

Joanna Lubecka
Ignatianum University in Cracow
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2965-7925>

Maciej Zakrzewski
The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2608-7533>
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Cuius regio, eius historia?

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: The article outlines the relationship between politics and history in the period before the emergence of the politics of memory as a consciously organised state policy.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: This section discusses the historical turning points that determined the interrelationships between politics and history, with particular focus being given to the instrumentalisation of the historical narrative in political and ideological conflicts.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: Interpretation of the past has always been a vital element of the legitimisation of power, especially during momentous periods of revolutionary changes that lead to comprehensive reconstruction of not only the political but also the social and worldview spheres. Using selected examples, this section demonstrates that the most effective participants in disputes about the past included not only centres of official state power but also independent circles and political parties.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The politics of memory treated as a public policy pursued by specialised government agencies is a continuation of activities in which history was politically exploited, as has often happened in the past. It also gives these activities a new bureaucratic form which can lead to a centralised and top-down creation of historical discourse at the expense of the processes that spontaneously shape the identity of community members and are sometimes a source of conflict.

Keywords: politics of memory, public policies, legitimation of power, Ricoeur

History without Political Science has no fruit; Political Science without History has no root.

John R. Seeley

Definition of the term

The increasingly popular term 'politics of memory' is an attempt to describe and thereby also 'civilise' the relationships between politics and history.

Defined as the rational pursuit of the common good or as the competition for power, politics has always been immersed in a mythological or historical past. At times, the border between the two has been flexible as their social and political function has been far more important than their concrete, self-changing contents. Historically, the links between history and politics are obvious. Nowadays, however, the politics of memory is increasingly becoming a public policy, i.e., an area that is no longer associated with 'politics' but with 'bureaucracy'. The spontaneous polyphony of historical narratives present in international and national circulation in the past is now becoming a duty entrusted to specialised agencies which are tasked with turning particularistic identity disputes into rational debates that can be resolved in a similar way to, e.g., environmental issues.

The conscious and intentional activities of state authorities, explicitly termed the politics of memory, emerged in the second half of the 20th century, although history has been used as a political instrument since the emergence of political power and the creation of the first states.

Historical analysis of the term

Historical narratives created over the centuries have not always (or only very rarely) re-created the actual course of past events. Their distortion has occurred in two areas: during their re-creation (natural, non-intentional deformation), and during the dissemination of narratives about past events. For centuries, the desired – the appropriate and 'legitimate'

–version of a given historical narrative has been created and disseminated only by the various centres of power, primarily centralised ones, which have adequate instruments to do so. In the past, the inheritance of power by an individual or the privileged socio-political position of individual families automatically imposed the necessity of grounding their current power in the achievements of their ancestors. Court chroniclers, lawyers, and bards described and embellished a historical narrative and modelled history in accordance with the will of rulers. This was intended to convince subjects and other political actors of the rightness of ‘the cause’ or of the divine anointing of rulers or chieftains, to justify and legitimise actions, to build a narrative of eternal enmity between ‘us and them’, and to win people’s hearts and minds.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the case of Jews as the chosen people. In their opinion, history (sacred history) did not merely support the authorities but was primarily a knot that bound their community together. This knot was so fundamental that it justified Jews’ existence even though they did not have their own state. Moreover, the chosen people found the justification for the absence of their statehood in the history of salvation.

Even if, in theory, in natural or theological narratives the role of the past was marginalised, in practice – with varying degrees of intensity – the past was used as an instrument in political or world-view struggles in search of the normative origins of institutions, and as a platform for the political work of peoples deprived of the possibility of full participation in current political life due to the absence of their own state.

We would like to see history as the science of what actually happened in the past: a science that reconstructs the past, i.e., reconstructs facts and adequately describes them. However, as Paul Ricoeur wrote: “The professional historian is someone who keeps in mind the question: ‘How can I know what I am about to say?’ This mental disposition defines history as ‘research’” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 171). The historian pursues the obvious goal of the science he practices, which is to reconstruct past events by means of a description in which events are not intentionally filtered and deformed but their filtering and deformation result from the very fact that descriptions are created in a given conceptual system and language, which itself also changes over time (Koselleck, 2004).

Description is what remains of actual events. Documents or, more broadly, written sources that are left from past centuries, irrespective of human activity, are also subject to natural selection (the physical perishability of documents, their illegibility, losses caused by natural disasters, etc.). The objective reality of centuries past becomes known to subsequent generations only through the narratives of witnesses, chroniclers, and historians. However, these are subjective descriptions that are characterised by their authors' personal experiences and views (or those who commissioned their works) and the fashion and style of the era in which they were written, which justifies the claim that there is an overwhelming difference between "a history in motion and its linguistic possibility" (Koselleck, 2004, p. 223) because a researcher experiences everything that happens outside his immediate experience only through speech or writing. It is 'speech and writing' that construct our (and subsequent generations') vision of history and that 'produce memory', as the ancient Greeks used to say. In one of her essays, Hannah Arendt observed that "every selection of material in a sense interferes with history, and all criteria for selection put the historical course of events under certain manmade conditions" (Arendt, 2006, p. 49). Paul Ricoeur put it even more simply: "If one cannot recall everything, neither can one recount everything. The idea of an exhaustive narrative is a performatively impossible idea" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 448).

Thus, by the very nature of their profession, historians are forced to make choices. Their choices about what to describe and how have several aspects, of which only three directly affect the way in which a narrative is constructed and events are selected. These will be analysed below.

First, the temporal distance to the events described is of great importance. Until the 18th century, being an eyewitness to events or being their co-creator was considered a guarantee of the veracity and accuracy of the story being told. Historicism, of which the eminent German historian Leopold von Ranke is considered the father, introduced a fundamental change in this respect. He argued that the essential task of the historian is to "tell only what actually happened" ("*bloß sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen*") and that this requires a temporal (and thus also emotional) distance from the events described (von Ranke, 1824, pp. V–VI).

Second, the perspective is determined by the social or political position of the historian. In this context, the 'loser-winner' category deserves special attention. When Thucydides wrote *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, when Tacitus wrote *The Histories*, and when Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, they were all political losers. A loser looks at events from a different perspective than a winner; in describing events he develops different, often new themes to analyse the mistakes and reasons for his defeat. The pressure to explain the reasons for defeat prompts authors to analyse events in greater depth and reflect on them more deeply, but it also often motivates large communities to suppress the defeat or to 'turn it into a success' or a 'moral victory'. A good example of the former is post-World War II Germany, which celebrates the date of 8 May, i.e., the signing of the surrender, as the date of the rebirth of democratic Germany. A 'moral victory' is a construct that accompanies political defeat, but in addition to being a cliché used to justify the causes of defeat, in today's world it can also be a powerful instrument in international relations. In an ancient narrative, the defeat at Thermopylae constituted considerable moral capital on which the identity of all Hellenes (not only the Spartans) was built. The Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, despite its defeat, also became a moral victory that soon brought political gains. So, a loser who is able to exploit his defeat politically can also be a moral winner. However, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that a new 'victim-perpetrator' dichotomy was introduced into the discussion in which being a victim does not always mean being a total loser and in which victims were given a voice. Being a victim became a political value helpful in the acquisition of 'moral capital', which in turn became a tool in international politics as it harnessed public emotion and aroused empathy for victims on a significant scale (good examples here are the Holocaust or the contemporary discussion on the victims of modern colonialism) (Łuczewski, 2017).

Third, the choices historians make are determined by whether they are co-participants in the political, religious, social, or economic events they narrate and whether they support events by directly affirming or participating in them. Basically, until the 16th century, the creation of historical narratives was monopolised by centres of power, which fought against competing interpretations of history. Although during the Middle Ages there was an *ius resistendi* in normative acts (e.g., in the English

Magna Carta Libertatum of 1215, the Hungarian Golden Bull of 1222, and King Henry's Articles of 1573 in Poland), it was rarely applied in practice because of the risk that it would violate the existing social order (Skomiał, 2015, p. 88). If political events undermined the legitimacy of power, such as in the case of the Carolingian seizure of power (which was a kind of palace coup with the consent of the Pope), and if the seizure of power was successful, as it was in this case, a new narrative was constructed and over time new founding myths displaced old ones. The chronicles of the Carolingian rulers invariably referred to the Merovingian rulers as 'do-nothing kings' (*les rois fainéants*).

The actual rivalry between the various medieval historical political narratives took place in the international arena. Above all, it was a competition between the Empire and the Papacy for supremacy in universalist Europe. Although at times it escalated, e.g., during the investiture controversy (between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV), this competition generally took place within the 'alliance of throne and altar'. Its main point of reference was the dispute over the universal heritage of Rome (as an empire and as Holy See) and, in this context, the conflict over leadership in the Christian world.

A good example here which also foreshadows the changes brought about by the Reformation is Jan Hus's attempt to break the 'universalist monopoly' by challenging the scope of imperial power in Bohemia. Accused of 'offending Christianity' and ultimately of heresy and burned at the stake at the Council of Constance, Hus was the creator of an alternative narrative about the history and place of Bohemia in the Holy Roman Empire. Although he did not explicitly challenge the legitimacy of the emperor's power, but only its scope, his views were considered dangerous to political stability.

The Reformation brought an end to the narrative based on the bipolar arrangement of 'throne and altar'. The end of political and cultural unity defined by religion led to the destruction of the monopoly on conveying the story of what happened in the past. Individual state political centres emerged which both destroyed the previous vision of history with a universalist ruler at the head of Europe and dethroned the momentous role of the papacy. The principle *cuius regio, eius religio* completed the destruction of the monopoly of the 'universalist narrative'. In the following centuries, the sense of distinctiveness of individual nations, which were

no longer equated with a specific monarch (dynasty) or even with the sacred history of salvation, became stronger and a particular collectivity constructed itself from scratch. Along with nations, it was inevitable that different visions of their histories would appear on the stage of European history.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the ground-breaking processes that took place in the perception of the past in England in the 17th and 18th centuries, given that – until the American and especially the French Revolution – this country was the main centre for all new trends.

First, deistic approaches appeared in the 1720s. Admittedly, their proponents focused on philosophical criticism of revealed religion and on the formulation of arguments in favour of natural religion, but historical criticism was commonly used in the ‘naturalist’ battle against Revelation. Authors such as Charles Blount, John Toland, and Henry Saint John Bolingbroke juxtaposed the results of historical research with biblical descriptions and demonstrated their unreliability: previously, historiography had been intended to reveal the ‘mythicism’ of sacred history. Whereas, for Saint Augustine, secular history was merely an episode – sometimes only a shadow – of the proper history of the pilgrimage of the Kingdom of God, deists put both Revelation and *historia sacra* on trial before the tribunal of Reason. In France, the philosophers of the Enlightenment era zealously fought against providential historiography rooted in the Augustinian tradition: in his *Philosophy of History*, with his typical arbitrariness, Voltaire attacked the old approaches based on Providence and at the same time introduced measures of ‘enlightenment’ and ‘superstition’ into the evaluation of history.

Second, historical research started to seek justification for the demands voiced by the parties in internal political conflicts. Theological and philosophical arguments were still used, but historians introduced a new dimension. The dispute over the ancient constitution of England that began in the 17th century was between supporters of the ancient common law tradition (who recognised the existence of a pre-Norman system of laws as the determinant for the legitimacy of various institutions, including parliament) and historians such as Henry Spelman and Robert Brady, who argued that the Norman invasion and the feudal law introduced afterwards was the proper origin of English law, and that parliament had no pre-Norman genealogy because prior to the invasion

it was merely an assemblage of the king's immediate vassals and had no legitimacy independent of the king's will (Pocock, 1957). Interestingly, however, the arguments of the proponents of 'feudal law' were not always used by the Tories (who traditionally supported the throne). In the 18th century, this narrative was far more decidedly supported by the Wigs – who at that time held power and supported the Hanoverian dynasty – than by the Tories, who referred to the tradition of a long-standing constitution, which they had previously rejected. The American and French revolutions changed things abruptly by forcing the elites to realise that a new narrative had to be created that would bind societies together, not necessarily in support of the idea of monarchy but perhaps against it. Moreover, new history needed to justify a new beginning symbolised not only by a new constitution but even, in the French case, by a new calendar. The new narrative had to reinterpret the history of the state and the nation, but it could not discard all its previous elements as such a far-reaching revolution of the collective memory of society (or rather of its elites) would probably be unacceptable. It was necessary to construct an 'invented' identity, as Dariusz Gawin (2010, p. 25) calls it, to build a new system of rituals, symbols, and meanings, and to create a new narrative that would preserve the old social ties but around new values. The authorities of the new republics, although they built state organisms on the foundations of the antithesis of the old regimes, nevertheless had to refer to the past and seek in it the legitimacy of their power. A new historical narrative thus referred to an intentionally 'chosen' tradition with new and different heroes, festivals, and symbols. The period of *sacra historia* was coming to an end and was being replaced by *historia saecularis*. On the ruins of the former, great liberal syntheses that portrayed the past as a march towards freedom were erected in the 19th century. When Whig historiography, represented by Lord Acton and Thomas Macaulay, was born in England, Michelet's great synthesis of French history emerged with its white legend of the Great French Revolution on the other side of the English Channel.

There was a growing awareness that words could change the perception of the past. As Koselleck put it:

As soon as such concepts become irreplaceable and unexchangeable, they become basic concepts which no political or linguistic community can do without.

At the same time, they become contested because different speakers want to impose a monopoly (Koselleck, 2009, p. 104).

Discussion of the term

The modern era is characterised by the increasingly conscious use of history in politics, but the increasing instrumentalisation of history has led to tensions that stem from the “infuriating stubbornness of facts” (Arendt, 2006, p. 236). Since the monopoly on the dissemination of the historical narrative ended, the politics of memory has become an increasingly difficult art to practice.

There is a natural tension between memory, especially collective memory, and politics. It stems from the relationship between these two concepts and truth. Between history, understood as a reliable reconstruction of the past, and politics, which *per se* uses history instrumentally, there exists a fundamental contradiction which was well captured by Hannah Arendt:

The trouble is that factual truth, like all other truth, peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate, and debate constitutes the very essence of political life. [...] Facts are beyond agreement and consent, and all talk about them – all exchanges of opinion based on correct information – will contribute nothing to their establishment. Unwelcome opinion can be argued with, rejected, or compromised upon, but unwelcome facts possess an infuriating stubbornness that nothing can move except plain lies (Arendt, 2006, p. 236).

Who are the “language users” that seek to impose their own interpretation of history on others? When does “history become the servant of politics”? This political ‘service’ offered by history to politics intuitively evokes negative associations with manipulation and instrumentalisation. However, deeper reflection reveals many arguments in favour of a certain directing of a historical narrative, especially from the perspective of the state, defined as a permanent community of citizens. If it is assumed that a historical narrative is, by its very nature, a selective message and largely dependent on its narrator, why not consider it acceptable to interfere with it in the name of a justified *raison d’état* or the internal integration of a community? It is worth adding here that the question of the acceptability of one or another politics of memory is a totally

contemporary issue and is characteristic of a democratic system. In the past, state authorities pursued the politics of memory at their own discretion; sometimes they took into account the balance of power within the state, but they also tried to neutralise competing centres, following the principle that “a revolution begins with words”.

As was already mentioned, the turning point in the dissemination of a historical narrative was the period of the Reformation (in which the printing press played a significant role) and the Enlightenment, which gave rise to the establishment of the first modern republics (American and French). The revolutionary role played by the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* in the pluralisation of a historical narrative was also mentioned. This principle, introduced at the Peace of Augsburg, gave rise to the concept of *res publica* as a legal person of public order and thus granted political subjectivity to rulers who were previously subordinated to the empire or the papacy. Granting them the *ius reformandi* strengthened their impact on the historical narrative and led to an alliance between conservative religions and rulers in order to impose certain political and religious solutions on citizens by means of state laws. As a result, the position of the official state churches strengthened and opposition to the activities of dissenters increased, and their role was marginalised by both political and formal-legal instruments (e.g., Anabaptists, Antitrinitarians, and Arians). Religious issues were subordinated to political issues. An interesting consequence of the introduction of the *cuius regio* principle was the equation of a nation with religion, thus the significance of the national narrative increased and would become even greater in modern times.

The establishment of the 18th-century republics necessitated the integration of society around new or redefined old values and the legitimisation of new authorities which lacked divine mandate. As Tocqueville wrote, the ‘patriotism of the monarchy’ was instinctive, while the ‘patriotism of the republic’ was reflective:

Peoples have been encountered who have, in some fashion, personified the native country and have caught a glimpse of it in the prince. They have therefore carried over to him a part of the sentiment of which patriotism is composed; they have become haughty with his triumphs and have taken pride in his power (Tocqueville, 2000, p. 225).

New republican authorities had to create their own ‘founding myths’ and their own interpretations of history.

In the modern era (the 19th century being of key importance here), marked by technological progress which facilitated the effortless spread of ideas, groups that opposed the ruling powers – not necessarily derived from the political elites (e.g., socialism and communism) – created their own competing narratives which ‘told history anew’. History was becoming a tool which was increasingly consciously used in politics.

This obvious synergy between history and politics was noted by German historians in the 19th century, including Leopold von Ranke, Heinrich von Sybel, Heinrich von Stein, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, all of whom emphasised, however, that this interdependence should not be used to manipulate (*Geschichtsfälschung*) or mythologise (*Mythologisierung*) the past. Germany (Prussia) became the cradle of historical education, which, according to its creators, was supposed to build a shared identity for the nation. Stanisław Salmonowicz, an eminent expert on Prussian history, wrote:

The monarchy supported education on ideological grounds as a method of ideological pressure on the subject, and above all as an element of economic development (Salmonowicz, 1998, p. 221).

Perhaps such a model of the internal politics of memory in Prussia does not arouse our enthusiasm, but it is a perfect example of the instrumentalisation of history for political purposes. Simplifying somewhat, it can be said that the effectiveness of this model of education was proven on the battlefields, as the leading French politician of the time, Leon Gambetta, emphatically expressed after France’s defeat by Prussia in the War of 1870: “the Prussian schoolmaster won the last war” (Rothbard, 1999, p. 29).

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that [h]istory belongs, above all, to the active and powerful man and is thus instrumental to the governing powers of states, regardless of their regimes (Nietzsche, 1874, p. 7) Ricoeur referred to Nietzschean powers as “higher powers” that “take over this emplotment and impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 448). In the anarchic world of international relations, in which states struggle for better positioning that ultimately translates into political success and

economic gains, the historical narrative of one's state, its place and position in world history, does matter. Winston Churchill allegedly once said: "History will be kind to me for I intend to write it myself". States and nations fight for the right to impose their 'monopoly of interpretation' and thus to make history 'kind' to them, which is why states distribute memory and historical narratives. To a large extent, this is, of course, linked to the politics of memory and societies' expectation that the best possible image of their country should be presented in the international arena. It seems almost impossible to find any common interpretations of particular events offered by different states, and clashes between disseminations of memory are sometimes painful.

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

In the 20th century, the awareness of the politics of memory as a political instrument of power and social change was first recognised by Russian communists, who from the very beginning began a process of 'rewriting history' according to the determinants of the Marxist doctrine and the political strategy of their movement. The most glaring testimony to this instrumental approach is *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, commissioned by Joseph Stalin, in which the historical message had an explicitly political function. Marxist historiography was a form of 'partyised politics of memory' pursued by the countries in which Communist parties took power.

In Poland, the official authorities made an effort to write history based on a class scheme of interpreting history, in which they emphasised those elements which by their 'progressive' character confirmed the validity of Marx's doctrine and dismissed those that did not fit as 'reactionary'. This official version of Polish history also accounted for the 'geopolitical' dimension by downplaying anti-Russian elements and emphasising pro-Russian ones. This 'geopolitical' theme was particularly important because it touched on Poland's relations with the Soviet Union, which were fundamental from the point of view of Polish communists. This theme was sometimes expressed more violently than the 'class' theme, which was particularly evident in the reaction of the authorities to the

staging of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady, Część III (Forefathers' Eve, Part III)* in March 1968.

It should be remembered, however, that tactical flexibility was evident in the communist politics of memory. Depending on political necessity, selected non-Marxist elements of national history were used to strengthen legitimacy or to forge certain political attitudes. A telling example was the official permission to publish works devoted to Józef Piłsudski and to print Roman Dmowski's writings in the second half of the 1970s (and especially in the 1980s). Historically, they represented an explicitly anti-communist ideological programme and they were useful from the perspective of the political goal of retaining power. Communists used non-communist national narratives which supported the justification of authoritarian rule or expressed a favourable geopolitical orientation (Dmowski's realist pro-Russianism and anti-Germanism). The selective and clearly profiled inclusion of such narratives in public opinion was intended to counter the increasingly popular myth of 'pre-September Poland', which clearly contrasted with the People's Republic of Poland; its goal was to strengthen the legitimacy of the system of power through "non-socialist" themes.

Such actions provoked reactions from independent Polish groups in exile. The most important émigré circles saw the need to conduct reliable historical research and offer a narrative different from the one presented by communists. A number of organisations outside the country, such as the Piłsudski Institute in New York and London and the Polish University Abroad, made efforts to conduct reliable research. Undoubtedly, the circle of Jerzy Giedroyc and the Literary Institute in Maisons-Laffitte undertook the most comprehensive activities that could be called historical 'counter-politics', which worked in a number of directions. First, from the very beginning, historical publications (including books, memoirs, studies, polemics, and selections of sources) were given a prominent place in the publishing strategy of the Literary Institute. Second, apart from the "Kultura" ["Culture"] journal, in 1962 the Literary Institute in Maisons-Laffitte started publishing the "Zeszyty Historyczne" journal ["Historical Notebooks"], which for years was the most important forum for independent historical thought, the output of which can hardly be overestimated. Third, in these two journals, a genuine debate on sensitive topics was initiated, often provocatively, which was impossible in Poland and served

at the same time as a form of education for the Polish nation. Giedroyc understood perfectly well the importance of history as an instrument of political influence, but also, as Piotr Wandycz emphasised, he saw the importance of history for shaping proper mature political attitudes in the nation (Pomorski, 2017, p. 239). In this last respect, he was heir to the Kraków historical school, which saw history as a means for learning political craftsmanship at a time when practical learning through action within sovereign politics was not possible.

The circles of, in particular, the Literary Institute recognised the importance of history in their relations with other nations, including in terms of international politics. This is why Poland's relations with Jews, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Germans were so often discussed. All these debates, sometimes conducted among Poles themselves, had not only a historical dimension but also a political one. Giedroyc realised only too well the burden of 20th-century history, which could make any positive political programme impossible. History was one of the fronts of the ULB (Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus) doctrine. A look through the annals of "Kultura" and "Zeszyty Historyczne" or other publications of the Literary Institute reveals that the debates conducted within their pages are the same debates that are held in Poland today, and – as in the past – they still arouse emotions.

The project of liberal democracy, as Ralf Dahrendorf wrote, is a 'cold project' which leaves man 'without a roof over his head' and without a sense of community (Dahrendorf, 1996, p. 9). Francis Fukuyama's proclamation of the end of history marked not only the triumph of individual rights and democracy, but also – using Hegelian terminology – the reign of a bureaucratic machine that safeguards a non-political system of organised freedom. Conflict in this area is invariably reduced to technical solutions.

However, it is clear that the prophesied 'end of history' did not occur. Political rivalry has returned, and with it not only the demand for 'useful' history but also the demand for an unsteered communal identity. Because history is always communal and never liberal in its nature, history is not reduced to a mere account of facts when the temperature of disputes rise. It takes on a renewed political significance. In the Hegelian tradition, 'the end of history' meant the end of politics, as one cannot happen without the other.

Europe entered the illusion of the ‘end of history’ at different rates. In the central and eastern parts of the continent, it was a rather pleasant but short-lived fad that brought people from these regions some optimism after the dark years of communist dictatorship. In fact, however, this part of the continent never escaped from the ‘need for history’, which is something the West never understood.

Russia’s return to its politics of expansion, which it had pursued for a long time, was accompanied, at the vanguard (as it always had been), by a change in its historical narrative (see also Adamski’s article “Russia’s politics of memory”). The new stage of the war in Ukraine (it should be remembered that the conflict began in 2014) also prompts in Western societies the need to reflect on their own memory as well as on the history of the entire continent.

Politics has the power to ignite conflicts over symbols (historical disputes represent such conflicts), but it also has the power to extinguish them. Not only is politics born out of history, but also history is born out of politics. So perhaps the end of the ‘end of history’ – so clearly symbolised by the House of European History in Brussels – opens up the possibility of not only more serious politics but also a more valuable discussion about the past.

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