

Histor(iography) and Memory in 'Post-Truth Era'. Towards a European Public Sphere? Some Theoretical Considerations

Senior Researcher/Lecturer **Florin ABRAHAM**, PhD

The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism
College of Communication and Public Relations (NUPSPA), Bucharest
E-mail: florin.abraham@comunicare.ro

Abstract. *New social media brought not only a “democratization” of communication but, at the same time, a negative transformation of the process of imposing scientific truth in society. The trivialization of knowledge and the erosion of popular trust in the epistemic authority of scientists undoubtedly includes historiography (with the role of providing knowledge based on the systematic analysis of the facts of the past). Post-truth policy, conventionally referred to as “populist”, it influences the institutional process of “producing historical truth”. Simultaneously with the European Union identity crisis, projects are being carried out to create a transnational European public sphere, by re-conceptualizing European history. The latest project in this direction is House of European History, which proposes a new approach to historical memory for European citizens. The dominant feature of European historiographies is insularity, not only because they are produced in vernacular languages but also by theme, because they are considered to be an essential part of national identity. Thus we identify conflicting perspectives between the description of historical truth and social memory. In the end, are assessed the theoretical conditions to be met in order to achieve a trans-European historical memory.*

Keywords: *New social media; European public sphere; Historical memory; European identity; House of European History.*

Whenever events do not follow an envisaged, anticipated or desirable pattern, we use the ambiguous concept of “crisis” in order to interpret a situation. It is undoubted the fact that the European Union has often been described as the subject of some multidimensional crises – economic, institutional, constitutional, identitar – (Habermas 2013; Bootle 2016; Dinan, Nugent and Paterson 2017; Verhofstadt 2017), hard to diagnose and, especially, to be solved. The Eurozone crisis, the Brexit, the legitimacy deficit of the communitarian governance, the issue of massive migration to Europe and failure of solidarity around it, the electoral rise of Eurosceptic parties all over Europe, secessionist actions (the most prominent being that of Catalonia in Spain) or the advance of sovereigntism in Central Europe (which is the exhibition of open opposition to the sovereignty transfer towards EU institutions) are all, together with others, elements of the European project crisis. The crises of the European Union are not confined to the west of Europe, but belong to the whole continent, the eastern part being most vulnerable to them. By their duration and magnitude, these crises seem to have become a *modus operandi* in themselves and the events previously enumerated cannot be understood in terms of a temporary crisis, after which everything returns to the stage before crisis. On the contrary, they are part of a systemic transformation phenomenon concerning the European Union, whose result and consequences cannot be certainly determined. Almost all analytical scenarios approach, apart from searching for political and institutional solutions, the issue of EU’s survival and the extreme hypothesis of a “general amiable divorce” is no longer excluded from the beginning, even if it remains marginal (see, for example the German army’s document *Strategic Perspective 2040* of February 2017 which also includes a scenario envisaging EU’s dissolution).

In this sketch of “Greatest European Issues” the matter of the European citizen’s political and cultural identity occupies a central place. Political/civic identity cannot be understood outside the complicated relation between social memory and historiography. As such, following the guideline of a very rich academic literature analyzing “European memory/identity”, our analytic undertaking is directed towards a niche issue: the influence of historiography in the process of creating a “European public sphere”, in the context of the increasing role of Web 2.0 tools (Facebook, My Space, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) in social communication. A special attention is given to the European History House, considered to be a first paradigmatic example for attempts to build a European *demos* (Pérez de las Heras 2017). The issue of national identity, and also the fear of losing it, is one of the elements systematically nourishing Eurosceptic political options, even if it is not the main factor and also not evenly distributed among EU member states (Di Mauro and Memoli 2016, p. 68).

Are we in the “post-Truth era”?

The “post-Truth” concept is not precisely enough defined, but it enjoys an increasing notoriety, being even designated as the “word of the year 2016” by Oxford Dictionaries. It is associated with the “post-truth politics” expression (Davies 2017; Ball 2017), being used in recent contexts by progressive/liberal intellectuals in order to explain the result of Brexit referendum (23 June 2016) or Donald Trump’s success in the US presidential electoral campaign; both events were considered unfortunate successes of populism (Klein 2017). In essence, “post-Truth politics” refers to: a) systematic use of information that are not related in any way to reality (fake news); b) domination of emotional motivation over rational political choices; c) turning fake information in dominant political themes. What is really new, as politics based on fake information is also specific to totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, is the fact that the phenomenon this time takes place in countries with long democratic tradition and it would not have been possible without the existence of social media. The latter have a changing effect over contemporary societies, but the dimension and consequences of changes can rather be intuited than precisely anticipated (White 2014). What is certain, though, is the fact that forms of political participation have changed, social media offering the possibility of being politically active without a physical participation to the political life, a phenomenon pejoratively called “slacktivism” or “clicktivism” (Penney 2017, p. 3).

The major cultural change brought by social media is related to the regress of traditional mass media as main information sources and the quick rise of social communication networks, which tend to replace media (Beasley and Haney 2013). If, in what concerns traditional media, there are minimal tools (deontological codes or even laws) in order to defend truth in its Kantian meaning, Web 2.0 communication tools are not (yet) subject to regulations by which the truth, meaning a correspondence between reported facts and reality, to be institutionally protected and society to be able to build credible models in evaluating reality. Responsibility of information sent via Facebook, for example, belongs to the account owner and he/she is not subject to any external constraint outside his/her own will/conscience of creating or conveying fake information.

Another important element that can explain the appearance of beginning a “post-Truth era”, having older roots, is the systemic erosion of the position occupied in society by “experts”, “intellectuals”, “professionals” (Nichols 2017), by professional categories that can offer a version closer to the truth over reality. Confusion between facts and opinions, between expertise and ignorance, was deepened by the expansion and increase of social media impact within all liberal democracies. There is the belief that, in the name of citizens’ rights equality and freedom of expression, opinions of fact reports are equivalent or correct only because they exist. The role of “knowledge referee”, previously attributed to intel-

lectuals, has structurally diminished in contemporary societies, truth being often reduced to a simple quantitative game of notoriety and degree of information's favorability. According to such a social media functioning logic, the most spread an information is the more it is true, an interpretation which is logically fraudulent. Enshrining the criteria of notoriety as an argument for truth seems the more pernicious if we are taking into account the multiple informational techniques of artificial boost ("political bots") concerning an information's notoriety or spreading fake information through credible sources, apparently independent a. o. (Freedom House 2017, pp. 9-11).

Factually, it is hard to support the hypothesis according to which fake news and manipulation are predominant in democratic political regimes from the Euro-Atlantic world and even more difficult to accept that from an ethical perspective. Still, the issue of fake news turned into a real political problem. The question of fake news emerges in three distinct contexts: as an external subversive action (i.e. Russia), in order to gaining geopolitical advantages; a secret action of governments from countries which are not consolidated democracies in order to control public opinion; political and electoral marketing action, without involvement of any state institutions.

Disinformation through social media tools as a part of the informational war has become a prominent subject in the context of Crimea's annexation to the Russian Federation (2014). Then, the Brexit campaign, the US presidential election campaign of 2016, as well as electoral campaigns from other European countries (for example, presidential elections in France, 2017), were marked by disputes about fake news. In the United States, disinformation campaigns were investigated which were supposed to have helped Donald Trump win presidential elections. The European Commission, following repeated demands from the European Parliament and some of the Member States, envisages building a strategy of countering disinformation, the purpose being to offer tools to citizens for identifying fake news and managing received information (European Parliament 2017). The International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) was created and several "fact-checking" sites were established, while Facebook announced as early as December 2016 its support for counteracting disinformation campaigns. However, there is daily news about detecting fake news, which shows the phenomenon persists.

Scientific doubt urges us to inquire if a discussion about "fake news" is not itself a fake. There are several difficulties concerning creation of an adequate and functional methodology to measure the real and direct impact (for example, over voting options) of fake news. Notoriety of (fake) news – by measuring its spread in social media – can be determined in reasonable limits. But quantifying the impact that fake news has over electoral behavior is an almost impossible task – only if *a posteriori* experiments are achieved, whose relevance is questionable – in the

context of vote secrecy. An attempt to determine fake news' influence over US electoral behavior (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017) emphasized the existence and impact of fake news, but the authors could not conclude that Donald Trump's victory was determined by them.

Countering fake news, desirable for ethical reasons, is not without dangers for society. In the event when fake news was correctly and fully identified and searching engines (Google, for example) or social media platforms (Facebook, for example) decided elimination of articles containing fake news, this would imply the existence of a referee of Truth. But what are the guarantees of neutrality and fairness necessary for such a referee? Who establishes and, especially, who gives him neutrality in order to perform censorship on behalf of the "guerrilla for establishing the Truth"? The experience of totalitarian regimes shows how easy monstrous acts can be committed on behalf of defending ideals.

While websites dedicated to correcting and counteracting fake news have a diminished influence (Vargo, Guo and Amazeen 2017), other authors (Bartlett 2017) propose approaches that take into account not so much the perpetrators of fake news but rather their receivers: preparing citizens to look for true information, in order to resist to manipulation. What can be easily noticed is that no efficient methods were found for reconciling freedom of expression as a fundamental right and eliminating consequences of manipulating public opinion through fake news. Nevertheless, the "post-Truth era" is only a danger and not an unavoidable reality.

The European public sphere, historical memory, historiography

Without being able to approach here the complexity and diversity of discussions about the European public sphere, about the various conceptual models, it is important to mention that it is correlated, implicitly or explicitly, with the three options of continuing and deepening European integration. The first alternative is the current one, integrated to the logic of *inter-governmentalism*, according to which states associate and give up part of their sovereignty for the purpose of reaching optimal solutions for some issues. The legitimacy of associating states in relation to their own citizens functions as long as the issues are solved. The model of political and institutional organization is based on delegating competences from the Member States towards the established common institutions. The second alternative, whose elements can also be found in certain functional sequences of the current European Union, is the *supranational* one, based on the federal model. Legitimacy of political institutions is grounded, according to political theory, on the citizens' community of values. The democratic process functions both at the level of Member States as well as at the level of institutions from the federal side. Finally, a third alternative is that of a *post-national* democracy and the source of legitimacy is represented by the very rights of citizens, who would have increasingly reduced

relations with national states in which they live. Citizens, on the basis of common political values, shared and communicated, would create a cosmopolitan, post-national political community (“polity”). (Conrad 2014, pp. 113-115).

The notion of “public sphere”, contested itself under the conceptual aspect, but having a predominant status within studies concerning European governance, refers to the social space in which values, beliefs, problems are expressed and discussed. The public sphere includes, at the same time, public opinion and actors contributing to its formation (Bozzini and Bee 2016).

In the academic literature, several normative models of the public sphere are identified (elitist; liberal; discursive; participative, see Walter 2017, pp. 51-73) as well as different alternatives of the European public sphere:

“1. **The Habermasian model** presents the European public sphere as a communication space whose goal is to promote the common interests in the discourses addressed to the Europeans. The transnational European public sphere hosts simultaneous regional, national, European debates in an osmotic model. The debates at European level legitimate the European Union’s policies. The emergence of the public sphere depends on the existence of democracy, participation, free media, and debates. Mass media are the interface of the public sphere, one of its tools (...).

2. **The model of interconnection of national public spheres by media** (...). The European public sphere is born as a result of the restructuring of the national public spheres under the pressure of setting the European perspective on different topics in national discourses. The same topics are discussed in all national public spheres under similar frames of shared meanings. (...).

3. **The model of the transnational public** (...). The transnational discourse based on the same topics in media in all member states aims at the transnational public who are unified by their European citizenship awareness. The pre-condition of the functioning of the homogeneous European public sphere is the synchronization of the public attention on a European topic (...).

4. **The model of the three pillars** (...). The three pillars of the European public sphere are European, not national: media, political actors and the general public. The first mentioned pillar comprises national and transnational media which function in a parallel way supported by the shared media culture. Media represent the central pillar of the model as they attract a sufficient number of the public and connect them to the political actors seen as speakers in the European public sphere and translators between European and national perspectives on debated issues (...).

5. **The model of the publics** (...) comprises three types of public spheres: the general public, the strong public (decision-makers) and the transnational segmented public (a network of actors sharing the same interests in different

member states). The technical support of the network formed by the three types of publics is (national, European, transnational) media (...).

6. **The supranational model** (...) in which an overarching public sphere appears to parallel the national public spheres as European media parallel national media. Every level of the public spheres is assigned a type of mass media: national media and European media (...)." (Pană 2015, pp. 2-4).

The dominant element concerning theoretical and empirical studies concerning European public sphere regards the role of mass media or Internet in communicating the issues of the European Union, especially those managed by communitarian institutions (Koopmans and Statham 2010; Lindner, Hennen, and Aichholzer 2016). Research papers approaching political communication in the European Union emphasized difficulties in creating a European public sphere (Pérez 2013) as well as the reactions of denying the supranational Europe project, taking the form of Eurosceptic populism (Aalberg *et al.* 2016).

The role that social memory and, particularly, historical memory have in forming the European public sphere was little explored, both conceptually and empirically. The explanation could be found in the fact that a relation of domination of public discourse over historical memory was self-implied, translated into an automatic change of the latter through socialization strategies of individuals and mass media communication.

In order to better understand relations between historical memory and the public sphere we must consider memory as being dual, at the same time collective and individual. It is collective by reference to the various communities to which a citizen belongs and personal for each individual. That is why we consider that, when the collective dimension of memory conflicts with the deep values of the individual, the tension created among the two ends into victory of the most stable, the one resulting from direct experience or conveyed by family and the close friends and not the alternative formed by the individual's socialization process (education) or conveyed by mass media.

The importance of the relation between the European public sphere and historical memory has a strategic value for elites wishing for a supra- or post-national organization of the European Union and only a functional role for those aiming at preserving the Union's inter-governmental structures. Traditional historical memory, closely linked with the nation-state, is considered an obstacle against creating a trans- or post-national identity of citizens, who should communicate in a homogeneous and unified public sphere, according to the Habermasian or the supranational models previously mentioned.

Within the triad European public sphere – historical memory – historiography, the latter has the function of offering necessary information, epistemically legitimizing them as valid for the public. For the option of Europe's federal or

supranational organization, the need for founding myths of a new political order has become fundamental (Bottici and Challand 2013). Creating a mythology of the “European Odyssey” also needs re-conceptualizing historiography and breaking it from the tradition of researching the past of nation-states. The concept of trans-national history, in general, and of European history, in particular, had to be substantiated (Akira and Saunier 2009; Steinmetz *et al.* 2017, pp. 139-174). What is essential is producing a historical narration which would illustrate the history of European integration and its inevitable character for preserving European peace (Bruneteau 2006; Berend 2016). In fact, the social history of the Annales School, *Histoire Intégrée*, the history of nationalism or comparative history, contributed, programmatically or not, to the process of “historiography Europeanization”, which could be used by European elites in order to politically justify the transfer of sovereignty from national states towards EU institutions.

Europeanization of historiography did not go far enough in order to create a new historical memory, uncoupled from the nation-state and which would legitimize organization of the EU on federal or post-national bases. The latter’s recent identity crises offered additional arguments for a part of European Union elites in order to support creation of a pan-European historical memory and its main product is the House of European History.

