

# **Where does Poland fit in Europe?**

## **How political memory influences Polish MEPs' perceptions of Poland's place in Europe**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Debates about Europe's past influence its future. Until recently, these debates have been dominated by Western Europeans. But the 2004 accession of ten new member states to the European Union (EU), eight of them former Soviet republics and so-called Soviet 'satellite states', shifted these debates toward the east. One of the fora in which this shift can be observed is the European Parliament (EP).

In 2008, we conducted interviews with Polish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in Brussels. Each of the MEPs interviewed, without being lead by the interviewer or colluding or consulting with their fellow MEPs, made reference to one or more moments/events which they believed to be important to Polish history. With respect to these particular moments/events, a small variant on the following theme was apparent in each of the interviews: Western European knowledge of Central and Eastern Europe is limited; their understanding of important historical events is equally limited; thus, the primary task for Polish MEPs is to remedy this problem through 'educating' their western colleagues.

Poland's accession to the EU was regarded by a great many Poles as a 'return to Europe', not only in the geographical sense, but also in the sense that it served to reaffirm Poland's European identity. This notion of belonging to Europe clearly influences the way that Polish MEPs behave. But what other factors influence the decision making of Polish MEPs?

Using the interviews as its foundation, this research article investigates the degree to which the 'politics of memory' influences the behaviour of Polish MEPs. It explores the ways in which Polish MEPs, through 'educating' the European Parliament about important Polish/European moments in history, reaffirm their own national identity while

simultaneously promoting the need for European identity to be constructed in relation to Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

While this article focuses primarily on Poland, it is suggested that the conclusions reached here regarding the way that Polish MEPs have used the politics of memory to both promote and reaffirm forms of identity might not be limited to just Poland. Indeed, the issues discussed here will hopefully provide an impetus to encourage more research exploring the links between political memory and identity formation in Europe.

## **2. POLAND AND EUROPE**

The popular notion of a 'return to Europe' represents three mutually reinforcing ideas. First, as in other parts of Central Europe, Poland conceived its fight against communism as a fight to return to Europe;<sup>1</sup> after 1989, hence, the goal to join the European Union was widely shared across political divisions. Second, it suggests that the forty-five years under Communist rule, when Poland was deemed to belong to Eastern rather than Western Europe, represented nothing more than an aberration. Third, it suggests an equally strong feeling that Poland had in some way always been a part of Europe. As such, it reflects a need to recover 'national self-esteem as a member of the family of free, independent and above all *modern* European states...The idea of 'returning to Europe' thus inextricably linked the external and internal dimensions of change...'<sup>2</sup>

Like all conceptions of national identity, Polish national identity is deeply contested. It is strongly shaped by its history: the memories of great Polish war victories; repeated uprisings against foreign domination; and years of lost independence, which served to enforce Polish cultural identity. But it is also shaped by its historical links to the Catholic Church. In this respect, Polish notions of belonging to Europe are grounded in the idea of shared, 'European' experiences.

Rather than regarding themselves more generally as European, Poles regard themselves as belonging to a more particular *Western* European tradition. This is due in part to Poland being

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe,' *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 31, No.7, 1984, pp. 33-38.

<sup>2</sup> J. Batt, 'European Identity and National Identity in Central and Eastern Europe' in H. Wallace (ed.) *Interlocking Dimensions of European Integration*, London: Palgrave, 2001), pp.250-251.

situated between West and East in terms of religious and cultural tradition, with nineteenth century spiritual and political national elites creating the myth of Poland as the eastern flank of Western Europe. This idea, together with nineteenth century anti-Russian uprisings, created a myth of Poland being a gatekeeper of western values and defender of western civilisation. This being the case, Polish intellectuals, including the clergy, 'created an ideological image of Poland as the protector of Christianity, of Western, Latin culture [and] of Europe from eastern barbarians and pagans'.<sup>3</sup>

Adding weight to Poland's particular claims of belonging to Western European is its rich literary and artistic tradition, especially that which developed during the Napoleonic Wars. As Zdzislaw Mach notes, Polish participation in these wars 'were the subject of a vast body of literature and visual arts created by Polish writers and artists, as part of their attempt to teach the Polish population... the meaning of Polishness, Polish patriotism and Polish heroic history'.<sup>4</sup> The writings of Adam Mickiewicz were especially important. He created an image of Poland as both the Martyr and Saviour, a country who had suffered for the greater good of Europe. Even the defeat of the Russian Army on the outskirts of Warsaw by General Józef Piłsudski during the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1921) was presented by Polish historians as a victory that prevented the exportation of Bolshevism to Western Europe, thus saving European culture and identity.<sup>5</sup> In summary, Polish intellectual and moral elites had created an image of the West, of Western Europe and of Latin culture and Christianity as a centre of civilisation (and values such as freedom and democracy), all of which Poland was part of.<sup>6</sup>

But this is only half the story. While some Central and East Europeans embraced the West, there were those who looked upon the West 'as false, cold and morally corrupt, because it was seen to be materialistic, godless, mercantile and rationalist'. By comparison, the Slavic civilization 'even if less sophisticated, was seen as been organic, spiritual, humane, based not

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<sup>3</sup> Z. Mach, 'Polish National Culture and its Shifting Centres', Centre for European Studies, Jagiellonian University, available at <http://www.ces.uj.edu.pl/mach/national.htm>. Also see N. Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, Volume 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.3-82; and J.Tazbir and A. Rodzinska, 'Antemurale or bridge?', *Dialogue & Universalism*, Vol. 9, Issue 5/6, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Mach, 'Polish National Cultures'.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> J. Wozniakowski, 'Anu tu Zachód ani Wschód' in *Europa I co z tego wynika* (Warsaw: Res Ruplica, 1990). See also J Jedlicki, 'A Stereotype of the West in Postpartition Poland', *Social Research*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Summer 1992), pp.345-364.

upon greed but upon true Christian values'.<sup>7</sup> As Jerzy Jedlicki explains, however, 'over the course of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century... the Romantic apologists for native cultures gave way to those intellectuals with a strong sense of belonging to an all European cultural community'.<sup>8</sup>

The Polish émigré journal *Kultura* has been one of the most prominent and influential sources debating the issue of Polish national identity; arguing, amongst other things, that the image of an uncivilised and primitive Eastern Europe maintained by Western elites contributed to the disastrous and duplicitous decisions made at the Yalta conference.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, one of the aims of *Kultura* has been to facilitate discussions about Eastern European values, letting go of Eastern European complexes and building independent attitudes towards the West and the East.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, while the 'Poland as belonging to (Western) Europe' discourse became dominant among Polish intellectuals, it is certainly not the only discourse. Considering the complex, fluid and contested nature of national identity, it is not surprising that Poles continue to grapple with the tensions associated with identifying themselves as belonging to a Western or Central Eastern European tradition.

