

## Historical Memory in Eurosceptic Discourse

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### Abstract

The article aims to investigate the nature of the connection between the phenomenon of historical memory and the phenomenon of Euroscepticism and the way historical memory influences the formation of Euroscepticism as the most important element of public consciousness in modern Europe. The obtained results confirmed the research hypothesis that modern Euroscepticism is rooted in the inconsistent historical memory of EU countries and the absence of a common view on historical events does not allow to establish the common historical memory for the EU which may cause disintegration process in united Europe. The policy of managing historical memory and manipulations with it as well as the formation of historical consciousness following certain political goals and objectives of the state, supranational structures, or even a specific group of people will be crucial for the future of the EU.

**Keywords:** Historical Memory, Euroscepticism, European Union, Remembrance Policies, Nationalism, Conflict.

### 1. Introduction

The European Union, being a unique integration structure, for a long time served as a home for its members, which guaranteed a comfortable co-existence and a stable future. Today the United Europe project is going through a large-scale systemic crisis. The manifestation of this crisis was the process of transformation of Euroscepticism from a marginal political periphery into a normal phenomenon. Moreover, as Brexit has shown, Euroscepticism has become a real threat to the existence of the EU. Regarding to this issue, after the 2016 referendum in Britain, G. Soros said, "the collapse of the EU is almost inevitable" (Soros warns of EU disintegration, 2016). Ex-President of the

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**Atıf İçin / For Citation:** Balabanov, K. & Karaman, K. (2021). Historical Memory in Eurosceptic Discourse. Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler ve Eğitim Dergisi – USBED, Cilt/Volume 3, Sayı/Issue 5, 393-410. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/usbed>

Makale Türü / Article Type: D Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Gönderilme Tarihi / Submission Date: 31.05.2021

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted Date: 14.07.20221

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European Commission Claude Juncker was forced to admit that the EU is in an existential crisis (State of the Union, 2016).

Euroscepticism has become one of the most significant trends determining the development of the EU in the 21st century. The phenomenon of Euroscepticism is a complex, multifaceted and multi-level phenomenon. Recently, the problem of Euroscepticism has been actively developed by representatives of various scientific schools representing almost the entire spectrum of socio-political, economic, and humanitarian disciplines. Conceptual approaches to its study, developed by P. Taggart and A. Shcherbak, were further developed in the works of both Western authors and the works of representatives of scientific schools of the post-Soviet space.

Despite the presence of a significant number of researchers, some aspects of this phenomenon are rather controversial and have no interpretation in the relevant literature. These include the problem of understanding the essence of Euroscepticism, the reasons that cause it, and reasons that lead to the growth of its influence. A vivid example of his victorious march across the EU countries was the election campaign of 2015-2016, during which Eurosceptics achieved success in the elections to the European Parliament, increasing their presence by an average of 38 MPs, as well as in elections to national parliaments.

This article aims to clarify the nature of the connection between the phenomenon of historical memory and the phenomenon of Euroscepticism and the way historical memory influences the formation of Euroscepticism as the most important element of public consciousness in modern Europe.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The fundamental basis of this article is an overview of the unique bibliography, which consists of modern researches on the problem of historical memory and Euroscepticism. The features of the study of historical memory are associated with the deep attachment of scientists to the formal-descriptive traditions of the social sciences. Such a traditional formal approach was applied while describing the transformation of political ideology in modern Europe.

The research is conducted by using principles of objectivity, historicism, analysis and synthesis, comparison and classification, systematization.

The research hypothesis is that modern Euroscepticism is rooted in the inconsistent historical memory of different EU countries which does not allow to establish the common historical memory for the EU which in its turn has the potential to disintegrate process in united Europe.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1. Historical Memory and its Interconnection with Euroscepticism**

The growing interest in the problems of historical memory is justified by the "universal thirst for memory" that emerged in the late 1980s and gradually transformed by the 21st century into a "memorial boom" in Europe - a worldwide celebration of memory, a memorial era (Maier, 1998).

"The reason for this, - notes the greatest historian of our time P. Nora, - is the legacy of the institutions of late modernity, when the loss of teleological perspective (the collapse of large narratives according to Lyotard) is made up for by increased attention to one's history" (Hopa, 2005). The relevance of the study of Euroscepticism in this perspective is due, first, to the degree of its poorly studied; secondly, the role played by historical memory in the life of modern society.

Euroscepticism is a complex phenomenon both in nature and in the forms of its manifestation, and the result of the action of an equally complex set of factors, among which several researchers give priority to factors whose nature lies in the sphere of culture and spirituality (Harmsen & Spiering, 2005). In our opinion, among the factors of this order, it is worth highlighting historical memory, particularly, the role, and significance of the life of modern society, according to the above estimates, a steady growth trend. By its nature and realization of functions, "historical memory" is a relatively new construct introduced into the scientific world by M. Halbwachs and soon became a category that is commonly used in a wide range of socio-political, humanitarian disciplines.

The problem of historical memory is reflected in the works of famous researchers of Western scientific schools: these are P. Nora, A. Assman, J. Assman, P. Hatton, P. Riker,

I Ryuzin, Y. Lotman. In the post-Soviet space, whole institutes are engaged in this issue, of particular interest are the works of L. Repina, Zh. Tishchenko, N. Medushevsky, A. Zashkilnyak, Yu. Bushansky.

Despite the huge layer of literature devoted to the problem of memory, nowadays there is no unique interpretation of this phenomenon. There are many approaches and definitions. In the context of identifying the nature of the mutual influence of historical memory and Euroscepticism, we will proceed from the understanding of historical memory as a part of a socio-cultural phenomenon aimed at understanding historical events and their symbolic representation, which has an alliance of social functions of historical consciousness, memory, that define a "social construction". In the context of this approach, M. Halbwachs and M. Golka define the concept of historical memory: "historical memory presents us with the past only in an abbreviated and schematic form" (Хальбвакс, 2005) the first researcher claimed; the second researcher focused on archiving what once happened, not passive, but selective, highlighting only some elements of the past and adapting them to the present (Golka, 2010).

Historical memory is the key to the identity of a society and its core. As a result, the formation of a common European identity as the main condition for the success of the "United Europe" project is possible only if there is a common European history.

In this context, the potential opportunities of "historical memory" as a social structure to influence the development of political processes in modern society, in particular, the development of Euroscepticism in the political space of the European Union, are of high interest (Савельева & Полетаев, 2005). The modern level of research on historical memory allows us to interpret it as a factor that ensures the identification of political, ethnic, national, confessional, and status groups, which forms in them a sense of community and dignity.

Historical memory can be formed based on the past, considering key significant events or personalities as, according to P. Nohr, "sheets of memory", both localized on the chronological axis, in spatial objects and social actions (Hopa, 1999).

Therefore, the nature of historical memory can be updated following the agenda, which is determined by the needs of society or its specific social or political groups (Hutton, 1993).

Actualization of the past to rethink it in the context of new social conditions leads to changes in the public consciousness because it forms the basis, the mental core of public consciousness (Цыганков, 2016).

At the same time, historical memory is a value that significantly determines both social and political behavior. The nature of this influence determines the content of memory and is also determined by the ways it is used to achieve specific goals - for argumentation or justification of the modern world.

Historical memory, like almost all spheres of life of up-to-date society, is undergoing a process of profound transformation both of the formation of its sources, where the media play an increasing role, and the nature of its impact on social and political life (Tryma, Pakhomenko & Francis, 2018).

The process of politicization of historical memory has taken on an unprecedented scale, which fits into the framework of the thesis "who controls the past, controls the future" (Савельева & Полетаев, 2005). Hence, the shaping of the collective historical memory of a society, a country is an integral part of nation-building and is closely linked with the solution of the problem of forming a national identity.

Historical memory, realizing its functions arising from its nature as a social concept, affects public consciousness, forms assessments of the past, indirectly affects the development of political processes, being an instrument of political struggle (Forster, 2014).

The struggle for power and political leadership is also manifested as a rivalry between different versions of historical memory and different symbols of its greatness and shame in the understanding of certain political forces. This requires the implementation of a memory shaping process. This need may also be due to the needs of society itself.

Several researchers define historical memory as a functional system of interaction and communication of various actors regarding the political use of the past, as well as the crucial tool for the formation of the macropolitical identity of a society and purposeful

political public actions, with the help of which the events of the past are remembered, represented or forgotten (Fuchs & Otto, 2013).

Also - as a purposeful activity to represent a certain image of the past, in demand of a political context through various verbal and visual practices (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). Researchers also interpret the politics of memory as the modeling of collective memory by political agents using political technologies that allow focusing public attention on some historical events and hush up others, forming stigmatized thinking in recipients, a new mindset, within which they appear as a single community (Медушевский, 2019). Hence, the politics of memory is being transformed into the vital element of political struggle, which initiated the process of institutionalizing the politics of memory through the creation of special structures, the purpose of which was to develop the whole complex of problems associated with the implementation of the politics of memory. These became the Memory Institutes and similar structures with other names.

### **3.2. European Remembrance Policies: Milestones of Formation**

In the same period, the process of legal recording of the characteristics, the role of the meaning of certain events of the past have been started. Historical memory is embedded in a certain legal field, within which the concept of historical memory should be realized. This process took place both at the supranational and national levels. In the 90s, the EU defined the essence of the common European culture of memory as the perception by Europeans of the commonality of the historical process, in which their countries and peoples are involved (Медушевский, 2019). The solution to this problem within the EU was fraught with great diverse difficulties and obstacles.

Some nature was explained by the fact that the common European culture of memory had to be formed from several different-level components: individual, collective, national, supranational, in some cases - regional (considering the peculiarities of the development of member countries, for instance, Spain, where memory plays a significant regional role). A set of other difficulties was due to the need to develop a concept of a common European culture of memory, its principles of historical narrative, which should have been used as its basis. Two stages can be traced in the realization of the historical memory of

the EU. The first chronologically covers the 90s and ends in 2004. The second lasts from 2005 to the present.

The process of the formation of a common European culture of memory has caused a broad discussion, which continues today - first of all, this concerns the prospects and boundaries of a common European memory by its nature. The memory of Europe should ideally represent not a homogeneous master narrative, but the coherence of memory in dialogue and the interaction of national images in history.

While solving the problem of forming a common European memory, Brussels saw not only the foundation of a future common European identity. The motivated use of the past was seen as an effective tool for the development of the European integration process, primarily associated with the transfer of a part of national sovereignty to the supranational level (Roger, 2020).

The formation of a common European culture of memory, first of all, presupposed the development of its concept. The process of its creation took place rather slowly and was born in the course of discussions and finally formulated in the 1980s. It was based on a study of the historical past of Europe of the twentieth century, associated with the events of the two world wars. The priority was given to the historical narrative of the history of the Third Reich and World War II. On this basis, a consolidating historical narrative was formed. A. Assman noted that his goal is to understand the uniqueness of the Holocaust as the main European tragedy of the 20th century (Ассман & Хлебников, 2014).

The Holocaust became the thread that weaved the canvas for a common European culture of memory - a common European historical narrative. It is "the ultimate embodiment of a catastrophic experience that disrupted the narrative of continuity in the consistent implementation of basic values and provided a holistic identity.

The key role of the Holocaust in the concept of a common European culture of memory was confirmed in the process of institutionalization of this topic, which was embodied in the creation of such structures as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and the World Holocaust Forum. Commemoration of the Holocaust has become one of the requirements for the EU members, a marker of belonging to European values. The Holocaust was also legalized in the framework of the adoption by the European

Parliament of the resolution on the Holocaust in 2005 (European Parliament resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, 2005).

The concept of a common European culture of memory was defined by memory based on critical patriotism and the need to admit guilt and responsibility according to the ideas of Jaspers outlined in his book "The Question of Guilt. On Germany's Political Responsibility" (Ясперсбс, 1999).

