

In search of lost time: memory politics in Estonia, 1991–2011

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(Received 12 February 2012; final version received 1 May 2012)

This article analyzes memory politics during the first 20 years (1991–2011) of the newly independent Estonia. Memory politics is understood as a politics endeavoring to shape the society's collective memory and establish notions of what is and is not to be remembered of the past, employing to this end both legislative means and practical measures. The paper presents one possible scheme for analyzing Estonian memory politics and limits its treatment in two important ways. Firstly, the focus is on national memory politics, that is the decisions of the parliament, government, and president oriented toward shaping collective memory. And second, only internal memory politics is discussed; that is, bi- or multilateral memory-political relations with other states or political unions are not examined separately. The analysis is built on four interrelated dimensions of memory politics, which have played the most important roles in Estonia: the legal, institutional, commemorative, and monumental dimensions. Also, a general characterization and temporal articulation of memory politics in newly independent Estonia is proposed.

Keywords: memory politics; history politics; transitional justice; Estonia

Major upheavals in the present generally cause a society to pay more attention to the past. Transitional societies always work in two directions at once: they are building a bright future and settling their accounts with a complicated past. Indeed, in that turmoil of change, models for the future are frequently borrowed from the past, so that the society finds itself hitched to its previously suppressed or forbidden inheritance. Intensive work with the heritage of recent history – something that can be described as social memory work – implies that in transitional societies the past is never just “another country” deprived of all topicality, “but a positive archipelago of vulnerable historical territories, to be preserved from attacks and distortions perpetrated by the occupants of a neighbouring island of memory” (Judt 2002, 172).

In recent years, three largely synonymous terms that try to conceptualize contemporary societies' intensive relationship with the past – *history politics*, *past politics*, and *memory politics* – have gained currency in the specialized literature. All these terms became popular more or less simultaneously over the second half of the 1990s, primarily in German and English literature.¹ In the interest of clarity, however, I find it necessary to make a tentative distinction between them. By *history politics*, I mean activity of the public authority that aims at a conscious shaping and influencing of the study of the past (working out an official account of history, as it were) (see for example Wolfrum 1999; Heinrich and Kohlstruck 2008; Heisler 2008). By *past politics*, I mean politics that aims at shaping certain attitudes toward the past in the society, either holding up or spurning certain persons or episodes in order to accomplish that (see for example Frei

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1996; Andrieu, Lavabre, and Tartakowsky 2006; Art 2006). By *memory politics*, I mean a politics endeavoring to shape the society's collective memory and establish notions of what is and is not to be remembered of the past, employing to this end both legislative means (by instituting historical anniversaries, rehabilitating certain persons, condemning certain ideologies, etc.) and practical measures (organizing public rituals, erecting monuments, building museums, etc.) (see for example De Brito, González-Enríquez, and Aguilar 2001; Gready 2003; Kahler and Poltermann 2003; Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006; Art 2010).

In the following paper, I examine the social and political developments in newly independent Estonia primarily in the key of memory politics; however, for greater breadth of view I shall somewhat extend the definition presented above and dwell also on some decisions of the history-political and past-political kind. While so doing, I intend to treat memory politics as part of a more general identity politics (Calhoun 1994; McDonald 2008) that aims at shaping a given community's basic values and principles of belonging. Memory is the cornerstone of all identity creation and thus it is not unexpected that memory politics plays a key role in identity politics, that "*how* we remember shapes *what* we can imagine as possible" (Gruz 2000, 311). Since I focus on the memory politics of public authority, it might be useful to distinguish two different politics of the shaping of identity creation: the *identity politics* that came into being in the 1960s and was characteristic of the aspiration of social minority groups to win greater recognition for their identities by the dominating communities; and the *politics of identity* that works mainly on the national level and aims at shaping identity from top to bottom (see Sicakhan and Lithman 2005).

Social developments in Estonia, and more generally in the Baltic states, since regaining their independence have already attracted researchers' attention in terms of memory and history politics,² but the more panoramic studies are still to be written. In the present paper, I intend to present one possible scheme for analyzing Estonian memory politics in 1991–2011, limiting my treatment in two important ways. First, I will only examine *national* memory politics, that is the decisions of the parliament, government, and president oriented toward shaping collective memory. And second, I shall discuss only *internal* memory politics, that is, I shall not examine separately bi- or multilateral memory-political relations with other states or political unions (in which sphere special attention must be paid to relations with Russia and the EU; see Onken 2007a; Berg and Ehin 2009). Admittedly, this kind of "top-to-bottom" analysis torn out of its broader context remains unable to offer a comprehensive overview of the subject matter; yet, it presents a possible departure point for further studies. The analysis is built on four inter-related dimensions of memory politics, which in my judgment have played the most important part in Estonia: the *legal*, *institutional*, *commemorative*, and *monumental* dimensions. The four dimensions are of course tightly intertwined and have been distinguished here only in the interest of clarity. But to begin with, I shall give a general characterization and temporal articulation of memory politics in newly independent Estonia.

The evolution and course of memory politics

The foundations of the official memory politics of the restored Estonian Republic were laid at the end of the 1980s, when the principles were defined and organizations created that began to shape the political decisions of the subsequent decades. In Estonia, the policy of *perestroika* initiated by the new secretary general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, evolved from 1986 onwards mainly in the form of environmental protection and heritage protection: these were the two pivotal

movements that paved the way for restoring political independence. From the point of view of memory politics, the key event was the foundation of the Estonian Heritage Society (EHS) in Tallinn, 12 December 1987. The EHS quickly spread all over Estonia, and by the end of 1988, 185 local cells comprising about 6000 members had sprung up (Seltsi ajalugu, n.d.). The society focused on gathering, recording, and studying historical memory, elevating the concept of “memory” to a catchword of the period, as one of the leaders of the movement (and later prime minister) Mart Laar wrote in 1988: “Just like 100 years ago, so also in the present era of awakening, *memory* has become one of the catchwords” (Laar 1988a, 76). The same is borne out by the first public address of the EHS in February 1988: “It seems that the struggle for our own history, our own memory is becoming one of the prevalent ideas of the new ‘age of awakening’” (Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts 1988, 258). With that same address, the EHS launched a nationwide initiative for gathering historical tradition in order to “glean truthful facts about the history of Estonia, keep memories of the past alive for the coming generations, preserve and protect our historical memory” (Laar 1988a, 76).

The rapid emergence of historical memory (or oral history) at the end of the 1980s is of course related to the history (and memory) politics of the Soviet era. The emphases of the new (as yet grass-root-level) national memory politics evolved in clear opposition to those of the toppled regime: all the historical topics that had been taboo under the previous regime were re-opened, and an avowedly genuine historical memory was set against the predecessor’s red-tape historiography. But equally as important as setting the new approach apart from the Soviet-style treatment of history was anchoring it in prewar historical traditions. So, for brevity’s sake, I propose that the new Estonian memory politics of the end of the 1980s can be characterized mainly by two key words: *repression* and *restoration*.

As soon as the first cracks appeared in the Soviet memory regime at the end of the 1980s, treatments of the memories of the suppressed – primarily of the deported and of the “forest brothers” (anti-Soviet partisans) – began to ooze out through them (see Anepaio 2003), first in fiction (by Heino Kiik, Jaan Kruusvall, Viivi Luik, Arvo Valton, etc.) but soon also in historical writings. In a Freudian spirit, this surge of a nation-wide interest in the repressed observable at the end of the 1980s could be called a kind of collective “return of the repressed.” From the viewpoint of memory politics, the historian Evald Laasi’s newspaper article, “Filling In Some Gaps,” published in November 1987 – the first work that publicly, and citing concrete numbers, took up the issue of the deportations – can be regarded as the opening shot of this return. In its wake there followed a surge of memoirs, surveys, and discussions of the theme of deportations that spread like wildfire, culminating around the 40th anniversary, in 1989, of the March deportation. That tragic anniversary was commemorated with several mass ceremonies, great media attention, and the rehabilitative joint “Address to All the Inhabitants of Estonia” (“Pöördumine Eestimaa elanike poole” 1989) by all the contemporary institutions of power. On 25 March of the same year, the Memento Union was founded – an organization uniting and representing the repressed with the professed aim of assuring the protection of the legal and social rights of the repressed, as well as gathering and recording their memories. Already a few months earlier, on 7 December 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR had passed the law On the Extrajudicial Mass Repressions in Soviet Estonia During the 1940s and 1950s, which can be regarded as one of the founding documents of Estonia’s new memory politics (Seadus kohtuväliste massirepressioonide kohta 1988). Among other things, it declared that “the extra-judicial mass repressions carried out in Soviet Estonia in the 1940s and 1950s must be completely and unconditionally condemned and denounced as unlawful acts and crimes against humanity.” About a year later,

on 12 November 1989, another political decision related to memory was passed by the Supreme Soviet: On the Historical and Legal Assessment of the Events of 1940 in Estonia, which characterized the annexation of Estonia by the USSR as “an act of aggression” and “military occupation.”

In the 1980s, the new emerging memory politics fed on the idea of legal and historical continuity: all the memory-political measures were legitimized by a desire to return to prewar traditions and institutions, to restore everything destroyed or condemned to neglect by the Soviet period (Lagerspetz 1999; Aleksahhina 2006; V. Pettai 2007, 2010b). That ideology of restoration could take very specific forms in memory politics, such as the massive restoration of monuments to the War of Independence, the reinstating of prewar place, town, street, and house names, the re-institution of old anniversaries, or the re-interment of politicians in their homeland from the interwar independence period. But the same sentiment was also expressed on the more general level of historical interpretations, such as a return to the prewar national romanticist models of history well represented by the book *Kodu lugu (Country History)* – a short survey of Estonian history published in 1989 in two parts and co-authored by Mart Laar, Lauri Vahre, and Heiki Valk (see Kaljundi 2009). The book vividly expresses the notion that the past plays a crucial role in the building of a future – a fundamental notion for all memory politics: “By holding on to its past, the Estonian nation was actually making its way into a future” (Laar, Vahre, and Valk 1989, 66).

Strictly speaking, the desire of many social leaders from the 1980s on to “restore to the people their expropriated history” (Laar 1988b, 11) of course consisted not only in introducing unfamiliar or forbidden episodes and figures of that history, but also in shaping a new history and memory politics. “What took place was not only a *reconstruction* of the historical memory: it was also a process of *construction*. Not only were new facts presented to the public, but also what was previously known came to be interpreted in a new way” (Lagerspetz 1996, 73). Thus, it was not only scenarios for the future that became bones of contention on the threshold of the new independence, but equally zealous battles were fought over what, who, and how should be commemorated. I have previously described the foundation of independent Estonia as the building of a “republic of historians,” since both in the movement for independence and later in the government of the new republic the leading role was taken by politicians who were historians by profession and who first made their names in the heritage protection movement and by publishing articles on history in newspapers and magazines (Tamm 2006, 136–38). During the transition period, history was not just about the past; “history became an argument for restoring national independence” (Kõresaar 2005, 20).

It might be accorded that the period sketched above, that is the years 1987–1990, was the formative stage of the memory politics of the newly independent Estonia – the time when the main themes of the national memory politics-to-be were framed at the grass-roots level, as it were; when the key concepts were defined and a provisional network of institutions was created. For greater clarity of presentation, I shall complete here the temporal articulation of memory politics – the exact meaning of which will unfold below – by suggesting that the next period falls between the years 1991 and 1994. This period comprises the work of the Constitutional Assembly, the government of Mart Laar, and the better part of the work of the new Riigikogu (Parliament) – the seventh in overall count – and of the first term in office of President Lennart Meri. During that time, the Riigikogu passed a number of acts of memory that were of political significance and created a legal framework for the measures to follow. These included the Law on the Rehabilitation of the Repressed (19 February 1992), the Oath of Conscience Act (8 July

1992), the Law of Preserving and Gathering the Materials of Foreign States' Security and Intelligence Organizations (10 March 1994), and the Law of Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes (9 November 1994). Thus, it can be said that in these years, memory politics was dominated by a legal dimension. Yet, institutional memory politics was not neglected either. In that period, a State Commission for Examining the Policies of Repression and Crimes against Humanity was created by a decision of the Supreme Soviet (26 March 1992); it was later renamed by the Riigikogu the State Commission for the Examination of Repressive Policies Carried Out during the Occupations (17 June 1993). The new Public Holidays and Days of National Importance Act (8 February 1994) that provided a provisional structure for the new national order of commemoration also dates from the same period.

The next period in Estonian memory politics could tentatively be delimited by the years 1995–2000, encompassing the eighth Riigikogu, four governments, and the second term in office of President Lennart Meri. The memory-political decisions of the period were characterized by following up and elaborating the existing principles, as well as a certain softening of positions in connection with the movement toward membership in the EU and NATO. Similarly to the previous period, the legal dimension remained prevalent in memory politics. Among other things, a law was passed that regulated the registration and disclosure of persons who had co-operated with the security and intelligence organs of occupying powers (6 February 1995), and the first list of such collaborators who had not registered themselves as required by the law was published in the *Riigi Teataja* (*State Gazette*, hereafter RT) on 30 January 1997. In 1996, the first criminal case under the paragraph of crimes against humanity was taken to court; however, the trial was discontinued because of the decline of both defendants' health. An important landmark was the forming of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity by President Meri on 2 October 1998, opening a new stage in institutional memory politics.

The third period in memory politics began in the new millennium and can tentatively be said to have ended with the Bronze Soldier crisis of 2007 (see below). This period of 2001–2007 saw almost two full terms of the Riigikogu, and the president of the republic was Arnold Rüütel. The period was opened by outgoing President Meri's tour through all Estonian counties in the summer of 2001, on the 60th anniversary of the deportation of 1941; during that tour, the persons repressed by the occupational powers received the Badge of the Broken Cornflower from the president. A few years later, the badge was officially confirmed by the government of the republic as the external sign of a repressed person (27 February 2004). In contrast to the previous periods, the monumental dimension now came to the fore in Estonian memory politics, beginning with the "War of the Monuments" that began in Pärnu in 2002 and culminating in Tallinn in 2007 with the clash of conflicting views of the past. On 18 June 2002, the Riigikogu passed the declaration On the Crimes of the Occupation Regimes in Estonia, in which all the institutions of the Soviet Union's communist regime that had perpetrated crimes against humanity and war crimes in Estonia were declared as criminal. A year and a half later, the Parliament passed the Persons Repressed by Occupying Powers Act (17 December 2003), which for the first time defined an "unlawfully repressed person" and his or her rights. In June 2003, the privately run Museum of Occupations was opened in Tallinn and immediately won official support from state authorities.

According to the proposed periodization, the last stage in newly independent Estonia's memory politics began in 2008 and, in my judgment, still continues in 2011, the year with which the present survey closes. Throughout the period, the head of government has been Andrus Ansip, who was confirmed in that office by the 11th Riigikogu, whose term of

office also falls in the same period. The office of the president has for the main part of the period been filled by Toomas Hendrik Ilves. This period has been characterized by a new surge in the importance of memory politics, particularly on the institutional and monumental levels, exemplified by the erection of the War of Independence Victory Column in Tallinn and the lively discussion that accompanied it. Moreover, the Estonian Memory Institute was established by President Ilves (1 February 2008) to ensure that the work of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, which had officially concluded its research at the end of the same year, could be continued in a new form. Over that last period, two new public holidays were also added to the former order of commemoration – the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communism and Nazism (23 August), and the Day of Remembrance for Resistance (22 September).

The legal dimension of memory politics

National memory politics can be enacted in Estonia primarily via legislative means: through the laws, resolutions, and declarations of the Riigikogu and the regulations and orders of the government, complemented by the president's speeches and initiatives. In a society liberated from a totalitarian regime and building up a democratic order, this kind of legislative activity takes on a special weight and significance in assessing the past. In the context of such changes, judicature is, as a rule, faced with a dilemma. "Law is caught between the past and the future, between backward-looking and forward-looking, between retrospective and prospective, between the individual and the collective" (Teitel 2000, 6). In the specialized literature, the entirety of the legal and legislative activities of this kind of a transitional period is usually designated by the term *transitional justice*. The term derives from the period immediately after World War II (the Nuremberg trials), but came into wider currency in the 1980s and gathered new momentum in connection with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Teitel 2000; Elster 2004; Stan 2009b; Nalepa 2010). In its broad sense, transitional justice is virtually synonymous with national memory politics, i.e. it includes all kinds of decisions taken by the legislative, executive, and judicial powers oriented toward assessing and reassessing the past.³ In the present article, however, I shall use this term in a more restricted sense, paying attention only to such legislation as deals with compensating for and condemning the injustice suffered in the past, and the court cases related to it.

In Estonia, legislative work aimed at reassessing past events began even before the declaration of renewed independence, at the end of the 1980s. The first step in that direction was the Law on the Extrajudicial Mass Repressions in Soviet Estonia during the 1940s and 1950s (7 December 1988), which (1) mandated that all persons who had suffered in mass repressions be rehabilitated; and (2) charged the Prosecutor's Office of the ESSR with investigating the possible crimes committed in the course of these repressions. The persons repressed during and after World War II indeed became the first object of legislative attention in newly independent Estonia. To complement the law passed in December, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR a few months later deemed it necessary to pass a decree, On the Rehabilitation of Persons Extrajudicially Repressed or Wrongfully Convicted (RT 1990, 7, 85), which specified the legal grounds for rehabilitation. The Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Estonia, which began its work on 29 March 1990, set out to complement and specify the decisions of its predecessor, and on 19 February 1992, the law On the Rehabilitation of Persons Extrajudicially Repressed and Wrongfully Convicted (RT 1992, 7, 103) was adopted. The law declared null and void all the measures taken by the Soviet repressive organs against the inhabitants of

Estonia, and decreed restoration or compensation for expropriated property to the repressed. In addition to legal assessments, the law offered a clear memory-political interpretation of the past, defining as “unlawfully repressed” those persons “who fought for the independence of the Republic of Estonia and against the injustice done to the Estonian people.”

Although somewhat later, in November 1993, the law was amended by the Riigikogu (RT I 1993, 76, 1128), a conclusive solution to the issue of repressed persons was arrived at only in the early 2000s. On 17 December 2003, the Riigikogu adopted the Persons Repressed by Occupying Powers Act (RT I 2003, 88, 589), which for the first time defined an unlawfully repressed person and established such persons’ allowances, benefits, and pension rights. The purpose of the law, as professed by its opening sentence, was “to alleviate the injustice done to unlawfully repressed persons by the states that occupied Estonia from 16 June 1940 to 20 August 1991.” The law also charged the government with the task of organizing “the perpetuation of the memory of persons repressed and equated to the repressed, and of investigating the repressive politics of the occupying states.” In the wake of the 2003 law, the government adopted a number of regulations that established the procedure for issuing special identification certificates to repressed persons, and for applying for health benefits and public transport benefits.

The legal activities of the Republic of Estonia were aimed not only at rehabilitating the repressed but also at punishing the repressors (Ellis 1997, 191–92; Jaskovska and Moran 2006; Stan 2009a, 235; V. Pettai 2010a). In the Constitutional Assembly, legal arguments broke out over a paragraph in the Implementation Act of the Constitution that barred those who had participated in the repressive and prosecution activities of the occupying regime from seeking either elected or appointed office. That issue heated up passions through at least six sessions of the Assembly, beginning with January 1992 when it was first put on the agenda (*Põhiseadus ja Põhiseaduse* 1997, 697–923.). Discussions broke out first over the question as to whether a paragraph so restrictive of civic rights should be approved at all, and continued, after majority approval, as a dispute over what kind of positions that had been held in the occupation structures should be singled out as odious. The camp that deemed it unnecessary to add the restrictive paragraph was represented in the Assembly, *inter alios*, by poet and translator Ain Kaalep, who found that “the question of all these bad guys, the party members and collaborators of repressive organs, must be solved on a personal, case-by-case basis... This paragraph is not democratic, and most importantly – in the wider world, this kind of rough-and-ready solution would give an extremely unfortunate impression of us” (750.) One of the leaders of the opposing camp, however, former political prisoner Enn Tarto, argued his support for the paragraph as follows: “We cannot keep ignoring forever the problem that the Estonian state and nation are undergoing an historical process. First, we are getting free from bolshevism, and second, we are casting off an occupation. And the situation where the old cadre remains in place, where absolutely no change is to be seen anywhere, cannot last forever” (705.) Finally, Paragraph 6 was included in the Implementation Act of the Constitution, enacting that up to 31 December 2000, everyone running or applying for a high local or national position (including the Riigikogu, government, and municipal councils) “shall take a written oath that he or she has not been in the service or an agent of a security organization, or of an intelligence or counterintelligence service of the armed forces of a state which has occupied Estonia, nor participated in the persecution or repression of persons because of political beliefs, disloyalty, social class, or serving in the civil or defense service of the Republic of Estonia” (1235; RT I 2007, 43, 312). Soon after the Constitution and its Implementation Act had been approved through a referendum, on 28 June 1992, the

Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Estonia adopted the Procedure for Taking the Oath of Conscience Act (8 July 1992: RT 1992, 31, 408) establishing the text of the compulsory oath of conscience. When the term set for the compulsory taking of the oath expired at the end of 2000, proposals were made for extending it, but the government deemed it unnecessary. So far, only one person has been removed from office through court decision for violating the oath of conscience – Narva City Council member Valdek Lanski, formerly Vadim Tomilov, in March 2001, who had worked in the Narva department of the KGB in 1984–1988 but omitted to state it in the oath of conscience.

The enacted restrictions were soon followed by laws regulating the registration and bringing to justice of the persons who had collaborated with the repressive organs. In November 1994, the first Riigikogu of the newly independent Estonia passed the Act on the Criminal Liability of Persons Who Have Committed Crimes against Humanity or War Crimes in Estonia (RT I 1994, 83, 1447), which amended the Criminal Code by defining those crimes and sanctioning the proper degree of punishment for them. From the memory-political point of view, however, the Procedure for Registration and Disclosure of Persons Who Have Served in or Co-operated with Intelligence or Counterintelligence Organizations of Security Organizations or Military Forces of States Which Have Occupied Estonia Act (RT I 1995, 17, 233), passed by the Riigikogu three months later, carried greater significance. This act listed the names of all the organs of the occupation regimes, collaboration with which required registration, and established the proper procedure for registration. The persons who had cooperated with such organs were given one year from the entry into force of the act to make a voluntary confession to the Security Police. It also stipulated that after the expiration of that term, the names of the persons who were known to have collaborated but had neglected to confess would be disclosed by a notice posted in the RT by the Security Police Board. According to the Security Police Board, over a thousand people made a voluntary confession during the stipulated time. As for the rest, 13 lists carrying a total of 647 names of persons who had served in the intelligence or counterintelligence organizations of the security organs or armed forces of the former USSR and ESSR have been published in the RT since 30 January 1997 *Eestit okupeerinud*, n.d.

According to the chapter on crimes against humanity and war crimes added to the Criminal Code at the end of 1994, the investigation of these crimes comes under the jurisdiction of the Estonian Security Police Board. As of this writing, a total of 12 cases coming under the paragraph of crimes against humanity have been taken to Estonian courts, and the courts have passed sentence under that paragraph on 11 persons (*Aegumatud rahvusvahelised kuriteod*, n.d.). In this work, the Security Police Board has focused mainly on the following periods: the crimes of the first Soviet occupation (including the deportation of June 1941); the crimes committed during the German occupation; the deportation of March 1949; and the killing of the “forest brothers” after World War II.

But the Estonian state authorities have not stopped at enacting individual liability for crimes committed under the occupation regime; they have also condemned publicly the crimes of the occupation regime in Estonia, in general. The relevant proclamation was proposed to the Riigikogu in June 2001 by 33 of its members. Andres Herkel (of the conservative Pro Patria Union), who spoke to the Riigikogu on behalf of the initiators of the proposal, noted in his speech: “The adoption of this proclamation has no direct implications for the administration of justice in Estonia. Crimes against humanity, if they have been committed, are taken to court and judged only according to the rules of court, exactly as before. The present proclamation has no bearing on that. We give an assessment to what has happened in history, and this is all we intend” (Riigikogu

stenogramm 2001). Thus, this step can be regarded as concerning memory politics, not the administration of justice. The widely disputed proclamation did not in fact gain majority support; however, it was seconded by a statement made by President Meri on 14 June 2001, the 60th anniversary of the June deportation, wherein he declared criminal “the NKVD-NKGB, KGB, the troikas and innumerable other repressive organs that were granted powers for handing out extrajudicial death sentences and other punishments by the totalitarian power” (Vabariigi Presidendi avaldus 2001). In a slightly altered phrasing (instead of the crimes of the communist regime, it now spoke about the crimes of the occupation regime – a meaningful semantic shift that deserves analysis in its own rights), the proclamation was again submitted to the Riigikogu about a year later, on 18 June 2002. It was again introduced by Andres Herkel, who confirmed the memory-political purport of the proclamation: “I have repeatedly emphasized and emphasize again that the condemnation of the crimes of the Soviet communist regime is primarily a matter of memory, not of retribution. Memory and remembrance are a criterion of our dignity here. If we choose the path of forgetting and suppression, we shall also forfeit our dignity and the system of values founded on the ideals of freedom and democracy” (Riigikogu stenogramm 2002). This time around, the Riigikogu passed the declaration overwhelmingly (of the 75 voters, only one was against). The relatively short text, which briefly describes the crimes of the Soviet regime in Estonia, declares “the communist regime of the Soviet Union and the agencies that violently executed its power, such as the NKVD, NKGB, KGB etc., together with the tribunals and special consultations convened by them, as well as the destruction and defense battalions that committed these crimes, criminal” (RT I 2002, 52, 326). There are of course several other acts and declarations passed by the Riigikogu which carry memory-political significance (including, for instance, the Citizenship Act), but here I shall limit myself to those directly related to the reassessment of the past.

The institutional dimension of memory politics

The public authorities of Estonia have promoted national memory politics not only through legislation but also by creating various institutions for gathering data about and analyzing the traumatic recent past (see Iberand and Ruggenthaler 2007; Onken 2007b; Hiio 2010). The work of adding up losses and damages suffered in the past began soon after the first gusts of the wind of liberty, with its first fruit materializing in a collection of reports in English, taking account of the losses caused by occupation, prepared by the Estonian Academy of Sciences in 1991 (Kahk 1991). This *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was given official status on 26 March 1992, when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Estonia adopted the decree On Forming a State Commission for the Examination of Repressive Policies and Crimes Against Humanity, confirming a few weeks later (7 May 1992) the 28-member staff of the commission headed by writer Jaan Kross (V. Pettai forthcoming b). The decree specified that the commission was created “in order to analyze the repressive policies of the Soviet and Nazi occupying powers on the territory of the Republic of Estonia and against its citizens on the territory of other states; to investigate the crimes of genocide carried out by these authorities in relation to Estonian citizens; and to formulate a general assessment.” The commission was to present the first report of its results to the parliament already in the second half of 1992. The need for this kind of a commission was acknowledged by, among others, the new prime minister, Mart Laar, who on 19 October 1992, the day he was confirmed in office, affirmed to the Riigikogu on behalf of the new government: “We are convinced

of the need to quickly set to work an authoritative commission that would examine the crimes committed during the Soviet occupation and could in case of need present evidence for official prosecution of people” (Riigikogu stenogramm 1992). The Riigikogu shared this opinion, and on 17 June 1993, the resolution On the Issues Related to the State Commission for the Examination of the Repressive Policies of the Occupying Regimes (RT I 1993, 40, 591), in which it supported the initiative of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and confirmed again the existing staff of the commission, was passed. In the new decision, the purposes of the commission were slightly transformed and specified, so that they now came to four points:

1. Analyzing the repressive policies of the Soviet and Nazi occupying powers on the territory of the Republic of Estonia
2. Investigating the “crimes of genocide” carried out by these authorities in relation to Estonian citizens
3. Evaluating the degree of economic damage inflicted on the Estonian people by the occupations
4. Formulating an objective scientific assessment of the actions of the occupying powers in Estonia

According to the resolution, the work of the commission is founded on the “desire of the Estonian people to have a truthful account of the events that took place in Estonia during the occupations, of the crimes committed and distortions of social development caused by them.” It was expected at the time that the commission would complete its work by 1995 at the latest. As it was, it took the commission nearly 10 years longer to accomplish its tasks, and the work was brought to an end only by a resolution of the Riigikogu, 9 June 2004, declaring the activities of the commission concluded by September 1 of the same year (RT I 2004, 49, 343). Jaan Kross stepped down as chair of the commission in early 1995 and was replaced by a Roman Catholic priest, Vello Salo. All in all, nearly 20 studies and biographical works of reference were published under the auspices of the commission. The commission concluded its work, as prescribed by the 1993 statute of the Riigikogu, with the presentation of the so-called *White Book* (*Valge raamat*). This collection, published in 2005, contained a total of eight short surveys of the losses caused by the occupations in four domains (population, culture, environment, and economy).

Yet, this was not the last initiative by state authorities to form a special commission for dealing with the problems of the past. The International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity (EICICH) (see E. Pettai forthcoming), created by President Lennart Meri in the autumn of 1998, found much broader resonance in the society than its predecessor had. The new commission, which was clearly formed under international pressure and of which sister commissions sprang up coordinately in Latvia and Lithuania, was charged with two tasks: to demonstrate to the international public that Estonia takes the heritage of its totalitarian past seriously, and at the same time to satisfy the domestic need for trustworthy data on the crimes against humanity committed under occupying regimes. Meri invited a distinguished Finnish diplomat, Max Jakobson, to chair the commission; in addition, six other scholars and politicians of international renown served on the EICICH. The daily activities and research work of the commission were coordinated by its executive head, Toomas Hiio.

The first session of the EICICH was held on 26 January 1999, in Kadriorg Presidential Palace. In his opening words, President Meri defined the aims of the commission as “clarifying in as great detail as possible which crimes against humanity had been committed in Estonia” and “compiling research materials documented well enough so as to leave no one

a chance of denying the events that had taken place, or ignoring the truth” (Meri 2001, 101). Meri’s speech clearly demonstrates that the initiative was not merely historical and legal, but related more generally to memory politics:

And more importantly: the work of the commission reflects our common belief that it is impossible to build up a free and democratic future without facing the past. Trying to brush the dust of the past under the edge of collective forgetfulness won’t help us to achieve reconciliation or lay the foundations for a better future. This kind of behavior would not safeguard us from the same kind of horrors happening again. Were we to ignore our past, we would be building our home on sand, because this would equally mean ignoring our future. (Meri 2000, 101)

More particularly, the EICICH aimed at investigating the crimes against humanity committed in Estonia and against the citizens of the Republic of Estonia. The commission proceeded in its work from the definitions of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide, as given in the Rome Statute adopted by the International Criminal Court in 1998 (Rome Statute 1998). The work was carried out in three stages: first the commission studied the first Soviet occupation of 1940–1941, then the German occupation of 1941–1944, and finally the Soviet occupation from 1944 on. Over its slightly more than 10 years of work, the EICICH accumulated a great quantity of archival materials from German, Russian, and Estonian archives. It published three reports, each covering one period of occupation separately, as well as two voluminous collaborative studies, in English, on the political history of Estonia in 1940–1945 (*Estonia 1940–1945*) and from 1944 to the 1950s (*Estonia since 1944*). Since the work of the EICICH was clearly oriented toward an international audience (as confirmed by the fact that the results were published only in English), its impact on domestic memory politics remained rather limited. The work of the commission was officially concluded with a meeting held in December 2008.

Yet, even before the work of the EICICH was officially concluded, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves created another institution charged with the task of critically analyzing the materials related to the country’s recent past. The Estonian Memory Institute (EMI), officially founded on 1 February 2008, carries on from where the EICICH left off, that is with the investigation of the communist regime during the second half of the twentieth century. Again, the work of the institute is curated by an international board consisting of 10 outstanding scholars and politicians from several countries. The majority of the EMI’s local researchers and its executive head are the same as in the EICICH. This time, however, the main purpose of the researchers is not to investigate crimes against humanity but to examine violations of human rights on a more general scale. The legal basis of the work is provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 (Estonian Institute of Historical Memory n.d.). At the first meeting of the international board of the EMI on 8 December 2008, President Ilves noted that “the purpose of the Estonian Memory Institute is not to find out whether human rights were violated in Soviet Estonia. There is no doubt about that. Still, detailed historical research is required to answer the question of how and to what extent human rights were violated.” He added: “The facts determined by the Institute have no legal consequences. Our purpose is to understand” (Ilves 2009).

Of course, the historical commissions created in Estonia on state initiative to deal with the totalitarian past are not an exceptional phenomenon. Over the last couple of decades, analogous institutions have been created almost everywhere in East and Central Europe and even further afield (Stan 2009c; Hiio 2010). It is a phenomenon that can, on the analogue of transitional justice, be called “transitional history” (Teitel 2000, 60). The peculiarly Estonian characteristic would be that these historical commissions are

charged only with carrying out research, while the prosecution of the persons accused of occupation crimes has been entrusted to the Security Police; in several East and Central European states, one and the same organization is in charge of both these activities.

As a rule, museums are the second important institutional instrument of memory politics. In Estonia, however, museums have not been put into the service of national memory politics to any considerable extent, at least insofar as we limit our discussion to the central theme of the local memory politics – the crimes of the occupation regimes.⁴ Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the Museum of Occupations founded in 2002–2003 on private initiative immediately found the memory-political support and recognition of the state authority. Indeed, the Museum of Occupations has caught many researchers' attention as testimony to Estonia's prevalent historical ideology and thus is comparable to analogous museums in East and Central Europe (Mark 2008; Wulff 2008, 2010; Burch and Zander 2010; Dovydaitytė 2010; Velmet 2011).

The commemorative dimension of memory politics

Next to laws and institutions, official symbolic and ritual practices that collectively constitute what can be concisely termed commemorative politics (see Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000; Brubaker and Feischmidt 2002; Wingfield 2003) play a very important role in national memory politics. The backbone of commemorative politics is formed by national remembrance days and the public rituals related to them (see McCreone and McPherson 2009; Feuchtwang 2010).

In Estonia, the provisional foundations for a new national commemorative agenda were laid by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR of 16 October 1990, On Amending the Public Holidays and the Labor Code of the Estonian SSR. By this decree, eight public holidays were instituted in the country, three of which commemorated historical events: 24 February as Independence Day, 23 June as Victory Day (anniversary of the battle of Võnnu [Latvian: Cēsis] in 1919), and 16 November as the Day of Declaration of Sovereignty. The issue of instituting public holidays was again and more systematically taken up by the first Riigikogu elected after the regaining of independence. The new draft of the Public Holidays and Days of National Importance Act came to its first reading in the Riigikogu on 27 October 1993 and was adopted after lengthy debate on 8 February 1994 (RT I 1994, 12, 199). The act separately instituted 10 public holidays and 8 days of national importance. It specified two public holidays of a memory-political dimension (Independence Day on 24 February and Victory Day on 23 June). Among days of national importance however, there are four holidays of that kind: the anniversary of the Tartu Peace Treaty on 2 February, the Day of Mourning and Commemoration on 14 June, Re-Independence Day on 20 August, and the Day of Declaration of Sovereignty on 16 November. The stenographs of the sessions of the Riigikogu demonstrate that the debates flared up mainly around the commemoration of events associated with "re-independence," primarily the significance of 20 August 1991 (declaration of re-independence) in national memory politics. The seventh Riigikogu remained of the opinion that promoting 20 August to the rank of a public holiday would undermine the significance of 24 February and endanger the idea of legal continuity. Thus, it was in fact the hierarchy of historical events that was debated. Mart Nutt (of the Pro Patria Union), who spoke on behalf of the proposers of the bill, nicely summed it up:

Probably none of us doubt that 20 August represents a very important day for Estonian statehood. This is the day when independence was restored in Estonia, and the day that has been internationally accepted as the date of Estonia's return to the international arena. On the other

hand, Estonia has kept declaring that it is re-independent, not independent for the first time. In this context, I am not very sure that it makes sense to regard 24 February and 20 August as equally significant. I say it again, 20 August is a day worth celebrating, but is it equally important as 24 February? Wouldn't 20 August fit in better among the public holidays? (Riigikogu stenogramm 1994).

Thus, the Act of 1994 kept the dates related to the events of re-independence (20 August and 16 November) to the status of public holidays; however, just a few months later, on 1 August 1995, the government submitted to the new Riigikogu a bill of amendment to the Public Holidays and Days of National Importance Act, proposing to promote 20 August to public-holiday status. The heatedly debated bill passed two readings, but was dropped from the agenda due to lack of support.¹⁵ An alternative solution to the tension that had arisen between the different anniversaries associated with independence was submitted to the Riigikogu on 19 January 1998. This time around, the bill of amendment proposed to differentiate three kinds of holidays – national day, public holiday, and day of national importance – instead of the former two. The status of national day was reserved for 24 February alone, while at the same time it was proposed to promote 20 August to the rank of public holiday. This bill gained the support of various political forces in the Riigikogu and was passed with a great majority on 27 January 1998 (RT I 1998, 13, 162). Estonia now had a total of 18 national and public holidays of various importance, with 5 of them related to the perpetuation of Estonian history.

The next debate of memory-political import was held in the Riigikogu in the years 2006–2007, when the conservative Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica wished to include in the commemoration agenda a new anniversary: a day of remembrance for resistance on 22 September. The contents and memory-political pathos of the bill are best expressed by Mart Nutt in a report on the bill delivered 7 February 2006:

The present bill . . . was submitted because 22 September 1944 – a day worthy of commemoration, as we, the initiators of the bill, believe – has not yet been included in our calendar of commemorative days. On 22 September 1944, the Estonian blue, black and white tricolor flew on the Tall Hermann tower in Tallinn. On that day, the Red Army conquered Tallinn and the tricolor was pulled down from the tower and replaced by a red flag. Next, the Soviet Union occupied the whole territory of Estonia. . . . We believe that the overthrow of the legitimate government of Estonia on 22 September 1944 must be regarded as a violation of international law and accordingly, the just resistance of both the Government of the Republic and the Estonian citizens to the invaders must be recognized. . . . We do not wish to conceive of this day as a day of mourning, but we do find that public events irreconcilable with respect for the memory of the resistance fighters should be banned on that day. (Riigikogu stenogramm 2006a)

The bill passed several readings and was adopted in altered and improved form (“Day of Remembrance for Resistance” became simply “Resistance Day”) on 15 February 2007 (RT I 2007, 22, 118).

The last memory-politically significant amendment to the Public Holydays and Days of National Importance Act was submitted to the Riigikogu on 10 June 2009. This initiative of the government of the republic derived from the declaration adopted by the European Parliament on 23 September 2008, On Declaring 23 August European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (European Day of Remembrance 2008).⁵ The new bill would confirm 23 August as a public holiday in Estonia. During the readings, the word “Stalinism” was replaced by “communism,” and the amendment was passed with a large majority on 18 June 2009 (RT I 2009, 34, 229).

To complement this laconic survey of the shaping of a new national commemorative agenda in the Riigikogu, we may stop briefly at some arguments presented during the

debates, as they can be read in the stenographs of the sessions. These reflect a rather clear awareness among the various political forces, especially the conservatives, of the memory-political importance of their decisions. To confirm this, I shall quote some excerpts from the debates held on the passing and amending of the Holidays and Commemorative Days Act. Already during the first debates held in the autumn of 1993, Vootele Hansen (Pro Patria Union) aptly summed up the core of the issue:

The law regulating holidays and commemorative days is quite important in the life of a state and nation, since it defines the hierarchy of the values that this nation considers significant in its history or cultural traditions. Nor should it be forgotten that it therefore also has a great educational impact, since these are the days that are celebrated and kept in mind. (Riigikogu stenogramm 1993)

Thirteen years later, in the debates over adding Resistance Day to the existing commemorative agenda, even more unequivocal memory-political statements were made in the parliament hall (see Riigikogu stenogramm 2006b). Trivimi Velliste (Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica):

We are under the obligation to know our history the way it really was, and there is nothing to be ashamed of in our history. We must know and perceive well the historical and constitutional law framework of our state... Such dates as 24 February, 23 June, as well as 3 January or 2 February, in fact no longer need to be emphasized, they are part of our narrative. 22 September, however, remains pivotal, and in connection with the events that took place at Tõnismägi in the past year [this refers to street rioting by the Russian minority on 26–27 April 2007], its significance and psychological impact have doubtlessly increased by a magnitude.

Velliste was seconded by Urmas Reinsalu (Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica): “We are not after all speaking about having to institute the anniversary, but about the state having to offer its conception of how to commemorate the past events.” A year and a half later, in June 2009, as the Riigikogu debated the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communism and Nazism, Aadu Must (Center Party) subtly summed up the role of the Parliament in shaping memory politics: “Undoubtedly the safeguarding and interpreting of the historical memory of our nation is one of the areas that the state must treat with great attention and responsibility” (Riigikogu stenogramm 2009).

But legally instituted anniversaries alone do not affect collective memory definitively; it is crucially important to furnish the anniversaries with ritual activities, which perpetuate certain attitudes and values through regular repetition. During the transitional period, the collective practices first focused on commemoration of the repressed, beginning with the 40th anniversary of the deportation, commemorated nationwide in June 1989. Officially, 14 June was declared National Day of Mourning by the Public Holidays and Days of National Importance Act of 1994. This day is meant to commemorate all the deportations carried out by the occupying regimes, or, as President Meri put it a year earlier, on 14 June 1993, in Tallinn: “Today we have gathered here . . . to commemorate all the Nazi and the communist waves of deportations that followed this first wave [of communist deportation in 14 June 1941 – M.T.]” (Vabariigi Presidendi avaldus 2001). Traditionally, the events of the Day of Mourning take place around the statue of Linda, on Toompea Hill, where speeches are given by the highest representatives of the state (a joint address by the president of the republic, the prime minister, and the president of the Riigikogu has become a tradition in its own right), as well as the dean of the diplomatic corps; songs are sung and wreaths are laid at the foot of the statue of Linda. Mourning Day commemoration ceremonies are also held in several other locations across Estonia.

Side by side with the Day of Mourning, the commemoration ceremony of Victory Day plays a great ritual role. This ritual goes back to the 1930s, when it was developed into a

huge nation-wide celebration, with the lighting of victory bonfires, a military parade, and festive speeches, on the initiative of President Konstantin Päts (Brüggemann 2003). In re-independent Estonia, the Victory Day parade is one of the most spectacular state rituals of the year, with the president giving to a distinguished audience a speech that usually has the greatest memory-political importance of all the speeches of the year. The celebration of Victory Day involves all of Estonia, because the ritual is movable, as it were, the ceremonies being held in a different town each year; besides, a central element of the victory parade is the lighting of victory torches, which are then carried out into all the counties to light victory bonfires.

But the most solemn Estonian state celebrations are, of course, reserved for Independence Day, 24 February. This long day begins with the ceremony of hoisting the flag, where the first speech of the day is given by the president of the Riigikogu; this is followed – to list but the most important events – by the laying of wreaths at the foot of the War of Independence Victory Column; the Independence Day service at the Dome Church; the parade of the Defense Forces at Freedom Square, where speeches are made by the prime minister and the chief of the defense forces; the ceremonies in celebration of the anniversary of the republic in the Park of St. George's Night; and, to wind up the day, the festive concert and reception of the president of the republic, culminating in the president's anniversary speech. Naturally, Independence Day is celebrated all over Estonia.

Of the new historical commemorative days (Re-Independence Day, Day of Declaration of Sovereignty, Resistance Day, and Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communism and Nazism), in my judgment none have gained nation-wide memory-political significance, although attempts have been made with varying success to associate each of them with ritual practices, most successfully perhaps in Tallinn in connection with the celebration of re-independence on 20 August. Among the anniversaries not legally enacted, Holocaust Remembrance Day should be noted, which was first commemorated in Estonia on 27 January 2003.⁶ Customarily, on that occasion, a memorial service is held at the former Klooga concentration camp, usually with the participation of government representatives. After the adoption of the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communism and Nazism on 23 August, declared a national holiday in 2009, the preference of the state authorities can be observed to tend away from Holocaust Remembrance Day toward the new commemorative day.

The monumental dimension of memory politics

Commemorative politics is tightly linked to memorials – materialized “memory places,” with monuments backed up by ritual ceremonies contributing to the shaping of collective memory (Till 2003; Winter 2010). The erection and removal of monuments reflect memory politics in practice; in like ways, they point tangibly to the nature of the dominating memory regime. In a general sense, the monuments (as well as the names of streets and squares, etc.) erected by the public authority form a kind of memorial landscape that shapes values regarding the past (Dwyer and Alderman 2008; Palonen 2008).

The reshaping of the Estonian monumental-memory landscape began as soon as the opportunity for it arose at the end of the 1980s. On the initiative of local rather than national authorities, the majority of the War of Independence monuments destroyed or hidden during the Soviet period were restored. The first to be reopened, already in 1988, were the memorials at Lalsi (on 19 June), Võru (23 June), and Mihkli (26 June). All in all, the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s saw the re-erection of 15 original monuments, while 27 more were restored with the use of fragments of the originals.

Sixty-eight monuments were erected as copies of the original projects. In addition, 8 monuments with a new solution of the project and 11 completely new ones were erected (see Strauss 2002). Today, only around 20 of the War of Independence monuments from before World War II remain unrestored.

In national memory politics, monuments played an insignificant role up the early 2000s, when a peculiar monumental chain conflict broke out. It began in the summer of 2002 in Pärnu, where a bas-relief of an Estonian soldier in German uniform sprang up on the initiative of the Union of Freedom Fighters, and culminated in Tallinn with the erection of a controversial War of Independence Victory Column on 23 June 2009. The “Estonian War of the Monuments,” which even reached the even international media – in particular, the riots that broke out around the Bronze Soldier in April 2007 – has by now been so diligently analyzed by researchers⁷ that there seems to be no need to dwell on it at any length here. Therefore I shall only take a brief look at the general course of events and point out some of the more significant conclusions.

When the “War of the Monuments” began to unfold in 2002, state authorities had a mainly negative function to fulfill, namely that of removing monuments already erected. The fate of the bas-relief erected in the Old Park in Pärnu in 2002 was sealed by its Nazi iconography together with the inscription intensifying its message: “To all the Estonian soldiers who fell in the Second War of Independence for Homeland and Free Europe 1940–1945.” Under pressure from the public, the government, and foreign embassies, the municipal authorities decided to remove it even before the official opening. A couple of years later, the same bas-relief emerged in Lihula, this time with a slightly altered text: “To Estonian men who fought in 1940–1945 against bolshevism and to restore Estonia’s independence.” Solemnly opened on 20 August 2004, the monument was removed a few weeks later under pressure from the EU, foreign states, and upon Prime Minister Juhan Parts’s order, provoking physical resistance on the spot and a heated public debate. It can reasonably be claimed that the two removal operations activated extremist groups in society and elevated the tensions surrounding the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn, which so far had been saved from any more extensive conflicts. During the March 2007 parliamentary elections, right-wing parties promised a quick and vigorous solution to the issue of the Bronze Soldier. After their election victory, they indeed set to work on Tõnismägi. The monument was qualified as a grave-site, and work began to identify the remains of the people buried near it. For this purpose, on 26 April the square was surrounded with a metal fence and the monument covered with a tent. The Russian-speaking population felt these steps to be provocative, and as a result, street riots broke out in Tallinn the same night and lasted for two days – the most extensive public disturbance since the restoration of independence in Estonia. In the early hours of 27 April, by government decision, the Bronze Soldier was removed from Tõnismägi; it was re-erected at the Cemetery of the Estonian Defense Forces, where it was given a conciliatory visit on 8 May by several cabinet members, led by the prime minister, to lay flowers before it.

Parallel with the removal of the Bronze Soldier and inspired by national sentiment, the government made preparations for erecting a new monument in Tallinn: the War of Independence Victory Column. Plans for erecting a War of Independence monument had already come up in the Riigikogu as early as in spring 1997, and on 3 July of that year, a declaration was adopted, In Support of Creating an Independence Monument (RT I 1997, 42, 684). In the declaration, the delegates promised to “finance the monument from the national budget and by donations from members of the Riigikogu.” However, the initiative lost momentum, regaining it only on 5 April 2001, when the Tallinn City Council passed a decision, On Constructing a Victory Column Complex in Tallinn. A two-stage open competition was declared to procure a project for the column, curated

by a 16-member jury chaired by President Meri. Although the competition was successful (over 100 projects were submitted), untoward political conditions (including a change of president) prevented the practical execution of the project (Lõhmus 2009).

A new chapter opened in the saga of the Victory Column in spring 2005, with the passing of the resolution, On Erecting a War of Independence Victory Column, by the Riigikogu on 23 March (RT I 2005, 19, 111). By 2 July 2007 – the final term of the competition declared for column projects – 44 conceptual designs had been handed in, from among which a majority of the commission selected the design “Libertas,” featuring a large dolomite Cross of Liberty on a massive pedestal (Vahtre, Sternfeld, and Laidre 2009). In the development phase of the design, dolomite was replaced by glass and the column was shrunk in dimensions. In spite of technical mishaps, the column that had caused deep public controversy was finally erected and was opened with great solemnity on Victory Day, 2009. “Estonia thus shows a desire to import an ‘imagined’ pure national identity from a past century that today seems to be at odds with the wider context of the EU,” commented Brüggemann and Kasekamp (2008, 438). Taking into account the price paid for the victory column, both economically and politically, its erection can be regarded as one of the most important national memory-political decisions of the last few years. At the same time, it marks the rebirth of the memory rhetoric of the late 1980s and early 1990s, where the principle of continuity (i.e. completing the column erection plans of the prewar republic) and the victim cult (i.e. those who fell in the War of Independence) again intertwined to make up the argumentative fabric of memory politics.

Conclusion

A national memory politics inspired by the spirit of restoration has been an integral part of the politics of newly independent Estonia. But compared to several other countries of the former Eastern bloc, settling accounts with the past has taken place rather mildly in Estonia: former collaborators with foreign special services were given the opportunity to declare themselves, anonymously, and access to the higher offices of the state was restricted only by a public oath of conscience. As noted above, so far only one person has been removed from office due to violation of the oath of conscience; the disclosure of the names of such collaborators also passed without any grave consequences. Only 11 persons have been convicted in court of crimes against humanity. The work of the state historical commissions has been characterized by accumulation and systematic presentation of data, while legal conclusions and prosecution have been left to law enforcement structures.

On the other hand, Estonian politics during the re-independence period has been characterized by a clear desire to establish a more or less unified conception of the events of Estonia’s recent past, and to shape collective memory with the help of laws, regulations, and monuments. Although the most important steps in that direction were taken in the 1990s, the developments of the last few years demonstrate that forceful memory politics has not yet fallen into oblivion in Estonia. One need not be a clairvoyant to foretell that this kind of attitude has no bright prospects in the modern world: “For a small state like Estonia, with a history that does not fit into frames popular in the West (or the East), official *Geschichtspolitik* means attempting to square the circle” (Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2008, 429).

Undoubtedly, the present survey has painted a picture of Estonian memory politics more homogeneous than it has ever been in reality. As emphasized at the beginning, I focused only on the national aspect of memory politics, which means that various forms of counter-memory (Davis and Starn 1989; Young 1999) were left aside. Nor did my analysis involve the party-political dimension of memory politics; that is I did not

examine which political forces stood behind one or another memory-political decision. Finally, it is obvious that over the last decades, several memory-political decisions of both legislative and executive power have been made under foreign political pressure and in the context of integration into the EU and NATO (this concerns particularly the issue of the Holocaust and the “War of the Monuments”), but again this aspect found no place in this discussion.

Looking ahead, I should say that one of the greatest challenges facing Estonian memory politics will probably be the “desacralization” (Gillis 1994) or “democratization” (Onken 2003) of the collective memory. Instead of establishing by legal means a policy of “one history” and tying the national identity to past sufferings, in a multicultural society it would be more appropriate to favor the plurality of argued opinions, to guarantee the pre-conditions for a critical exchange of opinions and support an academic, free, and politically independent study of history. This is an appeal topical not only in Estonia but in wider Europe, too.

Memory is inherently contentious and partisan: one man’s acknowledgement is another’s omission. And it is a poor guide to the past. The first post-war Europe was built upon deliberate *mismemory* – upon forgetting as a way of life. Since 1989, Europe has been constructed instead upon a compensatory surplus of memory: institutionalised public remembering as the very foundation of collective identity. The first could not endure – but nor will the second. (Judt 2005, 829)

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Toomas Hiio and Vello Pettai for sharing their (as yet) unpublished texts and commenting on an earlier draft of this article, and to Siobhan Kattago for her copy-editing. The research was funded by the Estonian Science Foundation grant no. 8625 and supported also by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory).

Notes

1. A good survey of the emergence of these three (or more precisely four – there are two words for “memory politics” in German: *Gedächtnispolitik* and *Erinnerungspolitik*) terms in Germany, first in journalism and then in academic writing, is given by Schmidt (2009). His analysis also demonstrates that currently, the term most frequently used in Germany is “history politics” (*Geschichtspolitik*). In the relevant English literature, however, the dominating term today in my view seems rather to be “memory politics.”
2. See in the first instance Hackmann (2003, 2009); Budryte (2005); Onken (2007a, 2007b, 2010); Brüggemann and Kasekamp (2008, 2009); Wulf (2008, 2010); Mälksoo (2009a, 2009b, 2009c); Hackmann and Lehti (2010); Grönholm (2011); Smith (2011); Kattago (2012).
3. An exhaustive survey of the legislative steps taken in Estonia in 1985–2009 within the broad framework of transitional justice is given by Pettai and Onken in their (undated) manuscript report to the research project commissioned by the European Commission on the crimes committed under European totalitarian regimes and their later treatment (cf. V. Pettai forthcoming a). See also the synthesis by Montero (2010) of the reports by all the states that participated in the project.
4. However, the foundation of the Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum by the order of the minister of defense 26 February 2001 (RTL 2001, 33, 435) should be noted here.
5. The decision recommending the celebration of this day in member states was made by the European Parliament on 2 April 2009 (European Conscience and Totalitarianism 2009).
6. I admit that the present discussion somewhat unjustifiedly bypasses the memory-political attitudes toward the heritage of the German occupation, mainly concerning the commemoration of the Holocaust and the investigation of the crimes of Nazism. Although anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, including participation in it by Estonian citizens, were condemned already by

the declaration of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Estonia of 30 December 1991 (RT 1991, 45, 551), the issue has clearly been marginal in the general national memory politics; it has been urged as topical mainly by the US embassy and the Simon Wiesenthal Center. The official Estonian position has constantly been that, the Republic of Estonia having been occupied by the Nazis, Estonia cannot accept responsibility for the crimes committed during the Nazi occupation, though it does regret the participation of some Estonians in these crimes. See Weiss-Wendt (2008); E. Pettai (2011).

7. See for instance Burch and Smith (2007); Brüggemann (2008); Brüggemann and Kasekamp (2008, 2009); Lehti, Jutila, and Jokisipilä (2008); Münch (2008); Petersoo and Tamm (2008); Pääbo (2008); Smith (2008); Torsti (2008); Wertsch (2008); Ehala (2009); Kattago (2012, 77–95); Norman (2009); Selg (2009); Grönholm (2010); Wulf (2010); Leggewie (2011, 56–80); Tamm (2012).

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