

# **POLITICS OF MEMORY AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS: WAR COMMEMORATIONS IN CROATIA AND UKRAINE**

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Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of International Relations

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary  
2017

## **Abstract**

The process of collective identity formation raised to the state level formulates the official identity narrative that reflects and legitimizes certain politics. Commemoration rituals are one of many manifestations of the official state narrative, which are particularly relevant for formulating the collective memory of wars. Therefore, studying the commemoration events allows to look into the commemorations related to war as an institutionalized nation-building project. How these two conflicts are related to the revision of the history of WWII is tracked through the changes in the discourse in commemorations related to WWII, in which the newer conflicts are reflected. The process of nation-building in Croatia and Ukraine has different patterns in terms of the changes in commemoration rituals related to the Second World War, despite the fact that both countries had similar pre-conditions in terms of their controversial past related to WWII and regime change after the break-up of the Yugoslavia and USSR. Institutionalized changes of commemoration rituals in Ukraine happened only after the outbreak of the conflict in Donbas, while in Croatia they took place earlier after the Homeland War.

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## Introduction

In 2015, a new holiday "Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation" was established in Ukraine, which is celebrated on 8th of May and was explained by the President as "joining the European countries" in celebration<sup>1</sup>, which implied a change in the traditional Victory Day commemoration on 9<sup>th</sup> of May, which was established in the USSR and later remained in independent Ukraine. In Croatia, the late 90s marked the beginning of official commemorating in Bleiburg<sup>2</sup>, which was a taboo topic in Yugoslavia. These are only two examples of the changes in the commemoration rituals of events that happened over 70 years ago. The changes in commemorations are interrelated with current politics, through giving an official state narrative regarding the national past and, consequently the present and future vision. This is important to understand, because formulated collective memories and identity, although constructed, create the field of imaginable possibilities.<sup>3</sup> This means that through understanding the promoted state discourses, we can better understand the conflict-peace dynamics between ethnic groups. This is relevant for seeking the possible explanations of outcomes of ethnic-based violence.

The process of collective identity formation, raised to the state level is used by state leadership to formulate a national identity narrative, which reflects and legitimizes certain

<sup>1</sup> Petro Poroshenko, 2016, speech of the President during the "first minute of peace" at the celebration of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation, [in Ukrainian], *Vysoky Zamok*, 9 May.

<sup>2</sup> The Bleiburg commemoration is dedicated to the victims of Partisan forces, i.e. Ustašas and Bosnian Muslim soldiers and civilians who were executed at the end of WWII in May 1945; the event is called "Memorial Day of Croatian Victims in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence". See: House of Representatives of the Croatian Parliament, 1996, "The Law on Holidays, Incentives and Non-Working Days in the Republic of Croatia," [in Croatian], *Narodne novine*, accessed May 21, 2017, [http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1996\\_04\\_33\\_674.html](http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1996_04_33_674.html)

<sup>3</sup> Consuelo Cruz, 2000, "Identity and Persuasion: How Nations Remember their Past and Make their Futures," *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 3, pp. 282.

politics.<sup>4</sup> Commemoration rituals is one of many manifestations of the official state narrative which is particularly relevant for formulating collective memory.<sup>5</sup> The most recent and large-scale conflict, that is of ultimate relevance for the collective memory on the European continent is WWII. Therefore, studying the commemoration events allows to look into memories of war as an institutionalized nation-building project.

The process of nation-building in Croatia and Ukraine has different patterns in terms of the changes in commemoration rituals related to WWII, despite the fact that both countries had similar pre-conditions in terms of their controversial WWII history (related to the fact that parts the populations of both countries fought in different armies) and regime change, that allowed re-interpretation of that history after the break-up of Yugoslavia and the USSR. Also, both cases are relevant because of the conflicts that happened after WWII, during which the Institutionalized changes of commemoration rituals in Ukraine happened 25 years later than in Croatia, after the outbreak of the conflict in Donbas.<sup>6</sup> By linking how the WWII discourse echoes in the conflict in Donbas and echoed in the Homeland War<sup>7</sup> discourse in Croatia, it is possible to investigate patterns of revision of history in relation to violent conflicts. The comparison of the two cases allows to see how the WWII discourse develops after the regime change but without a conflict

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, 2002, "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet–Era Monuments and Post–Soviet National Identity in Moscow," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 3 (September): 525.

<sup>5</sup> Aleida Assmann, 2006, Memory, Individual and collective, in *Contextual political analysis*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly. Oxford Handbooks of Political Science: 210-224.

<sup>6</sup> Conflict in the Donbas region is also referred to as the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, War in Donbas, Russian military intervention in Ukraine, 2014 pro-Russian unrest in Ukraine, etc. The terms mean the armed conflict between the armed forces of Ukraine and pro-Russian and Russian-backed separatist movements, in the region that started after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014.

<sup>7</sup> The Homeland War, or the Croatian war of Independence took place between 1991 and 1995 and started with the demand autonomy from Yugoslavia and resulted in a large-scale conflict that ended with establishment of modern Croatia.

(Ukraine from 1991 till 2014) and in the long-run peace after the conflict (Croatia after the Homeland War till present day). This analysis gives a more in-depth perspective on number of issues, such as the role of commemorations in official state narratives, the influence of external factors on the changes of such narratives and use of old symbols for legitimization of certain politics. It is important to research the official commemorations organized by the state, as the state has the monopoly over material means to spread a certain vision of national identity through commemoration rituals. That, in turn, is useful for understanding potential and actual conflict dynamic, through (as Kaufman does) the influence of the narratives on actions, and by analyzing how the narratives are being adapted to the wider external environment and the agenda of political actors.

This work researches the state nationalism through one of its manifestations, namely commemoration rituals. The way the war commemorations are interrelated with conflict dynamics can be explained by elite-based<sup>8</sup> and emotion-based<sup>9</sup> views on nationalism. The elite-based allows to see how the respective commemoration rituals are formed and used by the elites to further their agenda. The emotion-based attitude, in turn, can be used to explain how the feelings that are created through commemoration rituals are transferred into actions and vice versa. Finally, the core element of the research is to look into the relation between armed conflict and politics of memory. A method that takes into

<sup>8</sup> Elite-based approaches explain ethnic clashes through manipulations of elites, which channel the dissatisfaction of the population to ethnic conflicts in order to sustain power; see: V.P. Gagnon, Jr. 1994-95, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 130-166.

<sup>9</sup> Emotion-based approaches explain the timing and targeting of - ethnic violence based on the individual-level emotions of the perpetrators. See: Rogers Petersen, 2002, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

account all elements - Kaufman's *symbolic politics framework*,<sup>10</sup> is the theoretical basis for my research. I argue that the symbolic politics framework does not fully explain the different timing of change in politics of memory regarding WWII in Croatia and Ukraine. Therefore, I build on Kaufman's largely endogenous framework by adding the exogenous factors in accordance with the *situational nationalism thesis*.<sup>11</sup>

In the following work, I investigate how to explain revisions of history in state nationalism. For this, I will look at the commemoration rituals that reflect the changes in interpretation of history. My main question is under which circumstances and how the interpretations of history change. Understanding of this allows to see how contemporary politics are shaped in relation to past and current armed conflicts. I elaborate on the different timing of changes in the cases of Croatia and Ukraine, linking this to the external security threats, such as the Homeland War and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. These two cases have been chosen precisely due to the combination of regime change, change in national identity discourse and violent conflicts – the timing and links between the phenomena will be investigated by comparing the commemorations in the countries. My choice of discourse analysis as a method is based on the applicability of this methodology for grasping the essence of identity-building projects through the rituals of commemorations. The discourse analysis is done through investigating the overall symbolic meanings related relevant commemorations (symbols, dates, flags, etc.) and the speeches of the

<sup>10</sup> The symbolic politics framework is explains different outcomes in divided societies with the different narratives used by the elites – if they were promoting national unity the outcome was peaceful, however in the case the elites mobilized their respective groups on the basis of existing fears the outcome was ethnic conflict; see: Stuart J. Kaufman, 2015, *Nationalist Passions*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

<sup>11</sup> Situational nationalism thesis explains that national identities can change in situations of domestic, regional or international environment; see: Erin K. Jenne and Florian Bieber, 2014, "Situational Nationalism: Nation-building in the Balkans, Subversive Institutions and the Montenegrin Paradox," *Ethnopolitics* 13, no. 5: 431-460.

highest officials on the occasion (usually the President), as well as their repetition in the media.

In the next chapter, I explain the symbolic politics framework and situational nationalism thesis and link them. Following that I elaborate on commemoration rituals, official state narratives, the interests of elites and the wider international environment. That allows me to proceed with analyzing the discourses on war commemorations in my respective cases in a way that explains the outlined research question. Further, I elaborate on the relevance of the topic, link the applied theories with the cases, justify the applicability of the cases for research and outline my methodology and research design.



## Chapter 1 - Theory, Literature and Methodology

Many states have gone through different stages of revisions of national history and changes in identity formation. However, the core re-interpretation of history and the national "self", expressed in changes in commemoration practices, in the case of Ukraine happened two decades after gaining independence, and not even as a part of mobilization strategy before a conflict, but actually after the beginning of a violent conflict. In Croatia the institutionalized changes happened much earlier after the regime change, but also not as a part of mobilizing for conflict, but in the aftermath of it. Tracing the links between commemoration rituals of WWII and the more recent conflicts shows a similar relation in the two cases. Taking into account that both countries were at the same stage of just gaining independence in 1991 from a federal socialist state and were facing a regime change, that required the establishment of a new official state narrative, one would expect similar revisions of history. However the significant difference is that Croatia went through a violent conflict in the early stage of independence, while Ukraine had more than two decades of peace. Now, when the changes in the official commemorations in Ukraine are happening and reflected in the changes in the official state narratives, the link between the "start" of the revisions of history and national identity and the violent conflict can be tracked.

In order to look into the nature of this difference, I concentrate on the re-interpretation of history of WWII, and more precisely on the rituals of commemorations of wars. Linking the narratives about WWII to more recent conflicts such as the Homeland War and conflict in Donbas allows to look into the interrelation of external security threats and national identity formation which is expressed through revisions of WWII history in state

nationalism. WWII is not only the most large-scale international conflict in world history, but the core part of the contemporary national history in the respective countries. The main mechanism that establishes this link between current and past conflict is the use of historical comparisons or metaphors as instruments of political communication.<sup>12</sup> In other words, past conflicts provide symbolic material for understanding and re-interpreting new conflicts.<sup>13</sup> In this way, the established metaphors and comparisons of WWII are re-used in the shaping of national identity in the context of more recent conflicts. And by understanding the references, images and understandings of national identity based on a certain interpretation of WWII, that are used in a newer conflict, it becomes clear how the re-thinking of WWII was related to the later conflicts.