The consensus developed was based on the recognition of collective guilt, collective responsibility, and repentance. By the beginning of the 21st century, the EU had made significant progress in implementing the "One Europe" project by introducing a single currency - the euro. Problems related to the movement towards a "global cosmopolitan memory" and the formation of a common European identity were successfully solved (Levy & Sznajder, 2002). At the beginning of the 21st century, more than 67% of EU citizens perceived themselves primarily as Europeans. The common European culture of memory, becoming, in fact, cosmopolitan, took dominant positions in the historical narrative of the European space.

### **3.3. European historical memory: conflict potential**

In 2004, there was a large-scale expansion of the EU at the expense of the countries of the former socialist camp. The enlargement carried out for purely political purposes and without economic justification, became the reason for the development of a whole complex of negative phenomena for the EU, one of which was the emergence of a conflict of memory. The culture of memory of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was based on fundamentally different concepts of understanding the experience of the historical past and its crucial layer associated with the Second World War - it was a different historical memory.

Nationalism was the core of historical memory, and the concept of sacrifice was its key component, the basis of historical narrative. The historical memory of these countries were focused on recognizing themselves as double victims - the Hitler regime and Soviet totalitarianism. Hence their resolute agreement to take the guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust and bear the burden of repentance. They considered themselves the same victims as the Jewish people, therefore they were not going to join the concept of the



culture of memory that had formed by that time within the EU. Moreover, as part of their assessment of the Holocaust, they tried to construct their national narratives of "the search for the lost genocide" (Фелькер, 2018).

The model of the historical memory of the new members was built based on equating the communist regimes to the Hitler regime. For them, they were essentially a phenomenon of the same order. At the official level, these states refused to join the official concept adopted by the EU, defending their right to have their own culture of memory. Historical memory played a vital role in the national formation of new democratic statehood, in the formation of new values, socio-psychological climate, and social consciousness in their countries. Historical memory, the politics of memory in these countries has become an effective means of consolidating society around certain political forces.

Refusing to integrate into the current concept of the common European culture of memory, countries behaved quite aggressively towards it, striving to replace it or radically correct it under their concept (Clarke, 2014).

In the conditions of a new emerging reality, the situation of which was aggravated as a result of the failure of the adoption of the EU Constitution in 2005, Brussels was forced to adjust the policy of memory, to give it dynamism, consistency, and to make it more effective and understandable for the citizens of the European Union. Under the new conditions, the memory of Europe could not represent a homogeneous master narrative, but the coherence of concepts in dialogue and the interpenetration of national images into history. A consensus must be reached, the premise of which is the shared European knowledge of "executioners and victims" (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 2004).

The principles of the politics of memory were changed, the transition from a cosmopolitan approach to the principle of agonism, i.e. dialogue-based not only on conflicts of interest but also on mutual respect for the disputants. Within the framework of this approach, the key assessments of the historical narrative were adjusted. Thus, in 2009, the European Parliament made additions to the previously adopted 2005 Document that assesses the Holocaust and the fascist regime with the inclusion of Soviet totalitarianism in these evaluative frameworks. In subsequent years, assessments of the World War II narrative began increasingly to correspond to the concept of a culture of historical memory adopted

by the countries of Young Europe, which is evidenced by the content of the document adopted during this period.

In 2019, the European Parliament adopted Resolution "Importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe", which dealt with the authoritarianism and totalitarianism of the Nazi and communist regimes.

To overcome the "memory crisis", the EU and its governing institutions are stepping up their activities aimed at resolving it. It acquires a systemic planning character, calculated for the long term, as evidenced by the implementation of two special programs during this period, the purpose of which was to overcome the crisis and strengthen the common European identity. An example of such a program is the European Citizen's Initiative (2006-2013 and 2014-2020) (Council Regulation, 2014).

The development of the second program was preceded by an in-depth analysis commissioned by the European Parliament Committee on the topic "European historical memory: politics, problems, prospects". This made it possible to more clearly formulate it in a program for the formation of historical memory in the EU. The correction of the memory policy presupposed the convergence of the two concepts in favor of the approaches of the Eastern European countries, but its implementation did not lead to the achievement of the set goals. The European historical narrative remains split and develops within the framework of two concepts.

