Defending Memory in Global Politics

Mnemonical In/Security and Crisis

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Chapter 3

The securitization of memory and the practice of public history in the Baltic States

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Introduction

The launch of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has had surprisingly little impact on historical discourse in the Baltic States because a long-standing model of public history, born of the independence movements of the late 1980s, had already been securitized in the wake of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014. Since then, both civilian and military authorities across the region have become vigilant to hostile information operations (Rimaitė-Beržiūnienė, 2022). But while the historical memory of the Second World War has indeed become a referent of populist political discourse throughout the region (Krawatzek and Soroka, 2021), this has not led the Baltic States to adopt the kind of state-sponsored historical revisionism predicted by theorists of ontological security and observed in certain other states in the region, like Poland or Russia (Mälksoo, 2021).

Securitization is defined as a discursive process 'through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as a threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat' (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 491). The securitization of memory occurs when the foundational narratives of a political community are seen to be faced with an existential threat. Accordingly, Maria Mälksoo (2015, p. 223) defines mnemonic security as 'the idea that distinct understandings of the past should be fixed in public remembrance and consciousness in order to buttress an actor´s stable sense of self as the basis of its political agency'. Distinct understandings of the past are typically defined as historical myths of national identity. Together with the forcible exclusion of other narratives, securitization is thus portrayed as an extreme version of the politicization of the past (Jutila, 2015). In the context of European integration, the securitization of memory has come to be seen as a problem common to candidate and newly acceded states from Eastern Europe, which latch onto 'fixed narratives of the past' in order to calm the anxiety and alleviate the 'ontological insecurity' caused by the loss of 'traditional and familiar objects of fear', as they 'break with their war-torn and authoritarian pasts' (Rumelili, 2018, p. 282).

This chapter argues that securitization of memory has indeed occurred in the Baltics, insofar as exceptional and urgent measures relating to public discourse of the past have not only been proposed but also implemented. However, the identification of the security challenge and the actual policies developed to solve it bear very little resemblance to the stylized facts invoked in the literature on securitization in Eastern Europe. Indeed, the root cause of the 'anxiety' that has prompted policy decisions lies not in some atavistic fear of the prospect of perpetual peace, but in the rational assessment that Europe is not adequately prepared to defend itself against information offensives of the type used by Russia against Georgia, Ukraine and EU states themselves. Combined with the deepening of historical revisionism within Russia itself, Russia's external aggression has led policymakers across the Baltics to see the integrity of their historical narratives as threatened and in need of defence. The means of defence have not, however, involved the imposition of fixed narratives or nationalist myths of the past, disinformation or restrictions on freedom of expression. Securitization in the Baltics has not generated a 'security dilemma' because the means used to respond to foreign information operations have not mirrored the threat. Instead, the decade following Russia's invasion of Ukraine has, thus far, been marked by the consistent development of a preexisting model of *public history*, understood as the measures used by state and non-state actors to engage the citizenry in the co-creation of the past to promote democracy and social cohesion while maintaining professional standards of truthfulness (Cauvin, 2022).

Emerging from the national independence movements of the late 1980s, this model predates the Russia–Ukraine War and the accession of the Baltic States to the European Union. Efforts to defend the integrity of key historical narratives lie at the core of the restoration of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as independent and democratic states. 'Arguably more than in other former communist countries', Eva-Clarita Pettai (2020, p. 1) writes, 'the democratic revolutions in the Baltic countries were as much about re-conquering the country's history as they were about securing an independent and democratic future'. The history in question was the history of Baltic statehood, which began in the wake of the First World War but was interrupted during the onset of the Second after the Pact of Non-Aggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union opened the door for Stalin to annex the Baltic States. After several decades of foreign occupation, a public assembly held in Lithuania on 23 August 1987 tested the waters of Gorbachev's *glasnost* by condemning the signing of the Pact on that day in 1939. Exactly two years later, on 23 August 1989, a human chain of two million individuals stretched across Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in a mass expression of popular support for national independence, known as the Baltic Way. When the Baltic States regained their independence in 1991, they did not create new states or secede from the USSR, but pointedly *re-established* the states that had been annexed by the USSR in August 1940 (Bergmane, 2022).

Given the close entanglement of democratic transition and public history in the Baltic States, the risk posed by the securitization of memory should be reframed as follows: Has the democratic and participatory model of public

history born in 1989 retained its integrity? Does it proceed from a critical assessment of facts to support democratic pluralism, or has it retreated to myth in the service of nativist populism? The analysis offered below aims to show that rather than advancing a fixed narrative of the past—the stylized fact so often assumed by theorists of securitization to apply throughout Eastern Europe—the *civic-patriotic* paradigm of public history born in 1989 has found expression as a narrative of national agency and continuity that links the interwar period of independence to the nation-building project of the post-Cold War era. Driven by the tension between the national and European models of remembrance, the paradigm manifests the civic and patriotic ideals of political community in a dynamic unity. While acknowledging the presence and force of populist and revisionist tendencies, this chapter contends that the scope for any abuse of history by Baltic States has been limited by the reliance of these sparsely populated countries on the EU and NATO for their prosperity and security. A coarse pluralism and resigned adherence to European and Euro-Atlantic models of rules-based multilateralism and remembrance was born in the transition from communism and has developed to the present day in a series of three stages or, more accurately, three vectors in the evolving Baltic model of public history.

The first stage, nationalization, succeeded in consolidating the population during the early years of independence prior to accession to the EU, in 2004. It was sufficiently robust to endure into the second stage, Europeanization, which is more properly seen not as a discrete and subsequent stage, but rather as a distinct vector in the development of the Baltic model of public history, complementing the nationalizing impulse. Since 2014, the civic-patriotic model has been marked by securitization and challenged by the need to counter Russia's revisionist stance towards the post-Cold War order. However, the process of securitization has occurred *in line with*, and not *against*, the adoption of European norms of public history. Like the rest of Europe, the Baltic States are the site of an ongoing *kulturkampf* between nativist populists and defenders of liberal democracy. But for the time being, at least in the Baltics, the Euro-Atlantic *acquis* appears to be holding.

The nationalization of memory

The first stage in the evolution of the Baltic model of public history can be characterized as a process of nationalization or re-nationalization, insofar as it represented an effort to 'reconquer' a past that had been suppressed and appropriated through communist control over history. This had to do with the illegal annexation of the Baltic States (Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact), Stalinist deportations, the suppression of the anti-Soviet armed partisan movement, restrictions on freedom of speech and religion, and practices of Sovietization, like collectivization and the nationalization of property. The attempts to integrate these erased aspects of history were at the core of the popular movements against Soviet rule, the success of which depended on the effectiveness of the narratives used to mobilize the masses at the time. As a result, the transition from

communism was fuelled by grassroots efforts to collect and disseminate the stories of traumatic suffering from the early days of Stalinist Sovietization.

In Lithuania, for example, mass rallies, the publication of deportee memoirs and commemorative events were supplemented by efforts to collect personal written evidence of oppression. In July 1988, the popular movement against Soviet rule established a Commission for Investigation of Stalinist Crimes to establish the truth about the full scope of these crimes. The commission distributed questionnaires on Soviet deportations in Lithuania and collected data about the camps, mass killings and number of victims, sharing the information gathered with the press and the public. For most Lithuanians at the time, the full scale of Soviet crimes was unknown, and their public disclosure prompted shock and public indignation, which the popular movement successfully channelled into political mobilization. Similar processes occurred in Latvia and Estonia (Bergmane, 2022). Indeed, the democratic transition was initiated and sustained by the generation of public history, not only through the vigorous dissemination of personal stories, testimonies and memoirs, but also through the active engagement of the citizenry in the co-creation of history and in the activities of newly established institutions of transitional and retrospective justice (Pettai and Pettai, 2015).

However, the nationalization of memory was not without controversy, particularly in the area of transitional justice. In the decade following the restoration of independence, the Baltic States emerged as leaders in the prosecution of communist-era crimes. Based on historical research conducted by dedicated institutes of national memory (primarily in Lithuania and Latvia), several hundred investigations against former Soviet security service and military officials were initiated, of which some 50 cases eventually led to prosecutions. They all concerned crimes committed during the 1940s and 1950s and involved charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and, most frequently, genocide (Pettai, 2017).

However, several of these convictions were subsequently overturned through appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, because they relied on the retroactive application of idiosyncratic national definitions of genocide adopted in the early 1990s, which were not aligned with established international law insofar as they included social and political groups within the scope of the definition of genocide. At the time of the alleged crimes, the law of the land was aligned with the Genocide Convention of 1948, which defines genocide as an action committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The criminal codes of the Baltic States would later be brought into conformity with European norms, enabling a closer integration of Baltic and European approaches, but the initial round of genocide prosecutions generated a significant degree of controversy (Sagatienė, 2020; Milašiūtė, 2021).

That said, the outcome of the friction between national and European perspectives on transitional justice was not a one-way street. Once the Baltics learned and adapted to European and international standards of law and procedure, they eventually succeeded in asserting and securing recognition for national and regional narratives of the Second World War.

The first example of this process consisted of the conviction in Latvia of a Soviet partisan as a war criminal. After a lengthy criminal prosecution process beginning in 1998, the Latvian Supreme Court found Vassili Kononov guilty of war crimes involving the murder of nine villagers in May 1944. The events in question took place in a Latvian village where local inhabitants had denounced some Soviet partisans, who were then killed by German troops. Kononov led the unit that killed nine citizens in retribution for the denunciation (Mälksoo, 2017). The defence, which was supported at various times by the Russian Federation, was based on the argument that the villagers were partisans collaborating with the Germans and thus should not be considered civilians. When the case was reviewed by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the initial finding was that the murder of potential collaborators could not be condemned retroactively as a war crime. This decision was appealed by Latvia, with Lithuania's support as a third-party, and again Russia backed the defence. In the final judgment, passed in 2010, the Grand Chamber of the ECHR accepted that the villagers, although in possession of weapons, were not carrying arms at the time of the attack, nor did they resist capture. On this basis, the court issued a judgment grounded in extensive historical reasoning in support of Latvia's assertion that the murder of these unarmed civilians by a man, designated by the Soviet Union as a war hero, constituted a war crime.[1]

The second case occurred on 12 March 2019, when the Fourth Section of the European Court of Human Rights upheld a ruling of the Lithuanian Supreme Court, issued on 12 April 2016, in which it found a Soviet security officer by the name of Drėlingas guilty of genocide. A prior conviction of genocide by the Lithuanian courts (Vasiliauskas v. Lithuania) was overturned by the ECHR on the grounds that the crime of genocide as defined in Lithuanian law did not conform, in its inclusion of social and political groups, to the definition of genocide as existed at the time of the alleged crime.

However, unlike the prosecution of Vasiliauskas, the prosecution of Drėlingas relied on the recently adopted, internationally accepted definition of genocide as per the 1948 Convention. The ECHR decision in favour of Lithuania was not, however, unanimous. There was one strongly dissenting view relying on the argument that the decision overturned established ECHR case law and introduced the concept of 'ethno-political' genocide, that is, that the decision effectively expanded the definition of genocide from that established in the Genocide Convention. The decision of the majority, however, made no mention of 'ethno-political' genocide. On the contrary, the Lithuanian 'victory' lay not in the expansion of the term of genocide, but in the recognition by the ECHR of the *historical argument* made by the Lithuanian Supreme Court about the international legal and historical circumstances of the period between 1940 and 1956, the massive scale of the national resistance to the occupying power and the scale of repression of the Soviet occupying power against the Lithuanian population.

The key historical conclusion of the Lithuanian Supreme Court was that the participants of the resistance had not only fought to ensure the survival of

the nation but had 'also embodied that survival'. Therefore, the effort of the Soviet security services to eliminate the resistance had been an effort to eliminate a significant part of the nation and was thus genocidal in intent. The acceptance by the ECHR of the Lithuanian Supreme Court's chain of reasoning in its characterization of the international legal and historical circumstances of the period between 1940 and 1956 marked a victory for Lithuania's efforts to gain international recognition for its approach—not through the redefinition of international law, but through the careful, balanced and substantiated articulation of a historical narrative.

The Europeanization of memory

The second stage or vector in the evolution of the Baltic model of public history can be characterized as a process of Europeanization triggered by the December 1997 decision of the European Council to enlarge the EU and the launch of programmes to support the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* by the ten new member states from Central and Eastern Europe.

By the late 1990s, the Baltic approach to transitional and retrospective justice was being seen as falling short of European standards. The countries' institutes of national memory appeared to be concerned mainly with investigating Soviet crimes, even though the German occupation also fell within their remit. Their apparent lack of interest in prosecuting, documenting or teaching about Nazi crimes, including the role of locals in the Holocaust, was the subject of frequent criticism. The commemoration of Waffen-SS legions in Estonia and Latvia and of Lithuanian partisans who collaborated with the Nazis prompted international outrage, as did local tensions with Russian speakers over the celebration of Victory Day on 9 May (Onken, 2007). International organizations, Holocaust memory activists and Western embassies in the Baltics were concerned that antagonistic memories of the Second World War would fester and derail the process of democratization (Pettai, 2015).

To address these concerns, in 1999 the presidents of the three Baltic States established national historical commissions tasked with investigating and determining responsibility for crimes committed under the Nazi regime. The involvement of Western experts on the Holocaust was solicited to boost the authority and credibility of these commissions and to reinforce the reconciliatory dimension of the effort. While experts suggest the commissions may have failed to achieve reconciliation among different antagonistic memories of the Second World War (Pettai, 2015), this paper argues their emergence from a shared intention to implement a European approach to memorialization nonetheless contributed to the refinement and strengthening of the Baltic model of public history.

Indeed, the refinement of the model not only facilitated the integration process; it enabled the Baltics to exert influence on the European stage. Politicians from the region played a key role in advancing proposals to make 23 August—the day of the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in 1939—an

official European day to commemorate the victims of totalitarian regimes. This idea was included in the 2008 Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, which called for the overhaul of history textbooks so that children could learn about communism and its crimes in the same way as they had been taught about Nazi crimes. The overall intent of the Declaration was to broaden the historical perspective of Europeans to include the historical experiences and perspectives of the new EU member states.

The idea gained support and was debated in the European Parliament. The text underwent several changes and was ultimately approved by a large majority in the spring of 2009 as a European Parliament resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism. The shift in the wording of the title from that of the Prague Declaration (replacing 'communism') represented a sort of compromise. Leftist parties in Western Europe did not want to identify the ideal of communism with the worst crimes of Stalinism. At the same time, the changed name also aimed to take account of the harm suffered by Eastern European countries under Nazi occupation.[2] The European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism was created by the European Parliament in 2008, and it was also supported by the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe in the Vilnius Declaration of 2009.[3]

The spread of this approach prompted expressions of concern by some Holocaust memory activists about the proliferation of the 'double genocide thesis'.[4] The most sustained criticism of the Prague Declaration came from associates of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, an organization devoted to bringing Nazi war criminals to justice. Efraim Zuroff, the head of the Center, called the EU resolution a 'Red-Brown' manifesto and said the ideas it represented were insidious: 'If communism equals fascism', he said, 'then communism equals genocide. This would mean that Jews also were involved in genocide, because among Jews there were many communists' (Zuroff, 2010). More broadly, the EU resolution was seen as part of a campaign to entrench martyrological myths of Eastern European nationalism and to mitigate the culpability of local collaborators under German occupation for their participation in the genocide (Ghodsee, 2014). A similar intent to 'shift the blame for historical injustices entirely to others' was attributed to the adoption by Lithuania in 2010 of a memory law which forbids the denial of crimes 'committed by the USSR or Nazi Germany on the territory of the Republic of Lithuania or against the inhabitants of the Republic of Lithuania' (Koposov, 2022, p. 9).

These fears were not unfounded, insofar as narratives of victimization and competing suffering retained currency at various levels of discourse. Indeed, the leading institution of national memory in Lithuania, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre (GRRC), has since been embroiled in a steady stream of scandals associated with the efforts of its leaders and employees to defend the reputation of anti-Soviet partisans who also played an active role in the Holocaust, such as Jonas Noreika (1910–1947). Before the Second World War, Noreika was a member of the Lithuanian Activist Front, an antisemitic, nationalist organization that collaborated with the Nazis to

overthrow the Soviet regime. As the German-appointed governor of the Šiauliai district, Noreika signed orders in 1941 to confine local Jews to a ghetto and confiscate their property. He was arrested by the Germans in 1943 for refusing to raise a Waffen-SS division from the local population and emerged as a member of the anti-Soviet resistance from 1944 until his arrest and execution in 1947 (Foti, 2021).

With this chequered background, Noreika is revered by some as a national hero for his resistance to the Soviets and reviled by others as a Nazi collaborator. Several monuments have been erected in his honour across the country, including a commemorative plaque mounted in 1997 on a prominent building in downtown Vilnius. While these and several other monuments to individuals implicated in the Holocaust have attracted occasional criticism from abroad, they were not subject to sustained public attention within Lithuania until 2015, when the mayor of Vilnius removed Soviet-era sculptures from a downtown bridge, triggering a widespread debate over the need to maintain or remove monuments to historical figures associated with the Communist or Nazi totalitarian regimes.

Pressured by a public campaign to remove the plaque, the city commissioned the GRRC to make an assessment of Noreika's role in the Second World War. The resulting memorandum, published in October 2015, refuted witnesses' claims that Noreika had been personally involved in the killing of Jews and minimized his agency as a collaborator, admitting only that 'the Nazi authorities managed to involve him, as well as other officers of the Lithuanian civilian administration, in matters relating to the isolation of Jews' (Beniušis, 2020).

In March 2019, the GRRC published another defence of Noreika, which was intensely criticized by Lithuanian and international historians as riddled with exculpatory arguments and obfuscations. In December 2019, the Centre went further, implausibly claiming that Noreika had actually rescued Jews from their fate. Based solely on the uncorroborated testimony of a Lithuanian émigré given in 1986 to an extradition hearing in the USA, the memorandum was roundly condemned by prominent Lithuanian historians as unprofessional, raising questions about the leadership and professionalism of the institution (Miškinytė, 2019).

Tensions came to a head in January 2020, when 17 historians from the GGRC petitioned the Lithuanian parliament, drawing attention to the 'ideologization of historical research in support of memory wars, the issuance of biased memoranda and the devaluation of professionalism by the Centre's management' (Gaučaitė-Znutienė, 2021). Within a couple of months and after a rancorous series of public exchanges over the mandate of the GRRC, the parliament dismissed its director general, Adas Jakubauskas, and appointed Arūnas Bubnys, the head of the GGRC's historical department and one of the signatories of the petition, to replace him.

Thus, while scandals associated with the GGRC have often been cited as evidence of historical revisionism (Subotić, 2020), care should be taken to avoid generalizing from individual cases, thereby distorting the overall trend

in the field of public history. Quite apart from the development of Holocaust-centred museums like the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, founded in 1989, existing museums in the Baltic States are in general coming to reflect a more sophisticated approach to the past, reflecting the pluralism of social actors involved in the production of discourses about the past (Rindzevičiūtė, 2020).

In Estonia, for example, concerns that the Museum of Occupations was being visited only by foreigners and was of little interest to locals, especially the country's youth, prompted a wholesale change in management. The former dissidents who had been recruited to create the museum's original exhibition were replaced by new generation of institutional entrepreneurs. Renamed the Museum of Freedom in 2015, the institution continues to tell the story of occupation, including the experiences of those who died in the Holocaust or were deported to Siberia or exiled to the West, but there is now a new focus on the more nuanced experience of late communism. Most importantly, as the name change suggests, the new representations of the past are framed within a discourse of universal values and ethics (Pääbo and Pettai, 2019).

In summary, there is clear evidence of a growing integration of national Baltic and European approaches to public history. Every year, the European Commission issues a call for proposals for projects aligned with this shared approach. To cite the 2021 call, the objective is to support studies that reflect on the 'causes and consequences of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in Europe's modern history (especially but not exclusively Nazism that led to the Holocaust, Fascism, Stalinism and totalitarian communist regimes) and to commemorate the victims of their crimes'.[5] What was once seen as a distinctly Baltic or Central and Eastern European approach to the legacy of totalitarian regimes has now become standard in EU programmes on European remembrance in support of cultural diversity and common values.

The securitization of memory

Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014 provoked a sharpening of memory conflicts across the Baltic States (Platt, 2020). In Estonia, the media projected a 'grave new world' from which the peace of the post-Cold War order would be banished (Mälksoo, 2014). Russia's deployment of revisionist rhetoric in its historical discourse and foreign policy targeted the key vulnerabilities—cultural, social, political and military—of the Baltic States. The authorities became acutely concerned of the potential for 'hybrid attacks' that included appeals to the hearts and minds of Russian minorities in border regions to support an incursion or destabilizing action.

In 2015, the ministries of defence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania began to take general surveys of the population to measure their levels of patriotism, their understanding of security and defence, their media literacy and their satisfaction with public services. Compulsory national military service was reintroduced in Lithuania, and recruitment to the reserves was reinforced in each country. Exchanges were held at meetings of the Education, Science and

Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly on national approaches to the inclusion of civil defence in educational programmes.[6] Notably, the Baltic approach to strengthening the resilience of society to external threats differs intentionally from the Soviet/Russian practice of mobilizing society for war (familiar to the older generations of security practitioners), including the paradigm of 'military-patriotic' education at schools and the mass propagandization of militaristic values through state media (Kolesnikov, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2018). Instead, it follows the Nordic model developed by Finland and Sweden during the Cold War, emphasizing a 'civic-patriotic' model of education (Atmante, 2020).

Indeed, the securitization of memory in the Baltic States has occurred in close coordination with NATO and EU institutions. This is most evident in the establishment, in 2015, of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga and the EU's East StratCom Task Force (part of the European External Action Service). Baltic defence and security agencies have developed an approach to strategic communication that takes account of the main thrust of Russia's propaganda efforts—to exacerbate social divides—and counters it not with nativist narratives of integral nationalism, but by promoting enhanced critical thinking, media awareness and fact checking.[7]

While the overall response to Russian revisionism has been similar across the Baltic States, national varieties are also evident. In Lithuania, the Baltic model of public history has developed in the most traditional manner, by elevating the experience of anti-Soviet resistance as the highest example of civic valour and by formally incorporating the history of the resistance into the history of the state. Indeed, this approach is a continuation of a process that began earlier, in 1999, when the Lithuanian parliament enacted into law a document signed by partisan leaders in 1949 which declared that the Council of the Movement of the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania 'constituted the supreme political and military structure … and was the sole legal authority within the territory of occupied Lithuania'.[8]

Commemoration of the post-war struggle became more prevalent in 2009, a year after Russia invaded Georgia and seized some of its territory. The Lithuanian parliament retroactively proclaimed Jonas Žemaitis, a partisan leader who established the Movement for the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania and survived in hiding until 1953, as the fourth president of Lithuania.[9] But it was not until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 that post-war resistance assumed a leading role in Lithuanian public memory. Indeed, since 2014 several dozen monuments to the partisans have been erected across Lithuania (Rimaitė-Beržiūnienė, 2022).

The renewed interest in the history of armed resistance against the Soviets is by no means limited to Lithuania, extending to Latvia and Estonia as well, and is reflected in a growing paramilitary ethos in the region (Kandrík, 2020). Even NATO got into the game, producing a short docudrama on the anti-Soviet resistance in 2017. Featuring interviews with former anti-Soviet partisans from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, *Forest Brothers: Fight for the Baltic*

draws a sympathetic link between the anti-Soviet guerrilla struggle for independence in the post-war era and the threats currently facing the armed forces of the three Baltic States.[10] Intended to promote a sense of Allied cohesion in the face of Russian revisionism, the film was much appreciated in the Baltic States as a sign of international recognition of their historical struggle for independence and of their determination to preserve their sovereignty in the face of looming threats. Predictably, Russian officials were quick to condemn the film as an attempt to rewrite the history of the Second World War and whitewash the role of Nazi collaborators.[11]

Towards militant memory?

The Estonian scholar Maria Mälksoo introduced the term of 'militant memocracy' to characterize states that seek to address a 'mnemonical anxiety problem' through the 'governance of historical memory through a dense network of prescribing and proscribing memory laws and policies'. The parallel between 'militant memocracy' and 'militant democracy' suggests the 'precautionary and punitive measures' used to protect memory risk harming the object of defence, they may 'resound rather than fix the state's mnemonical anxiety problem' (Mälksoo, 2021). Has securitization of the civic-patriotic model of public history in the Baltics led to the creation in Estonia, Latvia of Lithuania 'militant memocracies'? The answer is no, or at least, not yet.

   In Mälksoo's approach, Russia is characterized as a 'mnemonic positionalist', asserting its position in the Cold War consensus of victory over Nazi Germany and seeking to subordinate the position of Central and East European states to its superior status in the international hierarchy. Meanwhile, she portrays Poland as a 'mnemonic revisionist', keen to revise the Cold War consensus by challenging the 'twofold structural injustice' of Western acquiescence with Russia's 'victorious liberator' narrative and the privileged place of the Holocaust in Western public memory (Mälksoo, 2021).

   Against this background, the Baltic model of public history comes across as reformist, not revisionist. Having secured their place in the EU and NATO, the Baltic States have promoted change at the margins of the European narrative of the Second World War, seeking recognition for their distinct experience within accepted discursive and legal frameworks. This includes recognition and atonement for their role in the Holocaust and other atrocities committed during the war.

   In this approach, the valorization of the legacy of the Forest Brothers in Lithuania serves in the main to assert the illegitimacy of Soviet rule and to embody the doctrine of state continuity, not to revise the fundamental interpretation of the outcome of the Second World War. To be sure, as with any narrative focused on the development of the state, it has the potential to sideline other narratives and experiences, like the collaboration of some partisan fighters with German forces and their participation in the Holocaust, or the atrocities committed against other civilian populations (Davoliūtė, 2017).

The point, however, is as follows: As this state-centred history matures, it will either fall into the trap of revisionism by denying 'dishonourable' facts and narratives involving the experiences of minorities who are recognized by the international community, or it will come to incorporate these other memories, asserting full ownership over an inalienable national past, assets and liabilities included. In Poland, the evolution of the state's 'historical policy' has moved towards denying the role of Poles and Poland in the Holocaust, in marked contrast to the policy of acceptance and atonement stated succinctly by the president of France, Jacques Chirac, in 1995, when he asserted that the deportation of Jews from the Vélodrome d'Hiver in Paris to Auschwitz was a crime 'committed in France, by France'.

As evidenced by events over the past half decade, Lithuania is arguably teetering on the edge of Polish-style revisionism, given its uncritical obsession with the partisan legacy, as certain social and political groups seek to institutionalize a militantly patriotic narrative in wilful ignorance of those aspects of the struggle for independence that violated the norms and ethical principles on which it was ostensibly based. In July 2017, for example, a municipal official in Vilnius sparked a public outcry when he posted a question on his Facebook page about the morality of the summary executions of individuals judged by the anti-Soviet partisans to be collaborators because they had taken part in the organization of collective farms in the late 1940s. Memory activists set in motion a public campaign to dismiss this official from his job on the grounds that people who do not understand or who misrepresent their country's history should not hold public office. He was fired within days, ostensibly for performance-related reasons unrelated to the post. A similar campaign was launched later in the year by social media 'influencers' against Rūta Vanagaitė, author of a best-selling book on the Holocaust in Lithuania, *Mūsiškiai* ('Our People'), in the wake of critical (and, as she later admitted, mistaken) comments she made about a famous partisan (Vanagaitė and Zuroff, 2020). The hate campaign culminated in the decision of her publisher to withdraw all of her books from sale, including *Mūsiškiai*, effectively ruining her livelihood (Gessen, 2017).

Seeking to capitalize on 'partisan fever', a Eurosceptic, nationalist political party called the National Union was created in the spring of 2020 to run in parliamentary elections that autumn. The party selected the title of an antisemitic pamphlet published in 1933 as its motto: 'Raise your head, Lithuanian!' The pamphlet, which had called on Lithuanians to 'liberate themselves from economic slavery to the Jews', was authored by the above-mentioned Jonas Noreika.[12] In the end, the National Union failed to win any seats in the Lithuanian parliament, which suggests that the more potent sources of Eurosceptic, anti-liberal militancy lie not in narratives of partisan valour, but in homophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric (Davoliūtė, 2021).

Indeed, it would be premature to conclude that the securitization of the past inevitably leads to the defensive acts of censorship and militant memocracy. In Latvia, for example, Russian propaganda has raised awareness of how the lack of popular confidence in public institutions constitutes a threat to national

security, for which transparency and open debate is the most effective solution. For decades, one of the main sources of public mistrust in the Latvian authorities was their refusal to disclose the contents of the notorious 'Cheka bags': several thousand index cards of former agents and informants, which were left behind in postal bags when the Soviet KGB evacuated from Latvia in 1991.

Over time, a perception grew in society that former KGB agents might still be active behind the scenes, feeding the rise of populist parties (Bergmane, 2019). As a result, a decision was finally made in 2014 to open the archives, and the files were published in 2018, at which point the main reaction was surprise at the extent to which the cultural and intellectual elites of the late Soviet period were implicated as collaborators with the KGB. According to Pettai (2019), the disclosure contributed to a creative engagement with late socialism and widespread recognition that black-and-white categories do not contribute to a better understanding of this period.

In Estonia, the securitization of memory has taken an even more forward-looking approach. Having transitioned to a purely digital mode of producing and preserving state records, databases have replaced physical objects as the most important repositories of statehood. Accordingly, Estonia launched a programme in the wake of Russia's aggression against Ukraine to establish virtual 'data embassies' in the public clouds of private companies like Google and Microsoft, and physical data embassies located in existing Estonian embassies or the data centres of Allied countries. The objective is to develop a solution whereby the Estonian state will endure in digital memory in the event of a catastrophic occupation of its entire territory. According to Lorraine Kaljund, who conducted ethnographic fieldwork with the Estonian engineers, lawyers and cyber-security experts responsible for the project, the overriding concern expressed in the guiding policy documents and the informal discourse surrounding its implementation was to provide a digital incarnation for the doctrine of state continuity (Kaljund, 2020).

While the Estonian project may be ostensibly forward-looking, its centrality to the Baltic model of public history is equally clear. The reference to 'data embassies' harkens back to the way in which Baltic diplomatic legations, mainly in the United States, kept the flame of state sovereignty alive throughout the Soviet occupation. When independence was restored in 1991, three Lithuanian legations (in Washington, London and the Vatican), one Latvian legation (in Washington) and one Estonian legation (in New York) returned to the Baltics physically to transfer relics of the pre-1940 constitutional order to the newly established constitutional bodies (Mälksoo, 2022, p. 123).

Concluding remarks

The launch of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has led to a spike in iconoclastic removals of Soviet-era war monuments in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but has had relatively little impact on historical discourse, insofar as a stable model of securitization was already established in the wake

of Russia's aggression in 2014. In other words, Russian aggression had already had a profound impact on the societies of the Baltic States, triggering a rise in paramilitarism and the securitization of memory. Meanwhile, the balance between the civic and patriotic thrust of the Baltic model of public history born in the popular movements against the Soviet regime has survived three waves of Russian aggression against its neighbours, in 2008, 2014 and 2022. While some social and political actors continue to push ultra-patriotic historical agendas and launch hate campaigns against people voicing contrary views, press and academic freedoms have not been curtailed, and the coarse pluralism of historical discourse remains in place.

The fact that the securitization of the Baltic model of public history has not led to historical revisionism or the erosion of its democratic and participatory core recalls the warning of McQuaid and Gensburger that the politics of memory is often studied 'without recourse to corresponding policy'. The administration of memory remains, they assert, 'in the abstract, and actual decision-making, (re)formation, delivery, implementation, evaluation, and feedback remains in a black box' (McQuaid and Gensburger, 2019, p. 129). Indeed, the hypothesis of ontological insecurity put forward by some theorists that the Baltic States pursued securitization because of some alleged anxiety attending accession to the EU appears strikingly off the mark against the background of Russia's aggression and the orchestrated response of national and EU-level institutions to the threat. Much of what passes as analysis of public history in the region is replete with outdated assumptions that fail to apprehend the broader evolution of policy or practice and ignore developments that are indicative of learning and adaptation.

Indeed, previously sensitive topics like the accommodation of society to Soviet structures during late socialism and the participation of locals in genocide during the German occupation are now much more widely studied and debated in public. Concerns that the spread of the Baltic model at the European level would promote the 'double genocide' theory have proven unfounded. Holocaust commemoration has become an integral part of the commemorative practices that are slowly spreading through society, driven by state policy and grassroots activism. The Baltic States are gradually assuming ownership of their histories, including the experiences of minorities—the honourable as well as the shameful moments from a difficult past.

Nevertheless, certain political groups within each of the Baltic States are trying to move in the populist direction. A mnemonic *kulturkampf* is underway, fought between various factions for control of parliaments, funding for research and the leadership of institutions. The current examples of populist rule in Poland and Hungary, including controls over the media and historical discourse, remain an attractive model and a conceivable alternative for some. Moreover, there is no dialogue on historical issues with Russia. So long as Russia threatens the sovereignty of the Baltics, dialogue and debate will be replaced by strategic communications; the danger that the Baltic States may be

tempted to mirror rather than distinguish themselves from Russia's militant memocracy should not be disregarded.

That said, any temptation to falsify history or exploit traumatic and divisive memories has largely been checked by a widespread critical awareness of how Russian propaganda is designed to divide society by inciting hatred. Indeed, the most effective sources of Eurosceptic and illiberal politics lie not in stories about the past, but in homophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric. The governments of the Baltic States remain tightly bound to the multilateral approaches of the EU and NATO, not only because they have no alternative, but because they have succeeded in securing recognition and advancing national agendas, playing a genuine part in shaping Europe's future and past. To date, at least, challenges to the Baltic model of public history have strengthened rather than derailed it.

Notes

1 The Soviet Union awarded Kononov the Order of Lenin for his wartime service. In April 2000, President Putin made Kononov an offer of Russian citizenship, which he accepted.
2 European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism.
3 Vilnius Declaration of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and resolutions adopted at the 18th annual session (29 June to 3 July 2009).
4 The 'double genocide thesis' refers to a false equivalence between the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews and the Soviet persecution of ethnic Lithuanians, with the implication that the genocide of Jews was somehow a justifiable response to a Soviet 'genocide' of Lithuanians—one in which Jews were supposed to have played an active role. This thesis was inculcated by Nazi propaganda during the war and persisted for some time at the margins of émigré circles.
5 'This Strand will support activities that invite to reflection on European cultural diversity and on common values in the broadest sense. In this context, it aims to finance projects reflecting European Commission, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV).' *Call for proposals. European Remembrance* (19 April 2021).
6 Speech by vice-minister Antanas Valys, Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania. Inclusion of civil protection/civil defence in the educational programmes of the Baltic States. Meeting of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly (12–13 February 2015), Šiauliai.
7 See the publications listed at: https://euvsdisinfo.eu/ and stratcomcoe.org.
8 Lietuvos respublikos įstatymas dėl Lietuvos laisvės kovos Sąjūdžio tarybos 1949 m. Vasario 16 d. Deklaracijos (12 January 1999) No. VIII-1021, Vilnius.
9 Lietuvos respublikos Seimo deklaracija dėl Jono Žemaičio pripažinimo Lietuvos valstybės vadovu 2009 m. kovo 12 d. Vilnius.
10 For full details, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5rQFp7FF9c.
11 For full details, see: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/07/13/russian-spokesperson-slams-nato-film-baltic-resistance-a58379.
12 Noreika was arrested by the Germans in 1943 for refusing to raise a Waffen-SS division from the local population and emerged as a leader of the anti-Soviet resistance from 1944 until his arrest and execution in 1947.

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