

## Introduction

In 2008, on the anniversary of the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), the European Parliament designated 23<sup>rd</sup> August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism), aimed at the commemoration of “all the victims of the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes that have scarred parts of Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>1</sup> The memory of totalitarian systems lies, alongside the memory of the Holocaust, at the heart of the EU’s policy of remembrance. It also plays an important role in the politics of history of many European countries. In Poland, a country which in the course of its tragic history faced two forms of totalitarianism, both Nazism and communism, the memory of these forms of persecution still constitutes a key element of public discourse about the past. Similarly, the memory of fascism and attempts at its assessment in Italy are still subject to disputes and controversies, both in the scholarly literature and in public opinion, even though it has already been 70 years since the collapse of Mussolini’s regime.

This collection of articles, devoted to various aspects of the memory of fascism, National Socialism, and communism, consists of enhanced versions of lectures presented during the Krakow-Padua conference entitled *Building a Common Past: Italy and Poland in the face of EU Remembrance Policies. The Memory of Totalitarianism (Costruiamo il passato comune. Italia e Polonia di fronte alla politica della memoria dell’EU. Memoria dei totalitarismi)*, which took place in Krakow on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October 2016. Through the analysis of contemporary intellectual reflections, political disputes, and institutional programmes, scholars from Poland and Italy — historians, political scientists and sociologists — tried to answer the question as to what degree the changes that have taken place in Europe after 1989 have influenced the shaping of shared European historical memory in respect to totalitarianisms.

The opening of the collection is an article by our tragically deceased colleague Ewa Bojenko-Izdebska which analyses the role played by the issue of the expulsion

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:008E:0057:0059:PL:PDF> (access: 11.11.2018).

of Germans from the western territories of Poland after the Second World War in contemporary German historical policy, as well as its impact on Polish-German relations.

The three subsequent articles, by Filippo Focardi, Francesco Berti and Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas, pertain to issues of memory of fascism in Italy, with particular focus on the assessment of fascism and its place in the contemporary culture of remembrance, as well as new attempts at an interpretation of Mussolini's regime.

The two articles closing the collection are devoted to various forms of remembrance of crimes and victims of totalitarian regimes based on the example of European museums and places of memory. The article by Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs deals with the mutual relations between two key subjects of the European map of memory, the Holocaust and the Gulags, with special attention paid to their role in the construction of national identities in the collective memory of both Western and Central and Eastern Europe. The final text of the volume, by Lidia Zessin-Jurek, is devoted to controversies around the opening of the House of European History in Brussels in 2017, as well as the ways of representing the aforementioned sensitive fields in European history in the EU's policy of memory.

The 40<sup>th</sup> volume of "Studies on Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism" (which the reader finds in their hands) is thus an encouragement of a deeper reflection on the phenomenon of 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianisms and their destructive character, as well as the need for the consolidation of historical memory of these tragic events, both on the national and the pan-European levels.

*Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas*