at face value in order to show the merits and the limits of this paradigm from the inside, not to reaffirm this dichotomy. Considering Central Europe as a memory region on its own, as Jarusch (2010) and Troebst (2010) did, would probably make sense for drawing up a new memory map, but

an internal critique needs to work with the same categories as the theory that it wishes to deconstruct.

The concept of collective memory itself is all too often used in a totalizing manner when a certain social group is said to have a memory of a past event. This language is based on the common sense assumption that regards memory as a thing that is or is not, as a thing that exists or does not exist. But as Olick puts it, collective memory is ‘something – or, rather many things – we do, not something – or many things – we have’ (2008, p. 159). Collective memories should be regarded as social practices that are performed rather than as social facts that are objectively ‘out there’, and we need other terms that are better suited to describe the ‘fluid process’ that the construction and the reproduction of the representations of past events really are (2003, p. 6). For this reason, it is theoretically problematic to use terms like national memory that give the impression that there is a single, unconditionally accepted historical narrative in a national community. In fact, the terms that we use should emphasize that contestation is always possible and the dominant or governing myth in a social group always ‘coexists with and is constantly contested by subaltern myths’ (Bell, 2003, p. 74).

Saying that a nation has a certain memory is inadequate, and saying that a whole sub-continent has one is even more so. But this is exactly what many scholarly works on the East-West memory divide do. Georges Mink (2011), for instance, notes the ‘stalemate that paradigms that aim to explain *national* situations end up in’ (p. 256), but this does not prevent him from talking about the Eastern European memory (p. 260), which is an even more totalizing concept than national memory. Morgan (2010) talked about how close Spain is to a ‘Western European experience of communism’, how ‘different this experience is from that of the East’ (p. 261) and how these experiences were translated into different memory practices. Banke (2010) also argued for making ‘an important distinction (...) between the culture of memory developed in Western Europe and that developed in Eastern Europe’ (p. 164).

Such statements are abundant in the literature and there are two problems with them. First, they essentialize half continents when they talk about their experience or memory. Second, some of these works intentionally or inadvertently naturalize these supposed memory differences when they openly assert or unreflectively assume that the different memory regimes arise from different experiences, that it is *natural* for the two parts of the continent to think differently about the past and to deem different narratives important. The usual story is that the West and the East sides of the continent had markedly different historical experiences of totalitarianism. Western Europe experienced only right-wing dictatorships, while the East experienced both right-wing and left-wing totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, whereas the free and democratic nations of the West had sufficient time to work through the dark parts of their pasts, or so the argument goes, the peoples of the East lived under the spell of historical myths imposed by communist regimes for a long time and had the chance to confront uncomfortable events in their national pasts only after the Cold War. Because of these significantly different experiences, the East and the West *naturally* constitute different (and in some respects diametrically opposed) cultures of remembrance. This assumption is problematic in that it completely disregards the gap between personal experiences and the public representations of historical events. In fact, many representations of the past (for instance, national origin stories) have little or no experiential (or even historical) basis whatsoever. Many have noted that the concept of

collective memory is often employed with such unjustified (and unjustifiable) leaps from the individual to the social (Assmann, 1995; Kansteiner, 2002; Lebow, 2006; Olick, 1999). Those who carelessly invoke the notion of the East-West memory divide make this mistake on a grand, continental scale.

The two theoretical problems that I have explained above, the totalizing and the naturalizing aspects of the notion of the East-West memory divide, contribute to a scholarly discourse in which social agency is largely ignored. Viewing memories as things out there and portraying sub-continents as having memories that naturally follow from their historical experiences leave little room for individual social actors, their decisions and their creative actions. In the following, I seek to counter this tendency and to determine who exactly 'does' European memory. This agent-based empirical analysis identifies the actors in this debate, makes some modest generalizations and concludes that the idea of a continental memory divide is not a useful one to guide our thinking.

## II. The Early Stages of the European Memory Debate

The roots of the idea of European memory can be found in the commemoration of the Holocaust, which gradually became more and more transnational after the early 1990s. After the national debates that had taken place in the 1980s (of which the most famous is the German *Historikerstreit*), the EP passed two resolutions in 1993 and in 1995, which indicate the increasing attention paid to the matter. In the late 1990s, national days of the commemoration of the Holocaust became more and more common in Europe and throughout the world (the most prominent advocates being Sweden and the UK). The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust of 2000 was a landmark event in the process that gave a transnational standing to the commemoration of the Holocaust. Five years later the commemoration of the Holocaust became truly international when the General Assembly of the UN adopted 27 January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz, as an international remembrance day.

In the mid-2000s many believed that the Holocaust could become a common memory for Europe. This was opposed by some, mostly East European conservative, politicians and intellectuals on the grounds that an exclusive emphasis on the Holocaust would not do justice to the victims of other totalitarian regimes. While very few of them questioned the uniqueness of the Holocaust openly by declaring Nazism and communism 'equally criminal' (Sandra Kalniete, quoted in Troebst, 2010, p. 60), they did argue that paying too much attention to the victims of the Holocaust came at the expense of the victims of other totalitarian regimes, so the latter are effectively treated as second-class victims. This anti-communist agenda is opposed mostly by the West European left whose proponents believe that it illegitimately relativizes the Holocaust and falsifies history by equating communist regimes with Nazism.

The main elements of the anti-communist rhetorical repertoire had been developed before the European memory debate. In the 1990s many conservative politicians in post-communist countries built their political profile on an uncompromising anti-communist stance and on the objective of raising awareness about the crimes of communist regimes and their victims. As a result, state-sponsored museums of communist (or sometimes more broadly, totalitarian) crimes mushroomed all over East Europe. It was with these political initiatives that the 'memory of communism' and its political entrepreneurs emerged

(Bottici and Challand, 2013; Zombory, 2017). However, the debate began in earnest on the transnational European level after the Eastern enlargement of 2004. The first major clash in the European memory wars occurred in 2005 when a Europe-wide ban on the display of totalitarian symbols was discussed and finally dropped in the EP. The original proposal aimed to ban the swastika in order to combat anti-Semitism and racism in Europe. However, this quickly ran into the opposition of a group of mostly conservative East European members of the European Parliament (MEPs)<sup>1</sup> who insisted that if the display of the swastika was to be banned, the use of the red star and the hammer and sickle should also be prohibited. Their reasoning was that banning the symbols of Nazism but not those of communism would lead to unjustifiable double standards. After it became clear that no consensus could be reached about the totalitarian symbols to be banned, the plan was dropped altogether in February 2005. This was the first instance that the hegemony and the uniqueness of the Holocaust was questioned on the European level, arguably as a result of the changing composition of the EP after the Eastern enlargement of 2004. The debate about whether the two totalitarian systems are comparable, equally criminal or should be treated separately has overshadowed discussions of European memory ever since.

The controversial issue nevertheless remained and communist atrocities received more and more attention at the European level in the following years. The first official EU document invoking the idea of European memory,<sup>2</sup> the resolution on the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe adopted in May 2005, had offered to recognize the crimes of communism. Even though this recognition was rather limited and ambiguous, the resolution managed to anger some (mostly West European left-wing) MEPs who saw it as an attempt to discredit communism by equating it with Nazism. They criticized the proposal in the parliamentary debate that preceded its acceptance on the grounds that it disregarded the role that the communist resistance in Europe and the communist Soviet Union played in the defeat of Nazism. Despite considerable opposition by these MEPs, the subsequent resolution on 25th anniversary of Solidarity, accepted in September 2005, made a clearer statement on the atrocities committed by communist regimes.

It is worth noting that, in the resolutions of 2005 on the end of World War II and on Solidarity, the first two mentions of European memory and the first two (limited) acknowledgements of communist crimes in the official documents of European institutions were intimately connected. This marked the opening of the European memory wars and I thus consider 2005 to be a symbolic turning point in public discussions about Europe's past. In the first half of the decade the most hotly contested point was whether and in what form the concept of European heritage should be included in the European Constitution while a (West European) consensus was slowly being formed around the importance of the Holocaust. After a rejection of the European Constitution, attention decisively shifted from European inheritance narratives to more recent history, but just when the Holocaust had achieved a certain degree of hegemony and was boldly

<sup>1</sup>The most active members of this group were Vytautas Landsbergis (EPP, Lithuania), Tunne Kelam (EPP, Estonia) and József Szájer (EPP, Hungary).

<sup>2</sup>Confirmed by an exact match search for the term 'European memory' in the EUR-Lex database and the EP's collection of adopted texts.

proclaimed to be on its way to become 'the foundational event for a European collective memory' (Diner, 2003, p. 43), it came to be challenged by a (mostly East European conservative) group who believed that their victimhood myth was equally worthy of recognition. This happened in 2005 for at least two reasons. First, the size and the composition of the EP changed dramatically after the elections of June 2004 and the effect of the work of the East European MEPs could be seen in the following year. Second, this was a year of important anniversaries ending in zero and five, which usually serve as good grounds for political action.

The East-West memory debate continued after the tumultuous 2005 with the anti-communist group claiming some important victories. In January 2006 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the landmark Resolution 1481 on the Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes, which was in many respects stronger than those of the EP a year earlier. Finally, a resolution was passed by the EP in October 2006 on the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution.