### **1.1. *Symbolic predispositions and situational nationalism***

According to Kaufman the existing narratives shape symbolic predispositions, which then get mobilized through threat perceptions and the leaders' encouragement and lead to outbreaks of violence. He explains different outcomes in divided societies with the different narratives used by the elites – if they were promoting national unity the outcome was peaceful, however in case the elites mobilized their respective groups on the ground of existing fears, the outcome is ethnic conflict. Kaufman also contributes to the international relations component of the studies of conflict, by adding that if two states have mutually hostile official narratives, they will be symbolically predisposed to feel threatened.<sup>14</sup> The way an enemy or friend perception is created is through attributed

<sup>12</sup> Roland Paris, "Kosovo and the Metaphor War," *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (2002): 426.

<sup>13</sup> T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, 2000, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* Psychology Press: 22.

<sup>14</sup> Kaufman 2015.

symbols, that make a certain part of the others identity hostile or friendly. The elites are, in a way, dependent on the preexisting predispositions, they cannot promote politics that are controversial to them or change them from one day to another. Therefore for Kaufman, the symbolic predispositions are the starting point.<sup>15</sup> However, taking into account the broader international context, allows to trace a different pattern of the relation between official state narratives and peace-conflict relations.

If in Kaufman's model the closest external variable that influenced the model was the other group's behavior, I complement the model with exogenous factors, where the conflict arose due to external factors and symbolic predispositions reflected in war commemorations started to be re-shaped only in the new post-conflict environment. If Kaufman operates mostly with openly hostile predispositions, looking at commemoration events in my cases allows to analyze the self-other perception, traced through discourse analysis of certain commemorations/celebrations. History interpretation as a way of promoting a certain symbolic predispositions is recognized by Kaufman, for instance through textbooks. Commemorations are, for the purpose of my study, also a reflection of the promoted narratives.

The external factors importance is in my research added by using the *situational nationalism thesis* that explains trends of national self-identification that are different, from what the mobilization efforts of the elites suggest.<sup>16</sup> For instance, situational nationalism explains how changes in national identity strength is not entirely in the hands of elites and institutions, but depends on the wider national and regional identity perceptions and

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Jenne and Bieber 2014.

clashes. Depending on how the predominant identity is defined regarding the nation-state, the narrative can promote national unity over different criteria, causing inclusion or separation among different populations. In the case of the study of the case of Montenegro, which the authors use to explain the situational nationalism thesis, the national identity meaning changed due to regional dynamic, so the “the Montenegrin identity came to be associated with anti-federal attitudes” and “titular identity was thus thickened still further to include a political position”.<sup>17</sup>

I investigate similar dynamics related to national identity formation in Ukraine and Croatia, however concentrating on one state attempts to define a new national identity. Scholars researching the influence of discourses and narratives on politics and conflict assume or imply, that the state leadership or the elites are using the former to influence the later – by encouraging or discouraging intervention<sup>18</sup>, conflict<sup>19</sup> or simply to receive political capital.<sup>20</sup> My understanding is based on the same assumption, taking into account Kaufman’s implication that the elites have to take into account and manage the existing symbolic predispositions and the assumption of Jenne and Bieber that the outcome of the identity-building process the outcome depends also on the international environment. Following that line of reasoning, I see the importance of the changes of national identity for the elites in the need to legitimize their politics in the respective international context. Commemorations are one among the means of organizing the collective memory and

<sup>17</sup> Jenne and Bieber 2014, 452.

<sup>18</sup> Lene Hansen, 2006, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. Routledge; Paris 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Kaufman 2015.

<sup>20</sup>; Forest and Johnson 2002.

through it the national identity perception<sup>21</sup>, which is very relevant for studying official state nationalism, as the state has the monopoly over the material means for promoting certain commemorations.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the situational nationalism thesis explains that the nation-building process depends upon existence of clashing identities – which makes it a very suitable framework for researching my cases, due to the past divisions related to WWII. Conflicting identities that come from the wider international environment can influence the self-other perception. Therefore, to examine how elites aim to revise the national identity depending on the wider international environment and how that is reflected in history revisions, I want to take a look at the WWII history.

The theoretical contribution is based on complementing Kaufman's theoretical framework, by looking at the shifts of the elites' attempts to change the national identity politics depending on the wider international environment. The choice of Kaufman's framework is based on the fact that it takes into account both of the elite-based approach and collective emotions, which are of core importance to research commemorations at a state level.<sup>23</sup> I complement this with the concept of situational nationalism which adds to our understanding about when the elites adjust or not adjust the official state commemorations, due to new external factors, such as escalation of violence. In this way the topic adds an additional international relations dimension and value in explaining the relation of the international environment and the politics of memories in states.

<sup>21</sup> Assmann 2006, 217.

<sup>22</sup> Forest and Johnson 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Kaufman 2015.

By looking at the commemoration events as examples of creating narratives, which are shaped by the elites, I assume that the interests of elites are in this case what shapes the narrative. One of the factors that is related to the interests of the elites is the wider international environment. As the elites aim to stay in power, when they face an external threat they have to respond differently than if they aim to maintain peace. Tracing that relation to the official state narratives regarding WWII in the case of Croatia and Ukraine and the Homeland War and the conflict in Donbas, illustrates how the conflicts mark the change of commemoration rituals and the discourse about WWII. As Croatia found itself in a different position in the international environment, as a newly established state that is at war, the circumstances required a new official narrative, which would be in line with the elites needs to legitimize the new respond to the international environment. In Ukraine, the independence was not followed by institutionalized changes of narratives, but after the external threat emerged, the official narrative was re-shaped, using the WWII discourse to explain the conflict in Donbas.

In the case studies, I will concentrate on the armed conflicts and their interrelation with revisions of history that reflect the official narratives re-shaped by the elites. In this way the changes in the commemoration rituals, reflect the current official narrative, however, the question when the elites change the narrative has to be explained by taking into account security threats. This is in line with the understanding of the *situational nationalism framework*, which explains that national identities can change in situations of domestic, regional or international conflicts, which gives the broader international relations perspective and allows to incorporate important regional and international

factors in the analyses of state nationalism.<sup>24</sup> I combine my cases with the established framework by Kaufman that foresees that the elites cause conflict through creating certain narratives, which, however, do not necessarily have to be a cause-effect relationship. Rather, by observing that the changes in the institutionalized state practices of identity formation actually may happen only after an actual outbreak of violence, we can see that the elites' framings and the violent conflict are interrelated in a way that one may influence and re-enforce the other, according to the situation in the wider international environment. By supplementing Kaufman's framework with the situational nationalism framework I take the shifts in the wider international environment into account and look into the case studies in order to elaborate on the differences in timing of changes in the national identity politics in Ukraine and Croatia.

If Kaufman sees the ethnic conflict as following the elites creating symbolic predispositions and maintaining existing predispositions between groups, I want to shift the attention to external factors, that through the elites the symbolic politics formation. If Kaufman's framework suggest direct causal relationship between the created believes and the outbreak of violence, the situational nationalism thesis explains the possible deviations, such as in case of outbreaks of violence that happens when the symbolic predispositions are not used on the state level to mobilize for conflict. By adding to Kaufman's framework the situational nationalism approach, the assumption is that the conflict is caused by external factors, as the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia or annexation of Crimea, after which the elites face the necessity to mobilize the population

<sup>24</sup> Jenne and Bieber 2014.

through new narratives. The outbreak of the violence, however, was not caused by institutionalized symbolic politics, as Kaufman's theory would foresee: in the case of Croatia before 1991, when the Homeland War started, the commemoration rituals simply could not promote a narrative that was implying any conflicting predispositions, as they were in line with the Yugoslav ideological narrative. The official commemorations in Ukraine before the beginning of the conflict in Donbas also remained in line with the post-Soviet narrative. However, after the outbreak of violence that changes in narratives become evident, first in examples of changes of commemoration practices and discourse related to WWII. This reveals a deeper interrelation between armed conflict and symbolic predispositions, and shows how the outbreak of a violent conflict can cause the elites have an interest in re-formulating the official state narrative.

## **1.2. *Commemorations and state nationalism***

Linking the situational nationalism thesis and symbolic politics framework in analyzing official state narratives, I concentrate on nationalism, or more precisely, on a national identity perception, promoted through state institutions through commemorations related to WWII. My choice of war-related commemorations is based on the fact that the main external factor related to national identity shifts I want to research is a violent conflicts – in the case of Croatia the Homeland War and in the case of Ukraine the conflict in Donbas. Therefore I look at how the disputes and symbols as well as identity-perceptions of the previous biggest conflict are re-interpreted to explain the new conflicts.

The literature on official/state nationalism explains the institutionalized ways of creating a national identity, mostly related to an ethnic group. Brubaker names it "nationalizing nationalism", which is the nationalism of the core ethnic group that includes "using the



state power to promote the specific (and previously inadequately served) interests of the core nation."<sup>25</sup> The cases of Ukraine and Croatia are examples of newly established independent states, which became homelands for their core nations after a past in socialist federations. This, combined with regime-change and strong ideological shifts, creates a field for establishing new "nationalizing nationalisms", where the interests of the core nation as well as the identity are closely linked to the traumatic past struggle.<sup>26</sup> In order to relate state nationalism to commemoration events, it is useful to look at Billig's<sup>27</sup> understanding of hot and banal nationalism. The author sees official commemorations as part of hot nationalism - a suspension of maintaining national identity through banal routine, and turning to the state of exception in order to create extraordinary patriotic emotions and sentiments.

Commemorations of historical events as part of the nation-building process reflect the current official narrative. The theoretical background includes linking Renan's understanding of a nation, extended by Billig's separation of hot and banal nationalism. According to Renan, the core element of the formation of a nation is "possession in common of a rich legacy of memories"<sup>28</sup> and a desire to build a common future, based on the existing heritage. The common suffering in the past, as well as the will to build a common future as a community is what defines a nation. In this context, what a nation remembers and what it forgets in the collective imagination, is created out of the need to

<sup>25</sup> Rogers Brubaker, 1996, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press: 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London : Sage Publications, 1995, n.d.): 44-46.

<sup>28</sup> Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.) *Becoming National: A Reader*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, [Originally a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne, March 11, 1882.]

have a common history. Remembering is done through the commemorations, which become an institutionalized way of remembering and forgetting certain events in the past and seeking for historical continuity of the represented national identity.<sup>29</sup> According to Assmann, the way the political memory (a transgenerational common memory) is formulated is different in nature than the individual memory.<sup>30</sup> Repeated occasions for collective participation are, among others, a way how the political collective memory exists. In order for it to be preserved, the society needs rituals, practices and symbols, including commemorations.

Within the literature on politics of memory and commemoration, there is empirical research on the cases of Ukraine and Croatia. Vjeran Pavlaković<sup>31</sup> offers a comprehensive analysis of the politics of memory related to WWII in Croatia, looking into how commemorations illustrate the traumatic divide within the society regarding national history. The author describes it as the "red-black" division, where the commemorations of events become reserved for certain groups and are seen or perceived as either a pro-Ustaša commemoration (as Bleiburg) or as a pro-Partisan commemoration (such as the commemoration at Jasenovac).<sup>32</sup> Although both commemorations are done "under the national flag", namely officially by the state, in both cases they are commemorating victims of ideology (communism and fascism, respectively), where there were Croatian victims in both cases. Regarding Ukraine, scholars like Zhurzhenko and Klymenko study

<sup>29</sup> John R. Gillis, 1996, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton University Press.

<sup>30</sup> Assmann, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Vjeran Pavlaković, 2008, "Red Stars, Black Shirts: Symbols, Commemorations, and Contested Histories of World War Two in Croatia," *National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*.

<sup>32</sup> Jasenovac was a concentration camps established by the Ustaša regime. Annually commemoration for the victims are held in April. The ceremony is not recognized as an official holiday, but is organized by the state. See: Pavlaković 2008, 5.

the development and changes in official national identity discourse by the Ukrainian leadership, showing the ambivalent attempts of the Ukrainian leadership to create a national identity.<sup>33</sup> According to them, the first decade of Ukrainian independence was marked by moderate attempts to formulate a national identity and separate from the Soviet identity, but did not result in active history revisions and in promotion of an inclusive narrative. The scholars show how the issue of revisions of history became politicized after the Orange Revolution, and shifted depending on the geopolitical orientation of the state leadership. However, no changes in institutionalized commemoration practices took place.

### **1.3. Case study justification and relevance**

The controversial national history in WWII created a division over national identity in both Croatia and Ukraine. In Croatia the “red-black” division is relevant: the division between antifascist Partisan forces the Independent State of Croatia.<sup>34</sup> In Ukraine, similarly, the division between the veterans of the Red Army and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army<sup>35</sup> arose. This has two crucial implications for my research: first, the existence of two national identity narratives resulted in the need for formulating a more inclusive self-representation narrative. The strong association of the WWII antifascist movements with the,

<sup>33</sup>Lina Klymenko, “World War II or Great Patriotic War Remembrance? Crafting the Nation in Commemorative Speeches of Ukrainian Presidents,” *National Identities* 17, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 387–403.

Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “A Divided Nation? Reconsidering the Role of Identity Politics in the Ukraine Crisis”, in: *Die Friedenswarte*, Vol. 89, No. 1-2 (2014), Special Issue “Die Ukraine-Krise”, pp. 249-267.

<sup>34</sup> The Independent State of Croatia (Croatian: *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH; was a Germany’s puppet state during WWII, established on parts of the occupied Yugoslavian territory. NDH was governed by the fascist Ustaša regime.

<sup>35</sup> Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Ukrayins’ka Povstans’ka Armiya*, UPA) - Ukrainian nationalist partisan army that fought against Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during the Second World War.

representatively, Soviet and Yugoslav domination added to the division. Finally, the outbreak of the latter conflicts in both cases caused the re-emergence of WWII discourse.

Croatia experienced a shift in WWII discourse and a change in institutionalized commemoration rituals in the early independence phase, while Ukraine experienced it more than 20 years after the breakup of the Soviet Union. This difference in terms of the changes in commemoration events makes the comparison of exactly these two cases suitable for looking into how the external security threat and changes in commemoration rituals are interrelated. This, in turn, contributes to the understanding of revisions of history in official state nationalism. Moreover, Ukraine, as the first case is analyzed in order to look at how a discourse develops after regime change but prior to the armed conflict, while the Croatian case shows the development of the discourse in the long run after the conflict. Empirically, the work contributes to the existing work on the politics of memory in Croatia and Ukraine, by analyzing the broader discourses regarding WWII commemorations. It is important to understand how WWII is represented in pre-conflict peaceful Ukraine, post-conflict peaceful Croatia and periods when the countries were actually going through conflict. The differences in patterns of commemorations in different periods reflect how elites are, through commemorations, creating an official narrative in the period when they are maintaining peace, unlike periods when they engage in conflict.

By observing how the WWII narratives get re-enforced and repeated in further conflicts, the research on the narratives regarding WWII becomes crucial for understanding the nature of the broader dynamics in the relevant country and region. Therefore the topic of

national identity formation in this case has real life policy relevance. Jović<sup>36</sup> considers the monopoly over official memory an attribute of non-democratic states, as democracies allow multiple narratives to be present and discussed. Additionally, the author stresses that "[a]ny political change — and especially one that includes a complete collapse of a regime — is followed by a period of transition and consolidation, in which the bond between 'real power' and power to dominate over symbols, memories and forgetting remains strong."<sup>37</sup> The author explains well the dynamics in post-Communist states, where certain narratives were marginalized, and came back only after the collapse of the regime. This was the case with the commemoration of Bleiburg in the time of Yugoslavia, where it took place only within the community of Croatian emigrants.<sup>38</sup> It is also clear that an undemocratic regime through censure and propaganda implies a certain official narrative that does not allow any different interpretations. This makes the topic even more relevant for tracing the transition in terms of political culture and manipulation with politics of memory in regions like Eastern Europe and Western Balkans.

Nationalism scholars devote attention to commemorations as one of the ways to examine the success of post-conflict reconciliation.<sup>39</sup> I want to concentrate on the use of WWII symbols in explaining later conflicts looking for a better understanding of the current

<sup>36</sup> Dejan Jović. "'Official Memories' in Post-Authoritarianism: An Analytical Framework." *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 6, no. 2 (August 1, 2004): 97–108.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>38</sup> Pavlaković 2008: 8.

<sup>39</sup> Darko Karačić, Tamara Banjeglav, and Nataša Govedarica, 2012, "Re:Vizija Prošlosti : Politike Sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji Od 1990 Godine", Sarajevo: *Asocijacija alumni Centra za interdisciplinarnu postdiplomske studije*; Pavlaković 2008.

political orientation of the state leadership and a more comprehensive overlook at the conflict-peace dynamics and state nationalism.

#### **1.4. *Research design and methods***

In order to analyze the discourse of the commemoration in each case the core official events were chosen. The Victory Day and the recently established Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation represent the perfect cases for looking into the dynamics of national identity formation in Ukraine. Additionally, another crucial holiday that reflects the official narrative about wars is the Defender of the Fatherland day and the changes in celebration of that holiday. As the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is still ongoing, there are no established commemoration events, however, the events of the conflict are re-called in WWII commemorations in recent years. In sum, although not all commemoration events are exactly parallel in terms of their symbolism, in each case they together represent an adequate ground for tracing the changes and links in the discourse regarding war commemorations. I look at the pre-conflict period since independence, then devote attention to the outbreak of the conflict itself, and finally evaluate the development of the discourse at the moment, roughly 3 years after the beginning of the fighting.

In the case of Croatia, Jasenovac and Bleiburg are the most horrifying massacres committed by the opposed forces during WWII that are commemorated nowadays in Croatia and raise both public debate and attract the attention of scholars dealing with the politics of memory. Another crucial commemoration event is the Victory over Nazism Day, the discourse around which allows to see the main narrative and self-representation of the state in relation to the events of WWII. I will start with the historical background overview of the role of WWII terms and narratives at the moment of the dissolution of

Yugoslavia, the war period and the main milestones of the post-war history. The Homeland War discourse is also going to become part of the post-war WWII discourse, through narratives that bound them and use similar patterns of legitimization. This is the way to trace the logic of WWII commemoration changes and their relation to the more recent conflicts. Overall, the analysis of the two cases allows me to compare the changes of rhetorical frameworks that are used during commemorations, but even more importantly the two cases together allow to trace patterns of the conflict-commemoration in different time settings, in order to confirm the relevance of the more current conflicts in revision of history of WWII.

There are numerous studies which use discourse analysis to look into how actual foreign policy outcomes and identity formation are interrelated. Hansen<sup>40</sup> analyzes the Western discourse on the Bosnian War and offers a methodological contribution in terms of the analyses of discourses on conflicts in the region and is my methodological guideline for setting up the categories for future analysis: the self-other distinction and identity construction. Paris'<sup>41</sup> work with the Kosovo conflict discourse adds the crucial methodological insight into how metaphors of previous conflicts re-emerge in later conflicts' discourses and change the context. For my case study this is relevant, as the main relevance of the analysis is in tracking the re-emergence of the WWII discourse in the Homeland War. Milliken<sup>42</sup> describes different methods for doing discourse analysis, for instance predicate and metaphorical analysis of texts, which are both useful for my

<sup>40</sup> Hansen 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Paris 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Jennifer Milliken, 1999, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (June 1).

discourse analysis. In discourse, the identity of an actor is constructed into a representation of self, situated and differentiated from the other, often by using juxtapositions. This indication of self, either explicit or implicit, reflects the promoted national identity and the role this identity will be perceived on the international stage. The indication of self is not necessarily direct, but has to be established. In my case, discourses about WWII will be examined, in order to see how they establish themselves in state commemorations in relation to a newer conflict and the national identity narrative. Applying intertextuality on the first level, I analyze the addresses given by the highest state representatives on the occasions of commemorations. In analyzing the discourse about a certain commemoration practice, the understanding of the background and the broader context are necessary, such as the history of establishment/abolishment of a certain commemoration and the meanings and symbols related to it. I look into speeches delivered by the highest official present at the commemoration (which is by itself also a telling factor) and into the published addresses on a relevant occasion. I also take into account the media discourse during the relevant periods when the debate about commemoration practices received attention. Finally, I link my findings to the conflicts, and trace the interrelation between the changes in commemoration practices of WWII and the next violent conflict.

In chapter 2 I begin by analyzing the WWII discourse in Ukraine with the overall context of the establishment and symbols of the commemorations, proceeding by looking into how that is reflected in the speeches and in the broader discourse. I trace several main elements: the self-representation and the changes in it, the linkage of the more recent conflict to WWII and the meanings attached to a certain commemoration. I then proceed



with analyzing the discourse in Croatia along the same lines, comparing the case to Ukraine. The elites in both cases for this analysis are the representatives of the respective current state leadership. I analyze the commemorations in Ukraine, beginning with Victory Day (9 May) and the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation (8 May) that illustrate how the pompous Soviet celebration day became a part of the nationalistic discourse. The second commemoration event is the Defender of the Fatherland Day (changed from 23 February to 6 of December). The two commemorations are analyzed in the context of the official state narrative, starting from 1991 till the aftermath of the conflict in Donbas. The established analytical model based on Kaufman's symbolic politics complemented by situational nationalism in the case of Ukraine explain how the WWII discourse since did not change significantly 1991 till 2014, when the new conflict led to the necessity of a new national identity representation. The rapid changes in the discourse and commemoration practices before and after can be seen by looking into the new discourse after 2014 that allows to track how the WWII narratives are linked and re-interpreted within the newly developed commemoration rituals and how they are used to legitimize the current conflict.

In chapter 3, I apply similar methodological tools to the case of Croatia, using the commemorations of Bleiburg and Jasenovac for illustrating the conflicting discourses. The Victory over Fascism Day (9 May) will also be analyzed as a commemoration reflecting the identity discourse. As in the previous case, the changes of the WWII narrative and how they are related to the more recent conflict will be observed in the aftermath of the conflict itself. I situate the results of my research within the broader topic. Finally I will conclude by linking the outcomes of my empirical research with the provided theoretical background.

## Chapter 2 - Commemorations in Ukraine

Ukraine's complicated national history related to the Second World War that still finds reflections in the present public discussions is caused by Ukrainians fighting on different sides of the conflict: as part of the Red Army, as partisans and in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. After the end of the war, parts of the UPA continued operating in small partisan groups against the USSR up till 1950. During the Soviet times the interpretation of history of WWII, or, as it was called The Great Patriotic War<sup>43</sup>, was monopolized and brought in line with the dominant ideology.

While throughout Europe the end of the Second World War was celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, in the Soviet Union the Victory Day was celebrated a day later, on the 9<sup>th</sup> and was commemorating the end of the Great Patriotic War. The commemoration was introduced following the signing of the German surrender on 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 or 9<sup>th</sup> of May by Moscow time. Therefore, the victory was announced in USSR one day later, so 9<sup>th</sup> of May became the Victory Day, and remained such in some of the former republics after 1991, including Ukraine. The second relevant commemoration is the Defender of Fatherland Day, which was related to the memory of the Red Army (former Red Army Day and Soviet Army Day) and was celebrated on the 23<sup>th</sup> of February.<sup>44</sup> The re-naming of the commemoration to Defender of Fatherland was done later separately by states of the former Soviet Union after its dissolution.

<sup>43</sup> The term "Great Patriotic War" refers to the war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany from 22 June 1941 to 9 May 1945 and was used in the USSR and is still used in some former Soviet Republics.

<sup>44</sup> "The secret of 23<sup>th</sup> of February. Ukrainians do gave something to celebrate,"[in Ukrainian] *Istorychna Pravda*, accessed May 23, 2017, <http://www.istpravda.com.ua/articles/2013/02/23/113366/>.

In the following two sub-sections I analyze the two commemorations in Ukraine described above beginning from the years of independence till the present day. I outline the relevant state narrative, the incentives of the elites to formulate it in that way, depending on external environment and the manifestation of the narrative in the commemoration events.

### **2.1. The Victory Day**

The official rhetoric regarding WWII in Ukraine in the early years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was, on one hand, still using the typical Soviet clichés, and on the other – confronted with the necessity to formulate a new narrative of the independent state and answer the controversial questions regarding interpretation of national history. If the pre-Soviet history provided rich material for glorification of the national identity, the interpretation of the Soviet period of history did not change significantly, due to the state leadership avoiding discourse seen as openly anti-Russian (namely any discourse that glorified the pro-national struggle during the WWII).<sup>45</sup> The Victory Day remained institutionalized in the same way as it was during the Soviet times – as a celebration of the victory in the Great Patriotic War and commemoration of the victims of the war, taking place on 9<sup>th</sup> of May. Although both terms – Great Patriotic War and Second World War were used in the discourse about the commemoration, but the Great Patriotic War was clearly preferred by the Ukrainian leadership in 90s. At the Great Patriotic War was a typical Soviet discourse, the use of it implied the affiliation with being a part of the USSR in the WWII. Such identity included the common Ukrainian and Soviet common identity,

<sup>45</sup> Kataryna Wolczuk, 2000, "History, Europe and the "national idea": The "official" narrative of national identity in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers*, 28:4, 682.

however it excluded those parts of population, for whom the Second World War started in 1939.

In the speeches of the first two Presidents of independent Ukraine, Kuchma and Kravchuk, the link to the common heritage of the Soviet peoples that jointly contributed to the great victory is made through stressing the common efforts and suffering. For example such cooperation would be highlighted how other Soviet peoples accepted and helped Ukrainian civilians that were evacuated from the front line.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, constructions that imply inclusion, assimilation and are aimed at construction of a "self" are used to stress two different features: the suffering of the Ukrainians in WWII and the heroic victory that saved not only Ukraine but entire Europe from the fascist threat. Both implications were made through the Great Patriotic War discourse – so, meaning the fighting of Ukrainians in the Red Army. Another feature that Ukrainian leaders use to address the public are the constructions that imply the continuation of the history and nation, linking the contemporary generations to the heroic past of their ancestors. This emphasis on continuity also serves as a legitimization tool for the political leadership. In terms of self-identification, the official narrative was, in line with the pro-Russian foreign policy orientation of the elites.

Building up a "common future" with Russia and preparing for the joint celebration of the upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War was recognized as a priority in 1993 that shows how close the identity ties with the post-Soviet discourse

<sup>46</sup> Leonid Kravchuk, 1993, "Victory in the name of life" [in Ukrainian], report of the President of Ukraine L.D. Kuchma at the Festive Meeting on the Occasion of 48th Anniversary of Victory, *Uriadovyi Kurier*, 11 May.

were.<sup>47</sup> Although president Kuchma explicitly addressed the controversy of the relations with Russia, for instance by calling upon objective recognition of the past, that had both problems and common glorious achievements, but ultimately stating that the relations between Russia and Ukraine should never be spoiled.<sup>48</sup> In constructing the official narrative, forgetting or avoiding of some elements of national history was at least as important as stressing others. The UPA was not a part of the official discourse in the first decade of Ukrainian independence. The only early indirect mentioning of their role in the President's Victory Day speech was made in 1995. Namely, Kuchma stated that everyone who fought against the Nazis, are heroes, regardless of the colors of their flags.<sup>49</sup> This was far from formulating an inclusive Ukrainian ethnic identity, the discourse still implied the political (Soviet against Nazi) self-identification regarding the WWII. But as in the example about the relations with Russia, this is a modest attempt of president Kuchma to address controversies and explain the new national narrative. Such attempts to create a more inclusive national identity by partly downplaying and avoiding the dividing elements and using unifying images illustrate the attempts of the Ukrainian leadership to create a coherent national identity.

The first shift in the official state discourse can be observed after the 2004 Orange Revolution, after President Yushchenko tried to change some elements of the official narrative, by rehabilitating the Ukrainian nationalistic discourse regarding WWII. Zhurzhenko stated that due to lack of democratic institutions and politicization of the

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Leonid Kuchma, 1995, "Greetings from the President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma on the Occasion of the 51st Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War" [in Ukrainian], *Holos Ukrainy*, 11 May.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

issues of history, Yushchenko's attempts were presented by his political opponents as radicalism and even pro-fascist and helped to mobilize the electorate against him.<sup>50</sup> The main difference of Yushchenko's speeches is the absence of emphasis on the role of the common heritage of the Soviet nations.<sup>51</sup> The second most striking issue is the call for reconciliation between the veterans of the Red Army and UPA.<sup>52</sup> Yushchenko in his 2009 speech on the occasion of the Victory day stressed that the main lesson from the war was the unacceptable nature of any totalitarian or undemocratic regime – a striking difference from Kuchma's 1998 speech, when he pointed out that the main lesson was the need for peace. Since the Orange Revolution the contribution of the Ukrainians as part of the Soviet Union was no longer emphasized, shifting the focus to the contribution of the Ukrainian republic as such. The Ukrainian national contribution to the anti-fascist struggle was the main self-identification element, but already shifting from a purely political to ethnic affiliations, not associated with anti-Soviet affiliations. However this did not result in change to the institutionalized commemoration practices, and also the shift in the discourse lasted till the next President Yanukovich received most of his political credit by opposing previous Yushchenko's politics of memory.

After winning the elections in 2010, Yanukovich supported the more pro-Russian historical narrative than his predecessor and reviewed Yushchenko's institutionalized attempts to change the official narrative. As Kuchma used to do, he stressed the importance of common heritage of different nations in the Soviet Union and he historical

<sup>50</sup> Zhurzhenko 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Victor Yushchenko, 2009, "Address of the President of Ukraine on the Occasion of Victory Day," [in Ukrainian], *Zaporozka Sich*, 8 May.

connection between Ukraine, Europe and Russia. Generally this pattern was reflected through all his speeches, which reflects the attempt "to appeal to both the Ukrainian population and the international community".<sup>53</sup> In 2011, a law, amending the regulations of the celebrations of WWII, (that at that time was still called the law of Ukraine "On the perpetuation of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945") was proposed. According to this amendment, the red flag of the Soviet Union (as the banner of victory) should be used as a symbol alongside the Ukrainian national flag.<sup>54</sup> The law was adopted right before the commemorations in 2011, in April, and abolished by the Constitutional Court in June the same year.<sup>55</sup> But within this short period of time, the use of symbols already caused an outbreak of violent clashes between the pro-nationalist and pro-Russian activists during the celebration of 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2011, in Lviv.<sup>56</sup> This marked the first attempt to institutional changes in the commemoration rituals, even if not a long-lasting one.

After the beginning of the conflict in Donbas however the WWII commemorations changed, first by introducing the "Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation" on 8<sup>th</sup> of May; secondly, within the same law changed the 9<sup>th</sup> of May was re-named Day of Victory over Nazism in World War II<sup>57</sup> – the re-naming was also part of the abolishment of the Soviet

<sup>53</sup> Klymenko 2015, 398.

<sup>54</sup> Law on Amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On perpetuation of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945" on the order of official use of copies of the Victory Banner [in Ukrainian], 21.04.2011 № 3298-VI," accessed May 6, 2017, <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3298-17>.

<sup>55</sup> "The Constitutional Court blocked the law on the red flag" [in Ukrainian], 2011, *UNIAN*, accessed May 6, 2017, <https://www.unian.net/politics/507867-ks-zabrakoval-zakon-o-krasnom-flage.html>.

<sup>56</sup> "Red flags, fighting and shooting in Lviv", [in Ukrainian], *Istorychna Pravda*, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2011/05/9/38262/>.

<sup>57</sup> "MPs regulated the issue of celebration of the victory over Nazism day in Ukraine" [in Ukrainian], 2015, *Ukrayins'kyi Tyzhden*, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://tyzhden.ua/News/133920>.

discourse, that used the term “fascist Germany”, which was replaced by “Nazi”.<sup>58</sup> The changes happened within the context of decommunization that started in Ukraine in 2015. Within this process, the symbols of communism and Nazism were prohibited. According to the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, the meaning of the new commemoration and the re-naming of the old holiday is "...rethinking the events of the Second World War, the destruction of Soviet historical myths, establishment of an honest dialogue about difficult pages of the past".<sup>59</sup> The same document states the need to establish equal commemorations for all peoples who fought against Nazism and, additionally, that the changes represent a "shift from the history of military operations in the history of specific people, and therefore the rejection of the celebration in favor of honoring."<sup>60</sup> In terms of symbols used on the commemoration a significant change happened as well - the use of the St. George Ribbon<sup>61</sup> as a symbol during the commemoration was abolished and it was replaced by the Remembrance Poppy which is used in Western Europe.<sup>62</sup>

The Victory Day in 2014 took place in an indeed troublesome period for Ukraine, following the annexation of Crimea and fightings in Eastern Ukraine, which escalated in Mariupol

<sup>58</sup> Methodological materials to the celebration of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation and the 70th anniversary of the victory over Nazism in World War II (8-9 May 2015), [in Ukrainian], *Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance*, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/metodichni-materiali-do-vidznachennya-dnya-pam-yati-ta-primirennya-ta-70-i-richnitsi-dnya-perem>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> St. George's Ribbon is an orange-and-black striped ribbon that has origins as a military decoration of Imperial Russia and in 1992 was officially introduced in Russia as a state award. It became well-known in 2004, when they were distributed and popularized on Victory Day in Russia. It was also used in Ukraine, however since the 2014 conflict in Eastern Ukraine the St. George's Ribbon has become a symbol of the separatist movements.

<sup>62</sup> Olena Goncharova, 2015, “Ukraine Breaks from Russia in Commemorating Victory.” *KyivPost*, May 7, accessed May 6, 2017, <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-breaks-from-russia-in-commemorating-victory-388068.html>.



exactly on 9<sup>th</sup> of May.<sup>63</sup> In that time Ukraine did not have an elected President, as Victor Yanukovych fled to Russia after the Euromaidan protests, and the new elections were scheduled for 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2014. The celebration of the Victory Day, therefore, did not receive much attention, and the acting President Turchynov published a neutral address on the occasion.<sup>64</sup> However, from next year on, changes in the commemoration events became visible. First of all, the re-naming of the 9<sup>th</sup> of May and introducing the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation was referred by the Ukrainian President as "joining the European countries" in celebration.<sup>65</sup> Numerous other references indicating unity with Europe in stating Ukraine's unique and special role and enormous contribution in the liberation of Europe from the fascist threat.

A great shift can also be noticed in the speeches of the President – it was explicitly stressed that what unifies the veterans of UPA and the veterans of the Red Army are their grandchildren who are nowadays fighting together against the Russian aggression “as their grandfathers did during the Second World War”.<sup>66</sup> Also the Russian aggression is called breach of international law, unprecedented since Hitler and Stalin.<sup>67</sup> "Predatory and voracious empire again does not respect state borders and seeks to expand its so-called living space. Ukraine again gives resistance - with the difference that now the enemy has come to us not from the West but from the East”.<sup>68</sup> President Poroshenko devoted a lot

<sup>63</sup> In Pictures: Russia's Victory Day and Ukraine Clashes, *BBC News*, May 9, 2014, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27339717>.

<sup>64</sup> Oleksandr Turchynov, "The congratulation on the occasion of Victory Day," [in Ukrainian], *Holos Ukrainy* 8 May.

<sup>65</sup> Poroshenko, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> "Poroshenko's outspoken speech on the occasion of the Victory over Nazism," [in Ukrainian], *TCH.Ua*, accessed May 16, 2017, <https://tsn.ua/politika/vidverta-promova-poroshenka-z-nagodi-peremogi-nad-nacizmom-povniy-tekst-426283.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

of attention to praising the Ukrainian army fighting in Eastern Ukraine, drawing parallels with their ancestors fighting against other totalitarianisms - both the Soviet and the Nazi. Finally the national reconciliation can be summarized by the implications that claim historical continuity and inclusive national identity for both Red Army and UPA veterans. In this way the tendency to claim political and historical continuity in the discourse also started to include directly the recent fighting of the Ukrainian army in Donbas. Essentially, the Ukrainian national identity received a different meaning in the WWII discourse.

The elites were formulating a new inclusive national identity this time based on ethnic kinship not political affiliations. This is done by claiming historical continuity and formulating the criteria for inclusivity – if earlier the commemorations was devoted to the civilians, who lived the war and the veterans of the Red Army, now it commemorates all Ukrainians, including those outside the Soviet Union or those who fought against the Red Army. The Great Patriotic War discourse, namely stressing the common contribution of all the Soviet nations to the fight against fascism, was even officially abolished, and became associated with pro-Russian affiliations. Instead the earlier beginning of the Second World War than the Great Patriotic War is important, as it indicated that the Ukrainian identity does not match with the Soviet identity: “Back in March 39th Ukrainians from Transcarpathia were the first in our land to experience the deadly breath of future tragedy. In September of the same year, on the other side of the mountains over a hundred thousands of Ukrainians participated an unequal battle against the Wehrmacht as part of the Polish Army.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Poroshenko 2016.

All the Presidents in every single speech tried to find a pattern that would consolidate the nation regarding a complex matter – an unavoidably important, horrifying and dramatic part of national history. Up till 2005, and the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, no significant attempts to go beyond the Great Patriotic War discourse were made. Yushchenko's Presidency tried to include a more nationalistic narrative but failed after his main opponent won the next elections. Yanukovich, as the first two presidents, tried to avoid in his speeches problematic issues and maintain a balance between Europe and Russia. The Euromaidan and the later conflict in the East is what marks the significant changes in commemoration rituals, while the beginning of the conflict in Donbas, together with the law on decommunisation ended the Great Patriotic War discourse. Not only the name, date and symbol changed, but the former Victory Day became an occasion to consolidate the nation against the Russian aggression in the East.

## ***2.2. Defender of Fatherland Day***

Another important date that was indirectly linked to the WWII discourse and later to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is the former Defender of Fatherland Day, which by nowadays developed into the Defender of Ukraine Day.<sup>70</sup> The occasion is dedicated to the armed forces of the state, as well as veterans of conflicts. In the USSR the Defender of Fatherland Day was the new name for the Red Army Day and was celebrated on the 23<sup>th</sup> of February - that remained this way in some the former Soviet republics. In Ukraine the Defender of Fatherland Day was officially re-introduced in 1999, between 1991 and 1999 however, the occasion was informally celebrated. The Defender of Fatherland Day is

<sup>70</sup> Decree of the President of Ukraine №806 / 2014 On the Day of Defender Ukraine, [in Ukrainian], accessed May 16, <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/8062014-17816>.

relevant for understanding of official state narratives regarding wars in a way, that this day was an occasion for the state leadership to congratulate the veterans of WWII and to express a general vision of the role of the army in the state. This combination of defining the WWII history interpretation and the self-identifying regarding wars is what makes the Defender of Fatherland discourse important.

Before the Orange Revolution the speeches of the President published on the occasion mostly revealed neutral messages, such as congratulating the representatives of military and the veterans of WWII. If any political messages were made then they were against the change of the old narrative, like in 2004 during the pre-election campaign that later resulted in the Orange Revolution, when President Kuchma stated during his that the "fake patriots" spread "dissension" "unrest" and "disbelief".<sup>71</sup> The reference was made to the pro-nationalist agenda of the future President Yushchenko. But within the next decade after the turbulent time of the Orange Revolution the Defender of Fatherland Day did not reflect any significant political discourses. The change of the national identity discourse that happened after the 2014 conflict in Eastern Ukraine reveals the new meanings attributed to the military on the state level. When establishing the new celebration, the Defender of Ukraine Day and abolishing the old celebration, the President clearly revealed the intention of "consciously erasing from the Ukrainian calendar the alien and artificially introduced holiday of the Russian occupier-army".<sup>72</sup> "I emphasize, Ukraine will

<sup>71</sup> Leonid Kuchma, 2004, "In order not have to forge plowshares into swords: Speech of the President of Ukraine on the occasion of the Day of Defender of the Fatherland" [in Ukrainian], *Uryadovyy kur'yer*, 25 February.

<sup>72</sup> Petro Poroshenko, 2015 "The slogan of the Day of Defender of Ukraine, which will be celebrated for the first time on October 14, will be "The Power of the unbroken", *the official website of the President of Ukraine*, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/gaslom-dnya-zahisnika-ukrayini-yakij-vpershe-vidznachatimets-36119>.

never celebrate this holiday according to the military history calendar of the neighboring country. We will honor the defenders of our homeland, not someone else's!"<sup>73</sup> The President clearly addressed the relations with Russian Federation by that. For instance, the President underlining in his 2016 speech the "black cloud" that is hanging over Ukraine due to the eastern neighbor.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, the change of the date of the holiday is relevant in this sense, as the new date – 14<sup>th</sup> of October is the day of Intercession of the Theotokos, who was considered the patroness for the Ukrainian Cossacs. But even more important is the fact, that the Ukrainian Insurgent Army was established on 14<sup>th</sup> of October. In that way, the main military celebration, that is not related to a particular event reflect the general meaning that is given to the military sphere and war memories. In just one year the Soviet Defender of the Fatherland day became a completely new celebration with a new meaning in Ukraine, turning from the Red Army legacy to the UPA legacy.

All the discourses from the early 90s and till 2017 have in common the use of such patterns strategies that imply continuity and link the victory in WWII to the contemporary Ukrainian nation. Additionally, the expressions that characterize the common suffering, the joint efforts and the importance of the heroic deeds of Ukrainians in WWII hardly changed. What changed is a more inclusive national identity discourse, which recognizes the UPA fighters. The westward turn is also mainly a post-Euromaidan phenomena –

<sup>73</sup> "Poroshenko refuses to celebrate the Defender of the Fatherland Day according to the calendar of the neighbors," [in Ukrainian], *Ukrainska Pravda*, accessed May 16, 2017, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/08/24/7035657/>.

<sup>74</sup> Petro Poroshenko, 2016b, "Full Speech of President Poroshenko on the occasion of Defender of Ukraine Day" [in Ukrainian], *TV noviny 24*, accessed May 16, 2017, [http://24tv.ua/povniy\\_vistup\\_petra\\_poroshenka\\_z\\_nagodi\\_dnya\\_zahisnika\\_ukrayini\\_n737327](http://24tv.ua/povniy_vistup_petra_poroshenka_z_nagodi_dnya_zahisnika_ukrayini_n737327).

instead of stressing the common suffering of the Soviet nations, the contemporary discourse links the Ukrainian fighting to the European and international struggle against fascism. Although there were no predispositions against Russia or the USSR in the Ukrainian WWII discourse before 2014, the outbreak of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is what marks the change in the commemoration rituals and the shift in the discourse. Nowadays, the Russian state as such is portrayed as an aggressive force in the Defender of Ukraine commemoration speeches and clear efforts are made to challenge the Kremlin's monopoly over Defender of Ukraine. Therefore, the speeches of President Poroshenko in the last years since the beginning of the conflict in Donbas, together with the institutionalized changes in commemoration rituals represent the largest shift in the discourse. The timing and logic of it is obviously related to the conflict with pro-Russian separatist, what required from the elites to legitimize the common struggle.

### ***Conclusion***

The Great Patriotic War discourse, namely, the identifying the beginning of WWII by the moment of Nazi Germany's attack on the USSR was the starting point at the formulation of the official state narrative in independent Ukraine. This is evident in both the Victory Day and Defender of Ukraine Day commemorations. Both discourses experienced some politicization during the Orange Revolution, which did not lead to changes in the commemoration practices. The change happened in the aftermath of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The national identity-definition promoted through the commemoration events changed from the political-inclusive (glorifying only the contribution of the Red Army in the antifascist struggle) to ethnic-inclusive (including the experience of all the Ukrainians, regardless of their political affiliations). In that way the Victory Day and the

Defender of Ukraine Day ceased to be pro-Soviet and therefore a priori anti-nationalist narratives, but formulated a new meaning. Linking the empirical findings with the background theoretical framework, I want to begin by looking the commemorations as a example of hot nationalism, that builds on the emotional reaction to the symbols. The meaning of the symbols themselves are shaped by the preexisting narratives, and through the change of them the perception of symbols changes – that is how the St. Georgie's Ribbon in few years became the rejected symbol of separatism, while recently it was officially used at the commemorations. By re-thinking of the symbolic predispositions, as Kaufman defines them, the discourse changes. However, the sequence of the conflict and the commemoration changes suggests, that the relation between them is not one-sided.

As most institutionalized changes happened after the actual outbreak of the conflict, Kaufman's framework cannot explain that by the elites' mobilization into conflict, as the masses got engaged into the conflict even before the state official narrative was used. Actually, the fact that for over 20 years the established commemoration practices, although disputed about have not been officially changed implies that the elites felt the need to coherently re-define the national history interpretation and identity only at the point when the conflict in Donbas made it impossible to legitimize the leadership through the old narrative. Namely, the symbols of the post-Soviet discourse, favoring the pro-Russian affiliations and calming continuity the current Ukrainian state from the Red Army victory, such as the date 23th of February for the main military celebration or the St. Georgie's Ribbon at the Victory Day celebration, became associated with pro-separatist sympathies in the current conflict in Donbas. Therefore, for a comprehensive explanation

of all the dynamic, situational nationalism thesis is suitable to be added to Kaufman's framework, and look at the conflict in Donbas as a change in the wider regional environment, that caused the strengthening of national identity, that eventually become evident in its re-thinking promoted by elites. The creation of new official state nationalism is happening through the re-interpretation of history and national identity, promoted through the commemorations. The mechanism described by Kaufman that includes developing narratives and symbolic predispositions into mobilization through threat perceptions is evident, however the timing is to be explained by the situational nationalism thesis. If in the past the Ukrainian leadership was mainly legitimizing their geopolitical orientation (pro-Russian or pro-European) and gaining support through that, the current Ukrainian leadership rather responds to the new environment in which it found itself, with the beginning of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

In the next chapter I want to observe a similar case, with the difference that the external factor – the conflict, happened at the early stage of independence. In finding similar patterns in the relation of the conflict to the re-defining of national identity, I want to once more establish that the independence itself is not the only factor that shaped the re-thinking of national past, as in Ukraine under similar circumstances but without a conflict the independence was not enough to cause changes in institutionalized practices.



### Chapter 3 - Commemorations in Croatia

In the following chapter I will analyze the WWII discourse in Croatia beginning from the breakup of Yugoslavia, till 2016. First, as in case of Ukraine I begin with the Victory over Fascism Day. Further two contradicting commemorations – Jasenovac and Bleiburg will be analyzed. The discourse changes that followed the end of the Homeland War are tracked, which show how it shaped the memory politics of WWII. The link between commemoration rituals and conflict in case of Ukraine is evident by the fact that for more than 20 years the discourse shifts did not result in any commemoration rituals changes, and stayed without any conflicting predispositions. Additionally the linkages made to the conflict in Donbas during commemorations after 2014 imply that the conflict actually marks changes in institutionalized practices. In Croatia the revision of history happened immediately during the break-up of the former federation, in relation to the Homeland War – a conflict that brought up the old ethno-national narratives and linked them to the ideological camps.<sup>75</sup> This is how the antifascist movement in Croatia became associated with Communist rule, and, consequently, Serbian dominance, due to Partisan-Ustaša division during WWII.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly to Ukraine in 1991, the Croatian leadership was also confronted with the task of creating a new official state narrative that would legitimize the national idea and unify the citizens of the new state. As in the case of Ukraine, Croatia's WWII history creates divisions into those who fought on the side of the Independent State of Croatia and who

<sup>75</sup> Banjeglav 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Stevo Đurašković, 2016, "National Identity-Building and the 'Ustaša-Nostalgia' in Croatia: The Past That Will Not Pass." *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 5 (September 2): 772–88.

joined the Yugoslav Partisan forces. Again, like in Ukraine, after the WWII due to communist ideology the any anti-Yugoslav movement was represented as pro-fascist.

When Croatia became an independent state, after the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Homeland War started and the WWII divisions needed to be re-interpreted. Pavlaković observes a period of unity among Croats regarding the national past that lasted during the war. After the war in Croatia the "all-Croatian reconciliation" politics maintained by the first Croatian President Tuđman started shaping the WWII discourse.<sup>77</sup> The way the reconciliation was meant to be achieved was by creating a narrative in which both the Ustaša and the Partisan supporting parts of the Croatian nation were initially supporting Croatian national freedom.<sup>78</sup> His project did not succeed, any anti-fascist support was ultimately seen as pro-communist and therefore pro-Yugoslav.

### **3.1. *Victory over fascism Day***

As in the USSR, in Yugoslavia the Victory over Fascism Day was celebrated on the 9<sup>th</sup>, not the 8<sup>th</sup> of May – the same was used by the successor states, including Croatia. Unlike Ukraine, in Croatia the 9<sup>th</sup> of May did not receive as much state attention during the early independence period – Victory Day was not officially commemorated till mid 90ties.<sup>79</sup> During Tuđman's mandates (till 1999) the state leadership found itself in need to maintain the antifascist discourse but still create an identity separation from the Yugoslav common heritage. Therefore, the narrative that legitimizes both the ethnic and antifascist essence

<sup>77</sup> Alex J. Bellamy, 2003, "The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-Old Dream?," *Europe in change*, Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press: 67.

<sup>78</sup> Đurašković 2016, 776.

<sup>79</sup> Davor Pauković, Vjeran Pavlaković, and Višeslav Raos, eds., 2012, Confronting the Past: European Experiences, *Political Science Research Centre Forum*: 338.

of the national identity were maintained, as a result the communist-associated Victory Day remained as an antifascist commemoration, but lost importance. Although the celebration remained, some changes and debates took place. Namely, controversies arose after the re-naming of the Square of the Victims of Fascism in Zagreb, where the commemoration used to be performed, into the Square of Croatian Great Men. This was seen as denying importance to the victims of fascism.<sup>80</sup> Since then the 9<sup>th</sup> of May was the day when people would gather demanding the old name to be returned, condemning the rehabilitation of the Ustaša legacy and Tuđman's governance in general.<sup>81</sup> In 1999, violent clashes broke out between antifascist and pro-Ustaša activists.<sup>82</sup> Finally, in 2000 the old name of the square was reinstated, that was a beginning of another period for the commemoration, when due to international pressure and the European integration affiliations of the state, the antifascist discourse became stronger.<sup>83</sup>

After Tuđman's death and the democratization process starting 2000 settled the new important role for the commemoration, which was - legitimizing Croatia's modern democratic identity by presenting continuity to the antifascist struggle, that was not equalized to the Partisan movement, but was about Croatian national project. In that period the end of Tuđman's governance as well as an active phase of EU integration process started, with starting the negotiations and signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement and adopting the Joint Declaration of the Republic of Croatia and

<sup>80</sup> Karačić, Banjeglav and Govedarica 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Pavlaković 2008, 9;

<sup>83</sup> Karačić, Banjeglav and Govedarica 2012.

the European Union on the Political Dialogue.<sup>84</sup> During the protests against re-naming the Square of the Victims of Fascism the antifascist activists especially stressed that joining EU is only possible with antifascist values.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, in the aftermath of the Homeland War and with the international environment demanding commitments to democratic values, the discourse in Croatia became re-shaped in a way, that it defines the national identity not as part of the antifascist struggle in the Yugoslav forces but as national anti-totalitarian struggle.

At the same time, by legitimizing that for modern Croatia, the Homeland war was also legitimized and the two conflicts became interrelated in the national identity building. An example of that can be seen in the President Mesić's speech from 2000: "You (Croats) did not start the war in 1941. Nor did we start the war in 1991. Croats never started wars first. They were always the first to begin building peace. That peace, you, as the winners of the antifascist struggle, started in 1945. We started our peace as winners in 1995."<sup>86</sup> This way of linking the WWII discourse and the Homeland War discourse is often implicitly present in many speeches, however such a concrete example captures the link in a most comprehensive way – the Homeland War can only be legitimized and glorified as part of a legitimate struggle for a democratic state if opposed to the autocratic Yugoslav regime and separated from the Ustaša crimes.

<sup>84</sup> *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration*, 2009, "Croatia on the Road to the European Union", accessed May 13, 2017, [http://www.mvep.hr/files/file/publikacije/Croatia\\_on\\_the\\_Road\\_to\\_the\\_EU.pdf](http://www.mvep.hr/files/file/publikacije/Croatia_on_the_Road_to_the_EU.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Pavlaković 2012, 9;

<sup>86</sup> Stjepan Mesić, 2000. The 55th anniversary of the victory over fascism. Zagreb, 8th of May," [in Croatian], *the official website of the President of the Republic of Croatia 2000-2010*, accessed May 13, 2017, <http://www.stjepanmesic.hr/hr/arhiva-govori/08052000-zagreb-55-obljelnica-pobjede-nad-fa%C5%A1izmom>.

During Mesić's Presidency (2000-2010) The Victory over Fascism Day was therefore an occasion to stress Croatia's contribution to the antifascist struggle. The discourse praised the national antifascist movement without equalizing that with pro-Yugoslav affiliations that might threaten the national identity. "It is true, that we were not independent, we were part of the Yugoslav federation. But, in that federation, Croatia existed, had certain attributes of statehood, in order to get a status of a state, which allowed it to separate from Yugoslavia."<sup>87</sup>

Moreover, the Yugoslav aggression during the Homeland War is equalized with the evil of fascism in WWII: "We also faced evil and aggression in the 90-ties, and that is why on Victory Day we also remember the victims of the Homeland War".<sup>88</sup> Another example of the legitimization of the Homeland War through the WWII discourse can be seen in Mesić's speech: "In this small and most beautiful country in the world the freedom of today's Europe was defended and saved from fascist, Nazi and racist tendencies of those who tried to impose themselves on the entire humanity as "overmen". We showed that there are no overmen, that we all are just humans. We also showed that in 1991 when on this area new "overmen" appeared. And as in 1941, when we /.../ opposed the fascist-Nazi armed forces /.../ so we opposed Milošević's armed forces in 1991, opposed those Balkan "overmen".<sup>89</sup> That created a national identity based on common Croatian origin and the antifascist and anticommunist political affiliations.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ivo Josipović, 2014, "Josipovic: On Victory Day, we also remember the victims of the Homeland War", *Dnevno Hr*, accessed May 13, 2017, <http://www.dnevno.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/josipovic-na-dan-pobjede-sjecamo-se-i-zrtava-domovinskog-rata-122294/>.

<sup>89</sup> Stjepan Mesić, 2000, "The Victory over Fascism Day. Zagreb, 8th of May," [in Croatian], *the official website of the President of the Republic of Croatia 2000-2010*, accessed May 13, 2017, <http://www.stjepanmesic.hr/hr/arhiva-govori/07052005-zagreb>.

To sum up – the Victory over Fascism Day in the 90-ties, in Croatia, unlike Ukraine, was not gloriously commemorated by the state, as it used to be before independence. However, a decade later, the commemoration found its place in the new national discourse, and became an occasion for the elites to form the new vision of the national self. The categories of WWII re-emerged during the Homeland War and required their re-interpretation, which was done in a way that again put the Croatian state on the side of the fighters against a totalitarian regime and de-legitimized the Ustaša regime. Therefore, the example of commemoration of the Victory Day on the state level in Croatia shows that, like in Ukraine, active re-thinking of the commemoration happened in relation to the new conflict. What is similar in the Ukrainian and Croatian discourse is the glorification of the victims and fighters of WWII and the stress on the national contribution to the victory that saved Europe, and also the collective suffering, the nation went through.

### **3.2. Bleiburg and Jasenovac**

Bleiburg and Jasenovac commemorations were also a field where active re-interpretation of the official vision of national history and identity could be seen. Jasenovac is an annual commemoration at the Jasenovac Memorial Site and the Museum that are nowadays commemorating the victims of former concentration camp where during the Second World War, Serbs, Jews, Roma and Croats-antifascists were executed.<sup>90</sup> Bleiburg, in turn is a commemoration organized in the Austrian town of Bleiburg near the Slovenian border, where the armed forces of the Independent State of Croatia and civilians wanted to

<sup>90</sup> Helen Walasek, *Bosnia and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015), 83.

surrender to the British forces, after the capitulation of Nazi Germany. The British forces sent them to surrender to the Yugoslav Partisans that later executed them.

### **3.2.1. Jasenovac commemoration**

During the times of Yugoslavia the memory politics over Jasenovac were monopolized by the ruling party and used to legitimize the governance, and condemn the crimes of fascism. Jasenovac massacre was commemorated in Yugoslavia till 1990, then till 1997 no commemorations were held, as it was occupied during the Homeland War. In 1996, Jasenovac became part of Tuđman's new narrative that tried to overcome the so-called “red-black division” meaning the division between the supporters of the Ustaša movement and the Partisans during WWII.<sup>91</sup> The narrative aimed at unifying the successors of the Partisan and Ustaša fighters against the common enemy – the totalitarian Yugoslav states and the Serbian dominance.<sup>92</sup> But Tuđman's idea to nationalize the suffering of the Croats due to the ideological divisions in the discourse about Jasenovac was heavily criticized domestically and internationally – by the US congressional representatives for instance.<sup>93</sup> But Tuđman himself never visited either the commemoration in Jasenovac or the one in Bleiburg - it is only after his death and the change of the ruling party when Jasenovac was visited by the President.

The Croatia's pro-European course, taken after 2000, contributed to increasing the significance of Jasenovac as an antifascist commemoration, which was attended by the highest officials every year. The speeches of President Mesić clearly show how the need

<sup>91</sup> Pavlaković 2008, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Pavlaković 2008, 27.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

to create a clear self-image of the national identity, based on anti-fascist values. This was articulated through using the occasion not only for expressing condolences for the victims and the suffering of the Croatian antifascists who also were among the victims of Jasenovac alongside with Serbs, Jews and other ethnic groups, but to stress the contribution of the Croatian people to the anti-fascist struggle in Europe.<sup>94</sup> A clear statement that the Ustaša regime was not supported by the majority of Croats indicates how the Independent Croatian State should not be seen as the predecessor of the modern Croatian state.

The official state discourse aimed at creating an antifascist narrative that is at the same time legitimizes Croatian national contribution to the antifascist struggle, separating it from the Yugoslavian. Admitting that horrible crimes had been committed in the name of a fascist ideology that was bearing the Croatian name goes hand-in-hand in the speeches with “compensating” these actions by emphasizing the democratic nature of the current Croatian state. The misuse of the legitimacy of the Croatian will to have an independent state was also re-called,<sup>95</sup> as well as explicit recognition of the shame over the national past.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the discourse about Jasenovac is being linked to the Homeland War discourse by warning that the genocides like Jasenovac were already repeated.<sup>97</sup> However, the responsibility for such crimes was shifted to the individual level, not the level

<sup>94</sup> Stjepan Mesić, 2008, “President Mesić’s speech on the 63rd anniversary of the commemoration of victims of Jasenovac camp,” [in Croatian], *the official website of the President of the Republic of Croatia 2000-2010*, accessed May 13, 2017, <http://www.stjepanmesic.hr/hr/arhiva-govori/20042008-jasenovac>.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Stjepan Mesić, 2006, “Speech by President Mesic at the Jasenovac Commemoration,” [in Croatian], *the official website of the President of the Republic of Croatia 2000-2010*, accessed May 13, 2017, <http://www.stjepanmesic.hr/hr/arhiva-govori/30042006-jasenovac>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



of the state.<sup>98</sup> In 2016, President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović explained that she is not going to attend neither Jasenovac nor Bleiburg in order not to participate in the politicization of history.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.2.2. Bleiburg commemoration

Bleiburg was, in turn, an example of a "forgotten" element of national history during the Yugoslav times that was completely out of the official state discourse and was commemorated only by the Croatian emigrant community. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, these forgotten memories became part of the official state narrative, as the anniversary of the Bleiburg massacre became a public event, officially managed by the state in 1995, while the highest state officials started to participate in the commemoration from 1999 on, beginning with Prime-Minister Ivica Račan.<sup>100</sup> The commemoration was officially established as the Memorial Day of Croatian Victims in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence and was used to stress the ethnic-based nature of the massacre, rejecting the ideology.<sup>101</sup> The main controversy over Bleiburg was and remains the blurring between commemorating the victims and legitimizing the Ustaša regime. Therefore, the commemoration is seen as the "opposite" of Jasenovac, which is, as it was illustrated earlier, used to deligitimize the same regime. The legitimization of the ethnic-based narrative by the elites in the aftermath of the Homeland War was intended at also legitimizing the war itself. The representative of the Croatian parliament saying in 1995 at

<sup>98</sup> Stjepan Mesić, 2005, "Speech by President Mesic at the Jasenovac Commemoration," [in Croatian], *the official website of the President of the Republic of Croatia 2000-2010*, accessed May 13, 2017, <http://www.stjepanmesic.hr/hr/arhiva-govori/22042005-jasenovac>.

<sup>99</sup> Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, 2016, "I decided not to go to either Jasenovac or to Bleiburg this year. I do not want to participate in ideological divisions" [in Croatian], Interview by Jelena Lovirć, *Jutarnji List*, accessed May 17, 2017, [http://predsjednica.hr/files/Briefing\\_Objava\\_2.5.2016..pdf](http://predsjednica.hr/files/Briefing_Objava_2.5.2016..pdf)

<sup>100</sup> Banjeglav 2012, 110.

<sup>101</sup> Pavlaković 2012, 26.

the Bleiburg commemoration, that the Homeland War prevented another Bleiburg from happening.<sup>102</sup>

However, later on Bleiburg received less attention of the Croatian government as Jasenovac during the democratization period of 2000-2010. The first time the President of Croatia would visit Bleiburg was in 2010 and not during the commemoration itself, but on the occasion of the Antifascist struggle day. Since 2013, the commemoration is no longer financed by the state, which indicates the loss of the importance of Bleiburg in creating the official state narrative.<sup>103</sup> Bleiburg since 2000 and still remains the commemoration of the right, where the ethnic Croatian identity of the victims is emphasized, although representatives of different nationalities were executed. The elites used the opportunity during and in the aftermath of the Homeland War to publicly commemorate Bleiburg and create the ethnic-based national identity that would legitimize the Homeland War struggle. However, the further demands for democratization after 2000 resulted in the antifascist discourse, when the elites concentrated at creating a national identity that is based on the antifascist values. This resulted in the Bleiburg commemoration losing its importance for the official state narrative.

### Summary

To sum up, the Victory over Fascism Day as a main commemoration of WWII was still associated with the pro-Yugoslav affiliations during the first decade of independence. In the aftermath of the Homeland War there were attempts to re-name the place where the

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> "Milanović: 'Everything should have been abolished in 2013'," [in Croatian] *Jutarnji List*, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/milanovic-ljutit-na-sprema-%C2%B4sve-je-trebao-ukinuti-2013.%C2%B4/1517622/>.

commemoration took place, however, the issue lost its importance for the public discourse.

The Bleiburg and Jasenovac commemorations are a perfect illustration of the division over national history, that allow to compare how such divisions were explained and represented. The establishment of a commemoration in Bleiburg immediately after the breakup of Yugoslavia is a sign of a strong shift in national identity formation, by recognizing the crime of the communist regime. However, later the maintenance of an antifascist discourse gradually led to the period when the commemoration was no longer financed by the state. Jasenovac, was of core importance during the Yugoslavian times, and got new meanings attributed – the ideological aspect was stressed rather than the ethnic, in a way that allowed the modern Croatian state to separate itself, and especially the events of the Homeland War from the Jasenovac massacre. Bleiburg and Jasenovac showed once again that the shift in the commemoration rituals in Croatia took place after the conflict.

The two commemorations have different national identity implications – if in Jasenovac the Croats are victims due to their ideological affiliations, together with other nationalities, in Bleiburg the victimhood is defined on the ethnic basis. That was done by the elites through the official commemorations in the aftermath of the Homeland War, when the need for a national identity that solved the internal divisions. The way how the WWII discourse is being re-called in the Homeland War commemorations and vice versa, shows that the main element of the war commemorations is the legitimization of the war fought. The violent dissolution of Yugoslavia made it impossible for the old antifascist discourse to go on, as it was associated with the Partisan and anti-national movement.

In case of Croatia the state official nationalism was established and the narratives were formulated after the ethnic conflict itself, not as the stage before the conflict. But the conflict itself to a large degree shaped the variation of options for the elites to legitimize the official narrative – the external factors such as the war made the maintenance of certain interpretations impossible. In order to maintain the claim of continuity of the nation-state as well as the democratic nature of it, the Croatian leadership linked the commemoration rituals of WWII and the Homeland War in a way that equalized the Yugoslavian communists, Ustašas and the Nazis as the opposition of the values on which the modern Croatian state is based. At the same time the Homeland War was compared in the discourse to the antifascist struggle of WWII. The most recent developments, such as the decision of the current President not to visit neither Jasenovac nor Bleiburg as well as forgoing of the official commemoration of the Victory over Fascism Day shows that after a longer period of peace, the WWII discourse became less relevant.

As in the case of Ukraine, the more recent conflict certainly is embedded in the discourse of WWII, and is evident in the commemoration discourses. The institutionalized changes of commemorations also took place after the conflict, and certainly did not serve as a starting point for creating a mobilizing threat perception, as the symbolic politics discourse would foresee. The rhetoric frames used in the speeches to legitimize the Homeland War through the Second World War discourse are similar as in case of Ukraine: claims of historical continuity, equalization of the enemy in the newer conflict with Nazi Germany and stressing the common suffering and victory of the nation. In the long-run peace after the conflict however, the WWII seems to lose its importance, as the commemorations are not attended by the President.

## Conclusion

Using Kaufman's symbolic politics framework complemented by situational nationalism thesis I analyze the cases that reveal how conflict not only is caused by predispositions, as foreseen by Kaufman, but also can be related to the predispositions in a way that the conflict shapes and enforces them. As becomes evident through the dynamics in discourses in Croatia and Ukraine, old narratives about WWII are used by the elites as rhetorical frames to legitimize themselves, position the national identity by using WWII symbols and identifications in a more recent conflicts. However, the cases of the Homeland War and conflict in Donbas show that this narrative were not pre-established and used to encourage conflict, but rather newly formulated in the aftermath of the conflict. This shift and revision of history manifested itself in changes in commemoration rituals that are used to express and perform the official state narrative.

The situational nationalism framework, in this case, explains the timing of the changes in narratives, in Ukraine and Croatia, which are a result of the situation in the broader international environment - the outbreak of a violent conflict. This was followed by changes in national identity building, causing discourses and re-thinking in fields that were relatively stable before - during the Yugoslav times in Croatia and before the outbreak of the conflict in Donbas in Ukraine. The two cases reveal how the aftermath of a conflict is characterized by active promotion of a new official narrative, which results in changes in commemoration practices related both to the current conflict, but also to WWII. The link between WWII and a newer conflict is mainly seen by the need to separate the national identity from the preexisting, respectively, Soviet and Yugoslav common heritage. As the antifascist struggle in both cases used to be associated exclusively with the Yugoslav and

Read Army contribution, the post-independence antifascist and left movements were seen as pro-Soviet or Yugoslav, and in contradiction with the nationalist movements. The read-black division in Croatia, therefore, is very similar to the division between the UPA fighters and the Red Army veterans. In Croatia the official narrative was reviewed in the first years of independence, this resulted in changes in commemoration practices – the Bleiburg massacre commemoration was introduced, the Victory over Fascism Day caused contradictions due to re-naming of the main square.

In Ukraine, in turn, the commemoration practices related to WWII remained formally the same, while no significant attempts to address the division between the veterans was made. Both countries experienced some public debates in the early 2000s, in Croatia this happened in relation to Tuđman's death and Ukraine after the Orange Revolution. Additionally, in Croatia, the WWII debate was recalled in the discourse about the Homeland War, which marked the beginning of the existence of the modern Croatian state. The new narrative condemned the Ustaša legacy and stressed the Croatian national contribution to the antifascist struggle, although within the Partisan forces. At the same time, through the references to WWII in the Operation Storm commemorations and references to the Homeland War in the Victory Day speeches parallels are drawn between Milošević's Yugoslavia and the Third Reich, as well as parallels between the WWII Croatian antifascists and the veterans of the Homeland War.

The violent conflicts such as the Homeland War and the conflict in Donbas in Ukraine mark the shift in the WWII discourse and commemoration practices, as the situational nationalism framework explains, through the same mechanism that Kaufman uses to trace the link between symbolic politics and conflict. Ukraine before 2015 did not

experience any formal changes in the commemoration rituals and symbols since Soviet times, although some shifts in the discourse can be observed. Croatia also faced the actual conflict without existing official state nationalism practices, which could not exist in Yugoslavia. And the commemorations became re-interpreted only in the aftermath of the conflict, when the elites were formulating the new identity.

Kaufman's framework would suggest that the groups would only get mobilized for the conflict through threat perceptions that exist due to symbolic predispositions. However the cases illustrate that the link is not always a straight causal relationship, the discourse can be influenced by a conflict, as well as a conflict is influenced by the discourse. The mechanism of using the symbolic predispositions, described by Kaufman, stays the same. By modifying the framework with the situational nationalism thesis the timing of the appearance of new narratives in relation to the beginning of the conflict is additionally explained. The conflicts, although without the elites to play on the symbolic predispositions to mobilize for the conflict, resulted in the elites re-inventing the old narratives after and during the conflict, seeking coherence in the promoted self-identification criteria, and the external environment.

In both cases studies the commemorations displayed the different national identity understanding – from including only the members of the antifascist struggle in the Yugoslav/Soviet army (respectively in case of Croatia and Ukraine), to including all members of the ethnic group, on both sides. This was linked to the more current conflict, equalizing the pro-Russian separatist forces and the Serbian forces to the Nazi threat. At the same time, the wider international environment and the self-representation of both countries as democratic and EU oriented leads to the glorification of the antifascist

struggle and rejection of the exclusively nationalist discourse. In both cases the outbreak of violent conflict, although not preceded with active use of symbolic predispositions for mobilization, were followed by an active re-interpretation of the national identity. The result in both cases is an attempt to unify and achieve reconciliation of the WWII divisions on the basis of a new, ethnic-based national identity, juxtaposed to the enemy in the new conflict.

The combination of the two cases illustrates the dynamic of the conflict-commemoration interrelation in the long-run peace before the conflict (as in Ukraine) and after the conflict (Croatia). That not only strengthens the link between the new conflicts and revisions of WWII history, but shows the use of similar rhetoric frameworks by state leaders in both countries. The Ukrainian case illustrates that regime change is not necessarily followed by revisions of history, while the Croatian case shows how in the long-run peace the relevance of the old discourse for the legitimization of the new conflict decreases. The current work gives an insight into the role of commemorations in official state nationalism in relations to conflicts. Through adding an external oriented outlook to Kaufman's mechanism of the symbols and narratives shaping the conflict dynamics, we receive a more comprehensive overview of the official state narratives and conflict interrelation. The concrete motives of elites depending on different internal and external dynamics are useful for policymakers and researchers to understand the role that commemorations play in official state nationalism and how not only nationalism fosters conflict but conflict strengthens nationalism.



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