While Polish elites might have felt an ingrained part of Western Europe, they were well aware of the fact that the relationship between Poland and Western Europe has often been 'asymmetrical, not only because Poles took from the west more than they contributed, but also because the west was more important for the Poles than Poland for western Europeans.<sup>11</sup> Jedlicki, for example, observes that whereas the West was always a reference point for Poles (especially the elite), the East certainly was not the point of reference for Western Europe.<sup>12</sup> Polish intellectuals know that knowledge of Poland among western Europeans is limited, as is

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<sup>7</sup> J. Jedlicki, 'The Revolution of 1989: The Unbearable Burden of History', *Problems of Communism*, Vol.34, No.4, July 1990, pp.41-42. (39-45).

<sup>8</sup> Jedlicki, 'The Revolution of 1989', p.42.

<sup>9</sup> Ł.Jasina, J. Kłoczowski, A. Gill (eds.), 'Aktualność przesłania paryskiej „Kultury” w dzisiejszej Europie', Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, Lublin, 2007, p.75.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.77.

<sup>11</sup> Mach, 'Polish National Cultures'.

<sup>12</sup> Jedlicki, 'A Stereotype of the West in Postpartition Poland'.

the presence of Polish history and current events in school textbooks and the mainstream media.<sup>13</sup>

The idealisation of the west only increased during the years of Communist rule, when Poland found itself on the ‘wrong’ side of the Iron Curtain. Again, (anti-Communist) elites and the clergy maintained the myth of Poland’s Europeaness, ‘an ideological and emotional construction which presented Poland as part of Europe, artificially and temporarily separated from the rest of the family of European countries by the Iron Curtain’.<sup>14</sup>

A combination of the mythologising of Poland’s place in Europe and the key role that Poles had played in the defeat of the West’s ‘other’ (Soviet Communism), lead to the assumption that integration with the West, and more specifically membership of NATO and the European Union, had a degree of inevitability about it. While Poland was among the first group of post-Communist countries to accede to the European Union in 2004, its accession encountered a number of hurdles.<sup>15</sup> Not least amongst these was the question regarding how or where Poland fitted in Europe.

The foreign policy of Poland in the early 1990s, conducted primarily by then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, concentrated above all on ‘returning to Europe’. However, as Timothy Snyder points out, references by Central Europeans to a ‘return to Europe’ didn’t reflect a desire to return to a pre-modern Europe; rather ‘What [Central] Europeans meant by the “return to Europe” after 1989 was not a return to the past, but a leap forward to the achievements of post-war Western Europe’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mach, ‘Polish National Cultures’.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* At the end of the Second World War, Poland’s place in Europe was discussed and analysed by the Polish émigré circle predominantly associated with *Kultura*. Indeed, the ideas of Poland’s dissenting opposition, especially those associated with KOR-KSS and Solidarność, concerning Poland’s place in Europe, were heavily influenced by the concepts formulated by *Kultura*. Ł. Jasina, J. Kłoczowski (et. al.), *Aktualność przestania paryskiej “Kultury” w dzisiejszej Polsce*, IEŚW, Lublin, p.173.

<sup>15</sup> See K. Cordell and A. Antoszewski (eds.). *Poland and the European Union*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000). Mach notes that the Polish intelligentsia were somewhat disillusioned with this treatment; ‘[A]s heroes who have been protecting Europe for centuries, Poles believe that they need a better (sic) treatment than they actually receive, that they deserve a certain reward for what they did and are doing’ (Mach, ‘Polish National Culture’).

<sup>16</sup> T. Snyder, *The reconstruction of nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p.290.

Commenting in 1992, Skubiszewski argued that ‘history is not and cannot be the factor which determines one’s view of today’s reality, or which determines how today reality is formed’.<sup>17</sup> However, after Poland acceded to the EU in 2004, the importance of history in determining Poland’s place in Europe was revised, with Polish MEPs in particular pursuing an agenda whereby ‘Polish success in the European Parliament’ was dependant on their ability to ‘rectify historical truths’<sup>18</sup> and in turn remedy Western Europe’s ‘historical amnesia with regard to the history of Central and Eastern Europe’.<sup>19</sup>

While Polish MEPs promote a particular form (or sense) of Polish Europeaness in the European Parliament, this is certainly not to say that all Polish political elites are of the same mind. Domestic political elites, and more specifically those associated with the Kaczynski twins and the PiS (the Law and Justice Party), have demonstrated a different understanding to that of Polish MEPs about Poland’s place in Europe.<sup>20</sup> While the Kaczyński’s are often described as Eurosceptics, this does not tell the whole story. Both Lech and Jaroslaw ‘acknowledge Poland needs an EU ready to countenance further enlargement to the east and sensible policies towards Russia’,<sup>21</sup> but this acknowledgement is premised on the belief that ‘Europe is fated to be perpetually stuck at the end of the Second World War in 1945, facing the problem of how to arrange the affairs of the continent in such a way as to counter a resurgence of German might’.<sup>22</sup>

The PiS Party Programme states that ‘we intend to pursue active politics of historical memory’.<sup>23</sup> But this has been realised quite differently domestically than it has on the

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<sup>17</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p.258.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Zbigniew Zaleski - interview conducted in Brussels on 16 October 2008.

<sup>19</sup> J. Saryusz-Wolski, *EPL-ED News Archives*, EPL-ED website, <http://www.epl-ed.pl/?q=node/9>, accessed 17 August 2008.

<sup>20</sup> It is not only the nationalist-right who promote a particular Polish national interest in Europe. In 2003, the governing Democratic-Left Alliance (SLD), the successor of the communist party, and then President of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, also former communist, battled for a reference to Christianity in the proposed EU Constitution Preamble, in 2003. Poland wanted a reference based on its own national constitution, which refers to ‘both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, as well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values from other sources’.

