ONLINE DISCUSSION

The Politics of Memory and Remembrance Practices in Southeast Europe

Transcript

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KOMRA
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Fondi për të Drejtën Humanitare Kosovë
Fond za humanitarno pravo Kosovo
Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo

Vjollca Krasniqi

Good afternoon and welcome to our panellists and participants in the panel. Right now, there are 30 participants in the panel, but this number will grow as we continue with the panel, I believe.

Over the past two decades, a diversity of bottom-up and top-down memory politics and remembrance practices have evolved in Southeast-Europe. They are constitutive of collective memories situated largely within national-frameworks and characterised by diverging accounts of the past, contested symbols and representations in the public sphere. Against this backdrop, the panel will discuss the dynamics and patterns of memory politics and remembrance practices in Southeast Europe, but more specifically, we will focus on post-Yugoslav states. Conversations in the panel will centre around three broadly defined, yet interrelated set of questions, that include the following:

Firstly, how does the past continue to live in the present, and how does it shape the politics of memory and remembrance practices today? The second question is: What are the main trends in memory politics and remembrance practices? And the third question is: How has memory activism shaped the politics of memory and in what way has it contributed towards the creation of a shared vision for the future?

We have distinguished guests on our panel, and I'm very happy to introduce them to you. They are: **Ana Milošević**, **Vjeran Pavlakovič**, **Naum Trajanovski**, and **Venera Çoçaj**.

Let me continue with my introductions. I will start with **Ana Milošević.** She is a postdoctoral researcher at the Leuven Institute for Criminology, in Brussels, Belgium. She completed her Ph.D. on the topic of "Europeanisation of Memory Politics in Croatia and Serbia", and has published extensively on collective memory, identity and European integration of post-conflict societies, with a special focus on coming to terms with the past. She co-edited a volume with Tamara Trošt, entitled "Europeanisation Memory Politics in the Western Balkans", published in 2020. In current research, Ana examines the roles assigned to memorialisation processes in relation to terrorism, with a view to critically assessing their effectiveness for victims, survivors and societies at large.

Vjeran Pavlakovič is Associate Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Rijeka, in Croatia. He received his Ph.D. in history in 2005 from the University of Washington, and has published articles on cultural memory, transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia and the Spanish Civil War. Vjeran's recent publications include a co-edited volume with Davor Paukovič, "Framing the Nation and Collective Identity: Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia", published by Routledge in 2019, "The Controversial Commemoration: Transnational Approaches to Remembering Bleiberg," in *Politička misao* (2018), and "Yugoslav Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War" (2016). He is currently the lead researcher on the *Memoryscapes* project as part of Rijeka's European Capital of Culture in 2020.

Naum Trajanovski is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences. He holds MA degrees in Southeastern European Studies and Nationalism Studies. He was affiliated with the European Remembrance and Solidarity Network and the Faculty of Philosophy, Skopje. His major academic interests include memory politics in North Macedonia and sociological knowledge-transfer in the Eastern European 1960s. His most recent publication is the monograph "The Operation Museum: The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and Macedonian Memory Politics" (in the Macedonian language) .

Venera Çoçaj is a Ph.D. candidate at the European Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science – (LSE). Her Ph.D. research is part of a larger scientific research project entitled "Justice Interactions and Peacebuilding from Static to Dynamic Discourses across National Ethnic Gender and Age Groups", funded by the European Research Council. Her research focuses on wartime sexual violence and gender-based violence in Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Kosovo.

Before starting with the presentations by our panellists, I would like to provide a couple of technical details. The panel is broadcast live on the YouTube channel and Facebook of RECOM. Interpretation is provided throughout the panel from Albanian to English, and English to Albanian, and from Bosnian-Serbo-Croatian to English and vice-versa. You may find in the screen below the sign for interpretation, with English, German and French listed. Participants in the panel who may need translation, may find that Albanian translation is provided in the German channel, and in the French channel for the Bosnian-Serbo-Croatian language.

Participants wishing to engage in the discussion may raise their hands; when talking you may use your cameras, or if you decide not to turn the camera on, that's fine too. If you decide to pose questions without speaking, you may do so by using the chat option. Please feel free to decide the best way to engage in conversation around the topic of today's panel.

Now, without further ado, I would like to give the floor to Ana.

Ana Milošević

Thank you, Vjollca. Thank you for inviting me to speak today on this very important topic. Today, I'm here in a twofold role. On the one hand, I want to say a few words about the Memory Studies Association Regional Group that I am co-chairing with Naum and Vjeran, my dear co-chairs in the Memory Group of Southeast Europe. And secondly, I am also here as someone who has been working extensively on memory politics in the region, especially the region of the Western Balkans. And as you said, Vjollca, at the very beginning of the short presentation that you gave about my work, actually, there is this new volume that I co-edited with Tamara Trošt that examines the effects of the Europeanisation of memory politics in the Western Balkans. I would like to talk more about this later on.

