
UCL

**Université
catholique
de Louvain**

Debates on historical issues at
the European Parliament after
the enlargement (2004-2009)

Introduction

The EU enlargement of 2004 transformed the big narrative of EU integration

Did the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 (2007) set in motion a process that leads to the **replacement** of the previous European narrative centred on the Holocaust?

Idea .1 /

There is an **enrichment** of the previous narrative centred on the Holocaust with new elements from Central and Eastern Europe, **without competition.**

Idea 2 /

The previous narrative, centred on the Holocaust, remains at the centre of the European narrative, but there is **a struggle over the hierarchy** of events in the narrative.

Hyp.3 /

The **resistance** to this new plurality / hierarchy comes partly from MEPs who fear that transforming the **past** may put their **future** in peril.

Methodology

- Only the debates mainly devoted to the interpretation of history: when the **title** indicates a **historical event or a date**
- **7 resolutions** and **6 debates** between 2004 and 2009
- Nvivo, a “Qualitative Analysis Software” (QSA)

Methodology - corpus

- “25th anniversary of Solidarity and its message for Europe” (debate) (resolution)
- “50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising and dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government” (debate) (resolution)
- “Commemoration of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising” (debate) (resolution)
- “Commemoration of the Holodomor, the artificial famine in Ukraine (1932-1933)” (debate)(resolution)
- “European conscience and totalitarianism (debate)(resolution)(explanation of votes)

Methodology - corpus

- Proposed hearing of the Commission on crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by totalitarian regimes” (debate)
- “Srebrenica” (debate)(résolution)
- “The Balkans: 10 years after Srebrenica” (debate) (resolution)
- “The Holocaust, anti-semitism and racism” (debate)(résolution)
- “The future of Europe sixty years after the Second World War” (résolution)
- “Twenty Years after Chernobyl: Lessons for the future” (debate)

The changing scape of European memory

The enlargement of the memory landscape

- The 2004 enlargement brought
a new **plurality**

The enlargement of the memory landscape

- The Holocaust is a central European “lieux de mémoire”

Illustration – Resolution on 1956

“recognising the historical and political link between the Hungarian Revolution in October 1956 and various other forms of resistance and resistance movements, such as the mass demonstrations in East Germany in June 1953, the Poznan demonstrations in Poland in June 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, the birth of the Solidarity Movement in Poland in 1980 and democracy movements in the former USSR, notably those of the Baltic peoples”

The enlargement of the memory landscape

- The 2004 enlargement brought a new **plurality**
- The 2004 enlargement brought a new **exemplarity**

Illustration – debate on Solidarity

Anna Ibrisagic (SW – PPE):

“I myself was living at that time in Communist Yugoslavia and clearly remember the pictures from Gdansk. I could not understand how anyone could actually believe it was possible to topple Communism. When, almost two decades after Gdansk, the people of Serbia protested against Milosevic’s regime, they had learned something from Solidarity.

The enlargement of the memory landscape

- The 2004 enlargement brought a new **plurality**
- The 2004 enlargement brought a new **exemplarity**
- But the Holocaust is a central European “lieux de mémoire”

The enlargement of the memory landscape

- Holocaust: 41 occurrences in 9 debates and resolutions
- Auschwitz: 9 occurrences in 4 debates and resolutions

Illustration

« resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism » :

“whereas millions of victims were deported, imprisoned, tortured and murdered by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes during the 20th century in Europe; whereas the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged”

Illustration

Helmut Markov (GUE – DE) contested the fact that the Holodomor is a genocide and said:

« this resolution recognises the Holodomor as genocide. Genocide is defined as extermination according to ethnic criteria. This applies in particular to the Holocaust. To equate one with the other undermines the argument of the singularity of the national socialist crime of the annihilation of Jews in Europe, the recognition of which has, to date, been the subject of broad democratic consensus ».

Idea .1

→ There is pluralisation of the European « lieux de mémoires »

A struggle over a new hierarchy in the European past

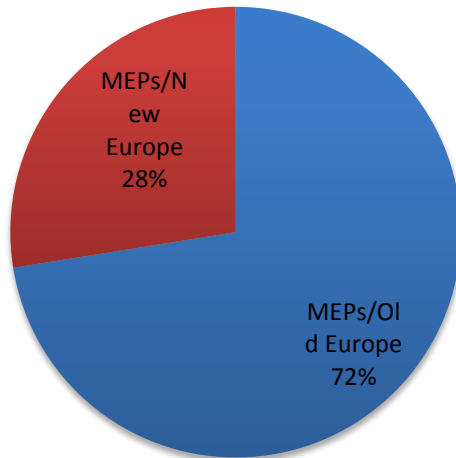
Illustration

Helmut Kuhne (DE-ESP)

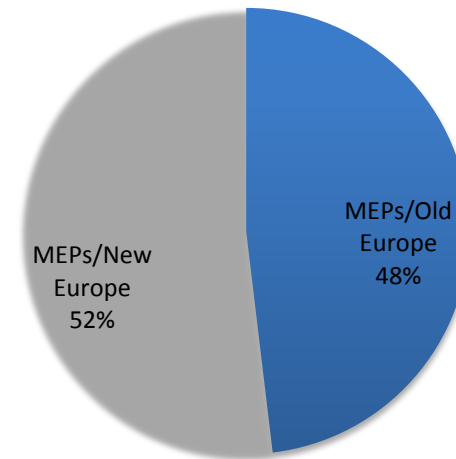
« We say 'no' to the attempt to establish a new framework for interpreting European history, which emerged from the speeches made by some Members of this House at a conference held on 22 January this year. We are deeply opposed to the view that the extermination of European Jews by the Nazis came from a conception of history that was developed by the Soviet regime. We reject that view. »

A controversy on the hierarchy: An issue for the new MS?

Pre vs Post 2004 MEPs

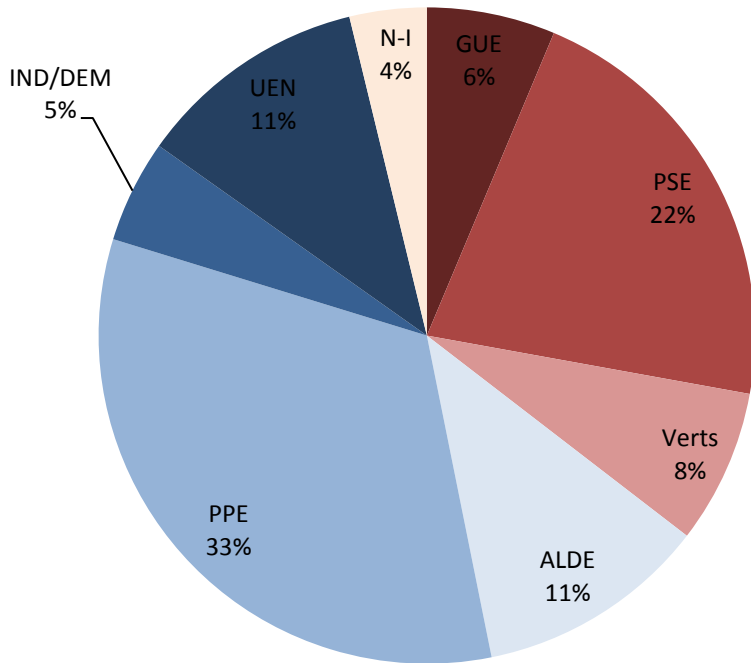


Pre vs Post 2004 MEPs in
memory debates

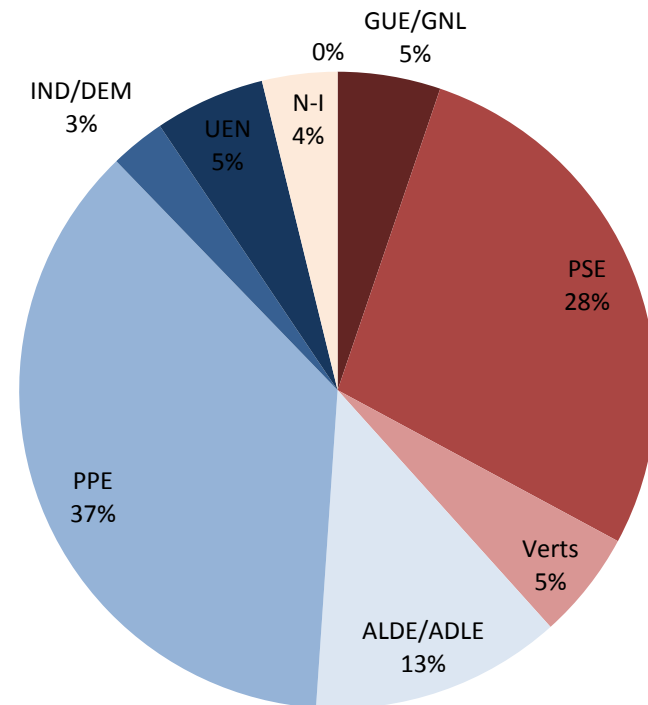


A controversy on the hierarchy: A political issue?

MEPs and historical issues / Group



MEPs / Group



Idea . 2

→ There is a struggle over the hierarchy of European
« lieux de mémoire »

**To make sense of it, one has to
take the Future back into the
analysis**

Janus back into the picture

- A part of the European left fears that a new past may imperil the future

Illustration

Georgios Toussas (EL – GUE) - Holodomor resolution

“The arrow of the famine is being withdrawn from the quiver of anti-communism in order to serve the needs of the anti-communist campaign and rewrite history, to criminalise the communist ideology and ban actions by communists. (...) Thus, an undisguised attempt is being made to distort historic facts and interpret them in an arbitrary and unscientific manner because, quite simply, the basic objective is to underpin at the strategic defamation of socialism and communism”.

Conclusions

Conclusion

- *After 2004: pluralisation*

Conclusion

- After 2004: pluralisation
- After 2004: struggle over the hierarchy. It has a East vs West + Left vs Right component

Conclusion

- After 2004: pluralisation
- After 2004: struggle over the hierarchy. It has a East vs West + Left vs Right component
- After 2004: this struggle is not only about the past, but also the future

- Thank you -

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