

*Angelos Giannakopoulos, editor*

**Politics of Memory and War**  
**From Russia to the Middle East**





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for International and Regional Studies

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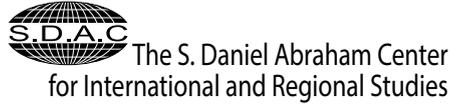
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# **Politics of Memory and War From Russia to the Middle East**

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## Angelos Giannakopoulos

### Introduction

Memory politics represent a broad academic field. In this volume memory politics are considered and discussed exclusively in terms of *historical revisionism*; that is, as a specific state policy stemming from a particular view and interpretation of national history and, ultimately, as a more or less crystallized state ideology. At the time this book was being finalized, the war in Ukraine was still dominating the public and academic discourse. Although many readers might be interested mainly in analyses of this war, this does not mean that two other confrontations, namely, the one between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, and that between Israel and Palestine in the Middle East, do not share commonalities. In fact, the opposite is the case. This introduction purports to point out similarities between the conflict in Eastern Europe between Ukraine and Russia and that in the Aegean between Greece and Turkey, and highlights common revisionist policies of Russia and Turkey. As for the Middle East, both the introduction and the book as a whole are inspired by the joint environmental cooperation endeavor in the region represented by the EcoPeace Organisation. This joint venture, which at first glance has nothing in common with the focus of the book, underlines the urgent existential problems we face today as a planet and looks beyond false notions of national memory and identity and the aggressive policies they usually cause by finally replacing the centuries-old concept of *resistance* with the urgent one of *resilience*.

### Contributions

Against this background, Marco Siddi, in the first chapter of this book, argues that collective memory can be a powerful tool to motivate or justify foreign policy. Siddi contends that policy makers can forge a link between collective memory and foreign policy through several discursive and rhetorical tools, including the application of historical analogies, construction of historical narratives, creation of memory sites, marginalization and forgetting of the past, and securitization of historical memory. The use of collective memory in foreign policy discourse is investigated through an analysis of two case studies: that of historical narratives in the first phase of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, in 2014–2015, and the role of selective remembering and forgetting in Italian foreign policy, with a focus on how collective oblivion of the colonial past

influenced Italy's position on the refugee reception crisis in the Mediterranean region in the 2010s. The aim in this chapter is to highlight the complexities of collective memory, which is shaped by both active remembering and by intended or unintentional forgetting, and to describe how these mechanisms play out in foreign policy discourse.

The second chapter by Liudmyla Pidkuimukha, as well as the third one by the editor of the book, Angelos Giannakopoulos, are dedicated to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Pidkuimukha analyzes the myth of three fraternal peoples—Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians—as well as the narrative that Russia is the successor of Kyivan Rus. The data included in this research is based on the article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians: Trinity and Unity of Eastern Slavs,” by Vladimir Putin, together with his interviews and speeches and the state decree *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*. She also explores how this “civilizational unity” is reflected in the media, as well as in popular culture. The research is informed by critical discourse analysis (CDA) involving an analysis of text, discourse, and sociocultural practice. The Russian media underlines that the three nations—Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia—are united not just by territory but also by history, culture, and spirit, which have created a unique civilization (trinity).

The Soviet thesis, continued by Russia, about the “single nation” is manifested in terms such as “brotherly people,” “Russian-Ukrainian friendly society,” “one people,” and “fraternal peoples.” The results demonstrate that the Kremlin has been manipulating historical facts in order to minimize Ukraine's culture, display its weakness, and distort its language. By spreading these notions through the legal system, mass media, education, and mass culture, Russia is attempting to justify its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Angelos Giannakopoulos has compiled and summarized critical information, testimonies, and analyses published in various European media regarding Russia and the war in Ukraine shortly before and after February 2022, in order to highlight the reasons behind the war. He argues that the Russian attack on Ukraine changed forever the “comfortable” world we believed we lived in.

The chapter, however, goes beyond the sense of shock and embarrassment caused by the war, in an attempt to show its inevitability, and the naivety with which European countries, especially Germany, have so far dealt with Russian irredentism and aggression. He contends that today's Russia incorporates two basic politico-historical traditions that represent a fundamental heritage of this country over the last 750 years: Asian despotism and war of conquest. Moreover, regarding contemporary Russia and in terms of everyday politics, he also claims that Russia is a rogue and bandit state,

captured by an elite which combines an amalgam of Soviet security apparatus and organized crime groups. The purpose of the chapter is to substantiate the truth of these claims.

Regarding the conflict between Greece and Turkey over the Aegean and in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cengiz Aktar points out that the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453 is undoubtedly one of the most significant events of the Ottoman past that have been used, abused, and distorted extensively since the mid-1950s in modern Turkey by the two mainstream ideologies, Kemalism and Islamism.

The manipulation of this milestone and the invention of numerous accounts relating to the period following the conquest took a decisive turn with the celebration of the fifth centenary in 1953 when Kemalists and Islamists were competing to appropriate and lead the event. The “rewritten” conquest represents a historic development that befits and enriches in different ways the two fundamental national ideologies of modern Turkey, secular Kemalism and political Islam. The chapter reviews the modern narratives and their use by the underlying ideologies in order to illustrate their historical irrelevance in light of Mehmed II’s policies during the period in question. Further, it examines the advent of a “neo-conquering” narrative which has become the leitmotiv of contemporary Turkish political discourse.

Leonidas Karakatsanis, on the other hand, underlines that during the early 2000s Greek–Turkish relations enjoyed a period of rapprochement, raising hopes for a resolution of several long-standing disputes between the two countries. However, gradually, since the turn of the following decade and more intensively since 2015, relations have once again been deteriorating. Manipulation of the past, and memories of war, loss, and conflict have re-entered the landscape as yardsticks of nationalist rhetoric.

Written during this tense period in Turkish–Greek relations, Karakatsanis focuses on the inverse role that politics of memory have played in Greek–Turkish relations, namely, as a remedy for conflict and a force for peace. Memory work meant a difficult process—for Greeks and Turks alike—of exploring the past of atrocities, pain, and loss that the two sides had both exerted and suffered. It stresses the positive effects of such work for reversing the symptoms of trauma, and for battling national(ist) biases of history. It suggests that memory work contributed greatly to the official improvement of bi-national relations during the early 2000s. The chapter closes with the question of whether the residues of this memory work can still be used to counter the new rising tensions in Greek-Turkish relations.

## Russia-Ukraine and Turkey-Greece: a short comparison

A brief comparison between the conflicts and antagonisms mentioned so far calls for some commentary concerning the startling similarities between these two conflicts, between Russia and Ukraine, and Turkey and Greece. Comparing the behavior of Russia and Turkey, a first likeness, which actually extends beyond these two conflicts, is the attempt of conservative and nationalist governments to revive the imperial national past in order to restore the nation's "glory."<sup>1</sup> Just as the Islamic government of Tayyip Erdogan is seeking to create a great "new Turkey," Vladimir Putin is calling for a strong "new Russia" (and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is promoting a purely Hindu "new India"). The aggressive arguments expressed by the authoritarian leaders of these states have some common features that could be summarized as follows:

1. History has been unfair to the nation and its negative consequences must be corrected, if necessary, by force. This usually takes the form of territorial claims against neighboring countries.
2. The country and the nation are surrounded by external enemies. These are threatening the integrity of the state and the power of its people.
3. The same applies to internal enemies. These include, of course, political dissidents, those who question the omnipotence of the autocratic leaders of their countries; minorities of all kinds; and foreigners living in the country.<sup>2</sup> Russia's Putin, in particular, is part of a generation of world leaders who know how to build their popularity mainly on the strength of their resistance to enemies at home and abroad.
4. All of this is accompanied by the claim of ethical superiority of the nation vis-à-vis the decadent West. The West functions as the reference point of all evil in the world, politically, culturally, and especially ethically. Decadence is understood almost exclusively as the excessive freedom that

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1 have no hesitation in placing "Let's make America great again" in precisely this ideological framework.

2 An example is the large-scale version of India's national emblem, which features four proud lions enthroned on an ornate lotus base, recently unveiled by the Indian prime minister in New Delhi. It is worth noting that in the eyes of some Indians, the wild cats look much more belligerent than the ancient models. "Angry lions with exposed fangs! This is Modi's New India!" wrote lawyer and Modi critic Prashant Bhushan, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/75-jahre-unabhaengigkeit-modi-erschafft-sein-neues-indien-18235087.html?premium>. Modi's "New India" ignores of course and represses the vast Muslim population of the country. Significantly, India's more famous landmark, the Taj Mahal, which is of course a mosque, is lately much less present in official government tourist websites than it used to be. Instead, these are dominated by Hindu monuments, rituals, and traditions, among others. See, for example, the government website "Incredible India," <https://www.incredibleindia.org/content/incredible-india-v2/en/destinations/popular-destinations.html>

leads to promiscuity of all kinds, especially with regard to sexual freedom. The anathema of all authoritarian regimes, regardless of whether they are conservative Muslim or Christian, is of course the LGBTQI+ community. This is precisely where the whole argument of moral superiority over the West rests: on sexual morality! In fact, “the religious neoconservatives (from Putin and Trump to Iran) advocate a return to ancient Orthodox (Christian or Muslim) traditions against the ‘Satanic’ postmodern decadence of LGBT+ and transsexuality; however, their actual policies are full of barbaric obscenity and violence”.<sup>3</sup>

As far as Turkey’s role in its neighborhood is concerned, it is obvious that it is taking advantage of global multipolarism in order to strengthen its role as a regional power, since the United States has shifted the center of gravity of its foreign policy to Southeast Asia. This has become increasingly clear in the way Turkey is behaving toward the war in Ukraine. So far, Russians have felt few of the consequences of sanctions from the West, due to the many ways and means of circumventing them. Turkey plays an important role in this. Turkey is the only NATO member that has not imposed a single economic sanction on Russia, which is using the Turkish economy as a way to avoid them. Turkey, as a “warehouse and bridge” for Russia, is considered one of the most important hubs for the transport of goods—even those that should not actually reach Russia because of the sanctions, such as spare parts for aircraft or luxury items. Regarding in particular Turkey’s relations with Greece, President Erdogan’s rhetoric, in which all opposition parties, religious and secular, also participate, has poisoned society and spread hatred against the “unfaithful” and “insolvent” Greeks who are backed by the West (in line with the “external enemies” argument). This martial rhetoric serves not only to distract voters from vital economic problems but also to prepare for widespread acceptance of a military conflict with Greece. Similarities to Putin’s strategy of militarizing Russian society and convincing Russians of the inevitability of a military conflict with Ukraine are evident.<sup>4</sup> It would not be erroneous to claim that although still a NATO member and a formal candidate state of the EU, it is not Turkey but Ukraine in eastern Europe and Greece in the southeast of the continent are currently the *front lines* of the West. Just as the role of Ukraine as a frontline state of the West depends on the outcome of the war with Russia, so too does that of Greece, which depends

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3 Slavoj Žižek in an article in the Berliner Zeitung at [https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/slavoj-zizek-vermisst-fast-die-liberalen-waehrend-er-viele-linke-extrem-woke-und-viele-rechte-extrem-rechts-findet-li.288590?utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR1txl8sxQi-JasUvwhz90Tzhyxk\\_Ur\\_ucvfvfnxrwS4Ulo-Do1cNl5Z-Cs#Echobox=1668866903](https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/slavoj-zizek-vermisst-fast-die-liberalen-waehrend-er-viele-linke-extrem-woke-und-viele-rechte-extrem-rechts-findet-li.288590?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR1txl8sxQi-JasUvwhz90Tzhyxk_Ur_ucvfvfnxrwS4Ulo-Do1cNl5Z-Cs#Echobox=1668866903)

4 <https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/foreign-policy/562038448/toyrkia-i-anthelliniki-ritoriki-dilitiriazeti-tin-koinonia/>

on the result of the forthcoming Turkish presidential election and the kind of democracy or dictatorship Turkey will finally adopt after June 2023.

As far as the international behavior of Turkey and Russia are concerned, it is significant that US senator Robert Menendez, who has introduced an amendment in Congress to suspend the sale of F-16s to Turkey, equates Erdogan with Putin, in exclusive statements he made to Greek ANT1 television, including:

Erdogan threatens too much. Just like Putin, he assumes that everyone will cower once he threatens. The US is not a coward and it will be a violation of UN Security Council resolutions and for the EU, of which Cyprus is a member, and I think there will be consequences for that as well. I will not take his threats seriously, but we have to be careful so that the threats don't become reality, however at the moment I think it's more of a "boast" than anything else.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Konstantinos Filis, director of the Institute of International Affairs in Greece, condenses, graphically, the similarities between the two authoritarian regimes, thus:

Putin and Erdogan—apart from their authoritarian way of governing—seem to share a common playbook in the effort to promote/impose their revisionist aspirations. First, by issuing threats and intimidating the neighbors, they attempt to bend their will/resistance. At the same time, they militarize the problems, blackmailing them by using military means to achieve their goals. The projection of their military power and their sense of post-imperial arrogance have led them to disregard or misinterpret international treaties/the UN Charter at will. They use hybrid tools (e.g., migratory flows in the case of Turkey, cyberattacks in the case of Russia) and propagate false news to legitimize their actions (Greece commits crimes against humanity and Ukraine genocide). They overestimate the caliber of others, however, presenting them as a threat to their national security not so much in isolation, but as part of a plan by powerful states (in this case the US) to undermine their sovereignty (because their leaders are not liked). They exploit the minorities they

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.capital.gr/diethni/3661993/gerousiastis-menentez-o-erntogan-apeilei-opos-o-poutin-den-tha-deiliasoume>

are supposed to protect in order to gain a foothold and justify their involvement in the internal affairs of third countries. They believe that they must correct the history and mistakes of their predecessors, driven by a strong sense of personal vanity. They behave like bullies beyond diplomatic boundaries and break institutional taboos to demonstrate that in the new global environment anything is possible. They conjure up artificial crises for future use and every eventuality, yet often end up at a dead end, having raised the bar of expectations. Ultimately, by inciting intolerance and fomenting tensions, they falsely attribute to their opponents the intentions they themselves have and/or the actions they are about to take, appearing to be on the defensive/at risk, while preparing the ground for a “pre-emptive” counterattack. This technique is described as a “mirror accusation” or, alternatively, a “mirror argument.”<sup>6</sup>

## The European perspective on politics of memory

Finally, Markus Prutsch focuses on European affairs by arguing that history and memory thereof, on the one hand, and politics, on the other, have a complex relationship, one that is particularly true for the European Union. As a supranational body politic, the EU continues to be characterized by cultural diversity, among the most pervasive expressions of which are long-standing national historical narratives and remembrance cultures. These cultures cannot easily be reconciled with one other and make for one of the biggest obstacles to both coming to terms with the past and political integration in Europe. This is especially the case in times of crisis and a visible resurgence of “politics of the past” on the political stage. Against this backdrop, the objective of the chapter is twofold: first, to assess the challenges of a pan-European historical memory, and present past and current memory policies of the European Union and its predecessors; second, on this basis, to examine existing dilemmas and shortcomings of European memory policies, and outline possible avenues for development. The chapter demonstrates that while history might indeed continue to be a divisive force, it is also a potential tool for a pan-European sense of belonging to develop in the long-run—provided that a genuinely European and self-critical “culture of remembering” is successfully fostered

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/foreign-policy/562059940/arthro-toy-k-fili-stin-k-to-koino-egcheiridio-poytin-kai-erntogan/>

that stresses the prerequisites and the process of coming to terms with the past, and considers historical memory, first and foremost, as a matter of civil rather than political action.

## Ex oriente lux: An alternative perspective about conflict and violence from the Middle East

Regarding the long-running conflict in the Middle East, an article by the well-known *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman (January 25, 2022), came to my attention shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine. During the time of uncertainty in the Western world as to whether Russia would finally invade Ukraine, Friedman referred to a point in a recent speech made by US President Biden in which he argued that “Russia has something much more important to worry about than whether Ukraine looks East or West—namely, ‘a burning tundra that will not freeze again naturally’.” Summarizing the argument by Biden, Friedman pointed out that the president “tried to persuade a Russian leader to get out of his neighbor’s front yard and focus instead on saving his own backyard—because as Siberia is affected by climate change, it will threaten Russia’s stability a lot more than anything that happens in Ukraine.” The details provided in Friedman’s article regarding the environmental problems Russia faces currently and will face increasingly in the near future are indeed terrifying. At the time the article was written in the winter of 2021–2022, some 900 acres were “burning despite below-zero temperatures in the Magadan region some 10,000 kilometers east of Moscow. Russia’s territory is warming 2.5 times as fast as the planet on average, and the situation there is going to get only worse.” According to the *Moscow Times*, Friedman continues: “As air temperatures have risen in recent decades ... soil that has been frozen for millennia has begun to thaw.” If this melting accelerates, it is “expected to cause significant damage to human settlements and key energy and transportation infrastructure. And as permafrost melts, it releases long-stored greenhouse gases like methane, triggering an accelerating feedback loop of warming.” The article in the *Moscow Times* also states that the republic of Dagestan, some 930 miles south of Moscow, is near Russia’s agricultural heartland, “and experts worry that desertification could spread to these regions and impact the country’s food supply” (Friedman, 2022).

As Friedman also reports, these very same pressures around climate and drought are already spurring some of the new generation of Middle East leaders to subtly shift the basis of their authority from *resistance* to *resilience*. Now this struggle between resistance leaders and resilience leaders is taking place within countries as well. The EcoPeace organization is an alliance of

Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian environmentalists that have been pushing for a regional strategy called a Green Blue Deal. Building on the Jordan–Israel–UAE Abraham Accords, but also including the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, it would focus on both fresh water and electricity. Two EcoPeace leaders, Gidon Bromberg from Israel and Nada Majdalani from the Palestinian Authority, were invited to present their ideas to the UN Security Council. In fact, Israeli environmental protection minister Tamar Zandberg and her Palestinian counterpart have already launched joint projects in the fields of environment and waste and their “work is progressing well in a different atmosphere than before based on the understanding that climate change has no borders and that the two peoples will benefit from this collaboration.” (Friedman, 2022). This is just the beginning of an entire new kind of power struggle within and between countries based on who is leading with resistance and who is leading with resilience.

## A Green Blue Deal for the Middle East

In “A Green Blue Deal for the Middle East” (which we proudly republish in this book with the permission of EcoPeace), Gidon Bromberg, Nada Majdalani, and Yana Abu Taleb, hence, provide a completely different perspective on how local conflicts can be overcome as a way to solve common problems that threaten people’s livelihood. Their chapter is an attempt to inform the considerations of Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian policy makers, and the understanding of international stakeholders, as they work to meet the challenges posed by climate change in the region. The Middle East Green Blue Deal emphasizes the particular importance of water and water scarcity issues. It represents a practical, feasible, and effective policy approach to an urgent challenge, one that can serve to address conflict drivers, advance a two-state solution, based on 1967 borders, and promote trust-building and cooperation in a conflict-mired region. The EcoPeace report also makes recommendations applicable to international community actors for paths that might not only contribute to climate security, cooperation, and development in the Middle East but simultaneously provide entry points for advancing Israeli–Palestinian and broader Middle East peace issues.

## Conclusion

Anachronistic conflicts are intensifying, extreme, closed, aggressive nationalisms are returning, with new wars

affecting the elderly, children and the sick, and which are causing destruction everywhere... After the two World Wars, we thought that the world had learned to march, gradually, towards respect for human rights, international law, multiple forms of cooperation. But history, unfortunately, shows signs of regression ("Pope Francis," 2022).

The conflicts analyzed in this volume, and especially the war in Ukraine, should not lead to a cessation of the efforts to save the planet; on the contrary, they should bring about an intensification of green policies. As Friedman (2022, September 27) says, Putin's war "is not just a crime against Ukraine and humanity. It's also a crime against the home we all share: planet Earth." In an earlier opinion piece (2022, March 29), he hopes the war in Ukraine is the last one in which the United States and its allies finance both sides of the conflict. While NATO member states are helping the Ukrainian army, Western nations are filling Putin's coffers by buying Russia's oil and gas (Friedman, March 29). Fuel independence is the most effective threat against Putin. Just as the Americans obeyed Roosevelt's call for food self-sufficiency in World War II by planting vegetables in city flowerbeds, so now we must fight our oil dependence and petro-dictators by creating makeshift solar parks on our rooftops (Friedman 2022, March 29). A clean energy expert quoted in Friedman's March 29 article, states: "The clean alternatives are now cheaper than the dirty ones ... it now costs more to ruin the earth than to save it. It also now costs less to liberate ourselves from petro--dictators than to remain enslaved by them." It is now past the hour to leave old-fashioned resistance policies leading to meaningless conflicts aside and to finally pave ways based on resilience in order to secure peace, freedom, and prosperity and, ultimately, to save our planet. As the Secretary General of the UN Antonio Guterres recently pointed it out: "Humanity has a choice: cooperate or perish!"<sup>7</sup>

Finally, we should urgently recognise that others see the West as an enemy again. **The systems competition is back.** China, however, will pose a much greater challenge to us in this century than Russia. As Kai Strittmatter points it out by using the words of Thomas Haldenwang, the chairman of the Federal Constitution Protection Agency of Germany: if "Russia is the storm, China is climate change."<sup>8</sup> The dependency especially of Germany on China - in supply chains, in the export market - and its vulnerability to blackmail are much greater. Especially Germans seem to make exactly the

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7 <https://www.dw.com/en/cop27-un-chief-warns-world-is-on-path-to-climate-hell/a-63669612>

8 Kai Strittmatter in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/projekte/artikel/gesellschaft/diktatur-demokratie-putin-xi-biden-merkel-scholz-gerhard-schroeder-china-russland-handel-e326279/>

same terrible mistakes in their China-policy today as they did in the past with Russia. China's president Xi Jinping makes no secret of the fact that China deliberately wants to deepen the dependencies of other countries in order to use them geostrategically as well. China is a state that is now just beginning to "reinvent" democracy. The CP regime, as Beijing has just announced at the party congress in October 2022, is a "true, comprehensive, effective democracy".<sup>9</sup>

At the global level we are witnessing more clearly than ever a polarisation between democratic and anti-democratic forces. In this century the conflict will not be between nationalisms but between democracies and non-democracies. The bill of this conflict will be finally paid by the planet if you don't change our strategy soon.

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9 See Strittmatter above.

# **Marco Siddi**

## **The Politics of Memory and Foreign Policy**

### Introduction

When political leaders announce important foreign policy decisions, they often refer to “lessons of the past” in order to justify them. Since such “lessons” are usually described or broadly perceived as defining moments in the history of a country, they tend to resonate with the knowledge and beliefs held by public opinion. Examples are numerous. When justifying the wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003, or the bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999, US leaders recalled the Nazi armed aggressions of the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the need for a strong military response rather than “appeasing” negotiations. In another context, when announcing the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian president Vladimir Putin made extensive analogies with the Soviet fight against Nazism in World War II, and highlighted the alleged need to “denazify” today’s Ukraine. While different in nature and substance, these discourses shared the goal of mobilizing the collective memory of US and Russian citizens in order to garner their support for military interventions abroad.

The term “collective memory” refers to the shared memories held by a community about the past. It is an image of the past constructed subjectively in the present in order to serve current social and historical necessities (Siddi, 2017). For some scholars, memory and history are two distinct, albeit mutually dependent conceptions that reinforce each other and overlap. According to this understanding, historical knowledge derives from memory, but memory often needs to be corrected by historical knowledge (Müller, 2002, pp. 22–25). In political and foreign policy debates, however, what really matters is the way political leaders present and discuss historical events, most notably the way they try to link them to current political purposes. Access to the media enables political leaders to shape collective memories and adapt them in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives.

This chapter examines the construction and use of collective memory in foreign policy. It starts with a conceptual discussion of the main discursive strategies and mechanisms through which collective memory and foreign policy are linked. It then briefly examines two empirical case studies: the use of historical narratives in the first phase of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, in 2014–2015, and the role of selective remembering and forgetting in Italian foreign policy, with a focus on how collective oblivion of the colonial past

influenced Italy's position on the refugee reception crisis in the Mediterranean region in the 2010s. My aim in this chapter is to highlight the complexities of collective memory, which is shaped by both active remembering and by intended or unintentional forgetting, and to describe how these mechanisms play out in foreign policy discourse, where they often constitute an influential instrument at the service of policy making.

## Collective Memory, the Politics of Memory, and Foreign Policy

The selection and dissemination of discourses about a country's past has been termed the "politics of memory" (Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu, 2006). Politics of memory involves actors who use their public prominence to propagate discourses about the past that are useful for current political goals (Lebow, 2006). Thanks to their importance, state leaders and senior politicians enjoy discursive power to influence a country's official memory narratives. By doing so, they can pursue both domestic and foreign policy goals. For instance, a state leader could use a narrative about the past (such as the negative effects of appeasement toward Hitler in the 1930s) in order to construct analogies with the present and justify foreign policy decisions (such as portraying Saddam Hussein as a "new Hitler" in order to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003). Often, domestic and foreign policy goals are interlinked in memory politics: a particular historical narrative may serve the purpose of both corroborating a foreign policy decision and uniting domestic public opinion behind it (Klymenko, 2020; Siddi, 2017).

Memory and foreign policy are linked in a complex and reciprocal way. Five mechanisms can be identified through which this link is forged: the application of historical analogies; construction of historical narratives; creation of memory sites; marginalization and forgetting of the past; and the securitization of historical memory (Klymenko and Siddi, 2020). Lessons learned and analogies with the past influence decision making and can be used to legitimize it. For instance, politicians in several Western countries made analogies with the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s, most notably Western inability to stabilize both countries, in order to argue against military intervention in Syria in the 2010s (Mouritzen, 2020). Policy makers can also construct historical narratives to revisit and revise historical facts in order to underpin their current foreign policy. As Klymenko (2020) notes in her study of Ukrainian discourses about past relations with Russia and the EU, these narratives are in fact concerned primarily with shaping the future; in the case she discusses, they serve to justify Ukraine's aspiration to completely separate itself from Russia and pursue deeper integration with the European Union.

Next to historical narratives, physical sites of traumatic memory can be constructed to serve as locations of foreign policy building—notably as material and visual repositories of narrative claims of past violence that are easily invoked for current foreign policy demands, the scope of which can vary. They can be claims for foreign restitution, reparations and apologies, or they can even back up aggressive claims on territory (Subotic, 2020).

Foreign policy narratives are shaped not only by what a country remembers about its past, but also by what is forgotten. Forgetting is a central component of memory politics and foreign policy discourses because the selection of specific events to build a narrative inevitably implies marginalizing or excluding other historical facts. As discussed in the case study on Italy below, marginalization can occur when influential social actors strip individuals of their power to recount their actions and memories themselves. Furthermore, discursive securitization is often inherent in memory politics because political actors tend to portray denial and diminishment as existential threats to collective memory. Thanks to its malleability, historical memory can be used by different actors to securitize, counter-securitize, or de-securitize a current issue. Most notably, historical memories can be mobilized to construct a “way out” of the threat and especially, to legitimize the use of extraordinary means to confront it (Makhortykh, 2020).

## The Politics of Memory and the Beginnings of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict, 2014–2015

The Maidan protests in Ukraine in 2013–2014 and Russia’s annexation of Crimea were accompanied by an escalation in the use of memory politics by both Russia and Ukraine. The official Russian discourse denounced Ukrainian protestors as nationalists and fascists, thereby disregarding the main reason that had led most of them to protest—the profound corruption of Viktor Yanukovich’s government in Kiev (2010–2014). In March 2014, Russian leaders attempted to justify the annexation of Crimea as an act to protect the Crimean population from the policies of the “fascist junta” in Kiev. The Russian authorities held a hastily prepared referendum which they framed as a choice between returning to Russia or joining a Nazi state (BBC, 2014).

Meanwhile, in the winter of 2013–2014, numerous Ukrainian demonstrators at Maidan had revived the myth of Stepan Bandera, of the ultranationalist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN, created in the 1930s), and its wartime armed wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) (Portnov, 2016). The Maidan demonstrators appeared to view OUN/UPA primarily as Ukrainian patriotic and anti-Soviet structures, but their record

during World War II included collaboration with the Nazis in the genocide of Ukrainian Jews and the ethnic cleansing of Polish villages in Volhynia and Galicia in the mid-1940s, as well as the murder of numerous Ukrainian citizens (Rossoliski-Liebe, 2014). Next to the relatively small, but vocal far-right factions that consciously promoted this myth, a significant number of Maidan followers called themselves “Bandera supporters.” Lacking adequate historical information about Bandera, many of them attempted to appropriate the pejorative epithet used by the Kremlin and give it a positive connotation. The image of Bandera acquired new, current political meaning as a symbol of resistance to the Yanukovich government and to Russia (Portnov, 2016). Meanwhile, EU institutions and leaders took the side of Ukrainian demonstrators, but remained largely silent about the controversial use of historical symbols by Ukrainian protestors.

In April 2015, the Ukrainian parliament approved “decommunization laws” which, inter alia, equated and condemned the Communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes, and banned their symbols. This exacerbated the conflict with Russian memory politics, since the Kremlin glorified the Soviet victory in World War II, while distancing itself and at times even denouncing Communist ideology. At the same time, some aspects of Ukrainian memory politics remained reminiscent of Russian commemoration of the Great Patriotic War, as it continued to honor Ukrainian Red Army veterans and their role in liberating Europe from Nazism (Klymenko, 2020). Moreover, its focus on historical figures that were not just anti-Soviet/Russian, but also anti-Polish and anti-Semitic have led to discursive and institutional clashes with Ukraine’s western neighbors too, most notably Poland (Siddi, 2017, pp. 473–474).

The escalation of armed clashes in the Donbas region in the spring of 2014 was accompanied by a new proliferation of highly politicized historical narratives and analogies. Russian officials and media portrayed the new Ukrainian government and its armed forces as fascists, and the struggle of pro-Russian insurgents as anti-fascist, thereby relating contemporary events to the main dichotomy of the official Russian narrative of the Great Patriotic War. Arguably, in Russia, the acceptance of this equation was made easier by the current use of the term “fascism” in political discourse, where it often appears outside the historical context to denote anyone who allegedly opposes Russian interests (Wagstyl, 2014, Zhurzhenko, 2015). This narrative was accompanied by the adoption of new legislation in the State Duma which established criminal responsibility for “spreading knowingly fraudulent information about the activity of the Soviet Union during World War II” (Miller, 2014). The legislation was aimed at counter-narratives that criticized Soviet conduct of the war and the crimes committed by the Red Army during

its advance into East Central Europe.

In the fall of 2014, Putin further contributed to radicalizing the clash between memory narratives by reconsidering the significance of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Reversing his condemnation of the pact as “immoral” in Gdansk five years earlier, Putin argued that it was normal diplomacy for the time and compared it with the 1938 Munich Agreement. According to him, the Munich Agreement had been the true reason for the failure of an anti-Nazi alliance and hence for the outbreak of war. This interpretation is intended to shift responsibility for the start of the war on France and the United Kingdom (besides Germany), rather than on the Soviet Union. Moreover, Putin implied that the secret protocols of the pact, which divided Eastern Europe between a Soviet and a Nazi sphere of influence, were still a matter of dispute (Parfitt, 2014). Such claims are at odds with official memory narratives in East Central European countries, in particular, where the pact is blamed for the outbreak of the conflict and for unleashing the ensuing crimes in Eastern Europe.

A few weeks after Putin’s remarks, the Polish foreign ministry fueled the discursive clash with Russia by negating the role of the Red Army in the liberation of the Auschwitz extermination camp in 1945. In January 2015, on the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of the camp, Polish foreign minister Grzegorz Schetyna argued that the camp had been freed by Ukrainian soldiers. Schetyna later corrected his statement and credited a multiethnic Soviet army for the historical deed, but only after a diplomatic row in which Russian officials accused him of “ridiculing history” and “engaging in anti-Russian hysteria” (Easton, 2015).

These clashes paved the way for the separate and conflicting commemorations of the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II, a major event, held in May 2015. The radicalization of Russian and East Central European memory narratives made it difficult to reconcile them not only with each other, but also with West European and German narratives (Siddi, 2017). Russia’s mobilization of historical narratives to support the annexation of Crimea and its aggressive military posture vis-à-vis Ukraine meant that the commemoration of World War II would entail the legitimation of Russia’s stance on current developments.

On May 9, speaking at a large military parade in Moscow, Russian president Vladimir Putin reiterated the glorifying Russian narrative of the Great Patriotic War and defined the anniversary as “sacred.” He argued that the Soviet people had “made an immortal exploit [*sic*] to save the country” and had “liberated European nations from the Nazis” (Putin, 2015). Linking the experience of World War II veterans to the activities of contemporary Russian armed forces, he argued that “your [the veterans’] children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren live up to the highest standards that you set ... They

respond to the complex challenges of the time with honor.”

Two days before Putin’s speech, Polish president Bronislaw Komorowski noted that, for East Central European nations, the end of the war “did not mean any tangible participation in the victory,” nor the “beginning of the era of freedom” Addressing an audience composed mostly of leaders of East Central European countries who met at the Westerplatte peninsula, near Gdansk, where World War II started, he blamed both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union for the start of World War II, arguing that “the outbreak of war was preceded by and was made possible due to cooperation between the two totalitarian systems: Hitler’s and Stalin’s.” Furthermore, Komorowski’s speech included an indictment of the Soviet Union, which he defined as “the evil empire” that had imposed a “totalitarian yoke” and perpetrated “mass violations of human rights and of the rights of the nations.” Komorowski emphasized that, for East Central Europe, freedom came only in 1989, when “a peaceful revolution led by [the Polish trade union] Solidarity” paved the way for a “greater, better united Europe.” Significantly, he linked history to the present by arguing that this hard-won freedom was threatened by forces that “continue to think through the prism of spheres of influence, which strive to maintain their neighborhood in the condition of vassal’ dependency, and do not respect civilized principles of law and of relations among nations” (Komorowski, 2015)—a clear reference to Russia.

Very few leaders from other European communities attended the commemorations in Moscow and Gdansk. Then French president Francois Hollande and British prime minister David Cameron—leaders of two countries that epitomize the Western culture of remembrance of the war—shunned both commemorations and attended those in their own countries. As argued, the event in Gdansk focused exclusively on the East Central European self-victimizing narrative of uninterrupted Nazi and Soviet oppression. Thus, it marginalized facts that are essential to the Western European culture of remembrance, notably, the defeat of Nazism and liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, as well as acceptance of the year 1945 as the beginning of Europe’s economic and democratic reconstruction.

As for the celebrations in Moscow, Russia’s armed intervention in Ukraine, its instrumental use of World War II to justify its policies, and militarization of the commemorations made it unappealing or politically inconvenient for other European leaders to attend. Compared with the 2010 celebrations, most striking was the absence of the leaders of Western countries that had been part of the anti-Hitler coalition, notably France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Angela Merkel was the only Western European leader who travelled to Moscow. Despite tensions over the Ukraine crisis, Merkel felt compelled to go

because of the German culture of remembrance, notably its focus on the Nazi war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. In Moscow, Merkel argued that it was important “to lay a wreath on May 10 together with the Russian president in remembrance of the millions of dead for which Germany is responsible from World War II” (Troianovski, 2015). However, Merkel met Putin only on the day of the event and did not attend the military parade. This allowed her to distance herself from the Russian leadership while simultaneously expressing regret for German war crimes. In a difficult balancing act, Merkel’s speech at the joint press conference with Putin recognized that “the Red Army, together with the Western allies, liberated Germany” but also stated that “the end of the Second World War did not bring freedom and democracy to all Europeans” (Merkel, 2015).

## The Politics of Forgetting and Foreign Policy: The Italian Case<sup>1</sup>

While the effects of selective remembrance or the distortion of historical events in official memory have been analyzed widely in scholarly literature, less attention has been devoted to the politics of forgetting. Forgetting is a central component of memory politics: dominant narratives are constructed through a selection of events, almost inevitably implying the marginalization or omission of others that are seen as inconsistent with the narrative. Like selective remembering, selective forgetting can justify or permeate both domestic politics and foreign policy decisions. While the politics of forgetting can occur in different ways and for different reasons (Ricoeur, 2004), this case study explores a specific type of forgetting, in which leading state actors and institutions take a central role. According to Ricoeur (2004, p. 448), these actors may “impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery. A devious form of forgetting is at work here, resulting from stripping the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves.”

While leading politicians can play a central role in the politics of forgetting, their efforts to confine certain historical events to oblivion can only be successful if they are endorsed by a substantial part of society. As Ricoeur explains, social actors’ dispossession of memory is

not without a secret complicity, which makes forgetting a semi-passive, semi-active behaviour, as is seen in forgetting by avoidance (*fuite*), the expression of bad faith

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis of this case study draws extensively from Siddi (2020).

and its strategy of evasion motivated by an obscure will not to inform oneself, not to investigate the harm done by the citizen's environment, in short, a wanting-not-to know. Partial or selective memory can also be seen as a form of forgetting (p. 449).

The politics of forgetting shaped Italian narratives concerning the country's colonial and migrant past and influenced official Italian domestic and foreign policy discourses regarding the refugee crisis in Europe in the 2010s. Italy's official politics of memory marginalizes and represses the country's colonial experience. The Italian colonial empire included Eritrea, Somalia, Libya and, albeit for a short (but significant) period, Ethiopia. In Europe, Albania and the Dodecanese islands of Greece were also Italian colonies. Italy's colonial experience took place between the late 1880s and 1943. It started later and ended earlier than that of other European colonial powers such as France, the United Kingdom, and Portugal. However, it was a constitutive part of national politics for over five decades, in a period that coincided largely with the foundation of the modern Italian state and the formation of national identity. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat (2006) has argued, the empire was central to the construction of both national identity and national conceptualizations of modernity, particularly during fascism. Many Italian intellectuals embraced colonialism as a means to strengthen national identity. According to the fascist vision, the imperial experience would produce a new type of human being, disciplined and patriotic; this "regeneration" embodied the fascist idea of modernity. Significantly, the fascist regime reached the peak of its popularity in the wake of the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936 (Ben-Ghiat, pp., 382, 386).

In its colonial empire Italy committed a vast range of crimes<sup>2</sup> on a large scale, among them, seemingly, genocide. They also included summary executions and deportations as tools to maintain order, mass repressions, and the burning of Tripoli in 1911. Moreover, during the fascist period, Italy used chemical weapons in the conquest of Libya and Ethiopia and constructed concentration camps in Libya (especially in Cyrenaica) for detaining the civilian population during large-scale repressions. In addition, arbitrary killings took place in Ethiopia against members of the Coptic Church in the fight against the anti-colonial resistance, and throughout the colonial occupation (1936–1941). The crimes perpetrated against the Cyrenean population and Ethiopian resistance fighters can be regarded as instances of genocide. According to available estimates, some 100,000 Libyans died as a result of Italian policies by the early 1930s, out of a population of less than one million (Labanca, 2004, pp. 304–306; Del Boca, 2003). Throughout the colonial period, women

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2 By crimes, I mean acts that contravened laws and norms to which Italy had subscribed at the time (Labanca, 2004, pp. 303–304).

in the colonies were subjected to further discrimination; many were forced either into prostitution or domestic and sexual servitude for Italian colonists, a phenomenon called *Madamismo* in Italian (Iyob, 2000). Italy's colonies also served as a testing ground for strategies of mass repression that would later be applied during Italy's occupation of Greece and Yugoslavia in World War II (Ben-Ghiat, 2006, p. 383)

The legacies of Italy's colonial empire—for both Italians and the colonized—lasted well after 1943. Many Italian settlers remained in Libya and Ethiopia in the first postwar decades. Italy lost all its colonies with the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, despite diplomatic efforts (endorsed by all its political forces) to salvage at least part of the empire. As other European powers retained their colonial possessions, the loss of empire left many Italians “feeling wronged rather than repentant” (Ben-Ghiat, 2006, p. 390). In postwar Italy, there were no critical public debates on the colonial experience and crimes, nor any related trials. Conversely, national myths about the innate goodness of the Italian colonialist became entrenched and have persisted until today. Italy continued to seek a privileged relationship with its former possessions and was in charge of a UN-authorized trusteeship over Somalia from 1949 to 1960.

After losing all its colonies during World War II, Italy did not have to confront the process of decolonization in the 1950s to 1970s that countries like France and the United Kingdom underwent. This, together with the fact that very few people from the former colonies were allowed to settle in Italy, insulated the country from contemporary and sometimes critical European debates on colonialism and its legacies (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo, 2012, pp. 6–7). Active official politics of denying and forgetting colonial crimes, while only remembering the alleged positive aspects of Italian colonialism, contributed to the widespread ignorance of Italian public opinion regarding the country's colonial past.

The official politics of suppressing the colonial past entailed the following aspects. First, postwar Italian governments rejected Ethiopia's requests to try presumed war criminals, “using delay, trickery and every possible expedient” (Labanca, 2004, p. 308). Second, they actively hindered the emergence of truth about Italian colonial crimes. In the postwar years, the Italian ministry of foreign affairs entrusted former colonial officials with the task of publishing documentation regarding the alleged achievements of Italian colonialism. A large sum of money was expended to publish fifty volumes, which critical historians have defined as a “colossal, costly and almost incredible effort of mystification” (Del Boca, 2003, p. 18). For decades, access to colonial and military archives was controlled by and only granted to people associated with the former colonial administration (Del Boca, p.

19; Morone, 2010). Finally, both official and societal discourse promoted the myth of the “good Italian,” which portrayed average Italians as good soldiers, incapable of committing criminal acts. As a result, in Italian mainstream public debates, colonialism has been remembered mostly in exotic terms and in praise of the infrastructural projects carried out in the former colonies (Labanca, 2004, p. 309).

Hence, memory of the colonial past in Italy can be portrayed as a pendulum oscillating between an “all-out desire to forget,” and the “nostalgic recollection of a past which is selectively remembered and re-enacted to suit Italy’s new role in the postcolonial age” (Triulzi, 2006, p. 430). This re-enactment occurred in particular as a response to immigration and took the form of a revival of an assertive colonial memory. Selective memory and forgetting fueled a sense of cultural and racial superiority, which shaped the new postcolonial encounter between Italian citizens and the disenfranchised ex-colonial subjects.

Both the construction of national identity within racial and religious boundaries and the failure to come to terms with Italy’s racist past contributed to Italians’ hostility to migrants in the 2010s (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo, 2015, p. 368). Furthermore, after 2015, other developments contributed to the polarization of the Italian debate concerning migration. The Christian/Muslim dichotomy, which became highly conflictual after 9/11, intensified further following the 2015–2016 terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. The terms “migrant,” “Muslim,” and “terrorist” were often juxtaposed and even equated in mainstream Italian (and European) discourses.

The link between migration, Italy’s postcolonial condition, and the politics of forgetting the colonial past became particularly evident during the Five Star League government in Italy in June 2018. Manlio di Stefano, Italy’s undersecretary for foreign affairs, publicly argued that

Italy can and should be a protagonist of a new season of sincere and concrete multilateralism. We can be one because we have no skeletons in our closet, we don’t have a colonial tradition, we haven’t dropped bombs on anyone and we haven’t put the noose around the neck of any other economy. We are Italy and Italians, a people that is used to being respected for the quality of our products and actions (*L’Espresso*, 2019).

Di Stefano’s claim that Italy has no “colonial tradition” and did not “drop bombs on anyone” highlights the extent to which oblivion and ignorance of the country’s history has pervaded Italian politics. As a prominent government official and representative of the then largest party in parliament (the Five

Star Movement), Di Stefano felt entitled to make a public statement blatantly disregarding ascertained facts and historical evidence. Moreover, when reminded of Italy's actual colonial past, Di Stefano persisted, claiming that Italian colonialism was just an "episode" of little importance. Significantly, he juxtaposed his denial of this past with a reiteration of the myth of the "good Italian" ("a people that is used to being respected for the quality of our products and actions"). This shows how both themes concur in the official repression of memory concerning Italy's crimes perpetrated in the early twentieth century. The fact that Di Stefano used this "cleansed" narrative of Italian history to advocate the role of protagonist in international affairs demonstrates the link between Italy's politics of forgetting and foreign policy.

The silencing of Italy's migrant and colonial past was not only a feature of the Five Star League government. Ministers of the previous two governments, led by a center-left majority (2013–2018), contributed to the framing of migration as a threat in official discourse. They also promoted discourses that suppressed past Italian migration. Marco Minniti, a member of the center-left Democratic Party and interior minister from June 2016 to January 2018, engineered and praised agreements with the Tripoli-based Libyan government and Libyan warlords to prevent migrants from crossing the Mediterranean. These agreements "violated refugees and migrants' rights through the externalization of border control to countries outside Europe ... trapping tens of thousands of people in Libya, where they are at risk of serious human rights violations" (Amnesty International, 2019). According to Amnesty, Italy was therefore complicit in the torture of migrants in Libya due to its efforts to keep them on Libyan territory. Moreover, the Italian government helped to establish a system of detention centers in Libya where human rights were violated. These centers were reminiscent of Italy's policies in Libya in the 1920s and 1930s, when civilians were deported to detention camps against their will, and often died as a result. Nevertheless, no prominent Italian politician discussed this historical precedent, nor were there any noteworthy societal debates. The lack of such discussions can be seen as a consequence of Italy's politics of forgetting the colonial past (Siddi, 2020).

## Conclusion

As Konrad Jarausch (2010) noted already a decade ago, "more and more politicians are justifying their policies by appeals to their own sanitised versions of the past" (p. 309). This applies not only to domestic politics, where memory narratives are often used to rally popular support across various (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.) dividing lines, but also to international

politics. As demonstrated in this chapter, memory politics is often utilized to serve foreign policy agendas. Political leaders disseminate historical or pseudohistorical narratives in order to highlight presumed “lessons learned” from the past, which allegedly show the necessity and correctness of their foreign policy decisions in the present. All too often, in the global North in particular, such narratives have been deployed to justify military intervention abroad. US military intervention in Iraq and, more recently, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are prominent examples. In other contexts, such as in the Italian case discussed above, the dissemination of “sanitised versions of the past” has been utilized to exculpate the country from historical responsibility and to conduct a foreign policy that has disregarded or negated Italy’s colonial legacy. However, this does not mean that politicians always use collective memory for militaristic or aggressive purposes. The memory of past crimes can also induce a country to conduct a pacifist foreign policy and to pursue reconciliation with neighboring countries—as Germany’s postwar *West-* and *Ostpolitik* prominently demonstrated (Siddi, 2018). Ultimately, a country’s present foreign policy is not predetermined by its past; political leaders tend to have ample room for maneuver to interpret history and steer collective memory in the pursuit of various political agendas.

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# **Liudmyla Pidkuimukha**

## **Myths and Myth-Making in Current Kremlin Ideology**

### **Introduction and Background<sup>1</sup>**

Politics and discourse are inseparably connected since political interaction involves language structure, and linguistic behaviour requires structures of domination and legitimation (Giddens, 1984). Political discourse occurs “when political actors, in and out of government, communicate about political matters, for political purposes” (Graber, 1981, p. 196). The vast majority of researchers who investigate political discourse concentrate on the media, analyzing mainly political news (Geis, 1987; van Dijk, 1985, 1987; Ahmadian & Farahani, 2014). Nonetheless, “the mass media constitute only one forum for political communication (Boyton, 1991, p. 131), and there are many other platforms and ways of spreading political ideas. Thus, the data for this study originate from a talk show, legal documents, a video lesson, and Vladimir Putin’s public statements.

In an address to his fellow countrymen following a Russian Security Council meeting held on February 21, Putin described his version of the history of Ukraine. Accordingly, Ukraine was created by Lenin who gave it “too much autonomy” in the new Soviet state. Claiming that Ukraine had never existed previously, Putin declared that it had always been purely Russian territory (*Vneplanovoje soveščanije*, 2022). Analyzing his speeches and articles over almost a decade, one notices that he has been repeating the thesis that there is no basis for the existence of Ukraine as a state and a nation and that the Lord desires a Ukrainian–Russian reunion. Many Russians see Ukraine as a “little brother” who must obey his “elder brother” or he will be forced to do so. In the meantime, Russia proclaimed itself a world power. Thus, Putin tried to lay the foundations for a possible large-scale attack, which began on February 24, 2022. On the other hand, since “history occupies no less a place in Russian propaganda than current policy ... our [Ukraine’s] northern neighbor justifies its actions with ‘historical’ facts and traditions very often” (Harkavenko, 2017).

Moreover, Putin considers himself the second Volodymyr the Great and sees his task as completing the prince’s work that began more than a thousand years ago. He believes that Russia should grow and unite with Ukraine not

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only physically, territorially, and politically, but above all dialectically. As long as there is no unification, there is no Russia; Russia will come into being only when it unites with Ukraine (Sierakowski, 2022).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the persuasive strategies of the Kremlin and their ideological component. Its focus on a sociocultural analysis has enabled me to gather data in order to explore my research objectives, including:

1. identifying the main myth about Kyivan Rus as a cradle for three peoples—Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian;
2. characterizing the main channels and platforms through which these myths have been spread;
3. examining the role of Volodymyr the Great in current Kremlin ideology.

In the present study, I have used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for analyzing the relations between language and society, and power and traditional ideology in implied discourse. In order to analyze the messages spread by the Kremlin, I have collected samples of discourse (text in context) and classified them using the sociocognitive approach in critical discourse studies, thus allowing for an understanding of social constructions of *Us vs Them* (van Dijk, 2009).

## Theoretical Approach

The theoretical core of this research has a firm basis in critical approaches to language as social interaction. The analysis will draw primarily from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1984; Wodak, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Fairclough (1989) recognizes that “discourse” is a wider term than “text”: “I shall use the term discourse to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (p. 24). After taking into account social context, CDA examines the links between textual structures and their function in interaction within the society. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) point out that discourse and society are in a dialectical relationship: “Every instance of language use makes its own small contribution to reproducing and/or transforming society and culture, including power relations” (p. 273). Horváth (2009) adds that this relationship is bi-directional; this means that not only is language use “affected by its groundedness within a certain frame of cultural or social practice, but also the use of language influences and shapes the social and cultural context it finds itself in” (p. 46). Fairclough (1995) defines CDA as:

discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practice, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (p. 135).

Discussing Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), van Dijk (1997) points out that the vast majority of research on political discourse is “about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions,” such as the president, prime minister, members of government or parliament, and politicians on various levels (local, national, and international) (p. 12). However, he underlined that *recipients*, too, in political communicative events such as “the public, the people, citizens, the ‘masses’, and other groups or categories” should also be incorporated (p. 13).

In this study, I will include an analysis of official documents such as *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* (Stratehija nacional’noj bezopasnosti Rossijskoj Federacii) from July 2, 2021, as well as Vladimir Putin’s article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” (July 12, 2021), since textual communication is “no less a form of action and interaction” (van Dijk, p. 20). In addition to laws, government regulations, debates, and other institutional forms of text and discussion, in line with van Dijk (p. 18), I also utilize political discourse genres such as propaganda, political speeches, media interviews, TV political talk shows, and mass culture products. Thus, I also analyze one of Putin’s last speeches, his address to the nation after the Russian Security Council meeting of February 21, 2022; a Russia-wide video lesson for schoolchildren *Defenders of Peace*, aired on TV and on many other platforms; and the TV talk show *We Need to Talk*.

Further, I assume that the Kremlin exploits myths for its own political ends and in order to bolster its discourse. Geis (1987) defines a myth as a simple and non-falsifiable causal theory that justifies actions or assertions and is somewhat widely held by the discursive community (pp. 28–30). Thus, referring to historical myths in his speeches and articles, Vladimir Putin has been trying to justify his military actions in Ukraine. According to Gastil, if the listener or reader believes in myths, the speaker “may manage to persuade them of their ability [to do so] without even presenting a coherent argument” (Gastil, 1992, p. 489). Moreover, while myths provide “a common experience” for members of the linguistic community, shared myths can bolster loyalty

and group cohesion (Lasswell, 1949).

Both distance and solidarity between two entities can be created by language, manifested in the dichotomy “self” and “other.” Through exclusion, stereotyping, or discrimination, in political discourse the ideologies of dominant groups in society are propagated/repropagated by using the categories “us” and “them” (Baig et al. 2020, p. 415). According to van Dijk (2001), such thinking simplifies and compresses complex political realities into neat, easy-to-remember campaign slogans; thus, we begin to see the political influence of the us vs. them dichotomies (as cited in Meadows, 2007, p. 4). This gives the Kremlin an opportunity to promote Russia as a great power state, “an elder brother,” and Ukraine as “a younger brother” which is unable to exist without a connection to the former.

## Myth-Making on the State Level

The ideology of the uniqueness of Russian civilization is reflected in the decree “National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation” (*Stratehija*, 2021). This is an updated version of a previous edict from December 31, 2015. It advances a conservative narrative as an ideological response to the promotion of the values of liberal democracy in Russian society. Thus, a separate section highlights the protection of Russia’s traditional spiritual, moral, cultural, and historical memory. The document underlines the destructive effects of the globalization of culture and technology on traditional culture and values. The United States and its partners, multinational corporations, foreign nonprofits, and non-governmental, extremist and terrorist organizations have been accused directly of attacking Russia’s traditional spiritual, moral and cultural–historical values:

88. Information and psychological sabotage and the “westernization” of culture [increases the threat of the Russian Federation losing] its cultural sovereignty. Attempts to falsify Russian and world history, distort the historical truth and destroy historical memory, incite interethnic and interfaith conflicts, [and] weaken the state-forming people, have become more frequent.

89. Traditional Russian confessions, culture, [and] Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation are being discredited (*Stratehija*, 2021, p. 35).

In order to protect traditional Russian principles and values, the strategy proposes building up civic unity, protecting historical truth and memory,

strengthening the institution of the family and family traditions, and enhancing the cultural sovereignty and cultural space of Russia.

It also declares measures to strengthen “fraternal ties” between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples. Jarmolenko (2021) points out that this indicates a likely change in the Russian leadership’s approach to Ukraine, especially against the background of returning to the ideological cliché of “one people” in defining relations between Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, it illustrates the division between the “people” and “leadership” of Ukraine in the rhetoric of Vladimir Putin.

Vladimir Putin, in his article “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” published on the president’s official website on July 12, 2021, stresses the claim that in the history of Russian–Ukrainian relations Ukrainians have been an ancient and inseparable part of the “triune Russian nation.” According to the Kremlin narrative, this community is based on a common history spanning one thousand years, language, “Russian” ethnic identity, shared cultural sphere, and the Orthodox religion. The bond with the Russian state is special and organic; it guarantees Ukraine’s development, and any attempts to sever or weaken this link (which could only be inspired by external actors) will inevitably result in the collapse of Ukrainian statehood. Åslund (2021) branded the article “a masterclass in disinformation and one step short of a declaration of war.” Meanwhile, Snyder’s speech during the Kyiv Security Forum held on December 1, 2021, emphasized that Putin’s article reveals

how early Russia is in the development of its own national story. The way that Mr. Putin tells this story, Ukraine is there as a kind of crutch. Belarus is there as a kind of crutch. Russia is unable to tell its story about itself, so the story that he told relies upon other peoples (*Vystup*, 2021).

In his article, Vladimir Putin refers to Alexei Shakhmatov’s theory of the origin of East Slavic languages. Accordingly, all East Slavic peoples—Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians—and their languages originate from “all-Russian unity” and “an all-Russian protolanguage.” This doctrine was and is the basis of Russian imperial, as well as Soviet and current policy, and Putin’s ideology and philosophy:

*Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are all descendants of Ancient Rus, which was the largest state in Europe. Slavic and other tribes across the vast territory—from Ladoga, Novgorod, and Pskov to Kiev and Chernigov—were bound together by one language (which we now refer to as Old Russian), economic ties, the rule of the princes of the Rurik*

dynasty, and—after the baptism of Rus—the Orthodox faith (Putin, 2021; emphasis added).

Further study of the history of the Ukrainian language and other East Slavic languages by Kurylo (2008), Ohijenko (2004), Shevel'ov (1965), Smal'-Stoc'kyj (1927, 1928), Tymčenko (1930), and others have revealed the artificiality of the Common Russian theory, which stresses similar phenomena but ignores differences peculiar to the dialects of the Eastern Slavs of that period. Moreover, Ševel'ov (1994) points out that “the real” and “live” Ukrainian language has never been “Old East Slavic” (Ukr.: *davn'orus'ka*), and has never been “Common Russian” (Ukr.: *spil'norus'ka*). It was never identical to Russian, nor was it an ancestor or descendant or a branch of the Russian language. It arose from the Proto-Slavic language formed from the sixth to sixteenth centuries (p. 18). Ohijenko (2004) underlined that there is no scientific basis for talking about the unity of the ancient Eastern tribes of the North and the South since “there has never been such a unity and there has never been a single common Russian language in the East of Slavdom.” He argued that the state of Ukraine, then called Rus, united the entire Slavic East—the peoples of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus; “it was exclusively a political union and was not based on ethnic or language grounds” (p. 8).

Moreover, Putin considers Ukraine and Russia “parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space,” and refers to “the large Russian nation, a triune people comprising Velikorussians, Malorussians and Belorussians” (Putin, 2021). This is the imperial interpretation of Kyivan Rus as the cradle of three fraternal peoples—Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian—which remains a canonical scheme in the Russian Federation. This myth is discussed not only in the aforementioned article by Putin, but also in his earlier speeches, as well as by the Russian Orthodox Church and the media, among others, since “the phrases ‘brotherly people’ and ‘one people’ hint at the possibility of power claims (after all, the older brother must ‘take care’ of the younger brother)” (Kusse, 2019). Creating a historical justification for one people, Vladimir Putin returns to Kyivan Rus. In his opinion, a “common history” (in which, of course, the periods of oppression are omitted) unites the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, and this connection is inseparable (p. 254). Levy (2022) points out that Ukraine and Russia merely have a common story of colonization and mentions Stalin and the Holodomor which killed five to six million people. Accordingly, “everything else is propaganda, wastepaper about so-called brotherly Slavic peoples, a fable about ‘Kyivan Rus’, which in the 9th century was the cradle of Russia when the latter did not yet exist.”

The narrative of fraternal nations is not new and was widespread in the Russian Empire and Soviet periods. In *Theses of the CPSU Central Committee on the 300th Anniversary of the Reunification of Ukraine with Russia (1654–1954)*,

approved by the CPSU Central Committee in 1954, the idea that “Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian peoples come from a single root” (Tezy, 1954) was proclaimed as the only ethno-political concept that could be presented in books and textbooks in secondary and high schools.

Contemporary Russia, which also relies on education for the “protection of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, culture and historical memory” is reflected in the *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*:

- 5) advancing the system of education, training, and upbringing as the basis for the formation of a developed and socially responsible personality that strives for spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical perfection;
- 6) support for public projects aimed at the patriotic education of citizens, the preservation of the historical memory and culture of the peoples of the Russian Federation (*Stratehija*, 2021, p. 36).

After the Russian Federation launched its full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the Kremlin decided to justify its actions by resorting to well-known theses and manipulations such those found in the Russia-wide video lesson *Defenders of Peace* (Zaščitniki mira) for schoolchildren (March 3, 2022). During this media broadcast, participants spoke of the so-called liberation mission in Ukraine and why it was necessary. In order to make a strong impact on the youngest groups within the population, Russia used the following narratives:

- Ukraine “did not exist on the world map until the twentieth century” and was a “political project”;
- Ukrainians and Russians are “one people”;
- Russia did not initiate the war with Ukraine, but is conducting a “special peacekeeping operation” to “restrain nationalists who oppress the Russian-speaking population.”

The lesson begins with a historical introduction going back to Kyivan Rus times. Using simple phrases from the well-known Kremlin narrative, as well as vivid visual images, the creators of the lesson try to inculcate in children notions such as:

We spoke the same language, we have the same history and customs. We called ourselves Russian people and were united. Slavic tribes were called Russian peoples until the middle of the last century (*Vserossijskij otkrytyj urok*, 2022).

Another channel for spreading the government's narratives and historical myths to influence not only schoolchildren but also the rest of society is the Kremlin-sponsored media which has always been the most powerful tool for Russian propaganda. The idea of Ukrainian and Russian "similarities" is a major component analyzed in the TV talk show *We Need to Talk!* (Nado pohovorit') which instilled slogans such as "Ukrainians are like Russians," "the fraternal people," "we think alike," "Russian-Ukrainian friendly society," "one nation," "friendly people," "common families," "common movies," "common holidays," and "we are all one" (*Rossijsko-ukrainskij proekt*, 2019). In it, guests and the host discussed love, friendship, and relationships, but without politics or an analysis of the causes that led to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict—a format that conformed with the Kremlin propaganda concept according to which viewers are given a pre-packaged and clear idea, rather than the possibility to think and analyze for themselves about what is unfolding around them (Pidkuimukha, 2022).

The Soviet narrative of Russian-Ukrainian "fraternal brotherhood" that denies the Ukrainian right to independence and depicts Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" (*odin narod*) is pervasive in Russian propaganda. Kuzio (2017) argues that in the second half of the 1930s the notion of "friendship of peoples" and "brotherly Russian-Ukrainian peoples" became central to Soviet nationality policies and was assiduously promoted through Soviet ideological tirades and official historiography (pp. 85–117). However, Putin and Russian leaders have replaced the Soviet view of Ukrainians as a separate but closely bonded people to Russians with pre-Soviet, Russian nationalist views of Ukrainians as one of the three "Russian" peoples (Kuzio, 2017, pp. 33–84).

According to Masenko (2016), due to the concept of a "common cradle," Russia has appropriated the ancient Ukrainian state, its written heritage, and even its name, replacing the original Russian *moskovyty* ("muscovites") with the strange adjectival formation *russkije*. She points out that the "cradle of three fraternal peoples" is threatening to become a coffin because one of the "fraternal peoples," like a kleptoparasitic bird, is doing everything to throw its true owners out of the nest and replace them. In addition, the image of a "common cradle" is a failed concept since no sane person would put as many as three children in one cradle: these children should be triplets. However, according to the official ideology, the Russian brother was proclaimed the eldest who, together with his two younger brothers, found himself, for some reason, in the same cradle (Masenko, 2016). Furthermore, the "Russian brother" is not the "eldest" at all, but the youngest. And he—the Russian brother—was never in a common cradle because by the time he was born, "the 'cradle' had already collapsed" (Pivtorak, 2001, p. 78). Ukrainian historian Zalizniak

(2004) notes that “Moscow’s rights to the historical and cultural heritage of Princely Kyiv are neither greater nor less than the rights of Madrid, Lisbon, Paris, and Bucharest to the history and culture of Latin Rome.” Just as the Roman peoples inherited a certain legacy of Roman culture, the Belarusians and Russians absorbed into their ethno-defining complex certain elements of the princely Kyiv culture. However, just as the former were not the direct creators of the Latin culture of the Roman Empire, the latter have merely “an indirect relation to the creation of the Kyivan Rus culture” (p. 123).

## Vladimir Putin vs. Volodymyr the Great

In order to underline the closeness between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, Vladimir Putin writes of “St. Vladimir who was both Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev and made the spiritual choice [Christianization of Rus in 988] that still largely determines our affinity today” (Putin, 2021). Accordingly, Volodymyr the Great, ruler of Kyivan Rus from 980 to 1015,

made this decisive choice, became a conductor of faith, saw in it moral support, beauty, light of truth and virtue, a basis for renewing life, for strengthening the unity and community of peoples inhabiting ancient Russia. A warrior who went through fierce battles and trials, Vladimir became a creator and enlightener. Churches and monasteries, cities, schools, and libraries were built under his leadership (*Obraščeniye*, 2018, p. 16).

Snyder (2018) points out that “in his first address to the Russian parliament as president in 2012, Putin described his place in the Russian “timescape” as the fulfilment of an eternal cycle: as the return of an ancient lord of Kyiv whom Russians call Vladimir. The politics of eternity requires points in the past to which the present can return to, demonstrating the innocence of the country, the right to rule of its leader, and “the pointlessness of thinking about the future.” (p. 55). Putin’s first such point was the year 988 when the early medieval warlord Volodymyr the Great converted to Christianity. Thus, Putin implicitly associates himself with Volodymyr the Great, stressing that they are namesakes. Although the name of the prince is written as Volodymyr in *The Primary Chronicle* (or *Tale of Bygone Years*) (Povist’), Putin identifies himself with Volodymyr the Great even in spelling and pronunciation, referring to the Great Prince as Vladimir. Volodymyr the Great is evoked by Putin as a powerful reminder of a timeless superhero who “predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization, and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus” (Putin, 2014)—ideas that did not even exist at

that time. One of the most well-known means for attaining this civilizational unity is the monument to Prince Volodymyr built next to the Kremlin in 2016. The Russian president stressed that Volodymyr the Great had gone down in history as “a collector of Russian lands and a far-sighted politician who laid the foundations of a strong, united and centralized state” (*V Moskve otkryli*, 2016). Further, Putin called the Prince of Kyiv “our outstanding ancestor” and “the spiritual founder of the Russian state”:

This is a great, significant event for Moscow, for our country, and all our compatriots. The new monument is a tribute to our outstanding ancestor who is a respected saint, statesman, and soldier, [and] spiritual founder of the Russian state.

After Putin’s speech, Patriarch Kirill consecrated the monument to Prince Volodymyr. At the same time, the patriarch emphasized in every way the “unity of the peoples of historical Russia”:

The monument to Prince Vladimir is a symbol of the unity of all the peoples of which he is the father. And these are the peoples of historical Russia who now live within the borders of many states (*V Moskve otkryli*, 2016).

Snyder (2018) points out that

when a statue of Volodymyr/Valdemar was unveiled in Moscow (with the modern Russian spelling “Vladimir”), the Russian media were careful not to mention that the city of Moscow had not existed when Volodymyr/Valdemar ruled. Instead, Russian television repeated that the new monument was the first such homage to “the leader of Rus” (p. 56).

However, this was untrue and a manipulation of facts since a statue of Volodymyr the Great has been standing in Kyiv since 1853.

In order to appropriate the history of Kyivan Rus and emphasize that Volodymyr the Great had “determined the further centuries-old path of Russia” (*Obraščeniye Prezidenta*, 2018, p. 16), the Kremlin began erecting monuments to Volodymyr the Great throughout the Russian Federation. Currently, there are twice as many monuments to Prince Volodymyr in Russia than in Ukraine. According to my calculations, there are fifteen monuments in Russia compared with eight in Ukraine—excluding those where he appears with other characters, for instance, Princess Olga in Pskov or Saint Theodore in Vladimir. Notably, since 2004 monuments have been erected in Pskov, Novocheboksarsk, Tula, Astrakhan, Kemerovo, Smolensk, Bataisk, Stavropol,

Novosibirsk, Samara, Saraktash, and Moscow, as well as two in Vladimir; six monuments were built between the years 2012 and 2016, and four between 2016 and 2018 (Moscow, 2016; Stavropol, 2017; Novosibirsk, 2018; and Samara, 2018). It can be assumed that such activity is due not only to the anniversary of the prince's death (1015–2015) but also to his political relevance.

Since mass culture also plays an important role in establishing Russia as a superpower and a successor of Kyivan Rus, and Putin as the successor of Volodymyr the Great, the image of the prince has been used in fictional films (*Viking*, 2016), animated movies (*Prince Vladimir*, 2006), documentaries (*Prince Vladimir: Baptist of Russia*, 2018), books (*Prince Vladimir*, 2006, by Igor Brusnetsov, and *Prince Vladimir*, by Igor Brusnetsov & Leonid Yachnin, 2006), table games (*Prince Vladimir: Maslenica*, 2006), and computer games (*Prince Vladimir*, 2006), among others. Furthermore, the face of Volodymyr for the monument in Moscow was modeled on that in the animated film *Prince Vladimir*, produced in 2006.

An important role in the film is played by Christianity where Aleksha, one of the main characters, is inclined toward that religion. Some film critics even accused the creators of the film of religious propaganda (*Recenzija Kinoafiši*, 2006). Moreover, while watching the film I noticed similarities between the image of Prince Volodymyr and Jesus Christ. This likeness is visible in some scenes that are reminiscent of chapters from the Bible or films about Christ's life.

**Figure 1**

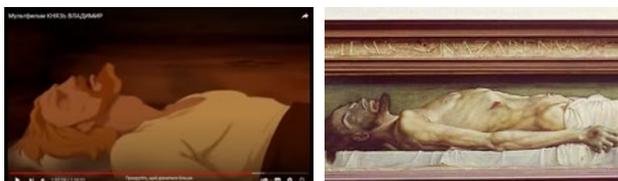


Images from the animated film *Prince Vladimir*

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iuSoQ-Pk08>

In addition, there are references to famous art works. Figure 2 from the film alludes to the well-known painting by Hans Holbein, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521).

**Figure 2**



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iuSoQ-Pk08>

Thus, Putin routinely ascribes to Russia the history of Kyivan Rus and continues the myth that today's southern Ukraine lands—Sloboda Ukraine and Donbas—are “historically Russian.” It enables him to claim that the existence of Ukraine as a nation and a state has no grounds or justification so that he can invade it and join its territories to the Russian Federation.

## Conclusion

Kremlin ideology is based on falsifying historical facts in order to justify Russia's current actions and its full-scale war in Ukraine. The manipulation of history is aimed at demonstrating Ukraine's inferiority, minimizing its culture, and distorting its language. The Kremlin insists that Ukrainians and Russians are fraternal peoples that share a common history (dating from the period of Kyivan Rus), belong to the same ethnic (Eastern Slavic) and linguistic (Slavic) groups, and have links to the Christian Orthodox religion. In order to influence the various strata of Russian society, these narratives are spread via various platforms and channels: the legal system, education, mass media, and popular culture. Particular attention is paid to the image of Volodymyr the Great since Vladimir Putin sees himself as his successor. Numerous monuments, fiction films, documentaries, and animated movies are intended to establish the view that Prince Volodymyr is a Russian hero, and Putin is continuing his work to unite the lands.

Therefore, this chapter introduces a discussion about the role of history in Kremlin ideology and its manipulation. In future research, I will be focusing on an analysis of historical myths in social media. A comparison of Soviet and current Russian myths could also be a fruitful area for further investigation.

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## Angelos Giannakopoulos

### Russia's *Heim-ins-Reich* Policy: Historical Revisionism and War of Conquest

Why does the state pursue such a policy,  
which deprives the population of its resources, benefits,  
and advantages to such an extent? ...  
If one considers what one conquers,  
it is in no way profitable,  
and what is gained  
is not nearly so much as that  
which is lost ...  
If ... high officials and nobles  
really want to benefit the Empire  
and avoid harming it,  
they must realize  
that a war of aggression  
does great damage to the Empire.

Mo Ti, *Against War* (2016 [4<sup>th</sup> century BCE]), pp. 31, 45)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Exactly four months after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Sergei Lavrov, minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, declared that Russia was seeking to overthrow the Ukrainian government.<sup>2</sup> Adding, “We will definitely help the Ukrainian people to free themselves from this regime which is absolutely anti-people and anti-historical,” he assumed that the Russian and Ukrainian people would live together in the future (“Lavrov,” 2022). His

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1 My translation from German into English.

2 This article is not review of the literature in the specific realm of East European studies. Like the volume itself, the article was prepared while war in Europe has broken out again. Accordingly, my aim has been to collate and summarize the most important information, testimonies, and analyses published in various European media on Russia and the war in Ukraine immediately before and after February 2022, with the goal of highlighting the reasons behind the conflict. In fact, the Russian attack on Ukraine has changed forever the “comfortable” world we believed we knew. As one renowned Ukrainian historian Serhii Plokhy (2022) stated: “On February 24, 2022, the world awoke to a new reality.” However, beyond the sense of shock and embarrassment caused by the war, Plokhy tries to show, as rationally as possible, the inevitability of the war and the naivety with which Europeans, especially Germans, have so far dealt with Russian irredentism and aggression.

words merely clarified further what president Vladimir Putin himself had stated earlier that month when he said: "Today we hear that they want to beat us on the battlefield. What can we say about that? Let them try. Everyone should know that we haven't even started in earnest yet" (2022). Only a few days after Lavrov's statement, Dmitry Medvedev,<sup>3</sup> former president of Russia and current deputy chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, was even clearer about Russia's plans, particularly in regard to the desired outcome of the war. On a map he displayed the territory of Ukraine as heavily decimated. Only the Kiev Oblast around the capital of the same name is indicated as Ukrainian. The rest of Ukraine's territory appears divided between three countries: Russia, Poland and Romania: Russia's projected territory covers all of eastern Ukraine, east of the Dnieper River to Kiev; in the southwest, all territories up to the Republic of Moldova also appear as Russian; the territories of western Ukraine, with the city of Lviv, are annexed to Poland, while Chernivtsi Oblast and Vinnytsia Oblast, north of Moldova, are shown as part of Romania (Durach, 2022). Although Medvedev left open the question of whether this scenario is actually Moscow's objective, similar Kremlin statements about Ukraine regularly reach the public and are part of an efficient media war it has developed.<sup>4</sup> In addition to Putin himself, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov and Foreign Minister Lavrov often make verbal slips with regard to the war. Medvedev has also repeatedly caused a stir with his provocations in recent months. As in all such conflicts, propaganda, defamation, and disinformation certainly play an important role. German commentators, at least, are among those convinced of the final goal of Russia's war following Medvedev's statement that "Russia's boundaries are boundless".<sup>5</sup> In fact, based on the various statements made by Russia's leading political representatives, I would label this country's policy toward its neighbors, and especially toward Ukraine, *Heim-ins-Reich*.

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3 Dmitry Medvedev functions as the "spokesperson" of Russia's president Vladimir Putin and is the classic example of a *σφουγγοκωλάριος* (*sfoungokolários*; lit.: sponge cake), in Greek. Against the background of Russia's claim to be a Third Rome after the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453, I stress that, at least in regard to the role of *σφουγγοκωλάριος*, I see a continuation of the authoritarian Byzantine tradition in today's Russia. *Σφουγγοκωλάριος* was indeed a high office in the Byzantine Empire. The incumbent was simply the emperor's "straw man," a position to which only very trustworthy people were appointed. A pejorative term in English would be "bootlicker," or the slang "ass-wipe." That is exactly this culture of political suppression which was criticized by Russian rock star Yuri Shevchuk who was fined by a Russian court for allegedly saying during a concert in May 2022: "Homeland is not the president's butt that you have to kiss all the time." <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/russischer-rockstar-juri-schewtschuk-zu-geldstrafe-verurteilt-18248175.html>

4 On the functioning of the Kremlin propaganda apparatus, see Mascolo (2020).

5 <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/russland-raetsel-um-geloeschten-brutalen-text-von-dmitri-medwedjew-18216703.html?premium>

Heim-ins-Reich had a long tradition in Germany, dating from the post-World War I period to its incorporation into the official policy of Nazi Germany. The catchword was used mainly for efforts to establish a greater German empire and, consequently, to bring German minorities, such as Baltic Germans, back into the fold of the empire after 700 years. This project became possible as a result of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939. The minorities included, among others, South Tyroleans from Italy, Baltic Germans from Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, Volhynian Germans from former Eastern Poland and, from 1940 onward, Bessarabian, Bukovinan, Dobrujan, and Galician Germans, as well as Gottscheer. Some of these groups had inhabited—in some cases for centuries—territories in Eastern Europe that were to fall to the Soviet Union under the terms of the pact. Those were resettled received as compensation expropriated land in German-occupied Poland, in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, or in the region of Lower Styria, which was to serve as a future living space in the East for Germans.<sup>6</sup>

I maintain that Russia was led to impose its own view on the future of Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union by launching a brutal war based on a similar logic of replacing and integrating, even by force, national populations or even entire independent states, within an ideal empire to which, according to the aggressor, these countries and their peoples belong, whether they want to or not. Moreover, as noted, according to Lavrov, the war against them is for their own benefit.

The Russian state view is that these countries and their populations were led astray from the “empire” as a result of historical mistakes, which it is the empire’s mission to correct. This, of course, is not the first time that historical revisionism on the part of a state has led to war. The most recent wars in history, and European history, in particular, have been fought to correct, by force, any so-called injustices caused by history. What particularly shocked people, especially in the West, when the Russian attack on Ukraine began, was the fact that we all believed that such wars, especially on the European continent, were a thing of the past. To the best of our knowledge about Russia’s quasi-civilizational deficit (about which Huntington [1993] warned us long time ago<sup>7</sup>), we never believed, despite Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent acts, that such a classic war of conquest would ever be possible. From the morning of February 24, when the Russian onslaught on

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6 <https://library.fes.de/library/netzquelle/zwangsmigration/32heim.html>

7 According to Huntington, conflicts have evolved from the nation–state level to ideological hostilities which will develop further into cultural clashes. He put forward the theory that nation states and other groups which share cultural affinities would unite and cooperate and fight as one, against other cultural blocks. He introduced the main forces of his new world order as eight major civilizations (Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and eventually African) of which the Muslim, the Western, and the Confucian would be dominant (Reymond, 2012).

Ukraine was launched, it was obvious, that the ultimate aim of this war was the forcible incorporation of Russia's neighbors into the *russskiy mir* (Russian world). This view has been gradually confirmed over the last four months by various representatives of the Russian Federation, as noted above.

My aim in this chapter is to explain how the Russian version of Heim-ins-Reich, with the ultimate objective of integrating neighboring countries by force into the "Russian world," came about.

## **Features of Russia's Politico-Historical Heritage: Asian Despotism, War of Conquest, and the Ideology of *Russskiy Mir***

In this chapter, I argue that today's Russia incorporates two basic politico-historical traditions, representing a fundamental heritage of this country for the last 750 years: *Asian despotism* and *wars of conquest*. Moreover, regarding contemporary Russia and in terms of everyday politics, I also claim that Russia is a *rogue and bandit state*, captured by an elite which combines an amalgam of *Soviet security apparatus and organized crime groups*. The purpose of this chapter is to substantiate these claims.

First, I should emphasize that in today's Russia the prevailing attitude of the majority of the population is that however much the country suffers, they will never give up and will never be defeated. Notably, according to the Russian Orthodox worldview, Russia is the "roof of the earth" that God has predestined to defend His world. At the recent pro-Russian forum "Strong Ideas for a New Era" (ASI Forum, 2022),<sup>8</sup> Putin asked the following: how is it possible that the "golden billion" (the population of the democratic West) dominates the planet, enforces rules of conduct and international law, and cultivates the conditions for their enforcement at the expense of the underprivileged seven billion? By using the term "golden billion," Putin seeks to create a link to the Mongol-Turkic "Golden Horde" (commonly known as Tatars), notorious in history for their brutality, and for their devastation of

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8 These views are being disseminated by certain Russian intellectuals and have been developed into a pseudo-scientific theory. The most prominent of these intellectuals, Alexander Dugin, derisively labelled "Putin's Rasputin," transformed his world view into a pseudo-religious doctrine. "Like any religious doctrine, Dugin's ... ideology divides the world into light and darkness. It is quite primitive and based on the belief that Russia has a great future ahead of it. For Dugin, the 'Anglo-Saxons' who support the civilization of the sea are to blame for all the evils, while Eurasia without clearly defined borders is the divine gift of the country. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/darja-dugina-russischer-schriftsteller-aussert-sich-zu-attentat-18268983.html?premium>. On the role of Russian intellectuals in the radicalization of Russian politics, see Umland (2022). Especially regarding Alexander Dugin's philosophy and its impact in Russia see Umland (2007). Umland defines the pseudo-scientific approach by Dugin or Lev Gumilyov as "historical esoterism." One can surely argue that these Russian intellectuals are the instigators of the war in Ukraine.

Russian lands for centuries by overthrowing the various Russian principalities. The global balance, Putin added, must change—even if it means violence and war; the natural rights to free participation and technological development must be restored to every nation state and, of course, to Russia in particular.

There is no doubt that Putin’s “Mein Kampf” expresses visions of domination of other peoples under the pan-Slavic umbrella of “Mother Russia,” just as there is no doubt that the idea of great Russian Orthodoxy justifies the violent treatment and death of thousands of people. It is on these two pillars that Putin’s popularity rests; in fact, a month after the war on Ukraine was launched, it had risen to 86 percent (“83% of Russians,” 2022). Europe is socially fragile, divided and unable to defend its values, while Russia, many times larger, remains solid, multicultural, aggressive, but also strongly united with its Asian satellite states (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan). Russia will change the West, not the opposite, Putin believes.

As the non-democratic leader of the world’s largest country in terms of territory and geopolitical importance (perhaps even natural wealth), Putin firmly believes that Russia is being grossly wronged by the West.<sup>9</sup> As the heir to Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, he sees himself as destined by history to right those wrongs. If these revisionist efforts require war, if they lead to a break with the West, Russia will go all the way.

In this context, the term “russkiy mir” as a geopolitical concept unites a number of currents of anti-Western, anti-liberal, and neo-imperialist Russian beliefs. In its most recent manifestation, russkiy mir forms an important basis for legitimizing Russia’s military involvement in Ukraine and dominates the ideological climate in the Russian Federation.

## The Russian heritage of Asian despotism from Karl Marx onward

What is “Asian despotism”? As far as this question is concerned in relation to the evolution of Russia over the last seven centuries or so, we need Karl Marx for an answer. In general, this term refers to an authoritarian order of government with the following characteristics: individual property rights play only a secondary role; most land belongs to the state; the ruling class is

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<sup>9</sup> This refers to the narrative propagated by the aggressor itself, which finds some supporters in the West: that the aggression against Ukraine is a reaction to the expansion of NATO to include countries of the former Soviet Union. The real reason, however, for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is rooted in history: in a particular version of Russian history and its relationship with Ukraine that Putin and much of Russia’s political elite have adopted (Plokhyy, 2022).

defined by its position in the state apparatus and not by private ownership of the means of production; and separate centers of power outside the ruling house and the state apparatus (such as the relative independence of the nobility, autonomous cities or an independent church) do not exist.

The term "Asian despotism" is of course very old. Even Herodotus described the display of power and grandeur by the Persian god-kings as a political order alien to the Greeks (Konstantakos, n.d.). Characteristically, Aristotle believed that Asians were more likely than Europeans to endure despotic rule (Aristotle, 2007 [4<sup>th</sup> century BCE]). Similar ideas can be found among many European philosophers and thinkers like Hobbes, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Hegel. The current term, however, comes from Karl Marx. By using the term "Asian mode of production," Marx was describing a despotic political order in which the state dominates all economic life. Marx justified this form of state due to the geographical and climatic conditions of the East, which necessitated large-scale artificial irrigation. Only a centralized-bonded state was capable of implementing such plans. Classic examples are Pharaonic Egypt, with its regulation of the Nile; Mesopotamia, and ancient China. Marx regarded Russia as an "Asiatic" or "Oriental" despotism and traced its origins to Mongol rule. In his "Revelations on the History of Diplomacy in the 18th Century," Marx (cited in "Excerpts on Russia," 1951) wrote: "The origin of Moscovy lies in the bloody degradation of Mongolian slavery and not in the rude heroism of the Norman epoch. Modern Russia is nothing but a transfigured Moscovy ("Excerpts on Russia," 1951)."<sup>10</sup> Marx's description of the relationship between Russia and the West has lost none of its relevance: "The overwhelming influence of Russia has taken Europe at different epochs by surprise, startled the peoples of the West, and been submitted to as a fatality, or resisted only by convulsions" ("Excerpts on Russia," 1951). Regarding the important role played in the development of Russia by Ivan III, Marx expresses a thought that can easily be used as an explanation for Russia's war against Ukraine today:

It is still interesting today to note to what extent Moscovy endeavored – just like modern Russia – to conduct attacks upon the republics. Novgorod and its colonies open up the cycle, the Cossack Republic follows suit, and Poland

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10 Hermann Reich (2022, July 19) states in this respect: "The bloody mud of Mongol slavery, not the rude glory of Norman times, was Moscow's cradle, and modern Russia is but a metamorphosis of this Mongol Moscow. It is a tragedy that many Leftists today, if they do not support Russia's conquering attack on Ukraine, ... do not condemn it openly. Indeed, this attitude is to a large extent a sort of necrophilia since, even after the fall of the Soviet Union and with regard to Russia, they completely ignore Marx's own view of Russia as a despotic state of Asian provenance, which of course applies to a great extent also to the Soviet period."

closes it ... Ivan seems to have wrested from the Mongols the chains which crushed Moscovy only to impose them upon the Russian republics (“Excerpts on Russia,” 1951).

Regarding the epoch from Ivan the Great to Peter the Great and the question of world conquest, Marx sums up as follows:

[I]t is in the terrible and abject school of Mongolian slavery that Muscovy was nursed and grew up. It gathered strength only by becoming a virtuoso in the craft of serfdom. Even when emancipated, Muscovy continued to perform its traditional part of the slave, as well as the master. At length, Peter the Great coupled the political craft of the Mongol slave with the proud aspiration of the Mongol master to whom Genghis Khan had, by will, bequeathed his conquest of the earth.<sup>11</sup>

For his part, Hermann Reich (2022, July 19) connects Putin’s Russia with the despotic Mongol tradition, arguing that it has been shaped by the following important historical developments and features:

1. The Mongols appointed a trustworthy Russian prince as Grand Prince to oversee the other princes and to whom the collection of tribute to the Mongols was later delegated. Thus, under the Mongols the foundations were laid for the subsequent powerful position of Russian Grand Prince, and hence for a centralist system of rule with all its consequences. This set the course for the rest of Russian history up until today.
2. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, freedom of movement of the old Russian aristocrats—the boyars—was gradually restricted. While in ancient Russia a nobleman had the right to leave his prince and offer his services to another, these rights were gradually abolished altogether under the Moscow Grand Princes. This enabled local rooting of the nobility and stifled regional independent life.
3. The Church was also subordinated to the Moscow state. After the fall of Constantinople, the Moscow Grand Duchy formed the main power of the Orthodox Church. Ivan III, the first Russian ruler to hold the title of tsar, regarded Russia as the successor to the Byzantine Empire, the “third Rome” after Constantinople.
4. Thus, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, an autocratic form of government had emerged in Russia, reaching its peak during the reign of Ivan the Terrible (1547–1584). In vast areas of the Russian Empire, landed property of the nobility was confiscated, and the boyars were resettled or

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<sup>11</sup> As part of this very tradition, the statement by Medvedev that “Russia’s boundaries are boundless,” mentioned above, is understandable.

murdered. The freed lands were distributed as service estates to minions of the tsar. They became the dominant form of agrarian structure in Russia. These estates, which were granted by the tsar for a limited period mostly in exchange for military service, could be reclaimed by him. With this peculiar coupling of land ownership and service obligation, the traditional hereditary and property rights of the nobles disappeared. They were now completely at the mercy of the tsar.

5. The Russian system of rule thus differed fundamentally from that of Western European feudalism, in which political power was decentralized and limited by the nobility, the Church, and autonomous cities. In Russia, the nobility, Church, and cities were controlled by the state.
6. Dependence of the aristocracy on the tsar was also reinforced during the time of Peter the Great, who carried out a violent program of Europeanization in Russia. Peter's reign, however, was then followed by unstable political conditions. In 1762, the liberation of the nobility from compulsory service was finally proclaimed, and in 1785, aristocratic land ownership was declared private property. Between 1762 and 1861, three pillars of the old order were finally eliminated: compulsory service of the nobility, the state's claim to ownership of the aristocracy's land, and serfdom. These were essential prerequisites for Russia's modernization.
7. Nevertheless, many features of "Oriental despotism" in nineteenth century Russia remained, among others: the absolute power of the tsar; subordination of the Church to the state; the lack of autonomy of the cities; and the impossibility of developing a system of estates in the European sense.
8. The main problem, namely, the instability of property relations, was related to the dominant position of the state in the Russian economy. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, about two-thirds of industrial workers were employed in state enterprises. The Russian banking system was predominantly in state hands. Only the gradual emergence of capitalist economic forms caused a slow decomposition of these structures. However, the political structures remained authoritarian. In addition, there was state-directed anti-Semitism, the likes of which did not exist anywhere in Europe at the time.<sup>12</sup> Only the democratic February Revolution of 1917 seemed to overcome these structures. But only six months later the October Revolution and the Communist regime that followed established a state

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12 It is no coincidence that the book that has most influenced anti-Semitism since the beginning of the twentieth century was published in Russia in 1903: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Protocols is a fabricated document purporting to be factual; in current media terminology, "fake news." Despite having repeatedly been discredited as a historical document, and in spite of the fact that it served as an inspiration for Hitler's antisemitism and the Holocaust, it continues, even in our time, to be influential.

with an omnipotence that dwarfed most Oriental despotisms known in history (Reich, 2022, July 19).

I fully agree with Reich's view when it comes to evaluating the significance of this despotic tradition for the present in Russia. According to Reich, Russia is thus not only outside European history; it is, in this sense, even more "Asian" than many Asian countries. Although after the fall of the Soviet Union the Russian government was less autocratic, when despotism during the Communist era is compared with Putin's regime there is indeed a difference that makes the latter unique: after the Stalinist era there was always a relatively independent Politburo to which party leaders were accountable and which could also depose a party leader. No Soviet party secretary from Khrushchev on held absolute power. In Putin's regime, there is no Politburo; he has absolute power. Russia is experiencing a new edition of autocracy of the tsarist era (Reich, 2022, July 19).<sup>13</sup>

## Russkiy mir: From a loose ideology to an aggressive imperial program

The term *russkiy mir* (Russian world) originates from the nineteenth century and developed over time from a poetic metaphor into an ideological concept. Especially in the context of the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian conflict, *russkiy mir* has been enjoying an unprecedented boom: In the preamble to the constitution of the Donetsk People's Republic, the term is mentioned no fewer than four times, functioning simultaneously as a historical foundation, an ideal for the future, and a community-building principle of "the young people's republic." The constitution proclaims the "creation of a sovereign and independent state aimed at the restoration of a unified cultural and civilizational space of the Russian world" (Zabirko, 2022). There is, however, an important element of *russkiy mir*, which distinguishes it from other post-imperial Western constructs ("Francophonie" or "British Commonwealth"), namely, the role of the Church and religion in the emergence and propagation of the concept. In most of its manifestations, Russian space, or the space of *russkiy mir*, is primarily a sacred Christian space, or in a narrower sense, a Russian Orthodox space. The following focuses more closely on this fundamental aspect.

According to Zabirko (2022), this ideological term became functional primarily because it represented the unifying element between the common people and the elite on the basis of love for the Christian faith and loyalty to

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13 The West will have to coexist in the long term with a Russia shaped as it is by "Asian" structures. This is also true for China, the classic state of "Asian despotism," whose political system is today even more totalitarian than Putin's Russia.

the monarch. The Russian equivalent of *Liberté, Égalité, et Fraternité* for the definition of a modern Russian nation was *Pravoslaviye, Samodershavije, and Narodnost* (Orthodoxy, Tsarist Rule, and People's Solidarity). In the nineteenth century, the terms "holy Rus" and the "Russian God" became commonplace in literature, signaling the abandonment of a rational examination of the cornerstones of Russian spatial and communal order—a state of mind that was probably most clearly articulated in the well-known lines of the poet Ivan Tyutchev: "One cannot understand Russia ... one can only believe in Russia."<sup>14</sup>

Following a short hiatus during the October Revolution, the USSR radically reinterpreted this ideology. It developed a truly global "world" (*mir*) concept. Significantly, in this respect, even the first stanza of the Soviet anthem contains a reference to Rus: "Great Rus has united forever the unbreakable union of free republics." A fundamentally different understanding of *russkiy mir* eventually developed within the framework of the so-called Eurasian ideology, developed primarily by Russian intellectuals in the diaspora. The ideological doctrine of Eurasism was based on the premise that there was an insurmountable contrast between the Eurasian culture of Russia and the "Germano-Romantic" culture of Western Europe.<sup>15</sup> Notably, the centerpiece of the Eurasian ideology was the preservation of the unity of the Russian state, not infrequently understood metaphysically or ideationally. This state, according to the Eurasian school, could take on different political and ideological expressions and thus be realized, for example, as the tsarist empire, the USSR, or a utopian Eurasian League of Nations. Despite some further metamorphoses, the discourse around *russkiy mir* was gradually "nationalized" and spread, among others, to the Moscow Patriarchate and the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation (established in 2007 and primarily concerned with cultural and language promotion). However, it is the war in Ukraine that has caused the transition of *russkiy mir* from discursive empire- and nation-building into the realm of political programming. As an umbrella

14 The following analysis is based on Zabirko (2022).

15 In order to extend the analysis provided by Zabirko (2022), I underline that the cultivation of a new Orthodox theological wave, mainly by Russian theologians in France (such as P. Evdokimov, V. Leskii, G. Florovsky, A. Schmemmann, and J. Meyendorff) can only be understood in this general spiritual context of new quests of Russian émigrés. Their impact has reached even as far as Greece, with Christos Giannaras as its leading representative (and in the past Stelios Ramfos), a movement which would be unthinkable without the Russian diaspora's search for a new definition of the Russian national body (if not of the Russian "Orthodox soul" itself). I also stress that beyond new theological trends, the presence of "Russian propaganda in Greece is grounded on a palette of reasons. It employs concepts as historical bonds, orthodox religion, cultural relations and narration that in the past ... significantly helped Greece to gain its independence from the Ottoman yoke, although the Russian contribution to the Greek Revolution (1821) against the Ottoman Empire has been fully challenged by reputable historians [and is just a myth—A. G.]. For instance, Russian propaganda exploits and promotes the narrative of the *blond savior* mainly circulated from ultra-orthodox Christian religious sects." For more, see Protopoulos (2022).

term for various Great Russian ideals with religious overtones, russkij mir now provides an important basis of legitimacy for the pro-Russian fighters in eastern Ukraine.

With its intervention in Crimea and later in the eastern Ukrainian Donbass, Russia has not only called into question Ukraine's identity as a nation. In a speech from March 18, 2014, President Putin referred to Russians as a "divided people," opening a Pandora's box of ethnic irredentism. At the same time, Putin invoked the geohistorical term *Novorossiya* (New Russia), which regards some regions of Ukraine as an ancestral province of Russia. "New Russia" has thus become the slogan of a struggle for new political realities—military empowerment and, ultimately, aggression and war.<sup>16</sup>

Looking now at Ukraine and the definition of Ukrainian national identity, Taras Kuzio identifies four interpretive trends in Ukraine, namely. Russophile (traditionally known as Russian-imperial), Sovietophile (Soviet), East Slavic, and Ukrainophile (Ukrainian-national). Both the Russophile and Sovietophile interpretations place Russia as the leading Eastern Slavic nation, but the two interpretations differ in that the second gives Ukrainians and Belarusians limited recognition. While Sovietophiles have opposed Russia since the demise of the USSR, and Russophiles favor the existence of Ukrainians and Belarusians as independent ethnic entities, referring to them as Russian subregional groups, these interpretations of history jeopardize the milestones of Ukrainian independence and are thus unpopular in Ukraine. In contrast, the Ukrainophile interpretation has dominated the Ukrainian educational system since 1991 and has been the basis for the nation-building and independent statehood of Ukraine. An example of the difference between the four historiographies lies in the interpretation of the medieval state of Kievan Rus. Against the background of the current war, Russian policy tends to correspond with the Soviet interpretation of history. According to Sovietophile historiography, the origins of the three East Slavic groups (Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians) lie in Kievan Rus. The three Eastern groups developed from the "*drevnerusskaya narodnost*". However, this was understood to be Russian (*russkij*) and, as the eldest brother in the former Soviet Union, Russia was the sole successor to Kievan Rus. In Russia, the view of the alleged cultural and ethnic unity of the East Slavic peoples still holds today. In Russian intellectual circles, Ukraine is deprived of the attributes of nationhood and the right to political sovereignty, and is not referred to as an equal or even a component of the Russian nation (Spinello, 2013).

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16 <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

Furthermore, *russkiy mir* can indeed be considered a sort of Russian “palingenetic” ideology.<sup>17</sup> In the context of nineteenth century nationalism, the term is known in relation to the Greek revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire which led to the establishment of a Greek independent state in 1830 with signing of the London Protocol. The revolt (which was clearly influenced by the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution) was considered a “palingenesis” in reference to the glorious Greek past, a modern Greek view influenced by the Philhellenism movement in Europe at the time; but mainly because Greece was recognized as an independent state. The Greek nation was therefore resurrected, or reborn, because it acquired an independent existence. While in Greek historiography the term denotes the rejection of a yoke by a foreign conqueror, in the case of “Russian world,” “palingenesis” is the contrary: an aggressive policy aimed at the enslavement of independent nations in the name of a nationalistic and imperial ideology.

However, *russkiy mir*, especially since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, has achieved the opposite: instead of establishing a transnational community of destiny, it has caused the rediscovery, or even reinvention, of a Ukrainian national consciousness. On both sides of the front, people now stand against or fight each other, speaking largely the same (Russian) language and praying before the same (Russian) icons. Just where *russkiy mir* should come into its own, it is now degraded to a distinguishing feature between the two nations, Russian and Ukrainian (Zabirko, 2022).

Of course, not all Russians support such aggressive ideologies. Some seven thousand Russian scientists issued a protest against the attack on Ukraine just a few days after the war in Ukraine began; they criticized their country as a “military aggressor” and a “rogue state,” and accused the political leadership of “historiosophical fantasies.”<sup>18</sup> They not only denigrated what they saw as the imperial behavior of an autocrat who believes he is fulfilling a national mission, but also the sacrilege of Russian politics in the past two decades. The Russian scientists confirmed the view of Western commentators that Putin sees himself as carrying out a national mission and wants to reclaim “lost” territory. This is a narrative that served the tsars, as well as Catherine II, who used it to justify the partition of Poland.

Significantly, Putin justified the annexation of Crimea in 2014 citing its religious significance for Russia—an argument used to legitimize Russian claims after the first annexation in 1783. Seven years ago, Putin emphasized

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17 Palingenesis is a concept of rebirth or re-creation, used in various contexts in philosophy, theology, politics, and biology. Its meaning stems from Greek *palin*, “again,” and *genesis*, “birth”.

18 Only a day after this declaration was published on the internet it was removed, I assume, by the Russian authorities. Thus, it is not possible to provide the URL of the declaration. Information on it, however, can be found at “Thousands of Russian scientists” (2022).

the “extraordinary civilizational and sacred significance of the peninsula” and compared it to that of Jerusalem’s Temple Mount for Jews and Muslims. On the “spiritual soil” of Crimea, “our ancestors understood themselves as one people for the first time and forever,” Putin said at the time. And that is how Russia will behave toward them, “today and forever.” The Ukrainian city of Kherson, around which bloody fighting is taking place at the time this article is being written, is where the baptism of Grand Prince Vladimir took place. Kherson “was the basis for the Christianization of Kievan Rus,” Putin said in December 2014. Orthodox Christianity had become the strong unifying force “through which a unified Russian nation and state emerged—from the different tribes of the East Slavic world” (Schmoll, ???).<sup>19</sup> Finally, Russia’s leadership claims should also be seen against the background of the absolute and partly violent Russification of the former Soviet Union, which is a primarily Stalinist product. The cultural–historical superiority of the Russian “ruling nation” over its neighbors today is still based on this version of the national self-image.<sup>20</sup>

## A final factor that made war possible: The gradual militarization of Russian society alongside the trivialization of violence

The fact that aggression and war have become an indispensable and widely accepted option in Russian society concerns not only with the sacralization<sup>21</sup> of Russian politics, especially in terms of ethical superiority vis-à-vis the West, but above all with the systematic militarization of Russian society. In

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19 For more on these widespread myths used by the Kremlin propaganda apparatus, see the article published by Liudmyla Pidkuimukha in this volume, as well as works by Kappeler (2017 & 2011). As for the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, significantly, Russian Patriarch Kirill regards the invasion of Ukraine as an internal conflict within *Rus*. “Kirill does not name the Russian Federation as the aggressor, but blames ‘evil forces’ that have ‘always fought against the unity of Rus and the Church’— something like the religious version of Putin’s hostility towards the West. One day before the war began, Kirill congratulated Putin on the ‘Day of the Defender of the Fatherland’. The Russian Orthodox Church sees military service as an expression of ‘charity’ according to the Gospel. He wished the president peace of mind and God’s help in his service to the Russian people”. See the excellent analysis by Schmoll (2022, March 5).

20 <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/russische-geschichte-das-herrschervolk-regiert-noch-in-den-koepfen-18261109.html?premium>

21 Putin’s alleged confessor, Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov, is a key figure in the recent sacralization of Russian politics. He heads the Council for Cultural Affairs at the Moscow Patriarchate and is head of the Sretensky Monastery not far from the headquarters of the Russian secret service. He is responsible for relations with all museums and cultural institutions in Russia and advises Putin on cultural and historical issues (Schmoll, 2022, March 5).

December 2021, just two months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Anton Troianovski, Ivan Nechepurenko, and Valerie Hopkins wrote in the *New York Times*: “With a ‘youth army’, a cathedral honoring the military and state media promoting patriotism the government is preparing Russians for the possibility of a fight.” They summed up what has been going on in this regard in Russia over the last decade by arguing that,

over the past eight years, the Russian government has promoted the idea that the motherland is surrounded by enemies, filtering the concept through national institutions like schools, the military, the news media and the Orthodox Church. It has even raised the possibility that the country might again have to defend itself as it did against the Nazis in World War II ...

“The authorities are actively selling the idea of war,” Dmitri A. Muratov, the Russian newspaper editor who shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022, said in his acceptance speech in Oslo this month. “People are getting used to the thought of its permissibility.”<sup>22</sup>

One important measure on the part of the state is to dramatically increase the “patriotic education” of Russians, including a plan to enlist at least 600,000 children from the age of eight in the ranks of a uniformed youth army. This need is reinforced by the permanent presence in the public sphere of narratives of an alleged fascist coup in Ukraine and a West bent on Russia’s destruction. Especially on Russian state television, the narrative of a Ukraine controlled by neo-Nazis and used as a staging ground for Western aggression has been commonplace since the pro-Western revolution in Kiev in 2014. “And all are united by the almost sacred memory of the Soviet victory in World War II—a memory that the state has seized upon to shape the identity of a triumphant Russia that must be ready to take up arms once again,” claim Troianovski, et al. (2021). In this respect, Aleksei Levinson, head of sociocultural research at the Levada Center, an independent Moscow polling institute, even calls this trend the “militarization of consciousness” among Russians (Troianovski, et al., 2021)). Furthermore, near Moscow, as noted by Troianovski, et al., a large cathedral of the Russian armed forces was opened in 2021. Its exterior is khaki-colored and its floors are made of weapons and tanks confiscated from the German Wehrmacht. The arched stained-glass windows display insignia and medals. Significantly, the belief in society that Russia is not the aggressor, reflecting a core Soviet-era ideology, continues to be nurtured: the country only wages defensive wars. “Right now, the idea being propagated is that Russia is a peace-loving country that is constantly surrounded by enemies,”

22 <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/13347/dmitry-muratov-nobel-peace-prize-acceptance-speech>

says Anton Dolin, a Russian film critic (cited in Schmoll, 2022, March 5).

A Russian teacher, Maria Kalinicheva, who fled to Berlin in June 2022 because she had to endure reprisals for her stance on the war, has reported that an entire generation in Russia is being educated for war. She claims that hatred is systematically instilled in children and young people in Russia. The West must know that even if Putin is defeated, there will not simply be peace with Russia. Not becoming part of this education to hate, she says, is almost impossible for teachers. “The teachers are simply hostages of the regime,” she opined (cited in Schmoll, 2022, March 5).

According to Ksenia Krimer (2022, July 30), whether in popular songs, prisons, orphanages, clinics, private homes, or the army, violent relationships dominate Russian life.<sup>23</sup> Krimer describes a frightening culture of violence in Russian society that is not only socially acceptable, but officially supported by the highest political authorities. For example, she uses the Russian *chanson*, a type of music that was considered rebellious in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was persecuted by the state for its vulgarity and romanticization of crime. In the last twenty years, radio and television have mainstreamed this genre, and it has become the “true soundtrack of contemporary Russia,” she says. The annual “Chanson of the Year” awards ceremony is held at the prestigious State Kremlin Palace, once reserved for operas, ballets, and other “high cultural” events. “The popularity of the chanson in the public sphere and its quasi-official status make clear the role that criminal culture plays in Russian society: it shapes its ethos and makes violence its most important modus operandi” (Krimer, 2022, July 30). Crime statistics on Russia are simply appalling. According to a study cited by Krimer, more than 15 million Russians were imprisoned between 1992 and 2007—about a quarter of the adult male population! In 2007, 18.2 percent of the population had a criminal record, according to a calculation by *Kommersant-Vlast* magazine (cited in Krimer, 2022, July 30). The proportion of former or current offenders is predictably higher in the poorest regions of the country. These regions send the most conscripts and mercenaries to Ukraine. The atrocities now being committed by the Russian army in Ukraine are a visible consequence of this imprint. In Russian provincial prisons, violent criminals are charged by the prison administration with “disciplining and punishing” other inmates by beating and sexually abusing them. According to Krimer, this is

almost the only significant difference from the Gulag:  
sexual abuse, which did not exist before, has now

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23 Ksenia Krimer studied Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan and received her PhD in history from the Central European University in Budapest. She has been involved in research projects at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Since March 2022, she has been living in Berlin as a freelance writer and researcher.

become a key element of control and domination. It seeps back from the camps into mainstream society and shapes its attitudes and norms. Russian homophobia, for example, feeds largely on the criminal concept that sexual intercourse between men is necessarily non-consensual and always degrading. The notion of sex as a form of violent domination manifests itself in many behaviors, from culturally sanctioned attacks on women and LGBTQ+ to mass rapes perpetrated by Russian soldiers in Ukraine (Krimer, 2022, July 30).<sup>24</sup>

And finally,

In the first years of Putin's "stability," former gangsters flocked to power en masse. They became mayors, governors and deputies, bringing with them their language and their worldview: Cynicism, insatiable greed, disregard for laws and rules, macho posturing, worship of physical strength, and the deeply held conviction that anyone could be bought and sold if the price was right, really anyone (Krimer, 2022, July 30).

Similarly, Irina Rastorguyeva, a direct witness to the violence in Russian society and politics, reported:

It is a completely perverted, [and] at the same time cynical, totalitarian regime without any ideology. The regime does not care what nationality you belong to, what faith you

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24 Especially regarding homophobia, this stance fully reflects the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church. Its highest representative, Russian Patriarch Kirill, openly considers Western liberalism to be the devil's work. In his eyes, equality of homosexuals is a sign of the imminent end of the world. Significantly, only a few days after the invasion of Ukraine and during a sermon in the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, considered one of the most prestigious buildings of the Orthodox Church in Russia, he stated: "For eight years there have been attempts to destroy everything that exists in Donbas. In Donbas there is a rejection, a fundamental rejection of the values that those who claim world power today espouse. Today there is a test, a way to verify the faith of any government, a kind of doorway to this 'happy' world, the world of over-consumption, the world of so-called freedom. Do you know what this test is? The test is very simple and at the same time terrible? It is the gay pride parade. The demands of many to have a gay parade is a test of loyalty to this powerful world; and we know that if people or countries reject these demands, they do not enter this world, they become strangers to it" [my translation], <https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5906442.htm>. The interaction between state and church was also lamented in February 2012 by the young women of the performance group Pussy Riot who, sporting colourful costumes, jumped around in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Their protest song read: "The KGB chief is their supreme saint, he puts demonstrators in prison ... The patriarch believes in Putin, but he, the dog, should believe in God." Regarding the feminist movement in Russia, see the excellent work by Sperling (2014).

have or what political views—the main thing is to be loyal  
...

Putin's gangster regime is a horror amalgam of Soviet security apparatus and organized crime groups from the nineties. Over the past two decades, the Kremlin's rhetoric has radicalized into a kind of gangster jargon even at the diplomatic level. The people in power do not care about human lives and humanitarian values; they consider the pursuit of civilized solutions to be an expression of weakness, and they infect the people with this simple idea" (Rastorguyeva, 2022, July 22).<sup>25</sup>

Her experience with the state security apparatus is terrifying.

In big cities today, the forces of order control everyone. People are identified by cameras, police officers come to their homes, put protesters in jail, threaten to take away their children, threaten physical violence, beat them. If we add Rosgwardia, the Federal Security Service, the OMON special police unit and other security bodies, it means that every tenth man works for state security institutions. According to the independent online media *Project*, one-third of the Russian budget is spent on the maintenance of law enforcement agencies, i.e., the maintenance of the principle of loyalty and stability (Rastorguyeva, 2022, July 22).

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25 The author comes from Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in Russia's Far East and lives in Berlin. See her testimony on violence in Russian society at <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/schriftstellerin-irina-rastorgujewa-ueber-putins-banditenstaat-18189512.html?premium>.

On a personal note, one of my female students wrote to me from her town in eastern Ukraine in the first days of the Russian invasion, "I am 22 years old and I don't want to be beaten, killed or raped, because that's what the Russians did to Ukrainian women in the occupied territories. These people are beasts and we have to stop them." I thought the characterization of the Russian army as "beasts" was a bit exaggerated. After only a month it turned out that she was right and that her outburst was a cry of despair, not hysteria. The Russian army is simply putting into practice call by Russian film director and political philosopher Timofey Sergeytsev, who writing for the Russian state news agency *RIA Novosti*, (in imitation of Goebbels), openly called for the destruction of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people ("Into the Heart," 2022). Andreas Umland (2022) argues in this respect that Russia is rewriting human history. An intellectual deformation of the elite through the abstruse ideas of theorists such as Lev Gumilyov and Aleksandr Dugin is partly responsible for Russia's increasing secession from Europe.

Finally, Yuri Andrukhovich (2022, April 8), a well-known writer who lives in Ivano-Frankivsk in Ukraine, published an appeal in the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* under the title "Everything we see testifies to dehumanization" (*Alles, was wir sehen, zeugt von Entmenschlichung*).<sup>26</sup> The author goes a step further and claims that what we are finally observing in Russia is not only a militarization of society, but its dehumanization.

The Russian army is a widespread state terrorist organization with hundreds of thousands of members equipped with extreme cruelty and extraordinary sadism. Russia is a terrorist state. Its purpose is to sow suffering, pain and death. Russia is going its special way ... Bombs are dropped on people's heads: cluster bombs, phosphorus bombs and other forbidden varieties. They are dropped on hospitals, theaters, museums, libraries and kindergartens. People are tortured and killed en masse—shot in the back of the head ... Women and children are raped en masse. Evil, archaic instincts are breaking out: kill the man, rape the woman ... Everything we see is evidence of dehumanization. Russia's population has successfully dehumanized itself. This is an anti-world. This is a part of humanity that has voluntarily gone over to anti-humanity (2022, April 8).

Against the background of the analyses and testimonies discussed above, demonization of the West by Russia's rulers serves only to justify the state's own acts of violence and wars of aggression and conquest. Heinz Ohme, a distinguished expert on the Eastern Church, sees behind this attitude a historical-ideological edifice of ideas based on Russia in the sense of an Orthodox nation with an Orthodox ruler and resting on a union of Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationhood (Schmoll, 2022, March 5). This sounds frighteningly similar to the slogan *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* (One people, one empire, one leader) of Nazi Germany.<sup>27</sup>

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26 <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/butscha-war-kein-zufall-plan-zur-vernichtung-der-ukraine-17942535.html>

27 After the daughter of far-right thinker Alexander Dugin (see n.11), Darja Dugina was murdered by a car bomb in Moscow, Russian politicians, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, and representatives of the state media called for unity in the country and for "total victory" in Ukraine, where the "Russian world alone is fighting evil", at <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/trauerfeier-fuer-darja-dugina-russland-wirbt-fuer-totalen-sieg-18263445.html?premium>

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## **Cengiz Aktar**

### **Reconquest and De-memorization: The Fate of Hagia Sophia**

#### **Introduction**

It is no coincidence that this chapter has been written in a period of recent history when the theme of conquest, the ill-fated end of the Hagia Sophia Museum, and the deterioration of Turkish-Greek relations, as well as other problems, have created a degree of strain unknown since the Turkish military intervention which led to the occupation of the northern part of the island of Cyprus.

The conquest of Constantinople<sup>1</sup> is certainly one of the key historical events that still shapes Turkish political discourse, as well as its political psyche. Accordingly, it has always been subject to distortion, myths, and glorification of Herculean deeds, and thus, to a plethora of inconsistencies. These narratives constitute not only the modern Turkish political framework pertaining to the conquest but at the same time highlight the way the Turkish polity in general projects itself to the world.

The Ottomans, who were the actual conquerors, left no record of any official public celebration or commemoration of the conquest (Finkel, 2006; Kafesçioğlu, 2009). While the event itself and what followed, whether related to urban, cultural, religious, political, or legal matters, were ordinary developments for Ottoman rulers who felt “at home,” for Turkish rulers, the conquest, and the city itself, have become symbols of alienation. This is due to the cosmopolitan nature of the empire and of Constantinople which, as an ever-imperial capital (Eastern Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman), hosted a multitude of ethnicities, religions, and cultures—in contrast to the recently conceived “monochromatic” Turkishness, which structurally rejects any sort of cosmopolitanism, and is therefore at odds with that heritage.

Until this day, the modern Turkish narrative about the conquest and the city alike has never recognized the non-Muslim and non-Turkish past associated with 1453 and the city. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the first celebration of the conquest took place in 1914 under the dictatorial rule of the nationalist Young Turks, in the immediate aftermath of the defeat in the Balkan Wars. Their rule lasted only three years, until 1916. As for the current official

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1 The current name of the city, “Istanbul,” has existed since March 28, 1930. Previously, countless appellations existed, including the Turkified version of Constantinople, Konstantiniyye.

May 29 Conquest Celebrations, they date back no further than 1953. Today, modern narratives have altered every single act and designation related to 1453 and beyond, and transformed them into an ahistorical Turkishness and Muslimness. We will attempt to decipher this historical distortion through some significant acts and accounts relating to the conquest and post-conquest era.

## Kemalists and the Conquest

For early Kemalists, and for Mustafa Kemal himself, his close associates, and for the Turkish Left, the conquest was everything but a religious event. It was the affirmation of Turkish military genius and the Turkish art of ruling. Terminating the Ottoman Empire by abolishing the sultanate and the caliphate, and establishing a republic, Mustafa Kemal and his companions were the natural adversaries of anything Ottoman (Aktar, 1986). Indeed, for Kemalists and their predecessors, the Young Turks, the cosmopolitan empire had inhibited Turkishness for centuries, an act that resulted in its dilution within the imperial corpus. On the other hand, next to the empire, Islam and its representatives were seen by those positivist secularists as enemies of Turkishness as long as the Islamic *ummah* rejected any worldly identity and ignored popular aspirations. In a well-known speech from 1927, Mustafa Kemal compared the last Ottoman sultan, Vahideddin, with Constantine XI Palaiologos, the last emperor of Byzantium, thus:

Just like the last Caesar of the *Rumahoî*<sup>2</sup> in the last days of Byzantium, who declared against Fatih's invitation to surrender: "I will deliver this country, which is entrusted by God to me, only to God," today's Caliph and the government of the Sultan are trying to surrender the nation that was refusing to be made captive to the enemy by tying its hands (Atatürk, 2015, p. 432).

It is remarkable to read how Mustafa Kemal equated two empires, in the administration of which religion, despite its dominant caesaropapism, had weighed prominently, as opposed to the secularist/positivist way of running a country. A similar secularist posture was displayed by Kemalists at the Lausanne Peace Conference of 1922–23 where the Turkish delegation argued for the termination of the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople by calling the institution "archaic," as it did regarding the

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2 Hellenophone Romans as subjects of the Eastern Roman Empire, of the Byzantium Empire, then of the Ottoman Empire.,

caliphate which, in fact, was abolished a year later, in 1924.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the rejection of imperial and spiritual references rooted in the Ottoman past, and in order to create a secular nation, the Kemalists and Mustafa Kemal himself discarded the very notion of conquest as a guiding principle of the new republic, which was otherwise embedded in both imperial and Islamic canons.

One powerful example of Mustafa Kemal's rejection of conquest as a political means was his criticism of the Committee of Union and Progress, and in particular, Enver Pasha's pan-Turanist and pan-Islamist delusions, implemented in 1917–18. Headed by his brother Nuri Pasha, the Islamic Army of the Caucasus created in July 1918 by Enver, is infamous for the slaughter of thousands of Baku Armenians. There are countless examples illustrating Mustafa Kemal's position. For instance, on April 24, 1920, at a secret session of the National Assembly, Kemal reiterated that "we do not wish to expand beyond our borders and beyond the human resources and advantages that exist within those borders" (Akçam, 2006).

Another example of Mustafa Kemal's rejection of conquest was the inconclusive quest for Mosul. At the end of World War I, the former Ottoman province of Iraq was occupied by the victors, Britain and France. The Kingdom of Iraq was created by the British Foreign Office and immediately came under British Mandate rule. The success of Kemalist forces in 1922 in the remaining territories of the defunct empire and the ensuing Lausanne Treaty did not solve the issue of Mosul, over which the parties, Ankara and London, held their positions. Finally, the dispute was referred to the League of Nations, which decided in Iraq's—in other words, in Britain's—favor.

Although in the beginning Mustafa Kemal and his associates refused any compromise, especially referral of the issue to the League of Nations,<sup>4</sup> they were compelled to accept the outcome, enshrined in the Mosul (Ankara) Treaty of June 5, 1926. Moreover, after almost nine years of continuous all-out war, Turkey was worn down materially and spiritually and could not afford another battle for Mosul, especially against the mighty United Kingdom. It had to bear its cross and abandon all designs on the region (Akşin, 1966, p. 9). All in all, the Kemalist regime, by choice or under duress, chose peace, which became one of the central dictums of the polity attributed to Mustafa Kemal: "Peace at home, peace in the world." As the moment of decision in Lausanne approached, Mustafa Kemal moved further away from ideas of conquest and expansion in his speeches. "The idea of conquest has been erased from

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3 For an elaborate account of the discussions, see Alexandris (2018).

4 "The Vilayet of Mosul is within Turkish state's national boundaries; no one has the right to separate it from the motherland in order to give it to someone else. The League of Nations has nothing to do with this matter." *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, 1989), p. 82.

our dictionary forever," he said.<sup>5</sup> During the following years, the concept was vilified and condemned as opposed to peaceful human activity. Here is how Mustafa Kemal described the contrast between the two ways of societal existence in a well-known opening speech at the Izmir Economy Congress:

Those who conquer by the sword must give up in the end to those who conquer by the plough. For example, while the French were swinging the sword, finally the plough prevailed and the British got Canada (Ökçün, 1971, p. 244).

Thus, Mustafa Kemal's thoughts represented the consummate expression of westernization combined with disenchantment, after he had lost faith in the traditional Ottoman way of ruling. This included the conquest (*jihad*), after which Western-inspired reforms transformed the ruling elite of the declining empire throughout the nineteenth century. The Kemalist doctrine therefore rejected ideologically the praxis of conquest, expansion, and imperialism, unlike even its immediate predecessors, the Young Turks, who were highly inclined toward "internal conquest" against non-Muslims through genocide, pogroms, and ethno-religious cleansing, as well as external ventures in Central Asia in the name of pan-Turanism. The unique act of expansion during the early years of the Turkish Republic was the peaceful though fraudulent annexation of a Syrian territory, the Sanjak of Alexandretta, which was under French mandate (Khadduri, 1945). Otherwise, the young republic chose to and succeeded in avoiding entering World War II.

For Kemalists events unfolded differently after the death of Mustafa Kemal in 1938. The change occurred coincidentally the same year of his death: conquest celebrations were officially mentioned for the first time in the history of the republic with a view to preparing for the fifth centenary. Kemal's successors, President İsmet İnönü and Prime Minister Refik Saydam, were staunch supporters of planning for the celebrations. A special committee, headed by the influential education minister, Hasan Âli Yücel, was set up. Therefore, it was not an initiative of the pro-religious opposition as a gift to believers, as was often heard in Turkey, and still is today. The Istanbul Conquest Society was established immediately after the electoral victory of the opposition Democratic Party in 1950, although the preparatory work was

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5 Regarding Mehmed II, who epitomizes the figure of a conqueror in Turkish historiography, Mustafa Kemal had a cautious attitude. His unofficial biographer Âfet İnan writes that Mustafa Kemal had always expressed admiration for the "Great Conqueror." According to İnan, he was eager for a statue of the conqueror to be erected in Istanbul. "He nurtured admiration and affection for the ascension of the Ottoman Empire. For him, the Conqueror was not only a Turkish forefather he was the greatest man in history" (İnan, 2011, p. 312).

older and its endeavors were carried out thanks to public funds.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the initial debates and work, as well as the pompous fifth centenary celebrations, were perceived by Muslim public opinion as a first step in the preparations for revenge against the radical secularist period of 1923–38.<sup>7</sup> In fact, calls for reconverting the Hagia Sophia Basilica, which had been transformed into a museum in 1934, to a Muslim place of worship took off with the conquest debate. These were realized in July 2020. Last, but not least, a noteworthy position regarding the conquest, by an important figure of the rudimentary Turkish Left, should be mentioned. Dr. Hikmet Kıvılcımlı (1953) in a book published the same year of the first celebration, wrote:

The conquest of Istanbul is one of the greatest Historical Revolutions [*sic*] that not only Turks, but the whole world should celebrate, is right to celebrate, and even to some extent, has a duty to celebrate as humanity (p. 2).

The author, using a typical Marxist utilitarian approach, spoke of the liberation of the inhabitants of Constantinople who had suffered from indigence, thanks to the institution of Turkish nomadic traditions for an equitable distribution of the means of production. Moreover, he underlined the incentive for European powers to find alternative seaways to the Mediterranean following Constantinople's conquest by the Ottomans.

Then there is the celebrated leftist poet Nazım Hikmet, who penned the following poem dedicated to the Conqueror in 1921:

Eight Hundred and Fifty-Seven<sup>8</sup>

This is the most precious day that Islam has been waiting for:

Constantinople of the Greeks, has become Istanbul of the Turks!

A commander of an army which withstood the world

The young sultan of the Turk, like a sky is splitting off,

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6 The Istanbul Conquest Society (<http://www.istanbulfetihcemiyeti.org.tr/>) was established as a public interest association following a decision of the Council of Ministers dated July 28, 1950. At the time of its establishment, the honorary president of the association was the governor/mayor of Istanbul. Among its founders were about a hundred and thirty important figures from the arts, science, culture, and press as well as the bureaucracy and the business community. Its first title during the establishment was Association for the Celebration of Istanbul's 500th and Successive Years of Conquest.

7 It is noteworthy to recall the absence of President Celâl Bayar and Prime Minister Adnan Menderes at the ceremony due to friendly relations with Greece in those days.

8 The year 857 in the Hijri calendar corresponds to 1453 of the Gregorian calendar.

Having entered from the Eğrikapı on his battle horse  
Conquered Istanbul in eight weeks and three days!

What a blessed and sacred subject of Allah was he  
The sultan who conquered the Beautiful City,

He realized his biggest request:  
He performed the afternoon prayer in the Hagia Sophia!

And from that day Istanbul has been the creation of the  
Turk,

If it becomes someone else's, Istanbul should be brought  
down in ruins!<sup>9</sup>

## Islamists and the Conquest

For Turkish Muslims and Islamists, the conquest of Constantinople was a religious if not a hallowed event, dating back to the Prophet Mohammed's era, when he had wished and predicted it by a glorious Muslim commander. In a *hadith* attributed to him, the Prophet said: "They will conquer Constantinople. Hail to the Prince and the army to whom this is granted" (Necipoğlu, 1992, pp. 195–225). Reinforced by the fifth centenary and the new era of religious freedom allowed by the Democrat Party government, the conquest became the embodiment of the religious re-birth or "reconquest" of the city and spiritual values in general. The amalgamation of the end of radical secularism and the conquest celebrations was thus a constant theme in numerous speeches and writings of politicians and Islamist opinion makers.

The Democrat Party's rule came to a brutal end in 1960 with the first military coup in the Republic of Turkey, and the conquest and the entire narrative pertaining to it slowly became the privileged terrain of the opposition, political Islam. Political parties derived from the so-called *Millî Görüş* (National Vision), including its most recent incarnation, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), have used and abused the conquest politically for decades.<sup>10</sup> In the narrative of political Islam, which was not yet in charge of public offices during the 1970s and 1980s, the reconquest of Istanbul and the reconversion of Hagia Sophia became a sort of "promised land," albeit not *Dar-ul Harb*, a territory for which combat is legitimate against

9 <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/sekiz-y%C3%BCz-elli-yedi-eighty-fifty-seven.html-0>

10 The third-worldly Millî Görüş movement could be qualified as the Turkish soft version of the Muslim Brotherhood. See its founder's Erbakan's early writings in Erbakan (1975).

the *kafr*, the disbeliever. It was commonly made clear that the conquest would be “a spiritual one, not with guns,” the modus operandi being the “conquest” of the mayorship, which indeed occurred in 1994 with the election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to this office. Thus, the city would once again be the “Istanbul of Fatih,” the “Constantinople of the Conqueror,” and the “sad Hagia Sophia,” which was rudely transformed into a museum, but would be restored as a mosque.<sup>11</sup>

More recently, the Islamic narrative of the conquest was revived following the designation of Istanbul as European Capital of Culture in 2010 by the European Union. In the period before, during, and after holding this title, Islamist opinion makers took the opportunity to challenge its Europeanness precisely by means of their version of the conquest and the post-conquest era. There was an unresolved debate between those who had no doubt that Istanbul was a European city and those who claimed that its Europeanness was unnatural. Among the latter, the views of author Âkif Emre stood out. In his first article, titled “Which Istanbul is the Capital of Culture?” published in the *Yeni Şafak* newspaper on April 13, 2006, Emre claimed: “The European Union wanted to see a Hellenic Istanbul, not the city of Islam, as the Capital of Culture.” Emre then wrote two more articles on the subject in his newspaper and expressed his ideas on various panel discussions. His questions were plain: Was the European Union’s choice of Istanbul as the Capital of Culture intended for a city with different cultural codes and representing a variety of cultures? Or was Istanbul chosen merely due to its significance in relation to its European cultural credentials?

During those years, Turkey’s relations with the European Union were proceeding mainly in the cultural realm. In Europe, there were some who thought that Turkey’s membership in the Union would be intolerable, arguing that the differences were irreconcilable. They were therefore echoing Turkish Islamists, but in other words. These essentialist, exclusive, marginalizing approaches, which contend that cultural differences are invariable and remain incompatible, are blatant examples of Huntington’s theory of inter-civilizational conflict. Emre, in the above-mentioned *Yeni Şafak* article describes the Islamic credentials of the city as follows:

Istanbul existed ... before the Ottoman conquest; we inherited a legacy from Pagan Rome and Christian Byzantium. The encompassing feature of the Islamic civilization, which does not exclude the previous history

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11 Notably, those who demand that the edifice be restored as a mosque reiterate its 481 years of functioning as such, while omitting its previous 916 years as a church. The omission is deliberate and hints at the “irrelevance” of the pre-Islamic period since before the advent of Islam the era of jahiliyya or ignorance was dominant.

and civilizations, is also valid for Istanbul. The Ottomans established a new Istanbul following the conquest. They knew how to transform the civilization and cultural heritage [that existed] before them, without ignoring it or destroying it. They established a new and different civilization from a decadent Byzantine city. If there is a city called Istanbul today, it is thanks to the Ottomans and it was the Ottoman civilization that gave its character to this most magnificent city witnessed by history; as an Ottoman city, Istanbul has become the center of a new civilization on the top of the archaic remains of collapsed Eastern Rome.

He stressed the roots of the city's cosmopolitan character in the following terms:

The fact that it was a place for different cultures and religions, in other words cosmopolitan, as in other Ottoman and Muslim cities, is thanks to these cities' Muslim identity. The multicultural foundations of Ottoman cities such as Baghdad, Istanbul, Sarajevo, the cities of Andalusia, the Islamic cities of the Abbasid and Moghul periods, did not coincidentally become centers of civilization.

It is difficult to deny the role of the Ottoman *modus operandi* in the re-emergence of the city as a renewed imperial capital. Mehmed II's relentless efforts to repopulate the city and to strengthen its public infrastructure, as well as the place the empire gave its new citizens there, are clear examples of inter-civilizational blending. (Kafesçioğlu, 2009) The emperor became the caesar of Orthodoxy through his conquest of the city, thus determining the common interest of the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Christianity versus Western Christianity. Hence, he was both *Ehl-Sunna* and *Ansar-Al-Rum*, elder and worldly commander of Sunnis, as well as *Rumahoi'*<sup>12</sup> of the Eastern Christians. In fact, the predominance of Orthodox Christianity once more in Ottoman territory and the protection of Orthodoxy against the domination of revisionist Catholic Christianity, became imperial policy (Runciman, 1988, pp. 168–169). The next section deals with the essence of the Ottoman Empire vis-à-vis Constantinople and Eastern Orthodoxy following the conquest.

There is little in common between the "nationalized" and introverted Sunni Islam of present-day Turkey and the universal or cosmopolitan Islam of the fifteenth century, even from the standpoint of conquest. There is no relation between the Ottomans' treatment of other civilizations, mentioned by

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12 See note 2.

Emre, and today's political Islam, which categorically excludes anyone who is not a Sunni Muslim. These are two contrasting if not conflicting views, in terms of inclusiveness. Konstantiniyye was indeed Ottoman whereas Istanbul is still not Turkish. Similarly, the claim of the leading political Islamist, Erdoğan, that he is the direct successor of Mehmed II, but dismisses Byzantine antiquities as "pottery,"<sup>13</sup> seems odd in light of the fact that Mehmed II had a completely different approach to his successors. Actually, Turkish political Islam still aims to conquer the city, as seen in the efforts to Islamize and de-westernize the population and the landscape. Present-day conquering Turks' fondness for idioms and themes around "Istanbul," "conquest," "conqueror," and "1453," their zeal to rebuild the entire landscape with concrete to the detriment of anything "antique" or "ancient," including the edifices of the early republican era, contradict the preservation-minded and respectful approach of the conquering Ottomans. We will return to the "reconquest" in the final section.

### 1453: Facts versus Tales

In Ferrara, the Holy See, confident of its prepotency, took the opportunity of Byzantium's weaknesses to impose a spiritual union with the Second Rome by ending the schism of 1054. The deal was instantly rejected by anti-unionists in Constantinople, led by the future Ecumenical Patriarch, Gennadios II Scholarios, who was subsequently appointed by Mehmed II as head of the Great Church in 1454 immediately after the conquest of the city (Konortas, 1985). This was because, unlike Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos who reluctantly accepted the Ferrara covenant, the Great Church favored sustainability of the faith over survival of the Byzantine Empire.

According to the chronicler Michalis Dukas, it was the *megadoux* (grand duke) Lucas Notaras who, before the besieged ramparts, summed up this fundamental tension in the following terms: "Better to see the Turkish turban in the city than the Roman mitre!" This was to the dismay of the Western vision which since 1453 had deliberately maintained a projected unity between the two credos of Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Constantinopolitan Orthodoxy, in the face of the common enemy, the Turk. The Byzantine Empire was just as different as the Ottoman vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism and Western Catholic polities. After all, the Greek terms "latinocracy," "francocracy," and "venetocracy" had existed before "turkocracy." The reign of the Byzantines

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13 In 2011, during major construction work remnants of Theodosius Harbor were discovered. Angered by the insistence of archeologists to save them and impatient at the delays, Erdoğan, belittled the findings as "pottery." See <http://kentvedemiryolu.com/yenikapinincanak-comlekleri/>

ceased in the lands inhabited by Greeks following the Ottoman takeover. Similarly, following the rise of the Ottoman Empire and especially the conquest of Constantinople, Catholic powers had been striving to instill slogans such as: “Byzantine harmony versus Muslim chaos,” and “Wealth and opulence versus a system of raids and plunder,” thus feeding images of rupture that had replaced a supposed lost paradise. Such contrasts overlooked the fact that the Byzantine Empire had never recovered from the invasion and plunder of Constantinople by the Catholic Crusaders in 1204. From then on, the empire was under constant assault, not only by Muslim powers but also by Rome for the unity of the two churches, as defined and dictated by Rome. Similarly overlooked was the reality of a dilapidated and depopulated Constantinople which the new ruler immediately began to repopulate by bringing subjects of all faiths from all over the empire, including Armenians who were granted a Patriarchal See in 1461. In fact, Christian Orthodoxy was re-instituted by the Ottomans, as witnessed by the repossession by the Great Church in Ottoman Constantinople of Christian affairs throughout the territory of the empire at the expense of the Catholics, as noted above.

Protectors of Orthodox Christianity against the Catholics, before even becoming caliphs of Islam in 1514, the Ottoman emperors were monarchs for whom religion came second in their conduct of worldly governance. Caesaropapism was inherited from their predecessors, the Byzantine rulers. In fact, following the fall of the city, Mehmed II proclaimed himself *Qayser-i Rûm*—the Caesar of *Rumahoi*—in the mythical basilica of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople.

An emblematic figure of the late Middle Ages, Mehmed II the Conqueror reigned from 1444 to 1446, and then from 1451 to 1481. His stepmother was the daughter of the despot of Serbia, Mara Brankovića, and one of his father’s (Murad II) spouses. It is rumored that Maria might have asked her stepson not to convert the church of Hagia Irini into a mosque so that she would have a place to pray. After the city’s capture, the basilica was spared from conversion and survived; it is now a museum.

The sultan was a highly educated polyglot (in addition to Arabic, Persian, and Turkish he was reputed to speak Greek, Latin, and Slavonic), a vanquisher fascinated by his conquest, who ordered a translation of the sacred texts which he discovered after entering Hagia Sophia (Raby, 1982; 1983). The number of scholars present in his court was remarkable and he considered himself, like the entire Ottoman dynasty, a descendant of the Eastern Romans, no less than he was *Ehl-Sunna*, follower and servant of Sunni Islam. His amazement at the beauty of Athens during his four-day visit at the end of August 1458, shortly after the Latin despots peacefully handed over the keys of the city to its governor Ömer Bey, is legendary (Fowden, 2019).

Such syncretism without complexes was precious. Certainly, in accordance with the zeitgeist of the late medieval epoch it was expedient for challenging Catholic Western Europe, embodied by the pontiff and the crown of Spain. Thus, Mehmed II's son, Bajazet II, hastened to welcome the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula following the *Reconquista*, ensuring the shift of southern European Jewry's center of gravity from west to east.

Equally noteworthy is the approach by which the Ottoman Empire replaced the Byzantine Empire in its function as a hegemonic politico-military order, covering vast Eurasian territories. Thus, from the beginning of the fourteenth to the early seventeenth century, dozens of small sovereignties which had previously emancipated themselves in Asia Minor, in the Caucasus, in the Balkans, in Mesopotamia, and in the Maghreb by taking advantage of the weakening of the central Byzantine power, agreed, voluntarily or by force, to Ottoman suzerainty in its bid to shape the *Pax Ottomanica*. The Ottomans willingly acted as the successors of the Byzantines in regard to countless policies, thereby ensuring continuity rather than rupture between the two imperial entities (Balivet, 1999). Therefore, the conquest resembled primarily the means for a political and civilizational enterprise, signifying much more than brutal military might or a sacred crusade ordered from the Hereafter to Muslims. The Ottomans interacted deeply with the conquered lands, making cultural exchanges by respecting the specificities of the conquered, despite being motivated by the jihadi mandate as the standard-bearers of Islam (Inalcik, 1973).

Here is how an early observer of this era, Machiavelli, described in *The Prince* (Machiavelli/Constantine, [1532]2007) the necessity for a conqueror to interact:

But difficulties arise when you acquire states in a land with differing languages, customs, and laws. To keep these states, you need good fortune and much diligence. One of the best and quickest solutions is for the new prince to go and live in his new state. This makes the possession more durable and secure. The Turk did this in Greece. With all the other measures he took to keep Greece in his possession, had he not gone to live there he would not have succeeded because once the prince is established within his new state he is able to see problems as they arise and can remedy them. If he is not there, problems become obvious only once they are dire and can no longer be remedied. Furthermore, if he is present, his new state

will not be looted by his officials, and his new subjects can enjoy immediate access to their prince. This will give them more reason to love him if they are on his side, and to fear him if they are not, and foreign powers wishing to attack his state will respect him more. Hence, if the prince lives in his new state, it is difficult for him to lose it (pp. 10–11).

Constantinople has always been the object of lust. The Crusaders managed to capture and crush it; the Arabs tried many times without ever succeeding. The Ottomans settled there and were largely inspired by its civilization. The Phanariotes, for example, those large patrician families of the city, Orthodox but not exclusively Greek, were invited to serve in the Ottoman bureaucracy. They became active and influential in the imperial administration, including that of the vassal lands of the empire in the Balkans, particularly in the Danubian principalities (Florescu, 1968; Iorga, 1992. As for the Basilica of Hagia Sophia, its dome would be used as a model for the construction of mosques on Ottoman soil, to the extent that the architects of new churches would no longer be inspired by it—a reaction that continued until the end of the nineteenth century.

This was the case of the magnificent Fatih (the Conqueror) Mosque, built by the Constantinopolitan architect Christodoulos immediately after the conquest, and which obviously bears the imprint of Mehmed II. The building is at the center of a complex comprising, among other things, a hospital run by Jewish scholars and a madrasa for the study of theology, mathematics, law, medicine, astronomy, and physics, founded by Persian astronomer Ali Qushji, who was invited by Mehmed to his court.

Ottoman imperial cosmopolitanism was certainly not unique for its time. However, it had the particularity of wanting to embrace knowledge, whatever its religious or ethnic origin, and above all to adopt it without complexes: adopt the “Other” through subjugation, conversion, and voluntary assimilation, and adapt to the “Other”—the Arab, the Greek, the Jew, the Persian—by adopting their skills.

The predisposition of the Ottoman rulers to interact with the “Other” had deep roots in the art of governing, instilled in them by the best masters of Sunni Islam from the Sufi faction. The legacy dates back to Ibn Arabî (1165–1240) and his religious relativism, faithfully taken up a century later in the teaching of the Ottoman theosopher Hadj Bayram-ı Velî (1352–1430) and his disciple Akşemseddin (1389–1459), who was actually one of Mehmed II’s tutors.

The legacy of mid-fifteenth century Ottoman cosmopolitanism has had no impact on modern Turkey’s rulers since the creation of the Turkish nation-state, whether they have been Kemalists or Islamists. Similarly, the very

understanding of the conquest by modern rulers differs from the praxis of both the conquest and what followed in the conquered lands. Discrepancies and distortions are blatantly expressed by contemporary rulers who dare to appropriate that legacy in its entirety.

## The Turkish Ideology of Neo-conquest

The “New Turkey,” led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has been overtly Islamized and de-westernized. Themes pertaining to the conquest seem to have become the fundamental vectors of these two interconnected processes. A third process has also emerged, involving mobilization of the masses and militarization of public policies. Thus, Turkey today is attempting to implement a three-layered and interrelated process which encompasses society, politics, and the economy. Its underlying objective is clear: ideally, there should be no unconquered spot left, and, ideally, no people who are not Sunni Muslims should be living in the country or even in neighboring regions. On August 26, 2020, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Battle of Manzikert, held in Manzikert National Park, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated:

Our civilization is one of conquest ... in our civilization, conquest is not occupation or looting. It is establishing the dominance of the justice that Allah commanded in the conquered region ... First, our nation removed oppression from the areas that it conquered. It established justice. This is why our civilization is one of conquest (MEMRI TV, 2020).

Hence, military conquest is forcefully back in modern Turkish politics. Today, Erdoğan does not even feel it necessary to sugarcoat the ongoing invasions. On November 1, 2020, *Yeni Şafak* published a statement in which he proudly announced:

We had martyrs in Idlib, Afrin, during Operation Olive Branch and Operation Claw. But do not forget that each martyr means these lands are our own country now (Antonopoulos, 2020).<sup>14</sup>

Public opinion, both Islamist and secularist, happily agrees with the proposed model, both within the country, notably against Kurds, and externally with

14 A recent study shows how “the content of Friday sermons, which reach at least 50 percent of the country’s adult males every week, have moved from Turkish nationalist understanding of militarism and martyrdom to more radical, Islamist and violent interpretations that actively promote dying for the nation, homeland, religion and God.” See, for example, Yilmaz & Erturk (2021).

regard to irredentist wars in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, and conquest-inspired revisionist claims in territorial waters of Turkey's continental mass against Cyprus and Greece. Expeditionary forces are on duty in Doha and Mogadishu. The Nagorno-Karabagh war of autumn 2020 was of particular importance within the neo-conquest paradigm and praxis.

During the victory ceremony held in Baku after the war, Erdoğan recalled Enver Pasha and his pan-Turanist dreams, labelling the "reconquest" of Karabagh by Azerbaijan as just retribution for a hundred-year-old dream (*Armenian Mirror Spectator*, 2020). Thus, the Nagorno-Karabagh war was portrayed as a landmark military achievement which fully realized the New Turkey's conquering designs. The country has been militarizing speedily, both in the economic and social senses, and the local military industry, despite its complete technological dependence for the supply of key components, is becoming prominent globally. Two Turkish companies are among the top one hundred arms-producing and military electronic services companies in the world (SIPRI, 2019, p. 7).<sup>15</sup>

The fate of Hagia Sophia is probably the foremost symbol of this neo-conquering ardor.<sup>16</sup> The reconversion of the museum into a mosque was the climax of the Islamization that has been imposed on countless social and cultural behaviors that have become visible throughout Turkey. In a poll taken in June 2020, 73 percent of the population, among them, 90 percent of the ruling coalition's (AKP-MHP) voters, 70 percent of the opposition İYİ party base, and 40 percent of the opposition CHP base, were in favor of the reconversion of the Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque (BBC News, 2020). I would finally point to three significant developments, in addition to Hagia Sophia's fate: the ban on alcohol consumption, the mosque construction frenzy, and the May 29 celebrations.

The visual, legal, and financial pressures on the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, which are widespread in Istanbul as well as elsewhere, constitute a sort of revenge for the westernized lifestyle, and are presented as one of the milestones of the moral reconquest.

The mosque construction frenzy in the country is not just a matter of numbers, though the figure of 90,000 will soon be reached. The mammoth, and some would say, pointless mosque built on Erdoğan's orders on the remote

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15 "With the aim of becoming a major regional power, Turkey has been increasing its military spending over the past few years and is developing a comprehensive national military-industrial base. The two companies based in Turkey listed in the Top 100 benefited from these efforts in 2018: their collective arms sales increased by 22 per cent, to \$2.8 bn. Military electronics producer ASELSAN (ranked 54th) increased its arms sales by 41 per cent in 2018, to \$1.7 bn., while arms sales by Turkish Aerospace Industries (ranked 84th) rose very slightly (by 0.5 per cent), to \$1.1 bn" (SIPRI, 2019).

16 Following the reconversion of Hagia Sophia, the museum of Hagia Chora has been targeted for reconversion as well.

Çamlıca Hill in Istanbul is not only inaccessible to daily worshippers, but is an unaesthetic, impractical, and wasteful project. It could also be termed a provocation on the landscape due to its alleged rivalry or even enmity with Hagia Sophia. In other words, it stands as a symbol of the counter-conquest. Lastly, of note was the inauguration of the Taksim Mosque on Friday May 28, 2021, a day before the “Day of Conquest” and the eighth anniversary of the so-called Taksim Gezi Park Protests against the regime in that very neighborhood. Defying the “Gezi spirit” and every oppositional move, Erdoğan was delighted to be present at this momentous event.

The most eccentric if not pathetic example of efforts to impose an Islamic identity on the city are the celebrations of the 1453 conquest that take place on May 29 and which have become decidedly more evident with the advance of political Islam. The regime’s hegemony over local government and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s endless claims on Istanbul, have made “May 29” the main symbol of the new historiography. The festivities entered into a higher gear when Erdoğan became mayor, with a number of conquest-related projects, in particular, the announcement of the Panorama 1453 History Museum,<sup>17</sup> which was planned during his tenure. The museum represents the quintessence of the conquest, according to the regime’s distorted historiography, a sort of Disneyland glorifying heroism and, obviously, fake deeds. A similar “cultural” event, the movie *Conquest 1453*, has become a box-office hit.

Today May 29 is a legend associated with vengeance among a considerable part of society. The opposition mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, a presidential hopeful who is eager to compete with the central authority, proudly overdid the 2021 and 2022 celebrations, loyally following the pro-conquest propensity of the Kemalists. All in all, May 29 is not only a fairytale full of unhistorical facts, if not fallacies, but a very concrete and powerful event based on the reading, or rather rewriting, of a new history for the regime, as well as its Kemalist opponents.<sup>18</sup>

There is no other country in the world that celebrates the conquest of one of its major cities, an event that occurred more than five centuries ago—probably because these nations are now self-confident states that no longer need such legends; moreover, they have no doubt about their identity and

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17 <https://www.panoramikmuze.com/>

18 Further examples of Istanbul’s useless and wasteful megaprojects fulfilling the spirit of the “reconquest” include the third airport, the third bridge on the Bosphorus, and the northern highway, as well as an unchecked construction frenzy that the city has been exposed to for decades. Besides Istanbul, large swathes of Turkey have been filled with concrete and asphalt which have become the main tools of the physical reconquest. Similarly, national projects, like the national motorcar, the national aircraft, the national space shuttle, and national high-tech devices of all sorts, although imaginary, are presented to ill-informed but cheerful masses as “conquests.”

their place in the world. The New Turkey is unfortunately not one of them.

The reality check is quite painful: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's role model, Mehmed II, was a true world ruler, whereas he who pretends to the same title is no more than the leader of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood in the region.

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**Leonidas Karakatsanis**

**The Equilibrium of Loss: Memory and Politics of Reconciliation between Greece and Turkey**

Introduction

The long-standing tensions between Turkey and Greece, which have recurred in varying degrees of severity, are the grave result of mutual mistrust deriving from a long, burdensome history (Heraclides, 2010; Millas, 2009; Özkırmılı & Sofos, 2008). As in most nation-state formation projects, Greece and Turkey have relied on “mythscape” (Bell, 2003) that regulate memory through history teaching, national rituals, literature, and art, and through which real facts are indissociably linked with unreal facts (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, pp. 86–87) in order to promote a glorified version of national identity. In parallel with remembering, an imperative to forget usually accompanies such processes in order to obscure the “dark side” of the path to nationhood which, in many cases, has involved the annihilation or repression of those who did not belong to the national body (Renan, 1990 [1882], p. 11).

The distinctive element of Greek-Turkish relations is that the nation-state-building process for both countries, albeit a hundred years apart (early nineteenth century for Greece, early twentieth for Turkey), involved depicting each other as the main enemy, as the oppressor or invader against which the nation fought and managed to realize itself as a free nation-state. This mirroring effect resulted in what Alexis Heraclides (2010) calls a “perennial imagination” (pp. 5–30) that has loomed over Turkish-Greek relations. As part of this imagination, both sides extend and project their national narratives to a long, pre-national past of encounters between Christians and Muslims, framing them as episodes of protracted enmity going as far back as the 1071 Seljuk arrival in Asia Minor, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire in 1821.

However, the most “effective” aspect in consolidating contemporary national identities vis-à-vis Greeks and Turks has been the recent experiences of war, displacement, and loss that still echo in the memories narrated by survivors and are transmitted across the last three or four generations as lived experiences.<sup>1</sup>

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1 See the argument of D. Bell (2003) regarding the need to analytically disentangle lived memories from national(ist) mythologies in order to better understand how they operate in tandem to construct and consolidate national identities.

## **Displacement and Loss in the History of Greek–Turkish Relations**

The first decades of the twentieth century saw the demise of the last European empires and brought into being the nation–state as the predominant form of state organization. However, the emergence and consolidation of new, more democratic, and more ethnically homogenous states, which replaced the absolute power of emperors and monarchs over a rich amalgam of peoples and cultures, came at a historical cost.

The demise of the Ottoman Empire, in particular, saw one of the largest forced movements of people in recent European history. Approximately 1.5 million people were affected by the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey (Hirschon, 2003a, pp. 14–15) under the terms of the Lausanne Peace Treaty. The treaty ended half a century of ethnic strife and violence with an “unmixing of people” (Hirschon, 2003b), a practice that political leaders of the time envisaged as the only realistic solution to the tensions of the past. Before the displacement of Christians and Muslims that the agreement initiated—largely nonviolent and regulated by the two states—a significant number of people had already suffered brutal displacement, as well as extensive ethnic cleansing in these areas.

During the Balkan Wars (1912–13), about half a million Muslims were expelled from the Balkans toward Asia Minor, in a massive, violent, unregulated exodus with a large and mostly undercounted number of losses (McCarthy, 1995, pp. 184, 339). The Christians living under Ottoman rule in Asia Minor faced varying degrees of repercussions and displacement at different moments throughout a decade of ethno-nationalist strife: Although the extremity of the 1915 Armenian genocide (Akçam, 2006) has sometimes overshadowed the experience of other ethno-religious communities, between 1913 and 1922, the Greek Orthodox population of the empire was caught up in the midst of incompatible projects for nationhood, where one’s loss was the other’s gain. These populations suffered many instances of ethnic cleansing or violent displacement, primarily in the Black Sea region (Sjoberg, 2016, pp. 37–39) as well as in Thrace and the Western Aegean (Erol, 2016). The period in question concluded with a bloody coda involving a full-fledged Greek–Turkish war from 1919 to 1922. This conflict exposed many non-militants to violence: first, at the hands of the invading Greek army which was advancing toward the heart of Anatolia, and then during the vengeful and victorious campaign of the Turkish liberation army’s regular and irregular units (Kostopoulos, 2007; Toynbee, 1922). This was a victory that ousted, together with the Greek army, much of Asia Minor’s local Orthodox population.

The experiences of death and loss of homelands, as well as of rape, captivity, and—for those who survived—refugee status, left an enduring mark on millions of people whose descendants live today in Greece and Turkey. The historical burden of this past of collective pain, exile, and loss has stood out as one of the major factors sustaining the mythscapes of competing national narratives of victimhood, rightfulness, and blame. The individual and/or family traumas of the past were incorporated into national narratives as traumas of the nation, which in turn fed nationalist hatred across the societies of both nation-states.<sup>2</sup>

However, the collective symptoms of such traumas were radically different on the two sides of the Aegean.

In the Turkish case, the main symptom was *forgetting*, or rather, a *forced forgetting*. Instead of active remembrance, the connection of the refugee populations to their place of origin in the Balkan peninsula became a taboo theme in the Turkish Republic. Forgetting became a political tool in a project aimed at blockading memories of loss (of lands, of people, of roots) in favor of a sense of belonging in a new ethnically defined territory—a Muslim-Turkish Anatolia, now Turkified and “cleansed” of the “enemy” (Aktar, 2010)—which was presented as the new homeland of the entire nation (İğsiz, 2008, p. 451; Millas, 2003; Yıldırım, 2006, p. 18). Connection with this land became the basis for consolidating the identity of the Turkish nation. In this case, the “unmixing of people” meant also an *unmixing of memory*, where much of the history of cohabitation of Muslims and Greeks in the lands outside Asia Minor was taken off the nation’s mythscape.

On the other hand, in the Greek case, instead of forgetting, the first and second generations of refugee families sought to soothe the trauma by developing structures of mutual help, followed by a vibrant culture of *commemoration* that met no objection by the state (Hassiotis, 2006, p. 44). *Hamenes patriides* (the lost homelands) became the main discursive theme that represented what was left behind, through establishing communities, villages, and towns but also forming cultural associations based on common places of origin of the refugee communities in Asia Minor. The vast number of places in Greece called “new this” or “new that” (with “this” or “that” being the name of the original Christian communities in Asia Minor), such as Nea Marki and Nea Moudania, illustrates this commemoration practice that dominated the post-displacement era. Similarly, the first generations of refugees from the Black Sea region expressed their nostalgia via cultural practices such as the

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2 During the twentieth century, these traumas were sustained and reactivated through the ethnic conflict in Cyprus (Aktar, Kızılyürek, & Özkırmlı, 2010, pp. xv-xvi), as well as through the (mis)treatment of the respective ethnic minorities who, until the end of the 2000s, were considered hostages in a reciprocal strategy of repression (Akgönül, 2008; Tsitselikis & Kurban, 2010, p. 8).

preservation of the Greek–Pontic language and the performance of culture and music that reflected the specific localities they had left behind, even at the village level (Hassiotis, 2006, p. 44).

However, for reasons explained below, during the 1980s and 1990s the discourse of *hamenes patriides* gave way to the more irredentist and aggressive concept of *alytrotres patriides* (the non-liberated homelands). This change deeply affected the third and fourth generations of refugee descendants, as well as their cultural associations (Liakos, 1998; Tsibiridou, 2007, pp. 133–134). As Hirschon (2014) explains, in contrast to the 1970s, “many Greek homeland associations [became] noticeably nationalistic and vociferous” (p. 37).

Similarly, for the Pontic Greeks, the preservation of their cultural and linguistic identity did not suffice. The group campaigned vociferously for recognition of their experiences in Asia Minor as the “Pontic genocide.” This campaign became one of the central elements of their collective identity (Hassiotis, 2006, p. 46).

Despite the radically different approaches to the traumas of displacement and loss, and the different “symptoms” they aroused on two sides of the Aegean Sea, the result was largely the same at the ethical-normative and discursive level: the dominance of a narrative where only the national self could find its place as the victim or a hero, while the “other” was depicted as the perpetrator or the enemy.

## **Reconciliation via “Memory Work”: The “Homeland” Revisited**

For different reasons, the 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of nationalist sentiments in both Greece and Turkey. In Turkey, it was the militarization and Islamization of culture enforced following the 1980s’ coup d’état, referred to by many as a “Turkish–Islamic synthesis” (Kaplan, 2002). In Greece, the main drive was the populist-nationalism of Andreas Papandreou, the long-serving Greek prime minister who, from 1981 followed two politically contradictory paths. On the one hand, he supported a broadly successful democratization and de-militarization process for the country, which had suffered severely from military interventions in the past. On the other, in order to unite and expand his electorate, Papandreou promoted a popularized nationalism by exaggerating the “threat from the East” — namely, the impression that Greece was existentially threatened by its Turkish neighbors (Heraclides, 2010, p. 116).

Amidst this reign of nationalist sentiments in both countries, a small, courageous, but vibrant movement for Greek–Turkish reconciliation was

born on both sides of the Aegean. Against all odds, the Abdi İpekçi Peace and Friendship Prize was established in 1979, and awarded to Turks and Greeks for their common efforts for peace in bi-annual ceremonies held in Athens and Istanbul until 2002 (often arousing the wrath of nationalists).<sup>3</sup> In 1987, Turkish and Greek friendship associations were established in the two capitals, Istanbul and Athens, while in the Greek islands of the eastern Aegean and many western Turkish Aegean coastal towns, local initiatives for building cross-national bridges of cooperation and communication began emerging in the mid-1980s (Bayındır Goularas, 2017; Belge, 2004; see also, Bertrand, 2003; Karakatsanis, 2014). The two countries neared war over two uninhabited Aegean islets in January 1996, but instead of leading to annihilation, the incident gave even greater impetus to the peace movement. Despite the tenuous atmosphere, it kept growing steadily (Karakatsanis, 2014, pp. 175–194).

Initially, peace activists focused more on finding common ground for the future than trying to engage critically with the past. The most dominant patterns that underpinned the initial activities of the peace movement were the promotion of cultural proximity in material and immaterial culture (from food to body language and expressions, and from puppet theater to family traditions). Shedding light on the peaceful co-existence of Muslims and Christians during the Ottoman Empire also became a stable discursive pattern (Karakatsanis, 2014, pp. 139–141). Furthermore, for some of the peace activists, it was political identity that brought them closer. During the late 1970s and 1980s, many left-oriented initiatives for peace emerged which invested in the common experience of state persecution and anti-communism that both Greek and Turkish Leftists had suffered in both countries (Karakatsanis, 2014, pp. 37–38).

This path to reconciliation came at the expense of avoiding a common past which was painful for both sides. It accorded with the ideas of the German historian Christian Meier, who has pointed to the dangers of digging into such memories. Meier actually suggests an “imperative to forget” as a means of promoting peace and understanding and avoiding the traumas of the past (see Assmann, 2012, pp. 53–54).

In contrast, a vast body of literature focusing on reconciliation after civil wars (coined the Transitional Justice approach) evaluates highly the role of a collaborative effort in “digging into” a violent past for a long-lasting reconciliation that shapes a new identity for the parties involved (Norval, 2001, pp. 190–191). Similarly, the concept of “memory work” has been presented as a tool with which activists, citizens’ groups, and artists can invest in collaborative “place-based mourning and care work across generations.”

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://turkishgreekfriendship.info/online-supplement-content/30-abdi/75-abdi-ipekci-peace-friendship-prize.html>

Memory work can “[motivate] the creation of social capital, [provide] a range of memorialization activities, [create] new forms of public memory, and [commit] to intergenerational education and social outreach” (Till, 2012, p. 7).

In the case of Turkish–Greek peace initiatives, it was not long before confronting a mutual past of violence and loss entered the sights of the peace movement, and memory work took off. This was done initially by engaging the local communities on the Aegean shores, where the common experience of displacement and shared history of loss became the basis for new affective bonds between Greeks and Turks of refugee descent (Karakatsanis, 2014, pp. 81, 122).

Some vanguard communities launched twinning projects between Turkish towns abandoned by Greeks before or after the population exchange and Greek towns where these people had settled as refugees (pp. 208–213; for a timeline of the establishment of such projects, see Figure 1). In most cases, the towns in Turkey were themselves recipients of Turkish refugees from the Balkan wars (*muhacirler*) during 1912–14, or those who arrived in Turkey after 1922 as “exchangees” (*mübadiller*) from the population exchange.

Some of these initiatives took the form of long processes of negotiating the past for the communities involved, which led them to confront the common past of violence. Eleni Papagaroufali’s ethnography of a decade-long process of town twinning between Nea Fokaia in Greece and Foça in Turkey describes such a course. The twinning project was a painful experience and was often contested within the community; it was fiercely opposed at times by nationalist circles but persistently supported by many who wanted to build bridges with the “other side” (Papagaroufali, 2005, p. 342). The entire experience, Papagaroufali argues, was “inherently transitive and poetic and evoke[d] connections with the present not by mere repetitions of pre-existing codes, but by the performative poesis of new somatic orientations and affective assessments of ‘the past’ —or of what [both Turks and Greek] Fokaeis call[ed] ‘local history’” (p. 338). This history of Foça—re-discovered now as a “common” history of both Turks and Greeks—included a relatively peaceful cosmopolitan past of Muslim–Christian co-existence, followed by rupture due to the dominance of nationalism that led to a decade of mutually destructive ethnic violence (Erol, 2016).

Before these civil society initiatives for reconciliation began, a visit to Turkey by Greeks usually took the form of a private homage to the “lost homeland,” mostly by first generation refugees (those who experienced the displacement or were born during or immediately after the events). Such visits were sporadic, family-based, or purely personal, and were aimed at tracing the family house or its ruins in “Asia Minor” (*Mikra Asia*), or collecting some soil to bring back to the elderly (see also Gintidis, 2008, p. 34; Hirschon, 2014).

They constituted a sacred, private, and sometimes even secretive relation to the lost homeland. Even if they did involve, as Hirschon shows, empathetic encounters between Greeks and Turks, these remained isolated instances of cross-national contact, with no wider social appeal. In contrast, as argued above, the cultural associations of Asia Minor refugees in Greece had become increasingly more nationalistic (p. 37) and, consequently, for most second and third generations of refugees, a trip to Turkey tended to feel more like a visit to “hostile” territory.

On the other hand, for Turkish descendants of refugee families, such practices were unthinkable until about the late 1990s. For them, there was nothing to be sought on the “other side” since all links with the family’s past had been severed and silenced.

Despite being few and small, the civil society initiatives discussed above continued to grow during the 1990s, until a stable pattern of cross-national communication and memory work had been reached. The practice of building links and networks through repeated visits was transformed into a political act—in the sense of challenging established beliefs of historical hatred and stimulating a political process within the communities, making possible a transformation of their relationship to their past.

## The Positive Spill-Over

In my book *Turkish–Greek Relations: Rapprochement, Civil Society and the Politics of Friendship*, I have argued extensively and, I hope, persuasively, about the significance of such civil society initiatives for the diffusion—when the opportunity was given—of a culture of rapprochement beyond the narrow circles of peace activists to Turkish and Greek societies at large.

The consecutive earthquakes that hit first Turkey and then Greece in August and September 1999 led to an exchange of disaster aid, which many had not expected. This reaction kindled mutual feelings of empathy, and “humanized” relations between the two peoples (Millas, 2004). The sudden popular affection between Greeks and Turks and the improvement and expansion of bilateral relations that followed, coined “earthquake diplomacy,” did not emerge out of nowhere. Politicians and civil society activists who were involved in the pro-rapprochement initiatives in the past were ready, and quickly turned the disaster into an opportunity for the exchange of assistance, investing in the popularization of empathy (Karakatsanis, 2014, pp. 197–203; Yazgan, 2015).

With the shift in the political climate, town twinning projects reached unprecedented growth (see Figure 1).

The spread of such practices that had started in the 1990s as part of a small vanguard of peace activists was now having a significant effect on the politics of memory in both Greece and Turkey.

In Greece, the result was the emergence of a new approach to connecting with the ancestors' "homeland" in Asia Minor for the descendants of refugees. Instead of the private nostalgia of "lost homelands," or resentment over the "non-liberated" ones, a new practice began gaining ground: a communal homage paid to the "homeland," co-organized, assisted, and supported by the communities on the "other" side.

Memory work was now offering new possibilities for mutual mourning and reconsideration of the past. Figure 2 features the village of Panagitsa in the Edessa region in Northern Greece, northwest of Thessaloniki, where a joint Muslim and Orthodox Christian re-burial ceremony was held in 2014 for the Turkish Muslim population that used to live in the village before the population exchange between Turkey and Greece in 1924.

The story behind the photograph tells of a Greek farmer who was himself forcefully displaced from his hometown (the Black Sea town of Gümüşhane) during the years of ethnic strife there; he settled in Panagitsa in 1922. He lived together with the Turkish inhabitants of the village for several years before they themselves were expelled following the population exchange agreement. The state then gave him a piece of land to farm: the village's Muslim cemetery. He was forced to cultivate the land, but out of respect for his ex-neighbors' ancestors, he exhumed and re-buried the bones in a different location. He then directed his son to reveal the new burial location when, as he said, "the people would return" to trace their ancestors' homelands. Indeed, in 2014, after a long process of collaboration, the local Greek community, together with the descendants of the Turkish refugees, organized the reburial of the bones in a separate space created for Muslim burials within the village's Christian cemetery (Inan, 2014).



**Figure 1**

**A common Christian-Muslim reburial commemoration service in the village of Panagitsa, Greece. Source: *Milliyet* 2014.**

In Turkey, on the other hand, the popularization of such affective exchanges, which had already begun on a small scale in the early 1990s, was boosted by the 1998 publication of Kemal Yalçın's book, *The Entrusted Trousseau: Peoples of the Exchange* (Emanet Çeyiz), which fictionalized the author's story of such an exchange. It related his visit to his father's Greek Orthodox neighbors, who had settled as refugees in Greece, in order to return to them their daughter's wedding trousseau that had been left behind. According to Aslı Iğsız (2008), this book "arguably, most effectively broke the 65-year Turkish silence surrounding the 1923 Greek-Turkish compulsory population exchange" in Turkey. The book was granted the Abdi İpekçi Peace and Friendship Prize for its contribution to Greek-Turkish amity that same year (1998).

After 1999, what took place in Turkey was a total reversal of the culture of silence and a flowering of research on the historical Muslim presence in the southern Balkans, the Aegean Islands, and Crete. The establishment of the Foundation of Exchanged Populations (*Lozan Mübadilleri Vakfı*) in Istanbul in 2001 was followed by the formation of several local associations of third- or fourth-generation refugees/displaced families in various Turkish cities. As a result, new links with a forgotten past were formed and intensified through

a discourse that focused on displacement as a shared—with the Other’s—painful experience (Macar, 2004).

Many wished that this positive atmosphere created at the civil society level during the early 2000s would finally infiltrate high politics in order to solve bilateral disputes, but for many reasons that cannot be expanded upon here, this has so far not been the case.

However, the work done between Greek and Turkish civil counterparts, instead of spilling upward into high politics, did spread within civil society itself. The Greek–Turkish rapprochement and the successful memory work undertaken contributed to the establishment of a generation of activists who were courageous enough to work on other taboo themes in both Greece and Turkey from the 2000s.

In Turkey, the incentive to reconsider memories that the Turkish–Greek rapprochement facilitated led the way to the opening of many issues from a troubled past, including Turkish–Armenian relations and the Kurdish question (Çuhadar & Gültekin-Punsmann, 2012; Kasbarian & Öktem, 2014). This was because many leading academics, writers, journalists, and NGO practitioners who had participated in the Greek–Turkish rapprochement efforts in the 1980s and 1990s had, since the early 2000s, shifted their attention to these new terrains (Karakatsanis, p. xiv). In 2008, these initiatives reached a peak when a group of intellectuals launched a campaign to offer an apology to the Armenians, raising the taboo issue of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Turkey.

In Greece, academic research and literature took the lead in exploring the national past through a self-reflective critique that included voices of the Other, as in the case of oppressed minorities (Tsitselikis & Christopoulos, 1997), as well as the pain that Greek nationalism had caused the Other (Kostopoulos, 2007). Literature and art became new ground for memory work, creating spaces for departing from the old type of representation of rigid boundaries between “us” and “them” (Gedgaudaitė, 2021, pp. 1–15, 95–221).

## Phantoms of the Past and the Resurfacing of Memory as Enmity

Despite these undeniable successes, for a peace movement, reconciliation work is far from a linear or conclusive path. The eruption of economic and political crises in both Greece and Turkey during the 2010s disturbed this positive climate. Many of the progressive segments of civil society previously involved in reconciliation work in both countries grew more introverted, looking toward their own internal problems: In Greece, it was an economic crisis that turned political (the debt crisis, collapse of the social state, rise of unemployment, and the emergence of the “new poor”), followed by the

rapid growth in popularity of the neo-Nazi *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn party) between 2012 and 2015. Even though Golden Dawn was finally outlawed in 2020, an extreme nationalist discourse had been normalized as part of the mainstream political agenda, and polarization between “patriots” and “traitors” had developed (Skoulariki, 2020). Instead of exploring prospects of rapprochement, relations with Turkey were viewed as a dogmatic confrontation with an enemy (*The Economist*, 2020)

Turkey, on the other hand, saw the reverse: first a political crisis, followed by a deepening economic one. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s growing authoritarian tendencies in governance since 2008 led to a chain of events, including the de facto abandonment of the EU-accession-related democratization reforms his government had pushed for in the 2000s. Then there was the collapse of the Kurdish peace process in July 2015, leading to the resurgence of the war in Turkey’s southeast between the Kurdish PKK and the Turkish army. In July 2016, internal political rifts in the state apparatuses led to a failed coup attempt. As part of a wider structural shift in Turkish politics, Turkish foreign policy underwent a major transformation to what some have termed “coercive diplomacy” (Kardaş, 2020). The political turmoil that all these processes caused fueled a growing economic crisis with a highly damaging devaluation of the Turkish lira. Instability and a reversion to nationalist rhetoric became the norm.

These shifts, in both Greece and Turkey, revived the ghost of Greek–Turkish crises from their forgotten past. In fact, since 2015, the burden of history and memory has appeared once again at the epicenter of a negative trend in Greek–Turkish relations. As a result of inflammatory pronouncements, tainted by militarist nationalism, by state officials regarding past atrocities of one nation against the other, new flashpoints arose while dangerous military encounters began taking place in the Aegean. Previously marginal voices of nationalist circles, which had been subdued by the popularization of the rapprochement atmosphere since 1999, were gaining ground again in both Greece and Turkey.

In Turkey, especially, a revisionist approach to the settlement of Greek–Turkish borders began trickling out of a narrow and marginal circle of nationalists until it occupied the mainstream political agenda: A Turkish version of the “non-liberated homelands” discourse, pointing to many of the Greek islands of the eastern Aegean as “wrongfully given to Greece in 1922” is being promoted by the MHP Party, AKP’s extreme nationalist ally in government (MHP II Başkanı Alıcık, 2020).

## In Lieu of a Conclusion: The Equilibrium of Loss

Views regarding the burden suffered by Greeks and Turks as the result of their history of conflict usually differ sharply. As expected, each side focuses mostly on the suffering of its own people by downplaying the instances when their own side was the perpetrator. Whenever tensions rise in Greek–Turkish relations, this sharp asymmetry in the politics of memory resurfaces. Even within the terrain of critical academic literature, opinions differ regarding the symmetry or asymmetry of the experience of something as traumatic as a populations exchange.<sup>4</sup>

However once one takes the necessary step to examine the Greek–Turkish conflict comparatively, within the wider history of the region, it becomes clear that Greeks and Turks are heirs to a unique legacy: The violence they exerted against each other, their pains and losses, but also their past of peaceful co-existence and friendship, all maintain a peculiar *equilibrium*. Since the late 1970s, historians on both sides of the Aegean have unearthed historical evidence that challenges biased perspectives and presents a more critical picture beyond the perpetrator/victim dynamic (Millas, 2009, pp. 103–106). The result has been a revision of history and national self-image wherein each nation appears both as victim *and* perpetrator. Since the 1990s, the past violence between Turks and Greeks was reconsidered in tandem via common historical projects and research. What was missing until the late 1990s, however, were the conditions for such knowledge to diffuse into the societies at large. As I have tried to show, the Turkish–Greek movement for peace and friendship that emerged during the 1980s and peaked between 1996 and the mid-2000s was vital for creating and advancing such conditions. The effects of memory work done at the civil society level has meant that a new perspective for looking at this difficult past via an *equilibrium of loss* has been established. As I have argued elsewhere, memory work has offered “an affective balance of empathy” between Greeks and Turks (Karakatsanis, 2016).

As long as both [Greeks and Turks] take the brave step of self-reflection, [they] share the tragic “luxury” of having balanceable collective narratives when talking about memories of displacement and loss: the ethnic cleansing of Muslims during the Greek revolution of 1821 in the

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4 Renée Hirschon, for instance, points out a number of asymmetries in the way the experiences of population exchanges have been incorporated into the socio-political life of the two countries (Hirschon, 2014, pp. 32–37). Aslı İğsız, on the other hand, focuses on the symmetrical aspect of the experience deriving from the fact that the burden imposed on both communities was a result of a mutually agreed-upon project for unmixing, based on the consensual aspect upon which it was elaborated, via the agreement and collaboration of the two states (İğsız, 2008, p. 458).

Peloponnese alongside the massacres by the Ottoman and Egyptian armies; the displacement of the Muslims of Thessaly and Macedonia alongside the violent exodus of the Orthodox population of Anatolia; the brutalities of the occupying Greek forces during 1919–1922 alongside the atrocities of the Turkish irregulars pushing Greeks out of the coastal region of Asia Minor (p. 14).

My closing argument is that despite the recently fueled tensions in Greek–Turkish relations, the memory work undertaken during the last three decades in the spheres of civil society initiatives, academic research, literature, and art has been an indispensable tool for creating safeguards against the generalization of nationalist passions in Greece and Turkey. There are now more people “out there” who are aware of Self and Other in more critical terms than they were in the past, and who can raise their voices against a culture of confrontation and conflict. What we need is the re-activation of the spirit that brought activists, citizens, politicians, and artists from both Greece and Turkey in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s to unite their voices against nationalist chauvinism. We also need the replication of forms of action that worked well in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the creation of new ones that will better penetrate the societies at large.

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# Markus J. Prutsch

## History, Memory, and Politics of the Past: A European Perspective<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Recent developments around the globe suggest that we are facing a re-ideologization of history and a visible resurgence of “politics of the past” on the political stage: the Black Lives Matter movement and the reactions it provoked; the “1776 Project” initiated by the Trump administration in the United States and discontinued by his successor<sup>2</sup>; the ambitions to foster a more national(istic) public understanding of history through corresponding education policies and other means in many countries, including several EU member states such as Poland, but also political attempts even in Germany to challenge the country’s long-established critical remembrance culture, with the horrors of the Holocaust as its cornerstone,<sup>3</sup> may all be quoted as examples in this respect. The most recent and at the same time most troubling case for the political (ab)use of history are the attempts by the Kremlin to prepare and justify Russia’s aggression against Ukraine by means of a radical historical-cultural revisionism, denying Ukraine both state- and nationhood.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, while we are witnessing a renaissance of history as an instrument of power politics and a tool to even legitimize war and the full-scale invasion of another country, it is fair to say that history has never been separated from politics and was ever-present, though perhaps not always so blatantly. This is not particularly surprising, considering that history, and especially

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- 1 The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. Special thanks for her assistance in editing the first version of the article go to Aoife Lawlor.
  - 2 It speaks for the eminently political character of the 1776 Commission that President Joe Biden dissolved it on January 20, 2021, hours after his inauguration, by means of an executive order. The report of the Commission is archived under <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/1776-commission-takes-historic-scholarly-step-restore-understanding-greatness-american-founding/>.
  - 3 The right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), in particular, has been active in advocating a shift away from Germany’s traditional remembrance culture, including relativizing the importance of National Socialism for the country’s history. In 2018, for example, then leader of the AfD, Alexander Gauland, qualified National Socialism by stating that “Hitler and the Nazis are just a speck of bird poop in more than 1,000 years of successful German history” (*Hitler und die Nazis sind nur ein Vogelschiss in über 1000 Jahren erfolgreicher deutscher Geschichte*).
  - 4 See, for example, Kuzio (2022). In addition, the legal prosecution of MEMORIAL International in Russia can be seen in this wider context of Putin’s fostering of a monolithic understanding of Russia’s past as one of grandeur and heroism in the face of a foreign threat, in which critical dealings with history and the Stalinist past in particular are unwanted, and not even perceived as dangerous.

memory thereof, is a powerful tool of community building, in that it helps to capture and organize the past, provides a sense of purpose and stability for the present, and suggests the possibility of a common future.

However, nurturing “historical memory” has proven to be an intrinsically constructivist and difficult endeavor. As a collective act aimed at a common “understanding” of the past by remembering—and, indeed, also forgetting—specific elements, historical memory is not necessarily about reflecting “historical realities,” let alone “historical truth.” Rather, historical memory as a specific form of collective memory always incorporates a distinct degree of subjectivity, given that the choice of *what* and *how* to remember necessarily involves value judgements. Accordingly, historical memory by nature has a functional role, especially in political contexts.

At the same time, it can be argued that actively referencing and deliberating on “history” in the political realm is a *sine qua non* for any political system, since construing the present without any reference to the past is hardly conceivable. The question is thus less *whether* historical memory is an object of politics; rather, in which way and with what actual ambitions; and how prepared are policy makers to deviate from the established standards and rules of history as an academic discipline committed to objectivity and the reliance on facts.<sup>5</sup> Some policy makers clearly have few scruples in this regard, and deliberately misconstrue or actively falsify history in order to achieve a desired political effect—especially those who have internalized George Orwell’s dictum from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell, 2008 [1949], Part 3 [2], p. 260).

This quote aptly summarizes both history’s susceptibility to politicization and instrumentalization and the obligation that rests upon any politician, not only to responsibly handle the present and future, but also to sensibly deal with the past. The European political sphere is no exception here, though collective historical memory at this supranational level is confronted with specific challenges.

In what follows, the objective is to:

1. outline the challenges of a pan-European historical memory, and present, past, and current memory policies of the European Union and its predecessors;
2. on this basis, examine existing dilemmas and shortcomings of European memory policies, and outline possible avenues for development.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Pierre Nora once characterized the difference between memory and history as follows: “Memory separates, history unites” (Nora, 2001, p. 686).

6 The central arguments presented below have been outlined previously in Prutsch (2015) and Prutsch (2017).

## EUropean Memory Policies<sup>7</sup>

In Europe, with its diverse and in many respects divisive history, the issue of a common historical memory has proved particularly complex and controversial: on the one hand, due to the sheer pluralism of existing historical-cultural experiences that must be reconciled at the European level; and on the other, due to the fact that collective historical memory is traditionally closely intertwined with individual state- or nation-building processes and cannot easily be transplanted to a supranational level.

The close interlinkage of nation (state) and collective historical memory is manifested as follows:

1. A mostly positive interdependence of historical memory and the respective nation (or nation-building), in particular, exists in such a way that certain events of the past are considered central points of reference of national development or, less often, certain negative or even traumatic experiences of the past serve as points of contrast to the present or justify contemporary actions.
2. Historical memory tends to be focused on specific moments of the past, rather than on "history" in all its intricacies. This allows for a wider audience to be addressed, but unduly simplifies and "essentializes" national history.
3. In this connection, national historical memory tends to elevate one's own history and to create myths around it, by means of which a nation's past becomes a quasi-sacred object.

At the same time, due to persisting cultural, social, and educational differences, which are often covered merely by the rhetoric of "community" and "one nation," forging a historical memory becomes a difficult task at the national level. In a supranational context such as the European, the perception of the past is even more heterogeneous, and the difficulties of forming a collective memory, or even just determining common historical reference points, multiply.

Policy makers are thus left with essentially three tangible options as regards a "European historical memory":

1. acknowledging the diversity and parallelism of national remembrance cultures, without any far-reaching ambitions of having a common European historical memory;
2. promoting a common European memory based on large topoi such as "freedom" and "democracy," with a relatively non-binding character, but accordingly fewer implementation obstacles;

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<sup>7</sup> I would prefer to stick to the (admittedly unusual) "EUropean," in order to emphasize that the focus is on the EU, and not Europe in a geographical sense.

3. promoting a collective European memory based on clearly defined historical landmarks and events, with a more binding character, but accordingly, more implementation obstacles.

The policies of the EU and its predecessor organizations have wavered between these three options over the last seven decades, though with a tendency over time toward merely acknowledging the multitude of national remembrance cultures or emphasizing broad, overarching topoi, toward a more specific memory focusing on particular historical landmarks.

With a view to generating political legitimacy for the evolving “European project” and in order to foster a common sense of belonging, policy makers have focused on three traditional reference points of EUropean memory:

1. The idea of a common “European heritage,” emphasizing culture as *the* single most important element of a European identity, yet without highlighting any particular event or historical period, rather the idea of “diversity” being central. Noteworthy examples in this context are the *Declaration on European Identity*, adopted by the European Heads of State at their Copenhagen Summit in October 1973 (Council, 1973); the design of Euro banknotes, with the bridges representing certain periods in European cultural history being allegorical, rather than displaying actual existing ones; and the EU’s designation of 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage.
2. The horrors of the two world wars, especially World War II, which have given rise to “Europe” as a supranational peace project, in order to avoid similar culminations of radical nationalism, chauvinism, and racism in the future. The Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950, can be read as an expression of such reasoning, following in the wake of a long tradition of thought as far back as the nineteenth century that argued for a European (con-)federation as a means to overcome nationalism in Europe.<sup>8</sup>
3. European integration itself, the historical achievements of which function as a source of “self-legitimacy” for the Union and are corroborated, for example, by its official symbols (European flag, European anthem, and Europe Day).

What can be witnessed since the late 1990s is that these traditional reference points have been complemented by two more specific ones: memory of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and that of twentieth-century totalitarianism—in particular National Socialism and Stalinism—on the other. It is not by chance that attempts to arrive at a more binding definition of what a “European historical memory” should consist of, thus imitating practices of remembrance policies at the national level, coincided with the preparations

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<sup>8</sup> Cf., for example, Winston Churchill’s famous call for a “United States of Europe” in a speech at the University of Zurich on September 19, 1946.

for and then implementation of the so-called “Eastern enlargement” (2004 and 2007), but also the failure of the ambitious “Constitution for Europe” project, the deathblow to which was dealt by the rejection of the draft text in France and the Netherlands in the 2005 referenda. This could be seen as an expression of growing public disenchantment with European (Union) high politics, and proved the need for political action to promote not only European citizenship, but also European identity and a collective historical memory as crucial elements in strengthening and safeguarding the process of European integration.

In the wake of the failed “Constitution for Europe” and preceded, among other things, by a detailed qualitative study funded by the European Commission on *The Europeans, Culture and Cultural Values* (Commission, 2006), a new Europe for Citizens program was launched in December 2006 by Decision 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament (EP) and of the Council. Established for the period 2007 to 2013 (EP/Council, 2006),<sup>9</sup> it put in place the legal framework to support a wide range of activities and organizations promoting “active European citizenship,” meaning the involvement of citizens and civil society institutions in the process of European integration. With the overall goal of “developing a sense of European identity among European citizens based on recognised common values, history and culture” (EP/Council, 2006, Article 1 (2) (b)), the new program specifically aimed to “bring together people from local communities across Europe to ... learn from history and to build for the future,” and to make “the idea of Europe more tangible for its citizens by promoting and celebrating Europe’s values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past” (Article 2 (a) and 2 (c)). In this context, particular emphasis on remembrance activities was placed on sponsoring projects designed to maintain former concentration camps, as well as sites and archives associated with mass deportations, and commemorating the victims of mass exterminations and deportations that took place during National Socialism and Stalinism.

The Europe for Citizens program, 2007–2013, which was continued during 2014–2020 with a bolstered remembrance strand (Council, 2014), and has become an integral part of the new Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) program since 2021 (EP/Council, 2021), has set the tone for the EU’s current remembrance policies, which are characterized by overall inter-institutional consonance among the European Commission, the European Parliament, and member states as regards the (political) function and main content of a “European historical memory.”

Still, among European institutions, the European Parliament can claim

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<sup>9</sup> Two years later, the decision was slightly amended by Decision 1358/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (see EP/Council, 2008).

to have been particularly active in fostering European historical memory and defining National Socialism (particularly the Holocaust) and Stalinism as *the* main objects of such a common history, both before and after the launch of the Europe for Citizens program in 2007.

Following previous resolutions on racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism,<sup>10</sup> and in the wake of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust (January 26–28, 2000),<sup>11</sup> the European Parliament issued a Declaration on Remembrance of the Holocaust in July 2000 (EP, 2000), in which the Holocaust was declared a historical singularity that “fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilisation and must be forever seared in the collective memory of all peoples” (Recital A). Accordingly, the declaration called on the Commission and the Council:

- “1. ... to strengthen the efforts to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust, both in those countries that have already done much and those that choose to join this effort;
2. ... to encourage the study of the Holocaust in all its dimensions;
3. ... to encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual European Day of Holocaust Remembrance.” (Arts. 1-3)

In 2005, the European Parliament’s Resolution on Remembrance of the Holocaust, Anti-Semitism and Racism (EP, 2005a) reiterated the unique importance of the Holocaust as a historical reference point. Stressing that “Europe must not forget its own history,” the resolution declared that the “concentration and extermination camps built by the Nazis” were “among the most shameful and painful pages of the history of our continent,” and that the “crimes committed at Auschwitz must live on in the memory

10 See especially EP, 1994, EP, 1995a, EP, 1995b, EP 1997, and EP, 2000.

11 A joint declaration was unanimously adopted at the high-level Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which served as the founding document of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF)—since January 2013 the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)—as an intergovernmental organization. The declaration emphasized the importance of upholding the “terrible truth of the Holocaust against those who deny it” (Art. 3) and of preserving the memory of the Holocaust as a “touchstone in our understanding of the human capacity for good and evil” (Art. 2). The declaration called for increased education on the Holocaust (Art. 5), while expressing its signatories’ commitment to “commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who stood against it” and to “encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance, in our countries” (Art. 6). The declaration is available on the website of the IHRA: <http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration>.

of future generations, as a warning against genocide of this kind, rooted in contempt for other human beings, hatred, anti-Semitism, racism and totalitarianism" (Recital B). The European Parliament therefore urged Council, Commission and member states to promote: "awareness, especially among young people, of the history and lessons of the Holocaust." Suggestions included "making Holocaust education and European citizenship standard elements in school curricula throughout the EU," "ensuring that school programmes in the 25 EU countries address the teaching of the Second World War with the utmost historical rigour," and "making 27 January European Holocaust Memorial Day" (Art. 5). The latter was then de-facto realized at the international level by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/7 of November 1, 2005, establishing a special commemoration day for victims of the Holocaust (UNO, 2005).<sup>12</sup>

In 2008/9, the European Parliament actively worked towards supplementing Holocaust Remembrance Day with a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism. Preceded by Council of Europe Resolution 1481 (Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes, January 25, 2006; see Council of Europe, 2006), the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes, organized by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission in April 2008,<sup>13</sup> and the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, signed by prominent European politicians and intellectuals on June 3, 2008, the European Parliament's Resolution of April 2, 2009 on European Conscience and Totalitarianism (EP, 2009)<sup>14</sup> called for the proclamation of August 23—the day of the 1939 signature of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact—as "a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes" (Art. 15).<sup>15</sup>

The resolution acknowledges the impossibility of achieving "fully objective interpretations of historical facts"; it also declares that "no political body or political party" should have a "monopoly on interpreting history," and dismisses the possibility of "official political interpretations of historical

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12 The resolution on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, commemorated each year on January 27 in remembrance of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet Army in 1945, urged every member nation of the United Nations to honor the memory of the Holocaust, and encouraged the development of tailored educational programs about its history.

13 For a detailed report of the hearing, see Jambrek, 2008.

14 The resolution was passed in the EP by a vote of 533-44, with 33 abstentions.

15 This particular call of the 2009 Resolution was preceded by the Declaration of the European Parliament on the Proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (September 23, 2008), signed by 409 members of the European Parliament. See EP, 2008.

facts” being “imposed by means of majority decisions of parliaments” (EP, 2009, Recitals A–C). At the same time, however, the European Parliament stresses that “the memories of Europe’s tragic past must be kept alive in order to honour the victims, condemn the perpetrators and lay the foundations for reconciliation based on truth and remembrance” (Recital F); in addition, it considers “Nazism” to be the “dominant historical experience of Western Europe,” while Central and Eastern European countries “experienced both Communism and Nazism” (Recital H). The achievements of European postwar integration are described as a direct response and a real alternative to “the suffering inflicted by two world wars and the Nazi tyranny that led to the Holocaust and to the expansion of totalitarian and undemocratic Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe” (Recital I). It is maintained, however, that “Europe will not be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognises Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy and brings about an honest and thorough debate on their crimes in the past century” (Recital K). Accordingly, the resolution underlines the “importance of keeping the memories of the past alive, because there can be no reconciliation without truth and remembrance” (Art. 3) and urges “further efforts to strengthen the teaching of European history and to underline the historic achievement of European integration and the stark contrast between the tragic past and the peaceful and democratic social order in today’s European Union” (Art. 9). This is in the belief that “appropriate preservation of historical memory, a comprehensive reassessment of European history, and Europe-wide recognition of all historical aspects of modern Europe will strengthen European integration” (Art. 10).

The European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (also known as “Black Ribbon Day”) was further institutionalized by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s (OSCE), which joined the European Parliament’s call for declaring August 23 an international remembrance day for victims of totalitarianism in its Vilnius Declaration of July 3, 2009, urging its member states to increase awareness of totalitarian crimes, and the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council’s conclusions of June 10, 2011, reaffirming “the importance of raising awareness of the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes, of promoting a shared memory of these crimes across the Union, and underlining the significant role that this can play in preventing the rehabilitation or rebirth of totalitarian ideologies.” Moreover, it highlights “the Europe-wide Day of Remembrance of the victims of the totalitarian regimes (23 August),” and invites “Members [*sic*] States to consider how to commemorate it” (Council, 2011).

Since 2009, the day has become widely observed in the EU, especially in Eastern European member states, where it is seen as a historical justice

and recognition of Eastern Europe's contemporary history, which is fundamentally different from that of Western Europe, with Communist regimes perpetuating the experience of totalitarianism and dictatorship until the 1990s. The emergence of a stronger East European perspective in the European Union's political and culture—characterized by distinct anti-communist sentiments and the perception of the end of World War II in 1945 as not necessarily marking the dawn of a new era of liberty and freedom—has been further corroborated by Russia's increasingly aggressive and expansionist foreign policy since 2008, with the Russo–Georgian War, and the ongoing Russo–Ukrainian War since 2014 as its most obvious expressions. In view of ever more radical Russian historical revisionism and denialism, the European Parliament therefore adopted a resolution in September 2019 on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (EP, 2019). Therein, Parliament not only reiterated the importance of the European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism and called for remembering totalitarian crimes while condemning propaganda that denies or glorifies such crimes, but explicitly accused “the current Russian leadership [of distorting] historical facts and [whitewashing] crimes committed by the Soviet totalitarian regime” —seen as no less than an “information war waged against democratic Europe.”

Since Russia's recent escalation of aggression and violence against Ukraine, Eastern Europe's particular perspective on twentieth century history and acknowledgement of the need for a critical historical consciousness in Europe has undoubtedly become even more prevalent among EU politicians and the wider public alike. Still, despite the recognizable and increasing political will to promote a collective historical memory at European level not only with words but also with deeds,<sup>16</sup> the European Union's “politics of the past” is by no means conflict- and tension-free. Rather, it continues to be faced with a series of immanent dilemmas that merit closer examination before some avenues for future development can be sketched out.

## Dilemmas

The dilemmas of European memory policies are essentially threefold:

1. competition between different “memory frameworks”;
2. promotion of a teleological-reductionist understanding of history;

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16 Besides the Europe for Citizens program (continued as the CERV program), another tangible initiative aimed at strengthening citizens' consciousness of a common European past and legacy is the House of European History, funded mainly by the European Parliament and inaugurated in Brussels in May 2017.

3. a lack of incentives for a critical “coming to terms with the past” at the national level.

Competition between different “memory frameworks”:

Attempts to establish a European identity through general references to a common European (cultural) heritage, the world wars as the founding moment of the “European project,” and the history of European integration all proved insufficient for a strong, historically underpinned identification with the European Union to emerge, especially since such endeavors corresponded only to a very limited extent with existing national memory cultures. Accordingly, National Socialism, and in particular, the Holocaust as a caesura of Western civilization, became a key focus of EU discourses from the 1990s onward. But while the idea of the Holocaust being incomparable with any other historical experience became formative for postwar Western Europe and resonated well with national memory cultures there, the situation in Eastern Europe was fundamentally different in view of its Communist experience. Attempts to place Stalinist crimes and Communist terror on a par with the horrors of National Socialism in the wake of the Union’s Eastern enlargement were therefore a consequential step.

Yet while “aware[ness] of the magnitude of the suffering, injustice and long-term social, political and economic degradation endured by the captive nations located on the eastern side of what was to become the Iron Curtain” (EP, 2005b, Recital H) has undoubtedly been rising in the last two decades across the EU, gaining further momentum with Russia’s increasingly unconcealed neo-imperialist and Soviet ambitions in recent years, a challenge remains: In as much as there has been a discernible change of perspective and an increasing presence of Eastern European voices in discourses on a “European historical memory,” the parallelism of different—at times diverging and rivaling—memory frameworks in Europe (of which Western and Eastern Europe are just the two most prominent, but surely not exclusive examples) also continues to be a fact.

Promotion of a teleological-reductionist understanding of history:

The identification of National Socialism and Stalinism as the main points of reference for a collective European memory is understandable, considering that twentieth-century totalitarianism represents the clearest contrast to the idea(s) upheld in the “European project” since World War II: peace, freedom, and democracy, the rule of law, human rights and civil liberties, and the right to individual self-determination and pluralism. However, this focus proves problematic in that it forces a black-and-white view of history highlighting Europe’s “dark past” in contradistinction to its “shining present.” By presenting today’s Europe as a continent of noble traditions, institutions, and principles—indeed, a beacon of “historical reason”—an uncritical and

one-dimensional understanding of history is promoted that is detrimental to the creation of a critical European public sphere; nor does it do justice to the unmistakable achievements of the European integration process since the late 1940s either. Not by idealization but only by (self-)critically questioning the widespread narrative of a “continued success story” can a fruitful debate about the Union’s future take place in any meaningful way.

In addition, the focus on National Socialism and Stalinism at the European level proves problematic in that it essentially makes European history a post-World War I phenomenon. Historical complexity is thus unduly reduced, with earlier epochs and other historical experiences that are essential for an understanding of contemporary Europe remaining largely unconsidered. The problem of jingoism, for example, is difficult to discern without considering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and colonialism seems to be no less a “European experience” than totalitarianism, with far-reaching consequences for today’s societies in Europe.

Lack of incentives for a critical “coming to terms with the past” at the national level:

Somewhat paradoxically, essentially reducing historical memory to National Socialism and Stalinism—thus constituting a “negative founding myth” of the EU—diminishes incentives to critically question stereotypes and “sacred cows” of national histories and to address the issue of shared European responsibility for the past. The goal of “coming to terms with the past” at the supranational level necessarily raises the question of shared “European” dimensions and legacies of history. Needless to say, it is easier to recognize a European dimension if positive aspects of a claimed “European heritage” are in the spotlight, such as the Enlightenment. But if one assumes that the Enlightenment is not a specifically French, English, or German heritage, but rather a common European one, do not the world wars, the *Shoah*, or the gulags also prove to be “European” in a certain sense?

While responsibility should never be assigned in equal parts or lead to a reversal in the roles of victims and perpetrators, reaching a more critical and more inclusive understanding of “responsibility” for the past is indispensable if a “European historical memory” is to emerge—an understanding that does not consider National Socialism to be exclusively a German problem, or the gulags as a Soviet one, or accepts widespread legends of heroic national resistance to dictatorship unquestionably. In scholarly contexts, much has already been achieved in this regard, but at the levels of politics and public discourse, the appeal of clear-cut black-and-white schemes and unequivocal attributions of “right” and “wrong” is too tempting to lose importance anytime soon: they make it possible to capitalize on the supposed or actual guilt and historical misdeeds of others and to simultaneously evade critical

questions about one's own past.

The widespread merging of historical memory with morality proves to be a highly problematic undertaking, which creates a breeding ground for new conflicts rather than contributing to a critical review and reappraisal of the past. This also goes for the European level, where finding common ground and compromises is even more difficult than at the national level.<sup>17</sup> This leaves us with the question regarding what European memory policies—which are faced with the dilemmas outlined above and are overall less consistent than they might appear from the outset—can realistically do to help overcome the political instrumentalization of history and forge a European sense of belonging.

### Prospects: Towards a “European Culture of Remembering”

Like any attempt to collectivize historical memory, European efforts in this direction have clear limits as well. It has proved difficult to bring the plurality of existing remembrance cultures and traditions—national, but also regional—to a common denominator at the European level. In addition, there is a gulf between fixed historical reference points such as the Holocaust, which are provided with a quasi-universal interpretation that has “frozen” over time, and the dynamic changes in historical consciousness and priorities of memory that necessarily result from the alternation of generations. Against this background, trying to impose a static historical memory from above is doomed to fail, eventually. A remembrance culture that does not guarantee a sufficient link between the individual experiences of citizens, on the one hand, and the official political interpretation of history on the other, cannot be durable, and future European policies must be conceptualized accordingly.

If European memory policies should ultimately assist the emergence of an informed and resilient, but also self-critical historical consciousness, turning away from a firmly defined “remembrance culture” toward a “culture of remembering” seems to be the way forward. In other words: it is necessary to move the focus from the “content” of historical memory to the “process.” The central objective would be for Europe to actively promote and support a firm commitment of all nation states to “come to terms” with their own respective past—in the sense of an open process of social and political work on the past, not a definitive interpretation of it.

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17 One example of the difficulties of finding a common position at the European level is the failed 2013 initiative of the European Parliament to adopt a resolution on historical memory in culture and education in the European Union (2013/2129(INI)), due to a fundamental lack of cross-party agreement on what should feature in such a resolution; the initiative even failed at the committee stage.

Such an endeavor needs to be firmly based on common European principles and universalized practices, while at the same time recognizing the diversity of different national pasts. In other words, it would not be about a “homogenization” of different collective memories at the European level, but rather a Europeanization of attitudes and practices in dealing with very different and often conflicting pasts (Müller, 2010, p. 27).

Common European values on which such an undertaking could be built include human dignity, tolerance, freedom and equality, solidarity, democracy, and the rule of law; in short, the already existing repertoire of fundamental values that has emerged as the core of European integration and has also found corresponding legal expression.<sup>18</sup> Based on these values, the creation of open forums of discussion that facilitate the development of a mutual historical understanding and bi- as well as multilateral reconciliation would be at the center of the envisaged “culture of remembering.”

Such an approach implies not only the rejection of any attempts to rank guilt and suffering or to offset one crime against another, but also a preparedness to address difficult moments of one’s own history without reservations. Promising steps in this direction have already been taken, for example, in the form of the emergence of “policies of public regret” in Europe and beyond, in the context of which national political leaders take responsibility for historical misdeeds of their respective countries and express public repentance.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, an unbiased approach to history also requires the renunciation of “historical truth” as an absolute category. If even in the natural sciences one can only ever strive for an approximation of “the truth,” this applies all the more to the humanities. There may be historical facts, but there is no one single and universal “historical truth,” especially since the definition of truth always remains embedded in existing power structures and is subject to constant change over time (Foucault, 1970). What is considered “truth” today may well be considered “untruth” at some stage in the future, and what “the truth” is for one person is not necessarily so for another. Against this background, the authoritative and final determination of *the* historical truth seems a futile and dangerous undertaking, which inevitably has a polarizing effect.

Ultimately, it is important to recognize the potential risks of any policy

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18 These fundamental principles of the EU are set out, inter alia, in the preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Charter, 2012 [2000]).

19 On this subject, see, for example, Brooks (1999), Barkan (2000), Olick (2000). Exemplary for the “politics of regret,” not least for its inherent symbolism, was the “Warsaw genuflection” by German Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1970 as a gesture of humility and apology to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. A more recent example is French President Emmanuel Macron’s public apology for the mistreatment of the *Harkis*—native Muslim French who served as auxiliaries in the French Army—during and after the Algerian War of Independence.

aimed at a binding legislative regulation of the past and memory thereof, even if such a policy is guided by the noblest of motives. A more promising alternative than trying to impose a certain view of the past or special historical events top-down is the strengthening of civil society and a critical historical consciousness, in particular. Of outstanding importance in this context are education policies that correspond to the “culture of remembering” outlined above—a culture that cannot be imposed on citizens, but must emanate from personal insight and understanding.

Ideally, education designed to foster such a “culture of remembering” should achieve the following:

1. raise students’ awareness of diversity, both in the past and the present;
2. provide the necessary means to address national histories impartially and in broader (trans-)European and global contexts;
3. encourage young citizens to become actively involved in discussing history and to contribute to an informed historical memory.

To this end, a double focus is important: first, adapting existing curricula and teaching methods in such a way as to: a) break away from hitherto dominant national histories in favor of a more European and global approach, and b) enable young Europeans to develop a self-critical historical consciousness through open and discursive teaching formats, as well as offer tailor-made (history) teacher training that meets these requirements.

The European Union has neither the competences nor the means to undertake the tedious and challenging “work on history” for its member states. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly in a position to support national efforts in this regard, and to promote the above-outlined “culture of remembering” which seems best suited to satisfying the diversity of existing forms of historical memory in Europe, while at the same time providing incentives to look at them anew and question them, if required, by means of a common transnational approach.

To this end, the European Union cannot use only “soft power” to encourage member states to take action and exchange best practices in history and citizenship education, but should also draw on existing European funding programs. These could include the CERV program, which enables the funding of multinational history and remembrance projects, as well as the Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps programs, which support transnational mobility and exchange and allow for personally experiencing Europe’s cultural diversity.

On the basis of a critical (self-)reflection on history and historical responsibility at both the national and EU level, rooted in a reflexive civic culture that deserves this name, a truly European discourse on the continent’s past may develop in the long term. National collective memories would be an

integral part of that discourse, yet would be merged into a common European public space: rather than competing with each other, national cultures of remembrance would be complementary, and historical memory would be first and foremost a matter of civil, rather than political action.

All this might sound overly idealistic. However, at a time when historical amnesia and even historical negationism are rearing their ugly heads again, Europe must be able to deal with its history in a responsible manner, acknowledging achievements and positive developments in the same unbiased and open way as it knows how to admit and take responsibility for mistakes of the past—not just to enable European societies to learn from the past the necessary lessons for the present, but also to be in a position to turn more consciously and confidently to the future.

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# Gidon Bromberg, Nada Majdalani, Yana Abu Taleb

## A Green Blue Deal for the Middle East<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

The climate crisis is often described as a threat multiplier, where the weak adaptive capacity of a state or a region to deal with the negative implications of climate change can threaten stability and national security interests. In the Middle East, the failure to resolve the water scarcity challenges already faced in the region is a national security issue, that under conditions of climate change will be multiplied to a level that threatens regional stability. However, climate change can equally be seen as a multiplier Montserrat of opportunities, where a nation or a region could see the threats posed by climate change as a chance to reconsider existing policies and decide to work across borders, in order to increase adaptive capacities so that challenges can not only be overcome but more sustainable, equitable and prosperous results can be achieved. The 'Green Deal' concepts in both the US and Europe are designed precisely for this purpose, where to date Europe is leading the global climate effort by adopting a set of targets related to climate adaptation and mitigation, including zero total carbon emissions, investment in green jobs and infrastructure and advancing social equity by 2050. With the recent election in the US of a Biden-Harris Presidency, the US and EU will seek to return to working together productively to advance climate issues and this should help attract new investment opportunities including Arab Gulf funding towards Middle East Green Deal endeavors. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, many OECD countries have further added the term to 'build back better' focusing on climate adaptation and mitigation measures as their priority issues as a means to stimulate the economy and advance societal progress.

This report seeks to inform the policy considerations of Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian policy makers, and the understanding of international

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1 This article is a re-publication. We would like to thank the EcoPeace organization for granting us permission to publish it in this volume. In accordance with the republication agreement, this article is published here in its original form and without any interference, technical or otherwise. As mentioned in the introduction of this book, this report of EcoPeace has at first glance nothing in common with the focus of the book. However, this report underlines the urgent existential problems we face today as a planet and looks beyond false notions of national memory and identity and the aggressive policies they usually cause, especially in the Middle East. By finally replacing the centuries-old concept of *resistance* with the urgent one of *resilience* the report provides hence an alternative approach to memory politics and conflict in order to secure peace, freedom, and prosperity and, ultimately, save the planet.

stakeholders, as they work to meet the challenges posed by climate change in our region. The authors' assessment is that a "Middle East Green Blue Deal" – one that gives additional emphasis to the particular importance of water and water scarcity issues in the region is a practical, feasible and effective policy approach to an urgent challenge, and one that can serve to address conflict drivers, advance a two-state solution, based on 1967 borders and promote trust-building and cooperation in a conflict-mired region.

The recommendations in this paper build on learning from several programs and concepts developed and implemented by our organization, EcoPeace over these last 26 years. In the deeply complex conflict environment in which we work and live, and at a time of climate crisis, our shared consideration is that these recommendations represent solutions to urgent problems that are also "low hanging fruit," - practical and solvable issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict context.

Our "Green Blue Deal" proposes harnessing the sun and the sea to create region wide desalinated water and energy security for all; highlights the need and opportunity to solve Israeli / Palestinian natural water allocations today to achieve water equity; proposes climate smart investments and green job development around the Jordan Valley; and recommends public awareness and education programs that can engage the stakeholder publics, especially the younger generations, to understand the importance of diplomacy in the water and climate fields as an effective tool for conflict resolution and peace building.

This report does not seek to propose a holistic policy program for the Middle East covering all issues related to climate mitigation and adaptation. On the contrary, the purpose of this report is to highlight regionally focused low hanging fruit; opportunities that can serve as entry points for policymakers seeking to maximize fulfilment of their own countries' self-interests, spurring momentum toward governments creating their own holistic "green blue" plans and providing opportunities for mutual gain and dialogue on region wide integrated programs.

No less important, these recommendations provide relevant context for international community stakeholders, to weigh the foreign policy implications of their own varied programs and policy deliberations related to the environment. The EcoPeace report therefore also makes recommendations applicable to international community actors for paths that could not only contribute to climate security, cooperation, and development in the Middle East but simultaneously provide entry points for advancing Israeli-Palestinian and broader Middle East peace issues.

## 2. Background: Green Deal Concepts in the US and Europe and Local Efforts to Date

### *US Green New Deal*

In recent months, the US has seen its own debates around “Green Deal” concepts, with members of the progressive wing of the Democratic party proposing a plan formulated to tackle this century’s climatic, economic, societal and technological challenges.<sup>1 2</sup> Rooted in US President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal during the Great Depression, the Green New Deal focuses on issues such as stimulating the US economy by investing in environmental jobs, upgrading to more efficient infrastructure and power sources, and implementing climate adaptation measures. The ultimate stated goal of the plan is the transition of the US to 100% renewable energy and by 2030 cutting greenhouse gas emissions in half.<sup>3 4</sup> In addition and differing from Roosevelt’s New Deal, social equity has a high profile in the Green New Deal of the Democratic party.<sup>5</sup> While President-elect Joe Biden has stated that he does not endorse the Green New Deal, and it is particularly unlikely to be adopted should the Republican party retain control of the U.S. Senate, there exists a real opportunity to see policies associated with the Green New Deal adopted under the new Administration, including US return to and leadership in the post Paris Climate negotiations based on the “Biden Plan” for a clean energy revolution and environmental justice.<sup>6</sup>

### *European Green Deal*

Also in 2019, the European Commission released a communication that set out a European Green Deal for the European Union (EU) and its citizens on the basis of resetting their commitment to what they claim is this generation’s defining task – tackling climate and environmental-related challenges.<sup>7</sup> This new growth strategy aims for a just and inclusive societal and economic transition with the aim to “transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use”.<sup>8</sup>

As part of Europe’s endeavour to become the world’s first climate-neutral continent by 2050 heads of European governments convened in Brussels in July 2020 for a 5-day marathon summit where an unprecedented climate action plan of more than 500 billion euros was agreed upon.<sup>9</sup> This recent commitment to combatting climate change is the largest ever in terms of EU budget allocation and considered the world’s greenest stimulus plan, which

will be dedicated to the development of clean energy resources, stimulation of the market for emission-free cars, investments in budding technologies, and energy efficiency promotion.

The “European Green Deal” lays out the challenges and opportunities of transforming the EU economy and society onto a more sustainable path. It additionally recognizes the global implications of climate change and biodiversity loss and grounds its proposal in an affirmation of EU responsibility to use its influence, expertise and financial resources to mobilise and coordinate similar international efforts. Unlike the US Green Deal described above which is a conceptual document of just one of the country’s two primary political parties (the Democratic Party), the European Green Deal has become the official policy of all EU member states with a clear timetable in place and budget allocated to finance implementation.

### *Israel 2050*

In 2020 Israel’s newly appointed Environmental Protection Minister, MK Gila Gamliel, unveiled an “Israeli Green Deal” to address climate change and kick start the economy sustainably during the COVID19 pandemic and subsequent economic crisis.<sup>10</sup> The proposal calls for increased investments in the clean-tech and renewable energy industries, nature and ecosystem restoration, and improving environmental performance across various sectors with associated greenhouse gas reductions and job creation. The plan, deemed “Israel 2050”, unfortunately does not commit Israel to a specific percentage of carbon emission cuts. Rather, it puts forth goals and visions for a “transition to a competitive, low-carbon, thriving economy by 2050”.<sup>11 12</sup>

Notably the plan is that of the Israel Ministry of Environmental Protection and has yet to be adopted by the Israeli cabinet to become a plan of the State of Israel. The plan however was very much welcomed by the Head of Delegation of the European Union to the State of Israel, Emanuele Giaufret, and presented at the first EU-Israel forum on climate policy held simultaneously in Tel Aviv and Brussels in 2020.<sup>13</sup> In recent years the Israeli Ministry of Energy has committed to reducing carbon emissions by transitioning the energy sector away from coal and diesel fuels and towards natural gas and renewable energies, with plans to stop using coal for electricity generation within the next decade.<sup>14 15</sup> Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz presented a plan in 2019 to raise the Israeli renewable energy target to the Paris Agreement from 17% to 30% by 2030.<sup>16</sup>

### *Jordan 2025*

In 2017 the Jordanian Ministry of Environment released a national green growth plan called “Jordan 2025”. The plan is focused on a green growth

economy, decoupling growth from carbon emissions.<sup>17 18 19</sup> The plan of the Ministry of the Environment claims to chart a path for Jordan for water security, energy security, and food security as mechanisms of resource security and management. Like the Israel Environment Ministry plan, the Jordanian plan too is not a plan adopted by the government as a whole and lacks clear targets, a timeline and financing for implementation.

Government wide, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has conditionally committed in the Paris Agreement, to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 14% by 2030, depending on availability of international financial aid and support for means of implementation.<sup>20</sup> In line with Jordan's Energy Ministry 2020-2030 comprehensive strategy for the energy sector, Jordan is ahead of schedule and will supply 31 % of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030.<sup>21</sup>

### *Palestinian Cross-Sector Strategy of 2017-2022*

The Palestinian Environmental Cross-Sector strategy of 2017-2022 aims at integrating environmental issues and sustainability factors throughout the several policies and programs of the various sectors; setting out its framework to meet the national developmental goals and within the framework of 2030 SDG goals.<sup>22</sup> The strategy mainly addresses: low and controlled levels of pollution; protected natural environment and biodiversity and, most importantly in relevance to a proposed Green Blue Deal, climate change adaptation and prevention of desertification, that is supported by the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2016. Since the strategy and associated action plans have been adopted, the vision for cross-sector implementation still requires revision and extensive investments.

In 2012 Palestinian Energy Authority set a goal to achieve 10% renewables by the end of 2020.<sup>23</sup> So far only 3% renewables has been achieved of the total energy demand. The new National Renewable Energy Action Plan 2020-2030, set the target at 10% again constituting solar, wind and biomass.<sup>24</sup> For this to be achieved, approximately US\$734 million of investment by private sector, only in solar, are required over the coming 10 years.<sup>25</sup>

According to HE Zafer Melhem, Chairman of the Palestinian Energy Authority, investing in renewables is financially and environmentally feasible and necessary, however, they require certain prerequisites to be attained, including policy incentives to be developed in order to attract investors, present guarantees and overcome security concerns.<sup>26</sup> In a recent speech of HE. Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, as regards to a PA COVID-19 response plan, environmental sustainability issues were requested to be mainstreamed across the economy.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Rationale: Why a Middle East Green Deal

#### *Water Security Risks*

Worldwide, there is a growing understanding that we have entered a climate crisis. In the Middle East, the impact of climate change is predicted to be particularly extreme. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified the Eastern Mediterranean as a climate hotspot.<sup>28</sup> While the rest of the world is seeking to avoid a 1.5 degrees centigrade increase in temperature, the Middle East is forecast to see a 4 degrees increase.<sup>29</sup> Large parts of the Middle East will become unlivable for the long summer period. Latest research from Tel Aviv University indicates that in the Levant, by the end of the century, summer months will increase by 50%, with rainfall forecast to drop by up to 40%.<sup>30</sup>

The Middle East is already the most water scarce region in the world, and intermittent water supply is the norm for much of the region. In 2015, shared water bodies of Israel, Jordan and Palestine were being overdrawn by some 300 million cubic meters (MCM) of water annually, just to meet domestic drinking water needs.<sup>31</sup> If climate adaptation Green Blue Deal policies are not adopted, by 2030, the region will be overdrawing from natural sources double that amount just to meet domestic needs, threatening the very viability and sustainability of our natural water resources and jeopardizing the water of future generations.<sup>32</sup>

Today, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are living in an untenable water reality due to conflict, the Israeli / Egyptian blockade, overpopulation and mismanagement. Access to drinking water is a daily struggle for the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza.<sup>33</sup> Years of overdrawing of the underlying coastal aquifer, coupled with groundwater pollution and seawater intrusion, has led to irreparable damage to the aquifer and rendered 96% of the water in Gaza to be unsafe to drink.<sup>34</sup> With climate change significantly decreasing natural water availability region wide, if there is no change in policies and politics to increase adaptive capacities the populations of the West Bank and Jordan, are likely to face in the coming decades the same reality as Palestinians in Gaza.

The interim agreement on water of the Oslo Accords<sup>1</sup> allocated 75% of the shared ground water of the Mountain Aquifer to Israel, with only 25% allocated to Palestinians in the West Bank.<sup>35</sup> The Joint Water Committee established under the interim agreement has proven to be an inefficient mechanism for the management of water resources, driving the PA towards further purchasing of manufactured water from Israel to meet water demands. Though the accord has Israel recognize Palestinian water rights, what quantity of water would fulfil those rights, including access to a rightful share of the waters of the Jordan River, were left to be negotiated as part of a

final peace accord that was supposed to be completed within 5 years. Despite the demographic changes and increased demand, 26 years following the signing of Oslo Accords, allocated water quantities of natural water resources remain the same. Due to a combination of factors, about 15% of the Gaza population and 47% of the West Bank population have access to piped water supply for fewer than 10 days a month.<sup>36</sup> During the hot summer months, the situation exacerbates leading to many communities in the West Bank receiving municipal water on average, once or twice during the entire season.<sup>37</sup>

In Jordan, natural population growth and the flood of Syrian refugees, have cut weekly water supplies to residents of Amman by more than 50% from two days a week to just eight hours a week.<sup>38</sup> On the Jordanian side of the Jordan Valley, farmers are increasingly seeing their fresh water allocations reduced for the benefit of urban domestic water needs. With few other opportunities other than agriculture for livelihood, many rural communities in Jordan live below national poverty levels. Ecological demise of the Jordan River denies the opportunity of local communities to diversify incomes through tourism.<sup>39</sup>

### *Youth Risks*

Ecological demise, underdevelopment and high poverty rates, creates opportunities for extremist groups to brainwash youth to participate in violent actions that threaten not only national regimes, but as ISIS has proven, whole regions of the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel.<sup>40</sup> Pockets of 40% unemployment in Jordan have created in those same areas over 50% youth unemployment, resulting in Jordanian youth being the 3rd largest contributor to ISIS volunteers from the Arab world and one of the top five contributors globally.<sup>41 42 43</sup>

26 years after signing a Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan and the signing of the interim Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), not only has a culture of peace not been forged but school text books on all sides at best continue to either ignore the existence of the other and in some cases deny the very right of the other to exist at all.<sup>44</sup> Even on critical issues of common concern such as water insecurity and the climate crisis, an understanding of the shared nature of our environment and the necessity to work together to protect our scarce natural waters is rarely taught, with youth on all sides exposed to youth on the other side only through stereotypes based on fear and prejudice.

### *Adaptation and Mitigation to Risks*

The growing evidence that climate change induced drought, flooding, and other extreme weather events threaten Israeli, Palestinian and Jordan national security interests individually and regionally are at the heart of why EcoPeace

is proposing a Green Blue Deal for the region.<sup>46</sup> <sup>47</sup>The threats range from water, food and energy insecurity, to civil unrest, migration and full scale civil uprisings, all further contributing to the possibility of more failed states in our region. While the impact of climate change on the national security of a given country is much dependent on the adaptive capacity of that individual country to adapt to the changing climatic circumstances, the failure of a neighboring country to adapt to the climate crisis can equally lead to national security threats for all other states in the same region. The Syrian uprising is often cited as a case in point.<sup>48</sup> Israel feels confident that it has the adaptive capacity to deal with many of the threats associated with climate change, including water security. However, worsening water insecurity in neighboring Palestine and Jordan could contribute directly or indirectly to unrest and even uprisings not dissimilar to the ongoing conflict in Syria, with security implications for all in the region.<sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup>

#### 4. Climate Change as a Multiplier of Opportunities

Climate change could be seen as a multiplier of opportunities if Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian political and civil society leadership were to take a proactive stance on 1) cooperation to improve their adaptive capacities on water and energy security, 2) advancing Israeli Palestinian natural water reallocations, 3) developing the Jordan Valley through investments in region-wide climate smart initiatives and green jobs and 4) promoting public awareness and education programs - particularly directed toward youth - on diplomacy in the water and climate fields as a means of conflict resolution and peace building.. Through rigorous needs assessment, analysis and lessons learned from years of on-the-ground implementation the authors have identified these four programs as the low hanging fruit that can help produce sustainability and shared prosperity as a practical foundation towards a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East, in line with a two state solution based on 1967 borders and regional integration. This report describes in further detail the four programmatic opportunities and makes priority policy recommendations to our own national governments and the international community. This paper highlights the elements of both self-interest and mutual gain for the Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians to move forward on the political will needed to advance these programs and the leadership that the international community should take as part of the consideration and implementation of their own environmentally-focused foreign policies.

### *On Water and Energy Security*

The Water-Energy Nexus (WEN) is EcoPeace's flagship project for climate change adaptation and mitigation, designed to create a regional desalinated water - solar energy community between Jordan, Israel and Palestine that would result in healthy and sustainable regional interdependencies. Israel and Palestine would produce desalinated water and sell it to Jordan, while Jordan sells Palestine and Israel renewable energy, thereby enabling each partner to harness their comparative advantage in the production of renewable energy and water.

The results of a prefeasibility study commissioned by EcoPeace and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation to explore the technical, economic and geopolitical viability of the proposed exchanges concluded that this concept could indeed offer substantial economic, environmental and geopolitical benefits to all three sides, with strong incentives for sustained cooperation.<sup>52</sup> Once fully implemented, it would be a game-changer for the entire region; Israel would meet its Paris climate commitments to increasing renewable energy capacity at cheapest cost and see regional cooperation strengthened; Jordan would achieve water security at cheapest cost through the purchase of Israeli and Palestinian desalinated water and become a major exporter of green energy, to not only power Mediterranean desalination plants, but sell enough solar energy to supply a substantial part of total regional energy consumption; and Palestine in addition to becoming a water exporter to Jordan and perhaps the Negev in Israel, would become more independent from Israel to meet its water and energy needs.

EcoPeace is currently taking the WEN vision, researched at a prefeasibility level, to the point of political decision and implementation. Following years of preparatory work, three more steps are needed to set the stage for the substantial political support, regulatory commitments, and financial investments required for full scale implementation: 1) Demonstrating the WEN concept with a cross-border solar pilot project; 2) Conducting WEN's full feasibility and investment case 3) Outreach and education to policy and civil society stakeholders.

### *WEN Pilot Project*

As part of the Israel / Jordan Peace Treaty, water is already flowing from Israel to Jordan in a pipe that takes water from the Sea of Galilee, to the King Abdullah Canal and then on to Irbid and Amman. Following a billion NIS (US\$ 296 million) investment currently being implemented to reverse the Israeli National Water Carrier, Israel plans to pump up to 300 mcm of desalinated water into the Sea of Galilee.<sup>53</sup> The quantity of water supplied to Jordan can now increase substantially with not only Israeli desalination plants linked to

the national water carrier but also future plants to be built in Gaza. As to the proposed exchange of renewable energy from Jordan, electricity has never crossed the border from Jordan to Israel. EcoPeace proposes to implement a proof-of-concept WEN pilot project that will seek to establish this precedent by building a solar PV plant in Jordan, near the border, that will sell solar electricity directly to the Israeli grid.

The project will reveal the challenges that might be placed by technical and regulatory authorities to such cross border linkages and enable the governments and private sector to identify “the devil in the details,” providing insight into technical and regulatory challenges and exposing what regulatory and perhaps legal changes would be required for the scaling of energy exchanges in the region. These and additional challenges raised in the pilot could then be studied and addressed with appropriate solutions in a full feasibility study, shared with investors, and used to inform business-case development, commercial arrangements and formal agreements between the relevant governments.

### *A Full Feasibility Study*

A Full Feasibility Study will identify all areas and issues that require in-depth investigation, resolution and planning for successful implementation of the WEN. This would include developing alternative scenarios, considering environmental, socioeconomic and geopolitical considerations and options for decision makers and an advocacy plan targeting all stakeholders needed for successful implementation of the WEN Project. It will analyze and form recommendations for financial mechanisms for mobilizing public and private investments, commercial arrangements for sale, purchase and transmission of power and water between the three jurisdictions, the regulatory framework for the exchanges, and broader legal issues such as corporate governance, risk allocation and mitigation.

The full feasibility study will fill knowledge gaps, analyze political and other risks to potential investors and the mechanisms to mitigate them, and assess WEN’s social and environmental impact. A full study will assess likely market conditions in consultation with private sector actors currently active in the desalination and renewable energy market, as well as with potential funders. It will include a financial plan with fully developed recommendations, alternative action plans and priority investments, identifying the kind of finances needed and developing investment cases that show the economic sense of the proposed investments. As the security risks for such a large-scale project are significant, the study will also incorporate estimates of the costs of securing the infrastructure as well as related insurance costs. In addition, it will include a full environmental impact assessment, including life cycle analyses

of all options considered, and a thorough assessment of the regulatory issues inherent in implementing such a project needed to examine the legal and contractual issues that would be involved in project execution.

### *Outreach and Education on the Water Energy Nexus.*

For a project such as WEN to succeed, Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli national leadership would need to create an enabling environment for project-related investments, private sector investors would need to move forward on public private partnership/ private sector investments in WEN related projects. Ultimately, this would be best achieved through mutual Memoranda of Understanding by each government and discussions on purchasing agreements.

The WEN program has met resistance and hesitation on all three sides, due to concerns of dependency on another state and concern that radical elements might seek to damage cross border infrastructure, as occurred in the case of natural gas sales from Egypt to both Israel and Jordan. However, it appears that the tides have started to turn. Key relevant authorities are recognizing the advantages of the WEN program, with the overarching national security and climate security interests now more clearly understood and accepted.<sup>54 55 56 57</sup>

Most recently, on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Israel's Minister of Energy, Yuval Steinitz issued a letter to EcoPeace Middle East welcoming a pilot project where solar electricity produced in Jordan could supply electricity to the Israeli grid and help meet Israel's commitment to 30% renewables by 2030.<sup>58</sup> The interest of the Israeli Energy Ministry is to benefit from Jordan's comparative advantage of large land availability, which is lacking on the Israeli side. According to Israel's Planning Administration, Israel lacks 50,000 dunams of land to meet its 30% solar power targets. The new position of the Energy Ministry builds on an earlier letter of support for the full WEN program issued by the Israel Ministry of Regional Cooperation in 2018.<sup>59</sup>

The Palestinian Authority has undertaken serious steps towards diversifying energy from external sources. In June 2020 an agreement was signed with the Jordanian Government to increase energy supply through upgrading an existing electricity line connecting Jordan with Jericho, and further supply electricity to Ramallah and Jerusalem by increasing capacity and connectivity by 200% by 2023, funded through a World Bank program.<sup>60</sup>

In addition, business interests in Jordan, Palestine, Israel and internationally have come to appreciate the economic advantages of the WEN and are expressing an interest to invest not only in a pilot solar cross border sale but in the full WEN concept. The economic gains to all sides could be very significant. As an example, the EcoPeace study concluded that by 2050, Jordan

supplying 20% of the energy needs of Israel and Palestine would increase Jordan's GDP by 3-4%, with total revenue flows allowing Jordan to purchase Mediterranean desalinated water at quantities enabling Jordan to fully meet its own water needs and still be left with US\$1 billion annually.

Jordan is today producing solar electricity at under 3 cents a kilowatt hour, while in Israel and Palestine electricity is sold at 10 cents a kilowatt hour or more, making Jordanian solar energy not only more sustainable, but also much cheaper.<sup>61</sup> Jordan, on the other hand, does not have convenient access to seawater for desalination; with its only sea located far from its capital and main centers of population. Bringing desalinated water from the Red Sea is three to four times more expensive than the cost of pumping desalinated water from the Mediterranean coast.<sup>62 63 64</sup>

Through investment in the WEN our three countries can meet regional security challenges and utilize the climate crisis as a multiplier of opportunities. While dependency brings with it the political concern of domination, interdependency can be a stabilizing factor. The creation of the European Union was designed precisely to create conditions of interdependency and joint economic benefits and has turned into a stabilizing political factor in Europe. Just like the EU started as a very limited economic agreement between former enemies focusing on only two resources: coal and steel, cooperation on water and energy has the potential to be a springboard for broader cooperation, greater stability, and better living conditions for all in the Middle East.

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments

- The Government of Jordan could consider issuing the necessary permits that would allow the private sector to sell solar electricity produced in Jordan to Israel.
- Implement the Jordanian / Palestinian agreement to increase electricity sales from Jordan to the West Bank through an existing linkage to Jericho with a focus on electricity sourced from renewable sources.
- Agreements already reached between the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the donor community in favor of large-scale desalination in Gaza and increased electricity transmission from Israel to Gaza should move forward towards implementation.
- Desalination plants proposed to be built in Gaza, should be designed to meet not only Palestinian needs but include potential water export to Israel and Jordan, through linkage to Israel's national water carrier.
- Commit to undertaking a full feasibility plan for the WEN, including the creation of a tri-lateral commission to manage the sale and supply of desalinated water and renewable energy.

Priority recommendations to the international community

- Parallel investments currently made by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) should align with European Green Deal foreign policy objectives. EBRD investments in solar plants in Jordan should encourage cross border sales to Israel and Palestine. EIB investment in desalination facilities in Israel and Gaza should be powered by renewable energy sources, preferably sourced from Jordan. (See further details in section 4).

### *On Israeli / Palestinian Natural Water Allocation and Sustainable Management*

Twentieth century assumptions that dictated water diplomacy led the Levant down a path of conflict and competition over water. Last century the Levant was indeed wholly dependent on natural water and therefore Israelis and Palestinians were in dispute over how to allocate the scarce natural water supply shared between them. This was the mind-set of how water was negotiated in the Oslo Accords in the mid-1990s. Water was left unresolved as one of five final status issues because coming to an agreement over sharing scarce natural water was difficult and would produce winners and losers.

Today the advancements in water technologies this century, much led by Israeli innovation, presents the opportunity for Palestinians to obtain their water rights to natural water sources, without reducing water availability for the Israeli side. Depending on negotiations between the parties, Palestine could fully access its water rights, by increased Palestinian pumping from the three basins of the Mountain Aquifer, with Israel correspondingly reducing its pumping from those basins and increasing its own supply through desalination.

As regards riparian water rights from the Jordan River, Palestine like Jordan, cannot presently access their water rights from the river directly due to water diversion and river pollution. Here one suggestion could be that Palestinian water rights be sourced through increased Palestinian pumping from the Mountain Aquifer, or from the Sea of Galilee in line with the precedent of the Israel / Jordan peace treaty.<sup>65</sup> The ground-breaking work of MIT Professor Franklin Fischer further shows that from an economic and sustainability perspective optimal water management could take place through the creation of water markets between Israel and Palestine, with even greater efficiencies achieved if Jordan was also to be included.<sup>66</sup>

Israel's leadership in the utilization of treated wastewater for agriculture and the development of reverse osmosis desalination technology means that water is under less constraints as a resource. Presently 70 % of the drinking

water in Israel comes from desalination and half the agriculture grown is with treated wastewater.<sup>67 68</sup> The availability of large quantities of manufactured water, complimenting natural water, makes the fair share of natural water between Israelis and Palestinians attainable. Reaching a deal on water would result in more water in every Palestinian home, dramatically improving the lives of every Palestinian, and meaningfully benefit the Palestinian economy.

Compared to the other Israeli-Palestinian conflict “final status issues” of Jerusalem, refugees, borders/settlements and security, water is today the least controversial and the most solvable of final status issues. For the last 25 years, both Israelis and Palestinians have negotiated on the basis of having to agree to all final status issues as a single package. At the time of the Oslo Accords all five final status issues were seen as difficult and solvable only as part of a deal, where each side would compromise on each one of the issues as part of a single package. The failure to agree on all final status issues, simultaneously, has meant that there has been no advance on any of the final status issues. EcoPeace proposes a change in the policy paradigm that prioritizes solvable issues, like water, in reviving peace negotiations. This approach does not ignore the deep connection that water allocation has with other final status issues, such as borders, refugees and settlements. Both Palestinian and Israeli negotiators link water issue to sovereignty and borders and to the water quantity needs of refugees and settlements. The fungible nature of water as a resource however, means that water quantities can be agreed in a manner that takes into account these complexities and still represent an agreement to full Palestinian water rights, paving the path towards solving the other final status issues too.

Moving forward on water issues would create a middle way; improving the conditions on the ground for the disadvantaged Palestinian side through allocation of their full water rights, while maintaining Israeli water security, through increased desalination. Advancing on water as one of the core issues of the two state peace process, would show to the public on both sides that there is a partner for peace, help rebuild trust between the two parties that is today necessary to advance the other final status issues associated with a two state solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. No less important under a climate crisis, the need to act on water is more urgent than ever and its resolution will serve the climate security needs of both peoples.

Despite population growth and development over the past 25 years, Palestinian withdrawals of water from the Mountain Aquifer remain limited to the terms of Oslo II, often enforced through Israeli military control. This has created significant water scarcity affecting large areas of the West Bank, where municipal water services are provided in cities like Yatta, in the south of the West Bank, only one day per three months during the hot summer

period.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, due to its geological characteristics, most of the Mountain Aquifer's recharge area is vulnerable to groundwater pollution, and is degraded by inadequately treated sewage and unsanitary solid waste dumps, often caused by the limited ability to move forward in timely manner on projects in Area C communities.<sup>70</sup> An estimated 47 million cubic meters of Palestinian sourced raw and poorly treated sewage are released into the shared environment each year.<sup>71</sup>

The Coastal Aquifer, under the Gaza Strip, is in a state of extreme overuse. As a result, 96% of the groundwater is no longer potable.<sup>72</sup> Seawater infiltrates into the aquifer, and salinity levels have thus risen well beyond World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for safe drinking water. This situation is compounded by contamination from the discharge of the mostly untreated sewage of 2 million people. The continued blockade on Gaza and the failure to reach internal Palestinian reconciliation, result in the water and sanitation crisis facing Gaza being a core cause for Gaza not being a liveable place.<sup>73</sup>

Israel too is severely affected by the water and sanitation crisis in the West Bank and Gaza. West Bank sewage is carried by cross-border streams into major Israeli cities and contaminates the ground water of the Mountain Aquifer that Israel takes the lion's share of. A 2009 UN report estimated that 50,000 to 80,000 cubic meters of untreated or partially treated wastewater flow from Gaza into the Mediterranean Sea daily since January 2008. By 2018 it was estimated that more than 108,000 cubic meters of raw sewage flow from Gaza into the Mediterranean Sea every day through 9 sewage outlets distributed along the Gaza coastline, directly threatening the very viability of Israel's coastal desalination plants, which constitute 70% of the country's drinking water, threatening Israeli water security and national security interests.<sup>74 75</sup>

By not resolving water issues both sides are paying a heavy price that under conditions of climate change will further threaten the national security of both peoples. The COVID19 pandemic outbreak should be a wakeup call to both governments that sustainably managing shared water resources is essential to maintain basic hygiene standards that are in turn essential to the health and economic welfare of Israelis and Palestinians alike. Maintaining the status quo at a time when technological advances have altered the very rationale for why water was considered a final status issue in the first place only highlights that water issues are today being held hostage to other final status issues of the Israeli Palestinian conflict.<sup>76</sup> EcoPeace's efforts, towards achieving a fair water agreement between Israel and Palestine emphasize equitable rights and equal responsibilities related to joint management of shared water. 'Equitable rights' does not mean that all sides will receive equal volumes of natural water. Rather, it means that they will have equal standing within the

institutions for joint management and equal opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, criteria that indicate that it is not water but water management of all shared water bodies that is really shared.<sup>77</sup>

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments

- Give political support to change the all or nothing paradigm and agree to negotiate water issues first.
- Negotiate a water agreement to replace article 40 of the 1994 Oslo Accords.
- Create an action plan to address Palestinian water and environmental projects in order to solve urgent issues like water supply and sanitation in Gaza and the West Bank
- Create a Joint Israeli Palestinian Water Commission to manage all shared waters.<sup>78</sup>

Priority recommendations to the international community

- Encourage the sides to break away from the all or nothing political paradigm in line with meeting Middle East and foreign policy climate security priorities.
- Create a 'Friends of Water Group', as a coalition of states with influence on one or both Israeli and Palestinian governments, taking international leadership on the resolution of water issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the framework of a two state solution based on internationally agreed parameters.

### *On River Rehabilitation, Biodiversity and Sustainable Agriculture and Tourism*

The Jordan River Valley, stretching from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is a border area with a region-wide population of 800,000 people, Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. The valley's wetland ecosystem, the biological heartland of the region and one of the world's most important crossroads for migratory birds, is threatened by excessive water diversion and pollution. The Jordan River has seen some 95% of its fresh water diverted, half by Israel and the other half by Syria and Jordan, leaving Palestinians since 1967 without any access to river water and with its remaining flow polluted from Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian sources resulting in 50% biodiversity lost.<sup>79 80</sup>

Competition for scarce water, misuse of natural resources and lack of regional cooperation have led to the demise of the river valley and caused underdevelopment and poverty, especially on the Jordanian side of the valley. Due to the fact that the river itself is the border, rehabilitation of the river can only take place under conditions of cooperation. The climate crisis and resulting reduced precipitation makes rehabilitation of the Jordan River

and its valley so much more difficult today. With the climate crisis leading to further reductions in water availability and increased temperatures reducing soil fertility, failure to act towards rehabilitation will deepen existing levels of poverty and animosities that as described earlier could directly contribute to instability. Alternatively, a Green Blue Deal that sees the climate crisis as an opportunity to promote Jordan Valley cooperation can restore the river to a clean, fast-flowing body of water, revitalize the valley's biodiversity, and attract tourism and pilgrimage that can help diversify incomes and raise people out of poverty, not only for the benefit of the region but for half of humanity that sees the Jordan River as a holy river.

Our own organization's efforts to promote the rehabilitation of the river have borne fruit and served as proof of concept. Such projects have resulted in Israel releasing some 9 mcm of fresh water from the Sea of Galilee into the Lower Jordan River annually since 2013 and is expected to increase to 30 mcm annually.<sup>81 82 83</sup>

Though a minor quantity to be released compared to historic flows, it does mark a change in policy given that for 49 years no fresh water was released other than once in a decade flood year.<sup>84</sup> EcoPeace advocacy also helped leverage investment of over US\$100 million in the construction of waste-water treatment plants, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian in the Jordan Valley which are starting to remove pollutants from the Jordan River.<sup>85</sup> Also, an investment of a billion NIS in the reversal of Israel's national water carrier that will bring desalinated Mediterranean seawater to the Sea of Galilee creating opportunities to increase flow levels into the lower Jordan. From 2010 to 2015 EcoPeace, the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and the German Global Nature Fund convened stakeholders from all sides and completed the first-ever integrated Regional Jordan Valley Master Plan (JVMP) for the rehabilitation and sustainable development of the Jordan Valley.<sup>86</sup> The rehabilitation of the Jordan River would allow the river to be utilized again as the natural regional water carrier, meeting the water needs of all three populations along its banks, not supplied through human made water carriers on either side but accessed as needed from the river itself allowing other important economic activities to take place for the full length of the river. The Master Plan devised an investment strategy that would rehabilitate not only the Jordan River but the whole valley with the potential to raise the prosperity of the Jordan Valley from a GDP of US\$4 billion at present to US \$73 billion annually if carried out.<sup>87</sup>

Following the release of the JVMP, the Jordanian Government adopted the master plan on the Jordanian side, but due to outstanding final status peace process issues, the Israeli and Palestinian governments have refrained from doing the same. Given the political stalemate, EcoPeace negotiated

with all three governments the selection of particular master plan projects that were less politically controversial, to be advanced despite the political stalemate, as part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the three governments to enable the creation of a World Bank Trust Fund to start implementation on agreeable projects. Deteriorating relations between Israel and Jordan however and the Israeli Government's proposal to annex the Jordan Valley have thus far impeded the signing of a trilateral MoU.

EcoPeace, therefore, created a parallel strategy to work with the private sector, connecting projects in the field of climate smart agriculture with potential investors. Half a dozen such projects, including closed system fish farming, high protein grasshopper breeding, solar powered refrigeration for communal agricultural produce, and a palm fronds paper pulp factory, all led by local entrepreneurs, are several of the projects in various stages of seeing light. EcoPeace has secured financing for other climate smart investments such as installing solar panels to power a Jordan Valley wastewater treatment plant, improving effluent produced, so as to replace fresh water for agriculture with the effluent. In addition, EcoPeace has designed and distributed residential grey water systems in Jordan Valley homes to promote grey water reuse for fruit trees. All of the above projects focus on investments in the Jordanian and Palestinian side of the valley, with green job creation as a key objective. Local female plumbers have been trained to build and install the grey water reuse systems and climate smart agricultural training takes place for Palestinian and Jordanian farmers to improve water efficiency through the adoption of relevant practices developed on the Israeli side of the Jordan Valley.

In addition, plans for a protected ecological corridor, on both sides of the Jordan River between Israel and Jordan, have been developed. In cooperation with architects from Yale University's Urban Design School, a set of design ideas have been proposed to develop ecotourism, designed to provide opportunities for the preservation of biodiversity, joint environmental management, collaborative research programs, cross-border environmental education, and expand economic opportunities for regional cooperation in ecotourism.<sup>88</sup> A pre-feasibility study conducted by the Jordanian company EcoConsult detailed how an investment of US\$10 million in the infrastructure mentioned above, could draw over 250,000 visitors to the site annually, attracting strong private sector investment and significant green employment opportunities for local residents through eco-tourism.<sup>89</sup>

With the support of SIWI, a governance strategy for the valley has also been proposed to create a trilateral Jordan River Commission. A river commission would act as a coordinating body fostering cooperation around the Jordan River under the principle of 'one river, one management'.<sup>90</sup><sup>91</sup> <sup>92</sup>

A Jordan River Commission would help institutionalize long term and

strategic Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli cooperation around the Jordan Valley, needed to meet the challenges that climate change presents. In the future, the proposed commission should also include Syria and Lebanon as additional riparians to the river basin. The overall goal of EcoPeace's work in the Jordan Valley is to promote peace, prosperity, and security in the Jordan River Valley by promoting sustainable economic development that will safeguard and restore the valley's environmental and ecological values. All of the actions proposed by EcoPeace under a Green Blue Deal strategy increase the resilience of the local populations to not only adapt to climate change but by improving their livelihood reality on the ground, help create trust between the parties to move forward on outstanding peace process issues.

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments

- Move forward on the creation of a World Bank Trust Fund advancing climate smart, select, JVMP projects.
- Facilitate and advance permitting, where necessary, for regional and national climate smart private sector investments identified in the Jordan Valley.
- Prioritize plans for further fresh water releases in to the Jordan and investments in the removal of pollutants so that the river can be used as a multipurpose natural carrier as proposed in the JVMP.

Priority recommendations to the international community

- Support politically and through financial contribution to the creation of a World Bank Trust Fund for the Jordan Valley.
- Encourage the sides to support investments that will improve climate resilience on the ground, in line with meeting Middle East and foreign policy climate security priorities and the peace process based on two state solution principles.
- Support further research and joint learning required on international best practices for river rehabilitation and transboundary river governance for the Jordan Valley.

### *On Educating for Peace and Sustainability*

Investment in mainstreaming educational programs that focus on the relationship between climate change and peace building is particularly needed in areas of protracted conflict like the Middle East, an area recognized as a climate hot spot. Environmental peace building is increasingly recognized as a unique peace building practice that focuses on common threats and opportunities such as those created by the climate crisis to help create the political will needed for governments to act towards climate mitigation and

adaptation. The 26 years of experience of EcoPeace Middle East is that an essential ingredient needed to create top down political will is a long term investment in bottom up community based environment and climate education and public engagement programs. Mainstreaming educational programs that link peace and sustainability issues, both at the national and regional level, help create the needed public constituencies that support leaders to move towards cooperation and reject unilateralism. When communities living on either side of a shared water basin come to understand that their future is dependent on the actions of their neighbors, as much as it is dependent on their own behaviour, then they can become powerful actors calling on their leaders to cooperate across the border, as a matter of self-interest, if not survival, of their own community.

For this reason, EcoPeace developed a cross border education and community based awareness program called Good Water Neighbors. Instead of 'good fences' creating good neighborly relations, the experience of EcoPeace has been that the fences and other security barriers dividing communities, not only contribute to ecological demise but are often the source of attitudes that blames the other side for all of their problems and prevents each side from taking responsibility for their behavior that contributes to the ecological demise. The bottom up education and public awareness programs of EcoPeace have therefore focused on the shared interests in good water for all, as the entry point of mainstreaming peace and sustainability issues into education programs.

EcoPeace's award winning community based Good Water Neighbors (GWN) project has therefore encouraged young people for nearly two decades to support concrete environmental solutions and become agents of change for regional cooperation.<sup>93</sup> GWN includes a school program that educates thousands of Palestinian, Israeli and Jordanian youth about the interdependent nature of water resources and environmental impact and the need for cooperation.

"Neighbors Path" tours expose thousands of youth to their own water realities and that of their neighbors across the border and inspire them to plan and implement concrete community projects. Additionally, select groups of youth and young professionals are invited to cross-border activities that are designed to build networks of knowledgeable, empowered and regionally sensitive young leaders and professionals who forge vibrant cross-border connections to advance regional water and environment solutions. Teaching water and climate diplomacy to high school students encourages them to enrol in relevant programs at university, which then prepares those that choose a career path as young professionals and entrepreneurs who have the needed skill sets and comprehension to then implement the critical programs

earlier mentioned that would lead to such solutions as a water energy nexus, sustainable water allocation and cross border river and stream management. These are the tools required if we are to meet Green Blue Deal climate mitigation and adaptation goals. For those that do not adopt these issues as a career path, the investment made in water and climate diplomacy in schools and universities nevertheless significantly impacts mind-sets and helps create the public constituency needed in favor of cooperative rather than unilateral decisions.

The “Good Water Neighbors” project, significantly funded for close to a decade by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), includes two main components: 1) National School Programs and 2) Regional Leadership Programs.

### *National School Programs*

EcoPeace has developed national programs targeting youth (ages 16-18) in Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli high schools, with EcoPeace helping to develop lesson plans that either expand existing official school curriculum or introduce new curriculum, and provide national and regional teacher training, site tours, summit days and support for student-led projects. In Israel, EcoPeace has developed a water diplomacy program that annually reaches over 3,000 high school students in 80 high schools, representing all sectors of Israeli society. In Palestine and Jordan, EcoPeace has similarly helped develop unique interdisciplinary lesson plans that enable youth to become better informed and equipped to deal with environmental, water and climate challenges, while offering educators up-to-date, practical training to provide relevant, interesting lessons and activities to their students about these issues.

### *Regional Leadership Programs*

In parallel to the school programs, which are designed to target thousands of participants, EcoPeace has developed 3 leadership programs that identify and engage a select group of emerging young environmental leaders and young people with potential to serve as impact multipliers in regional cross-border (people-to-people) activities. Through these programs, EcoPeace seeks to create a network of empowered young leaders and professionals who will forge cross-border connections to advance regional water and environment solutions.

### *Youth Water Trustees*

Each year, 36 youth (ages 16-18) from Jordan, Israel and Palestine (12 from each country) are selected in a competitive process to join the regional Youth Water Trustees track. Trustees meet each other in person at regional

campers in Jordan and participate in trainings, simulations, master classes and delegations, that deepen their knowledge about climate change and regional security and help them plan and implement different kinds of climate change initiatives, focusing particularly on developing ways to create dialogue with decision makers and other stakeholders, while they develop local, regional and global networks. The trustees are also deeply involved in the national school programs as local organizers and guest speakers.

### *Young Professionals*

The Water Diplomacy for Young Professionals (ages 21-35) track has developed a regional leadership group of young leaders who cooperate to solve transboundary environmental issues by learning and practicing diplomacy skills and participating in cross border encounters for networking and joint problem solving. The program targets young professionals in the early stages of their careers: university students, young water professionals, young political leaders etc., from Palestine, Israel and Jordan. The program involves capacity building activities in a series of national and regional workshops on water and environmental issues, track II diplomacy and negotiation skills. Working together with the PATHWAYS Institute for Negotiation Education, EcoPeace developed a Climate Change Toolkit for use in training and preparing the Young Water Diplomats across the region to interact directly to explore and brainstorm new region-wide cooperative solutions to shared environmental challenges through the prism of climate change as well as being exposed to international cases, trends and developments, so to position them as global agents of change.

### *Green Social Entrepreneurship*

The Green Social Entrepreneurship track (ages 21-35) will be launched in late 2020 and targets students and graduates from environmental science and environmental engineering faculties, young entrepreneurs, and young water professionals. The program aims to advance innovative green enterprises that generate social value and create a cohort of young Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian entrepreneurs who cooperate to build shared prosperity and sustainable development in the region. The program will start with pre-incubation activities focused on the initial development of green initiatives, followed by regional workshops, the building of a regional network of entrepreneurs, and a long-term continuation program consisting of an incubator and a regional center of excellence.

### *Digital Activities and Virtual Technology*

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, EcoPeace accelerated and expanded the scope of its digital strategy, adding a variety of virtual and online educational activities that will be integrated into existing programs. The EcoPeace strategy is not just to mitigate current challenges, but to develop innovative virtual activities that offer added value in any scenario. This has led EcoPeace to develop a virtual immersive meeting environment for cross border (people-to-people) activities. Based on gaming technology, enabling the design of highly realistic open worlds, EcoPeace is currently building a virtual Lower Jordan Valley that would enable participants, as virtual avatars, to freely explore the Jordan Valley, crossing borders and entering usually off-limit areas, while interacting freely and engaging together in quests and challenges built and managed by the EcoPeace education team, and learning about our shared environment. The content incorporates a combination of virtual and zoom- meetings, presentations and video clips that can be experienced while in the virtual world, and virtual versions of the neighbors' path tours.

A virtual world brings value that can be used beyond the scope of the current crisis and offers access to a compelling vision of what our region could become. For example, the concept of building an ecological corridor connecting both sides of the Jordan River, long hampered by political constraints, is realized in a virtual world and creates a meaningful shared space for regional meetings and events.

Priority recommendations to the Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments

- Support national programs for Green Blue Deal education such as water and climate diplomacy and integrate them into nationwide programming across the national education system.
- Integrate Green Blue Deal concepts and priorities into national entrepreneurial programs. Priority recommendations to the international community
- Increase support for the regional Good Water Neighbors education and public awareness activities that could not otherwise take place without donor support.
- Support national government education programs that mainstream Green Blue Deal concepts and objectives.

## 5. Concluding Words

Opportunities exist to better align Green Deal international foreign policy with Middle East Green Blue Deal objectives. As an example, Europe's declared leadership to advance climate security is an opportunity to see important European led investments in Middle East desalination and solar electricity production, taking place at the moment on a bilateral basis, to harness regional Green Blue Deal linkages. The EIB recently announced financial support in Israel to build the largest reverse osmosis desalination plant in the world.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>95</sup> While the investment is strategically significant for climate adaptation and water security, the energy source is fossil fuel (natural gas), and represents a missed opportunity to promote the use of renewables and help Israel achieve its Paris Agreement goals. Equally, Europe is leading the effort to build a critically needed desalination plant in Gaza whose energy source would also be largely fossil. At the same time, Europe through both the EBRD and EIB are heavily invested in supporting Jordan's leadership in solar energy production.

<sup>96</sup> <sup>97</sup> The opportunity on the table is to link these European led investments in a manner that would facilitate the water energy nexus described above, so that Jordanian solar energy powers desalination plants along the Mediterranean that could then sell Mediterranean desalinated water from Israel and Palestine exported back to Jordan, to meet Jordan's critical water security needs.

Similarly, with the newly elected Biden Administration likely to reinstate Palestinian funding and increase peace building funding opportunities, US government funding in the region, mainly through the US Agency for International Development, should be aligned not only with environmental objectives but also with the objective that such funding helps to create cross border regional synergies. As an example, US Congress 2020 deliberations to advance 'The Middle East Partnership for Peace Act' provides an opportunity to align investment in people-to-people and economic activity with environmental goals.<sup>98</sup>

The authorization of \$50 million for five fiscal years to establish the People-to-People Partnership for Peace Fund and the Joint Investment for Peace Initiative, which will provide investments in people-to-people exchanges and economic cooperation, with the goal of supporting a negotiated and sustainable two-state solution, initiated by the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), is a prime opportunity to align environmental foreign policy objectives with Middle East Green Blue Deal objectives. Both EU and US cases demonstrate the potential for international actors to combine their influence in financial support with their climate action objectives through regional and international cooperation.

Finally, to harness and coordinate international political leadership in support of a Middle East Green Blue Deal, we propose the creation of a **'Middle East Green Blue Deal Coalition of the Willing'** that could bring together foreign ministers of interested states that support advancing a Middle East Green Blue Deal program. A Green Blue Deal combined with **post COVID-19 recovery** priorities, that are likely to remain on top of the agenda of international donors active in the region for the upcoming years, would further help attract international investors including from Arab Gulf countries. To support such goals, we envision and recommend a series of Track II preparatory meetings to encourage countries to join such a coalition, public outreach, and pursuit of research and analysis that can further inform such conversations. In that vein, the US Institute of Peace is partnering with us on a report to be published in early 2021 that will explore the evidentiary and analytical basis of the recommendations made by the authors in this report. We additionally propose that an international conference be convened on a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East. The conference would seek to attract high-level business, think tank, civil society and academia. Behind the scenes a 'Green Blue Deal Coalition of the Willing' could lead Track I diplomacy with the governments of Israel, Palestine and Jordan to advance a detailed program with timelines and financing towards the implementation of a Green Blue Deal for the Middle East to be announced in the proposed international conference. The European Union is well placed to initiate such an effort, inviting interested EU foreign ministers to lead and then broadening such a coalition with interested foreign ministers from non-EU states.

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In this volume memory politics are discussed in the perspective of historical revisionism. The negative consequences of memory politics on interstate relations are exemplified on three conflicts: Russia-Ukraine in Eastern Europe, Greece-Turkey in Southern Europe, and Israel-Palestine in the Middle East. Beyond aggressive memory politics the book urges the need of a policy based on *“resilience”* and not on *“resistance”*.

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