

Introduction

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The Onus of the Past

Europe is in the crucible! The ‘poly-crisis’ which hit the EU in the last decade – esp. the financial crisis threatening monetary union; the mismanagement of the mass inflow of refugees and migrants; the failure of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership; Brexit; and the rise of populism and Euroscepticism – have not destroyed the European integration project. On the contrary, outside states have demonstrated their European aspirations, and the overall support for the European Union has been increasing – **for now**. Indeed, there are several indications that, in the long run, the EU’s response to the current challenges might be not sufficiently effective, if only because identification of their causes has sometimes failed. One of the most neglected causes is the impact of the past as it appears in the standard narratives of the societies of EU member states. The collective memory of nations participating in European integration is a very fragile phenomenon that can easily be exploited by short-sighted, ruthless political leaders in order to mobilize their electorates.

In the 1950s, at the onset of European integration, the fresh memory of the two World Wars worked decidedly in favor of the new international order that would lead toward European federation. Today, after almost 70 years of integration, the achievements of integration are now an unquestioned part of both the everyday life of citizens as well as of relations between the European states participating in the joint project. However, “unquestioned” is often indistinguishable from being unaware. Most people do not link the free movements of goods or the elimination of physical borders with European integration. What is more, the long period of peace within the integrated part of Europe seems to be simply the new normal. However, such ‘naturalization’ – or, taking for granted of the effects of integration – does not erase long-lasting elements of the collective memory of European nations, all the more so as collective memory is usually reinforced by education, commemorations, art, literature, and historical monuments. The past looms as a constitutive factor in creating visions for the future. This mechanism is common to all societies and countries, although the elements that matter differ substantially. Most of the new member states suffered long-lasting dependence on the

Soviet Union and the political regime it imposed. Moreover, some of them have a very short history of statehood, while the history of others notes long periods of outright disappearance from the map of Europe due to the coordinated actions of neighbouring states.

Among the 'old' member states there are those which still seem to be nostalgic for their imperial past and substantial colonial possessions. One of them has just left the EU with the mirage of going back to its past splendour. Others may still be coping with the feeling of guilt over their responsibility for the 20th century's wars. In most countries the current phenomena undermining the process of European integration, such as populism or Euroscepticism, are usually put into the same theoretical category. However, in their background we may find elements arisen from entirely different collective memories. Some of those elements have the potential to initiate animosities among member states, renew old resentments, or incite unfounded frustrations. They are also exploited by extreme parties striving for power. Since populism needs someone who can be blamed for people's misfortunes, whether real or imagined, populists can relatively easily attribute such responsibility to the EU referring to arbitrarily chosen elements of the past and relying on well-known layers of the collective memory, be it the past subjection to the USSR in the former Soviet bloc countries, or the unquestioned world leadership years ago enjoyed by the British empire.

Social memory is usually subject to the politics of memory. Although such politics change over time, it is quite difficult to eliminate the remnants of the distant politicized interpretations of a nation's history. In some cases old historical framings survive and become active in current politics, complicating goal-oriented actions of the state.

Most European countries grapple with entirely different historical heritages, ones which have considerable impact on their visions for the future. While faced with differing kinds of problems related to the past, we all confront the same current challenges – and they cannot be faced effectively without European unity. Hence, the forging of a future-oriented attitude among Europeans is of exigency.

These challenges concern above all growing global economic competition, the effects of climate change, the current and potential mass migration to Europe, and military threats by foreign powers, along with a welter of possible 'black swans'. Therefore, there are certain necessities regarding both the future of each member state and the future of the EU. Some of those necessities may strike as unsolvable dilemmas. The most difficult of them are expressed by the concepts of governance, identity, and interests.

1. There is a need for a stronger, unified European Union with effective supranational governance accepted by the societies of all Members States. It seems that the only way to achieve this goal is via the rigorous implementation of subsidiarity and the communication of this principle to EU citizens everywhere.
2. At the same time, while deepening European integration via the increased competences of the EU organs, we need to secure and even strengthen the instruments which will protect the identity of individual European nations. There is no reason to assume that maintaining national uniqueness can in any way endanger the unity

of the EU – which is to state that stronger European governance does not need to threaten national identity.

3. There is also a need to clarify the interests of each member state and the interests of the Union. Ideally, the two sets of interests should be in harmony and mutually reinforce each other, with the interests of the Union being the lodestar of every member state. Yet no one should underestimate the difficulties which make such a scenario almost unimaginable.

The texts collected in the present volume are based on the contributions to the 2019 ALLEA conference organized in October by the Polish Academy of Sciences in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology in Warsaw. The location of the conference seems to be the deciding factor that made the authors focus on the Central-Eastern part of the European Union. The countries of this area still experience effects of their imposed dependence on the Soviet Union and many decades of authoritarian rules. These effects are clashing with the memory of the end of unwanted communist experiment, due to successful popular uprising and favorable international situation. As it looks like this quite recent past of former “communist” states affects also their performance in the integrating Europe. We can point out to the problems of national and European identity, the question of solidarity and perception of interests. However, the same issues appeared in the centre of political debates in most of the EU states. Although looking at those issues in different countries we may find completely different historical background there is no doubt that the past is an important factor in all EU member states. Having this in mind we can still ask how to cope with its impact, and what can be done to restore the sense of purpose in Europe’s bold, ongoing endeavour.