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The EU's Historical Narrative and Enlargement to Eastern Europe

ABSTRACT

The European Parliament's quest to provide a legitimising discourse for European Union enlargement led it to develop a compelling historical narrative to justify the entry of eight Central and Eastern European countries in 2004. This narrative was however built through the lens of Western European elaborations of historical myths and memory. Central and Eastern European representatives did not in fact share this historical identity, and use of the historical narrative fell by the wayside in debates of Romania's and Bulgaria's accession between 2004 and 2007.

Key words: European Parliament, identity, memory, myths, narratives, enlargement.

Introduction

The European Parliament (EP) is a key actor in the construction of an identity for the European Union (EU). As the only directly elected institution within the EU's structure, and the largest conglomerate of politicians within the European arena, it has ever since its inception strived to give voice and shape to ideas about Europe, the nature and goals of the process of European integration, and the identity and values on which this process is based. This quest for the construction of a European identity was especially evident in the EP's debates of subsequent enlargement rounds, when the need to justify the entry of new members into the European 'club' also provided a unique opportunity to actually define and refine the criteria for entering the club — not just in terms

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of the actual, practical criteria imposed by the EU as a whole, but also in terms of the ideational foundations of the project.

Over four decades of enlargement debates, the EP developed a strong identity discourse based on political, historical and cultural elements.² The debates on the enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, which were held regularly between 1999 and 2004 as part of the EP's increased involvement in the enlargement process, were characterised above all by the construction of a strong historical narrative to strengthen the legitimacy of eight new countries that had, until barely a decade before, been on the opposite political and economic side of the Iron Curtain. They provided an opportunity for the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to reflect upon and articulate their ideas about 'Europe' and about its historical identity, and were in this sense much more about the existing (largely Western) members of the EU and their shared project rather than about Central and Eastern Europe per se. The constructed historical narrative was therefore a Western European narrative — and the extent to which it actually resonated with Central and Eastern Europeans, and if they would actually subscribe to it during or after the enlargement process, is a question that will also be addressed towards the end of this piece.

On Historical Narratives and Collective Identities

The European Parliament's enlargement debates in the post-Cold War period gave prominence to new themes alongside that of political identity. The debates on the fifth enlargement, in particular, were characterised by the presence of a strong historical narrative that flanked the existing political features of the European identity constructed by MEPs in the previous three decades. In articulating this historical narrative and inserting it alongside political values in their legitimisation of the accession of ten new countries between 1997 and 2004, MEPs attempted to go beyond a purely political identity in their construction of 'Europe': this article explores the contents of this narrative, its use in parliamentary discourse, and its limits within the wider enlargement debate.

It is widely accepted in social identity theory that history, or rather shared historical narratives, constitute a fundamental element in the construction and re-construction of collective identities. The past is often mobilised in order to justify or legitimise the present, and it is interpreted and understood in function of contemporary concerns and needs. This interpretation and re-interpretation of

² For a discussion of the EP's enlargement discourse and identity construction with regards to Eastern Europe, see Emma De Angelis, "The European Parliament's identity discourse and Eastern Europe, 1974–2004," *Journal of European Integration History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2011, pp. 103–116.

the past constructs ‘myths’ that give meaning to the present and provide a shared framework for political debate.³

Myths can be defined as “a special kind of story about the past that symbolises the values of a group and legitimates their claims” — as for instance does Peter Burke in his work on European memory.⁴ Such myths are largely produced by political and cultural elites and are based on the construction of historical narratives that are then used as a frame of reference for political debate. They provide a source of political legitimacy, not necessarily based on historical continuity, but also, potentially, a legitimacy founded on a “sharp break with the past due to traumatic experiences or policy failures.”⁵ In this sense, historical events (or a specific selection of historical events) are interpreted and constructed into a historical narrative that shapes collective memory. History, memory and identity are thus inexorably interconnected to the extent that the meaning constructed through a historical narrative provides political legitimacy and cohesion to a community.⁶ Historians have a long tradition of looking at the role of myths and collective memory in the foundations of national identities. For instance, George Mosse analysed the creation of the “Myth of the War Experience” in post-WWI Europe, and Germany in particular, as the attribution of meaning to a hitherto meaningless experience by taking it through a process of memorialisation, institutionalisation, and even trivialisation that transforms a recent historical experience into a key element of political culture.⁷ Henry Rousso’s analysis of the way the French have remembered, or removed, their Vichy past, provides a further example of how history and memory have played out in a selective form of remembering a troubling past through different phases of French public life.⁸ The role of history in the construction of collective identities is therefore well documented, and it may not come as much of a surprise

³ Bo Stråth, “Introduction: Myth, Memory and History in the Construction of Community,” in Bo Stråth (ed), *Myth and Memory in the Construction of Community: Historical Patterns in Europe and Beyond*, PIE-Peter Lang, Brussels, 2000, pp. 19–46. See also Jürgen Straub (ed), *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, Berghan Books, New York, 2005.

⁴ Peter Burke, “Foundation Myths and Collective Identities in Early Modern Europe,” in Bo Stråth, *Europe and the Other and Europe as Other*, PIE-Peter Lang, Brussels, 2001, pp. 113–122.

⁵ Jan-Werner Müller, “Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory,” in Jan-Werner Müller (ed), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 26.

⁶ Bo Stråth, “Introduction: Myth, Memory and History in the Construction of Community,” op. cit.

⁷ Georges L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990.

⁸ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991.

that a historical narrative of Europe did in fact also emerge in the European Parliament's identity discourse on enlargement.

European Parliament discourse developed a strong historical narrative that provided legitimisation for the process of European integration as undertaken by the European Union: this discourse emerged most clearly during the debates on the fifth enlargement, after having been present but largely understated and never fully articulated in previous enlargement debates. The striking difference between the second and third enlargements as opposed to the fifth was, of course, the end of the Cold War, which greatly affected the way in which MEPs elaborated their historical narrative in the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s. If 'history' was mainly used as the spectre of past conflict and in order to justify cooperation among former enemies as a new political course during the Cold War, in what Ole Wæver referred to as Europe's past being Europe's 'other' in the construction of European identity,⁹ after the conclusion of the Cold War the order of the previous fifty years was called into question and the need to revisit the EC's role in this history arose. This development manifested itself in many ways throughout Europe. The end of the Cold War opened a Pandora's Box of contested histories between different nationalities in prospective member states, from the Baltic states to the former Czechoslovakia and to the bloody conflict in ex-Yugoslavia, while at the same time redefining the terms within which the existing members had previously been able to define the EC's place in history. The European Parliament's discourse on the fifth enlargement reflected this reality by articulating not a single historical theme, but a variety of historical references that, reprised by different actors at different times, formed a complex and heterogeneous narrative. Whether these themes can be seen to constitute a "historical narrative of Europe," much along the lines of historical narratives that are at the basis of the construction of collective identities,¹⁰ will hopefully be clearer at the end of this analysis.

Opening the Gates: The End of the Cold War and the Challenge of Redefining 'Europe'

The sudden collapse of the Iron Curtain brought back to the surface continent-wide historical debates that had thus far remained dormant within the discursive frame provided by the Cold War. The year 1989 represented a

⁹ See Pen den Boer, Peter Bugge and Ole Wæver, *The History of the Idea of Europe: What is Europe?*, Open University, Milton Keynes, 1993.

¹⁰ See Cristina Blanco Sío-López (ed), "European Memories and the Construction of a Collective European Memory," *Special Issue of Richie Europa Newsletter*, No. 8, Winter 2010.

watershed in the political, military and security, economic, and ideological organisation of the continent, unravelling the geopolitical order that had shaped Europe in the post-war era and ushering in new period of uncertainty, as well as opportunity, for the countries of both Western and Eastern Europe. Debates in the European Parliament reflected the climate of confusion that characterised the months immediately following the Eastern European revolutions of 1989-1991, and the soul searching that defined much of the 1990s up to the turn of the Twenty-first century.

The European Community was to a large extent a product of the post-war order: it may have claimed to represent 'European values' that reached beyond the Iron Curtain in time as well as space, but its exclusively Western European membership and its political and economic orientation placed it firmly and conclusively within the West. The US encouraged the integration process since its inception and the EC's political self-image was firmly opposed to the Eastern European dictatorial system — as exemplified by the emphasis on democracy and human rights in the development of the Community's political identity. When Eastern European peoples tore down their communist regimes and the new democratic governments started clamouring for their nations' right to 'return to Europe' and queuing up for EC membership, the EC had to suddenly come to terms with German re-unification, the 'moral obligation' to open its doors to its 'lost' neighbours, and the need to maintain economic and political stability within its own borders and, more hopefully, across the continent.¹¹ The very concept of a 'return to Europe' used by Central and Eastern European intellectuals from the late 1980s, claiming that their countries' rightful historical place was among the countries of Western Europe rather than with the non-European East, challenged the division into Western and Eastern Europe in the name of a prior shared history.¹² Gorbachev's Common European Home rhetoric, although not directly quoted by MEPs, may also have facilitated the emergence of a strong discourse based on the idea of a 'united Europe'. What do you make of that? Moreover, the wars in Yugoslavia acted as a powerful reminder of pre-Cold War European history of national and ethnic conflict and

¹¹ Ulrich Sedelmeier also highlights the idea of a moral obligation towards Eastern Europe (Ulrich Sedelmeier, *Constructing the Path to Eastern Enlargement: The Uneven Policy Impact of EU Identity*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2005. See also J. G. A Pocock, "Deconstructing Europe," in Peter Gowan and Perry Anderson (eds), *The Question of Europe*, Verso, London and New York, 1997, pp. 297–317.

¹² Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984; Timothy Garton Ash, "Does Central Europe Exist?," *The New York Review of Books*, 9 October 1986.

¹³ See for instance Ulpu Iivari, PSE, Finland, "EP Debates: Europe Agreement with Slovenia," 23 October 1996.

re-awakened fears of Europe falling back into its historical pattern of confrontation and war.¹³ The re-emergence of such concerns with historical legacies of the pre-Cold War era would become an important feature in the EP's discourse on the Eastern enlargement.

The membership requests from the countries of the former Eastern block flowed into the existing debate on the rationale and goals of the European integration process. After the revival of the Single European Act in 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the Union had already entered a phase of introspection and self-questioning, brought on by the economic challenges of rising unemployment and coping with globalisation, combined with the strategic and geopolitical challenges of the end of the Soviet Union and Europe's role in a changing global arena. Previous considerations for further integration and institutional reform within the EC itself would manifestly need to be adjusted to the new circumstances. The 1990s were therefore to a large extent a decade of soul-searching for the newly named European Union, which faced dealing with new institutional developments and further plans for reform via the Maastricht, Amsterdam, and Nice Treaties, while at the same time finding itself called to respond to complex political developments, with the violent break-down of Yugoslavia and the consequent European debacle as perhaps the most symbolic example of the new challenges facing the EU. The preparation from 1997 to 2004 of the most numerous enlargement ever experienced by the Union was an important catalyst for a new reflection on the deeper meaning of European integration, which accompanied the development of the Union well into the first decade of the new millennium until the accession of ten Eastern and Southern European countries in 2004, and its coda three years later with the entry of Bulgaria and Romania.¹⁴

The EP debated what would become the fifth enlargement round at length, not just in discussing the yearly Commission's Progress Reports on each candidate country starting in 1998, but also in preparatory discussions before and after Council meetings¹⁵ or 'State of the European Union' debates.¹⁶ This enlargement would become a defining issue for the European Union, and MEPs explored both the broader political aspects of accepting so many countries that were new to democracy and market economics, and the minute details of accession, from fisheries to agricultural subsidies, to the candidates' overall readiness to implement the *acquis communautaire*. The EP also pushed for

¹⁴ Dieter Fuchs and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Eastward Enlargement of the European Union and the Identity of Europe," *West European Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2002, pp. 19–54.

¹⁵ See, for instance, debate of 27 May 1998, "Preparation of European Council Meeting in Cardiff."

¹⁶ See, for instance, debate on the "State of the European Union" of 18 September 1996.

negotiations to start with all the candidate countries at once and for the date of accession to be set for 2004 and was keen to highlight how the Council and Commission later adopted its suggestions, as German EPP representative and future EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering proudly pointed out in April 2003, during the debate on the ratification of the accession treaty:

“it was our House that demanded a timetable for the negotiations — which the Commission and the Nice Summit accepted — so that they could be completed in time, enabling the countries capable of doing so, and their people, to take part in the 2004 elections to the European Parliament. It was our House that did that! That is what we should be telling people, and it is something of which we can be proud, for it helps to make democracy real in Europe and to give the people of the ten countries the opportunity to send freely-elected representatives to the European Parliament. Let us rejoice in that!”¹⁷

With the acceleration of the enlargement process after the beginning of accession negotiations, the EP’s related activities also increased: debates were more frequent, meetings with the representatives of the parliaments of the candidate countries intensified, and the EP’s presidents visited the candidate countries increasingly often.

Discussions of the fifth enlargement also intensified because at the turn of the millennium it was becoming more necessary than ever to explain enlargement to EU voters: disillusion with European integration, increasing talk of the EU’s democratic deficit, and widespread preoccupation with the citizens’ disaffection with the Union all highlighted in the mind of their European representatives the need to strengthen the legitimacy of the integration process in general and of enlargement in particular, in the eyes of the European public.¹⁸ There was, among MEPs, a perceived need to justify the intake of ten new Eastern European countries. A renewed recourse to history and Europe’s past was a means for providing just such legitimisation.

Throughout the fifth enlargement debates, the ‘return to Europe’ slogan resonated with European parliamentarians and fuelled their reflections on the idea of Europe, intended as the project of European integration but also more broadly as a community of peoples that shared the European geographical, political and cultural space beyond the borders of the EU. Enlargement provided new stimuli for this debate: perhaps more than any other enlargement round before it, the enlargement round of 2004, provided the context for a prolonged

¹⁷ Hans-Gert Pöttering, EPP, Germany, “Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

¹⁸ See for instance the debate of 3 October 2000, especially contributions by Pat Cox and Miguélez Ramos (PSE) on the need to engage with the public on enlargement. MEPs also discussed polls on public attitudes to enlargement in September 2001.

and open-ended discussion on the origins, progress, and ultimate aims of the process of European integration embodied by the EU.

The historical themes that emerge more frequently in European parliamentary discourse form a series of interconnected myths: the first is the myth of the ‘founding fathers’ and of European integration as reconciliation, which is elaborated in opposition to a broader, negative foundation myth of Europe’s heritage of conflict and bloodshed prior to the first integration initiative of 1950. These myths are very closely intertwined and constitute the basis for legitimisation of the European Union as a whole — and have been present in parliamentary and Community discourse ever since the launch of the Schuman Plan in 1950.¹⁹ Furthermore, in order to justify widening this process to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, MEPs emphasised a new set of historical references in their enlargement debates: the idea of a common European heritage and an undivided Europe before the Cold War trumping the ‘artificial’ separation superimposed by the post-Second World War confrontation between East and West.

The myth of European reconciliation and its ‘founding fathers’²⁰

European Parliament discourse after the end of the Cold War was characterised by ubiquitous references to the history of European integration and to the ‘founding fathers’ of the European Union. Besides the official commemorations such as the anniversaries of the Schuman declaration, MEPs often referred to the ‘founding fathers’ when they wanted to stress the positive moral, idealistic and yet pragmatic and innovative origins of the process of European integration. This was a recurrent need when debating the fifth enlargement. For instance, during the December 1997 debate on Agenda 2000 and enlargement, similar references were made by speakers on behalf of all the main party groups: Dutch Liberal Democrat Gijs De Vries highlighted that “the historical responsibility for our generation is to do for the whole of Europe as the generation [of] Adenauer, Beyen, Monnet and Spaak did for France and Germany: to build one communal house, a joint framework within which power

¹⁹ See Claudio G. Anta (ed.), *Les pères de l’Europe: sept portraits*, PIE-Peter Lang, Brussels, 2007; Mark Gilbert, “Narrating the Process: Questioning the Progressive Story of European Integration,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2008, pp. 641–662.

²⁰ An earlier version of this section was published in “Historical Narratives and the European Parliament’s Discourse on the Fifth Enlargement: The Foundation Myths of European Integration,” in Marloes Beers and Jenny Raflik (eds), *National Cultures and Common Identity: A Challenge for Europe?*, PIE-Peter Lang, Brussels, 2010, pp. 135–146.

is subordinate to the law.”²¹ He was echoed to the right of the political spectrum by Italian Alleanza Nazionale MEP Gastone Parigi:

“the coming enlargement is the direct and logical consequence of that revolutionary act which was the foundation of the construction of Europe – I refer to the Schuman Plan — revolutionary because it has weakened the nationalist culture which had been laid down over the centuries, east and west of the Rhine, giving rise to wars and tragedies with monotonous regularity.”²²

This even resonated with those on the left as reflected by the German socialist, and former European Parliament President, Klaus Hänsch:

“a final point which I shall phrase in very general terms: the generation of politicians of the 1950's had the courage and the foresight to remove the thousand-year-old antagonism between France and Germany in a European Community. Our generation of politicians will have to develop the courage and foresight to give the whole continent, for the first time in a thousand years, an organization of peace and cooperation.”²³

Irrespective of the different political affiliations, policy prescriptions, and nationalities of the three speakers, they all referred to the founding fathers of the European Union in a remarkably similar way: they credited them with creating a community for European nations on the Western side of the Iron Curtain and for having extraordinary vision in finding a creative and peaceful solution to conflictual relations among former enemies. The lexicon associated with the myth of the founding fathers always revolved around ‘vision’, ‘courage’, ‘foresight’, ‘inspiration’.²⁴ These references to a ‘generation of leaders’ constituted part of a positive myth that was accepted by MEPs from mainstream political groups across the political spectrum.²⁵ Moreover, when speaking to outside audiences on behalf of the EP, Presidents have used this myth whenever they needed to emphasise the ‘rightness’ of the European project, its implied

²¹ Gijs De Vries, Liberal Democrat, Netherlands, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997.

²² Gastone Parigi, Non Attached (Alleanza Nazionale), Italy, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997.

²³ Klaus Hänsch, PSE, Germany, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997.

²⁴ Maria Martens, EPP, Netherlands, “EP Debates: European Council in Vienna – Austrian Presidency,” 16 December 1998.

²⁵ There were, of course, exceptions to this consensus, mainly on the far-right and far-left of the political spectrum, who are against integration *per se*. See, for instance, Bruno Gollnisch, Non-attached (Front National), France, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997.

‘moral superiority’ over what came before, and its unique place in history. Pat Cox for instance spoke repeatedly of the “generation of European leaders [...] who had the courage of their European convictions,”²⁶ of the ‘vision’ and ‘indispensable’ leadership of Monnet, Schuman, Adenauer, de Gasperi and Spaak.²⁷ The general thrust of his references to the founding fathers is well condensed in this extract from a speech he delivered on 5 February 2004 in front of the Cercle Gaulois on “2004: Towards a Union of 25, towards a European Constitution, towards the European Elections:”

“In Western Europe, with the Second World War barely over, certain individuals had the courage to think big. People like Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Paul-Henri Spaak, Alcide de Gasperi and others, who took the time, who had the authority, the will and the political and personal determination to think in the long term and to think big: not to lose themselves in mean-minded trivia, but to pull themselves out of the ashes and ruins of war, and see hope where there was despair, see an opportunity in the midst of economic collapse, and see the European project in terms of the ideal of reconciliation: a project which offered possibilities which would make those men a generation different from any other generation that Europe had ever known.”²⁸

His predecessors in the role of European Parliamentary President also used similar sets of references. In 1998, José María Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado quoted directly from Jean Monnet’s memoirs in his speech entitled “The Europe We Are Building” to legitimise the ‘new philosophy’ of cooperation above national interest, which he saw as the underpinning of the integration process.²⁹ Nicole Fontaine also referred to the founding fathers as examples of extraordinary leadership: “What the founding fathers of the European Economic Community achieved with six states in the wake of the defeat of Nazi Socialism, we are now prompted by contemporary developments in the world to achieve in our turn, and for the same reasons, for the whole of the continent of Europe.”³⁰ Klaus Hänsch used very similar words during the enlargement debate of 9 April 2003:

²⁶ Address by Pat Cox (Liberal Democrat Group, Ireland) on the occasion of the solemn opening of the Convention on the Future of Europe, Brussels, 28 February 2002.

²⁷ Address by Pat Cox to the IBEC Conference on “Our Future in Europe: Nice and Beyond,” Dublin, 20 September 2002.

²⁸ Speech by Pat Cox to the members of the Cercle Gaulois on “2004: Towards a Union of 25, towards a European Constitution, towards the European Elections,” Brussels, 5 February 2004.

²⁹ José María Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado, “The Europe We Are Building,” Madrid, 1998.

³⁰ Nicole Fontaine, speech at “The 12th meeting of the President of the EP with the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Countries Participating in the Enlargement Process,” Brussels, 5 December 2001.

“I am cautious about drawing historical comparisons, but it is appropriate to do so today. A generation of politicians in the Fifties — Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Alcide De Gasperi, Paul-Henri Spaak and others — had the courage and the vision to establish a European Community that would overcome a thousand years of antagonism between Germany and France and begin the unification of Europe in the West. We, the present political generation, have the opportunity, for the first time in a thousand years, to bring the continent together by peaceful means and on a voluntary basis into a European Union, a union of freedom, peace and prosperity. If we do not seize this opportunity, we will be failing in our historic mission.”³¹

The allusion implied in Hänsch’s words remains fairly vague: it is in fact unclear whether the thousand years he refers to pertain to the Holy Roman Empire, to the Roman Empire, or perhaps to Charlemagne – a figure often considered a precursor of attempts to unify Europe. Nevertheless, the quote is exemplary of the way in which MEPs used historical references when discussing ‘Europe’ during the fifth enlargement: the abundant allusions to an unspecified historical time when Europe was allegedly unified served as one of the legitimising arguments for the ‘re-unification’ of the continent, lacking any chronological specificity but creating a sense of historical inevitability that permeated much of the fifth enlargement discourse.

The myth of the founding fathers greatly emphasised the idealistic aspect of the integration process. It was often embedded in an interconnected and yet wider theme of European integration, as ‘reconciliation’ and as a ‘peace process’. European integration was described as a ‘communal house’³² based on principles of ‘solidarity’³³ and ‘cooperation’³⁴ between former enemies. The MEPs deemed it “the only concrete idea for achieving peace and prosperity”³⁵ in Europe, based on “the brilliant, but historically unusual, idea of bringing people together at the negotiating table instead of through trench warfare.”³⁶ This was an image of Europe as the historical embodiment of new values: “peace as our rule and a shared destiny as the solution.”³⁷ The idea of

³¹ Klaus Hänsch, PSE, Germany, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

³² Gijs De Vries, Liberal Democrat Group, Netherlands, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

³³ Klaus Hänsch, “Rekindling the European Flame,” speech given at Leyden University, 21 February 1996.

³⁴ Staffan Burenstam Linder, EPP, Sweden, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000.”

³⁵ Otto von Habsburg, EPP, Germany, “EP Debates: Applications for EU Membership,” 14 April 1999.

³⁶ Cecilia Malmström, Liberal Democrat, Sweden, “EP Debates: Progress report on enlargement,” 28 November 2002.

³⁷ Enrique Barón Crespo, PSE, Spain, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

reconciliation was extended to the Eastern and Southern European candidate states during the highly symbolic ‘extraordinary debate on enlargement’ held by the European Parliament with the representatives of the candidate countries on 19 November 2002. Therein MPs from the ten candidate countries due to accede in 2004 participated in a session of the EP and sat with their future colleagues in their respective political groups. The debate itself was meant as a symbol of how reconciliation finally embraced Eastern Europe, marking “a truly continental-scale act of reconciliation and healing.”³⁸

MEPs gave little or no consideration to figures that had developed ideas about European integration before 1950, such as Aristide Briand or Richard Coudenhove-Kalergy. The history that they chose to speak about was very much the history of the Europe embodied by the European Union, with its Treaties and its institutions, as in debating the enlargement of the European Union to new member states. MEPs were concerned with legitimising a specific conception of ‘Europe’ realised in the institutional system originated by the Treaties of Rome in 1957, and not with alternative conceptions of Europe or any might-have-beens.

The founding fathers thus became the principal characters in the wider positive myth that underpinned the discourse on European Union: the myth of the inherent moral ‘goodness’ of the integration process, intended as a historical process of reconciliation among former enemies. Moreover, enough time had passed between 1950 and the first decade of the twenty-first century that any partisan allegiances to Christian Democracy or Socialism, Atlanticist or non-Atlanticist tendencies, or even nationalities to which Schuman or Monnet may have made politically charged references were effectively neutralised. Referring to more recent figures such as Helmut Kohl or François Mitterand, whose role in European politics and within the Community could have been considered just as significant, would have been much more likely to introduce an unwelcome partisan or national element to a discourse whose goal was essentially the construction of a common interpretation of the origins and evolution of the European Union of the present. The ‘founding fathers’ thus became more than merely the political leaders who initiated the integration process: whether their choice to initiate the integration process aimed to meet the geopolitical or economic needs of their nation states was no longer an important or determining factor in the way they were portrayed five decades later. What mattered instead was the fact that politicians working at the heart of the integration process in the 1990s used their very names, words, and choices as a legitimating myth for the continuation of that process, and that by doing so they chose to emphasise the ideals underpinning the process rather than national interest per se.

³⁸ Pat Cox, Liberal Democrat Group, Ireland, “EP Debates: Introductory Remarks — Extraordinary Enlargement Debate,” 19 November 2002.

This narrative of reconciliation as the historical uniqueness of European integration reverberated throughout the fifth enlargement discourse and inherently legitimised both the need to continue along this path of integration and the necessity to allow candidate states to become involved in it as full members. The possibility of referring to a generation of leaders that had initiated this process five decades earlier gave this theme the strength of a historical myth: in the 1990s, European integration was no longer a new initiative but a reality whose fifty years of institutional existence and success guaranteed its place in European history. The fact that this was a particular kind of integration based on the establishment of common institutions and that other ideas had existed, for instance in the interwar years, and still floated around about different methods of integration, remained largely outside of parliamentary debates. On the other hand, the figures who had launched this particular kind of integration in the 1950s had in some cases, for instance Jean Monnet's, already acquired a 'larger than life status' within the 'integration story': Monnet had a whole education programme dedicated to him in 1989, which included the establishment of Jean Monnet chairs and Centres of Excellence for the study of European integration — this meant that their names could be used to provide the European Union with a set of wise figures from the past. Moreover, at the turn of the twenty-first century, with arguably four decades of successful integration under the Union's belt, MEPs were no longer talking just about a recent political phenomenon with an uncertain future. They could now claim that what had been born as a risky political initiative had consolidated its rightful place in history over four decades of institution building. By the time the enlargement process to the Central and Eastern European countries began in earnest in 1999, the integration process itself was ripe for use as a myth in itself, and the source of legitimacy for continuing along the path indicated fifty years earlier by the founding fathers.

'Breaking with history': the European project defies historical legacies

The European Parliament's historical narrative of Europe inserted the positive myths of the founding fathers and of reconciliation highlighted above into a wider narrative depicting Europe's history as a negative and dark past that needed to be contrasted and overcome through an integration process whose primary aim was to "break with Europe's history."³⁹ The idea had in fact been present in European discourse since the inception of integration. However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, this came to form the tenets of a complex

³⁹ See for instance Ole Wæver, "European Security Identities," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1996, pp. 103–132, esp. pp. 121–122.

historical narrative in which the old negative myth of conflict was interwoven with the newer myth of reconciliation embodied by the European Union as a primary theme in the legitimisation of the fifth enlargement. This historical narrative was based on the claim that Europe must reject its history prior to 1950: the negative myth of Europe's long-term historical experience provided a broad frame for the positive myth of reconciliation and cooperation. Europe's dark past served to legitimise the integration process as the only tool capable of providing reconciliation among European nations and cooperation as the basis for peace and prosperity. Whilst the reconciliation myth was essential for the legitimisation of the European Union and for its enlargement to the wider European continent, its essence was entirely rooted in the historical legacies of Europe's experiences prior to the launch of the integration process in 1950.

The discourse of the European Parliament presented the idea of reconciliation and of European integration in general as a 'break with history', a "historical absurdity [...] that was gradually consolidated and came to change the face of history,"⁴⁰ a project initiated to defy Europe's historical legacy and to 'go against' history. Europe's past of war and violence culminating in the two world wars is the negative historical myth that underpins the whole European construction. Paradoxically, it was this very historical myth that legitimised the idea that in order to achieve peace and prosperity Europe must free itself of its historical legacy and project its political vision into the future, denying a past that led to so much bloodshed.

Throughout the fifth enlargement debates, MEPs and EP Presidents acknowledged that the roots of European integration were to be found in war:

"out of the ashes of destruction and hate of two world wars came a Union of the European peoples. War between the member states, despite centuries of rivalry and conflict, is now unthinkable. Europe can be a force of peace throughout the continent,"⁴¹ and that "the original challenge was twofold: first, through close cooperation, to subdue an historic hostility which tears our continent apart in order instead to build friendship and understanding, and secondly to provide political and economic strength and thus the confidence in our system based on democracy and market economy, which was necessary to be able to resist the external threat which the Soviet Empire posed on the dark horizon. Through its successes the EU has changed the path of world history."⁴²

⁴⁰ Enrique Barón Crespo, PSE, Spain, "EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000," 3 December 1997.

⁴¹ Klaus Hänsch, PSE, Germany, "Address to the National Assembly of Slovenia," Ljubljana, 2 April 1996.

⁴² Staffan Burenstam Linder, EPP, Sweden, "EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000," 3 December 1997.

Yet the historical roots of European integration also meant that Europe needed to break away from its past and create a new system that was to be completely detached and opposed to the previous one: not just to ‘overcome history’ but “not to allow a triumph of the dead over the living not to let history dominate our future.”⁴³

The myth of post-war Europe as a ‘peace process’⁴⁴ based on reconciliation and cooperation was thus based on a mirror historical narrative of the violence and nationalist antagonism that dominated Europe until the culmination of the Second World War. Many MEPs emphasised how historical attempts to unify Europe had been carried out by force and how only the European Union embodied the peaceful and voluntary unification of the continent:⁴⁵ for instance, in 1996 Italian EPP representative Antonio Graziani argued, referring to historical legacies and the rights of minorities in Slovenia, that a Europe assigning blame for past events “would not be a Europe of today, far less of tomorrow, but the Europe of the civil wars of the recent and more distant past.”⁴⁶ A year later, his Danish colleague in the EPP Frode Kristoffersen, speaking in his role as *rapporteur* for Lithuania, also talked about the need to bring Europe together after centuries of violent struggle:

“the idea is to get this Europe repaired and bind it together again. A characteristic of this part of the world is that for centuries, at regular intervals, we have bashed each other over the head, and time and again Europe has been dismembered [...] but now at the end of this century the important thing is to organise relationships in this part of the world and to repair the damage that was done in the first half of the century.”⁴⁷

Spanish Socialist and former EP President Enrique Barón Crespo argued on 19 November 2002 that enlargement would finally bring an end to the shameful trail of war and blood left by the Twentieth century and that Europe would go back to being a geographical union and would be born again as a political unit:

“Con ello [enlargement] conseguiremos, simbólicamente en Grecia, que Europa se libere del rapto del Minotauro, que la ha tenido tanto tiempo presa. Porque, cuando en 2004, se abran las puertas para los nuevos socios,

⁴³ Klaus Hänsch, “Address to the National Assembly of Slovenia,” Ljubljana, 2 April 1996. This was both a reference to national antagonisms that had led to conflict and world war and to the resurgence of nationalist conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

⁴⁴ Pat Cox, Liberal Democrat Group, Ireland, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

⁴⁵ Cecilia Malmström, Liberal Democrat, Sweden, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

⁴⁶ Antonio Graziani, EPP, Italy, “EP Debates: Europe Agreement with Slovenia,” 23 October 1996.

⁴⁷ Frode Kristoffersen, EPP, Denmark, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997.

Europe volverá a ser una union geográfica desde el Atlántico hasta el Báltico y desde la Laponia hasta Chipre, y atrás quedarán las ignominies de un siglo XX en el que las guerras y repartos de botín rasgaron los Estados, destrozaron a los pueblos y trazaron fronteras a sangre y fuego [...] Europa [...] renacerá como una unidad política.”⁴⁸

Swedish Liberal Democrat Cecilia Malmström reiterated during the enlargement debate of April 2003 that “for the first time, we are uniting almost the whole of the continent by peaceful means — through agreements, compromises and treaties, rather than through war and conquest.”⁴⁹ Pat Cox came back to this idea time and again in his speeches in front of the Parliaments of the candidate countries:

“For the first time in millennia on the continent of Europe, we are creating a common space of prosperity, reconciliation and peace. We are not creating that space at the point of a sword or from the barrel of a gun, but, as I said earlier, by the free will of a free people. It is that which gives the depth and strength to the European process of reconciliation.”⁵⁰

This negative foundation myth was predicated on the need to break with history, by creating and advancing a new, ‘ahistorical’ principle of organising political and economic relations among the peoples of Europe and thus breaking free from the dominant legacy of the past. The image of Europe constructed through the use of these historical narratives was therefore one in which Europe, intended as the contemporary framework of supranational institutions and close cooperation between member states, was the child of a unique generation of leaders who decided to reject the legacy of Europe’s past and on the basis of this rejection created a new system of relations based on the shared commitment to reconciliation. Europe, in this sense, is therefore to this day a historical process of reconciliation — one that stemmed from the history of this continent and yet projects its identity into the future and rejects the image of Europe embodied by the past.

This historical narrative had at its very heart a contradiction that could in the long term undermine the whole construction of a historical foundation myth for

⁴⁸ Enrique Barón Crespo, PSE, Spain, “EP Debates: Extraordinary Debate on Enlargement,” 19 November 2002 (“With this we will achieve, symbolically in Greece, that Europe free herself from the Minotaur’s abduction, which kept her prisoner for so long. When in 2004 the doors open for the new members, Europe will return to being a geographical union from the Atlantic to the Baltic and from Lapland to Cyprus, and so the ignominies of the twentieth century will cease, the wars and booties that tore apart states, strangled peoples and traced frontiers with blood and fire [...] Europe [...] will be reborn as a political unit.”)

⁴⁹ Cecilia Malmström, Liberal Democrat, Sweden, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

⁵⁰ Address by Pat Cox (Liberal Democrat Group, Ireland) to the Saeima’s Plenary Session (Latvian Parliament), Riga, Latvia, 28 May 2002. He used the word ‘reconciliation’ 28 times in his speeches over his two years as EP President.

the European Union. By selecting only a very specific and very short historical experience as the positive foundation of the modern European polity, and attributing a wholly negative connotation to the course of European history before 1950, the European Parliament effectively denied legitimacy to historical references attempting to go further back in time to the much richer and longer history of Europe before 1950. Moreover, in identifying the experience of European integration after WWII with the only positive historical experience that Europe could refer to in constructing its identity and advocating the need to break with all previous history, parliamentary discourse attributed a positive value to an experience that had been shared only by Western European countries on the basis of economic integration and, to a much smaller extent, political cooperation. This created problems on two levels: it excluded Central and Eastern European countries from the Union's positive historical narrative and it deprived even Western Europe itself of the possibility of finding positive shared experiences beyond the beginning of the integration process — rejecting as part of that negative past, cultural and political experiences that could otherwise provide additional content to a positive foundation myth. It excluded centuries of shared political, cultural and social experiences that were actually considered by many Europeans as the most important aspect of their common heritage. This contradiction is all the more striking considering that MEPs used this historical narrative the most in their discussions of Central and Eastern Europe, countries with whom the members of the European Union had in fact not shared the experience of institutional and economic integration of the previous decades. In light of the division between East and West during the Cold War, the MEPs' choice of founding their historical narrative on the exclusion of the experiences prior to the Second World War is in fact quite puzzling: justifying the fifth enlargement would thus entail a difficult balancing act between a double narrative of recent exclusive experiences and previous, unspecified common experiences of alleged European unity before the Cold War.

Justifying the fifth enlargement: a common history before the Cold War

The European Parliament's debates on the fifth enlargement saw MEPs engaging with the double challenge of providing legitimacy to the European integration process as a whole, and justifying the expansion of membership to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that throughout the East-West bloc confrontation had constituted the Community's political 'other'. Geopolitical and economic reasons were of course paramount, yet a historical theme also came into play: Central and Eastern European countries had the right to be part of the integration process because, according to the historical narrative of

‘Europe’, before the Cold War had forced them on the “wrong” side of the Iron Curtain, the CEECs were part of Europe and thus shared a long, if at times far from peaceful history with Western European countries. The theme of ‘breaking with history’ was vividly used in the justification of enlargement, when it was combined with the idea of the Cold War as the historical ‘kidnapping’ of the Eastern half of the European ‘whole’.⁵¹

Before the end of the Cold War, Western Europe had defined itself politically in stark opposition to the communist dictatorships of Eastern Europe. After 1989 its political identity could not be changed — in fact, it was strengthened by an increased emphasis on ‘European’ values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.⁵² Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe was predicated on the need to support these countries’ political re-orientation towards adherence to these same political/politico-cultural values.⁵³ However, this in itself was not sufficient to legitimise enlargement. After all, none of the former Warsaw Pact countries were yet fulfilling the political and economic criteria of membership and would not come close to Western European standards throughout the 1990s.

With the fifth enlargement, however, MEPs clearly felt the need to go beyond the traditional political identity to provide a historical one alongside it as a foundation myth of the European integration process embodied by the EU. The European Parliament largely justified widening EU membership to Central and Eastern European countries on the basis of a moral duty stemming from a twofold reading of history as having ‘robbed’ these countries of their ‘rightful place’ in Europe through the Cold War and of an earlier, shared historical heritage cutting across the Iron Curtain. This shared history made the accession of Central and Eastern European countries ‘natural’.⁵⁴ The fifth enlargement would bring together centuries of common ‘history, culture and art’, and overcome the division imposed by Yalta and Munich.⁵⁵ These two historical moments symbolised the two different aspects of the historical division of Europe: Munich was considered by many to be the moment in which Western

⁵¹ See, for instance Jean-Louis Bourlanges, Liberal Democrat, France, “EP Debates: Enlargement — Agenda 2000, 3 December 1997.

⁵² That such values may just as accurately be deemed to be ‘Western’ did not seem to alter the course of MEPs’ words much: only a few individuals pointed this out, or tried to engage with the prickly question of what can in fact be deemed to be the difference between the ‘Europeanness’ and the ‘Westernness’ of certain political values.

⁵³ The Copenhagen Criteria established in 1993 are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/criteria/index_en.htm

⁵⁴ Nicole Fontaine, “Speech to the European Conference,” Sochaux, 23 November 2000.

⁵⁵ Enrique Barón Crespo, PSE, Spain, “Extraordinary Debate on Enlargement,” 19 November 2002.

Europe had abandoned Eastern Europe to National Socialist aggression, and Yalta was seen as the imposition of an artificial geopolitical and ideological division that would then be cemented by the hardening of the Cold War. In both cases, MEPs claimed that the way in which these countries had been abandoned to their fate now imparted upon the European Union a ‘moral obligation’ to accept their membership applications.⁵⁶ Enlargement would mark the final end of the Cold War division and “ensure that the old iron curtain is not replaced by a velvet one, excluding part of the continent from the benefits of belonging to the European family.”⁵⁷ It was also “an act of moral justice: European countries, countries which are just as European as those which are already part of the Union but which, by a twist of fate, found themselves, through no fault of their own, on the wrong side of an artificial line drawn across our continent, are coming back to Europe, coming back to us.”⁵⁸ The lexicon in sentences such as the one above moreover shows how by using ‘history’ as a somehow external or superior force that imposed the Cold War division MEPs also partly absolved Western European countries and their most powerful ally, the US, from responsibility for the division of the continent.

Europe had, of course, never been unified in the first place, and so such talk of ‘re-unification’ constituted at best a very benevolent view of European history before the world wars and the onset of the Cold War. Wolff’s study of the invention of the idea of Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth Century provides but one example of the fact that the distinction between East and West had already been present in the European consciousness for centuries, and that Western Europe had a long tradition of excluding Eastern European countries from its political and even ‘civilisational’ self-image.⁵⁹ The concept of *Mitteleuropa* is another instance of the many different concepts of ‘Europe’ and potential ways of subdividing its countries and peoples by grouping them according to different cultural, political and geographical criteria — and one that did not really make an appearance on parliamentary enlargement discourse.⁶⁰ Furthermore, what the MEPs’ alleged ‘common history’ actually amounted to was never specified. While

⁵⁶ Otto von Habsburg, EPP, Germany, “EP Debates: Applications for Membership,” 14 April 1999. He was referring specifically to the Baltic states.

⁵⁷ Peter Truscott, PSE, UK, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997. For other examples, see also Frode Kristoffersen, EPP (2 December 1998), and Klaus Hänsch, PSE, Germany, “Progress towards Accession by the Twelve Candidate Countries,” 3 October 2000.

⁵⁸ Jas Gawronski, Liberal and Democratic Group, Italy, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

⁵⁹ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1994.

⁶⁰ See Peter Stirk, *Mitteleuropa: History and Prospects*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1994.

this was pointed out by some MEPs,⁶¹ such remarks remained isolated and did not influence the main thrust of parliamentary discourse. European parliamentarians seemed, on the contrary, to prefer instead a reading of history that was more in line with that put forward by East-Central European intellectuals in the 1980s, from Kundera to Havel. In fact, Vaclav Havel himself became an important point of intellectual reference for many MEPs, who quoted his words time and again during plenary debates. His ideas about the ‘dream’ of uniting the European continent made their way into the enlargement discourse of the European Parliament and EP President Pat Cox constantly quoted Havel’s 1990 speech to the EP when visiting the candidate countries:

“Without dreaming of a better Europe we shall never build a better Europe. To me the twelve stars of the European flag do not express the proud conviction that we will build heaven on this earth — there will never be heaven on earth — I see these twelve stars as a reminder that the world could become a better place, a better place that in time and from time to time if we had the courage to look up at the stars.”⁶²

Increasingly, MEPs and EP Presidents talked not merely of ‘enlargement’, but of ‘re-unification’: the word reunification appeared sixteen times in the October 2000 enlargement debate, twice in September 2001, eleven times in the 19 November 2002 debate (not the extraordinary debate of the morning, but the standard debate on the progress by the candidate countries in the afternoon), and nine times in the final enlargement debate before the official accession of the new member states on 9 April 2003. Pat Cox used the word ‘reconciliation’ sixty three times in the official speeches he gave outside plenary over his two-year term as EP President between 2002 and 2004.

Parliamentary discourse on the fifth enlargement also built upon the idea of the European project as a break from history by defining the need for enlargement as the need to ‘amend history’⁶³ and to ‘finally turn the page’⁶⁴ on

⁶¹ See, for instance, André Brie, Confederal Group of the European United Left, Germany, “EP Debates: Progress Report on Enlargement,” 19 November 2002.

⁶² Pat Cox was referring to the speech by Vaclav Havel to the European Parliament, 16 February 2000. Speech by Pat Cox to the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu), Tallinn, Estonia, 15 April 2002.

⁶³ As Enrique Barón Crespo put it: “As citizens of the European Union we now have the historic opportunity to transcend Munich — to reverse the events of 1939 when the people of central and eastern Europe were abandoned — and this must be done on the basis of what we have built. I think it is a question of amending history, and we should welcome the opportunity to do so” (Enrique Barón Crespo, PSE, Spain, “EP Debates: Enlargement — Agenda 2000, 3 December 1997).

⁶⁴ Jean-Claude Pasty, Union for Europe, France, “EP Debates, Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997. Even though Pasty had a very different, right-wing political position from the speaker preceding him, he still made use of the same set of references.

the ‘cruel division of Europe’⁶⁵ imposed by the Cold War. The accession of the Eastern European countries was therefore also the symbolic closure of the period of division and signified that the Berlin Wall had finally been torn down.⁶⁶ Enlargement was thus “an opportunity because it [was] an occasion to reunite what the tragedies of recent history had torn apart.”⁶⁷ The mere use of the word ‘re-unification’ provided the fifth enlargement with significant historical and moral legitimisation: “‘enlargement’ itself is not the correct name – it is the coming together again of our old continent of Europe, it is a reunification, a re-birth of sorts, a renaissance of the European idea.”⁶⁸ Upon the signature of the Accession Treaty on 16 April 2003, Cox stated that the history had finally been corrected and its legacy overcome: “Today we consign our fractured past to the history books.”⁶⁹

The narrative constructed by MEPs remained fairly superficial and the rhetoric highlighted above was really the whole extent of their elaboration of a historical discourse. They refrained from trying to define the actual contents of this alleged common history and created a narrative that could perhaps work within the specific circumstances and emotional connotations of the fifth enlargement, but would prove difficult to extend, as with the example of Turkey.