The memory debate became even more heated in the following years. Most importantly, a group of politicians, government officials and other intellectuals called for the establishment of an Institute of European Memory and Conscience in a document known as the Prague Declaration. Signed in June 2008, the declaration claimed that, like the Nazi atrocities, the crimes committed by communist regimes should be recognized, commemorated and taught throughout Europe. While the text did not go as far as saying that the two totalitarianisms are equally criminal, it stated that 'there are substantial similarities between Nazism and Communism in terms of their horrific and appalling character and their crimes against humanity'. The main point of the signatories was that there could and should be a united European memory, but this was possible only if equal weight was given to both Nazism and communism. Following this logic, the declaration went as far as calling for 'a day of remembrance of the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27th'; the day of commemoration was proposed to be the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939, which was supposed to represent well the aggressive nature of both totalitarian regimes. By explicitly demanding that the victims of communism should be remembered in the same way as those of Nazism, the proposal of the day of commemoration was the most overt bid of the anti-communist group for a place in the sun of European memory. Furthermore, the Prague Declaration was a stronger blanket condemnation of communism than any of the previously mentioned texts. The Prague Declaration put forward the bold, and highly contestable, claim that communist ideology itself is 'directly responsible for crimes against humanity'.

Naturally, the loosely connected group of public figures behind the Prague Declaration could make radical and highly controversial statements because the text was not a product of political compromise achieved in some European institution. The lack of formal institutional backing also meant that, as strong as the language of the declaration was, it did not carry much weight. Surprisingly, however, the two main claims put forward in the declaration (the call for the establishment of a European memory institute and the day of remembrance) were accepted by the EP when it adopted the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism (RECT) in April 2009.



### III. The Actors in the European Memory Debate

As we have seen before in the case of earlier transnational European memory initiatives, round-figure anniversaries usually provide a good pretext for pushing forward commemorative events and resolutions. The important resolution of 2009 can be explained in this vein, as catalysed by the 70th anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. However, the changing composition of the EP and the round-figure anniversary of such a pivotal historical moment should be seen only as factors providing the structural possibilities that allowed transnational comparisons between totalitarianisms (and the subsequent European memory wars) to emerge. If we are to pay sufficient attention to agency in this matter, it is important to consider the actual actors who pushed for and opposed such political developments.

If we look at the relevant historical processes from this angle, it does make sense to talk about a (pan-European) anti-communist group. The reason is that not only were the arguments of pan-European efforts to recognize Nazism and communism as comparably or equally evil similar, but the people sponsoring them formed a clearly identifiable group. Immediately after the first two signatories the Prague Declaration (Václav Havel, former President of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, and Joachim Gauck, former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records and former President of Germany), one can find Göran Lindblad, rapporteur of the Council of Europe resolution of 2006. Until 2010 Lindblad was a Swedish MP for the right-wing Moderate Party and was also a member, and later vice-president, of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In 2011 he became the director of the newly formed Platform of European Memory and Conscience, a project that the EP resolution of 2009 called for but did not actively pursue. Also among the first founding signatures are two of those East European conservative MEPs, Vytautas Landsbergis (European People's Party [EPP], Lithuania) and Tunne Kelam (EPP, Estonia), who were the most vocal advocates of extending the proposed Europe-wide ban on totalitarian symbols of 2005 to communist insignia. In addition, a small group of (almost exclusively East European conservative) MEPs were closely involved in the two events that catalysed the signature of the Prague Declaration and subsequently signed it. In January 2008 Kelam and Landsbergis organized an EP conference and proposed the establishment of a working group on 'United Europe-United History' along with three other East European conservative MEPs, Girts Valdis Kristovskis (Union for Europe of the Nations [UEN], Latvia), Wojciech Roszkowski (UEN, Poland) and György Schöpflin (EPP, Hungary). The draft resolution was worded in a relatively vague and neutral way, and emphasized the importance of truth, justice and reconciliation without actually specifying the historical events whose differing interpretations it proposed to reconcile. The draft resolution was soon signed by around 50 MEPs and finally led to the foundation of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group. The other preparatory event for the Prague Process occurred a few months later. In April 2008 the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes was organized by the European Commission and the (conservative) Slovenian government, which held the presidency of the Council at that time. The report that it produced mentioned the crimes committed by Nazism and Stalinism, along with many other regimes such as Italian Fascism or Titoism, on the same page (Jambrek, 2008). Together with the fact that the overwhelming majority of the participants consisted of right-wing politicians and intellectuals

from the new member states, the hearing was an important milestone of the activism of East European conservative politicians in the matter. The MEPs participating in the hearing were also the same people behind the United Europe-United History conference and its draft resolution; they were joined in this event by Kalniete whose views on the 'equally evil' totalitarian regimes were mentioned earlier and who became an MEP a year later. In the following, I take a closer look at the work and the members of these two institutions, the Reconciliation of European Histories Group and the Platform of European Memory and Conscience.

#### IV. Reconciliation of European Histories Group

We cannot be sure what the original intentions behind the formation of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group were. The founders may have honestly meant what they said when they talked about the creation of a platform where different views about past events could be represented, confronted and (hopefully) reconciled. But it is also equally possible that they paid only lip service to multi-perspectivity and knew exactly what kind of historical narrative they wanted the newly formed group to promote. What is clear, however, is that in practice the informal group has become completely dominated by the agenda of the anti-communist group. There are at least two reasons why it is fair to say this. First, the initial draft resolution on the establishment of the United Europe-United History working group stated that there was a need 'to deal with the most important developments of the European 20<sup>th</sup> century history' because a 'comprehensive reassessment of European history will strengthen European integration'. Without mentioning any particular historical events, this leaves open the question of what these 'most important developments' are. On the contrary, the Reconciliation of European Histories Group did not leave so many things up for debate and quite clearly pushed for the wider acknowledgement of East European memories of communism. In its latest manifesto the Group specifies that its aim is to 'develop a common approach regarding crimes of totalitarian regimes, inter alia totalitarian communist regime of the USSR, to ensure continuity of the process of evaluation of totalitarian crimes and equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all totalitarian regimes'. This is a fine example of how the anti-communist group currently frames its agenda. Instead of calling for the wider recognition of communist crimes and for treating Nazism and communism as comparably or equally evil (which could give the impression in the case of East European actors that they struggle for the recognition of their own victimhood), this passage argues for the equal treatment of the victims of all totalitarian regimes, among whom the victims of communist crimes are only one particular subgroup (rather conspicuously, it is the only one mentioned in the manifesto). Even though the Holocaust is not mentioned here explicitly, this line of thinking subtly challenges its uniqueness. If one states that the horrors of the Holocaust were historically unique, it follows that those who suffered from these horrors are also in a unique situation and should be treated in a unique way. This means that treating the victims of the Holocaust in the same way as the victims of other totalitarian crimes is incompatible with the supposed uniqueness of the former. The above outlines a significant change in the rhetoric of the anti-communist group. Initially, they openly framed their argument in relation to the Holocaust. Notably when they opposed the proposed Europe-wide ban on the swastika they stated that paying exclusive attention

to the victims of the Holocaust would treat the victims of communist regimes as second-class victims, which would in turn constitute an unjustifiable double standard. As this reasoning was vulnerable to the charge that these (mostly) East European politicians simply strove for the acknowledgement of the suffering of their own people, adherents of the anti-communist group shifted to a slightly more abstract language. They began to emphasize the need to develop a common approach to all totalitarian regimes and the non-discrimination against all victims. This shift in framing rendered their rhetoric less overtly East European but also vaguer because it left the term totalitarianism undefined. If, following the tradition of Hannah Arendt's seminal work (1979), totalitarianism is interpreted in the narrow sense to refer to Nazism and Stalinism, the new argument of the anti-communist group is actually the old claim in a refurbished form. If we substitute totalitarianism with Nazism and Stalinism in the new argument, what we get is that the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism should be judged by the same standards and the victims of Stalinism should not be discriminated against, which is actually the old argument. If, on the other hand, one understands totalitarianism more broadly to stand for fascism, communism, religious fundamentalism and a host of other repressive ideologies (as did many of the presenters of the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regime, for instance), the reframed argument of the anti-communist group is distinct from (and probably even more controversial than) the original one.

The second reason why it is fair to say that the Group has come to function effectively as an anti-communist group is that it is mainly composed of East European conservative MEPs who openly subscribe to such an agenda. As of 31 May 2014, the Group counted 41 members, only eight of whom were from the old member states and merely five were not conservative politicians (see Table 1). Additionally, 13 members of the Group are signatories of the Prague Declaration, and they are all conservative MEPs from the new member states. Even many of those members of the Group who have not signed the Prague Declaration clearly support an anti-communist group agenda; Sandra Kalniete, for instance, is not a signatory but she famously declared that Nazism and communism were equally criminal and later became the head of the informal group.

Not surprisingly, the attributes of the typical anti-communist described above (East European, conservative, member of the REHG, signatory to the Prague Declaration) also fit the profile of the majority of the most important figures behind the RECT (although it must be noted that the Group was formed after the adoption of the RECT). The background of the rapporteurs of the resolution is depicted in Table 2. Half of the 16 rapporteurs are or were members of the Group and/or signed the Prague Declaration (most often, both). Only a quarter of the rapporteurs were from the old member states and only a quarter of them were not conservative politicians. This evidence showing that many of the signatories of the Prague Declaration were also behind the adoption of the RECT supports the observation made earlier about the shift in anti-communist rhetoric that took place around 2008–9. The Prague Declaration and the preceding years were dominated by efforts that sought the equal treatment of Nazism and communism, and their victims. Beginning with the RECT, however, the new anti-communist narrative advocated a common stance against all types of totalitarianism. What Table 2 shows is that these were not conflicting claims made by different political groups; they were claims made by the same group of politicians who adapted their line of argument to the new circumstances and to the new institutional context. It is also interesting to see the high number of East

