
Primus Project

Title: The Past is Present: The Use and Misuse of Traumatic Historical Events in Foreign Policy

Project Duration: January 2022 - December 2025

Budget: Budget: \$490.000

Supported by: PRIMUS Research Program by Charles University

Summary:

How do traumatic historical events shape contemporary foreign policy? This question has been made more pressing by the rise of European populist parties who advocate revisionist policies, which they legitimize through controversial framings of the past. In assessing why and how "the past is present" (TPIP), this project will impact this ongoing policy debate by analyzing how memories of World War II and the Holocaust shape: (i) EU member states' foreign policies; (ii) the EU's decision-making and; (iii) Israel-Europe relations. There are few studies of how framings of traumatic events affect international relations, or how populism has affected memory politics. TPIP will address this research gap through an interdisciplinary, mixed-methods framework, which it will apply to key case studies at the intersection of memory politics and foreign policy.

Project Goals:

TPIP highlights the salience of history in foreign policy. In light of the instrumentalization of history in democracies, a process exacerbated by nativist populism (Norris & Inglehart 2019), this project examines how troubled and traumatic pasts affect international relations. TPIP will analyze how memories of historical traumas shape contemporary policy across the EU and between European states and Israel. This project will produce findings relevant to on-going policy debates concerning memory, populism, foreign policy and European integration.

TPIP addresses several salient research gaps. Multiple works have noted that memories of the past affect a state's international relations (Miskimmon et al. 2014, Finkel 2010). However, scholarly analysis has taken place within, rather than across, the disciplines of international relations and memory studies. Furthermore, academics have not addressed how the past shapes foreign policy in divergent time periods and milieu. Equally, scholars have yet to identify how populist-fueled European debates over historical traumas have re-defined relations with Israel.

TPIP will therefore merge and expand recent works on ontological security (Mälksoo 2015, Subotič 2016), memory politics (Pakier & Strz?th 2013) and Israel-Europe relations (Pardo & Peters 2009) whilst contributing its own findings on how framings of the traumatic past shape EU policy and bilateral ties between its member states and Israel.

TPIP constructs an interdisciplinary framework assessing the role of memory politics in foreign policy, a topic that scholars have only recently examined (Klymenko and Siddi 2020, Bachleitner 2019). TPIP will provide a timely and unique contribution to the literature, by focusing on how populism has re-shaped memories of historical trauma and provoked corresponding policy debates.

TRIP provides an important empirical contribution, by comparatively exploring the instrumentalization of historical traumas in Central, Eastern and Western European states. Each of these milieus have different historical experiences and memories and uneven postwar development. By comparing these cases, TPIP will contribute to the amelioration of conflict structures in international relations and counter divisive messages propagated by populist parties.