<sup>21</sup> K. Bobiński, ‘The Polish confusion’, *Open Democracy*, June 2007, available at: [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy\\_power/future\\_europe/poland\\_confusion..](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy_power/future_europe/poland_confusion..)

<sup>22</sup> Bobiński, ‘The Polish confusion’.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Zamierzamy także prowadzić aktywną politykę historyczną. Ma ona w nowoczesny sposób przedstawiać wolnościowe zasługi Polski w walce z nazistowskim i komunistycznym totalitaryzmem’, 2005 PiS Party

European stage. Domestically, the Kaczyński's use of politically memory appears to be little more than a clumsy attempt to instrumentalise history.<sup>24</sup> However, on the European stage, PiS MEPs have vigorously contributed to EP debates on a common European history and on relations with Poland's eastern EU neighbours, utilising the procedures of the EP, such as formal plenary debates, committee initiatives and informal discussions.<sup>25</sup>

Polish historian Daniel Grinberg identifies two effects which he argues influence views of Poland's contemporary history. The first of these, the 'pendulum effect', refers to Poland's pre-1989 'false history', the extent of which created a need for a contrasting version, leading to extreme interpretations of history. The second, the so-called 'defrosting effect', refers to views and attitudes not far removed from 1939 Poland, untouched by post-war experiences and returned to contemporary politics.<sup>26</sup> The Kaczyński's provide us with an example of the 'defrosting effect'; an idealised picture of Poland that serves as the platform for a revisionist and revanchist foreign policy.

But the policies of the Kaczyński's, premised as they are on a particular understanding of history, when contrasted with those of Polish MEPs, also remind us of the fluid and hotly contested relationship between historical memory and political decision making.

Hence, we arrive at two important issues. The first, and perhaps most significant, regards the matter of Polish historical experiences and the degree to which they contribute to a broader European narrative with regards to history and identity. According to Timothy Snyder, there

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Programme, p.49, available: <http://www.pis.org.pl/dokumenty.php?s=partia&iddoc=3>, (accessed on 20 February 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Jarosław Kaczyński's infamous remarks regarding voting weights in the EU serve as a perfect case in point ('Domagamy się tylko tego, by nam oddano to, co nam zabrano. Gdyby Polska nie przeżyła lat 1939–1945, byłyby dzisiaj, jeśli odwołać się do kryterium demograficznego, państwem 66–milionowym', Jarosław Kaczyński radio interview with 'Sygnały Dnia', 22 June 2007 in *Gazeta Wyborcza* 'Niemiecka prasa krytycznie o wypowiedzi J. Kaczyńskiego nt. strat wojennych', 22 June 2007, available at: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,86733,4244040.html>).

<sup>25</sup> For example see the list of omissions and misinterpretations of the European history presented in the initial proposal of the House of European History compiled by MEPs from PiS: W. Roszkowki, A. Bielan, backed up by MEPs from several countries, presented in a letter to the President of the European Parliament, 4 December 2008, available at: <http://www.bielan.pl/biuletyny/46.pdf> (accessed 20 February 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Grinberg, 'Uwagi o niektórych tendencjach najnowszej historiografii polskiej: klisze i stereotypy w ujęciach dziejów najnowszych' pp.10-15 in: Krzysztof Buchowski and Wojciech Śleszyński (eds.) *Historycy polscy, litewscy i białoruscy wobec problemów XX wieku. Historiografia polska, litewska i białoruska po 1989 roku*, Białystok, 2003, available: <http://www.bialystok.ap.gov.pl/dziedzictwo/pliki/historycy.pdf>, accessed 12 January 2009.

are at least three different interpretations of twentieth century European history: first, the Western European interpretation, focused on European integration after the end of Nazi occupation; second, the Soviet interpretation, based on the reintegration of the Soviet Union; and third, the Eastern European interpretation, stained by its totalitarian experience and characterised by its belief in a 'return to Europe'.<sup>27</sup>

This leads to the second issue. According to Marek Cichocki, diverse eastern and western perceptions of both their place in Europe and their past disintegrated after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union. Cichocki argues that this confusion over discordant views of the past has far reaching consequences for the European sense of a common past and the creation of the European identity. Cichocki's preference for a European identity and memory based on 'different negotiated narratives and interpretations' is a good starting point for a discussion on how the memories of the past (or political memory) might influence Polish MEPs perceptions of Poland's role in Europe.

### **3. POLITICAL MEMORY**

As Jan-Werner Müller notes memory 'lies at the intersection of so many of our current concerns and organises many of our current projects'.<sup>28</sup> In elaborating on the importance of memory, Hannah Arendt writes that:

For if it is true that all thoughts begin with remembrance, it is also true that no remembrance remains secure unless it is condensed and distilled into a framework of conceptual notions within which it can further exercise itself. Experiences and even the stories which grow out of what men do and endure, of happenings and events, sink back into the futility inherent in the living word and the living deed unless they are talked about over and over again. *What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in turn remains*

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<sup>27</sup> T. Snyder, "Niezrozumiała Historia Europy Wschodniej", *Nowa Europa Wschodnia*, No.1, 2008, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> J-W Müller, 'Introduction: the power of memory, the memory of power and the power over memory' in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and power in post-war Europe: studies in the presence of the past* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.1.

*futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it.*<sup>29</sup>

Memory has become ‘a powerful tool in quests for understanding, justice and knowledge’.<sup>30</sup> In particular, and of relevance to the arguments being made here, our memory preserves the past and provides us with foundations on which we can build a society’s identity. As such, memory mediates between our past and our present and in this respect, it becomes clear that memory matters *politically*.

While it is not unreasonable to argue that memory matters politically, we are confronted immediately with a number of important (and fairly obvious) questions. Memory, especially when associated with historical events, is often deeply contested; hence *which* memory matters politically? Similarly, memory has an intrinsically personal nature; hence *whose* memory is it that matters?

As Müller notes, the malleability and political instrumentalisation of memory means that it is often simply collapsed into myth and as such loses important conceptual distinctions. Likewise, when studying political memory, one needs to wary of ‘reification, reductionism and collectivisation’.<sup>31</sup>

Snyder suggests that a useful way to examine the role that memory plays with regards to politics, while at the same time respecting the possible pitfalls outlined above, is to distinguish between two forms of collective memory: the first, what Snyder calls ‘mass personal memory’, is ‘the recollection of a large number of individuals of events in which they took part; the second ‘is the organisational principle that nationally conscious individuals use to organise the national history...it allows [them] to place events in the national history, whether or not [they] took part in them’.<sup>32</sup> This national memory, according to Snyder, ‘is a means of organising the past such as to preserve the dignity of the group with

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<sup>29</sup> H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York: The Viking Press, 1965, p.220 (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup> I. Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Science of Memory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, p.3.

<sup>31</sup> Müller, pp.19-20.

<sup>32</sup> T. Snyder, ‘Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939-1999’ in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), p.39.

which we identify'.<sup>33</sup> Expanding on this idea of a national memory, Gesine Schwann suggests that common memory, as an element constructing a nation, is a result of political and cultural discussions; it is a process of communication.<sup>34</sup>

In Polish literature there are several terms used in the debates on history, memory and politics. 'Politics of historical memory' (*polityka historyczna*) is the most popular; however there is no single definition and the term is especially pejorative.<sup>35</sup> It is mostly associated with the instrumental usage of historical events and collective memory for political gain. Another important concept used frequently in Polish literature is 'historical conscientiousness'. This term, as defined by Maurice Halbwachs, alludes to the need to understand the complex nature of history and acceptance of different meanings and motifs of past events.<sup>36</sup> It is understood as contradictory to the concept of 'collective memory', which simplifies historical events, reducing their meaning into the myths. However, Andrzej Szpociński argues that current 'collective memories' are confronted with endless historical discoveries, so that mythical accounts of history are more difficult to sustain.<sup>37</sup>

While these distinctions are valuable, Eva-Clarita Onken's 'political memory' framework is of more value to the arguments being made here. She suggests that 'there are three distinct levels of analysis worthy of study: domestic memory politics, memory politics in bilateral relations and memory politics in the European Union'. However, in recognising the complexities associated with political memory, Onken acknowledges that the 'three analytical levels are closely related in so far as no thorough analysis of domestic debates and policies that involve questions of historical interpretation can ignore the impact of outside actors'. Of particular relevance to the issues and debates covered here are her comments regarding the 2004 Central and East European accession states: '...tensions between states

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<sup>33</sup> Snyder, 'Memory of sovereignty', p.55.

<sup>34</sup> G. Schwann, 'Po co nam te narody?', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 February 2008, available at: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,4933147.html>.

<sup>35</sup> For the debates on 'politics of memory' see: *Meandry polityki historycznej, Special Issue of Więź Vol. 1 January 2007; Polityka Historyczna*, special report in: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, available: <http://wyborcza.pl/0,93951.html>, accessed on 12 January 2008.

<sup>36</sup> A. Ziębińska-Witek, 'Wizualizacje pamięci – upamiętnianie zagłady w muzeach', Jagiellonian University, Krakow, <http://jazon.hist.uj.edu.pl/zjazd/materialy/ziebinska.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> J.Pieńkowski, R. Zenderowski, 'Wyszechrad i jego pamięci zbiorowe', Institute of Political Science at the Cardinal Wyszyński University, Warsaw, available: [www.visegrad.info](http://www.visegrad.info) or [www.zenderowski.republika.pl/visegrad1.pdf](http://www.zenderowski.republika.pl/visegrad1.pdf); accessed on 15 January 2009.

over issues of the past not only derive from domestic considerations and perceptions, they can also be affected and affect the way history and memory are politically dealt with on a supranational level such as the European Union'.<sup>38</sup>

It is clear that current efforts by Polish MEPs to encourage awareness and appreciation of significant historical Polish events in the European Union do indeed derive from domestic concerns and considerations and perspectives from dealings with immediate neighbours (in particular the Soviet Union/Russia, Lithuania and Ukraine) BUT are also affected by their relatively recent accession to the EU.

### *3.1 POLISH POLITICAL MEMORY*

Much of Europe's political decision making, both at the supranational and member state level, is affected by historical experience. Indeed, the European Union is the product of a desire to avoid the unprecedented catastrophe and carnage wrought by half a century of war and economic crisis. While many Europeans can justifiably lay claim to having the most tragic history, it is perhaps Poland who has the strongest claim. Even with regards to the experiences of World War Two, where most countries experienced extraordinary levels of suffering, it was arguably the Poles who suffered the most. Tony Judt expresses the same sentiments when he writes that 'overall, it was clearly not good to be a Jew, a Gypsy or a Pole in the Second World War...'<sup>39</sup>

Debates regarding the significance of historical memory in Poland have assumed a variety of forms in the post-war period. During the communist period, dissidents, especially those contributing to the *Kultura*, were relatively free to debate Poland's history. However, within Poland, historical debate was controlled, and largely appropriated for its own purposes, by the Party-state. In the immediate post-communist period, debates about the significance of Poland's history were influenced by Tadeusz Mazowiecki's now famous 'thick line' speech, which was generally interpreted as an explicit rejection of the need to debate Poland's most

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<sup>38</sup> E-C. Onken, 'The Baltic states and Moscow's 9 May commemoration: Analysing memory politics in Europe', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.59, No.1, 2007, pp.24-25.

<sup>39</sup> T. Judt, 'Myth and Memory in post-war Europe' in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), p.159. Polish insistence on changing the Constitution's Preamble from reference to a 'reunited Europe' to a 'Europe, reunited after bitter experience', also reflects a sense of having experienced a particularly traumatic past (Cichocki, p.312).

recent history.<sup>40</sup> Anna Wolff-Powęska provides a further reason for a lack of historical debate when she suggests that the first years of independence were dominated by political and intellectual elites concentrating on the processes associated with democratic transformation, while the debates on the meaning of history evolved around discovering the ‘white spots’ (*białe plamy*) of Poland’s past. However, after 2005, the change on the domestic political scene in Poland triggered a hot debate on the meanings of political history and historical memory in contemporary politics in Europe. Thus, only recently, has room for debates over the role of the historical memories in politics been made.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of their political preferences, Polish MEPs feel that informing the European Parliament about the CEE’s historical experiences is an essential part of their position; indeed, they feel that they are in a unique position to promote (and perhaps even provoke) discussions about the past. This is fuelled by the belief that an awareness of the Central and Eastern European perception of history would facilitate an acceptance, or at least understanding, of the CEE nations’ distinctive political beliefs and choices.<sup>42</sup>

The Western European understanding of twentieth century history, according to Polish elites, is ‘weird’ and based on exotic stereotypes.<sup>43</sup> Thus, there is an urgent need to ‘rectify historical truths’ and to re-educate western society.<sup>44</sup> For Polish MEPs, EP plenary debates provide the perfect forum from which to draw attention to what they believe to be the most important historical episodes.

Considering the complex nature of Polish history, one might expect there to be a degree of contestation amongst Polish MEPs concerning which political memories are the most important. However, for the Polish political elite, especially those belonging to the European

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<sup>40</sup> ‘We draw a thick line on what has happened in the past. We will only answer for what we have done to help Poland to rescue her from this crisis from now on’ (*Przeszłość odkreślamy grubą linią. Odpowiadać będziemy jedynie za to, co uczyniliśmy, by wydobyć Polskę z obecnego stanu załamania*). See Ryszard Stemplowski, *Wprowadzenie do analizy polityki zagranicznej RP*, Second Edition, Vol.2, Warsaw, 2007, p. 149-166.

<sup>41</sup> A. Wolff-Powęska, ‘Polskie spory o historię i pamięć. Polityka historyczna’, *Przegląd Zachodni*, 2007, no. 1, p.10.

<sup>42</sup> From the interview with Zaleski: ‘All activities promoting Polish history are important for shaping West’s historical conscientiousness. They will not understand Russia unless they understand our history’.

<sup>43</sup> Roszkowski W., ‘The reconciliation against the historical truth is a lie’, *Historia i Media*, 11 April 2008, available at: <http://historiaimedia.org/2008/04/11/pojednanie-wbrew-prawdzie-historycznej-jest-falszem-rozmowa-z-prof-wojciechem-roszkowskim/> (accessed on 19 February 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Zaleski.

Parliament, there is a remarkable degree of consensus relating to important Polish events *vis-à-vis* its European membership. During interviews conducted at the European Parliament, Brussels, in October 2008, each of the Polish MEPs that were interviewed, without being guided or prompted, or colluding with each other, revealed the following issues to be those that they regarded as the most important with regards to Poland's place in Europe: the Katyń Massacre; Poland's experience under Communist totalitarianism, including Solidarność; and Poland's historical and on-going relationship with its immediate neighbours.

### 3.1.1 THE KATYŃ MASSACRE

Between April and May 1940, Soviet Security Service (NKVD) massacred about 14,700 Polish military officers and police taken from three prisoner of war camps, an event that has since become known as the Katyń Massacre.<sup>45</sup>

In a speech delivered at the Charkow military cemetery in 1998, former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski noted that 'the crime of Katyń... occupies a special place in the collective memory of Poles. It is a great sore, which we have to talk about ceaselessly – just so that it can be healed'.<sup>46</sup> Kwaśniewski's comments reflect a number of issues regarding Katyń. First, the pain of Katyń for Poles not only lies in the massacre itself, but also in the inability, prior to 1992, for Poles to properly commemorate this tragedy. There are two aspects to memory; the truth, which was eventually revealed; and commemoration or 'a way of marking out a space in the public sphere'.<sup>47</sup> The second issue regards the need to discuss Katyń. For Polish MEP Zbigniew Zaleski (EPP-ED), the ideal forum for such a discussion is the European Parliament.

In 2005, Zaleski proposed a motion for a minute's silence to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Katyń massacre. Zaleski admits that his proposition resulted from his

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<sup>45</sup> For more on Katyń see: G. Sanford, *Katyń and the Soviet massacre of 1940: truth, justice and memory*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2005); G. Malcher, *Blank pages: Soviet genocide against the Polish people*. Woking: Pyrford, 1993); .J. Snopkiewicz, A. Zakrzewski, *Dokumenty Katynia Decyzja*, Interpress, Warsaw 1992; and J. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Massacre* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

<sup>46</sup> 'Zbrodnia katyńska zajmuje jednak w zbiorowej pamięci Polaków miejsce szczególne. Jest jak wielka rana, o której musimy ciągle mówić - właśnie po to, aby mogła się zabliznić' (A. Kwaśniewski's statement during the official visit in Charkow, Ukraine, 27 June 1998, available at: <http://www.kwasniewskialeksander.pl/int.php?id=263&mode=view>, accessed on 16 January 2009.

<sup>47</sup> G. Schopflin, *Nations, Identity, Power* (London: Hurst, 2000), p.74.

personal life experiences; his father was a prisoner in the Starobielsk PoW camp. But the motion to commemorate the Katyń massacre was rejected by the President of the European Parliament.<sup>48</sup>

This was strongly criticised by Polish MEPs, who were disappointed with a ‘lack of historical knowledge by a whole generation (of Western Europeans)’.<sup>49</sup> For many, it served to reinforce their suspicions that ‘Western Europe suffers from historical amnesia’.<sup>50</sup> Their disappointment was exacerbated when the Parliament chose to commemorate the 11 March 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid with a minute’s silence.

For Polish MEPs, the President’s rejection of the motion, coupled with the move to commemorate the Madrid bombings, merely served to reaffirm many of the fears that Polish MEPs held about being thought of as ‘second class Europeans’.

An understanding by the European Parliament, and the EU in general, of Polish policy choices, especially towards Russia, can only come from a degree of understanding concerning Poland’s sensitivity to their past under Soviet occupation. As far as Polish MEPs were concerned, a Katyń commemoration in the European Parliament would provide support for Polish claims to recognize Katyń victims as ‘victims of Stalinist repression’.<sup>51</sup>

The defeat of the motion notwithstanding, Polish MEPs use every occasion to educate their fellow MEPs about Katyń. This includes organising thematic exhibitions in the EP, distributing copies of Norman Davies’ books and disseminating copies of the letter signed by Stalin ordering the shooting of Polish officers in Katyń.<sup>52</sup>

With regards to Katyń, three issues present themselves concerning political memory and decision making in the EP. First, as the defeat of the Parliamentary motion and the resultant decision to distribute Katyń material shows, the process is as important as are the more

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<sup>48</sup> See ‘Dwa i pół roku polskiej obecności w Parlamencie Europejskim. Ocena siły polskich partii politycznych we frakcjach PE’, Instytut Kościuszki, 2007, s.34; and interview with Zaleski.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Bogusław Liberadzki (PES) – interview conducted in Warsaw, 29 September 2008.