Case study of “Europeanization of memory”: the House of European History

One of the most visible initiatives designed to build a pan-European historical memory is the House of European History (HEH), which is part of a larger project of rewriting European identity. This action was legitimized by an argumentative mechanism of the following kind: “in order to preserve peace and prosperity, the European Union needs not to repeat the mistakes of the past which determined two world wars; their main cause was nationalism, which represents the violent exacerbation of national feelings: acceptance by the citizens of the trans- or post-national organization of the European Union requires the change of predominant political values in society, including the establishment of a new historical memory”. The values that have to be conveyed are humanism, tolerance and democracy, and this demands deep educational changes, by which youth’s attention has to be diverted from local and national history to European and global history (Prutsch 2013, pp. 6-7).

The idea of convincing the public of the existence of a common trans-national European history by means of museums is not new, on the contrary. Here are some examples: *Musée de l’Europe*, inaugurated in Brussels in 1997, with public and private financing; *Museum Europäischer Kulturen* opened in Berlin in 1999, with public financing; *Musée Européen Schengen*, opened in Strasbourg in 2010, with public financing, etc.

On 7 May 2017 HEH (<https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en>) was opened in Brussels more than a decade after the decision to this end taken by the European Parliament, being an institution financed from the EU budget. Two premises were at the basis of achieving this project by which historiography, together with museology, were used to build a *sui generis* historical memory, that of “Europeans”. The first is assuming constructivist theories concerning formation of nations, whose main exponent became Benedict Anderson (1983), according to which modern nations became nations not because they were based on a primordial and perennial identity (with racial and ethno-confessional foundations), but are the result of a social construction process achieved by elites (political, intellectual), in a strictly determined historical context. The second, the only method of institutionally consolidating the European Union, is the construction of an ideological basis for the “European dream”, which would be shared not only by elites, but which would also become an identity pillar of most European citizens. Its mission became imperative as, after the failure of the European Constitution as a result of rejection referenda from France and the Netherlands (2005), it became obvious that one cannot make steps towards communitarian integration against the will, scares and fears of member States’ citizens. The premise was dominated by optimism, as it was considered that, in spite of political difficulties revealed by the rise of populist Euroscepticism (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008), the European Union will continue to enlarge and deepen its integration, to the point where it would have become a structure having a trans- or post-national identity (Huistra, Molema and Wirt 2014, pp. 125-126).

The HEH project was conceived as an ideological product, meant to emphasize the need for founding myths concerning the European Union (Bouchard 2016:4). Its essence was synthesized in the document entitled *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History* achieved by a group of experts (most of them historians), under the authority of the president in office of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering (European Parliament 2008). Even though the political route of HEH project would deserve a separate analysis (Segú 2016), in this analytical context we envisage to emphasize the main conceptual approaches, as they appear in the *Conceptual Basis*. The document (including 116 distinct paragraphs) is structured in three sections: “Conceptual and museological basis”, “Central topics of the permanent exhibition” (with the subsections “The origins and development of Europe until the end of the 19th century”; “Europe and the World Wars”; “Europe since the Second World War”; “Questions for Europe’s future”) and “Outlook”.

The project’s purpose is defined in terms of a historical teleology by its main initiator, Hans-Gert Pöttering, in his message to the European Parliament on 13 February 2007:

- (1.) “It should [be] a place where a memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is

available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union”.

Objectives are fixed in instrumental terms, the final mission being to build a European *demos*, animated by a new European memory:

(3.) “one of the key objectives of the House of European History is to enable Europeans of all generations to learn more about their own history and, by so doing, to contribute to a better understanding of the development of Europe, now and in the future. The House of European History should be a place in which the European idea comes alive”; (5.) “The exhibitions should make it clear that, in a world of progress, a united Europe can live together in peace and liberty on the basis of common values.”

Historians who elaborated the *Conceptual Basis* considered that the undertaking of building a new historical memory is scientifically founded and the museum institution has the role of facilitating access of the public to an adequate representation of the past:

(11.) “The House of European History sees itself primarily as a bridge between the academic world and the general public.”

Even during the conceptual phase, HEH was thought as a complete historical representation on the European space-time axis:

(13.) “The House of European History is aimed at Europeans from all parts of the continent, in all age groups and in all walks of life”; (14.) “A chronologically based narrative will help the likely target group to understand historical events and processes. Such a narrative, incorporating any retrospectives and broader surveys which may be required, will help visitors to place events and developments geographically and in their correct periods”.

In what concerns the historical thematic that needs to be included in HEH, the option was clearly expressed from the very beginning, the past being singled out from a supranational perspective and its centre of gravity is in the interwar period:

(23.) “The permanent exhibition will not portray the individual histories of Europe’s states and regions one after another, but will instead focus on European phenomena. In that connection, particular emphasis will be placed on the era of peace Europe has enjoyed since the end of the Second World War. It should be borne in mind that the diversity of Europe is its defining feature”.

Without being able to explore more, in this analytic context, the detailed expository content, HEH generated controversies, not only as a project, but also after its finalization. The situation is not new, being similar to other museum initiatives aiming to offer content to “national identity”; to this end, it is significant to recall controversies related to *Maison de l’Histoire de France* (van Gaal and Dupont 2012, p. 48).

On its inauguration, the HEH permanent exhibition, as the leader of the museum's academic team, Taja Vovk van Gaal, explained:

“Displaying almost 1000 artefacts from 33 countries, the permanent exhibition sets out to tell the story of Europe, in each of its 24 official languages. From the myth of *Europa* in antiquity, to the European Union's latest political twists and turns, the museum charts a course through Europe's history, from its triumphant advances to its most sombre and violent chapters. (...) In our museum, we give an overview, a frame with the reasons and the basis which the European integration process started from. Looking at these milestones of integration it becomes clear that the development of the European Union has never been a straightforward process, there have always been circumstances in which something has failed, and if you had three steps forward you might have two steps backwards. (...). There have been a lot of discussions around building up European identity, and for our museum from the very beginning we decided that we would build our concept on shared memory, because we thought it was more organic and it's not top-down.” (greeneuropeanjournal.eu 2017; Arjakovsky 2016).

Open to the public in an un-favorable political context, marked by contestation of the idea concerning a post-national Europe, both in the West (the United Kingdom following the Brexit referendum) and in the East (following parliamentary elections in Hungary and Poland in 2015 or in the Czech Republic in 2017), HEH generated several controversies, which we can systemize in four critiques categories.

HEH is rejected because it would not have a scientific basis, but would represent an ideological manipulation of the past in order to offer a mythological support to the European Union. In the arguments for this critique there are indications of both absence or under-representation of some chronologic-thematic segments (Middle Ages) or geographic elements (Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Eastern Europe) as well as the presentative character of the exhibition, with an overrepresentation of contemporary history or the inclusion of ongoing events (Brexit).

HEH synthesizes anti-historical tendencies, of minimizing the role of the past in forming social identity. By emphasizing the history of European integration and Western history, it would convey the message that national or local histories are no longer relevant for the European Union, which would be a huge mistake. (Furedi 2016). It is true that the abuse of history was one of the reasons for the rise of nationalism, but denying it indicates the aim, as HEH critics say, of de-nationalizing European citizens by breaking their traditional identity relations, a situation which cannot be accepted.

HEH content indicates the fact that the main enemy of the European Union would be nationalism (Skwieciński 2017). However, the defenders of the nation-state claim

that recent crises of the European Union showed Europeans sought for protection and support precisely in the institutions of nation-states and not in communitarian ones, considered to be costly and inefficient by a great number of citizens.

HEH conveys to the public a tampered representation of the past, on behalf of political correctness. Two examples are significant. In the main exhibition there is a presentation with real righteousness of the negative effects of West European colonialism, but there are not recognized modernizing progress brought by the existence of colonial empires to indigenous populations. Secondly, there is the old division between the West and the East of Europe in what concerns the relation between Nazism and Communism (Stalinism). The tragic experience of people from the Soviet bloc and its crimes would not be, as the critiques of the initial HEH exhibition claim, sufficiently represented, at the level of their dimension.

These main critiques, together with others, can turn HEH, in the perception of some of its visitors, into very sophisticated “fake news”. Of course, the political initiators, the conceptual authors and curators, together with other communication experts, cannot be suspected to have intended the conscious misleading of the public, but following the contrast between local and national museums and the institution that is meant to offer to citizens a synthesis of the historical dimension of *Homo Europaeus*, in the context of substantial critiques against it, one can guess that the operation of inventing a historical memory can be regarded as unconvincing.

Between “assimilation” and “synchronization”: pan-European history impact in Eastern Europe

The political message expressed through historiographic concepts which took the form of the House of European History is about to produce an impact among the European public. The recent studies concerning historical memory in Eastern Europe (Pakier and Stráth 2010; Pakier and Wawrzyniak 2015) can anticipate a conflicting attitude towards the message of common pan-European history. Much like during the interwar period and, then, during the first part of the 1990s, the political message of accepting western political values determines a polarization of options: acceptance, emphasized by the need of synchronizing with western democracies by rejecting political authoritarianism and nationalism; rejection, being considered a form of assimilation and perverting the exceptional character of nations (Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, etc.) oppressed by neighboring empires.

Relatively recent evolutions from Central and Eastern Europe, mainly involving the rise of sovereignism contesting supremacy of European Union institutions over the will of nation-states, are significant in several ways.

Accession of former communist countries to the European Union (2004, 2007, 2013) brought socio-economic changes perceived as negative by variable but significant segments of the population. For the losers of EU accession the messages

showing the newly-joining state are kept at periphery have become very attractive, including the claim that they are considered by western states and companies only as selling markets for their products (often different in what concerns quality from those in Western Europe, although they have the same trademark). The perception of Eastern Europeans in western countries as immigrants and not-co-citizens in search of a better life (if we are taking into account the existence of European citizenship after the Maastricht Treaty) fuels the perception of preserving mental barriers between the West and the East of Europe, as well as between the North and the South.

Although it seemed that intellectuals (including historians) favorable to European integration dominated the national public discourse, their elitist message did not manage to produce radical transformations of historical memory and political options which are euro-critic about the European Union are not only witnessed among popular masses, but they have numerous adepts among opinion shapers. As several researches demonstrate (Kraenzle and Mayr 2017; Blacker, Etkind and Fedor 2013), European memory is divided in what concerns major events of the 20th century. A first dividing line is within Central and East European societies, which have a conflicting approach over recent past, mainly concerning communism, which is far from being considered entirely evil and its acceptance remains a source of conflict in society (Stan 2009; Mitroiu 2015; Tismăneanu and Iacob 2015).

The second cleavage is between historiographic evaluation and historical memory in the East and those from the West. The problematic knot is the competitive approach between Holocaust and Gulag. If in Western Europe the Gulag is a less traumatic event than Decolonization, for example, for the Eastern people the Gulag has the meaning of a national collective suffering, a brutal break-up in the natural course of their history, of which the main responsible are considered not only the Soviets but also the westerners, as they would have “abandoned” them to the USSR at the end of the Second World War. Also, if in the West acceptance of Holocaust is at the center of political correctness, in the East the Holocaust is a historical fact for which taking responsibility is a slow and conflicting process. In Poland, Hungary or Romania, accepting responsibility for the Holocaust has recently been integrated into the political correctness code, but at popular level partial or even total denial of Holocaust is still a reality of collective memory.

Another source of differentiation regarding historical memory between West and East is the issue of empires, the oldest form of trans-national administration. For western nations, empires represent stages of greatness and pride from their past, while for eastern nations, their heroic past is related to their fight for emancipation from under imperial domination. That is why it would not be risky to ask ourselves if the popular support for parties promoting sovereignism should be explained by a deeply rooted cultural matrix in the East: is the European Union

perceived as a new form of imperial domination, to which citizens should oppose out of patriotism, as their ancestors did in the past?

Conclusions. Some theoretical considerations

The relation between science and collective memory is in a phase of redefinition as a result of societal changes generated by the rise of social media. The relations between historiography and historical memory, conveyed in the past through the education system and media, are also becoming incoherent as a result of relativized axiological models within contemporary societies. Truth, from the perspective of its use in society, is undermined not only by fake news, which send information without correspondence in reality, but also by the deep decay of mechanisms which set information into motion without involving ethic or legal liability.

The European public sphere, in its unitary-functional meaning from a trans-national dimension wanted by partisans of deeper European integration according to federal criteria, is in an embryonic phase, in spite of efforts made during the last two decades. Implicitly, supranational memory is rather found in the creations of elites than in the minds and souls of current European citizens' generations. The main elements of collective identity within the European Union are anchored in the historical, local-regional and national items. The new European mythology, which is meant to replace traditional identities, often called "nationalist", "war-like", "anachronistic", is presented by its increasingly numerous opponents as one based on fakes or distorted history.

The project of a part of European political and intellectual elites, involving creation of a trans- or post-national political community ("polity"), also envisages creation of a "European unification" historicist mythology in order to offer ideological basis to the sovereignty transfer towards communitarian institutions. The first synthesis element of this project is the House of European Memory. Founding a pan-European historical memory poses however a series of practical and conceptual dilemmas which we are briefly presenting above.

What is the necessary duration to achieve a new historical memory? The question is essential, as studies about formation of modern nations (Gellner 2008; Hobsbawm 1992) emphasized that the emergence of a coherent historical conscience cannot be achieved during a single generation, but instead takes approximately a century (three generations) in order to build a functional national mythology, considered to be a form of truth. The project of establishing a mythology having at its center the Cosmopolitan and Democratic European who has to accomplish the "European Dream" is only during its first phase of application and any conclusions about its failure or success are premature.

Are there comparable undertakings to the Homo Europaeus project? The formation of a trans-national conscience shared by a great number of distinct ethno-

confessional groups is an unprecedented project, with the partial exception of *Homo Sovieticus*. Of course, the European Union is not Soviet Union, the first being democratic and the second totalitarian; the project of social engineering from the European Union is thought in terms of seduction offered by material wealth and conviction with democratic instruments, while the Soviet initiative was based on propaganda and social control. There is however an important similarity between *Homo Europaeus* and *Homo Sovieticus*: both were to be created according to a trans- or post-national ideological basis; the first within liberal political regimes, the second within a dictatorial regime. The resurrection of nationalism in the USSR and, then, the dissolution of the Soviet Union demonstrated that the ideological project of changing consciences and forming a new historical conscience, based on dialectic and historical materialism, was unsuccessful in spite of huge efforts.

What are the minimal necessary conditions for the success of the European history mythification process? If we are taking into account the process of modern European nations' formation, it is necessary to concomitantly fulfil the following conditions:

- The existence of broad consensus among political and intellectual elites around the pursued purpose. If, a decade ago, optimism was still predominant among EU elites and euroscepticism was marginal, at least in its electoral representation, at present the sovereigntist currents are increasingly powerful (both in old and new Member States), and the perspective of re-founding the Union upon authentically federal bases rather scares than attracts. Although it is not factually correct, the idea of creating a pan-European identity is associated by its adversaries with Euro-bureaucracy, being easier to reject. As such, the idea of mythologizing European past in order to establish a new historical memory is increasingly challenged by those opposing transfer of even more elements of sovereignty towards European institutions;
- The existence of an idea corpus accepted by a good part of elites from Member States. Here historiography plays an essential role, but it must be said there is no European historiography in the full meaning of the word, but only national historiographies within which currents manifest which have as objective the accomplishment of a European History. The operation in itself, of rewriting and selecting some moments from the history of European countries following ideological criteria, even if they are generous, is perceived among the guild of historians as being potentially dishonest, as the principle of searching for the truth *sine ira et studio* is ignored;
- Socialization tools should work towards creating *Homo Europaeus*. As Member States convened that education is a matter related to national sovereignty, the educational system, as the most important tool of socialization, does not have an established strategic objective of forming a pan-European historical memory, but still functions for producing historical conscience with reference

to the nation-state. Opinion polls demonstrate that the identity of Europeans essentially relates to the nation-state and other regional political structures and assuming a primary identity of “European” remains marginal. The European Commission manages the “Europe for Citizens” programme, but the less than 200 million euro proposed to be spent during the budgetary exercise 2014-2020 cannot determine substantial changes in the socialization of individuals within the European Union. Other institutions which played an important role in the establishment of modern states, such as protestant and orthodox churches, or the army, are not even parts of the project to establish a new historical memory.

- Mass media and social communication tools should insure support to possible socialization policies for creating a pan-European identity. On the contrary, as numerous studies concerning European public sphere, media in the European Union considers “European affairs” a secondary topic. There are no other alternative social networks that would systematically disseminate messages which would contribute to building a new historical memory.
- Developing and manifesting a unifying and non-conflicting “European culture of memory”. The predominant imaginary of Europeans is connected to local and national history, not to global or European history. The dominant message of museums and other *lieux de mémoire* is strongly linked with moments of local and national history, having as reference the two world wars. In spite of official narratives which highlight unifying historical moments and not those that divide, in the non-official historical memory conflict is still present: Germans know that during both world wars they had as opponents the French and the English and vice versa; Poles recognize the fact that their country was invaded not only by the Soviets, but also by Germans; Romanians and Hungarians also have a tradition of confrontation during the 20th century and examples can continue. Any commemoration moment and *lieux de mémoire* existing in the Member States indicates its very primary significance, related to the fact in itself and not to an interpretative narrative which can easily be perceived as artificial and, essentially, false.

The issue of European identity, having as essential element the subject of historical memory, although it is not new, has the perspective of turning into an essential subject of intellectual debates of the next years, as it is strongly correlated with alternative projects to reform the EU and, implicitly, to overcome the latter’s structural crises. While controversies predominate over consensual answers and uncertainty and anxiety become prevalent psychological moods, our main conclusion is that the European Union will preserve its force if its trans-national elites are not starting a conflict against historical identity and memory related to the nation-state, but instead accept the reality that Europe has too strong historical traditions

which cannot be easily removed. In fact, the European Union needs a multiple and non-hegemonic Europeanization of its historical memories (including its identity mythology) and not a brutal attempt of rejection, on behalf of a supposed “anachronism”. In fact, pan-European mythology cannot only dwell upon the memory of the two world wars’ memory; it needs positive examples that provide real and convincing meaning to the “European Dream”.

References

1. Aalberg, T.; Esser, F.; Reinemann, C.; Strömbäck, J. and de Vreese, C. eds (2016). *Populist Political Communication in Europe*. London: Routledge.
2. Akira, I. and Saunier, P.-Y. (2009). *The Palgrave dictionary of transnational history: from the mid-19th century to the present day*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
3. Albertazzi, D. and McDonnell, D. (2008). *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
4. Allcott, H. and Gentzkow, M. (2017). ‘Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2): 211–236.
5. Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso Editions.
6. Arjakovsky, A. ed (2016). *Histoire de la conscience européenne*. Paris: Salvator.
7. Ball, J. (2017). *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World*. London: Biteback Publishing.
8. Barisione, M. and Michailidou, A. (2017). *Social Media and European Politics. Rethinking Power and Legitimacy in the Digital Era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
9. Bartlett, B. (2017). *The Truth Matters: A Citizen’s Guide to Separating Facts from Lies and Stopping Fake News in Its Tracks*. California, N.Y: Ten Speed Press.
10. Beasley, B. and Haney, M. R. eds. (2013). *Social Media and the Value of Truth*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
11. Berend, I.T. (2016). *The History of European Integration: A new perspective*. New York: Routledge.
12. Blacker U.; Etkind, A. and Fedor, J. (2013) *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
13. Bootle, R. (2016). *The Trouble with Europe. Why the EU Isn’t Working What Could Take Its Place. How the Referendum Could Change Europe*. Third Edition. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
14. Bottici, C. and Challand, B. (2013). *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory and Identity*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
15. Bouchard, G. (2016). ‘Europe in search of Europeans. The Road of identity and myth’. *Studies and Reports*, December 2016. Notre Europe Institut Jacques Delors. Available at: <http://www.institutdelors.eu/media/europeidentitymyth-bouchard-jdi-dec16.pdf?pdf=ok> [Accessed 23 November 2017].
16. Bozzini, E. and Bee, C. (2016). *Mapping the European Public Sphere: Institutions, Media and Civil Society*. New York: Routledge.

17. Bruneteau, B. (2006). *Histoire de l'idée européenne au premier XXe siècle à travers les textes*. Paris: Armand Colin.
18. Conrad, M. (2014). *Europeans and the Public Sphere. Communication without Community?* Stuttgart: Verlag.
19. Davies, E. (2017). *Post-Truth: Why We Have Reached Peak Bullshit and What We Can Do About It*. London: Little, Brown.
20. Di Mauro, D. and Memoli, V. (2016). *Attitudes Towards Europe Beyond Euroscepticism. Supporting the European Union through the Crisis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
21. Dinan, D.; Nugent, N. and Paterson, W.E. eds (2017). *The European Union in Crisis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
22. European Parliament (2008). Conceptual Basis for a House of European History. October 2008. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf [Accessed 23 November 2017].
23. European Parliament (2017). 'Fake news' and the EU's response. April 2017. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/599384/EPRS_ATA%282017%29599384_EN.pdf [Accessed 23 November 2017].
24. Freedom House (2017). Freedom of the Net 2017. Manipulating Social Media to Undermine Democracy. November 2017. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017> [Accessed 23 November 2017].
25. Furedi, F. (2016). Reclaiming Europe from the EU. 18 April 2016. Available at: <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/reclaiming-europe-from-the-eu/18250#.WhVwVTdx1Pa> [Accessed 24 November 2017].
26. Gellner, E. (2008). *Nations and nationalism*. Second Edition. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
27. greeneuropeanjournal.eu (2017). Our Common Past: The Museum Presenting a Transnational View of European History. Available at: <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/our-common-past-the-museum-presenting-a-transnational-view-of-european-history/> [Accessed 23 November 2017].
28. Habermas, J. (2013). *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
29. Hobsbawm, E.J. (1992). *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
30. Huistra, P.; Molema, M. and Wirt, D. (2014). 'Political Values in a European Museum', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 10 (1): 124-136.
31. Klein, N. (2017) *Dire non ne suffit plus: Contre la stratégie du choc de Trump*. Paris: Actes Sud
32. Koopmans, R. and Statham, P. eds (2010). *The Making of a European Public Sphere. Media Discourse and Political Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
33. Kraenzle, C. and Mayr, M. eds (2017). *The Changing Place of Europe in Global Memory Cultures. Usable Past and Futures*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

34. Lindner, R.; Hennen, L. and Aichholzer, G. (2016). *Electronic Democracy in Europe. Prospects and Challenges of E-Publics, E-Participation and E-Voting*. Cham: Springer International Publishing
35. Mitroiu, S. ed (2015). *Life Writing and Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
36. Nichols, T. (2017). *The Death of Expertise. The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
37. Pakier, M. and Stråth, B. eds (2010). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*. New York: Berghahn Books.
38. Pakier, M. and Wawrzyniak, J. eds. (2015). *Memory and Change in Europe Eastern Perspectives*. New York: Berghahn Books.
39. Pană, A.-D. (2015). Models of the European Public Sphere. Available at: <http://www.eucommunication.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/pana.pdf> [Accessed 25 November 2017].
40. Penney, J. (2017) *The citizen marketer: promoting political opinion in the social media*. New York: Oxford University Press.
41. Pérez de las Heras, B. ed (2017). *Democratic Legitimacy in the European Union and Global Governance. Building a European Demos*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
42. Pérez, F.S. (2013) *Political Communication in Europe. The Cultural and Structural Limits of the European Public Sphere*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
43. Prutsch, M.J. (2013). *European historical memory: policies, challenges and perspectives*. Note, European Parliament. September 2013. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/513977/IPOLCULT_NT%282013%29513977_EN.pdf [Accessed 23 November 2017].
44. Segú, M. G. (2016). Proposing a New European Narrative: The House of European History Project, in Jordi Guixé i Coromines ed *Past and Power: Public Policies on Memory. Debates, from Global to Local*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, pp. 57-73.
45. Skwieciński, P. (2017). The House of European History forges a new European. 7 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.polska.pl/politics/opinions/house-european-history-forges-new-european-composed-primarily-sh/> [Accessed 24 November 2017].
46. Stan, L. ed (2009). *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Reckoning with the communist past*. Oxford: Routledge.
47. Steinmetz, W.; Freeden, M. and Fernández-Sebastián, J. (2017). *Conceptual History in the European Space*. London: Berghahn Books.
48. Tismăneanu, V. and Iacob, B.C. eds (2015). *Remembrance, History, and Justice: Coming to Terms with Traumatic Pasts in Democratic Societies*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
49. van Gaal, T.V. and Dupont, C. (2012). Entering the Minefields: the Creation of New History Museums in Europe. Conference proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citi-

zen, Brussels 25 January 2012. Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont & Chantal Kesteloot eds *EuNAMus Report* No. 9. Linköping University Electronic Press. Available at: http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083 [Accessed 23 November 2017].

50. Vargo, C.J.; Guo, L. and Amazeen, M.A. (2017). 'The agenda-setting power of fake news: A big data analysis of the online media landscape from 2014 to 2016', *New Media & Society*, June 15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817712086> [Accessed 23 November 2017].
51. Verhofstadt, G. (2017). *Europe's Last Chance: Why the European States Must Form a More Perfect Union*. New York: Basic Books.
52. Walter, S. (2017). *EU Citizens in the European Public Sphere: An Analysis of EU News in 27 EU Member States*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
53. White, A. (2014). *Digital Media and Society. Transforming Economics, Politics and Social Practices*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.