Now, just a short few words about the regional group that we have on Southeast Europe, that deals specifically with the memory of the region. It is a newly formed regional group within the memory studies association. It is our small 'Covid-19' baby. We kind of conceived it during the Covid-19 time and we are now trying to help it grow.

And secondly, yes, what I wanted to speak about actually are some of the ideas that Tamara and myself and our authors presented in the edited volume that relate to the Europeanisation of memory. It is quite a new approach to the politics of memory in the Western Balkans, to the countries that effectively have a shared past but are living separate futures yet might have a future together again in the European Union (EU). What we actually looked at in this book, in 10 empirical chapters, but also in the theoretical introduction that we worked on together, is actually how European integrations has affected memory politics in the Western Balkans. We looked at the countries - seven countries - that are at different stages of the European integration process, asking whether on the European level there is something that we can call European memory and

whether in the process of European integration, in the process of the Europeanisation of these countries, we can see changes, and if there are changes, what changes they are. This was quite a process, challenging; and I did examine Serbia and Croatia in more detail, because this was the topic of my Ph.D. thesis. But with this edited volume we offered an analysis of the effects of Europeanisation in seven countries of the Western Balkans. The main finding of our research is that there is no such thing as a European memory.

There is no such a thing as a European memory. There is EU memory politics, which is a product of continuous negotiation between member states on what Europe was and what Europe actually is at the moment, and what Europe aspires to become. This EU memory politics is shaped by historical experiences, by identities and, of course, by the political interests of its member states. And it is a politics of memory. What we looked at in this volume was: what were the positive and negative consequences of the alignment with EU memory politics. Let me say a few words about what I mean when I say, "EU Memory Politics."

Over time, we have observed, at the European level and the transnational level, a concept emerging, that we call the EU politics of memory, which is the way the EU member states upload the historical experiences at the European level. They seek acknowledgement of their experiences. They seek recognition of those experiences. And it was most salient after the 2004 enlargement of central-eastern European countries. What we had before 2004 was actually a kind of general understanding, a consensus between the Western European countries that, you know, there was a war and this war ended, and there was a Holocaust, and it was an event that was felt all over the world. And this is something that should not be repeated ever again. There was this consensus that the war had ended, and a common understanding that by working together, by believing in peace, we can move forward. What actually happened in 2004 with the EU accession of central European countries is this, let's say, investment that new EU member states define their national politics of memory in relation to the EU memory norms, which I also examined at the EU level.

Yes, what I observed at the EU level – the transnational level, is how certain European institutions are dealing with the historical experiences of their member states. I looked at how the EU memory framework is constructed. What I mean by this is, that I have seen how the member states and representatives of member states, especially in the European

Parliament, promote certain discourses and narratives and a use of the past, that are most visible in the resolutions made by the European Parliament, whereby this consensus between the East and West is a simplistic view of the past. But the simplistic view of the past was constructed within the European Parliament and then translated into policies that were enacted by the European Commission, for instance, in different kinds of programmes and funding initiatives that seek to find some kind of consensus and re-pacification of relations between the East and West, between different kinds of views of the past, especially after 1945.

The EU memory framework, as I have called it, has been in a certain way exported to the countries that seek to become members of the EU. These countries, such as the countries of the Western Balkans, and also Ukraine and other countries with these aspirations, are trying to emulate the EU identity by aligning with the EU norms of remembrance. What we have looked at in this book is actually in what ways countries and political representatives of the countries in the Western Balkans are trying to do that. How do they align with the EU norms and remembrance? We arrived at the conclusion that this is a selective process. Western Balkans countries, in order to show that they belong to Europe and that they are European countries, selectively take the experiences and policies that relate to the European past and download them to the national politics of memory.

Through the number of studies presented in our edited volume we can see different kind of alignments within the countries of the region, depending also on the stage that the country is at right now in the process of European integrations. To make it really, really brief: the countries that are most advanced in the process are trying to emulate the Holocaust forms of remembrance, by, for instance, enacting the politics of regret by creating museums that align with the European Holocaust norms that exist in Europe. But what they also do is download this kind of anti-totalitarian narrative that has been quite present, in at the European level, and what I mean by this and the totalitarian narrative is the fact that all totalitarian regimes, regardless of their origin or ideological orientation, are put on the same level. A number of authors did write about this. I don't want to repeat what I have said in the past, but fundamental to a number of resolutions by the European Parliament, what has been established is the rejection of totalitarian regimes, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, represented through a number of resolutions that have been downloaded in the Western Balkans countries.