<sup>50</sup> See Saryusz-Wolski, <http://www.epl-ed.pl/?q=node/9>, accessed 17 August 2008.

<sup>51</sup> See M. F. Goldman, ‘Polish-Russian relations and the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections’, *East European Quarterly*, Vol.40/4 Winter 2006, p.424.

<sup>52</sup> See ‘Dwa i pół roku polskiej obecności w Parlamencie Europejskim. Ocena siły polskich partii politycznych we frakcjach PE’, Instytut Kościuszki, 2007, s.34; and interview with Zaleski.

tangible results that a resolution would bring. This is confirmed by Zaleski, when he comments that although the President rejected his commemorative idea for Katyń, ‘the rejection prompted a larger reaction than did the proposed minute of silence. Later on, the whole issue was publicised in *Le Monde*, so the message went to the public. My actions influenced the raising of awareness beyond the EP’.<sup>53</sup>

Second, as the events detailed above reflect, the memories being discussed here are part of a history which is often still being discovered; many of the archival documents have only recently become available. Hence, these countries still provide living ‘evidence’ of Soviet-style Communism. But, as demonstrated by the actions of Polish MEPs, Polish-Russian, and hence also EU-Russia relations, are clearly influenced by Polish and Russian historical memories. Thus, it is not enough to protect these memories via commemoration only in Poland; for Poles, their sense of belonging to Europe relies somewhat on acknowledging the tragic events in its past in a *European* forum. A better understanding of Polish interpretations of their history might in turn help formulate a common approach to Russia.

Third, contemporary Polish national identity is greatly influenced by living memories of post-war historical experiences. Poland’s sense of belonging in Europe is influenced by a European appreciation of this. Without understanding these constructions, Poles are of the opinion that it is not possible to speak of a common European identity.

### *3.1.2 POLAND’S EXPERIENCE UNDER COMMUNISM*

Poland was arguably the most liberal of the Central and Eastern European Communist regimes; Poles were certainly the least acquiescent to Communist rule. This is not to say that other Central and Eastern European countries welcomed Communist rule, but it is clear that Poles offered the most sustained opposition to the Communist Party-state. Indeed, in the period between the 1956 riots in Poznań and the 1989 negotiated defeat of the regime via the Roundtable Agreements, Poles regularly challenged the authority of the ruling *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (PZPR or Polish United Workers Party), be it via *samizdat* (e.g. the ‘Kuroń-Modzelewski Open Letter to the Party’), opposition from the Catholic Church or more violent expressions of dissent (worker’s riots in Szczecin and Gdańsk in

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Zaleski.

1970 for example). However, undoubtedly the most significant oppositional group was the trade union movement *Solidarność*.

But *Solidarność* was more than merely a trade union movement. First, the *Gdańsk Accords*, signed on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 1980, represented the first time that a communist government had recognised the independent existence of another political force in society. Indeed, *Solidarność* was different from anything previously seen in Eastern Europe. The very name served to emphasise the self-confidence of the new movement, while at the same time contrasting its strength with a weak and divided party. Second, when one considers that its nearly ten million members represented ‘almost every single family’ in Poland, it is not unreasonable to argue that it ‘expressed the will of the overwhelming majority of the Polish nation’.<sup>54</sup> Third, although it was ‘legal’ for only a relatively brief period of time, the activities of *Solidarność* and the method by which it was declared illegal (the declaration of Martial Law and subsequent arrest of key *Solidarność* figures in December, 1981), served to reveal the illegitimacy of the regime.. In hindsight, *Solidarność* was a precursor for the regime’s eventual collapse. Finally, *Solidarność* was more than just a *Polish* opposition movement; its (limited) success provided a template for non-violent opposition to Soviet imposed rule for other opposition movements in Soviet-type regimes in Europe.

Many Poles, especially those intellectuals that formed part of Poland’s dissenting opposition, strongly believe that their struggles against the PZPR and the resultant negotiated defeat of the regime serve to reinforce Poland’s European credentials. According to former European Parliament Deputy Bronisław Geremek, ‘The *Solidarność* Movement began the process of liberation and unification of Europe. The unification of Europe started in Gdańsk’.<sup>55</sup>

While such views are reflected in academic literature, where there is a consensus that *Solidarność* mattered a great deal in the collapse of communism, this awareness has not yet reached the broader European populace. Polish MEPs have made a concerted effort to rectify this.

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<sup>54</sup> N. Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland’s Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.16-17.

<sup>55</sup> B.Geremek, “25 rocznica "Solidarności" i jej przesłanie dla Europy”, 26 September 2005, available at: the official web site of Bronislaw Geremek, section: wystąpienia, <http://www.geremek.pl/index.php?navi=006&id=76>.

According to Grażyna Staniszevska (ALDE), the western European members of the European Parliament have a different ‘historical conscientiousness’ and ‘different memories’ of the past.<sup>56</sup> In her opinion, this is best exemplified through the symbolism associated with the fall of Communism: ‘for us, *Solidarność* is the symbol of the collapse of communism, while for the old member states it is the fall of the Berlin Wall’.<sup>57</sup> One way in which Staniszevska has sought to ensure that this memory is preserved is via the submission of an official intervention to the EU Culture Commissioner regarding the annual essay for students interested in contemporary European politics. Staniszevska took umbrage at the essay question on the fall of Communism (it made reference to the fall of the Berlin Wall but not to *Solidarność*), and has requested that future questions make reference to both the fall of the Berlin Wall and *Solidarność*.<sup>58</sup>

Polish MEPs have been successful in promoting the commemoration, and indeed European significance, of *Solidarność* in the European Parliament. In September 2005, the European Parliament adopted the ‘25th anniversary of Solidarity and its message for Europe’ text. Included in the resolution were calls:

- ‘acknowledging that the Polish motto ‘there is no liberty without Solidarity’ is important for the whole of Europe and the world’;
- ‘recalling that the strike under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa, which took place between 14 and 31 August 1980 in the shipyard of Gdańsk under the eyes of Europe and the entire world, was conducted with extraordinary bravery and determination in the name of fundamental European values, and that the ‘21 postulates’ formulated by the shipyard workers from Gdańsk opened a new chapter in the European fight for ‘bread and freedom’;
- ‘expressing the belief that the historic impulse of *Solidarność* was one of the most important moments in the formation of a European public space’.

The resolution also

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Grażyna Staniszevska - interview conducted in Brussels on 14 October 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Staniszevska.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Staniszevska.

- ‘Recognises that, in order to commemorate this effort and to place it in the collective memory of Europe, 31 August is to be celebrated as the Day of Freedom and Solidarity’;
- ‘Calls on the Council and the Commission to raise awareness that *Solidarność* is part of European education and culture’.<sup>59</sup>

Unsurprisingly, *Solidarność* is commemorated in Poland as a moment of national consequence. But commemorating these events in the European Parliament gives them new significance. By acknowledging the *European* significance of *Solidarność*, the European Parliament has reinforced the Polish sense of belonging to Europe while simultaneously ensuring that the memory of these events remain ‘alive’.

The resolution acknowledging the significance of *Solidarność* also provides a possible ‘solution’ to one of the problems concerning political memory in former totalitarian systems; that is, the degree to which the state was able to control the truth.<sup>60</sup>

The democratic nature of the parliament provides the public space that is required to debate the significance of past events, a space that was certainly not present in both the communist and immediate post-communist period. In using the Parliament to ‘educate’ Western Europeans about Poland’s history, Polish MEPs have taken advantage of a democratic space that, pre-2004, was unavailable to them. It is the democratic nature of this space that ensures that the significance of these memories is preserved.

### 3.1.3 POLAND’S NEAR EASTERN NEIGHBOURS

The current territories of Poland and its immediate eastern neighbours (Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania) once formed the ‘largest realm of early modern Europe’ – the Polish-Lithuanian

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<sup>59</sup> European Parliament Resolution on the 25th Anniversary of Solidarity and its message for Europe, Strasbourg, September 2005, available:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2005-0357&language=EN&ring=B6-2005-0495>

<sup>60</sup> Václav Havel noted that one of the defining characteristics of the Soviet imposed systems in Central Europe was the state’s ability to control the truth. Although Havel argued that in order to survive the system, people no longer needed to believe in what he called the regimes’ ‘mystifications’, ‘they must behave as if they did...they must *live within a lie*’ (V. Havel, ‘The Power of the Powerless’ in J. Keane (ed.), *The Power of the Powerless*, (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), p.31 (emphasis in original)).

Commonwealth, established in 1569.<sup>61</sup> After the partitions of the Commonwealth, in Lithuania as well as in the historic Belarus and Ukraine, Poles remained the dominant element throughout the 19th century.<sup>62</sup> The wartime period (1939-47) intensified national tensions, particularly on the Polish and Ukrainian borderlands, resulting in the ethnic cleansing of thousands of Poles and Ukrainians.

In the modern era, Polish foreign policy towards its eastern neighbours has pursued policies that have been seen as representing the Polish national mission: to help its immediate eastern neighbours in ‘the struggle for freedom and international justice’.<sup>63</sup> These sentiments are reflected in comments made by Juliusz Mieroszewski, one of the major contributors to the *Kultura*: ‘We will be worth as much in the West as we are in the East’ (*Na Zachodzie będziemy tyle znaczyli ile znaczymy na Wschodzie*). This short statement summarises the grand strategy towards Ukraine, Lithuania and, Belarus (ULB) formulated in the 1950s by the journal and its editor, Jerzy Giedroyc, and pursued by the independent Polish state.

*Kultura* is credited with influencing the formulation of Polish eastern policy (particularly toward Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus) implemented in Poland after 1989. Both the policy and the ideas promoted by *Kultura* were based on the belief that independent Eastern neighbours serve as the foundation of Polish security and the general stability of the region.

Independent Poland’s eastern policy, based on *Kultura* values, has been continued for 16 years. While Adam Michnik argues that the ‘*Kultura* consensus’ was ‘shattered to pieces’ in 2005 by policies introduced by the ruling Kaczyńskis,<sup>64</sup> it could be argued that Polish MEPs have continued the *Kultura* tradition in the European Parliament, especially in their promotion of Central European culture and history, their support of Ukraine’s European ambitions and their raising of issues regarding Belarusian politics.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, p.1.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>63</sup> A. Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, p.78.

<sup>64</sup> A. Michnik, in: *Aktualność przesłania paryskiej ‘Kultury’*, p.28.

<sup>65</sup> According to Polish MEP Konrad Szymański (PiS), politics of memory and relations with Poland’s Eastern neighbours were the most important issues dealt with by Polish MEPs in 2004 (K. Szymański, ‘Parlament taki sobie’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 4 sierpnia 2005, <http://www.konradszymanski.pl/publicystyka.php?c=t&id=0015> (Accessed 25 February 2009)).

These actions might be premised on Poles' Central European identity.<sup>66</sup> Expanding on this argument, Zdzisław Najder, historian and former director of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe, argues that part of the Central European identity is the attachment to the cultures of the smaller nations. In his view, this is a value which the CEE countries bring to the European Union.<sup>67</sup> Najder points to an ongoing crisis regarding a sense of cultural identity in CEE countries. In his opinion, this is a consequence of the years of totalitarian rule.<sup>68</sup> In Poland, the crisis comes from the termination of long-lasting multinational cultural ties.<sup>69</sup> Thus, there is a widely shared view among Polish scholars that the restitution of Polish national identity should come from building closer bonds with its eastern neighbours, namely Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania.<sup>70</sup>

In Snyder's view 'Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania have successfully negotiated issues over past conflict, in large part because of awareness of the problems memory must pose for statesman'.<sup>71</sup> Such historical experiences that exist between Poland and Ukraine posed grave danger for normalisation of relations between them, particularly if based on personal memories. Therefore, during the first decade of independence, Poland, in accordance with the *Kultura* position, has been reserved in assessing the historical issues of Polish-Ukrainian relations.

Polish representatives head the EP Committees on Ukraine and Belarus. In this capacity, they have actively promoted these countries onto the EP agenda. According to Polish MEP Urszula Gacek (EPP), 'our personal contacts (Polish MEPs) with Belarusian opposition, Polish EU-Belarus Committee leadership and our activities in the EP turned out to be a

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<sup>66</sup> Milan Kundera argues that Central European identity is inseparable from (Western) European identity (M. Kundera, 'The tragedy of Central Europe', *New York Review of Books* 1984 Vol. 31, No.7, pp.33-38.