Table 1: Members of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group (as of 31 May 2014)

<i>Surname</i>	<i>Signatory to the PD?</i>	<i>Political affiliation</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Conservative?</i>	<i>East European?</i>
Kelam, T.	Y	EPP (2004–)	Estonia	Y	Y
Landsbergis, V.	Y	EPP (2004–14)	Lithuania	Y	Y
Macovei, M. L.	Y	EPP (2009–)	Romania	Y	Y
Preda, C. D.	Y	EPP (2009–)	Romania	Y	Y
Roithová, Z.	Y	EPP (2004–14)	Czech R	Y	Y
Schöpflin, G.	Y	EPP (2004–)	Hungary	Y	Y
Stasny, P.	Y	EPP (2004–14)	Slovakia	Y	Y
Surján, L.	Y	EPP (2004–14)	Hungary	Y	Y
Szajer, J.	Y	EPP (2004–)	Hungary	Y	Y
Tőkés, L.	Y	NI (2007–8), Greens/EFA (2008–9), EPP (2009–)	Hungary	Y	Y
Ungureanu, T.	Y	EPP (2009–)	Romania	Y	Y
Vaidere, I.	Y	UEN (2004–9), EPP (2009–)	Latvia	Y	Y
Zver, M.	Y	EPP (2009–)	Slovenia	Y	Y
Belder, B.		ECR (1999–)	Netherlands	Y	N
Gál, K.		EPP (2004–)	Hungary	Y	Y
Gutierrez-Cortines, C.		EPP (1999–)	Spain	Y	N
Hankiss, Á.		EPP (2009–14)	Hungary	Y	Y
Hökmark, G.		EPP (2004–)	Sweden	Y	N
Jäättteenmäki, A.		ALDE (2004–)	Finland	N	N
Juvin, P.		EPP (2009–)	France	Y	N
Kalniete S.		EPP (2009–)	Latvia	Y	Y
Kariņš, A.		EPP (2009–)	Latvia	Y	Y
Kovatchev, A.		EPP (2009–)	Bulgaria	Y	Y
Lamassoure, A.		EPP (1989–94; 1999–)	France	Y	N
Matula, I.		EPP (2009–14)	Romania	Y	Y
Migalski, M.		ECR (2009–14)	Poland	Y	Y
Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė, R.		EPP (2009–14)	Lithuania	Y	Y
Nedelcheva, M.		EPP (2009–)	Bulgaria	Y	Y
Ojuland, K.		ALDE (2009–14)	Estonia	N	Y
Padar, I.		SD (2009–14)	Estonia	N	Y

Table 1: (Continued)

<i>Surname</i>	<i>Signatory to the PD?</i>	<i>Political affiliation</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Conservative?</i>	<i>East European?</i>
Posselt, B.		EPP (1994–2014)	Germany	Y	N
Pöttering, H.		EPP (1979–2014)	Germany	Y	N
Šadurskis, C.		EPP (2009–)	Romania	Y	Y
Saryusz-Wolski, J.		EPP (2004–)	Poland	Y	Y
Sógor, C.		EPP (2007–)	Romania	Y	Y
Stoilojan T.		EPP (2007–)	Romania	Y	Y
Szymański, K.		UEN (2004–9), ECR (2009–14)	Poland	Y	Y
Tabajdi, C.		SD (2004–14)	Hungary	N	Y
Uspaskich, V.		ALDE (2009–)	Lithuania	N	Y
Záborská, A.		EPP (2004–)	Slovakia	Y	Y
Zalewski, P.		EPP (2009–14)	Poland	Y	Y

ALDE, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; ECR, European Conservatives and Reformists; EFA, European Free Alliance; EPP, European People's Party; PD, Prague Declaration; SD, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; NI, Non-Inscrit.

**Source:** Reconciliation of European Histories Group (2014).

Table 2: Rapporteurs of the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism

<i>Surname</i>	<i>Signatory of the PD?</i>	<i>Member of the REHG?</i>	<i>Political Affiliation</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Conservative?</i>	<i>East European?</i>	<i>UEN?</i>
Kelam, T.	Y	Y	EPP (2004–)	Estonia	Y	Y	N
Tókécs, L.	Y	Y	NI (2007–2008), Greens/EFA (2008–9), EPP (2009–)	Hungary	Y	Y	N
Vaidere, I.	Y	Y	UEN (2004–9), EPP (2009–)	Latvia	Y	Y	Y
Hökmark, G.	Y	Y	EPP (2004–)	Sweden	Y	N	N
Hybaskova, J.	Y	Y	EPP (2004–9)	Czech R	Y	Y	N
Kallenbach, G.	Y	Y	Greens/EFA (2004–9)	Germany	N	N	N
Kristovskis, Ģ.	Y	Y*	UEN (2004–9)	Latvia	Y	Y	Y
Roszkowski, W.	Y	Y*	UEN (2004–9)	Poland	Y	Y	Y
Bielan, A.	Y	Y	UEN (2004–9), ECR (2009–14)	Poland	Y	Y	Y
Foltyn-Kubicka, H.	Y	Y	UEN (2005–9)	Poland	Y	Y	Y
Horacek, M.	Y	Y	Greens/EFA (2004–9)	Germany	N	N	N
Neyts-Uyttebroeck, A.	Y	Y	ALDE (1994–9; 2004–14)	Belgium	N	N	N
Plotrowski, M. M.	Y	Y	IND/DEM (2004–6), UEN (2006–9), ECR (2009–)	Poland	Y	Y	Y
Podkanski, Z. Z.	Y	Y	EPP (2004–5), UEN (2005–9)	Poland	Y	Y	Y
Szent-Ivanyi, I.	Y	Y	ALDE (2004–9)	Hungary	N	Y	N
Zile, R.	Y	Y	UEN (2004–9), ECR (2009–)	Latvia	Y	Y	Y

\* Member of the United Europe-United History working group before losing mandate in 2009. ALDE, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; ECR, European Conservatives and Reformists; EFA, European Free Alliance; EPP, European People's Party; REHG, Reconciliation of European Histories Group; PD, Prague Declaration; IND/DEM, Independence/Democracy; UEN, Union for Europe of the Nations; NI, Non-Inscrit.  
**Source:** European Parliament (2009).

European MEPs who were members of the UEN group when the resolution was adopted. Half of the rapporteurs came from this Eurosceptic political group, which made up only 5 per cent of the EP.

When comparing the proportion of the MEPs from the former communist member states with the total number of MEPs participating in a certain project (for instance, the Group, the RECT or the Platform), we need to bear in mind that the East-West ratio in the EP is far from parity, that the number of total MEPs from the East and the West is far from equal. As Table 3 demonstrates, the share of MEPs from former communist member states in the EP has fluctuated over time, but it has never been higher than 27 per cent. Therefore, when I say that East European MEPs are disproportionately represented in the Group because they make up more than 80 per cent of its members, this should not be read with the assumption that their share would normally be 50 per cent, but with the knowledge that it would be less than 27 per cent.

## V. Platform of European Memory and Conscience

The Platform of European Memory and Conscience is another important actor in the European memory debate that is connected to the Group in numerous ways. The Platform is an international non-governmental organization whose main goal is to educate and to raise awareness about the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes; it also aims to become a platform for a pan-European network of public and private organizations that already work in this field. The ambition to encourage the commemoration and the education of the crimes of all totalitarian dictatorships (defined by the Platform as ‘National Socialism, Communism and Fascism’ in the context of 20th century Europe) seems to be in line with the reframed reasoning of the anti-communist group. The founding document of the Platform, however, tries to be less controversial than the manifesto of the Group as it notes ‘the exceptionality and uniqueness of the Holocaust’ in its second paragraph. This is an apparently clear position in the uniqueness–comparability debate, but its meaning is

Table 3: Number of MEPs from Former Communist Member States at Different Periods

	2004–7	2007–9	2009–11	2011–13	2013–14	2014–
Bulgaria		18	17	18	18	17
Croatia					12	11
Czech Republic	24	24	22	22	22	21
Estonia	6	6	6	6	6	6
Hungary	24	24	22	22	22	21
Latvia	9	9	8	9	9	8
Lithuania	13	13	12	12	12	11
Poland	54	54	50	51	51	51
Romania		35	33	33	33	32
Slovakia	14	14	13	13	13	13
Slovenia	7	7	7	8	8	8
MEPs from former communist member states (total)	151	204	190	194	206	199
All MEPs (total)	732	785	736	754	766	751
Share of MEPs from former communist member states (%)	20.6	26.0	25.8	25.7	26.9	26.5

MEP, member of the European Parliament

soon brought into question when the text states that ‘both National Socialist and Communist dictatorships committed crimes against humanity, war crimes, including crimes against national minorities and genocide’ and thus European citizens need to be ‘informed and educated about [communism] in the same manner as they are educated about National socialism’. As Maria Mälksoo notes, the document is ‘a curious mix of both claims’ of uniqueness and comparability (2014, p. 90). Let us examine these statements more closely.

1. A genocide committed by Nazism is exceptional and unique.
2. Nazi and communist dictatorships both committed genocide.
3. Both Nazism and communism should be taught in the same manner.

The text gives no information about what the genocide committed by communist dictatorships was and whether it was exceptional and unique. If we assumed that it was not, it would be difficult to live up to the standard set in statement (3). If there were two genocides, one exceptional and unique and another non-exceptional and non-unique, how could we teach them in the same manner? Surely, we would need to handle the former in a special way by virtue of its exceptionality and uniqueness. Therefore, if we are to keep the above three statements internally consistent, we should assume that the genocide committed by communist dictatorships is also exceptional and unique. What is more, it needs to be as exceptional and unique as the Holocaust if the two are to be taught in the same manner. If we consider that it is generally argued that the Holocaust is unique because of its ‘radical evilness’ and that the Platform implicitly assumes that the Holocaust and the communist genocide are equally exceptional and unique, we must come to the conclusion that, according to the Platform, Nazism and communism are equally evil. While the founding document of the Platform first appears to be less controversial than the manifesto of the Group, the arguments put forth by the former logically lead to the core claim of the anti-communist group.

The Platform can be regarded as an anti-communist group for three more reasons. First, the composition of the Platform follows a pattern that is similar to that of the Group in that it is dominated by East European conservatives. As of January 2016, of the 25 representatives of the Platform,<sup>3</sup> 20 were from new member states (see Table 4). Of the representatives 15 held political positions, which makes their affiliation relatively clearly identifiable, and only two were not affiliated with a right-wing political party. There is also a very significant overlap between the people involved in the work of the Platform and the Group and the signatories of the Prague Declaration. Of the 25 representatives of the Platform 14 were members of the Group or signatories of the Prague Declaration. The few West European members of the Platform were also known more widely for their strong positions on communism than for voicing their views about other totalitarian systems. As mentioned above, the president of the Platform was Göran Lindblad, the rapporteur of the Council of Europe resolution on totalitarian communist regimes. One of the members of the Board of Trustees was Stéphane Courtois, the French historian who

<sup>3</sup>I use ‘representative’ in a broad sense here standing for the president, the managing director, and the members of the executive board, the supervisory board and the board of trustees.



Table 4: The Representatives of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (as of 29 January 2016)

<i>Surname</i>	<i>Signatory of the PD?</i>	<i>Member of the REHG?</i>	<i>Political Affiliation</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Conservative?</i>	<i>Eastern European?</i>
Kélam, T.	Y	Y	EPP (2004-)	Estonia	Y	Y
Landsbergis, V.	Y	Y	EPP (2004–2014)	Lithuania	Y	Y
Macovei, M. L.	Y	Y	EPP (2009-)	Romania	Y	Y
Tótkés, L.	Y	Y	NI (2007–2008), Greens/EFA (2008–2009), EPP (2009-)	Hungary	Y	Y
Zver, M.	Y	Y	EPP (2009-)	Slovenia	Y	Y
Roszkowski, W.	Y	Y*	UEN (2004–2009)	Poland	Y	Y
Jansa, J.	Y	Y	conservative PM (2004–2008; 2012–2013)	Slovenia	Y	Y
Lehky, M.	Y	Y		Slovakia	NA	Y
Lindblad, G.	Y	Y	Conservative MP (1997–2010)	Sweden	Y	N
Majstrík, M.	Y	Y	independent senator (2002–2008)	Czech R	N	Y
Szilágyi, Z.	Y	Y	assistant (2007-) of MEP László Tótkés (EPP)	Romania	Y	Y
Winkelmann, N.	Y	Y		Czech R	NA	Y
Kalniete, S.		Y	EPP (2009-)	Latvia	Y	Y
Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė, R.		Y	EPP (2009–2014)	Lithuania	Y	Y
Applebaum, A.				US/Poland	NA	NA
Courtois, S.				France	NA	N
Hio, T.				Estonia	NA	Y
Kowal, P.				Poland	Y	Y
Mutor, M.				Poland	NA	Y
Nollendorfs, V.				Latvia	NA	Y
Reiprich, S.				Germany	NA	N
Schulz, W.			Greens/EFA (2009–2014)	Germany	N	N
Ukielski, P.				Poland	NA	Y
Vetehy, O.				Czech R	NA	Y
Vondra, A.			conservative senator (2006–2012)	Czech R	Y	Y

\* Member of the United Europe-United History working group before losing his mandate in 2009.

ECR, European Conservatives and Reformists; EFA, European Free Alliance; EPP, European People's Party; MEP, member of the European Parliament; MP, member of parliament; PD, Prague Declaration; PM, prime minister; REHG, Reconciliation of European Histories Group; UEN, Union for Europe of the Nations; NI, Non-Inscrit.

Source: Platform of European Memory and Conscience (2011).

edited *The Black Book of Communism*, but the Platform could not boast of a comparably influential expert on any other totalitarian regime.

Second, the actual activities of the Platform are more concerned with the crimes of communism than those of other totalitarian regimes. The very first conference that it organized bore the title 'Crimes of the Communist Regimes' in February 2010. More recently, the Platform hosted two conferences in the EP in co-operation with the Group on this theme: the 'Legal Settlement of Communist Crimes' in June 2012 and the 'Justice 2.0: International Justice for the Communist Crimes' in May 2015. The latter was also officially supported by the EPP group. To be fair, the Platform does have some projects that deal with totalitarianism in general<sup>4</sup> but not one has dealt solely with Nazism or the Holocaust. Given that the two largest events organized by the Platform were devoted only to the crimes of communism, this is at odds with its proclaimed ambition to promote the commemoration and education about the crimes of all totalitarian regimes.

Third, the circumstances of the establishment of the Platform also tell us a lot about its orientation. The idea of such an organization was raised during the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes and was subsequently supported by the Prague Declaration and the EP resolution of 2009. In preparation for the Presidency of the Council, the Czech government invited all member states to a meeting in November 2008 where the working group on the Platform of European Memory and Conscience was formed. Subsequently, although the EP also called for 'the establishment of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience to provide support for networking and cooperation among national research institutes specializing in the subject of totalitarian history', it did not take any concrete measures in this direction. In February 2010, the aforementioned working group organized the conference 'Crimes of the Communist Regimes' where the 'Declaration on Crimes of Communism' was adopted by almost the same people who were behind the Prague Declaration. In August 2011 important government officials from several member states – the most prominent of whom was Jerzy Buzek (EPP, Poland), President of the EP at that time – signed the Warsaw Declaration, which practically restated the demands of the Prague Declaration and hastened the implementation of plans for the platform. It was founded only as late as October 2011, two and a half years after the EP resolution, thanks to the activism of Donald Tusk, then Prime Minister of Poland, which held the presidency of the Council in the second half of 2011. The Platform was officially established during the summit of prime ministers of the Visegrad group (all conservative politicians) with funds provided by the International Visegrad Fund. Among the 19 founding institutions, those from East European member states were largely overrepresented, as only five organizations were from the West. The number of member institutions rose to 57 as of November 2017, but only five of the new members were from the old EU member states.

This is not to say that the Group and the Platform were established with the intention of functioning as anti-communist groups. The original motivation may well have been (and may still be) to initiate debate between people of diverse views. What is clear, however, is that these institutions do not currently function in this manner; the people involved are

<sup>4</sup>The travelling exhibition 'Totalitarianism in Europe', the conference 'Legacy of Totalitarianism Today' in June 2014 and the reader for secondary school students 'Lest We Forget: Memory of Totalitarianism in Europe'.

almost exclusively East European conservatives with an anti-communist agenda and the work that the Group and the Platform follows suit.

Finally, it is worth noting how keen the adherents of the anti-communist group are to spell out the word Nazi as national socialist. This serves a double function: on the one hand, it emphasizes that Nazism and communism stem from the same root and are thus comparably or equally evil; on the other hand, this framing pushes the responsibility for both totalitarian ideologies on the radical left. In the light of this, it is not surprising that the most vociferous opponents of the anti-communist agenda are members of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) group; that is, the West European left and far left, who could not be further on the political spectrum from the East European conservatives dominating the anti-communist group. In the parliamentary debate of the RECT, for instance, the members of this political group were among the strongest critics of the text. They often repeated the argument that the whole debate about totalitarianisms draws attention away from the big skeleton in the closet, the historical experience and legacy of colonialism, which is indeed suspiciously absent from European memory politics. However, we cannot justifiably call the GUE/NGL an interest group in the context of the European memory debate. While the anti-communist side is a single-issue group with institutions that further their cause, the GUE/NGL is a formal political group in the EP fighting for many more political causes and the memory issue does not seem to be so important for them.

To sum up, this empirical analysis has showed that the debate about the idea of European memory is much more complex than a simple opposition between the East and the West. It is possible to identify the most prominent supporters of the comparability of totalitarian systems, what I call the anti-communist group, most of whom can be associated with the signatories of the Prague Declaration and the members of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group. They mostly consist of East European conservative politicians and intellectuals and they have challenged the exclusive emphasis on the Holocaust of the mid-2000s with relative success. They have sponsored several decisions in European institutions in this regard, most importantly the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism and the Platform of European Memory and Conscience. Generally, the most vocal opponents of this trend were figures associated with the West European left, particularly the GUE/NGL group. For this reason, the most far-fetched generalization that is can justifiably be made is that the European memory debate is taking place between political groups that mostly come from the East European right and far right, on the one hand, and the West European left and far left, on the other. This is a long way from assuming that the two halves of the continent are locked in a fight between diametrically opposed memory cultures.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to show that it is misleading to talk about the East-West memory divide, and to say that the Eastern and the Western parts of Europe have different historical memories. First, I explained the theoretical objections to this notion by highlighting the totalizing and naturalizing aspects of talking about the continent in these terms. I argued that an important consequence of this kind of thinking is that social agency is almost completely ignored. My primary intention was to correct this mistake and to restore the

attention to agency to the heart of the empirical analysis. I showed that the social actors involved in the debate about the idea of European memory are far more diverse, the fault lines are far less clear and the sides of the debate are far more heterogeneous than the carelessly used notion of the East-West memory divide would have us believe.

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