Now what happens is that political actors who actually advocate for this kind of download of European memory norms, they do it for their own personal interest and in search of political gains, but also to gain symbolic capital. And I would also say, to make their road towards the EU smoother, by emulating this aspect of European memory.

I will stop there, because otherwise the conversation becomes really, really long, but if there are any questions afterwards, I would be very glad to respond to them, maybe by looking specifically at a certain case, or certain country, or certain aspect of this process.

Vjollca Krasniqi

Thank you very much, Ana. It is important, perhaps later on, to deconstruct a little bit more the dynamics and patterns of those simplistic views about the past and also how and in what way the memory norms of the EU have been transposed in the context of Southeast Europe, specifically in Serbia, Kosovo and Croatia. Thank you and we will come back with questions on this later on.

Vjeran, the floor is yours.

Vjeran Pavlaković

Thank you, Vjollca, thank you for inviting me. It's great to be on such an esteemed panel with some good friends. This is an important topic, it is a big topic and you've given us a lot of material to work with. Although I've presented on memory politics in Southeast Europe many times in the past, your questions have inspired some new reflections on this topic, especially in light of the global pandemic this year.

Let me start up with an image of this year's commemoration at the Jasenovac Concentration Camp, located in Croatia. After several years of being divided, a single commemoration was held this year in April. It seemed that despite the Covid-19 situation, Croatia's commemorative culture was getting back to being normalised. But actually, very soon after this photograph was taken, there was already some divide among the political leadership in Croatia. President Zoran Milanović could not resist issuing statements to the press about his opinion on a monument that contained the controversial Ustaša salute, "For the Homeland – at

the ready!" (*Za dom spremni*) that was removed from Jasenovac in 2017, sparking several weeks of renewed debates about symbols, monuments, and the memory of Croatia's War of Independence. In this presentation, I will provide a quick overview of memory politics in Southeast Europe (with a focus on Croatia), a reflection on recent trends and the impact of memory activism and conclude with some of the key changes that took place this year.

IMAGE 1: Jasenovac commemoration on 22 April 2020.

Source: https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/drzavni-vrh-i-predstavnici-zrtava-u-jasenovcu-kraus-dosao-sam-pruziti-ruku-i-dobru-volju-ali-slje-dece-godine-necu-doci-ako-se-nista-ne-promijeni-10234540

For years I have been following many of these commemorations, both for World War II and the Croatian War of Independence (or the Homeland War (*Domovinski rat*) as it's called here). My project "Framing the Nation and Collective Memory in Croatia" (FRAMNAT)[1] analysed five World War II commemorations, and two for the war of the 1990s. My research team (Davor Pauković, Benedikt Perak, Tamara Banjeglav and Renato Stanković) observed that in both institutionalised narratives and bottom-up remem-

[1] The results of the research project are available at framnat.eu.

brance politics, World War II, the legacy of Communism, and the wars of the 1990s were all intertwined. I think this is the case for pretty much all of the former Yugoslav countries at various levels.

I think this intertwining of these three narratives is particularly strong in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through monuments, commemorations, and popular culture, it is possible to see how they blend into each other. What are some aspects of this memory culture? There is a legacy of memories silenced and suppressed since 1945, in addition to the official narratives. Not just of World War II, but also of what happened during the communist regime as well as in the new post-1990s countries. There is a regional trend of being reluctant to openly discuss all aspects of the traumatic events of the 20th century.

Not surprisingly, each state and each regime has sought to impose its dominant narrative, and this is reflected in the public space through educational curricula, through the political discourse, popular culture, and so on. Moreover, I think these wars, because they serve as these foundational state building events, whether in socialist Yugoslavia or in the post-Yugoslav independent countries, are imbued with a sacredness that is reflected in their memorialisation. Thus, it becomes very difficult to challenge these in an openly democratic and pluralistic way. Finally, there is a blurring of these distinct historical periods into one national narrative. What happened to Croats or Croatia in 1945, we can see that repeating itself again in the 1990s, at least in the official narrative.

Another aspect of this blurring of the past - or, more specifically, blurring of multiple pasts - is the nationalisation of the narratives. For example, World War II is no longer about a pan-Yugoslavian resistance movement, but rather, national Croatian or Serbian or Slovenian interpretations of it. We noticed an example of this during our fieldwork at the Knin commemoration of Operation Storm, which celebrates the Croatian Army liberation of occupied territory in 1995. In addition to many souvenirs and t-shirts related to the Homeland War, there were many Ustaša symbols, shirts associated with "Bleiburg", and other references to World War II, which is both a fascinating and somewhat disturbing use of these images and symbols.

IMAGE 2: Souvenir stand in Knin selling t-shirts commemorating Operation Storm, Bleiburg, and the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), 5 August 2016.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

We noticed this on multiple occasions during our fieldwork. Consequently, I think it is important to identify the mnemonic actors and memory entrepreneurs who drive memory politics in Southeast Europe more broadly, and in Croatia more specifically.

A photograph from the Antifascist Struggle Day commemoration in the Brezovica Forest in 2015 depicts a truly broad spectrum of these mnemonic actors gathered in one place. It was the last time that the president at that time, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, came to this commemoration. But different political groups were using the commemorations in different ways, including through their commemorative speeches; and that was one of the aspects we focused on, to see how different politicians and political elites used commemorative practices. My colleague Benedict Perak, a cognitive linguist, analysed how the words politicians

and other key social actors use when speaking about the past can be grouped into actual communities of remembrance. Different political actors spoke in different ways at different places. This is an interesting way of seeing how memory is constructed, because generally, individual citizens will not attend multiple commemorations. Usually they go to the commemoration that's most ideologically close to them or directly related to some family trauma. It's only slightly crazy scholars who attend all of these commemorations.

IMAGE 3: Croatian political leadership gathers in the Brezovica Forest for the Antifascist Struggle Day Commemoration, 22 June 2015.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

And so, who are the participants? Because we were also observing how these various narratives were transmitted to society. Who were the people who attended these commemorations? There are all kinds of people at commemorative events, many of whose participation was organised by religious communities, veteran organisations, victims' associations, or official delegations. More research needs to be done about the motivation for attending commemorative events. One trend we observed from 2014 to 2018 in Croatian commemorations was disruption. Over the course of the past five years, almost every commemoration that we observed was disrupted in some way, whether it was the multiple commemorations at Jasenovac, the protests at Srb (for Uprising Day), counter-commemora-

tions during Antifascist Struggle Day, or the rival memorial processions in Vukovar.

Both World War II and the wars of the 1990s remain politicised and polemical. This image of two museum curators, one from the official Jasenovac Memorial Site (in Croatia) and the other from Donja Gradina (in Republika Srpska, Bosnia-Herzegovina), staring off at each other with the contested numbers of Jasenovac victims behind them, illustrates how the radically different interpretations of the past effect the bilateral relations not only of states but also of supposedly neutral scientific institutions. Each institution attempts to argue that their interpretation is the truth, and when international projects or actors are involved, there are additional narratives to consider. This becomes particularly problematic when these issues take precedence over resolving practical issues or economic concerns for the citizens of these countries.

IMAGE 4: Controversial plaques regarding the alleged number of victims of the Jasenovac Concentration Camp at the Donja Gradina memorial site in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

Since in reality a very small number of citizens actually attend these commemorations, the role of the media plays an important role in the transmission of memory politics. Therefore, the FRAMNAT researchers, in addition to extensive fieldwork, closely followed the media coverage of all

of the commemorations. We were interested in what the media reported on, what kind of images they chose to publish, and what kind of headlines were placed on the front pages. We followed both print and electronic media, and it was interesting to compare what we saw at the actual commemorations with the journalists' accounts. While there were no cases of any blatant distortions, the partial accounts proved that is was essential to conduct fieldwork onsite to fully understand how memory politics functions.

IMAGE 5: Bleiburg media: Article in *Slobodna Dalmacija* (19 May 2019) claiming that there was only one incident of a fascist salute and no Ustaša symbols.

Slobodna Dalmacija
NEDJELJA, 19.5.2019

3

novosti

Ministrica znanosti i obrazovanja Blaženka Divjak potvrdila je nove mjere sigurnosti na državnoj maturi: učenici neće moći koristiti svoje kemijske olovke nego one koje će dobiti na samom ispitu

KOMEMORACIJA NA BLEIBURŠKOM POLJU

Poljem su se vijorile nebrojene hrvatske zastave, držale su se slike Gospe, križevi, ali sve u okviru zakona

Političkih govora ove godine nije bilo te se komemoracija ograničila isključivo na vjerski obred kojeg je predvodio ravnatelj Caritasa i Hrvatske katoličke mreže, monsinjor Fabijan Svalina

Samo jedna ruka u zraku, nijedno ustaško obilježje

Ceremoniji prisjećanja na 74. obljetnicu masakra Hrvata na Bleiburgu nazočilo je ove godine više od deset tisuća građana koji su pristigli iz svih dijelova Hrvatske, a samo jedan pozdravio je nacističkim pozdravom te je ekspresno uhićen. Skup je nadziralo 500 policajaca

Samo je jedan incident na samom kraju skupa zaslužio isticanje, nikad mirnije i dostojanstvenije okupljanje na komemorativnom skupu u austrijskom Bleiburgu.

TOMISLAV KUREC
RONALD GORŠIĆ/VANJA MEDIĆ

PROSVJED RADNIČKE FRONTE

Jugoslavenska zastava na traktoru

Monuments are another important aspect of transmitting memory. I am not going to show you eight million images of monuments, but these that I will show are all from former Yugoslav countries that have engaged in state building. Some are more abstract than others, and even though the process varies from country to country, there are similar trends of erasing, vandalising, transforming, or destroying one narrative of the past and replacing it with a new set of memorials and narratives. This is not only related to the conflicts of the 1990s, but also includes reinterpretations of World War II. There are many examples with questionable aesthetic characteristics, as well as controversial symbols, that are in the public space. Sometimes the issue is what to do with the symbols from the communist regime or attempts to install new ones that are very obviously alluding to fascism or other problematic ideologies. There are numerous cases of monuments moving to new locations.

One of the most recent examples of moving monuments was the controversial memorial plaque mentioned by President Milanović after the Jasenovac commemoration. Dedicated to HOS[2] soldiers who died in the 1990s, the memorial included the Ustaša slogan *Za dom spremni* and was erected in 2015 in the village of Jasenovac, near to the concentration camp memorial site where tens of thousands of people had been killed by the regime that used that very slogan. This memorial plaque was one of the reasons for the divided Jasenovac commemoration. The compromise was to move it 20 kilometers to another site near the town of Novska, but that site used to have a Partisan monument on it. It was an ossuary, which was then destroyed during the war in the 1990s. The solution to dealing with all of these multiple layers of memory was just to shift the monuments, without really addressing the issue about the use of symbols in Croatia. President Milanović's comment was that the controversial memorial plaque should just be tossed into the garbage, which – unsurprisingly - angered many veterans of the Homeland War and merely strengthened their resolve to keep using the controversial symbols. In 2016, Prime Minister Andrej Plenković created a commission dedicated to dealing with the symbols of undemocratic regimes, which concluded that Ustaša symbols and *Za dom spremni* were un-

[2] HOS (*Hrvatske obrambene snage*, or Croatian Defense Forces) was a paramilitary formation under the control of the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP, Hrvatska stranka prava), until it was disbanded and the soldiers transferred into the regular Croatian Army in 1992. The HOS units played an important role in the crucial battles of 1991, but were controversial for their use and glorification of Ustaša symbols.

constitutional. However, the commission's position was paradoxical in that it simultaneously declared that the symbols were allowed at certain commemorative events, although it was never specified which. Ultimately, the problem is that Croatia has never completely defined legally what constitutes an Ustaša or fascist symbol, making it nearly impossible to effectively sanction their use. Moreover, this is an interesting question as regards the "Bleiburg" commemoration, where Austrian police are supposed to enforce a ban on fascist symbols, yet it is also not clear which symbols fall under this category.

IMAGE 6: Novska: Site outside of Novska where the controversial memorial plaque featuring *Za dom spremni* was relocated in 2017.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

IMAGE 7: Bleiburg police. Individuals wearing Ustaša uniforms displaying an Ustaša flag next to Austrian police at the Bleiburg commemoration in May 2009.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

Vjollca's second question was related to the recent trends in Southeast European memory politics. Across the region, states have used commemorations to frame the dominant state-building narratives, which have always been influenced by the political group in power. In Croatia, for example, right-wing or left-wing administrations have focused on either Bleiburg or Jasenovac, respectively, as the key narrative of World War II. There are new national or even nationalist interpretations across the region. Milanović, while he was prime minister, emphasised Croatian participation in the Partisan movement during Jasenovac commemorations, while at Bleiburg, politicians have claimed in the commemorative speeches the Ustaša regime had fought merely for an independent Croatian state.

Furthermore, these commemorative practices and remembrance cultures are divided not just ideologically but also ethnically - in other words, as to who goes to and attends which commemorations. I have been mostly focusing on the top-down aspect here, but there are many bottom-up memory initiatives, including from the non-state memo-

ry entrepreneurs I mentioned earlier: veterans' associations, victims' groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), even people selling souvenirs at various commemorations.

Images from Bleiburg in 2017 show all of the paraphernalia that is on sale, which has little to do with commemorating victims and instead is geared towards glorifying the Ustaša regime and its symbols. I didn't even show the sausage stand and the beer that was being sold there. Austria has since banned this kind of behaviour, so this is seemingly a thing of the past. Of course, because of the Corona pandemic this commemoration did not take place with a public this year at all, but this aspect of commemorations indicates there is an entire business of memory taking place. Perhaps a future project will examine more systematically the funding of monuments, the organisation of commemorations, the selling of souvenirs, and so on.

IMAGE 8: Souvenirs featuring Ustaša symbols and soldiers for sale at the Bleiburg commemoration in May 2017.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

Finally, the third aspect that Vjollca asked us to discuss concerns NGO's and memory activism. In a way, they are also memory entrepreneurs, but perhaps because I am involved with a lot of these groups and have

led many memory excursions, I tend to look at them more favourably and positively. Nevertheless, I think scientifically we should be objective when we analyse their role. But for Croatia, I think and believe that memory activism serves a positive role and has created a public space to discuss the traumas of the past for groups that have been marginalised, forgotten, suppressed, or silenced. NGO activism in Croatia has also drawn attention to forgotten sites of memory, such as "Goli Otok", where I took students several years ago. The NGO Documenta has worked extensively to create a proper memory site on "Goli Otok", which is a symbol of communist repression but was in fact directed mostly against non-Croat communists after the Tito-Stalin split and hence is not ideal for either the right or the left. The town of Vukovar, heavily damaged in Croatia's War of Independence, is another site where there is a lot of top-down memory work by the state, but also a place where various domestic and international organisations work on grass-roots reconciliation efforts.

IMAGE 9: The remains of a prison complex on Goli Otok, 2014.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

IMAGE 10: A study visit to the Memorial Center for the Homeland War,

Vukovar, in September 2018.
Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

This has included the organisation of many workshops, summer schools, round tables, and other activities directed towards young people. This is a positive and important approach, since students and young people in general know very little about the recent past and are susceptible to repeating the tragedies of the 1990s if they are not equipped with the critical thinking skills necessary to prevent the rise of a populist, xenophobic, and intolerant political climate. Moreover, NGOs can use memory work to help create a new generation that is politically literate and interested in understanding the recent past, since a greater willingness by them to be engaged means they are less likely to be manipulated by the state.

To conclude, despite these divisions, problems and political instrumentalisation, I think there was a shift in the Croatian commemorative culture this summer. Although there is plenty of cynicism and scepticism about the potential of commemorations for reconciliation, I nevertheless think that the effort at creating a more inclusive commemorative culture was an important symbolic moment twenty-five years after the conflict of the 1990s.

This August, at the commemoration of Operation Storm in Knin, the Croatian political leadership was joined for the first time by a representative of the leading Serb party in Croatia, Boris Milošević, of the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS). Although some Croatian Serbs felt this act diminished the recognition of Serb suffering during the 1990s war, which was echoed by the Serbian government of Aleksandar Vučić, the Croatian president, prime minister, and speaker of the parliament all issued reconciliatory messages that focused on the future. This historic commemorative event was followed by the participation of the Minister of Veteran Affairs (Tomo Medved) and President Milanović at a commemoration in Grubori, and of Prime Minister Plenković in Varivode, two villages where Croatian troops committed war crimes against Serb civilians. These were positive symbolic steps forward which need to be complemented by concrete socio-economic efforts to improve the lives of Croatian Serb returnees and, more broadly, by initiatives to create a tolerant society for all citizens of Croatia.

IMAGE 11: Vukovar Procession of Remembrance and the Vukovar water tower, 18 November 2014.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

My last slide features an image of the upcoming commemoration in Vukovar, which also has the potential for further symbolic reconciliation. It is another opportunity for recognising that the "Other" side's victims were also victims, especially civilian victims, which does not mean equating aggressors and victims in the overall narrative of the war. What it does do is create the atmosphere for pursuing a dialogue, allowing families who have lost people to remember their loved ones in a dignified manner, and not using these commemorative politics, these memory politics, just for the nationalist agendas of various political actors.

Vjollca Krasniqi

Yes, thank you, Vjeran for providing this detailed overview on the panel's theme. It is very important to build an archive of all the remembrance practices; to reflect on the changes, the new directions and what lies ahead in the future. Thank you, Vjeran very much, and I do have questions, and also our guests in the panel may have questions too. Thank you once again.
Now, I would like to give the floor Naum Trajanovski.

Naum Trajanovski

Thank you, Vjollca. I hope you can hear me?

Vjollca Krasniqi

Yes, I can hear you.

Naum Trajanovski

It's been an eventful period for Bulgarian-Macedonian relations. What started with the so-called Bulgarian Explanatory Memorandum in mid-September 2020 – a six-page position paper by the Bulgarian National Assembly – ended up with a fierce cross-national altercation over several national symbols claimed by both the Bulgarians and Macedonians and, eventually, with a Bulgarian block to the official start of North Macedonia's EU negotiations on 17 November 2020. The different interpretative frameworks over history- and memory-related issues thus

seem distanced more than ever in the contemporary history, with the future of good-neighbourly relations at a high risk. Most recently, thus, the positions of the two states have resembled an asymptote and a concave curve. The transversals have yet to be calculated anew.

I will attempt to contextualise the most recent history- and the memory-related Bulgarian-Macedonian quarrel by bringing the 2017 Greco-Macedonian settlement to the table. As per Valérie Rosoux, there are two prevailing EU approaches to interstate historical reconciliation in the last two decades – a "minimalist" one, which allows the existence of two (or more) parallel historical and mnemonic narratives, and a "maximalist" one, which pursues a rather transcendental, "far more demanding process requiring truth, justice, and forgiveness."

In the Greco-Macedonian case, the so-called Prespa Agreement of June 2018 distinguished both maximalist (public monuments depicting ancient history in North Macedonia) and minimalist domains (the signifier of "Macedonia" and "Macedonian" in both North Macedonia and Greece). In the Bulgarian-Macedonian case, the Friendship Treaty of August 2017 delineated a maximalist domain as a set of public state-commemorations of historical figures and events revered in both the states; and a minimalist domain: As put in the Treaty, "mutual respect, trust, understanding, good-neighbourliness and mutual respect for the interests" of the two states. Shortly after the signing of the treaty, Zoran Zaev, North Macedonia's Prime Minister, claimed that the document would "not harm or undermine Macedonia in any way", but make Bulgaria "more dedicated to friendship". What appears to be unfolding in the wake of the November veto is a strategic reshuffling in these regards: An attempt to redefine the very minimalist domain in Bulgarian-Macedonian bilateralism.

Here, another parallel with the Greco-Macedonian settlement comes in handy. Even though many observers of Bulgarian-Macedonian relations have accurately traced the interstate contestations back to the late 1960s, several Bulgarian high-officials raised the tone and started waving around with yet another obstacle to North Macedonia's EU integrations only after the Prespa Agreement (in 2012, Bulgaria, alongside Greece, blocked North Macedonia's EU path – an episode which rarely pops up in the Macedonian debates). This manoeuvre was conducted by - among other measures - a discursive shift in the symbolic domains of "shared history" – as per the Treaty – to a "common history" and, subsequently, the "European values" of the Friendship Treaty. The rightist

memory activism across state borders as of the early 2000s is one of the most prominent examples here, as these cooperating groups managed not only to bring certain historical figures to the forefront of the public debates, but also to load the public discourse over the "shared" or "common" history with these particularistic demands. The two-decades long history of commemorating Mara Buneva in Skopje, as well as other affiliates of the rightist interwar IMRO, are also telling in these regards

This brief note can serve as a pointer to the present debate over the level of political leverage of the notion of "ethnogenesis" – the new, post-November catchphrase of the Bulgarian -Macedonian relations. In theory, there is no uniform, one-dimensional and all-encompassing consensus over its scope and meaning, rather, it is subject to social and political concessions. The critical scholarship highlights the historians' agency as focal for the process of, in Wim van Meurs words, an uncritical division of "world history into neat, non-entangled grand narratives for most of the twentieth century." The political commonplace of "leave the history to the historian" is thus yet another trope which, similarly to the notions of "common" or "shared" history and "European values," is to be carefully approached in regard to the Bulgarian-Macedonian history- and memory-related dispute. The well-known political divides are alive and kicking in the history-writing sphere (needless to say, both in Bulgaria and North Macedonia), and the concept of ethnogenesis, is one of the most protuberant points of these divisions.

A rough map would be drawn across this axis: Experts who build upon nation centred, exclusivist narratives of ethnogenesis and the other group of experts who aim to go beyond this paradigm. Being a long-standing non-issue in post-communist Bulgarian historiography, Macedonia and its history were commented on mostly by scholars affiliated with the reopened Sofia-based Macedonian Scientific Institute – as per Tchavdar Marinov, an institution "eager to endorse every revisionist effort" in North Macedonia "as a step towards the (re-)Bulgarisation of Macedonia, as a promise of 'return to Bulgarian roots'" – hence its predominantly anti-modernist take on Macedonian nation-building (which can be traced back to the rightist groups within the interwar Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation). Several aspects of this position are, coincidentally enough, currently being recreated as a Bulgarian state-politics towards North Macedonia. What differentiates the other group of historians is their roughly speaking, endorsement of the present-day scholarly debates on the national solidarities in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Eu-

rope, the cross-border intertwinements, transnational ties, and knowledge-transfers. One should look up the signatories of the two open letters in reaction to the Bulgarian Memorandum and the Bulgarian veto, for those experts' names. Moreover, unfamiliar to the general public in North Macedonia, the Sofia-based Center for Advanced Studies is one such institution which vastly contributes to a de-essentialised historiography on the region and beyond.