The "memory conflict" raised the issue of historical injustice in the past. Consequently, Poland demands reparations from Germany, similar demands are put forward by Greece. The problem of German settlers who were forcibly evicted from their territories after the Second World War arose again. All this aggravates the development of crisis phenomena in the EU, undermines its unity, creates a fertile ground for Eurosceptics who receive more and more arguments to criticize Brussels and confirm the loyalty of their views, the need to strengthen national culture, national values, and national sovereignty.

The analysis shows the presence of a connection between the emergence of a conflict of memory and the transformation of Euroscepticism from a marginal political backyard into an influential political force. Most researchers tend to associate one of the reasons for the growth of Euroscepticism with the lack of a common European identity. The "conflict of

memory" actually made it impossible to form its basic component - a common European culture of memory. This largely provoked the growth of Euroscepticism, the strengthening of its influence in the political life of the EU countries, and the emergence of a supranational level. This is evidenced by the success of Eurosceptics in the elections to the European Parliament in 2014, 2019, where they managed to create their factions, as well as the successes of Eurosceptics in the election campaigns of 2014-2020 at the national level.

All this allows the majority of experts and researchers to conclude that the EU has suffered a crushing defeat in solving the problem of forming a common European culture of memory, the absence of which does not allow us to speak about the existence of a common European identity.

Assessing the EU's activities in this direction, Western researchers pointed out that it is virtually impossible to form a common European memory within the EU. Historically, due to the specifics of the development of the territories included in the EU, and their historical memory, four options can be distinguished: Atlantic (West European), German, East Central European, Russian. They are in a fight and are aimed at suppressing each other (Mälksoo, 2009).

Historical memory has transformed from a cosmopolitan instrument into a hotbed of contradictions and antagonisms associated with the imposition of its interpretation of history. It does not "unite", but "disunite" the European Union.

The EU's experience in shaping a common European culture of memory has shown that the politics of memory has a dual nature. On the one hand, it can be an effective instrument of consolidation, on the other, it carries a potential for future conflict. Thus, the destruction of a single concept of a common European culture of memory, the emergence of an alternative project led to a deep crisis of European identity, undermined European solidarity, the absence of which was demonstrated during the migration crisis of 2015-2016 and pandemic 2020-2021.

The way out of the crisis requires a new type of construction of the past, a new type of common European politics of memory. Separate plots, the memory of individual groups, countries of the regions, can live their own lives in it, being inscribed in the general

narrative frame of the EU. The future will show whether Brussels will be able to solve this problem, but the future of the European Union depends on the solution of this issue. The insolvency of this problem at the present stage objectively creates the basis for the perception by EU citizens of the program guidelines, rhetoric, demands, and slogans of Eurosceptics who actively oppose the common European culture of memory.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Historical memory has a decisive influence on the development of Euroscepticism in almost all EU countries. The influence of Euroscepticism is especially significant in Britain, where Eurosceptics were able to realize their goal - to leave the EU - and continue to be a significant example for Eurosceptics in France.

The growing importance of historical memory in the life of modern society is associated with the result of a serious temporal shift, the impact of the loss of a clear image of the future, and the loss of the present, which led to an increase in public interest in the past. At the same time, this contributed to the activation of the policy of managing the past, manipulating it through a policy of memory, the formation of historical consciousness following certain political goals and objectives of the state, supranational structures, or even a specific group of people.

Historical memory is being politicized, turning into an instrument of political struggle, into a politics of memory - an element of state and party politics. In the EU space, all actors participating in the political process are actively using it for their purposes, both in confrontation with the EU and in the struggle for power within national states. Historical memory has become an important resource for Eurosceptics to expand their influence. States are pursuing a policy of memory, aimed at the formation of priorities related to national values, the perception of the uniqueness and originality of their past, the significance of these characteristics for the present.

National memory, even in the context of globalization and purposeful activity along the path of its transformation within the EU into a common European culture of memory, turned out to be a priority for the EU citizens. This, in its turn, allows us to conclude the

close interaction and mutual influence of the socio-cultural phenomenon of historical memory and the political phenomenon, which is called Euroscepticism.

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