Contested histories: unresolved debates on the European past

The dominant historical narrative of parliamentary discourse on the fifth enlargement remained fairly general and rarely touched upon unresolved debates about the past that were still relevant for contemporary politics in the acceding states. A compelling illustration is provided by the way in which the European Parliament tried to tackle the issue of the Beneš Decrees, the controversial piece of Czech legislation at the centre of the debate on the political requirements for EU enlargement. MEPs were not in agreement over the interpretation of the Beneš Decrees in history and eventually a consensus emerged not to discuss them as a historical issue, which would have led to a much wider debate on reprisals and possibly on forced migration throughout

⁶⁵ Ursula Stenzel, EPP, Austria, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

⁶⁶ Address by Pat Cox (Liberal Democrat Group, Ireland) at the European Council in Brussels, 25 October 2002.

⁶⁷ Catherine Lalumière, ARE, France, “EP Debates: Enlargement – Agenda 2000,” 3 December 1997.

⁶⁸ Pat Cox, Liberal Democrat Group, Ireland, “Speech to the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu),” Tallinn, 15 April 2002.

⁶⁹ Address by Pat Cox, Liberal Democrat Group, Ireland, President of the European Parliament at the Ceremony of the Signature of the Treaty of Accession, Athens, 16 April 2003.

Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War. Instead, they mainly confined them to the realm of the past, as exemplified by the words of German EPP representative Jürgen Schröder: “This is not some sort of attempt to rewrite history on our part. There is no question of that. It is Today and, more importantly, Tomorrow, which are at stake.”⁷⁰ In addition, his fellow group member Elmar Brok stressed:

“Our task is not to examine the past from a legal perspective, but to ensure that no discrimination arises as a result of the current application of the law [...] there is no attempt to use issues of history as new combat instruments in the European Union; instead, we must ensure that we learn from history to prevent the suffering, expulsions, murders and wars which occurred in the past from ever happening again.”⁷¹

British PSE member Simon Murphy was in agreement: “Questions of history are important but questions of history are exactly that, historical questions [...] they are not conditions for accession to the European Union.”⁷² As was fellow British and Liberal Democrat Graham Watson: “[the] Liberal Democrats deplore the abuse of enlargement negotiations to reopen old wounds and animosities. The infamous Beneš Decrees are a good example of this. It serves no useful purpose to inflame tensions on this issue.”⁷³

The European Parliament, however, remained divided on its judgment of the Beneš Decrees and, more broadly, on how to address and deal with certain consequences of the Second World War in candidate countries. Many MEPs eventually argued that the controversy was unnecessary because the decrees were a historical occurrence and should bear no consequence for Czech eligibility for EU membership, as entry would project this country into a common future and a ‘community of justice’⁷⁴ that would ensure the respect of human and minority rights. They also argued that the Czech willingness to comply with the Copenhagen political criteria was evidence enough of their allegiance to the principle of reconciliation, the ‘moral foundation of integration’.⁷⁵ Reconciliation was thus used as a blanket concept that could also include the Czech case: by joining the EU the Czech Republic would embrace the principle of reconciliation as the founding principle of European integration, and other EU members would in turn extend this ‘spirit’ to the Czech Republic

⁷⁰ Jürgen Schröder, EPP, Enlargement, “EP Debates: Applications for EU Membership,” 14 April 1999.

⁷¹ Elmar Brok, EPP, Germany, “EP Debates: Enlargement of the Union,” 12 June 2002.

⁷² Simon Francis Murphy, PSE, UK, “EP Debates: Enlargement of the Union,” 12 June 2002.

⁷³ Graham Watson, ELDR, UK, “EP Debates: Enlargement of the Union,” 12 June 2002.

⁷⁴ Jürgen Schröder, EPP, Enlargement, “EP Debates: Enlargement,” 9 April 2003.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

and ensure, as a community, that the discriminatory nature of the Beneš Decrees would remain confined to the past.

This was a means to overcome the obstacle without dealing with the deeper historical issues inherent in the adoption and maintenance of the Decrees in the Czech legal system. It allowed the MEPs a way out of the debate on the treatment of minorities in Central and Eastern Europe after the war, and it also allowed for the continued use of the general narrative of integration as reconciliation, glossing over the more controversial aspects of the past and its consequences, without delving into the actual complexities of specific historical events, and even relegating them to a past that was ‘closed’ and far away as opposed to a past that still had contemporary relevance. Even if references to such events may have been more relevant to contemporary politics and hence they could arguably have stimulated greater interest and possibly identification among Europe’s citizens, there could be no agreement across the political spectrum and national divides on the ‘correct’ interpretation of such histories, and thus they were left out of the dominant narrative.

Conclusion

The EP’s historical narrative for the fifth enlargement followed many strands, weaving together the three historical myths: that of the founding fathers and reconciliation, that of Europe’s dark past, and that of a shared history prior to the Second World War and the Cold War — all the while using the idea of reconciliation as a common thread. Parliamentary discourse built up these myths within its debates. In the EP’s image of Europe, the European Union itself became the embodiment of the myth of the European peace process, and was presented in constant opposition to the historical tradition of violence. The recent positive myth was anchored in the myth of the long history of conflict and legitimized as a decisive rupture with Europe’s historical legacy and as the dawn of a new era. In justifying the fifth enlargement, however, Parliament also reintroduced the idea that there was in fact a positive shared history between the countries of Western and Eastern Europe and that this constituted the basis of a ‘reunification’ of the continent: enlargement was thus transformed into the rightful return of the kidnapped East to the common European fold.⁷⁶

To what extent, however, did this narrative resonate with those very Central and Eastern Europeans who were acceding to the EU and for whose accession the narrative was developed? Did they, entirely or in part, buy into the historical

⁷⁶ On this issue, see Helene Sjursen, “Why Expand? The Question of Legitimacy and Justification in the EU’s Enlargement Policy,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2002, pp. 491–513.

identity discourse articulated by MEPs, refer to the same foundation myths or at least use similar historical references? The first encounter between MEPs and representatives of the CEEC candidate countries, on the occasion of the November 2002 debate in which the doors of the EP were opened for participation to colleagues from the future member states, seem to suggest that there was little if any desire among the latter to share the historical narrative developed by MEPs. The myth of the founding fathers was used by some of the candidates' representatives, with a Slovak speaker referring to Schuman as 'the father of Europe',⁷⁷ Slovenia's representative referring to both Schuman and Adenauer, but the overwhelming majority did not refer to them, or indeed to any other elements of the historical narrative developed by MEPs thus far.

The absence of a common historical discourse upon this occasion, however, may well have derived from a preoccupation on the part of the candidates with the very real political and economic requirements of membership, trumping for the time being the need for a full development of a common identity beyond compliance with formal entry requirements. The question that remains is whether there was in fact a convergence onto a common discourse, and specifically a common historical narrative, in the enlarged European Parliament after the new countries' entry in May 2004. This would show that new MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe shared the same interpretation of the EU's historical identity, or at the very least that they were socialized into a common way of thinking and talking about Europe and European identity. The persistence of this discourse would also show that the historical narrative developed to justify the fifth enlargement could in fact be applied to other circumstances, rather than remain confined to a very specific time and context and thus failing to provide a universal, or at least more widely usable basis for a shared identity.

A preliminary exploration of enlargement debates between 2004 and 2007, when the enlarged EP debated the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, does not however seem to corroborate this hypothesis. On the contrary, very little mention was made of historical references, and the potent historical discourse that permeated enlargement debates between 1999 and 2004 was largely absent between 2004 and 2007. The idea of reconciliation, for instance, which was at the heart of the narrative before 2004, was mentioned once in the December 2004 debate on Romania's progress towards accession, in relation to the "historic reconciliation between Romania and Hungary."⁷⁸ The immediately subsequent

⁷⁷ Figel (MPC-SK), Internet: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/nov2002/verbatimreport.pdf>. Cyprus' representative also referred to the myth of the founding fathers, namely Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, as 'visionaries'.

⁷⁸ Csaba Sándor Tabajdi, PSE, Hungary, "Romania's Progress towards Accession," 15 December 2004.

discussion on Bulgaria did not even have that token reference — although the German Van Orden did state that “the European Union’s enlargement to the east and south-east marks a momentous change in Europe. We have finally put an end to the hostilities and the divisions of the Cold War.”⁷⁹

The debate on both Bulgaria’s and Romania’s accession on 12 April 2005 fared slightly better: Hungarian Socialist MEP Dobolyi stated: “We are ready to welcome the people of Bulgaria into the association to which they have always belonged, since they share our history, culture and values. In so doing, we mark the end of an artificially created break, just as in the case of Romania.”⁸⁰ Her Polish colleague Libcki also recalled the idea of the artificial division imposed upon Europe during the Cold War: “The accession of these two countries will mean that the divisions created by the Yalta agreement, and that ran counter to European culture, tradition and justice, will at last be totally erased from the map.”⁸¹

These were meagre offerings, however, for the nearly three years that passed between the enlargement of May 2004, and its completion with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007. Debates over this enlargement were held every few months, and yet no other examples of MEPs reprising the historical narrative of the previous five years were present. This may have been the result of a very simple change: as eight Central and Eastern European countries had already joined the EU in 2004, the urgency to justify the mere fact that they had in fact the right to join had lost most of its potency — and this would reflect on the debate on Bulgaria and Romania, whose accession could largely be seen as an extension of the 2004 enlargement. However, this seems only a partial explanation for the sudden disappearance of a discursive strand that had until then been so pervasive — indeed, the Bulgarian and Romanian accessions would have been the perfect occasion for reiterating and consolidating this discourse, and showing its applicability beyond the specific circumstances of the fifth enlargement. This, however, was not the case. There is therefore another reason that strikes the observer as the root of history’s disappearance from the enlargement discourse: the narrative developed prior to 2004 was not shared by the new post-communist states that had joined the EU. The strong Western European slant with which the historical construction had been drawn made it exclusive, rather than inclusive, because it justified the entry of Central and Eastern European countries on essentially Western terms.

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Van Orden, European Conservatives and Reformists Group, UK, “Bulgaria’s Progress towards Accession,” 15 December 2004.

⁸⁰ Alexandra Dobolyi, PSE, Hungary, “Application for Accession of Bulgaria and Romania,” 12 April 2005.

⁸¹ Marcin Libcki, UEN, Poland, “Application for Accession of Bulgaria and Romania,” 12 April 2005.

MEPs had shaped their historical discourse in the image of their own historical experiences and contemporary political concerns. MEPs in the 1990s were widely concerned with the public's increasing disaffection with the European project. They were also aware of the fact that the recourse to images of war and bloodshed risked not having any resonance with the new generations of European citizens: precisely because the reconciliation process had been so successful, MEPs in the 1990s grew increasingly aware of the fact that young Western Europeans had only ever experienced 'peace and prosperity'.⁸² Images of war in Europe no longer worked in the same ways as they had in the Cold War decades: despite the outbreak of war on European territory with the prolonged conflict in the former Yugoslavia, crucially, the new generations did not have any direct experience of the world wars and nor, increasingly, did their parents. The European Union had made the idea of war among the member states such an alien concept that it now became difficult to conjure up the myth of reconciliation as the primary factor of legitimatisation for the Union. At the same time when they were constructing this myth, MEPs were also increasingly aware of the fact that it would not be sufficient to stimulate strong allegiances to the enlarged European Union among its citizens: the myth of reconciliation may have been consolidated during the fifth enlargement debate and used to justify the accession of Central and Eastern European countries, but whether it would survive as a legitimating tool for the future remained open to question. Almost as significant was the fact that the myth of European integration was constructed on the basis of largely superficial, and even artificial, historical references: MEPs rarely, if at all, chose to venture into the complexities of European history, nor did they seek to provide an accurate understanding of the intricacies of the common historical experiences that they referred to. This was due to the very nature of their historical discourse, which revolved around the creation of a foundation myth for the contemporary needs of their political project. Their political use of history was part of a rhetorical arsenal aimed at defining 'historical' Europe in terms of the concerns of contemporary European politics: a simplified version of history was essential to the successful creation of a legitimising myth. To an extent, the intricacy of European history, both in terms of its divided and violent nature and in terms of the political, cultural, and social interconnection of European societies dating back long before the beginning of political and institutional integration defied the attempts by Europe's elected representatives to provide a simplified version of 'the common European history' that could be fully convincing to its citizens and to future member states. The European narrative remained composed of different myths

⁸² See, for instance, Gunilla Carlsson, EPP, Sweden, "EP Debates: Progress towards Accession by the Twelve Candidate Countries," 3 October 2000.

and the need to justify the fifth enlargement compelled MEPs to bring back references to yet another set of pre-war experiences to overcome the Cold War division. This undermined the coherence of the myth of post-war integration, and the attempt to use ‘reconciliation’ as the key concept bridging the gap between Western and Eastern Europe fell short of its target when Cypriots failed to resolve their own division and in the controversy surrounding the Beneš Decrees in the Czech Republic, for instance, also remained frozen and both countries joined the European Union in May 2004 without any progress on these issues. The fact that the historical narrative was largely absent from enlargement debates post-2004 does not necessarily mean, however, that the EP’s identity discourse abandoned history altogether. On the contrary, the late 2000s were characterised by a surge in activity within the European Parliament on questions of memory and history, exemplified for instance by the adoption of resolutions on the occasion of anniversaries such as the end of the Second World War or the Schuman Declaration, the designation of 23 August as the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, and of 11 July as the Day of Commemoration of the Srebrenica Genocide. The EP also took the highly controversial decision in December 2008 to set up a ‘House of European History’ in Brussels, a museum whose mission is “to bring Europe’s history alive [...] and help promote an awareness of European identity.”⁸³ History and memory thus remained very much at the heart of EP activities and discourse, and their absence in the 2004-2007 enlargement debates is not therefore an irrefutable indication of the end of the EP’s historical narrative. What the absence did mean, however, was that the legitimating function of the historical narrative applied to the fifth enlargement was not easily transferable to other enlargement rounds. Its specificity certainly made it difficult to apply to Turkey, for instance, and its marked Western European character meant that MEPs who joined the assembly from the new member states did not find it representative of their own historical experiences, rendering it unusable in their own elaborations of the identity embodied by the EU.

The historical narrative of reconciliation remained limited to the unique circumstances of the Eastern European enlargement, and would hardly be applicable to cases such as the Turkish one, for example. More importantly, it was based on a Western European experience of the post-war years that was not, and could not be, shared by the Central and Eastern European partners — and their reluctance to even broach the subject after their entry was evidence of the gulf in both the experience and perception of history.

⁸³ European Parliament, “EP Bureau Decides to Set Up a ‘House of European History’,” 16 December 2008.

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