<sup>67</sup> Z. Najder, 'Przyszłość więzi kulturowych między narodami w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej', *Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej*, 4 October 2005, available at: [www.omp.org.pl](http://www.omp.org.pl).

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Consider, for example, in 1931, Poland consisted of: 69% Poles, 15% Ukrainians, 8.5% Jews, 4.7% Byelorussians, 2.2% Germans, 0.6 others (N. Davis, *God's Playground*, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 2005, p.301.

<sup>70</sup> See 'Polska Polityka Wschodnia', a discussion organized by the Stefan Batory Foundation in 2001; available at: <http://www.batory.org.pl/ftp/program/forum/ppw.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Snyder 'Memory of sovereignty', p.39

success during the latest voting for the resolution (597 in favour, 31 against, 22 absent) postulating further dialogue with Belarus and lifting the existing restrictive measures'.<sup>72</sup>

An event that offers perhaps even greater insight into the way political memory motivates Polish MEPs is Poland's active support of Ukraine's European aspirations during the Orange Revolution. While it was the European Parliament which was most active in promoting the European ambitions of Ukraine, according to Olga Barburska, the committed attitude of Polish MEPs in particular became one of the main factors in the EU's involvement in Ukraine.<sup>73</sup> This view resonates with Staniszevska, who stresses that both the late Bronisław Geremek and then Polish President Kwaśniewski played a major role in guiding Javier Solana, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, in EU mediation during the Orange Revolution.<sup>74</sup> Again, such actions are reflective of Polish MEPs' desire to reaffirm their own Central and Eastern European identity, through promoting and supporting the political aspirations of a 'near neighbour', while simultaneously confirming their continued desire to belong to a greater Europe.<sup>75</sup>

#### **4. SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS...**

For much of Poland's history, Polish intellectual and moral elites promoted Poland as an integral part of European civilisation. Yet while Poles regarded themselves as an inefaceable part of Europe, Western Europe (the 'real' Europe) did not share their sense of belonging. In order to remedy this discrepancy, following Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, Polish MEPs have used the Parliament as a forum in which to promote Poland's European credentials.

This desire to educate Europeans is not driven solely by ethno-centric, nationalistic fervour. Rather, the issues that Polish MEPs want to discuss (in the case of Lithuania, Belarus and

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with Urszula Gacek - interview conducted in Brussels on 14 October 2008.

<sup>73</sup> O. Barburska, 'Polska wobec europejskich aspiracji Ukrainy' in: J. Borkowski (ed.) *Rola Polski w kształtowaniu polityki wschodniej Unii Europejskiej na przykładzie Ukrainy*, Centrum Europejskie UW, Warsaw, 2006, p. 51-64

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Staniszevska.

<sup>75</sup> Polish MEPs also assumed a prominent role in condemning the conditions of the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential elections. MEPs from PiS, in collaboration with those from EPP, initiated a proposal that ultimately led to a joint EP resolution on the situation in Ukraine (see K. Szymański, 'Unia czuje się odpowiedzialna', *Głos Wielkopolski*, 25 November 2004, <http://www.konradszymanski.pl/publicystyka.php?c=t&id=0012>; accessed 25 February 2009. Also see 'European Parliament Resolution B6-0195/2004', 2 December 2004, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P6-RC-2004-0195&language=EN>

Ukraine) and commemorate (in the case of *Solidarność* and Katyń) reflect an attempt to reinvigorate Polish national identity while at the same time reasserting their European identity through what Onken calls a 'European level of memory'.<sup>76</sup>

These initiatives reveal the growing importance of the link between memory and politics. However, whereas in the past this link has manifested mostly at the domestic level, in relatively traditional media such as national days of remembrance, anthems, statues and the like, the supra-national nature of the European Union has provided a new, democratic forum in which to 'recover' and commemorate national memory.

In a rapidly changing world, where traditional boundaries and identities often become blurred and distance is all but eradicated, the recovery of memory might serve as a 'temporal re-anchoring'. One might be tempted to regard such temporal re-anchoring as little more than parochial, nationalistic grandstanding, an attempt to fuel the growing need, in newly democratised nations, for fundamental myths used in the reconstruction of national identity. Somewhat related, this rediscovery of memory might also be regarded as representative of a certain resistance to globalisation.<sup>77</sup> Such reasoning seems justified, especially when one considers the recent behaviour of Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński. Their indulgences in memory politics have served primarily to reinforce simplistic nationalistic stereotypes. Their constant and somewhat repetitive rhetorical assaults about Germany and Russia as the European powers that most threaten Polish national security serve as a perfect case in point, as does their belief that the EU is little more than an instrument used to pursue German national interest.<sup>78</sup>

However, to view the actions of Polish MEPs as nothing more than ethno-centric, nationalistic grandstanding would be profoundly misleading. Rather, the way that Polish MEPs have promoted the commemoration and discussion of particular events highlights not only the way in which memory can be utilised politically, but also the way in which the link between memory and politics serves to reinforce a sense of belonging. By 'educating' MEPs

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<sup>76</sup> Onken, p.44.

<sup>77</sup> Wolff-Powęska argues that for the new members of the EU, such as Poland, the national pride and a new patriotism constitute the element of balance in a global arena (Wolff-Powęska p.10).

<sup>78</sup> K. Bobiński, 'The Polish confusion', *Open Democracy*, June 2007, available at: [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy\\_power/future\\_europe/poland\\_confusion](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy_power/future_europe/poland_confusion).

via the Parliament, Polish MEPs are able to commemorate and discuss their memories in a forum that strengthens both their Polish *and* European identity.

This is certainly not to say that debates about which or whose memories should be commemorated and discussed will not continue. Similarly, the points made here regarding the way that Polish MEPs have utilised the politics of memory to reaffirm their commitment to a greater Europe do not ignore the possibility that future MEPs will indulge in uses of political memory to promote nationalistic programmes in the European Parliament; ethno-centric nationalism in Europe has not yet been consigned to the dustbin of history. But the actions of Polish MEPs discussed here do represent ways in which tensions with regard to memory and politics might be reconciled without the imposition of an EU approved version of history.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See 'EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"' at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/008-44856-350-12-51-901-20081216IPR44855-15-12-2008-2008-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/008-44856-350-12-51-901-20081216IPR44855-15-12-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm)