Student: Alexandros Shanos

Student Number: 4179897

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Joris van Eijnatten

Divided Memories for a United Europe?

The European Capitals of Culture and the Search for European Unity

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1. Introduction:

The economic crisis of 2008 has demonstrated that solidarity between the nations of Europe is not as strong as it was previously suggested. The invention of new acronyms and the re-evocation of older stereotypes have offered additional ways to demarcate "Europe". Thus, in addition to the "Europe" of the European Union members, the "Europe" of the "Eurozone" members, and the "Europe" of the Schengen signatories, we now have the "Europe" of the creditors and the "Europe" of the debtors.[1] With the exception of Ireland, the countries of the South that have acquired the distinctive label "P.I.G.S." (Portugal, Greece, Spain) are now resisting what they claim to be the "unjustified" austerity measures that the so called "bullies" of the North are forcing them to implement. Amidst all the insecurity and frustration, the representatives of nationalist and populist parties have grasped the opportunity to strengthen their domestic political position by (ab)using the negative effects of the crisis and by instilling xenophobic sentiments to their fellow citizens. As a result, and in addition to the previous division between West and East, Europe now experiences a new division between North and South.

After the inauguration of the Eurozone in 1999, and its ongoing gradual expansion from 2001 onwards, one could claim that the European economic integration has entered its last stage. Even in the thick of the contemporary economic crisis, economic integration is progressing and this was made evident by the adoption of the common European currency by Lithuania in 2015. The possibility of a "Grexit", however, might bring about the collapse of the economic system of the Eurozone, and will set back the European integration project as a whole. I believe that even though the current European economic crisis was caused primarily by economic factors, it was not caused solely by them, but precisely by placing too much emphasis on the economic section of integration while the political and cultural sections were (and still are) lagging behind. What officially began as a European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950's and developed into a monetary union after 1999, was followed only by the partial surrender of national political sovereignty; by the failure of agreeing on a common European constitution, and by the inability to form a shared sense of European solidarity. As Lothar Probst has pointed out, "abandoning a

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[1] Kenneth Dyson. *States, Debt, and Power: 'Saints' and 'Sinners' in European History and Integration.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2014)

country's currency means to give up a central element of the sovereignty of the nation state and its capacity to structure [the] social security and solidarity of its citizens."[2] The current economic situation that the Greek government faces justifies Probst's argument. Yet, since the nations of Europe did not feel ready to surpass a certain level of political integration, and the sense of belonging to a truly united Europe was not as strong as was presumed, the idea of full-scale economic integration appears to have been misguided.

There are various, and probably substantiated, reasons why the adoption of a common European constitution failed, and why political integration can only be achieved up to a certain limit, but explaining this failure falls outside the scope of this thesis. Rather, the aim here is to demonstrate why the formation of a common European identity has proven such a difficult task to achieve, by placing emphasis on how the nations of Europe have remembered and interpreted their shared past, and specifically the events that took place in the second half of the twentieth century, during and after the Second World War. The "remembrance" and "interpretation" of these events plays a central role in the formation of a European identity because individuals, groups, and nations use or abuse the events of the past in order to distinguish themselves, and to justify their present social and political positions. As Andreas Huyssen has argued, the difficulties of forming a European identity lie in the fact that, "while memory discourses appear to be global in one register, in their core they remain tied to the histories of specific nations and states."[3]

These "memory discourses" are part of what was called the "memory boom" which began in the 1970's and has expanded enormously after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.[4] Thus, there seems to be a connection between the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the emergence of memory as a topic of interest. According to Aline Sierp, "in 1989 [...] the breaking open of the bipolar political world resulted in an eruptive return of memory and a reawakening of history."[5] The breaking open of the bipolar also loosened the alliances of the western European countries; alliances that had been forged in the immediate post-war years as a response to the catastrophe of the Second World War and to the ensuing "communist threat." Now that the threat

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[2] Lothar Probst. "Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust." *New German Critique* (90): (2003): pp. 45-58

[3] Andreas Huyssen. "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia." *Public Culture* Vol.12 (1) (2000): pp. 21-38

[4] Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Eds.). *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2011)

[5] Aline Sierp. "Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945," in Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Eds.). *The Transcultural Turn. Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders.* Berlin: De Gruyter, (2014): pp.108

was eradicated and the "binding glue" effect of the communist "other" started to dissolve, the western allies could confront their own past, as well as one another, for past misdeeds. Old nationalistic myths that had served the normalization of political and social life after the Second World War, and aided the reconciliation process between former enemies, such as the Federal Republic of Germany and France could be exposed, and a more honest approach towards the past could be followed.

The break, however, lead to diverging outcomes in Western and Eastern Europe. Whereas in the West the German term *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung* denotes the attempt to "come to terms" with one's own past and with the past of one's neighbours and former enemies; in the East the nationalisation of history still continues, or to express it more accurately, it was restarted by different actors performing a new scenario. There is a reason for this divergence. According to Klas-Göran Karlsson, "in Eastern Europe, the continuing nationalisation of history can to a great extent be explained as a reaction against the long-term submission to Soviet communist historical formulas and interpretations."[6]

It is obvious, then, that regarding its current interpretation of the past, Europe is divided between the attempt of the West, mainly by the institutions of the European Union, to construct a "supranational" and "transcultural" European post-war memory, and by the ongoing resurgence of nationalistic memory narratives in the East. If we add into the mix the growing contemporary gap between North and South, it becomes clear that a common European identity, and an enduring sense of solidarity among the nations of Europe appears to be an impossible dream.

Even before the divisive consequences of the economic crisis of 2008, scholars around Europe had initiated a debate in order to find a way to make the dream possible, and to discuss whether or not a "founding myth" was necessary in order to develop that collective European identity that would bridge the "memory gap" between West and East. Lothar Probst offered a definition of what political founding myths are and what their function is in 2003. As he put it, founding myths are:

> Narratives which bring about a collective identity beyond the social, cultural, and political
> fragmentation of a given community. Their character is fluid, and they are subject to a constant

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[6] Klas-Goran Karlsson. "The Uses of History and the Third Wave of Europeanization," in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 38-55

process of interpretation and reinterpretation. The extent to which political myths encompass elements of truth or lies does not matter - usually they encompass both. Important is their capacity to create a common WE-identity, to give meaning to the past and the future of a polity and to promise temporal continuity instead of the contingency of human existence and life.[7]

A European founding myth promises to bridge the historical gap between East and West, but also between North and South, by selecting to commemorate specific events of the intertwined European past, and by choosing to discard others. Anyone familiar with the birth of nationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and with the formation of "imagined communities" can realise that such a task could be feasible in the long run.[8] The question remains, however, is Europe truly in need of a founding myth? Does a collective "European" memory, from which a founding myth can be extracted, exist to begin with? Critics of the idea of a founding myth stress out the potential dangers of such an endeavour. If we take into account that the pre-existing model for this proposal is that of the nation-state, and if we trace its origins in the exclusionary policies of the 19th century, as well as contemplate on the totalitarian regimes that have sprung from within it, then the potential pitfalls of such a project on a European and international scale could turn out to be devastating. If Europe is to be a WE, then who will be its "other"? Is it wise to provoke such sentiments on a global scale? The current turbulent relationship between Europe and Russia indicates that serious consideration should be taken on how a European identity is to be constructed.

Furthermore, my opinion is that claims which resemble Aleida Assmann's argument that "the future has lost much of its power to integrate, while the past is becoming increasingly important for the formation of identity"[9] are not productive from a "European" point of view. I agree that in order to move forward, Europeans must first "come to terms" with their contentious pasts. In fact, that process is the main focus of this thesis. That never-ending process, however, should not be an obstacle to overcome present difficulties and grasp future opportunities. It is a difficult task, but we should try to balance the influence the past and the future hold on us. We should not divert our attention from current problems neither by appealing to past injustices, as is

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[7] Lothar Probst. "Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust." *New German Critique* (90): (2003): pp. 45-58

[8] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, (1983). And, Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Eds.). *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1983)

[9] Aleida Assmann. "Europe – A Community of Memory?" *GHI Bulletin* 40 (2007): pp. 11-25

the case with Greek demands to Germany to repay the wartime "occupation loan"[10], nor focus all our energy to hastily implement a future project without considering how it might endanger everything that we have achieved so far, as I believe is the case with the careless expansion of the Eurozone.

By answering the question, *how have the European Capitals of Culture: "Weimar 1999", "Linz 2009", "Sibiu 2007", and "Vilnius 2009" remembered and represented the events of the Second World War and its aftermath* this thesis argues that the institution of the European Capitals of Culture is an excellent opportunity to reconcile the past, celebrate the present, and promote ideas for the common European future. The analysis will focus on whether these cities have offered a "traditional" or a "reflexive" interpretation of their past during their cultural year. (The definitions of what a "traditional" and what a "reflexive" interpretation entails are given in the first section of this thesis). By situating our study cases between the bipolar of "traditional" and "reflexive" narratives we will be in position to better understand to what extent the commemoration of the events associated with the Second World War have moved from a national to a supranational level, thus offering proof of a reconciled "European" interpretation of the past which will aid the endeavour of the European institutions to promote a sense of solidarity and a common identity among the nations of Europe founded specifically on that *shared* "European" past. Moreover, by stressing the tension that exists between the idea of constructing a "founding myth" and the promotion of "reflexive" narratives on a European level, this thesis argues that "Europe" has much more to gain by promoting "reflexive" narratives which, as we shall see, are based on an honest supranational assessment of the past than by promoting a "myth" that encompasses elements of both truth and lies.

The study cases have been selected mainly with respect to their historical backgrounds, but also due to their geopolitical orientation, i.e. whether they stood inside or outside the "Iron Curtain" after 1945. The first two cities (Weimar and Linz) were on the side of the perpetrators during the Second World, but as we shall see both managed, for different reasons and to a different extent, to present themselves as victims until 1989. The other two cities (Sibiu and Vilnius) have a more mixed account both as perpetrators and as victims. Romania joined the forces of the Axis in 1940

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[10] Hagen Fleischer. "Germany owes Greece money for the war – but morality needn't come into it". Published in *The Guardian* on February 10th 2015 http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/10/germany-greece-second-world-war-reparations

following a military coup by Marshal Ion Antonescu which violated the neutrality status of the country. Romanian forces remained on the side of the Axis until 1944 when the Red Army began its westward march. During the final stages of the war, after Antonescu was overthrown, Romanian forces were fighting on the side of the Allies. Lithuania, on the other hand, was occupied by the Soviet forces as early as 1940 following the secret agreements between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). For that reason when the Nazi troops were marching Eastward in 1941 the Lithuanians perceived the Germans as liberators and assisted them in their advance, as well as in the atrocities they committed against the Jewish community of Lithuania. Lithuania was occupied by the Red Army once again during the final stages of the war, and became a part of the Soviet Union after 1945.

The rise of the "iron curtain" is another reason why these cities were selected. Three of these cities (Weimar, Sibiu, and Vilnius) became part of the Soviet bloc, whereas the other (Linz) remained under Allied control until 1955 when Austria eventually became a sovereign member of the "Western" bloc. Therefore, all these cities have a turbulent and diversified past to "come to terms" with, and by analysing their cultural years as European Capitals we will be able to discern their interpretation of that past.

Of course, more cities that have been designated as European Capitals of Culture could easily have been included in this study, such as Liverpool, Patras, Copenhagen, Prague, Tallinn, etc., but due to the limited boundaries of this thesis I have decided to focus on these four study cases, for the above mentioned reasons, but also for a more practical one. These four cities were the ones that organised a series of projects, or published communication materials, that specifically referred to the events of the second half of the twentieth century, and thus offered enough source materials for analysis. In this respect it is interesting to note that many cities did not present any projects regarding the Second World War and focused solely on earlier or later events, avoiding the topic completely.

Additionally, this thesis attempts to be innovative by combining the "state of the art" literature of two different fields of study. The first is the relatively recent field of "memory studies" which has expanded enormously after 1989 and currently covers various historical periods as can be observed by the diversified topics discussed in the contents of the two leading journals of "memory studies", *History & Memory* and *Memory Studies* respectively. The literature of the second field focuses mostly on the economic aspects of the ECoC and the benefits the title can

bring to the infrastructural and cultural renovation of the awarded city. The literature on this field has partly expanded via EU funding due to the attempts of the institutions of the Union to find ways to optimise the ECoC action and increase the potential benefits for cities that are awarded the title. By combining the insights offered by these two fields of study, this thesis argues that the ECOC action has more potential benefits than the institutions of the E.U. are aware of.

The analysis is based on the cultural projects that were associated with commemorating or representing the events of the Second World War and its aftermath. Therefore, the main sources are public relation leaflets, press articles or any other materials related to those projects. The projects are analysed in relation to the bipolar of "traditional" and "reflexive" narratives, and in relation to the national historical context, i.e. to the main national narratives that emerged in the period spanning from 1945 until 1989. Do these projects deviate from that "traditional" narrative or do they reproduce it? Additionally, whenever comparison is feasible, projects from different cities are compared in order to demonstrate whether a shared "European" memory of that event has emerged or whether the event has different (even conflicting) connotations.

The thesis is divided into three sections. The first section offers a general historical overview of the steps that the *Western* European integration project has taken from 1945 until 1989, and how the "memory narratives" were formed and gradually altered from the earlier post-war years until the collapse of the Soviet Union. With regard to the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, it demonstrates how the imposed remembrance of the Second World War in the East changed gradually from the Stalinist to the Gorbachev period, and how the nations of Eastern Europe dealt with their past after the break of 1989. Finally, it discusses the friction that exists between East and West on the topic of relativizing the crimes of Nazism and Communism, and the attempts of the European institutions to construct a "founding myth" based on the shared experience of the Holocaust.

The second section deals specifically with the institution of the European Capitals of Culture. The origins and early goals of the founders of the institution are examined, as well as its development from 1985 onward. How has the legislation regarding the institution of the European Capital of Culture changed, and what is the European Union's goal? What is the purpose of the European concept of "Unity in Diversity", and how did it come about? Isn't the attempt to form a "founding myth", based on the memory of the events of the Second World War and in particular of the Holocaust, contradictive with the promotion of the concept of "Unity in Diversity"?

The third, and final, section analyses and compares the study cases of Weimar, Linz, Sibiu and Vilnius in detail in order to illustrate how cities with different historical and geopolitical backgrounds have commemorated the events of the Second World War and post-war era. The analysis indicates which of these cities have offered "traditional" and which "reflexive" narratives, and demonstrates how problematic the construction of a European "founding myth" becomes when we take into consideration the various, and in some cases conflicting, interpretations of the past that have taken hold on the collective memories of each European nation after the breaks of 1945 and 1989 respectively. From this point of view it becomes obvious that currently the promotion of "reflexive" historical narratives could prove more beneficial and reconciliatory on a European level than the construction of a "founding myth" because the "reflexive" narratives function much better under the auspices of the "Unity in Diversity" concept and do not contradict the notion of "diversity" as the imposed homogenising tendencies of a "funding myth" do.

Part 1

Remembering the Second World War and its Aftermath:

A Historical Overview

2. Western European Integration, Burying the Hatchet

On May 8th 1945, Nazi Germany signed its unconditional surrender in the French city of Reims. The event signalled the end of the Second World War, the bloodiest conflict humanity has ever known that cost the lives of approximately 60,000,000 people.[11] VE Day (Victory in Europe Day-8th of May)[12] is celebrated since then by most *Western* European countries as the day that the *good* Allies defeated the *evil* forces of the Axis; the day that the most devastating clash in human history was over, and as the day that Europe, after six years of bloody struggle, was offered a chance to turn the page and start anew.

A new start, however, proved a difficult task to achieve, due to the tragic economic conditions of the immediate post-war years, but also due to the political differences among the victors. Most states had sustained damage to their industrial infrastructure due to the wartime bombings, and in order to reconstruct their production units they had to rely on the imports of capital goods from the United States of America. Initially, the Western European states lacked the means to obtain those capital goods, but the provisions of the Marshal Plan allowed them to keep pursuing their expansionist economic policies.[13] Yet, as Alan Milward has argued, it was the solution to the *German Question,* i.e. the economic reconstruction and re-emergence of Western Germany as an equal partner on the global political scene that safeguarded Western European economic recovery, and made the post-war economic boom from 1950 to early 1970's possible.[14]

Under these circumstances, European policy makers took the first steps to unite Europe. According to Tony Judt, the idea of a unified Europe was perceived a lot earlier, as is made evident by the phrase "Etats-Unis d'Europe" already being used on the February issue of the Paris journal "Le Moniteur" in 1848,[15] as well as by the proposals to found a European federation made by the French minister for Foreign Affairs Aristide Briand in the 1920s. Unfortunately, however, it required the devastating experiences of two world wars in quick succession in order to make

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[11] Hagen Fleischer. *Οι Πόλεμοι της Μνήμης: Ο Β' Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος στη Δημόσια Ιστορία*. Αθήνα: Νεφέλη, (2008)
[12] Because the Soviets requested that Nazi Germany signs a separate surrender in Berlin in the early hours of the 9th of May, the end of the war is celebrated a day later in the East, but the 9th of May has acquired general resonance lately.
[13]13 Milward, Alan S. *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-51.* London: Methuen & Co, (1984)
[14] Ibid.
[15] Tony Judt. "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." *Daedalus* 121(4): (1992): pp. 83-118

European heads of state realise the potential benefits of closer political and economic cooperation, and the potential dangers of unrestricted national competition.

The Schuman Declaration, on the memorial day of May 9th 1950, suggested the pooling of the Franco-German coal and steel production in order to safeguard world peace by eliminating the "age-old opposition between France and Germany."[16] A year later, on April 1951, six Western European states (France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries) signed the treaty that inaugurated the European Coal and Steel Community. Although Schuman in his speech had presented the union primarily as a moral and ideological necessity, the more practical, economically-calculated incentives behind this French initiative are commonly known.[17] France, after the adoption of the Monnet Plan, and in order to meet her post-war economic and political aspirations, had opted to control the areas of the Ruhr and the Saar which were rich in coal, coke, and steel.[18] After her plans to gain sole political and economic control over these areas had failed, due to American and British objections, Monnet realised that the only alternative was to place these resources under a Higher Authority. That way, France would gain free access to those resources.[19]

From their perspective, Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard, the heads of state of the Federal Republic of Germany, welcomed the French move because it gave them the opportunity to re-enter the international political stage, and lift the Allied occupation of Germany.[20] Besides, they did not have many other options other than to accept the French terms. The French suggestions were also backed by the Americans who were trying to promote European economic integration even before the adoption of the Marshal Plan.[21] As for the remaining members that joined this community, the economic gains offered by this union seemed substantial to just let them slip by. The Benelux countries had already signed a customs agreement in 1944, and Italy was looking for someone to take over her surplus of human resources.

Therefore, old enemies became allies, and in the immediate post-war years it did not seem wise to scratch old wounds and provoke one's newly acquired partners. Paul Connerton has coined the term "prescriptive forgetting" in order to describe this process. He defined "prescriptive

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[16] http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration/index_en.htm

[17] Lothar Probst. "Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust." *New German Critique* (90): (2003): pp. 45-58

[18] Milward, Alan S. *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-51.* London: Methuen & Co, (1984)

[19] John Gillingham. *European Integration 1950-2003, Superstate or New Market Economy?* New York: Cambridge University Press, (2003)

[20] Ibid.

[21] Milward, Alan S. *The Reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-51.* London: Methuen & Co, (1984)

forgetting" as, "the act of state to [forget the divisive recent past] because it is believed to be in the interests of all parties to the previous dispute."[22] Prime examples of this type of forgetting on a national level are the so called "Vichy Syndrome" in France, and the halt of the Nazi purges in Germany. When General De Gaulle and the Provisional Government of the French Republic took over in 1944, the former First World War hero Marshall Pétain and other leaders of the collaborationist Vichy regime were denounced as traitors of France. Despite this denunciation, however, the post-war French leaders chose to place all the guilt about the war crimes on the Nazis, thus consciously but indirectly absolving the lesser-known French collaborators of any war crimes they had committed. On the contrary, and in accordance with their counterparts in Italy and the Netherlands, the French statesmen promoted the 'myth of holistic resistance'.[23]

According to this myth, virtually all French citizens had played a minor or major role in the resistance during the Second World War. Therefore, they were entitled to feel proud of themselves, and for the French nation in general, because they had endured great pain and had still managed to emerge victorious.[24] As this myth gathered pace, due to its suitability both for the former collaborators, who were able to avoid punishment, as well as for the post-war statesmen, who were able to legitimise their authority, the Vichy regime was cast into oblivion. Besides, as the French claimed at the time, Vichy France was not a part of French history because the takeover of power by Pétain was (supposedly) illegal.[25]

In a similar manner, the Nazi purges in Germany were halted shortly after they had begun because if they had continued in the same rate and under strict criteria there would be hardly any German bureaucrat left untouched and West Germany would be unable to return to self-government. So, as in France, once some of the big fishes were caught, the smaller ones were thrown back into the water. As Paul Connerton has put it,

What was necessary after 1945, above all, was to restore a minimum level of cohesion to civil society and to re-establish the legitimacy of the state in societies where authority, and

[22] Paul Connerton. "Seven Types of Forgetting." *Memory Studies* 1.1 (2008): pp. 59-71

[23] Tony Judt. "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." *Daedalus* 121(4): (1992): pp. 83-118

[24] Robert Gildea. "Myth, memory and policy in France since 1945," in Werner Müller (Ed.) *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past.* New York: Cambridge University Press (2002) pp. 59-75

[25] Henry Rousso. *The Vichy Syndrome*: *History and Memory in France since 1944*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1991)

the very bases of civil behaviour, had been obliterated by a totalitarian government; the overwhelming desire was to forget the recent past.[26]

The desire to "prescriptively forget" proved beneficial, not only on a national, but, also on a supranational level, where old hatreds were put aside, and perpetrator states resumed their international roles. Yet, the desire to *put the war behind*, resulted - on occasion intentionally - in a new form of suffering and injustice for the returning Jewish survivors. While some of them, such as Primo Levy, wished to record their traumatic experiences, and to claim restitution for the physical and psychological pain that was inflicted upon them, their voices sounded like a whisper amongst the proud and loud nationalistic voices. In Primo Levy's case, his narrative, which focused on his persecution as a Jew, did not fit the post-war Italian narratives of *nationwide* antifascist resistance, and, as a result, he had trouble finding a publisher. His biography *Se questo è un uomo* was practically unknown until his death in 1987.[27] Another reason why the suffering of the Jews was side-lined in the immediate post-war years was that non-Jewish Europeans focused on their own suffering, or simply did not want to remember anything that took place in the past, and turned their attention solely to the future. Therefore, the Shoah was rarely discussed outside Jewish private circles, and those discussions focused mainly on the difficulty to perceive its scale and uniqueness.

In the meantime, the processes of "prescriptive forgetting" and Western European integration were accelerated by the rise of the "Iron Curtain", and the subsequent ideological, political, and economic divisions between West and East. By acting as a counterweight for the countries of the western block, the Soviet Union created a sense of "forced" solidarity among them, because after the emergence of the communist "other", the newly-formed and still fragile Western European community was able to define a "self". Under these circumstances, Western European nations were willing to cede some of their sovereignty to supranational authorities such as the EEC and the NATO in order to solidify their union and protect themselves from the Soviet threat.

During this phase a slight change in the memory discourses can be observed. While in the early stages of integration, the traumatic experiences of the Second World War and safeguarding peace where the dominant narratives in the speeches made by western political figures, by 1957 the speeches had acquired a more celebratory tone highlighting the successful implementation of

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[26] Paul Connerton. "Seven Types of Forgetting." *Memory Studies* 1.1 (2008): pp. 59-71

[27] Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin 2005), Epilogue. From the house of the dead. An essay on modern European memory, 803-831.

economic programs by the ECSC, and promoting the aspirations for further cooperation among European countries through the institutions of the recently inaugurated European Economic Community.[28] These new narratives, similar in a way to the national 'myths of resistance', wished to promote a sense of supranational Western European pride for the early successful years of integration.

According to Giesen, there are three modes of assimilating collective memories into a collective identity. The first mode is called "primordial" and it bases identity formation on a distant mythical past. An excellent example of the "primordial" mode is offered by the connection and continuity that modern Greeks feel to the ancient Greek civilization and its heroes, or like the Nordic countries feel for the discoveries and conquests of the Vikings. The second mode is called "traditional" and, in a close analogy to the "primordial" mode, it constructs collectives by transforming a not so temporally distant, history into a story of glory and success. The third, and final, mode is called "reflexive" and assimilates memories by presupposing a basic rupture with a glorious past, and by forcing community members to take a reflexive view of themselves and their "others".[29]

What Giesen has described as "traditional" identity formation, took place on a European level from the late 1940's until the late 1960's. Yet, in addition to the narratives promoting the glorious myth of resistance, and the emphasis placed on the successful post-war years of recovery and progress, in perpetrator and victim countries alike, narratives of victimhood were constructed in order to memorialise the misdeeds performed on us by others (usually the Nazis), and at the same time to overshadow the misdeeds performed by us to others.[30]

An exemplary case of this phenomenon is Austria. As is widely known, the majority of the Austrian population was in favour of the *Anschluss* in 1938 and Austria had participated in the war on the side of the Axis.[31] Nevertheless, after the war, the Second Austrian Republic presented itself

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[28] Aline Sierp. "Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945," in Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Eds.). *The Transcultural Turn. Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders.* Berlin: De Gruyter, (2014): pp. 103-118

[29] Bernhard Giesen. *The Intellectuals and the Nation. Collective Identity in German Axial Age.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1998)

[30] Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin 2005), Epilogue. From the house of the dead. An essay on modern European memory. The term "screen memory", coined by Freud, is usually used in order to describe the process of hiding one's misdeeds behind a screen while at the same time projecting the misdeeds that one has suffered on that same screen.

[31] Hagen Fleischer. *Οι Πόλεμοι της Μνήμης: Ο Β' Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος στη Δημόσια Ιστορία.* Αθήνα: Νεφέλη, (2008)

as "Hitler's First Victim". The post-war Austrian myth was founded on the Moscow Declaration of November 1st 1943 in which Austria was recognised by the Allies as "the first free country to fall a victim to the Hitlerite aggression."[32] Of course, in the next paragraph of the Declaration a warning was issued to Austria that she should take responsibility for her participation in the war on the side of Nazi Germany, but in the post-war Austrian Declaration of Independence the "responsibility clause" was reduced to a "postscript", and it was removed completely from the Austrian State Treaty of 1955.[33]

We can observe, therefore, that even a country that remained under Allied control until 1955, was able to develop a post-war national myth that practically negated what had taken place during the preceding period. The myth was able to gather pace, not because the Allies were "fooled" by the Austrians, but precisely because it had gained the Allies' concession. Of course, no one in the immediate post-war years had forgotten what had truly taken place before and during the war, but they all went along with their respective myths because they all had something to gain. Some to avoid persecution, some to legitimise their newly acquired positions, and all together in order to rebuild their country, and in extension Europe. This was the case everywhere: in France and in the Benelux countries, but also in Italy, in Austria, and in Germany.

The "traditional" memory discourses of the immediate post-war era remained sturdy in their place until the late 1960's and early 1970's. As Stefan Berger has pointed out, "the 1960's and 1970's were decades in which those traditional national narratives were in many cases severely questioned on the basis of a radical reinterpretation of the Second World War."[34] That period coincided, more or less, with the coming of age of the baby boom generation; with the first major economic crises that hit Europe since the Great Depression of 1929; and with the early efforts for a détente with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. Therefore, there appears to be a correlation between these events and the first attempts made by historians to debunk the post-war founding myths. It is important to note, however, that the road was paved a little earlier, by the belated trials of concentration camp administrators held in the Federal Republic of Germany

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[32] Judith Beniston. "'Hitler's First Victim?' – Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria." *Austrian Studies* Vol.11 (2003) pp. 1-13

[33] Ibid.

[34] Stephan Berger. "Remembering the Second World War in Western Europe." in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 119-136

between 1963 and 1965, and by the more publicised trial of Adolf Eichmann held in Jerusalem.[35] Yet, even though these developments urged historians to start asking "embarrassing questions" about the past, their works and revelations did not reach the wider public until later.

The May 1968 student protests in Paris, and the support they received by students from other cities all around Europe were meant to illustrate that the younger generation wished to confront their parents' generation for its current lifestyle, to criticise the division of Europe, and to learn more about the recent past that they had not personally experienced. I would argue that, even though scholars like Tony Judt, have pointed out that the protests of 1968 in the West were not truly serious and that the students just "loved the Revolution,"[36] their contribution on shaking, without altering completely, the "traditional" memory narratives should not be underestimated.[37] If we take into account that a year after the protests De Gaulle had to resign the presidency, then it becomes clear that the protests had a certain impact. Of course, it would be an exaggeration to claim that De Gaulle resigned solely, or even primarily, because of the student protests, but the protests definitely had an influence on the overall political life of France.

It was also during 1969 that Marcel Ophuls's film *Le Chargin et la Pitié* was firstly shown in the cinemas. The film, based on interviews that the director took from resistance fighters, collaborators, and German officers, depicted how the Vichy regime had collaborated with the Nazi occupation forces during WWII, but also what fears or motives drove collaborators and resistance fighters to join the one or the other side respectively. A few years later, in 1972, an American historian, Robert O. Paxton, published a book titled *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*. Paxton's book, like Ophuls's movie, challenged the post-war myth of resistance and victimisation, by highlighting that during the Second World War France had been home to people that belonged in all three categories, victims, resisters, and collaborators, and that sorting out who belonged to each category was not as simple as it was previously advertised.

Nevertheless, these revelations did not manage to dethrone the post-war collective myths due to their limited impact. Paxton's work, as the work of most professional historians, only reached a limited and already well-informed readership, whereas Ophuls's movie, more suitable

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[35] Tony Judt. "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." *Daedalus* 121(4): (1992): pp. 83-118

[36] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005)

[37] Hagen Fleischer. "The Past beneath the Present." *Historein* 4 (2003-4): pp. 45-130

for the general public, was not shown on national television for more than a decade.[38] Furthermore, the "generation gap" could not be so easily overcome. While young French citizens were more susceptible to the new narratives, the older citizens still preferred to hold on to the established familiar ones because, "they saw little benefit in rehashing the atrocities committed by Vichy even when they themselves [bore] no possible personal responsibility."[39] Similar developments occurred all over Western Europe at the time, but, as in France, while professional historians felt the urge to undertake new studies of the past, the majority of the population still adhered to the old "traditional" version.

The second series of events held responsible for altering the way Western Europeans viewed their past during those years are the economic crises of 1971 and 1973. According to Klas-Göran Karlsson,

> the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system (the collapse of the dollar in 1971 and the oil price shock in 1973), combined with mass unemployment for the first time since the 1930's, shook the confidence of the European Community and weakened support for its movement towards economic and monetary union, as proposed in the Werner Plan. The negotiation for the implementation of the Werner Plan became stalled. Instead, the political energy was invested in a more distant and more Utopian project that would circumvent the problems of the time. At its summit in Copenhagen in December 1973, the European Commission published a declaration on European identity in order to define Europe's place in the world.[40]

The Declaration of Copenhagen is the first official document that refers clearly to a "European identity."[41] As is stated in the Declaration, "defining the European Identity involves: (a) reviewing the common heritage […] and (b) taking into consideration the dynamic nature of European unification." What "reviewing the common heritage" entails is offered in the first paragraph of the first section. There, it is claimed that,

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[38] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005)

[39] Tony Judt. "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." *Daedalus* 121(4): (1992): pp. 83-118

[40] Klas-Goran Karlsson. "The Uses of History and the Third Wave of Europeanization," in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 38-55

[41] http://aei.pitt.edu/4545/1/epc_identity_doc.pdf

The nine European States might have been pushed towards disunity by their history and by selfishly defending misjudged interests. But they have overcome their past enmities and have decided that unity is a basic European necessity to ensure the survival of the civilization they have in common.[42]

By reading these lines we can observe the perpetuation of the same narratives as in the early stages of European integration, namely, the prevention of another war on European soil, and the benefits deriving from an economic and political union. Yet, since the nature of European unification is dynamic, so are the narratives that support the unification. As Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth have specified "the past is constantly present in the present and changes with the present."[43] Thus, even though the articles repeated the prevailing narrative, the mention of the dynamic nature of European unification allowed room for alteration in the way the present viewed the past. Because, in order to form a common identity, the members had to "review the common heritage" by facing the skeletons they were hiding in the closet, and by finding a common ground to discuss their previous experiences which, as we have seen, focused until then solely on a simplified narrative of the national past and excluded any contradictive variations. Thus, one could argue that, even though Karlsson appears to have been right when he claimed that the Declaration of Copenhagen was a utopian project fixated on the future in order to circumvent the problems of the present, the Declaration also altered the way the present viewed the past.

Finally, in this period, we can trace a third element that unsettled the "traditional" narratives of the early post-war years. As we have already seen, the rise of the "iron curtain", and the clear-cut division between East and West, helped the latter to form a sense of solidarity against the threat of the communist "other", and justified the promotion of narratives that would aid the nations of Western Europe in their post-war reconstruction and reconciliation. In the ninth paragraph of the Declaration of Copenhagen, however, it was stated that, "European unification is not directed against anyone, nor is it inspired by a desire for power." More importantly, in the sixteenth paragraph there was a clear indication that, "the nine [members of the European Economic Community] have contributed, both individually and collectively, to the first results of a policy of détente and cooperation with the USSR and the East European countries. They are determined to

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010)

carry this policy further forward on a reciprocal basis."[44] Consequently, since the threat of the communist "other" began to subside, there was no dire need for the early post-war myths anymore, and a more accurate version of history could emerge.

The forerunner of such policies on a European level was Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. In 1969, after twenty years of Christian Democratic governance, the Social Democrats took over in the Federal Republic of Germany. Their foreign policy agenda was aimed at normalising the relations with the German Democratic Republic and with the countries of the Eastern bloc in general. Thus, we see that the developments on German soil influenced the overarching European trend. The trend of revising and debunking the post-war national myths continued and expanded in Western Europe until the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the revelations remained more or less within the confines of a professional intellectual circle. The "new" discoveries gradually reached the wider public a few years before 1989, and erupted in a "memory frenzy" afterwards. Before I outline these new changes, however, I would like to focus on the narratives of memory on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

3. Eastern Europe, The "Red" Version of History

In Eastern Europe the celebrations for the end of the war subsided quickly. The wartime westward march of the Red Army signalled the beginning of what is considered by contemporary scholars, and by the majority of the citizens in those countries, as a second occupation.[45] In the immediate post-war years, the newly installed Soviet authorities imposed a version of the past that projected the views of Moscow in order to legitimise their ascendance, or in some cases to preserve their political power. Through a process resembling the way the post-war narratives of victimisation and resistance took hold in the West, the Moscow-imposed narratives assured the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe that they were the innocent victims of a German assault; that they had no involvement in the crimes committed on their soil against other ethnic minorities (no specific mention was made of Jewish victims), and that their efforts, by aiding the efforts of the Red Army,

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[44] http://aei.pitt.edu/4545/1/epc_identity_doc.pdf
[45] Heike Karge. "Practices and Politics of Second World War Remembrance: Trans-national Perspectives from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe," in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 137-146. See also: Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (Eds.). *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2013) pp. 1-20

had made the liberation of their own country, as well as that of their neighbouring countries, possible.[46] As in the West, everyone knew that that narrative was a lie, or to put it more accurately half the truth, but since no one had anything to gain by denouncing its validity the Soviet myth gathered pace. Moreover, in Hungary and other satellite countries, the atrocities of the Soviet Army, including mass rapings, were known to everyone. The citizens, however, either did not want to show disrespect to those soldiers who, whatever their misdeeds, had defeated the *ultimate evil,* or were too scared of the repercussions.[47] After 1947-48, publicly questioning the official interpretation of the past could prove harmful for one's career and, more significantly, for one's life.

The Second World War was to be seen from now on as the 'Great Patriotic War,' the greatest victims of whom were Soviet soldiers and civilians. The Red Army was a liberation army and, from this moment onward, the protector of the communist motherland from the western capitalistic threat. According to Tony Judt, "in the GDR School texts, Hitler was presented as a tool of monopoly capitalists who seized territory and started wars in pursuit of the interests of big business."[48] In fact, war memorials were constructed to convey exactly those messages, and to "remind" the Soviet citizens that the war had been fought by the 'people' against the fascist, *capitalist*, and imperialist forces of *Nazi* Germany. The emphasis placed on the adjectives capitalist and Nazi is crucial because the myth had to be functional even in the German Democratic Republic. There the oppressed 'workers' and 'peasants' were liberated from the Nazi capitalists of the West and had no involvement whatsoever in the Nazi atrocities.[49] On this point the post-war Allies were able to agree upon. The sole blame for the war and its catastrophes lay with the Germans. Yet, in both cases the process of de-nazification ended quickly for practical reasons. The crucial difference, however, was that the sole responsibility to make amends for those crimes was "transferred" to the Federal Republic of Germany, because supposedly in the East there were no capitalist Nazis left.

An interesting case that illustrates to what trouble the Soviet authorities were willing to go through in order to safeguard the official narrative is offered by the post-war experiences of the

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[46] Tony Judt. "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." *Daedalus* 121(4): (1992): pp. 83-118

[47] Hagen Fleischer. "The Past beneath the Present." *Historein* 4 (2003-4): pp. 45-130

[48] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005)

[49] Tony Judt. "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." *Daedalus* 121(4): (1992): pp. 83-118

Ostarbeiterinnen.[50] The *Ostarbeiterinnen* were young women who were deported to Germany for forced labour after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22nd 1941. During the war they laboured for the Nazis in a Belgian factory with other forced labourers. Some of them developed affairs with Belgian labourers, and when the war was over they decided to stay in Belgium, either because they wanted to create a family there, or because they were afraid of being accused of collaboration if they returned to the Soviet Union, or both. In the early post-war years, their voices, along with the voices of many other victims, were silenced because they did not fit any of the war narratives, either in Belgium or in the Soviet Union.

The situation changed slightly when Nikita Khrushchev became the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1953 following Stalin's death. The de-stalinization policies that Kruschev implemented allowed some space for the wartime memories of other groups of survivors, such as the Ostarbeiterinnen, to be heard, and did not focus solely on the war experiences of Red Army soldiers as had previously been the case.[51] Moreover, the Soviet embassy was able to establish some contact with the Ostarbeiterinnen via the associations the latter had formed in Belgium. The incentive behind this move was to keep a close eye on the activities of those women who were living abroad, and could thus challenge the official Soviet version of the past by somehow influencing their families who were still living in the 'motherland'. It is not as if their families had forgotten what had truly taken place during the war, and if there was anyone willing to believe the Soviet narrative it was those families who had lost their daughters precisely because they were deported to work involuntarily in "capitalist Nazi" labour camps after the invasion. The example, however, offers a clear insight on the extent of Soviet censorship.

Interestingly enough, after Kruschev came to power, the Ostarbeiterinnen were given the right to travel to the Soviet Union, but only if they could acquire an entry visa from the Soviet embassy in Belgium. The only Ostarbeiterinnen who managed to acquire an individual entry visa, however, were those who were members of the *Belgian Association for Soviet Patriots,* and thus the embassy could guarantee their patriotic feelings. The ones that were denied the right to travel individually, but still wished to travel to the 'motherland', could try to be invited on one of the annual excursions that the *Motherland Organisation* planned. According to Venken on these

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[50] Machteld Venken. "'You Still Live Far from the Motherland, but You Are Her Son, Her Daughter.' War Memory and Soviet Mental Space (1945-2011), in Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (Eds.). *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2013) pp. 54-67
[51] Ibid.

excursions, "the board members learned how to proliferate the Soviet narrative on war memory among their members by means of Soviet propaganda songs, articles glorifying the Soviet victory and commemoration services for the Soviet Army."[52] This example illustrates that the Soviet authorities were not concerned solely with promoting their narrative on Soviet soil and curbing any internal or external disturbances, but also that they attempted to cultivate the same narratives on groups of displaced Soviet citizens who for various reasons were not repatriated as the Yalta Agreement had dictated. In turn, these groups portrayed a romanticized vision of the Soviet Union abroad, and fed the illusions of communists in the West.

Yet, despite these slight changes in the official Soviet narrative, "the silence which fell across Eastern Europe was unbroken for forty years."[53] The Hungarian Revolution of October 1956, and its Polish counterpart during the same period, illustrated that Khrushchev's de-stalinization policies were perceived as a new beginning by the citizens of those countries who went out to the streets demanding reforms. But it soon became obvious that their demands exceeded the "reforms" that the Soviet authorities were willing to accept. Whereas in Poland Władysław Gomułka was allowed to maintain his position, after succumbing to the Soviet pressures of moderating the extent of his reforms and asserting Khrushchev of his Communist credentials,[54] the revolution in Budapest was violently suppressed by the invasion of Soviet forces. The Soviet invasion got the message across: de-stalinization did not mean deviation from the Marxist-Leninist principles, or from the official Soviet version of the past for that matter.

The 1960's were the decade when attempts at renewal were made, not only in the West, as we have already seen, but also in the East. The country that experienced the most extensive reforms at the time was Czechoslovakia, because, according to Tony Judt, there was no rotation of the old Stalinist elite as in Poland or Hungary[55] and thus, the reforms that had taken place earlier in the former countries reached the latter a little bit later. Consequently, Czechoslovakia adopted the reforming mood of the Khrushchev era only after Khrushchev had been ousted by Brezhnev's coup in 1964.

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Tony Judt. "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe." *Daedalus* 121(4): (1992): pp. 83-118

[54] Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadski. *A Concise History of Poland.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2001)

[55] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp.436

An artistic/intellectual upswing was noted which questioned the Communist system in general, economically, politically, and ideologically. Significant for our study, were the new works that dared *cautiously* to challenge the official Soviet narrative regarding the Second World War. In 1966, preceding Marcel Ophuls's film, director Jiři Menzel "gently debunked" the Communist myth of collective anti-Nazi resistance in Czechoslovakia with his film *Closely Observed Trains*.[56] In the film, the main theme is love and the sexual adventures of a young man during the Nazi occupation, but, even though it ends with an act of resistance, the film also depicts scenes of collaboration. Hence, while it avoided the direct clash with the official narrative as Ophul's *Le Chargin et la Pitié,* the film still carefully confronted the officially imposed version of the Soviet past.

Another parallel development between East and West were the student protests of October 1967 in Prague, which preceded their better known counterparts in Paris, and might have been influenced by similar events taking place in Poland at the time. A group of students from Prague's Technical University grasped this liberal opportunity and marched in order to protest the electricity cuts at their dormitories by shouting for 'More Light!', an ambiguous message the meaning of which was not lost on those who personally observed or learned about the march later.[57] The protests, the published works of dissidents, and the suggested economic and political reforms had already caught the eye of Kremlin, but when Brezhnev arrived in Prague in December and the current First Secretary Antonín Novotný asked for his guidance on how to deal with the current situation he received the reply: 'It's your business'.[58] A few days after the meeting, Novotný was replaced by Alexander Dubček. Dubček appeared to be the right man at the right moment because he fitted the profile that all the stakeholders were looking for. He was a Slovak, and thus could appease the Slovak resentments against Czechs, a respected and well-established member of the Communist party, and young enough to appeal to a younger audience by acting in favour of the long awaited reforms. The reforms he implemented were the reforms that the public was demanding, namely: decentralization, a form of economic privatization, abolition of the censorship over the press and the media, a purge of the old Stalinist guard that surrounded his predecessor, and finally the inauguration of a federal Czechoslovakian state comprised by the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic.

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[56] Ibid. pp. 438
[57] Ibid. pp. 440
[58] Ibid.

The extent of the reforms, however, alerted the Soviet authorities that the Party in Czechoslovakia was losing control. The case acquired a certain urgency when it became obvious that this trend could be transmitted in the satellite states and in the Soviet Union itself. A clear indication of this tendency were the reports that warned of Russian students being influenced by the uncensored publications of Soviet dissidents which were published daily in newspapers in Prague. At this point it stopped being "their business." The development led Brezhnev to adopt a harder stance against the satellite states. On August 3rd 1968, at a Warsaw Pact meeting, he proclaimed what became known since then as the Brezhnev Doctrine. The Doctrine contended that,

> Each Communist party is free to apply the principles of Marxism-Leninism and socialism in its own country, but it is not free to deviate from these principles if it is to remain a Communist party. […] The weakening of any of the links in the world system of socialism directly affects all the socialist countries, and they cannot look indifferently upon this.[59]

On that same day, the Czechoslovak delegation secretly handed a letter to the Soviet delegation. The letter expressed the formers' anxiety regarding the reforms Dubček had implemented, suggested that the situation had gotten out of hand, and invited the Soviet authorities to intervene. The latter intervened in a similar manner as they had in 1956, only this time the bloodshed was avoided because the Soviet troops encountered only passive resistance. Dubček's reforms were revoked, (with the exception of the reform that inaugurated the federal Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics) but, surprisingly, he remained in office for a few more months. It was believed that, after Dubček and his colleagues had renounced their previous actions, the counter-reforms could be carried out more smoothly if they remained in their positions because the public would be less agitated. Additionally, those who were visibly involved in the revolution of 1968 (journalists, authors, film directors, and student leaders) were also requested to renounce their previous actions by signing declarations of repentance. The few that refused to comply, instantly became social pariahs.[60]

The Prague Spring of 1968 indicates that not all was quiet on the *eastern* front, and that the "unbroken forty years silence" had some pauses in 1956 and 1968. But, as in the West, the pauses were not enough to debunk the traditional post-war narratives. The difference, however, lies in the

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid. pp. 445

fact that whereas in the West the revelations of the late 1960's shook the foundations of those narratives and the myths of resistance and victimisation began to corrode, in the East every time the frozen past started to crack the Soviet troops were called into action, and the past was placed back in the freezer. From 1964 until 1985, Brezhnev made the Soviet commemoration of the Second World War omnipresent, and by doing so he increased the role the war played in legitimising the Soviet regime. His actions did not counteract Khrushchev's efforts at de-Stalinisation, and a limited level of self-determination was offered to the satellite countries. Yet, as we have seen, both leaders remained adamant on adhering to the principles of Marxism-Leninism and whenever a deviation from those principles occurred repressive measures were imminent.

After 1985, however, Gorbachev's rise to power and his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* offered a chance to the Soviet citizens to form civil society movements. Examples relevant for our study are the formation of the movements *Pamiat* and *Memorial*. The former was formed in 1985 and the latter in 1987. These movements are indicative of the path the reinterpretation and reconstruction of the Soviet past followed, not only in post-1989 Russia but in Eastern Europe in general. Whereas *Memorial* started to criticise the Soviet version of the past, initially by concentrating on the victims of Stalinist purges, and later by expanding their scope to other victims and a wider array of topics,[61] *Pamiat* offered a new anti-Communist and nationalistic version of history by excluding the narratives that did not fit their vision of the past, and by abusing history in order to "ward off cosmopolitan challenges."[62]

The changes on Soviet soil could not leave the satellites unaffected. The velvet revolutions that took place in Eastern Europe, with Walesa's *Solidarity* movement, and with Václav Havel's free election as president of Czechoslovakia, signalled the end of Soviet hegemony and the fall of the iron curtain. The Cold War that had legitimised and imposed the traditional narratives both in the West and in the East was now over and Eastern European states could "return to Europe". The break of 1989 saw the emergence of a variety of new memory discourses and a reinterpretation of the past in order to match the requirements of the present. As Aleida Assmann has pointed out, however,

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[61] Machteld Venken. "'You Still Live Far from the Motherland, but You Are Her Son, Her Daughter.' War Memory and Soviet Mental Space (1945-2011), in Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (Eds.). *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2013) pp. 54-67
[62] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp. 825

While in Western Europe national myths were challenged and debunked, that was by no means equally the case in Eastern Europe. Far from confronting these complexities (persecution/collaboration, victimisation/guilt), many of these nations are now engaged in re-establishing old national myths or creating new ones.[63]

Thus, the old "traditional" narratives were replaced by new "traditional" narratives. The following section deals with these diverging trends in detail.

4. From the break of 1989 to recent attempts at mnemonic integration

As we saw earlier, the "traditional" narratives of the immediate post-war era started to erode in the West in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The new self-critical narratives, however, did not take hold until the mid- to late-1980's because, even though the younger generation was eager to debunk the "traditional" narratives, the older generation still adhered to them. Consequently, the period in between was a period of both contestation and adherence, a period when the old and the new narratives "coexisted". In the end, however, the "reflexive" narratives prevailed because the representatives of the older generation were passing away, and the younger generation gained more political power. In addition, historical studies shed new light on previously unexplored or hidden aspects of the national history. Yet, as we have already mentioned, these studies rarely reached a wider readership. Thus, it was left to the mainstream media to inform and influence the masses about "new discoveries" regarding the past. Of course, professional historians and well-informed readers were already aware of these "new discoveries", but the general public had to wait until the unresolved issues of the past spurred the interest of the mass media. In turn, this fresh public interest resulted in an intensification of research in the troubled years of 1939-1945, and an expansion of publications regarding the Second World War and the new "hot" topic of the Holocaust.

In France, the curiosity about the Holocaust was ignited in 1985 by Claude Lanzmann's documentary film, entitled *Shoah*. The documentary left a powerful impression on the French audience, and it was one of the reasons why the topic gradually acquired a particular significance on French soil. But, it should be noted that the documentary dealt primarily with the extermination

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[63] Aleida Assmann. "Europe – A Community of Memory?" *GHI Bulletin* 40 (2007): pp. 11-25

of the Jews in the East,[64] and thus it avoided any mention of the French involvement in the Shoah, or of the role that the Vichy regime had played in the deportation of the French Jewry. As late as 1985, the Vichy regime and its collaboration with Nazi Germany was still a taboo for French society.

The situation changed in 1989 when René Bousquet, the former secretary general of the Vichy police department, was accused for crimes against humanity. Bousquet was finally indicted in 1991, and was scheduled to appear in court in 1993, but he was assassinated shortly before he was brought to trial.[65] The indictment of Bousquet, and the subsequent publicity the affair received, delivered a hard blow to the credibility of the "traditional" French narrative of resistance and victimisation, but his convenient assassination gave the opportunity to the French government of François Mitterrand to avoid making any official concessions regarding the Vichy regime.

The following year, another trial, the trial of Paul Touvier, a former lower-ranking official of Vichy, brought the matter to the fore once again. The court condemned Touvier for crimes against humanity, but shortly after the latter's conviction, a third, more "illustrious", trial caught the spotlight. This time it was Maurice Papon, the former secretary-general of the Bordeaux administration under Pétain, but also a former government minister and police chief of Paris under De Gaulle, who was accused of committing crimes against humanity. Papon had been directly responsible for the arrest and transportation of Bordeaux's Jewish community to Paris, from where they were finally deported to the Nazi concentration camps.[66]

The fact that Papon had been able, not only to avoid persecution for fifty years, but also to pursue and hold administrative positions in his post-war career as a civil servant, is indicative of the extent and thoroughness with which the post-war purges of Vichy executives were carried out. It also explains why "reflexive" narratives about the events of the Second World War could not emerge in France before the old political guard lost its power. Papon was eventually convicted, but due to his old age and deteriorating health he was released shortly after the conviction. In the end, the only substantial achievement of his trial was that in 1995, the new French president, Jacques

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[64] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp. 817
[65] Stefan Berger. "Remembering the Second World War in Western Europe, 1945-2005", in Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (Eds.). *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2013) pp. 119-136
[66] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp. 819

Chirac, eventually acknowledged publicly that the country he was representing had participated in the extermination of Europe's Jewry.[67]

Hence, it took the French state fifty years to admit its collaboration to crimes that had by then become common knowledge for its citizens and its European neighbours. Yet, it is not a coincidence that this statement was delayed for so long, or that it took place that particular year. In 1995 President François Mitterrand died. Mitterrand was the last French head of state to experience the war as an adult, and he had also been a civil servant of the Vichy regime.[68] Therefore, during his tenure, it did not really seem prudent to recognise publicly that he had been a member (even a low ranking one) of a regime that had been an accomplice to the Nazi atrocities. The fact that a state so persistent on differentiating itself from the Vichy regime, was run by a former member of that regime can only be characterised as ironic. What is important for our study, however, is the generation gap. As soon as a representative of a younger generation took over, the process of "coming to terms" with the past could take place on a national level, and not only on an academic or juridical level as had previously been the case.

In a similar manner in Austria, the "traditional" post-war founding myth that cloaked the Second Republic with the mantle of "Hitler's First Victim" was lifted in 1986. As we saw earlier, the post-war Austrian politicians, with the permission of the Allies, had asserted that the *Anschluss* was a legal aberration and that the Austrian state did not legally exist from 1938 to 1945. With that legal pretence they were able to resist any legal claims made by war victims against the Austrian state throughout the Cold War period, and to deny any moral or political responsibility.[69] In 1986, however, the wartime record of the then presidential candidate, and later Austrian President, Kurt Waldheim exposed a different version of the past. Waldheim had served as an officer of Wehrmacht in the Balkans during the Second World War, and thus the revelations regarding his service shattered the myth that Austrians had solely been victims of Nazi Germany – they were also, and primarily, perpetrators.

Moreover, relevant to our study is the fact that from 1972 until 1981, Waldheim had served as the Secretary General of the United Nations Organisation, but no one at the time seemed troubled

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[67] Stefan Berger. "Remembering the Second World War in Western Europe, 1945-2005", in Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (Eds.). *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2013) pp. 119-136

[68] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp. 818

[69] Judith Beniston. "'Hitler's First Victim?' – Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria." *Austrian Studies* Vol.11 (2003) pp. 1-13

by his wartime record.[70] Therefore, the fact that Waldheim's past finally troubled his fellow citizens and the citizens of neighbouring European countries in 1986, offers another evidence in favour of our argument that in Western Europe the traditional post-war narratives were publicly debunked only in the period after 1985, and that the period from the mid-1960's to the mid-1980's tested the credibility of those narratives without, however, being able to deal the decisive blow.

As Judith Beniston points out, after the 'Waldheim Affair', "in a series of high-profile speeches, […] Austria's political leaders, amongst them Federal Chancellor Franz Vranitzky, increasingly distanced themselves from the 'victim thesis' and acknowledged the country's moral responsibility for its involvement in Nazi crimes."[71] The temporal analytical framework offered by the years spanning from 1985 to 1989 becomes relevant once again because, as Anton Pelinka has pointed out, the role that the generational transition played was essential, not only in the French case, but in the Austrian paradigm as well.[72] Vranitzky was only eight years old when the war ended, and in similarity with Jacques Chirac, he did not carry the burden of personal responsibility in the same manner as the politicians of the previous generation did.

There appears to be an exception to our rule, however, and that is the case of the Federal Republic of Germany. In the West German state, the official narrative also "attempted to restrict responsibility for WWII to the "demon" – or "(megalo)maniac" – Hitler and his wicked entourage."[73] By doing so, it could limit the extent of German responsibility to a handful of Nazis, subsequently acquitting the majority of the German population, and it could also avoid the reparation claims made by concentration camp survivors and other categories of victims. In addition to this selective remembrance, any reference made to the *Nazi* (and therefore non-German) atrocities was always accompanied by a careful reference to the German sufferings, namely, to the allied carpet bombings during the last stages of the war, to the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Eastern European states after those lands were annexed by the Soviet Union and its satellites, to the mass rape of German women by the advancing Red Army, etc.[74]

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[70] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp. 812

[71] Judith Beniston. "'Hitler's First Victim?' – Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria." *Austrian Studies* Vol.11 (2003) pp. 6

[72] Anton Pelinka. "Taboos and Self-Deception: The Second Republic's Reconstruction of History", in Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (Eds.), *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*. Pp. 95-102

[73] Hagen Fleischer. "The Path beneath the Present." *Historein* 4 (2003-4): pp. 45-130

[74] Ibid.

Yet, precisely because the Federal Republic of Germany was virtually transformed into the sole perpetrator of the crimes that were committed during the Second World War (after Austria was dubbed the "first victim of Hitler", Italy focused on the heroic resistance of the partisans and "forgot" about its recent fascist past, and East Germany placed the blame on the Nazi capitalists of the West) it was not so easy for her to evade the responsibility for crimes that were committed in her name. For that reason, the pressure that the May '68 generation applied on "coming to terms" with the past appears to have had greater impact on West Germany, or at least that the older generation there could not fend off the challenges of the students as easily as their counterparts in the neighbouring continental countries could. As Hagen Fleischer has argued, "German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* clearly reached new dimensions thanks to the reshuffle caused by the '68 generation and the replacement of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), who had been ruling for twenty years, by a centre-left government from 1969 to 1983. The change was symbolised by Willy Brandt falling to his knees at the Warsaw ghetto memorial in December 1970."[75]

Thus, what took place from the mid- to late-1980's in the rest of Western Europe, took place in West Germany almost two decades earlier. Even the topic of the Holocaust was "popularised" earlier in the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1979, the American miniseries *Holocaust* attracted the interest of twenty million viewers.[76] According to Tony Judt, the show achieved such high numbers of viewership precisely because "its story was simple, [i.e. offered a black and white version of the events], its characters were two-dimensional, and the narrative was structured for maximum emotional impact."[77] Even though this was an American production, an SS officer held the protagonist role on the side of the perpetrators, and so the German responsibility was once again limited to a specific group of people.

It is also interesting to note that the show was presented in Austria two months later, but it did not have the same impact as in West Germany.[78] We can only assume why this was the case. My guess is that whereas the German audience had been confronted daily with issues regarding the past after the mid-1960's, and was thus familiarised with those affairs, especially when they were presented from such a black/white perspective and placed the German guilt primarily on SS

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[75] Ibid. pp. 51
[76] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp. 811
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

officers, the Austrian audience was yet uncomfortable or perhaps simply uninterested in the past, because the myth of "Hitler's first victim" still held strong.

Hence, while the continental countries of Western Europe were busy with the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and debunking their "traditional" myths, in the German Federal Republic they were "revising" the history of the Third Reich. What became known as the *Historikerstreit,* the historians' dispute, was an attempt by conservative historians, led by Ernst Nolte, to interpret Nazism and the Shoah as a response to Bolshevism. According to Nolte and his supporters, the rise of National Socialism, and the crimes associated with it, were a defensive reaction to the threat that Lenin and his heirs posed.[79] For that reason, they argued, if we wished to analyse Nazism and the Holocaust, we would have to situate them in their time and place and not treat them as a unique historical phenomenon. In other words, this group suggested that although no one could deny that the Nazis had committed horrendous crimes, their crimes were no more or no less horrendous than the crimes of the Bolsheviks, and that the former had been provoked by the latter in the first place. Yet, this attempt to relativize the Nazi crimes, and subsequently to limit German responsibility, was (and still is), dangerous, because, as Jürgen Habermas, and the group of supporters that was formed around him, insisted, the Holocaust was doubtlessly unique. Regardless of the crimes that the Bolsheviks committed; the scale, the intentions, and the means with which the Holocaust was carried out was incomparable and unprecedented. So, any attempt at relativisation and contextualisation of the Nazi crimes constituted a regression for the way the German society confronted her past, and not a progression.

Of course, none of the developments in the West were coincidental. In addition to the generational transition, the simultaneous change at the helm of the Soviet administration, and the more liberal policies that Gorbachev implemented allowed more space for criticism against the Soviet regime and its crimes. The new narratives of victimisation under the Soviet rule, and the criticism that emanated from the Eastern European countries, influenced the intellectuals in the West as well, and offered Nolte the background to compare and relativize the crimes of Nazism with the crimes of Communism.

Thus, the "traditional" Soviet narratives were being debunked at the time, but instead of being replaced by more "reflexive" narratives, as was the case in the West, they were being replaced by a new version of nationalistic "traditional" narratives, which underlined the

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[79] Ibid. pp. 812

victimisation of one's nation at the hands not only of the Nazis but also of the Soviets (with greater emphasis placed on the latter). An excellent example of this trend is the reinstatement and appraisal of all historical figures that were labelled as 'fascist' and 'anti-communist' by the Soviet authorities. The reasoning behind this policy was the following: Since the official narratives of the 1945-1989 era were considered to be deceitful, it would not be a mistake to assume that the people who were branded as 'fascists' and 'anti-communists' by the Soviets were in reality heroes of their respective nations, and that they had struggled to maintain their country's independence against the communist takeover. The problem, however, lies in the fact that a fragment of the personalities that were reinstated and praised were true fascists who had collaborated with the Nazis in the extermination of Eastern European Jews and other ethnic minorities. The case of the infamous Romanian Marshal Ion Antonescu is illustrative. Antonescu had aligned Romania with the forces of the Axis after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22nd 1941, and he was responsible for instigating pogroms against the Jews. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Antonsecu was accorded one minute's silence by the Romanian parliament.[80] The minute of silence was obviously accorded for his services to the Romanian people during the Second World War (regardless of the fact that those "services" included ethnic cleansings), which were aimed at creating a geographically greater Romanian state, and most importantly because they were directed against the Soviet Union.

In 2003, the Romanian government went as far as issuing a denial of the country's involvement in the Holocaust.[81] Four days later, however, after being pressured by Jewish circles, and because foreign media had given the matter extensive publicity, the Romanian authorities were forced to revoke their previous statement and admit their country's role in the Jewish genocide.[82] Yet, since Romania, in accordance with most of the nations that were previously part of the Soviet bloc, opted to join the EU and the NATO, it was easy for the current members of those institutions to insist that the candidate states conform to a number of criteria in order to get accepted in the

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[80] Ibid. 824

[81] Oleksandr Feldman. "Ignoring Romania's Holocaust Complicity – Not an Option". Published in *The Algemeiner* on October 23rd 2011. http://www.algemeiner.com/2011/10/23/ignoring-romanias-holocaust-complicity-not-an-option/ See also: Laurence Weinbaum. "The Banality of History and Memory: Romanian Society and the Holocaust". Published in *Jewish Virtual Library* on June 1st 2006. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Romania_Holo.html

[82] Hagen Fleischer. "The Path beneath the Present." *Historein* 4 (2003-4): pp. 45-130

(Western) European community. As we shall see later, political correctness and "dealing with one's past" became imperative conditions.

In a similar manner, in the Baltic States no distinction was made between the truly innocent victims of Soviet terror and those who, like Antonescu, had voluntarily collaborated with the Nazis during the war and were themselves accomplices in a series of atrocities. In Lithuania, 35,000 citizens who had been convicted for war crimes and collaboration with the 'fascist capitalists', were instantly rehabilitated, without any screening processes taking place, and without even considering if any of the thousands rehabilitated were indeed guilty as charged. When representatives of foreign states requested that the names be published in order to be screened, the Lithuanian authorities responded "slowly and fragmentarily".[83]

Moreover, the tendency to relativize and compare the crimes of Nazism with the crimes of Communism was not solely a West German phenomenon. This phenomenon was also evident, and definitely more pronounced, in Eastern Europe among the countries of the former Soviet bloc. The difference, however, lies in the fact that whereas in the German Federal Republic the attempt of Nolte and his supporters was to equate and explain the crimes of Nazism as a response to the threat of Bolshevism, in the East some countries have gone a step further by representing the crimes of Communism not as equal, but as more catastrophic and inhumane than those of Nazism. This is certainly the case with the Hungarian *Terrorhaza* ('House of Terror'). The museum, located in Budapest in the building where the headquarters of the former Security Police used to be, was opened in February 2002 by the conservative government of Viktor Orbán.[84] In its erstwhile interrogation cells, torture equipment and other objects from the period 1944 to 1989 are on display. Thus, both the Nazi and the Communist atrocities are exhibited in an unbroken linear version of Hungarian history.[85] No distinction is made between the crimes of Nazism and the crimes of Communism. Whereas, however, only three rooms are devoted to the Nazi terror and to the Hungarian fascists of Ferenc Szálasi – responsible for the extermination of 600,000 Jews – the rest of the building is dedicated to the portrayal of the Communist terror.[86] As Tony Judt argues: "The

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Arfon Rees. "Managing the History of the Past in the Former Communist States", in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 219-232

[85] Hagen Fleischer. "The Path beneath the Present." *Historein* 4 (2003-4): pp. 45-130

[86] Tony Judt. *Post-War. A History of Europe since 1945.* New York: Penguin Press, (2005) pp. 827. Fleischer refers only to *two* rooms. Pp. 74

not particularly subliminal message here is that Communism and Fascism are equivalent. Except that they are not: the presentation and content of the Budapest *Terrorhaza* makes it quite clear that, in the eyes of the museum's curators, Communism not only lasted longer but did far more harm than its neo-Nazi predecessor."[87] The older generation of Hungarians can also subtract another soothing message. According to Laszlo Karasai, "the message is simple: Almost every Hungarian is innocent. The main guilty are foreign forces: first the Germans, then the Russians, and very, very few collaborators."[88]

The "nationalistic relapse" in the East, however, contradicted (and to a certain extent still contradicts) the efforts of the European institutions to create a European identity based on the homogenisation of the various versions of European history. As we have already seen, the Declaration of Copenhagen was the first official European document referring to a "European identity". The significance of the Holocaust as an event of global magnitude, and its rising popularity through TV shows, museums, and monuments, has made European policy makers to consider its power as a collective memory that could aid the construction of this transnational European identity, and offer European integration the symbolic legitimisation that it is currently missing. Initially, in 1995, the European Parliament passed a resolution on a day to commemorate the Holocaust. In 2000, the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson invited the delegations of sixteen nations (thirteen of whom were either present or future members of the European Union) to attend an International Forum in Stockholm in order to discuss and define a common framework for commemorating and teaching the Holocaust.[89] The forum was supposed to provide the "political blueprint" for contemporary Europe.[90] Finally, in 2002, the Council of Europe announced the introduction of a continent-wide day devoted to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and even though each state was given the freedom to choose its own specific date on when to commemorate its victims, most countries chose January 27th (the liberation day of Auschwitz by

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[87] Ibid. pp. 828

[88] Hagen Fleischer. "The Path beneath the Present." *Historein* 4 (2003-4): pp. 45-130

[89] Aline Sierp. "Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945," in Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Eds.). *The Transcultural Turn. Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders.* Berlin: De Gruyter, (2014): pp. 103-118

[90] Claus Legewie and Friderike Heuer. "A Tour of the Battleground: The Seven Circles of Pan-European Memory." *Social Research,* Vol. 75 (1) (2008) pp. 217-234

the Soviet forces), indicating that the date has indeed acquired a supranational European significance.[91]

The endeavour of the European institutions to spread awareness and establish a collective memory of the Holocaust, has been interpreted by contemporary scholars as an effort to construct a European founding myth.[92] If we look back at how Primo Levy and his autobiography were received in the early post-war years, and how the Jewish victims, or the topic of the Holocaust in general, were side-lined until the mid-1980's (with the exception of West Germany), it becomes clear that this is an *ex post* initiative by E.U. institutions to promote pan-European values based on a negative experience that everyone wants to make sure will never occur again. That this is an initiative of present actors to infuse the past with a new meaning in order to promote current interests is also confirmed by Aline Sierp when she points out that, "between 1950-1989, neither in public speeches, nor in the treaties, is reference made to the role the Holocaust may have played in defining the original values or the political goals of the E.U."[93]

Currently, however, it has become an unscripted law that those countries who wish to become a member of the European community must first acknowledge the suffering of the Jews, the Roma, the mentally or physically disabled, the homosexuals, and all other victims of National Socialism, and, most importantly, to admit their own involvement in those atrocities. In a similar manner, countries that were responsible for other genocides or ethnic cleansings, such as Turkey and Serbia, must first "come to terms" with their national past (by acknowledging the Armenian genocide and the massacre at Srebrenica respectively) if they wish to enter the E.U. institutions. Moreover, the post-communist countries have also condemned their Soviet past in preparation for their accession to the European Union (Czech Republic: 1993, Bulgaria: 2001, Romania: 2006), while granting individuals access to the secret police files compiled about them was made a specific

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[91] Aline Sierp. "Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945," in Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Eds.). *The Transcultural Turn. Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders.* Berlin: De Gruyter, (2014): pp. 103-118

[92] Dan Diner. "Restitution and Memory: The Holocaust in European Political Cultures." *New German Critique* (90): (2003) pp. 36-44. See also: Lothat Probst. "Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust." *New German Critique* (90): (2003): pp. 45-58, Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Eds.). *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2011), Aleida Assmann. "Europe – A Community of Memory?" *GHI Bulletin* 40 (2007): pp. 11-25

[93] Aline Sierp. "Integrating Europe, Integrating Memories: The EU's Politics of Memory since 1945," in Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (Eds.). *The Transcultural Turn. Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders.* Berlin: De Gruyter, (2014): pp. 103-118

"written" condition for E.U. membership (Hungary and Czech Republic: 2003, Slovakia: 2004, Romania and Bulgaria: 2005).[94]

Yet, instead of overcoming the contestation of memories, the E.U. transferred the issues on a supranational level and "institutionalised" them. In 2007, the E.U. passed a legislation that criminalised Holocaust denial and made it punishable by imprisonment. Each member state, however, still maintained the right not to enforce the rule if the legislation contradicted domestic legal limitations.[95] While the final version of the legislation was still under discussion, the Baltic States proposed that the law should also criminalise the denial of atrocities committed by the Soviet regime under Stalin, but their proposal was rejected.[96] This East-West "memory asymmetry", as Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer have called it, is evident not only between the different political factions on the European arena, but between the same factions as well. When in 2005, the 'Yalta Resolution' was drafted in order to commemorate the end of the war, the then President of the European Parliament's socialist group Martin Schultz had a heated debate with his Estonian socialist comrade Toomas Ilves.[97] Whereas Schultz maintained that, "the Red Army made it possible to defeat Nazism and end the Shoah," Ilves lamented the existence of "two visions of history" because "Westerners did not suffer as we did behind the Iron Curtain."[98] Therefore, as Mink and Neumayer explain,

> The controversy around the equivalence between Communism and Nazism – recognition that would justify the demand by many Central European political officials that the Communist regime be officially defined in the same terms as the Nazi regime with all the legal consequences this would entail – offers yet another illustration of the complexity of demands for memory 'readjustment'.[99]

As of today, no law that criminalises the denial of the crimes of Communism has been passed on a European level, but an annual European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism

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[94] http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta06/Eres1481.htm
[95] http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/19/world/europe/19iht-eu.4.5359640.html?_r=0 (accessed on March 24th, 2015)
[96] Arfon Rees. "Managing the History of the Past in the Former Communist States", in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 219-232
[97] Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (Eds.). *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2013) pp. 1-20
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

and Nazism was inaugurated in 2008.[100] The date chosen is the 23rd of August, the date when the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed and "Soviet Union and Germany divided Europe into two spheres of interest by means of secret additional protocols."[101] This move demonstrates that compromises have been made on a European level and I perceive them as a positive step. I believe, however, that we must draw a clear line that defines the limits of this relativizing tendency.

Moreover, I perceive the efforts of the European institutions to promote a European identity optimistically because it is true that after all these years of economic and political cooperation European nations have not yet managed to create a sense of solidarity, and nationalistic sentiments are still dominant. In my opinion, however, this is a normal outcome. If we consider that the idea of a European identity was formulated for the first time in the 70's, and that we had to reach the 90's for European policy makers and historians to initiate the debate on an overarching narrative based on our shared past, then it is clear that not enough time has been awarded to the project for it to come to fruition. As Stefan Berger reminds us: "The way in which a united Europe initially took shape was through an economic alliance. The EEC was meant to overcome the serious financial problems of reconstruction. The aim was to re-establish European nation states not to overcome them."[102]

So, with this in mind, we can move on to the second obstacle which is the European expansion to the East. After so many years under Soviet rule, the recently liberated nations are in need to re-construct their own national identity. Forced to conform with the imposed soviet narratives, and to a Nazi occupation before that, it has been a while since these people have had the chance to be masters of their own future, and for that matter of their own past. I am not saying that versions of the past such as the one exhibited in the Hungarian *House of Terror*, which relativize the crimes of Nazi Germany with those of the Soviet regime, by putting more emphasis on the crimes perpetrated by the latter, should be applauded. On the contrary, the authorities behind such representations of the past must be warned about the decontextualizing, confusing, and provocative effects of such endeavours. All I am saying is that the Western European members should be more sensible in order to comprehend where this nationalistic tendency is emanating

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[100] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0439+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

[101] Ibid.

[102] Stephan Berger. "Remembering the Second World War in Western Europe." in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 119-136

from. In the same way that it took the West some time to debunk the nationalistic myths (with the process still underway), so the Eastern partners should be allowed some time to "come to terms" with their own past. If they are pressured too hard by the European Union to change their approach, the citizens of these countries might falsely perceive it as a new attempt to deprive them of *their* history and subsequently fall prey to the rising populist parties. As Frederick Whitling contends, "centralised directives and constructed political taboos are sitting ducks for potential exploitation by xenophobes and extreme political groups prone to making infringements on national identities."[103]

The main problem here seems to be the different ways in which both sides perceive communism. On the one hand, the East remembers communism as the totalitarian regime that deprived them of their freedom in 1945 and made thousands of people *disappear*. As the regime which supressed them and used their resources and their labour for the benefit of Moscow*,* and as the regime which is responsible for their current backwardness. In the West, on the other hand, communism was remembered (and is still remembered to a far lesser extent) in a more idealistic way. The Spanish Civil War and the communist resistance maintain their significance as movements of anti-fascist struggle, while the connection of philosophers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre with communism shows that there is more to it than just terror and suppression. Therefore, it is still hard for these two narratives to find a common ground, and communism becomes a "thorny issue" on a European level. Whereas the Eastern partners demand an equation of communist and Nazi crimes, and compare the gulag with Auschwitz, the Western partners, some of whom comprise of representatives of communist parties, are reluctant to do so.

In my opinion, the equation of Nazi and Communist crimes is a false and dangerous interpretation. Eastern European historians must endeavour to make the distinction between the two regimes clear, because this asymmetry of memory ends up distorting the true historical facts. On the other hand, however, the West should also make sure to dissolve any remaining illusions about the Soviet regime, and incorporate the Eastern European narratives into the story.

With regards to the Holocaust, I would argue that spreading awareness is a positive thing, as it is positive to expose instances of collaboration with the Nazis. Yet, using the Holocaust as a "founding myth" i.e. as a mean to simplify and exclude other memories (other Nazi atrocities,

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[103] Frederick Whitling. "*Damnatio Memoriae* and the Power of Remembrance: Reflections on Memory and History." in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 87-97

Communist atrocities or, on the other hand, instances of resistance, courage, and altruism) is not something that should be systematically pursued on a European level. According to Konrad Jarausch, "inventing a common past by selecting merely those elements which lead to the current integration process will provide a highly biased and incomplete set of memories that fail to do justice to the complexity of pasts on the Old Continent."[104] Furthermore, it is impossible to impose a unified memory of the Holocaust, because each country commemorates it differently. It is unthinkable to require the citizens of the United Kingdom to commemorate the Holocaust in the same way as German citizens do.[105] Not only because the latter are the perpetrators and the former are not, but because each country had a different historical experience of the event. In this sense it would also be inappropriate to impose the same commemorative narratives to Poland and Greece. Top-down initiatives, such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, or the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, are excellent occasions to honour the memory of the victims of the continent's dark past, and they do create a sense of a shared community, but they should not be the reason why other victims are side-lined. This would only lead to a new round of competition among victims of other genocides committed on the continent, such as the more recent massacre at Srebrenica.

I do not mean to say that countries should not be criticised if they represent the past in a way that negates history, because those kind of representations are what creates tension in the first place. If there is something common in the continent's past is that all countries have experienced instances of both resistance and collaboration, and all have been home to both victims and perpetrators. Without blurring the lines of who was a perpetrator and who was a victim, and without mixing and relativizing the crimes of Nazism and Communism the European institutions should try to safeguard and promote complex "reflexive" narratives of the past instead of trying to create a simplified homogenised version of it. I believe that the institution of the European Capital of Culture offers, on the one hand, an excellent opportunity to safeguard and reconcile the various, and in many cases conflicting, national narratives from a top-down perspective, and on the other,

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[104] Konrad H. Jarausch. "Nightmares or Daydreams? A Postscript on the Europeanization of Memories." in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Strath (Eds.). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance.* New York: Berghahn Books, (2010) pp. 309-320

[105] Lothar Probst. "Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust." *New German Critique* (90): (2003): pp. 45-58

to promote a new supranational way of interpreting and reconstructing the past by funding bottom-up initiatives regarding our shared but varying history.

In what follows, I will offer an historical overview of the institution of the European Capital of Culture in order to indicate how it was conceived, how it has evolved, and how, in my opinion, it has the potential to aid the formation of a sense of solidarity among the nations of Europe by acting as a stage of promoting a "reflexive" view of the shared European past, and by blunting the sharp edges of nationalistic history.

Part 2

The Institution of the European Capitals of Culture

5. European Capitals of Culture: A Detailed Historical Overview

In the end of 2009, the institution of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) counted twenty five years of existence, and in order to celebrate this milestone the European Commission published a book entitled, *European Capitals of Culture: the Road to Success from 1985 to 2010.*[106] The book offers a "myth" on how the idea for the European Capitals of Culture was conceived. According to this publication, the ECoC action was "born at Athens airport in January 1985, a day of high winds and delayed flights."[107] The Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, and her French counterpart, Jack Lang, were sitting in the lounge of the airport waiting to board their planes. Lang had been in Athens in order to attend a meeting of Europe's culture ministers, and both participants expressed their disappointment that such occasions were rare and without a particular supranational impact. As the conversation progressed, Mercouri suggested the inauguration of "a series of yearly events that would put the spotlight on cities around Europe, and their role in the development of European cultures."[108] Lang was in favour of the idea, and supposedly both of them started promoting it on a European level afterwards. The fact is, however, that while the idea was indeed formulated by Mercouri, she did so during an informal meeting of the Member States' Culture Ministers in 1983, and not in the airport of Athens in 1985.[109] The exact purpose this myth serves eludes me, but I guess this anecdote was included in the European Commission's publication in order to make the birth of the ECOC appear more spontaneous, and present it perhaps as a bottom-up initiative and not a top-down directive.

Nevertheless, regardless of how, when and where the idea was conceived, Mercouri believed that "it [was] time for [the Culture Ministers'] voice to be heard as loud as that of the technocrats," because for her, "culture, art and creativity [were] not less important than technology, commerce and the economy."[110] The statement was intended to serve as a supplement to the European Community's economic policies. As we saw earlier, the European Community was formed in order to address economic issues, and for that reason it focused solely on economic

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[106] http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/documents/ecoc_25years_en.pdf
[107] Ibid. p. 3
[108] Ibid. p. 3
[109] Monica Sassatelli. "European Cultural Space in the European Cities of Culture: Europeanization and Cultural Policy." *European Societies*, Vol. 10 (2) (2008) p. 225-245
[110] John Myerscough. *European Cities of Culture and Cultural Months: The Network of European Cultural Cities.* Glasgow: 1994

integration. Consequently, in the Treaty of Rome of 1957 there was no explicit provision regarding culture or cultural policies. What Mercouri's initiative hoped to achieve was to indirectly overcome that policy gap and make cultural integration an integral part of the Community's political agenda. For that reason, ten years after the Declaration of Copenhagen, the Culture Ministers of the Member States of the European Community met unofficially in Athens. There, they agreed to participate in a cultural action that would promote, and simultaneously construct, a European identity based on the specific cultural values of the city that held the title each year, and on the new space created for dialogue and cultural exchange among the various European cities that participated in the programme.

The programme was inaugurated officially on June 13th 1985 with Council Resolution 85/c 153/02 establishing the European *City* of Culture event, as it was originally called. It is worth noting that the programme was launched at a time when the European Community had no legislative basis to act at the level of cultural policy. This legislative basis would be provided in 1992 via the provisions of the Treaty of Maastricht, but until then the only resolution that clearly referred to a cultural policy was the resolution establishing the ECoC. According to the resolution, the annual event was established in order "to help bring the people of the Member States closer together."[111] The primary aim of the initiative was to "highlight the cultural wealth and diversity of the cities of Europe whilst emphasising their shared cultural heritage and the vitality of the arts."[112] Additionally, according to a study prepared for the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, the event was intended to: "a) highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures, b) celebrate the cultural ties that link Europeans together, c) bring people from different European countries into contact with each other's culture and promote mutual understanding, and d) foster a feeling of European citizenship."[113]

The authors of the latter study, Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox, have divided the development of the institution of the ECoC from 1985 until the latest designations of 2019 into three phases according to the formal changes that were applied to the operational procedures of the Programme. Due to the fact that every city is awarded the title well in advance of its "cultural year"

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[111] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:41985X0622

[112] Ibid.

[113] Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox. *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long Term Effects.* Study prepared for the Directorate-General for Internal Policies. European Parliament: 2013 http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/513985/IPOL-CULT_ET%282013%29513985_EN.pdf

in order to have enough time to prepare the infrastructure and administer its cultural projects, each new phase begins only when the suggested formal changes were actually implemented. Because the changes could not be enforced retroactively on the applications, or on the cities that were already appointed ECoC *before* the formal changes were conceived, in Garcia's and Cox's temporal division those cities were placed in the previous phase, even if the calendar year that would be their "cultural year" still lay ahead of them when the changes were introduced. Since a city's application was accepted on a different set of rules, it was only natural that the new rules could not possibly apply to that application.

The First Phase

The first phase of the ECoC event began in 1985 and ended in 1996. During its first phase, the event remained an intergovernmental activity. The responsibility for its implementation fell on the Ministers of Culture because, as I have already mentioned, the European Community did not possess any legislative power in the field of culture at the time. For that reason, during its first inception, the programme operated in an obscure manner. The nominating and awarding procedures initially lacked the transparency that they acquired when the action came under the supervision of the European Commission, no strict criteria or deadlines existed regarding the preparation and the duration of the cultural programme, and the action's objectives were not clearly defined. Under the initial scheme it was decided that each year a Member State would nominate a city to organise the event, and after that year was over a new city would be appointed ECoC according to an alphabetical order.[114] In honour of Melina Mercouri, who had come up with the original idea to organise the event, the first city to be awarded the title was Athens. The alphabetical order, however, was not maintained and the cities were appointed in a more or less random way. Therefore. following Athens, the cities that held the title were: Florence (1986), Amsterdam (1987), Berlin (1988), Paris (1989), Glasgow (1990), Dublin (1991), Madrid (1992), Antwerp (1993), Lisbon (1994), Luxembourg (1995), and Copenhagen (1996).

If we take a closer look at the first nominations, we notice that, the first five cities to be awarded the title were, with the partial exception of Florence, not only the respective capitals of

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[114] Palmer-Rae Associates. *European Cities and Capitals of Culture: Study Prepared for the European Commission.* 2 Vols. 2004 Part I: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/documents/ecoc/cap-part1_en.pdf , Part II: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/documents/ecoc/cap-part2_en.pdf

their countries, but also cities that were "traditionally" associated with culture and widely perceived to be the cultural centres of Europe. Thus, the title did not have a great impact on the image of those cities, and did not do much to further increase their commercial touristic value. In fact, one could argue that those cities were the "safe choice", and served only as a stepping stone for the event and for the promotion of "Europe" that the Ministers of Culture had envisioned. Moreover, it seemed wiser to hand the title over to cities that were already adequately equipped to undertake such an endeavour, because the first cities did not have much time on their hands to organise a full-scale programme (Athens was afforded only a few months to prepare for her cultural year in 1985).

If the nomination procedures maintained the same momentum, i.e. with the Member States awarding the ECoC title to the cities I have dubbed as "safe choices", and solely via a top-down decision procedure, the institution of the ECoC would probably have been rendered obsolete a long time ago. Even though the overall "European" objective behind the event would still be promoted, the cities awarded the title would have nothing to gain out of the deal and the interest in obtaining the title would have dwindled. In other words, the programme would not function on a *quid pro quo* basis.

However, the pattern changed when it was the United Kingdom's turn to select a city to be awarded the ECoC title. If the authorities responsible for cultural policies in the United Kingdom had followed in the footsteps of their predecessors, the obvious choice would have been London. Instead of taking the trodden path, however, by appointing a city via a top-down decision, the UK authorities proclaimed a national competition for the title, and they were aided by the unforeseen fact that for the first time the winning candidate was afforded a four year planning time before its "cultural year" took place.[115] The city that won the competition was Glasgow, an industrial city known more for its manufacturing capacity and high criminality rates, and not so much for its success in the cultural sector. Yet, precisely the fact that Glasgow was viewed as an industrial city but still managed to deliver a year-long cultural programme with activities scattered across the four seasons, and not concentrated solely in the summer months as had previously been the case, allowed the city to regenerate itself economically by attracting a large number of tourists, and by creating a new image as a cultural destination. Additionally, whereas the previous ECoC had

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[115] Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox. *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long Term Effects.* Study prepared for the Directorate-General for Internal Policies. European Parliament: 2013

considered the title to be something ephemeral, a one-time passing event, the organisers of Glasgow's cultural year aimed to build on the annual nomination and achieve long term benefits.

The year was so successful that succeeding ECoC sought the advice of Glasgow's administrators in order to prepare for their own cultural year. The Director of Glasgow's ECoC organisation, Robert Palmer, was later recruited by the European Commission in order to prepare a study on the ECoC from 1995 until 2004, and to make recommendations on how the institution could be improved from 2005 onwards. More importantly, the way that the United Kingdom handled its nomination, and the eventual success of Glasgow, seems to have sparked the interest of the other Member States, because in that same year the Council of Ministers convened and decided to make some alterations to the programme. The Ministers' conclusion 90/c 162/01 stated that "they [noted] with interest that the current European City of Culture, Glasgow, will call towards the end of the year a meeting of organisers of the different Cities of Culture, with a view to pooling experience."[116]

Furthermore, by issuing the conclusion, the Council agreed that when the "first cycle" of nominations was completed in the year 1996, "not only Member States of the Community, but also other European countries, *basing themselves on the principles of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law,* should be able to nominate cities for the event."[117] This paragraph reflected the ongoing political transformations of the time, when the Soviet Union was collapsing, and was intended to be an invitation to the countries of the former Soviet bloc to participate in the European integration project.

In the early stages, however, their participation would take place through a different event specifically designed for the occasion. In the fourth paragraph of the conclusion it was specified that, "in view of the widespread interest in holding the event of European cities both inside and outside the Community, the Ministers agree to create a further cultural event, which would be a special European Cultural Month in one city […] each year, to be known as 'Europe in [name of city], 199…'"[118] The "European Cultural Month" scheme was launched in 1992 and lasted until 2003 when it was abolished, because in 2004 most countries that would normally adhere to that scheme became full members of the European Union.

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[116] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1990:162:FULL&from=EN pp. 1
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid. Emphasis added by the author

The signs that the "European Cultural Month" scheme would eventually be outdated became visible already in 1992. On November 12th, the Ministers of Culture issued resolution 92/C 336/02 which was intended to complement the two previous resolutions regarding the ECoC. They agreed to impose "a more precise procedure for the designation of cities, bearing in mind that the event is open not only to community cities but also to cities in other European countries basing themselves on the principles of democracy, pluralism, the rule of law and respect for human rights."[119] Thus, the resolution introduced the first set of selection criteria, expanded the institution's capacity to include cities outside the Community, and specified the bidding deadlines.

According to the new rules:

a) the city should be in a European State basing itself on the principles of democracy, pluralism, the rule of law, and respect for human rights; b) [the designation of the title would] alternate between Community cities and cities from other European countries, without this being a hard and fast rule; c) the cities should not be from the same geographical zone in consecutive years; d) a balance should be found between capital cities and provincial cities;" and finally, "e) that for a specific year a pair of cities may be designated jointly.[120]

With regards to the bidding procedure, it was decided that the ECoCs would be designated five to six years before their "cultural year". For example, the designations for 1998 and 1999 were made in 1993, whereas the designations for 2000 and 2001 were made in 1995. The same procedure applied in 1997 and thereafter, every two years.[121]

The year 1992 saw another development concerning the ECoC. For the first time, a European treaty, the Treaty of Maastricht, explicitly referred to cultural policies as being part of the European agenda. Article 128 finally provided the legislative background that the Declaration of Copenhagen and the institution of the ECoC were lacking. Particularly, the article stated that "the Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States while respecting their national and regional diversity, and at the same time [bring] the common cultural heritage to the fore."[122] Important also for our study, was the fact that in the first point of the second

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[119] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1992:336:FULL&from=EN pp. 3
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1992:191:FULL&from=EN pp. 27

paragraph it was declared that one of the aims of the Community's action was to improve "the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples."[123]

We can observe, therefore, that in the early 1990's the EU institutions came to realise that, if a sense of solidarity amongst the peoples of Europe was to be promoted, then better-orchestrated initiatives were required in order to defend their closed circle from a nationalistic backlash, or from the divisive narratives that were emerging in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Eastern European states were welcome to participate in the project, but only if they based themselves "on the principles of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law", a phrase repeated four times in the resolutions of 1990 and 1992.

Nevertheless, despite this positive development, the cultural aims of Article 128 were deliberately phrased in a vague manner in order to avoid any misunderstandings or estrangement on the part of the current, or potential, Member States. The end goal of the EU institutions associated with culture was (and still is), to bring the common cultural heritage to the fore. This endeavour, however, required careful handling, because if the "national and regional diversity" of the various Member States was not respected, the cultural aspect of the European integration project would have failed from the outset and might have led to new tensions. For that reason, the concept of "unity in diversity" was coined.

Monica Sassatelli attempted to understand what the loose European rhetoric of "unity in diversity" was trying to achieve by questioning the functionality of this concept. How can unity be achieved when we are promoting diversity? It seems that during the early stages of formulating the European cultural policies, the European authorities took great care not to be perceived as a threat to the hegemony the nation-states held over their own cultural policies. As she reminds us we should not overlook the fact that "the nation has been imagined as a culturally homogenous community, and as a result enforced homogenisation when required."[124] *Enforcing* cultural homogenisation on a European level would have had the opposite results than the ones desired, and thus, in order to come to an agreement, a loose terminology was used, and the concept of "unity in diversity" emerged.

Yet, what was conceived by "necessity rather than virtue" turned out to be beneficial, because an event like the ECoC could "only obtain a wide acceptance on the condition that it would

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Monica Sassatelli. "European Cultural Space in the European Cities of Culture: Europeanization and Cultural Policy." *European Societies*, Vol. 10 (2) (2008) p. 225-245

not impose a specific and exclusive content."[125] Even when the ECoC title acquired a certain cultural status, however, and European cities became more interested in hosting the annual event, the "unity in diversity" concept did not lose its resonance, because its meaning was altered and was associated with something different. As Sassatelli argues, the concept moved "in the direction of what some authors today call cosmopolitan virtue or cosmopolitan recognition of the other, based on a vision of (European) culture more as a *project* and a co-operative construction than in terms of inheritance of and belonging to fixed cultural contents."[126] As she put it in a previous paragraph, "we could say that through participation in the ECoC programme, cities prove not so much to be European, but that they are *becoming* European, thereby also contributing to the definition of the term and of the process."[127]

If this argument stands true, then the idea of a founding myth becomes unattainable because it contradicts everything that the "unity in diversity" concept stands for. A founding myth constructs a common identity by stressing the continuity with, and inheritance of, a shared past. It is fixed on a certain array of selected cultural contents, and promotes those contents alone. The founding myth presupposes the acceptance (or the enforcement) of a single or an interactive set of narratives, depending on the various historical eras that a nation draws from in order to legitimise its existence. As we have seen from the Treaty of Maastricht, however, and other documents that refer explicitly to EU cultural policies, the way that the promotion of a common European culture was envisioned by the bureaucrats in Brussels, was dynamic. "Europe" is in a constant flux and for that reason it is impossible to enforce a set of fixed cultural contents without including, or excluding, elements that might be crucial for one European nation and irrelevant for another, and vice versa. Therefore, one could argue that the institution of the ECoC fits the "unity in diversity" concept perfectly. On the one hand, it offers the opportunity to the nation states to promote their own national heritage by placing one of them under the European spotlight each year, while on the other, it provides the EU institutions the required legitimacy to pressure national or local governments to showcase what according to their opinion is the "European" dimension of their culture by making some of their cultural characteristics available for "European" appropriation.

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[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

The Second Phase

The second phase of the event spanned the years from 1997 to 2004. During that period nineteen cities held the ECOC title, beginning once again with a Greek city, Thessaloniki, and followed by Stockholm (1998), Weimar (1999), Avignon, Bergen, Bologna, Brussels, Krakow, Helsinki, Prague, Reykjavik, and Santiago de Compostela for the year 2000, Rotterdam and Porto (2001), Bruges and Salamanca (2002), Graz (2003), and Genoa and Lille in 2004.

If we pay attention at the increased number of cities that are not the respective capitals of their countries, or who are not widely renowned as cultural hubs, then the influence of Glasgow's cultural year becomes apparent. 1996 was the final year of the first cycle of designations, and consequently the changes that were introduced in 1990 and 1992 could be implemented only from 1997 onwards. Moreover, since in the new cycle more than one city could be awarded the title, and cities from non-Member states were allowed to apply for the ECoC title, the year 2000 saw a special designation where nine cities were European Capitals of Culture simultaneously. Two of them belonged to non-EU members (Bergen and Reykjavik), while two of them belonged to countries that were under the process of accessing the EU at the time (Krakow and Prague). Before I go into further details regarding the millennium designation, however, I would like to indicate a set of significant changes that took place in 1999.

On the 25th of May, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe issued joint Decision 1419/1999/EC.[128] The decision established the European *Capital* of Culture programme, as it was then renamed, and transformed it from an intergovernmental activity to a legally constituted Community action. Yet, even though the institution's name and legal framework were altered, its objectives remained the same, namely, "to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, as well as to promote greater mutual acquaintance between European citizens."[129] Another provision that remained the same as before, was the rotational designation system, with the title being allocated to a Member State each year in order to guarantee a fair distribution to every member. What changed, however, were the selection criteria. Instead of designating a city unilaterally, the Member State that the title was allocated to was invited to suggest one or more of its cities to be awarded the ECoC title. Each nominated city

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[128] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CONSLEG:1999D1419:20040501:EN:PDF
[129] Ibid. Article 1, pp. 3

was then expected to submit a complete application which included all the administrative details for its "cultural year."

The second paragraph of Article 2 specified how the final designation would be made. There it was stated that,

> The Commission shall each year form a selection panel which shall issue a report on the nomination or nominations judged against the objectives and characteristics of each action. The selection panel shall be composed of seven leading independent figures who are experts on the cultural sector, of whom two shall be appointed by the European Parliament, two by the Council, two by the Commission and one by the Committee of the Regions. The selection panel shall submit its report to the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.[130]

The ECoC was selected only after the latter institutions examined the report and made their suggestions, but the final designation would be made from the Council after it had taken all the previous recommendations into consideration. Compared to the previous intergovernmental arrangement, when lobbying played a crucial role, we can observe that via this procedure a greater level of transparency was achieved. Moreover, this selection procedure made sure the panel was in position to guarantee that, "the nomination shall include a cultural project of European dimension, based principally on cultural cooperation, in accordance with the objectives and action provided for by Article 151 of the Treaty."[131] (The Treaty referred to here is the Treaty of Maastricht, and Article 151 is Article 128 after the Treaty was amended). Important for our study is the fact that, once again, explicit mention is made to history. The final point of Article 3 elucidated that, "the submission shall specify how the nominated city intends […] to exploit the historic heritage, urban architecture and quality of life in the city."[132]

Not surprisingly, the concept of "unity in diversity" remained a pronounced aspect of the new decision. This is evident not only in the main objective, "to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share", but in Article 5 as well. There, it is requested that, "each city […] organise a programme of cultural events highlighting the city's own culture and cultural heritage as well as its place in the common cultural heritage, and [involve] people

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[130] Ibid. Article 2, pp. 4
[131] Ibid. Article 3. Pp. 4
[132] Ibid.

concerned with cultural activities from other European countries with a view to establishing lasting cooperation."[133] The new bidding and selection criteria that Decision 1419/1999/EC introduced were meant to be implemented during the third cycle of the programme. Before I go into further detail regarding this third phase, however, I would like to present the special designation of the year 2000 because I believe that it offers a concise view of what the EU tried to achieve trough the institution of the ECoC, and how the idea of two cities sharing the title crystallised.

As I have already mentioned, for the year 2000 nine cities were appointed ECoC. The thinking behind this decision was to celebrate the new millennium from various geographic locations, and to take advantage of the symbolic significance of the year in order to intensify the promotion of the European vision. From a "European" point of view this designation made sense. After all, what could possibly highlight a unified Europe better than a widespread simultaneous celebration under the ECoC banner? Sassatelli, however, is more critical of this designation and she points out that, even though the year 2000 was indeed an excellent opportunity to make symbolic associations, "this was rather a typical case of European compromise, as in fact all the cities that were candidates were nominated following failure to agree on one."[134] Therefore, from the cities' point of view the designation was more ambivalent because the *quid pro quo* balance was disturbed. On the one hand, attempts were made to coordinate the various cultural programmes. Examples include setting up a "coordination office" in Brussels, selecting a common logo for marketing purposes, and choosing an overall theme for each cultural programme. Yet, on the other hand, all these attempts revealed the incompatibility of the designations and the difficulties of combining the various themes in an interactive way. For example, when the discussions for a common logo were undertaken there was a certain amount of disagreement, and in the end only some of the cities used it on their publicity material.[135] Moreover, while there was truly a strong desire to integrate the cultural programmes, the practical possibilities were scarce, the themes remained unconnected and the organisers had only a few successful collaboration projects to present.

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[133] Ibid. Article 5, pp. 4

[134] Monica Sassatelli. "European Cultural Space in the European Cities of Culture: Europeanization and Cultural Policy." *European Societies*, Vol. 10 (2) (2008) p. 225-245

[135] Palmer-Rae Associates. *European Cities and Capitals of Culture: Study Prepared for the European Commission.* 2 Vols. 2004

All in all, the ECoC 2000 experiment was unsuccessful, but even from unsuccessful experiments lessons can be drawn. The first lesson drawn was that the chances of preparing a successful cultural year are increased when cities share the title, due to the given opportunity to exchange ideas on projects, or learn from more efficient methods of administration. The exchange of artists and community groups might also be easier during a shared year, especially when the cities sharing the title are on the same page, and projects that took place on one city can be exported to the other.[136] Finally, through the export of projects, the European dimension can be highlighted.

Sharing the title, however, can as easily become disadvantageous. The cities might have a completely different vision for their cultural year, and the different aims, objectives, and priorities might not allow too much space for collaboration. Consequently, the cities might lose their interest in cooperating with each other, and instead of highlighting European unity the shared ECoC designation might end up highlighting European disassociation. To a certain extent this is what happened in 2000 because the nine cities had to compete for visibility, visitors and sponsorship.[137] Since all of them were *Capitals of Europe,* the title lost is salience. What is the point of being a capital for a year when during that specific year there are eight other capitals? The bigger, wealthier and traditionally culture-associated cities were able to monopolise the interest of the audience and draw in more tourists, while their smaller and more obscure counterparts struggled to get a glimpse of the spotlight.

Interestingly enough, however, the study prepared by the Palmer/Rae associates notes that when respondents were asked "whether or not they believed the system of having more than one city designated as ECoC in the same year should be continued, [the] views were equally divided."[138] Fifty per cent of the respondents replied 'yes', while the other half replied 'no'. Matters became even more complicated because,

> Respondents in cities that felt more isolated or peripheral to European issues, or where for historical, geographical or cultural reasons there had been few opportunities to join with other European cities in joint cultural projects, tended to favour the idea of sharing the title more than in other cities.[139]

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[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid. pp.92
[139] Ibid.

Thus, despite the fact that sharing the title with a "central" and better-networked city entailed the risk of less visitors, less sponsorship and lesser visibility, at the same time it offered peripheral cities the opportunity to "return to Europe" by having their names and projects linked to those cities that were considered to be the "central" ones and usually belonged to the old Member States. Consequently, the question remained unanswered. "Should the title be shared or not?" In the end, the issue was handled by opting for the solution of the middle ground, because it appears that even those who were in favour of sharing the title did not want to share it with more than one other city.[140] For that reason the millennium experiment was never repeated.

Accordingly, if we leave out the exception of Graz in 2003, for the remaining years of the second phase two cities shared the title each year, and the pattern was maintained during the third cycle of the programme as well. In fact, as we shall see below, the shared designation became even more "useful" during the third phase of the programme when the new Member States were officially incorporated into the rotational system. Then, the pairing of a city belonging to the old Member States with a city belonging to the new guard gave more credibility to the shared nomination, whereas the increase in the number of participants meant that the shared nomination became useful from a practical point of view as well. If only one city was designated for ECoC each year, then many years would have to pass before the same Member State's turn would come to nominate another city.

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[140] Ibid.

The Third Phase

The third phase of the programme began in 2005 and according to the strategic plan it will be concluded in 2019. By the end of the third phase, twenty nine cities would have held the title starting with Cork in 2005 and followed by Patras in 2006, Luxembourg Greater Region and Sibiu in 2007, Liverpool and Stavanger in 2008, Linz and Vilnius in 2009, Essen for the Ruhr, Pécs and Istanbul in 2010, Tallinn and Turku in 2011, Guimarães and Maribor in 2012, Marseille-Provence and Košice in 2013, Umeå and Riga in 2014, Mons and Plzeň in 2015, Donostia-San Sebastian and Wroclaw in 2016, Aarhus and Paphos in 2017, Valetta and Leeuwarden in 2018, and finally Plovdiv and Matera in 2019. The sheer number of cities that will be ECoC by 2019 illustrates the extensive interest in acquiring the title, while their variety is a clear indication that the institutions of the EU want to make sure that every European voice is heard.

The enriched variety is of course attributable to the EU enlargement in 2004 and to the amendments made to Decision 1419/1999/EC in 2005. By issuing Joint Decision 649/2005/EC the European Parliament and the European Council officially incorporated the new Member States into the European Capital of Culture Event, and decided that each of the new Members would share the title with one of the old ones from 2009 onwards, thus offering the former four years of preparation time ahead of the cultural year.[141] The fact, however, that even before the amendments were made cities of non-EU members, Sibiu[142] and Stavanger, were awarded the ECoC title shows that variety was always an integral part of the European cultural agenda.

The Decision also made explicit reference to the sponsorship of the event. This was an issue that had traditionally stirred a certain amount of controversy because in the early stages of the event the EU institutions had offered only marginal funding to the various ECoC. The study prepared by the Palmer/Rae associates indicated that from 1995 until 2004 the average EU contribution to the event was only 1.53 per cent.[143] This can be partly attributed to the fact that in its early years the event was an intergovernmental responsibility and not an EU supervised Community action as it became later. Nevertheless, since EU sponsorship was scarce even when the title was not shared, the Member States were worried that sharing the title would mean even less EU funding, and in

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[141] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32005D0649
[142] Romania became a full member in its cultural year in 2007
[143] Palmer-Rae Associates. *European Cities and Capitals of Culture: Study Prepared for the European Commission.* Vol. 1 pp. 98

order to fend off the criticism, the EU authorities stated in Article 1 that, "account should be taken of the financial consequences of this Decision in such a way as to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate Community funding for the designation of two European Capitals of Culture."[144]
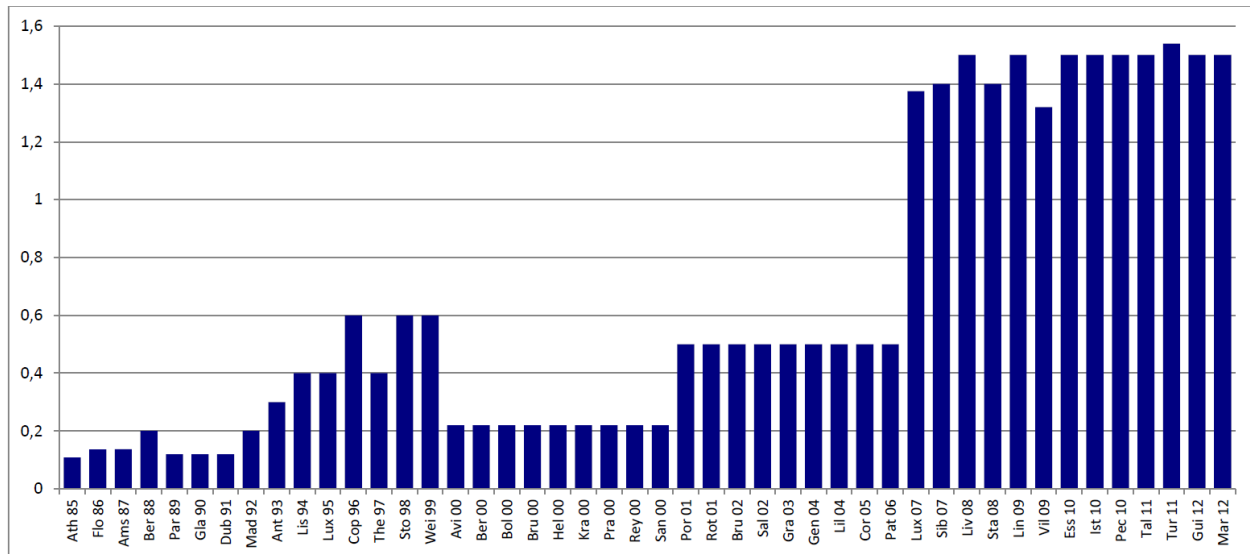

Figure 1: Levels of European Union Support, 1985-2012 (€m) Source: Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox. pp. 51

What this meant in practical terms was clarified by Garcia and Cox (Figure 1). In their study they demonstrated that, "European funding of the ECoC initiative has increased, from just over €100,000 (allocated for the first ECoC year, 1985) to a maximum of €1.5 [million], which is currently available through the Melina Mercouri prize."[145] From 1985 until 1991, with the exception of the city of Berlin which received €200,000, EU funding remained stable at €100,000. From 1992 until 1999 the amount fluctuated between €200,000 and €600,000, whereas for the year 2000 all the designated cities received €200,100. For the next period, spanning from 2001 until 2006 the cities received €500,000 each, and finally, from 2007 onwards, when the recommendation of Article 1 was taken into consideration, the amount of funding was increased and it has more or less stabilised at €1.5 million. EU funding, however, is still marginal in comparison with the money that the cities have to spend on their own, or in comparison to the sponsorships they receive via

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[144] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32005D0649
[145] Beatriz Garcia and Tamsin Cox. *European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long Term Effects.* Study prepared for the Directorate-General for Internal Policies. European Parliament: 2013 pp. 50

commercial deals. Still the increase of European funding is an indication of the Council's dedication to the ECoC action.

Since 2010, as the previous quote indicates, EU funding has been allocated via the newly introduced Melina Mercouri prize. The prize was introduced both for symbolic and for practical reasons. The symbolic reason was to honour Melina Mercouri, the Greek Minister of Culture who had the initial idea that inaugurated the event. The practical, and certainly more crucial, reason was to make the allocation of the prize work as a "safety net" in order to guarantee that the promises that the ECoC host city made in its application form were kept during the preparation phase that eventually led to their cultural year. Thus, in contrast to the previous procedure when the ECoC host cities received the funds automatically, without any supervisory mechanism set in place, after 2010 the funds would be awarded conditionally "no later than three months before the start of the event" and only "if the city has honoured the agreements made in the selections phase."[146]

On the 16th of April 2014, the European Parliament and the European Council published Decision 445/2014/EU which established the Union action for the ECoC for the years 2020 to 2033. This Decision is the most detailed decision published so far regarding the institution of the ECoC and clearly reflects the lessons drawn from the previous three phases. What is relevant for our study, is the fact that the EU authorities have decided that the criteria for awarding the prize would become even stricter after the end of the third ECoC cycle in 2019. Article 14 of the Decision states that,

> The prize money shall be paid by the end of March of the year of the title, provided that the designated city concerned continues to honour the commitments it made at the application stage, complies with the criteria and takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports.
>
> The commitments made at the application stage shall be deemed to have been honoured by the designation city where no substantial change has been made to the programme and the strategy between the application stage and the year of the title, in particular where: (a) the budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-quality cultural programme in line with the application and the criteria; (b) the independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected; (c) the European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final version of the cultural programme; (d) the marketing and communication strategy and the communication material

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[146] Ibid.

used by the designated city clearly reflects the fact that the action is a Union action; and (e) the plans for the monitoring and the evaluation of the impact of the title on the designated city are in place.[147]

The reason I have gone into great detail regarding the decision of sharing the title, and explaining the EU funding procedures, is important for the policy suggestions I intend to make in the concluding remarks of this thesis. I believe that sharing the title between a city belonging to the old Member States and a city belonging to the new Member States offers a great opportunity to bridge the historical gap between East and West, while at the same time it opens routes for dialogue between the different historical narratives that have emerged after 1989. As it was demonstrated in the first section of this thesis, whereas in the West we observe a trend to "come to terms" with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), in the East the "second occupation" of 1945 and the liberation of 1989 gave birth to more ambiguous narratives. Furthermore, the funding criteria that have been introduced recently can function as a bargaining chip in order to pressure the various ECoC to present a more complete version of their recent past. For example, the EU could promote projects that offer more reflexive narratives regarding the divided past by allocating resources to support those kind of projects. By answering our research question, how have the European Capitals of Culture, Weimar 1999, Linz 2009, Sibiu 2007, and Vilnius 2009 remembered/presented the events of the Second World War and its aftermath, we will be able to check if there have been any alterations to the narratives as we have presented them in the first section of this thesis, and, more importantly, we will be able to show to what extent the institution of the ECoC could be used as a stage where the divergent narratives regarding the shared European past could interact constructively, and shed their divisive skin. The third section of this thesis is devoted to that purpose.

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[147] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014D0445&from=EN pp. 10

Part 3

The European Capitals of Culture: Weimar 1999, Linz 2009, Sibiu 2007, Vilnius 2009

6. Weimar 1999

According to Weimar's *Application Booklet*, the year 1999 was "an exceptionally important" year for the city because during that year the city would commemorate a number of anniversaries that were "inextricably linked" with its name.[148] First of all, the city celebrated the 250th birthday of Goethe, but also the 80th jubilee since the establishment of the Bauhaus artistic movement and the proclamation of the Republic of Weimar. Additionally, the year 1999 signalled the passage of fifty years since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and ten years since the fall of the Berlin Wall; an event which allowed Weimar and other cities of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) to become a part of the FRG in the first place. "For [those] reasons, the city of Weimar [...] joined the competition for the title of "European City of Culture".[149]

Thus, simply by reading the first page of Weimar's application form, the reader is instantly confronted with a city "packed" with history. A city with a turbulent and complex past whose name is linked with some of the most central events of German history. It is no surprise then that during Weimar's year as a European Capital of Culture a plethora of cultural projects were associated with the city's, and by extension with Germany's, variegated past. The authority that was appointed to initiate, develop, and coordinate the cultural programme, *Office of Weimar 99 GmbH,* went to great trouble in order to incorporate as many projects as possible that highlighted the city's multifaceted history. In practical terms this meant that not only the glorious aspects of Weimar's past would be included, i.e. representing Weimar as the city of Goethe and Schiller, but also projects that fell under the category of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, i.e. projects that lead the visitor to the nearby Buchenwald concentration camp.

In order to get a glimpse of how much the cultural programme was expanded from 1996 until 1999, and to highlight the autonomy the Office of Weimar 99 GmbH enjoyed,[150] I will use as a stepping stone the article of Kieran Keohane who studied the social construction of collective memory in post-GDR Weimar.[151] In his article Keohane was critical of Helmut Kohl's inaugural

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[148] Weimar 1999 GmbH. *Application Booklet of Weimar 1999.* Published in 1996
[149] Ibid.
[150] The fact that the Office of Weimar 99 GmbH enjoyed great autonomy is also confirmed by the evaluation of Palmer/Rae Associates. Palmer-Rae Associates. *European Cities and Capitals of Culture: Study Prepared for the European Commission.* Vol. 2 pp. 92
[151] Kieran Keohane. "Re-membering the European Citizen: The Social Construction of Collective Memory in Weimar*." Journal of Political Ideologies* 4:1 (1999) pp. 39-59

speech at the opening of the Goethe Institute in Weimar, on the 8th of May 1996.[152] According to Keohane,

> In Kohl's vision of what of the traditions of Modernity may be remembered in Weimar, there are, of course, some biases: the classical age is emphasised, Buchenwald gets a 'mention'. And, interestingly, what is conspicuously absent from the recollection, is any reference to what might have been the contribution to Weimar's cultural capital of 50 years of communism. Communism cannot – must not – be remembered. The memory that there was once an alternative model, the memory of the very possibility of the idea of an alternative is repressed, for it may reveal the contingency, the arbitrariness, and thus interfere with the project of 'the united Europe which we are now building'. It is to be a recollection of the (distant) past, not the (nearly) present that is to be attempted in Weimar, and thus, despite the liberal scope of Kohl's vision it is a decidedly selective collective memory that is to be re-collected and reconstructed in Weimar.[153]

In addition to the previous observation, Keohane noted that,

> Buchenwald is downplayed in Weimar's tourist literature. It is referred to as 'a painful link' to the (otherwise glorious) name of Weimar. Nazi atrocities are also linked in a chain of equivalences with Allied and Soviet programmes of de-nazification, when Buchenwald was used as a 'special camp'. Furthermore, the significance of Buchenwald is insidiously inverted. It is articulated as 'both a symbol of human degradation and of courageous resistance'. The camp is celebrated as a monument to the durability of the human spirit.[154]

There is no doubt that Keohane's appraisal of Kohl's speech is correct, but I am more sceptical regarding his overall estimation of Weimar's stance towards the National Socialist and Communist past. I am in no position to challenge his argument that Buchenwald was downplayed in Weimar's tourist literature because the source material that I was able to collect regarding this aspect of Weimar's cultural year is limited. Nevertheless, from the material I was able to gather and I will analyse further down, it seems to me that the Office of Weimar 99 GmbH did its best to promote a

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[152] Helmut Kohl. *Address to the Goethe Institute in Weimar,* 1996 http://www.helmut-kohl-kas.de/index.php?menu_sel=17&menu_sel2=&menu_sel3=&menu_sel4=&msg=1610
[153] Ibid. pp. 41-42
[154] Kieran Keohane. "Re-membering the European Citizen: The Social Construction of Collective Memory in Weimar." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 4:1 (1999) pp. 39-59

diversified cultural programme that included as many aspects of Weimar's history as possible. It is definitely true that great emphasis was paid on promoting the glorious humanistic past and especially Goethe. In one publication alone I was able to count sixteen different projects referring to Goethe. Still, that does not necessarily mean that the city's darker past was downplayed. Keohane points out correctly that attention is paid to both operational periods of Buchenwald's concentration camp; operating under Nazi authority from 1937 until 1945, and under the Soviets from 1945 until 1950. Yet, his estimation that there is an "equivalence" of the Nazi atrocities with the Soviet de-nazification programmes is challenged by the materials presented in the remainder of this section. The ECoC promotional materials offer an honest estimation of both periods of the camp's history without attempting to relativize the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the war with those atrocities committed by the Soviets after the war. They rather point out that atrocities were committed under both regimes without claiming that the atrocities committed by the Soviets were as cruel, or crueller, than those committed by the Nazis. They simply stress the fact that in the post-war era the camp was used by the Soviets not only as a facility to detain former Nazis, but also for political dissidents who were not connected with National Socialism in any way.[155]

Moreover, where he sees a German "manipulation" of the meaning of Buchenwald, because the organising authorities presented the camp both as a symbol of human degradation and of courageous resistance, I once again perceive it to be a more honest appraisal of the camp's meaning. There is of course nothing celebratory in the existence of a concentration camp, but retrospectively the camp can easily be perceived as a symbol of resistance and of the durability of the human spirit. The survivors' will to hold on to life even under such atrocious conditions is indeed a cause for celebration; a celebration of life – not of the camp. By celebrating the durability of the human spirit, the camp does not conceal who the perpetrators were, while the fact that a minority of people were able to survive the camps does not absolve the Germans of their responsibility. My impression is that the Office of Weimar 99 GmbH tried to incorporate all the aspects of the city's history. Yet, it should be noted that more emphasis was given to the classical humanistic years, slightly less to the Nazi past, and even less to the city's communist past. This tendency, however, did not conceal the darker aspects of the city's past, and this is evident in a number of cultural projects.

The first project reflecting on Weimar's Janus-faced past was called "Time Break". Located 8 kilometres north of Weimar's town centre, a 1,300 meters long corridor was cut through the

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[155] Hagen Fleischer. "The Path beneath the Present." *Historein* 4 (2003-4): pp. 53

woods of Weimar and connected the concentration camp of Buchenwald with the Ettersberg castle.[156] These two locations are of great significance to the history of the city, and in extension to that of Germany because, as Jorge Semprun has put it, they represent "the closeness between modern barbarism and classical culture."[157] On one end lies the former "Palace of the Muses" of Anna Amalia where Goethe rehearsed and performed the role of Orestes in his version of "Iphigenia on Tauris", while on the other end lies the concentration camp "with its curving concrete posts and electrical insulators."[158] The architect responsible for this project, Walther Grunwald, noted that,

> The beech forest on the Ettersberg makes both places – the concentration camp and the palace – invisible to each other. But as pictures in the mind, the two are simultaneous, as are the aspirations and deeds they represent. With Time Break, I want to make this simultaneity and physical proximity tangible and perceptible. […] Here everyone can feel for himself or herself the closeness of two spheres of German attitudes of mind. A break – and a connection – through the woods and through time.[159]

Via this project we can discern that anyone visiting the classical past at Ettersberg palace would unavoidably come across the darker past of Buchenwald's concentration camp. In fact the report of Palmer/Rae associates indicates that the number of visitors to the concentration camp increased from 400,000 in 1998 to 700,000 in 1999 and remained high in the following years (600,000 visitors for the years 2000 and 2001 respectively)[160]

Eleven other projects also made explicit reference to Buchenwald and some maintained the same theme of relating Goethe with Buchenwald. These were mainly exhibitions, but workshops and films were also included.[161] A characteristic example is the exhibition *Marked Space* which displayed drawings of Goethe in the concentration camp while at the same time portraits of

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[156] See the front cover of this thesis.

[157] Weimar 1999 GmbH. *Programme of the Weimar 1999 – Cultural Capital of Europe.* English Translation. Weimar 1999

[158] Weimar 1999 GmbH. *Zeitschneise – Time Break.* Promotional Brochure.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Palmer-Rae Associates. *European Cities and Capitals of Culture: Study Prepared for the European Commission.* Vol. 2 pp. 94

[161] Silke Roth. "Goethe and Buchenwald: Re-Constructing German National Identity in the Weimar Year 1999", in Peter M. Daly, Hans Walter Frischkopf, Trudis E. Goldsmith-Reber, and Horst Richter (Eds.) *Why Weimar? Questioning the Legacy of Weimar from Goethe to 1999.* New York: Peter Lang (2003) pp. 93-105

Holocaust victims were exhibited in the Schiller Museum.[162] So, once again, someone who wished to be acquainted with Weimar's classical past by visiting the Shiller museum, would unavoidably be confronted with the darker past of the concentration camp. Other significant projects were *Planet Buchenwald – Deep Space Weimar* which invited fifteen people from various parts of the world to train and work as tour guides for their respective nationals during the cultural year, and *Victim, Deed, Rise,* a documentation of the history of the camp from its liberation to the political instrumentalisation in the GDR years, and to the new conception of the memorial after 1990.[163] Thus, all three phases of the camp's history were presented, while the multinational tour guides overcame the usual language barrier where two or three languages inform the visitors about the exhibits, and made sure that all people could receive detailed information about the camp's history in their mother tongue.

Apart from the projects that dealt with Goethe and Buchenwald, however, the organisers offered a smaller number of projects that focused specifically on the GDR and post-GDR years, presenting in that way a more complete image of the city's history. Even though those projects were fewer than the ones dedicated to Buchenwald, and especially to Goethe and the classical spirit of Weimar, they still attempted to convey an honest picture of the city and her past. Projects worth noting are: (a) *1999 – 50 Years of the GDR: An Imaginary Anniversary,* with the purpose of giving "an inside view of the GDR society between official announcements and real socialistic practice; a critical retrospective of life in the GDR in its social, cultural and topographic variety,"[164] (b) *October Spring: 10 Years "Change" in Weimar,* an exhibition of photos, banners, printings, and reports from contemporary witnesses, accompanied by a series of lectures and podium discussions that intended to remind the citizens of Weimar the events of the political change,[165] (c) *10 Years after the October Spring: How Long does a Change Take?* The project dealt with the events of the "peaceful revolution" and, importantly for our study, with the "excessive demands [made] on the provincial town [with regards to] the conflict of the cultural engagement, and in the discourse of European remembrance politics."[166] This latter quotation hints, once again, at the problem of

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[162] Weimar 1999 GmbH. *Programme of the Weimar 1999 – Cultural Capital of Europe.* English Translation. Weimar 1999. The exhibition was displayed from the 22nd of May until the 4th of July.

[163] Ibid. Other relevant projects are: *Crushed History, Before the Witnesses Stay Silent, To the People, the Art: Acquired by Adolf Hitler,* and *Ostracised – Suppressed – Freed.*

[164] Weimar 1999 GmbH. *Programme of the Weimar 1999 – Cultural Capital of Europe.* English Translation. Weimar 1999.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

conveying a complete picture of the events of the Second World War and its aftermath in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, as well as the delicate stance that the institutions of the EU should maintain. Even in a city which was "automatically" incorporated in the West, "excessive demands" could prove problematic. Excessive top-down "European" pressure could very easily provoke a nationalist backlash and shift the scale from a "reflexive" towards a "traditional" view of the past.

Concluding, I believe that the authorities in Weimar did a good job in incorporating the whole spectrum of Weimar's shaded past. Of course, one could easily argue that the projects representing the glorious 18th and 19th centuries were greater in number and, as Keohane indicates, better advertised, but I think that it would be an unfair assessment of Weimar's cultural year to claim that the city did not confront its darker past. In the end, we should not forget that Weimar was the first city to present her "darker face" to Europe in such a pronounced way, and that the institution of the ECoC was (and to a large extent still is) intended to be a celebratory event. Nevertheless, the authorities of Weimar decided to "punish" themselves by exposing their weaknesses to their European visitors. The latter were invited to discuss openly the National Socialistic and Soviet era, and that way the city took a first step towards liberating the united European present from the clutches of the divided European past.[167] This is more that can be said about Weimar's predecessors, which included cities like Berlin (always taking into consideration the fact that the city was appointed ECoC in 1988, before the fall of the Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union) and Madrid (1992).[168]

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[167] See project: *Before the Witnesses Stay Silent.*
[168] John Myerscough. *European Cities of Culture and Cultural Months: The Network of European Cultural Cities.* Glasgow: 1994

7. Linz 2009

In 2006, the supervising authority of Linz's ECoC application, *Linz 2009 Kulturhauptstadt Europas GmbH,* published a mission statement that defined the city's intentions for the European cultural year of 2009.[169] Among them was the statement that,

> The city of Linz and the Province of Upper Austria have tackled intensely the National Socialist era over the past years, have come to terms with their part in this past and have accepted responsibility for it. In view of the significance of that period of history and of the role that Linz played in it, the Nazi era will be a thematic focus of the Culture Capital Year.[170]

In retrospect, by examining Linz's cultural programme, we can argue with certainty that the organising authorities kept their promise. Linz's cultural programme was filled with projects that dealt with the city's National Socialist history. First of all, the city debunked the post-war myth that presented Austria as "Hitler's First Victim". The first entry of the project *In Situ* notified foreign and local visitors that on the 12th of March 1938,

> When Hitler triumphantly entered "the city of his youth", between 60,000 and 80, 000 people from Linz cheered him. The effusive reception is said to have led Hitler's definitive decision to annex Austria to the German Reich.[171]

Via the project In Situ, Linz's visitors had the opportunity to form a clear and diverse view of the city's past, and to associate that past with existing locations on the city's map. Sixty-five stencilled signs were inscribed in streets and squares around the city on places and buildings that were associated with the period spanning from 1938 until 1945. The project was a collaboration between artists and prominent Austrian researchers, and for that reason the accuracy of the information provided, as well as its reach, were ensured.

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[169] ECOTEC. *Ex-Post Evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture.* http://edz.bib.uni-mannheim.de/daten/edz-b/gdbk/09/ksj/cocreport_en.pdf pp. 25

[170] Ibid. Proposition no. 7

[171] Linz 2009 Kulturhauptstadt Europas GmbH. *Project In Situ*. Under the supervision of Dagmar Höss, Monika Sommer, Heidemarie Uhl. http://www.insitu-linz09.at/en/locations/1-locations-town-hall.html

The project included buildings and locations whose history was already well-known by the citizens of Linz, for example the Town Hall where Hitler gave his speech in 1938, but also lesser-known locations, such as the former houses of SS officers in the town's periphery, which offered stories of the persecution of Jews and of the everyday Nazi terror.[172] Consequently, these "stumbling blocks" could attract the interest of both foreigners and locals because, in contrast to a landmark as the Nibelungenbrücke for example, they referred to "barely noticed" events, such as the "aryanization" of Jewish properties or the living conditions of forced labourers. This allowed the simultaneous projection of a set of varied and contradictive narratives of cruelty and victimisation, but also of generosity and altruism. Moreover, since the signs were scattered in a large area all over Linz, it was almost impossible to stroll around the city's streets without stumbling upon at least one of them. For those who wanted to find out more, the website offered further details about each location.

The second project that dealt with Linz's Nazi past was called *The Cultural Capital of the Führer*. As one of the city's promotional publications informed the visitors, 2009 was "not the first time that Linz [had] been at the focus of the politics of culture on a European scale."[173] In fact, Linz was one of the five cities, along with Berlin, Hamburg, Nuremberg, and Munich, to be awarded the title "Führerstadt" – Führer's city.[174] Hitler had spent part of his childhood in Linz and for that reason he considered the city as his "hometown". Subsequently, he had a vision of upgrading the city's infrastructure and promoting its cultural image due to his sentimental attachment, but also because he planned to spend the last years of his life there after his retirement.

The exhibition, *The Cultural Capital of the Führer,*[175] wanted to illustrate how Linz had benefited from its relationship with the Third Reich, and how it had transformed from a small provincial town in the mid-30's to an industrial city before and during the war, by displaying the architectural blueprints that Albert Speer had designed in order to make Hitler's vision of the city a reality. Apart from the Nibelungen Bridge, however, the rest of Hitler's megalomaniac projects were never realised. Therefore, their blueprints were exhibited from September 2008 until April 2009 in the Schlossmuseum, together with a set of paintings that were looted from the occupied

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[172] Linz 2009 Kulturhauptstadt Europas GmbH. *Linz 2009 European Capital of Culture Programme 1/3.* Pp. 131.
[173] Ibid. Pp. 130.
[174] Niko Wahl (Ed.) *History Book.* Linz 2009 Kulturhauptstadt Europas GmbH. (2009). Pp. 12.
[175] http://www.linz09.at/en/projekt-2106353/quotkulturhauptstadt_des_fuehrersquot.html

countries or acquired via "aryanizarions", and were intended to fill the halls of the never completed "Führermusem".

The reason that the exhibition was opened earlier than 2009 was, firstly, in order to test the Linzers' and Austrians' reactions, secondly, in order to allow time for debates, criticism, and corrections, and, thirdly, in order to avoid any unwanted incidents during the cultural year. As the ECOTEC *Ex-Post Evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture* has shown, this was a wise decision because "the exploration of this issue did not sit comfortably with all stakeholders and local residents; […] the exhibition was criticised heavily by some sections of the media, though it did receive broad international acclaim."[176] In the end, however, "the evidence from the stakeholder interviews [indicated] that the exploration of this difficult topic helped Linz to come to terms with this difficult period in its history."[177]

The evaluation allows us to draw some interesting conclusions. First, it demonstrates that the interpretation of events that took place over 60 years ago can still be contentious even in a year as close to the present as 2009. Second, we can observe that it is much easier to confront and pressure someone else regarding his past misconducts than to accept responsibility for one's own. This was confirmed by the initial stance that the citizens of Linz kept towards the Führer's Capital of Culture project, and by the acclaim it received by the international community. Finally, the positive outcome of the project testifies that, if handled correctly, similar projects could lead to a more balanced assessment of Europe's shared past that could eventually resolve the present conflicts and allow an honest unifying narrative to emerge.

The third project that shed light on Linz's Nazi past was called *The Invisible Camp*.[178] Apart from the buildings that were designed in order to serve Hitler's megalomaniac vision, an array of more "practical" buildings were constructed in Linz. These included the "Hermann Goering Works", which increased the Reich's armaments production, and the housing district of Bindermichl, which housed the citizens of St. Peter's neighbourhood after their houses were absorbed by the Hermann Goering Works.[179] Among these "practical" constructions, and in proximity to the Mauthausen concentration camp, smaller auxiliary camps were built near Linz in the area of Gusen. These camps were called Gusen I, II and III, but in the post-war years they were

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[176] ECOTEC. *Ex-Post Evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture.* Pp. 38
[177] Ibid.
[178] Audiowalk Gusen: The Invisible Camp project website. http://audiowalk.gusen.org/index.php?id=24&L=1
[179] Niko Wahl (Ed.) *History Book.* Linz 2009 Kulturhauptstadt Europas GmbH. (2009)

destroyed and flattened out, and only scarce evidence remain today of what took place there during the war. In the place where the camps used to be, residential complexes have been built, and it is impossible to recognise what stood there before 1945.

That is what the Invisible Camp project attempts to avoid. In order to inform visitors about the stories that the surrounding landscape conceals, a group of artists created an audio-guide that leads the visitors through the sites of the past. According to Linz's published cultural programme,

> the soundtrack includes original recordings with personal reminisces of survivors, contemporary witnesses who lived there at the time, voices of present day inhabitants of Gusen, as well as testimonies of soldiers who worked in the camp and of members of the SS responsible for sending people there.[180]

Therefore, the invisible becomes visible; and because the voices from different sides are heard, both of victims and of perpetrators as well as modern-day inhabitants, the visitor is given the chance to get a more complete picture of the story and to form a clear view of the various perspectives. The project receives adequate funding, and continues to operate to the present day, because it is a collaboration of many Austrian institutions, such as the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the National Fund for the Victims of National Socialism.

Another similar project was called *The Concealed City.* Like the previous project, this project also focused on "hidden" locations of Linz's darker past. Instead of dealing solely with the location of a former subterranean concentration camp, however, the film by director Luk Perceval took the viewers on an audio-visual tour underneath the city, to a tunnel system that was used during the closing stages of the war as an air-raid shelter, and as a safe house for the artefacts that the Nazis had stolen from the occupied countries and were intended to fill the exhibition halls of the "Führermuseum" that Hitler had envisioned.

Once again, difficult issues of the past were addressed through this project. The viewers were informed, via interviews with contemporary witnesses and researchers, not only about the origins and the methods with which the artefacts were acquired, but also about the fact that, while the "Aryan" citizens of Linz were allowed to take cover in the tunnels during the Allied bombings, the forced labourers and the inmates of the concentration camp were not allowed inside but were

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[180] Linz 2009 Kulturhauptstadt Europas GmbH. *Linz 2009 European Capital of Culture Programme 2/3*

left outside unprotected. Thus, the viewer is confronted with the ambiguous message that, while on the one hand these tunnels saved the lives of many people and sheltered an important part of Europe's cultural heritage, at the same time they were the place of death for many forced labourers who either died inside them due to the inhumane "working conditions", or perished outside due to discrimination policies.

A fifth project worth mentioning was called *The European Green Belt.*[181] This project is interesting because it paid attention to two issues of contemporary European significance, namely to the Iron Curtain and the former East-West divide, and to the problem of environmental deterioration. As the webpage devoted to this project points out, due to the fact that "the Iron Curtain divided Europe for over forty years into two totally different worlds, […] nature could remain largely undisturbed in this 12,500 kilometres boundary strip that became a refuge for endangered species."[182] Today, as the entry continues, "hundreds of associations, groups and agencies in twenty-four countries are currently at work implementing a vision of preserving what was once a death zone as a one-of-a-kind space in which life can flourish."[183] Of course this project has no clear-cut connection with coming to terms with the past, but it still shows how the past can literally have a hold on the present. This green belt is a "natural" reminder of the East-West divide, but instead of a barrier, as was its previous function, this sanctuary can act today as another bridge of communication and solidarity. The coordinated preservation efforts of institutions from twenty four different countries are an excellent opportunity for exchange of people and ideas, and a path towards a united, and green, European future.

Closing my analysis, I would like to give a brief account about a series of other projects that were also associated with the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The first was called *The Library of Rescued Memories*[184] and it was an exhibition dedicated to the everyday lives of the people of the Jewish community before the war. It did not make explicit reference to the Nazi atrocities, but it presented the rich culture of a vivid community of people in the past, thus making their absence more pronounced in the present. The second project was called *Civil Wars*[185] and it was an invitation to scholars and experts from Spain, Italy, Germany, Serbia and Bosnia to give

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[181] http://www.linz09.at/en/projekt-2106336/das_gruene_band_europas.html
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] http://www.linz09.at/en/projekt-2106421/bibliothek_der_geretteten_erinnerungen.html
[185] http://www.linz09.at/en/projekt-2170777/civil_wars.html

speeches and participate in film screenings and discussions on the topic of the "civil war". According to the webpage entry,

> the focal point of the discussion was the question of how, following the end of hostilities, the former parties to these conflicts went about dealing with what had happened, and what influences the conflicts had – or continue to have – on social and political life in the respective countries.[186]

Thus, the project was an opportunity for representatives from various European nations to exchange ideas on how to deal with internal conflicts and their aftermath on a European level. Finally, during Linz's cultural year three symposiums were held in the city titled, *Invented Memory[187], Beyond History II[188]* and *The Sound of Power[189]*. The first discussed the role of literature and its influence on the promotion of collective memories. The second dealt with the difficult topic of what should happen to the material remains of National Socialism, and how the crimes instigated within the premises of concentration camps should be commemorated, while the third symposium "investigated the continuities and discontinuities in *music policymaking* in Linz and Upper Austria before and after 1945."[190] Music policymaking designated which pieces and composers were approved by the Nazi authorities during the war and the symposium traced their origins and development after the war was over.

All in all, merely by counting the large number of projects that took place during Linz's cultural year, we can easily discern that the organising authorities did a good job in confronting the city's difficult past from various angles. In comparison to the cultural programmes of the other cities that I was able to do research on,[191] Linz's cultural programme stands out as the one clearly oriented toward the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This, however, does not mean that Linz did not celebrate its cultural heritage, and the city's positive contribution to the European civilization (especially Anton Bruckner). This combination goes to show that celebration and self-reflection can coexist harmoniously during the ECoC year.

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186 Ibid.
187 http://www.linz09.at/en/projekt-2106393/erfundene_erinnerung.html
188 http://www.linz09.at/en/projekt-2106472/jenseits_von_geschichte_ii_-_disturbing_remains.html
189 http://www.linz09.at/en/projekt-2106471/klaenge_der_macht.html
190 Ibid.
191 Thessaloniki, Liverpool, Prague, Krakow, Rotterdam, Bergen, Copenhagen, Graz, Patras, and Tallinn.

8. Sibiu 2007

The first thing one notices while reading Sibiu's application proposal is the eagerness of the Romanian authorities to emphasise the city's "European" credentials. In the first page of the city's application it is stated that, "Sibiu/Hermannstadt has been for centuries the meeting point of European civilizations"[192] and in case someone was still sceptical about the validity of the previous statement, the application offered additional evidence that would make any doubt regarding Sibiu's "Europeanness" disappear. According to the proposal, the fact that the city was (and still is) "European" was confirmed by its historical origins because, "the colonists who founded the town in the 12th century originated in the area between the rivers Mosel and Rhine, where the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg lies nowadays."[193] Therefore, since they were linked by "the oldest European history" Luxembourg and Sibiu were "the most suitable partners" to share the ECoC title in 2007.

The reason I place emphasis on the Romanian authorities' efforts to prove that Sibiu was "European" is not because I question the city's "Europeanness", but in order to demonstrate how important the ECoC nomination was for them. In accordance with most of the cities that belonged to the former Soviet bloc, by applying for the ECoC title, Sibiu wanted to illustrate that the Communist period was just a negative interval in Romania's history, and that the country was ready to "return to Europe". In fact, Romania became an official member of the European Union on the 1st of January 2007, the same day that Sibiu's cultural year started. Thus, if we take into account that in order to be awarded the title a city must submit its application proposal five years before the ECoC nomination, it becomes evident that the country was awarded the ECoC title before it officially became an EU member. Subsequently, applying for, and eventually winning, the ECoC title boosted Romania's accession process, and was a definite confirmation of the country's "European" trajectory. But how exactly did the city present its history?

In Sibiu's application proposal there was a three-page section devoted to the overall history of the city.[194] The historical overview began from the earliest archaeological findings during the Late Stone Age and ended with the post-Communist democratic revival in the early 90's. Yet,

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[192] Sibiu 2007 Association. *Sibiu/Hermannstadt European Capital of Culture 2007: Application Proposal.* 2004
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid. pp. 7-10

while a number of paragraphs informed the reader about the most important historical events from the Roman period up until the unification of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania after the First World War, and included trivial references, such as the variety and richness of Baron von Bruckenthal's library, the only references made to the Second World War were, first, that "the city's population was 48,000" before the war started, and second, that the city "did not suffer destructions" during the war.[195] The remaining paragraph is devoted to what happened after the war when,

> The new communist authorities, backed my Moscow, began to nationalise the factories and the land, while launching waves of political trials and arrests against all opponents; for the population of Sibiu a long suffering began.[196]

We get an indirect glimpse of what took place *during* the Second World War only because reference is made to the post-war suffering of the city's Saxon community.

> The communist authorities considered [the] Saxons guilty *in corpore* for collaborating with the German Reich and many of them were deported in the Soviet Union for forced labour. Prompted by the dictatorial regime and economic hardships, Saxons began in the 70's to emigrate to West Germany. The massive emigration continued even after the Revolution in 1989, leaving in Sibiu only 2,200 Saxons.[197]

The same trend can be observed in another publication that offers an overview of the city's history.[198] In the foreword to that publication, the author deals with the same topic, i.e. the shrinkage of the Saxon community in Sibiu which he correctly attributes to the "ideological and nationalist upheavals of the 20th century."[199] When it comes to other ethnic minorities, however, he wrongfully places all of them in the same basket as the Saxons, and claims that "other ethnic groups were likewise decimated by emigration (sic.), the most dramatic example probably being

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[195] Ibid. pp. 9
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Sibiu 2007 Association. *Sibiu/Hermannstadt: Humanitas*. 2007
[199] Ibid. pp. 14

that of the Jews."[200] The fact is, however, that the majority of the Jewish community, particularly in the area of Transylvania where Sibiu is located, did not emigrate, but was deported to concentration camps in Transnistria and Auschwitz during the war, while the survivors emigrated massively to Israel only when the war had ended, and only after the communist regime had hardened its stance against them in the late 1950's.

Moreover, the period of the Second World War is once again omitted. This is how the brief historical overview undertaken in the foreword of the publication concludes.

> At the time of the First World War, Sibiu was a thriving regional metropolis. The city's privileged position was also to be preserved after Sibiu became part of the Kingdom of Romania. Its position did not change until after the Second World War, when the communists came to power. The large-scale demolitions in the area of the train station and the more sporadic destruction in the historic centre, the construction of drab and disproportionate housing blocks and factories in proximity to the Old Town, the neglect that overwhelmed many old buildings, and above all the attempt to destroy the social fabric of the city, all led to a decline that continued until the years immediately after the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in 1989.[201]

The question of how the city was able to maintain its position and avoid destruction during the Second World War is never answered in either of the publications, while the fate of the Jewish community is presented in a blurred manner, paying attention to the Jewish emigration in the post-war years, and neglecting the deportations during the war. We are informed fleetingly only about the collaboration of the Saxon community with the Third Reich, and not about Romania's alliance with the Axis for the larger part of the war, or the country's eventual switch to the side of the Allies only after August 1944. Yet, both publications devote some of their space to inform the reader about the suffering that the city and its citizens had to endure during the communist regime.

Not surprisingly, the same pattern is observed in a project that was developed for the city's cultural year. The project was called *History on Foot: Meet Hermann.*[202] Hermann was Sibiu/Hermannstadt's legendary founder, and on this occasion he was used as the city's mascot. Ten live-sized statues with his figure were placed in various locations around the city and Hermann

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[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid. pp. 15-16.

[202] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=1302

was dressed in different styles in order to represent the various identities of the city's history. Accordingly, Hermann could be a medieval knight on one occasion and an 18th century butcher in another. The range of his outfits spanned from the 14th to the 20th century.

Relevant for our study is the fact that one of the 20th century Hermanns was *Hermann the Deportee in 1945*, "dressed in battered clothes and suggesting a humiliated, downcast man, refreshing or evoking to the post-war generations, the tragic episode of the Germans' deportation to the Soviet Union."[203] Of course, there is nothing wrong with representing Hermann as a German deportee, and it is an honest estimation of the tragic history of Sibiu's German community after 1945. I cannot help but wonder, however, what Hermann would look like if he was represented *during* the Second World War. Would he be a resister or a collaborator? That kind of representation of a *fictional* character would have probably been out of place, but since there was a Hermann/German deportee shouldn't there be another kind of project devoted to the Jewish deportees, or a project critically reflecting on Sibiu's, and by extension Romania's, multifaceted twentieth century history?

It is interesting to note that, whereas references to what took place during the Second World War were in most cases omitted, projects related to the Holocaust and Sibiu's Jewish community were nonetheless presented. One such project was called *Witness to a Jewish Century – Digital Memory Program.*[204] The project was a digital photography exhibition, and it resembled Linz's *Library of Rescued Memories* project. In conformity with the latter project, this project also depicted the everyday life of the Jewish community before the Holocaust, asking the survivors questions such as: "who was your first boyfriend? Tell me about your favourite teacher? […] Describe your summer holidays", etc. Thus, the visitor could find out personal details about the background of the survivors, and he was definitely aware that the people in the photographs were victimised during the war. Yet, because the focus of the exhibition was more a celebration of the endurance of the human spirit, and a homage to the Jews, the perpetrator aspect was once again blurred. So, the exhibition made evident that atrocities had taken place during the war, but it did not focus on the question of who was responsible for them.

Therefore, in order to get a better idea of what had taken place in Romania during the war, and in order to understand who was responsible for the deportation of Romania's Jewish

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[203] Ibid.

[204] Sibiu 2007 Association. *Calendar 01.01.2007/30.06.2007. Transylvania. Romania. Europa.* 2007

community, the visitor had to attend the ASTRA FILM festival where a documentary *partly* dealing with the topic was shown. The documentary was called *Maramureş* and it dealt with the present and the past of the ethnic communities that live in northern Romania (Hungarians, Jews, and Ukrainians).[205] According to the "Sibiu 2007" website, "the film gives them each a voice to tell stories of dramatic moments in their history. One such account recalls the deportation of the Jews…"[206] This is the only clear reference to the deportation of Romania's Jews that I was able to find in Sibiu's cultural programme. Apart from *Witness to a Jewish Century* and *Maramureş*, there were also other projects associated with the topic of the Holocaust, for example the event *The Jewish Trilogy – Shoah. The Primo Levi Version*[207] and *Europe and the Jewish Community Languages*[208], but instead of dealing with Romania's involvement in the Holocaust directly, they dealt with the topic of the Holocaust in a more general perspective, focusing on its Italian and linguistic aspects.

The reason that the Romanian authorities promoted projects referring to the Holocaust has to do with the importance that the Holocaust has acquired in European politics.[209] As we saw in the first section, Holocaust recognition has become an unwritten condition for a country to acquire the "European entry ticket" and is considered as the basis from where a European founding myth can be constructed. Accordingly, Romanian authorities commemorate the victims of the Holocaust since 2004,[210] an international commission has been appointed to research Romania's involvement in the Holocaust,[211] and projects dealing with the topic of the Holocaust in a general manner were presented during Sibiu's cultural year. Yet, from the material I was able to gather, it seems that the authorities are still reluctant to deal with the topic in a more open and pronounced way. This resembles the process of debunking the post-war "traditional" narratives in the West in the late

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[205] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=767
[206] Ibid.
[207] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=850
[208] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=1492
[209] Projects were also prepared in order to commemorate other ethnic minorities and demonstrate the city's cultural diversity. Examples include opening a Cultural Centre for the Roma; an exhibition called *Sibiu and Multiculturalism's Effects;* an exhibition of Romanian, German and Hungarian painters in European artistic centres; and an exhibition titled *Attention, Gypsies! The History of a Misunderstanding.*
[210] BBC News. *Romania Holds First Holocaust Day.* Published October 12th 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3736864.stm Accessed May 11th 2015.
[211] Wiesel Commission. *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania.* Polirom: 2004 http://www.survivors-romania.org/pdf_doc/final_report.pdf

60's and early 70's, when researchers and more informed readers were aware of the partiality and artificiality of the narratives, while the wider public was still uninformed.

If the Romanian and European public are to form an honest, "reflexive", view of Europe's shared past, however, opportunities such as the one offered by the ECoC event should not be missed. The conflicts that arise between neighbouring nations due to "traditional" interpretations of history can definitely be overcome, but the process requires narratives that encompass instances not only of victimisation and resistance, but also of collaboration and misconduct and taking responsibility for ones actions. It seems, however, that the narratives of victimisation and resistance that muffled all other narratives in Western Europe from 1945 until 1989 have made their appearance in Eastern Europe after 1989. It is true that the nations of Eastern Europe suffered heavily under the Soviet rule, and the victims of Soviet terror should also receive attention. This, however, should not stand in the way of recognising the suffering that others have endured under the fascist rule of Eastern European authorities, or via the latter's collaboration with the Third Reich. Unfortunately, this is the trend that can be observed in Sibiu's cultural programme.

We have already seen how references to the Second World War were omitted from the publications of Sibiu's 2007 Association, and how the thread of history was retraced only after 1945 with narratives of victimisation and resistance. These narratives were a pronounced part of Sibiu's cultural programme, and were promoted mostly through films. The first film simultaneously promoting both narratives bore the title *Children of the Decree*.[212] The topic of the film was Governmental Decree no. 770 that made abortions illegal in Romania from 1967 until the collapse of the regime in the end of 1989.[213] The film shows how the regime intervened in the personal affairs of its citizens, with disastrous effects primarily to women's health, but also to the overall wellbeing of their families. Yet, as the film suggests, Ceausescu's policies backfired, because it was the children of the decree who overthrew his regime following the revolution of 1989 which ended with the public execution of him and his wife.

Another film dealing with both narratives of resistance and defiance was *The Great Communist Bank Robbery*.[214] The documentary's topic was a bank robbery that *probably* took place in Bucharest in 1959. Although there are eyewitnesses that claim that the robbery truly took

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[212] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=766
[213] Adina Bradeanu. "Romanian Documentaries and the Communist Legacy". *Cineaste*: Summer 2007, Vol. 32, Issue 3. Pp. 45-46
[214] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=752

place, the validity of the facts are disputed, firstly because the motives of the robbers are not clear, and secondly because the Party authorities at the time decided to shoot a film for propaganda purposes. Thus, suspicions of a communist "show trial" were raised.[215] The regime's film reconstructed the robbery and filmed the trial of the robbers by using the latter to act as themselves in the movie. For that reason, it was hinted that the case was a pretext in order to prosecute the culprits, who were Jews and former high-ranking officials of the regime, and to make an example out of them by showing the movie to other party apparatchiks. Nevertheless, because five out of the six culprits had lost their positions in the late 1950's, during a period when the regime started to purge the Jews out of its ranks, the robbery might have truly taken place as an act of defiance.

Regardless of whether or not the robbery took place, however, what concerns us here is the fact that the *Great Communist Bank Robbery* depicts how the regime treated its citizens, and makes clear reference to the anti-Semitic purges of the 50's as well as to the tendency of Romanian Jews to emigrate during that period. The documentary offers statistics on the number of people who were sent to labour camps for political reasons, it mentions how innocent people were interrogated and tortured, often resulting in death during the investigation to find the real culprits of the robbery, and narrates how ordinary Romanian citizens were arrested and tended to "disappear" every day without any evidence.

Another film, titled *The Craziness of The Heads,* also depicted how innocent people were sometimes caught in the middle of the power disputes within Romania's communist party.[216] The film was based on the biography of Lena Constante, a communist show trial victim in 1948, who was unjustly imprisoned until 1961, and was the sole survivor of the show trial. Moreover, similar documentaries that focused on narratives of resistance and victimisation from other Eastern European countries were also presented. One of them was the documentary *The Underground Man,* who depicted the life of Lithuanian dissident Jonas Pajaujis,[217] and the other was the film *One Day*

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[215] Adina Bradeanu. "Romanian Documentaries and the Communist Legacy". *Cineaste*, Vol. 32, Issue 3: Summer 2007. Pp. 45-46. See also: Calin-Andrei Mihailescu. "Re-enacted scripts in and around Alexandru Solomon's *The Great Communist Bank Robbery*". *Film Criticism* 34.2-3: Winter-Spring 2010. Pp. 96-105. There is also another documentary that deals with the topic of the bank robbery but from a more personal point of view. See: Irene Lusztig. *Reconstruction.* Komsomol Films: 2001. Unlike Alexandru Solomon's film, Lusztig's film displays images and narrates what happened to Romania's Jewish community during the Second World War, but the film was not presented in the ASTRA FILM festival.

[216] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=1511

[217] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=1674

in People's Poland, who chronicled "an ordinary day in the life of ordinary citizens in communist Poland", in order to reveal "the absurdities of those times."[218]

The projection of movies representing the Soviet oppression in other Eastern European countries is a sign of solidarity, and, as I said earlier, there is nothing illicit in the representation and confrontation of the traumatic Soviet past in Eastern Europe. In fact, honest efforts to "come to terms" with the Soviet past should be applauded. The problem, however, lies in the current asymmetry with which Eastern European countries treat their past, focusing on their suffering under the ruling minority of party apparatchiks, and sidestepping the traumatic experiences of their fellow citizens who belonged to different ethnic minorities; especially the Jews who suffered persecutions both under the fascist and the communist regimes.

9. Vilnius 2009

The year 2009 was a symbolic year for Lithuania because 2009 signalled the passage of one thousand years since the country was first mentioned in a written source.[219] For that reason, in 2001 the Lithuanian Minister of Culture started talks with representatives of the European Commission with the aim of obtaining the ECoC title for 2009. The country was not a member of the EU at the time, and it was hoped, as in the case of Sibiu, that getting a positive feedback regarding the title application would strengthen the county's accession process. Additionally, it was expected that the title would upgrade and promote Vilnius's cultural image.[220] In 2004, Lithuania became a full member of the EU, and in 2005 with the amendment of Decision 1419/1999/EC its application was taken under official consideration by the European Commission.[221] The original application was accepted later that year, and in 2007 the city's cultural programme started to take shape. One of the city's promotional brochures invited the visitors to celebrate Lithuania's one-thousand-year history:

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[218] http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=1682

[219] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *Vilnius CV – Creativity and Vitality. Application Booklet*. Published in 2004.

[220] ECOTEC. *Ex-Post Evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture.* Pp. 36

[221] The country would still have been eligible for the title because, as we have seen, Article 4 of the 1999 Decision allowed non-Members to hold the ECoC Action, but the 2005 amendment made the nomination almost definite.

Celebrating a Millennium: 2009 marks one thousand years since the name Lithuania was first mentioned in written sources. Having unified and established a State since the 13ᵗʰ century, Lithuanians preserved their statehood and language despite several occupations of the country. In 1990 Lithuania was the first of the occupied states to hand the USSR a fateful blow by reclaiming its independence, and in 2004 Lithuania became a member of the European Union.[222]

If we pay closer attention to the brochure, it becomes clear that in just a few sentences it manages to convey a simplified view of the "traditional" narratives of glory/resistance and oppression/victimisation. According to the brochure, the absolutely necessary historical facts that a person visiting Lithuania must know about the country are: (a) that the country has a long and turbulent history filled with occupations and oppression; (b) that despite these occupations the country managed to maintain its distinct identity; (c) that it was the *first* of the former Soviet countries to revolt and gain its independence; and (d) that Lithuania is a part of "Europe" since 2004.

As I will demonstrate below, the "traditional" narratives presented in this brochure are a micrograph of the dominant historical narratives presented in Vilnius' cultural programme, and it appears that the authors of the *Ex-Post Evaluation of the 2009 European Capitals of Culture* reached a similar conclusion. In their initial evaluating remarks they noted that,

Both [Linz and Vilnius] emphasised aspects of European history, identity and heritage already present in the city but in very different ways: Vilnius emphasising its long European history and cultural heritage and Linz exploring its role in a darker chapter in European history.[223]

Yet, it would have been unfair and inaccurate if one claimed that Vilnius's cultural programme did not include projects referring to the "darker chapter" of Europe's history. In fact, most of the "Vilnius '09" publications that I was able to trace included at least one reference to Vilnius's vivid and world-renowned Jewish community. The first project I came across was called *Kaddish (Requiem) for Holocaust Victims*.[224] It was an oratory performed by Lithuanian and foreign artists in honour of Lithuania's Jewish community. According to the publication, "the

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[222] 7-page Promotional Brochure. Each page summed up one of the city's cultural themes. (Let's Celebrate, Let's Discuss, Let's Create, Let's Remember, Let's Communicate, Let's Rejoice)

[223] ECOTEC. *Ex-Post Evaluation of 2009 European Capitals of Culture. Pp. 14*

[224] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *National Programme*.

Jewish community left a distinctive imprint on the spiritual heritage of Vilnius", and therefore the reproduction of this heritage via the oratory was an attempt "to commemorate the lost lives and departed people whose work […] had enormous influence in the world."[225]

Another project with a similar theme was called *Souls of Jerusalem.* It was an exhibition dedicated to the culture of the Litvaks, a community of Lithuanian Jews that reached its cultural apogee in the period 1880-1940.[226] The aim of the exhibition was to display the cultural achievements of the Litvaks to a wider audience and to revive a "forgotten, though infinitely eloquent culture."[227] In accordance with the exhibitions in Sibiu (*Witness to a Jewish Century*) and Linz (*Library of Rescued Memories*), this exhibition also focused on Jewish life before the Holocaust, and thus the emphasis was not placed on the community's tragic fate but on its cultural richness before the war.

Complementing these two projects was a tourist guide bearing the title *Naked Vilnius* which also commemorated and presented the Jewish community of Vilnius to foreign visitors.[228] The guide was not intended for "typical" tourists, but for those "alternative" tourists who were willing to explore a more "hidden" side of the city. The guide promised to take its holder to places that "no tourist has ever set foot before", and half of its contents were filled with information about the rise and fall of the Jewish community.[229] The guide was meant to demonstrate the city's multicultural and tolerant tradition, and for that reason, in addition to the Jewish heritage, a few of its pages referred to other ethnic minorities such as the Karaites, the Armenians, and the Romanians. In comparison to the Jews, however, the other ethnic minorities received lesser attention.

The brief historical overview offered by the guide informed the visitor that "Vilnius was called the Lithuanian Jerusalem for two hundred years."[230] This status, however, was not so highly appreciated by the Lithuanian authorities before 1989, and it became a title worth advertising only retrospectively, when Vilnius was no longer the Lithuanian Jerusalem. In fact, when the Jews first appeared in Vilnius during the 17th century, they were forced to live in a specific area of the town, around the streets Zydu, Stikliu, Antokolskio, and Mesiniu. The guide did not conceal this fact. On

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[225] Ibid.

[226] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *Vilnius CV – Creativity and Vitality. Application Booklet*. Published in 2004.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *Naked Vilnius: Un-Tourist Guide.*

[229] The other half dealt with architectural remnants from the Soviet period, such as an abandoned cinema, statues that symbolised the working class, etc.

[230] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *Naked Vilnius: Un-Tourist Guide.* pp.42

the contrary, it highlighted it, because it is precisely these streets that the owner of the guide was prompted to visit. A map pinpointing the locations of buildings that belonged to the Jewish community led the owner of the guide to the most important landmarks. Among them were the yard of the Jewish Ghetto, the Jewish Hospital, and the Synagogue Taharat Hakodesh, the only synagogue that still holds services today. The brief historical overview that the guide offered concluded like this: "The flourishing society was distributed and rushed out of Vilnius in World War 2 by [the] Third Reich."[231]

But if, as it is evident, the cultural programme included projects that explicitly referred to Vilnius's darker past, then where is the problem? The problem lies in the fact that the blame for the Holocaust is placed solely on the Nazis, while the widespread, and sometimes more than willing, collaboration of Lithuanians with the Nazi authorities is never mentioned. All Lithuanian citizens, whether they were of Jewish decent or not, are placed under the category of victim.

The historical facts, however, tell a different story. Lithuania came under *Soviet* rule for the first time on June 15th 1940, and during that period members of the Jewish community moved into prominent positions of power.[232] Yet, this reshuffling of power caused a rise of anti-Semitic sentiments among the population. These sentiments were expressed violently a year later, in June 1941, when the Nazi forces invaded the country. Due to the previous Soviet occupation, the Nazis were greeted as liberators by a large portion of the Lithuanian population who hoped that they would regain their independence, or at least a certain amount of autonomy.[233] Of course those hopes were dashed, but in the initial stages of occupation there was a joint German-Lithuanian government which lasted until July, and the Nazis exploited the Lithuanian anti-Semitic sentiments to their advantage. In fact, as Shoeps points out, "even before [the] German troops arrived, Lithuanian partisans who had fought against [the] Soviet occupation committed atrocities against Jews and communists in so-called 'cleansing operations'."[234]

It becomes clear then that the Nazis did not act alone when they committed atrocities against Lithuania's Jewish community, and that in some instances Lithuanian citizens acted out of their own initiative. The aforementioned "Vilnius '09" projects, however, make no reference to any kind

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[231] Ibid.

[232] Alfred E. Senn. "Reflections on the Holocaust in Lithuania: A New Book by Alfonsas Eidintas". *Lituanus*, Vol. 47, No. 4: Winter 2001. http://www.lituanus.org/2001/01_4_05.htm

[233] Karl-Heinz Schoeps. "Holocaust and Resistance in Vilnius: Rescuers in "Wehrmacht" Uniforms". *German Studies Review,* Vol. 31, No. 3: October 2008. Pp. 489-512

[234] Ibid. pp. 490

of collaboration. One could convincingly argue that this is natural in the case of the first two projects where the spotlight is placed on the rise of the community and not on its fall, but that does not explain the absence of narratives of collaboration in the tourist guide. The guide manages to take the visitors on a tour around locations such as the Jewish ghetto and the city's last remaining synagogue without mentioning that not only the Nazis, but also a substantial portion of Lithuania's population was responsible for atrocities against the Jews.

The absence of narratives of collaboration is even more pronounced in another project that was called *Virtual Historic Vilnius.*[235] The aim of the project was to construct a webpage which would function as an introductory virtual tour to the city. According to the "Vilnius '09" booklet, "the purpose of this [project was] to create a 'visiting card' of Vilnius or an 'ABC-book' for getting acquainted with Vilnius."[236] Amongst the various themes that were selected to introduce the visitor to the city's history, one could find the following: "Traces of Vilna Gaon and Yiddish Culture in Vilnius", "Holocaust and Soviet Genocide in Northern Jerusalem", and "Vilnius: European Capital of Tolerance?"

Merely by looking at the titles, one can guess what the topics of those themes were, but the introductory text in the third theme is noteworthy. There it is stated that Vilnius,

> Today, as in the past, is a place where ethnicities meet, interact and create a common future. If asked whether Vilnius was and is a tolerant city, there can only be one answer: yes, it was and is tolerant as much as the mentality of the citizens of Vilnius has allowed it to be in each historical period.[237]

If we trust the website, then the mentality of Vilnius's citizens in each historical period was very tolerant indeed. All the themes referring to the city's ethnic minorities do so in the "traditional" manner, i.e. either with narratives of pride for the city's cultural diversity, or with narratives of victimisation at the hands of foreign oppressors; never at the hands of Lithuanians. Consequently, the city is able to simultaneously project an image of tolerance and pride for the Jewish heritage, to incorporate the Holocaust in the cultural programme in a manner that places all responsibility on the Nazis, and to include all the citizens of Lithuania in the category of victims. Moreover, since

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[235] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *National Programme*. Pp. 143. See also: http://www.viv.lt/titulinis

[236] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *National Programme*. Pp. 143

[237] http://www.viv.lt/vilniaus_fenomenai/vilnius_tolerantiskas

the country was subjected to two consecutive occupations, Lithuanians are entitled to represent themselves as victims on two occasions. The narrative of "double-victimisation" is evident in the way the website fuses the "Holocaust and the Soviet Genocide". This fusion is justified by the introductory text to that theme. The text states that,

> The differences and similarities between the rein of Hitler and Stalinism, Nazism and Bolshevism, are often a subject of discussions these days. To Vilnius, both these regimes were equally cruel and Vilnius suffered from both of them.[238]

The impression one gets when surfing the *Virtual Historic Vilnius* website, however, is not exactly one of equality when it comes to the treatment of the Nazi and the Soviet past, and not only because instances of Lithuanian collaboration are omitted. Simply by counting the themes referring to the Soviet past, one notices that greater emphasis is placed on the Soviet rather than the Nazi occupation of Lithuania. There are three themes referring exclusively to the Soviet past: "Vilnius: A City of Communist and Anti-Communist Legends", "Vilnius and the Singing Revolution", and "Vilnius: A City of Soviet Breakup and the Reunion of Europe", while a fourth theme, as can be deduced by its title ("Holocaust and the Soviet Genocide"), is divided between the Nazi and the Soviet atrocities, with the latter atrocities also characterised by the term "genocide".

The overwhelming majority of entries in these three themes encompass, once again, narratives of resistance and victimisation under Soviet rule, [239] but there are also a few entries that demonstrate that the Soviet authorities would have been unable to control the country without some help from the local population. One such entry refers to Antanas Sniečkus, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania, and, "one of the longest serving leaders of the Communist parties in the world".[240] The entry informs the visitor that, "it is hard to evaluate Sniečkus, […]. Some call him a traitor of the nation and the servant of the occupation regime. Others know him as Master, as [his] colleagues [used] to call him."[241] Thus, it is clear that evaluating the Soviet past is

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[238] http://www.viv.lt/vilniaus_fenomenai/genocidai

[239] Entries such as: *Jonas Zemaitis-Vytautas tried by Beria, Sajudis (Revival) Movement, The Antagonism of Vytautas Landsbergis and Mikhail Gorbachev, Protest, Barricades in Vilnius, Fighting for Independence, etc.* are indicative of the resistance narratives, while entries like: *On this side of the Iron Curtain, The Chernobyl Disaster, The "Knight" of Bolshevik Revolution* are indicative of the victimisation narratives.

[240] http://www.viv.lt/vilniaus_fenomenai/komunizmo_antikomunizmo

[241] Ibid.

not as simple as it was usually presented in the "Vilnius '09" programme, and that, for the larger part of the Soviet oppression, resistance to the authorities was not as widespread or intense as the entries of the webpage suggest, even in a country such as Lithuania where resistance to the Soviet regime was higher in comparison to other countries of the former Soviet bloc.

Not surprisingly, the dominant narratives that are observable in the *Virtual Historic Vilnius* website regarding the Soviet past were also pronounced in other projects of the "Vilnius 09" cultural programme. One exhibition bearing the title *Time in Photography: 1960-2009*, reflected the last fifty years of Lithuania's history. According to the "Vilnius '09" booklet, "the oppressive atmosphere of Soviet stagnation and people's burdensome past [were] restored through images, [while] the Chronicle of Sajudis Events [brought the visitors] back to the days of independence fights [by] reconstructing the exhilarating spirit of shared goals and experiences."[242]

Another peculiar project dealing with the Soviet past was called *24 Hours in the USSR – 1984. Survival Drama in a Soviet Bunker*.[243] The project had been operating since 2007 and therefore it was not specifically prepared for the ECoC event. In 2009, however, a variation was introduced. The idea was to lock groups of thirty people inside a Soviet bunker for twenty four hours where they would have to "survive the unforgettable day and night of a Soviet citizen."[244] According to the booklet, the play would start with a Soviet breakfast and would end with a morning holiday of returning back to the EU. The "prisoners" were subjected to immense pressure from actors dressed in KGB uniforms, they were interrogated, and were placed in confinement cells if they did not obey the commands of the guards promptly.[245] The organisers of the project explained that "the purpose of the project [was] to say the final goodbye to the Soviet past, [and] to possible nostalgia or sympathies to totalitarianism."[246]

I am not sure, however, whether the project fulfilled the expectations of its organisers. Since its opening in 2007, the bunker has become a popular touristic attraction, and has spurred the curiosity of the mass media.[247] Yet, the way the project is presented, and especially the way it was

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[242] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *National Programme*. Pp. 147

[243] Ibid. pp. 144-145 See also: http://sovietbunker.com/en/1984-survival-drama/

[244] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *National Programme.* Pp. 145

[245] The Guardian. *Lithuania's Soviet Nostalgia: Back in the USSR.* Published on Sunday 11th of May 2011. http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2011/may/01/lithuania-soviet-nostalgia-theme-parks

[246] Public Enterprise "Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009". *National Programme.* Pp. 145

[247] http://sovietbunker.com/en/media/

promoted by the ECoC organisation in 2009 are questionable. This is how a postcard promoting the project invited the visitors to participate in it:

> If you want to remember or experience in what conditions Lithuanians lived quite recently, we invite you to visit a Soviet bunker in the region of Vilnius and take part in the project '24 Hours in the USSR: The Drama of Survival in a Soviet Bunker'. Get familiar with the totalitarian regime that ruled Lithuania for five decades.[248]

My opinion is that assessments of the past that generalise one of the most extreme aspects of the Soviet regime, and present it as a widespread and everyday phenomenon, can only lead to new conflicts on a European level. No one can deny that the Soviet regime committed hideous atrocities, and that its centralised rule caused much suffering to the citizens of Eastern Europe. Yet, the extremities were not as general as they are depicted in this project, where supposedly the everyday life of a Soviet citizen is represented, while the fact is overlooked that the Soviet regime could not have functioned without the assistance of a local communist elite, or without the passive acceptance of the population. It is true that whenever the Eastern European countries resisted (with Budapest 1956 and Prague 1968 being just the most famous instances) the resistance movements were violently crushed. Nevertheless, black and white interpretations of history, such as the ones presented by the cultural programmes of Sibiu and Vilnius, do not attempt to come to terms with the past, they rather project a nationalistic view of history that creates tensions on a European level and obstructs an honest supranational interpretation of Europe's past.

While the Eastern European countries complain that their suffering under Soviet rule is not recognised on European level, or that it does not receive the same attention as the recognition of the Holocaust, they choose to oversee the significant part that the Soviet troops played in defeating the forces of the Axis, the suffering of ethnic minorities under both regimes, and their own dubious relations with them. That is why whenever the institutions of the EU honour the Red Army for its contribution to the defeat of Nazism and the "liberation" of Europe, the representatives of the Eastern European members react negatively, or just choose to abstain. The word "liberation" is charged with negative connotations due to the diverse post-war historical experiences between West and East, but black and white representations such as the ones offered by these cultural

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programmes will not allow more complex and all-encompassing narratives of the Soviet past to emerge. The honouring of Soviet narratives of the West will always strike a sensitive chord within the Eastern European nations while Westerners will always seem puzzled by the fact that the Easterners are unwilling to recognise the Red Army's contribution.

Finally, it is also disturbing that, as the ECoC cultural programmes of Vilnius and Sibiu illustrate, the governing authorities of these countries suppose that they have done enough to confront their darker past simply because they have included projects that commemorate the victims of the Holocaust into their programmes. The projects, however, conceal more than they reveal, due to their propensity to reproduce "traditional" narratives of resistance and victimisation. It is obvious from the various publications that I have consulted for my study that research in Eastern European countries has moved from a "traditional" to a "reflexive" study and interpretation of the national past. Unfortunately, however, when it comes to projects that are addressed to a wider public, or events that promote the country's image internationally, like the ECoC action, the cultural programmes of these two cities still involve "traditional" narratives.

10. Conclusion

Since the action's inception in 1985 and until the end of 2015, fifty-three cities have been awarded the title of European Capital of Culture. The action has undergone significant changes from its early stages when it was an intergovernmental activity, to its later transformations when it became an initiative supervised by the European Commission. What began as a spring-summer celebratory festival became an all-year multifaceted event. The initial concept, however, remained the same, namely, to promote a city's, cultural heritage on a European level. The goal is still to highlight the variety and diversity of cultures on the European continent by placing them under an overarching "European" dome, or what has been termed as the "unity in diversity" concept.

Yet, even though the initial concept is still the same, the scope and reach of the ECoC action has been altered. As it was mentioned in the second part of this thesis, the first cities designated as ECoC were the "safe choices". They were already established and widely acknowledged cultural hubs. So, by designating those cities, the only intent of the ministers of culture at the time was to celebrate the united "European" present. Thus, the divided "European" past, which was still a tangible reality from 1985 until 1989, was supposedly left behind, while the prosperous "European" future did not receive as much attention as it was advertised because, if the future had indeed received enough attention, the first designations would have been planned with longer term benefits in mind, and not as one-off events.

The long-term and bilateral advantages of the ECoC action became evident only after the United Kingdom decided not to follow the trodden path of designating a "safe choice" city on a top-down initiative, but to proclaim a national competition for the title. Accordingly, Glasgow, the winning candidate, demonstrated how the ECoC title could rejuvenate a city culturally and economically, how it could have long-term benefits for the city's international image and infrastructure, and how it could add to the title's intended symbolic value by offering practical incentives to the cities. Consequently, the *quid pro quo* basis made the ECoC title attractive, and it transformed it from a mere temporary celebration of the present to a long-term investment for the future.

Reconciling the divided "European" past, however, still remained outside the scope of the ECoC action. Whenever the cities referred to the past, it was only in a celebratory tone for the rich and diverse cultural heritage. The focus was placed primarily on the glorious distant past of Greek

Antiquity, or on the humanitarian past of the Enlightenment, and not on the turbulent and more recent past of the twentieth century. As we saw in the first section, since the Western part of Europe integrated economically after the Second World War, there was no reason to scratch old wounds, especially when the economy was booming and the Soviet threat loomed over the heads of Western Europeans. Only after 1989, when the threat was eradicated, did a more honest approach towards the continent's shared past emerge.

The ECoC cultural programmes, however, still maintained their celebratory tone even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, because cities did not feel comfortable with the idea of presenting the darker aspects of their history during their cultural year. The first ECoC project that I was able to trace clearly referring to the Second World War was called *The Line, The Light* presented by Copenhagen in 1996. It was an outdoor exhibition of art works placed on the coast of Jutland, and was produced as a celebration of the passage of fifty years since the end of the war. In the following year, the city of Thessaloniki presented an exhibition bearing the title *The Land of Jewish Martyrs*. The exhibition's aim was to inform the visitors about the city's sizeable pre-war Jewish community and the community's wartime fate. Thessaloniki, however, or any other city before 1999 for that matter, pales in comparison to Weimar's attempt to come to terms with her darker past via her ECoC cultural programme.

Weimar was the first city to devote a substantial number of projects referring to her wartime and post-war history. If we take into consideration the city's eventful past, both under the Nazi and under the Soviet regime, then the outcome might appear to be natural, because the city could not hide its darker past as easily as some of its European neighbours. Yet, the majority of Weimar's ECoC predecessors and successors have their own atrocities to atone for, but during their cultural year they chose not to delve into the darker aspects of their past and preferred to promote a more positive image, perceiving the ECoC title only as a celebration. Therefore, it is to the credit of Weimar's organising authorities that they undertook such a difficult task when the European spotlight fell upon their city, particularly if we take into consideration that they managed to incorporate projects that referred to both aspects of the city's controversial past, celebrating simultaneously Weimar's humanistic heritage through Goethe and Schiller.

Unfortunately, despite Weimar's noteworthy attempt to come to terms with her past, the majority of the city's ECoC successors did not follow her example. Of course, a striking exception is the Austrian city of Linz in 2009. In my opinion Linz's cultural programme was designed

excellently because it managed to convey a balanced image of the city's history via a collaboration of artists and researchers. On the one hand, it introduced projects that celebrated the city's contribution to Europe's cultural heritage, but, on the other, it also claimed responsibility for the city's misconduct during the period 1938-1945. Yet, unlike the other cities included in this study, Linz only had one controversial past to face: its collaboration with Nazi Germany. When cities have to face two different conflicted periods in their history, however, matters become more complicated. That is why the cases of Sibiu and Vilnius require a different approach than Linz. Still, if we compare them to Weimar, who was also subjected to two different "occupations", then there is not much room left for excuses. If Weimar could find the means and the space to illustrate instances of misconduct under both regimes, then Sibiu and Vilnius could definitely find space too, especially when a webpage devoted to Vilnius's history had enough space to fit instances of the Soviet oppression, of the Lithuanian resistance, and of the "historically tolerant" attitudes of Vilnius's citizens. If Vilnius wishes to be a truly tolerant European city, then it must first admit that in the recent past there was an unfortunate moment when its citizens were intolerant towards one of the city's ethnic minorities, and that this intolerance had catastrophic consequences for the lives of the people who belonged to that minority.

With regard to the Holocaust, an interesting observation of this study is that most ECoC, regardless of their historical background and geographic location, have presented projects commemorating the Holocaust, even when they did not assume responsibility for their own role. Even in the United Kingdom, where no concentration camps existed, and the island never came under Nazi occupation, during Liverpool's cultural year an exhibition with the title *Anne Frank + You* was presented in order to spread awareness, while the national commemoration of the Holocaust Memorial Day (27th of January) for 2008 was held in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall precisely because the city was Europe's Cultural Capital. As I have mentioned earlier, this indicates the importance that the Holocaust has acquired on a European level and its consideration to function as the European founding myth. The emergence of the Holocaust as a central event in Europe's shared history, however, should not be allowed to become an obstacle to the European recognition and inclusion of other narratives of victimisation and persecution, as in the case of the German post-war expellees (*Vertriebenen)*, or the far lesser known case of the *Ostarbeiterrinen* for example.

If we take into account that "Europe" is not precisely geographically and politically defined, but that on the contrary it has numerous overlapping and interchanging borders according to the way each individual perceives it, and according to the institutions we use to describe it, then it is not hard to understand why identifying a set of characteristics that constitute a shared European memory is a difficult task to achieve.[249] We always run the risk of excluding important elements, or interpreting them in a way that is not accepted by all the nations that constitute the broader idea of "Europe." The complexity of the narratives illustrate that selection and simplification would only tell part of the story, leaving important elements behind; elements that might make a big difference on a national level, or on the relationship between two neighbouring nations. Furthermore, due to the fact that in some parts of Europe the "traditional" narratives still maintain their power, the idea of a founding myth becomes impossible and potentially dangerous. As this thesis has shown, currently the concept of "unity in diversity" appears to be more fruitful from a European point of view. We still need to be careful, however, not to allow "diversity" to act as a cover for the promotion of "traditional" narratives, and make sure that "diversity" goes hand in hand with a "reflexive" view of history. That is the way that the "unity in diversity" concept can truly promote unity and not become a hollow idea that would serve no other purpose but to illustrate the inability of the European nations to form a sense of solidarity.

Therefore, instead of funding projects that seek to provide a European "founding myth", based on practices of exclusion and simplification, the main aim of the European Commission should be to create a platform where different versions of our common past can be discussed openly. That way, all the varying European voices will have a stage to express their narratives, and if those narratives tend to conceal more than they reveal, or if they tend to reproduce an "asymmetry of memory", by emphasising instances of victimisation and resistance in order to hide one's own mischiefs, a constructive criticism can take place on a supranational level leading, hopefully, to a more "reflexive" and reconciling interpretation of each nation's recent past.

Moreover, since identity formation is a dynamic process, with the actors always defining and redefining their "selves" by drawing on specific elements of their past according to the needs of the present, the European platform also has to maintain a dynamic and interchanging character. In this respect, initiatives such as the "European Capital of Culture", with their rotational system of designation, have more to offer than a sterile founding myth. For that reason, Europe needs to

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[249] Ann Rigney. "Transforming Memory and the European Project." *New Literary History*, 43.4 (2012): pp. 607-628

redefine the scope of the ECoC action and make it something more than just an annual event of celebration. Of course, its celebratory tone is an integral part of the ECoC action and a great factor for its success, but via such an established and attractive title the institutions of the EU have the chance to recognise where the contemporary issues of dealing with Europe's shared past lie by checking how the various ECoC have presented their recent history during the ECoC year, while, at the same time, they have the opportunity to promote more "reflexive" narratives by funding projects which spark discussions and shake the established "traditional" ones.

A practical way of achieving this could be through the Melina Mercouri prize. The prize could be expanded to act as an incentive for the ECoC organisers to organise projects that focus on the city's controversial past, or by funding the export and exchange of projects between partner ECoC. In this respect, the rule that does not allow cities from the same geographical area to become ECoC in consecutive years is beneficial, not only because it allows various narratives to be expressed in a rotational manner by offering the podium to all European voices, but also because it creates bridges between cities that might lack any other historical connection. Additionally, this rule could act as a remedy for another issue that Ann Rigney has identified recently. In her article Rigney has argued that, in the past few years,

> The importance of dialogic memory to the working through of intra-European conflicts has been amply demonstrated. But the real challenge for the future may actually lie elsewhere: in creating solidarity and a sense of neighbourliness among people who have not been former enemies, who have been indifferent to each other, rather than at logger-heads.[250]

The fact that the ECoC title is now shared between two cities, one belonging to the "new" and one to the "old" guard of Europe, gives those cities a reason to come into contact during their cultural year, and builds a bridge of communication between them. For example, for the year 2017 two cities with no previous historical connection, Aarhus in Denmark and Paphos in Cyprus, will share the title. Exchanging projects that refer to the cities' history is an excellent way to kindle that sense of solidarity and neighbourliness, while promoting at the same time the idea of sharing a common intertwined past.

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[250] Ibid.

All in all, it becomes clear that the ECoC action has evolved tremendously since its first inception in 1985. Yet, even though it is in no way exhaustive, this study has demonstrated that there is still room for improvement. The action has many potentials due to its open and flexible character which allows each city to celebrate its participation in Europe in a distinct manner while promoting simultaneously a sense of unity among the nations of Europe. The institutions of the EU can use the legitimate means they have at their disposal to persuade the organisers of each ECoC to use the title not solely as a celebration, but also as a title of reflection and of spreading awareness for issues that may have national roots but their branches stretch to a supranational level.

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