However, the major issue remains a general one – the two groups of historians are rarely reading and hearing each other. A thorough analysis will even uncover different platforms of publishing and different peer-reviewing networks – both in terms of language (English, German, even French vs, Bulgarian and Macedonian) and audience (international vs. national). Yet – as counterintuitive as it may seem – the key to the present-day bilateral history- and memory-dispute is to accommodate all these (relevant and divergent) stakeholders' claims. In these regards, an ideal-type political endeavour would be an establishment of an all-encompassing neutral platform for a critical debate, conceptual framework and operational structure. The spillover of the critical notions into the public domain, their endless politicisation and, finally, relegitimisation by the various actors and agents, is one of the main shortcomings of the absence of such a platform.

In other words, a normative isomorphism, like the much-invoked European models of history commissions, seems to be the most rational solution. A final illustration: in the wake of the Polish-German history textbook commission debates from the 1970s and the 1980s, and especially after the Polish finalisation of the EU accession process in May 2004, several interstate and trans-European institutes were established with the single goal of nurturing the compromises achieved by the commission and, as Robert Traba put it, neutralising the tendency for the (re)misappropriation of history- and memory-tropes by the political elites. The five-year interdisciplinary project run by the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin, entitled "Polish-German Realms of Memory," is one such example, which besides the ambitious idea of "viewing Polish-German relations from a new perspective," has aimed at "linking research on memory cultures with the history of mutual relations." In the words of the researchers themselves, the "project draws upon the experiences of later-date research undertakings concerning European cultures of memory, introducing a hitherto absent element in them: the embodiment in history of bilateral relations." Nora's *lieu de mémoire* was

the framework adopted by the Germans and Poles. What could the critical framework adopted by the Bulgarians and Macedonians be? This remains an open question.

Vjollca Krasniqi

Thank you, Naum. Thank you for bringing the complexity of transnationalism in memory politics into the frame of the EU, which I think connects very well with Ana's presentation. We will go to our fourth panellist, Venera Çoçaj. Venera, the floor is yours.

Venera Çoçaj

Today, I will talk about Kosovo and I will focus on three themes. First will be the ethno-national framework. Second, I will look into gender dynamics. And lastly, I will show several examples of memory activism in Kosovo.

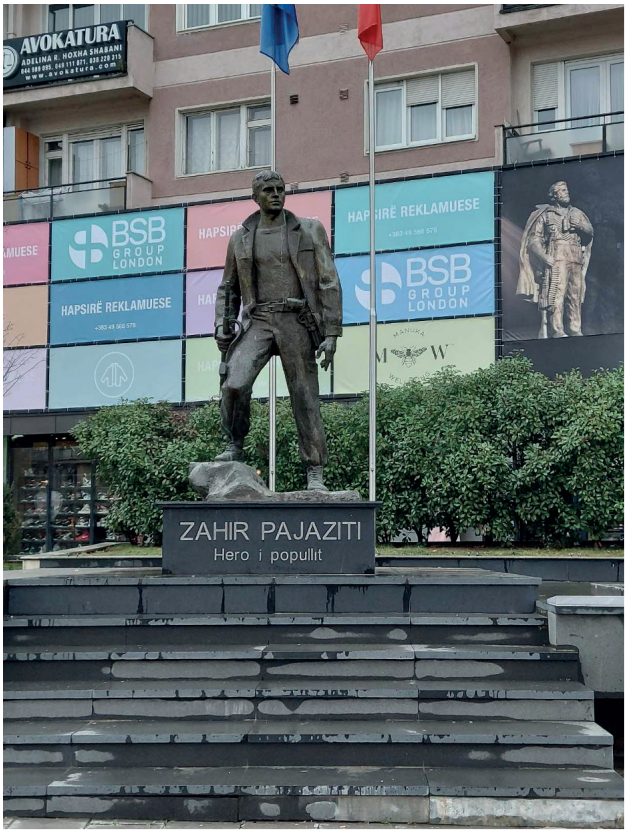
When we talk about the national framework and memory in Kosovo, we cannot avoid the 1990s. It is evident that the dominant memory practices are commemorating the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), both in institutional and private remembrance practices. The narrative developed is the "narrative of the heroes", and of the KLA as a group who provided security and peace to Kosovo Albanians in difficult times, and also as an enhancer of ethnic national belonging. The members of the KLA are perceived as the "founding fathers" who liberated Kosovo and brought peace.

This narrative has been used by political parties. Indeed, major political parties use this sentiment. Numerous monuments have been built to honour the KLA. Many KLA members have become prominent leaders of the dominant political parties in Kosovo. This goes hand in hand with legal acknowledgement. The KLA today is an acknowledged legal group in Kosovo - as compared, for example, with victims and survivors of wartime sexual violence. A veteran's family can inherent the pension after they die, but it is not the same for the families of the survivors of wartime sexual violence.

This memory dominance is very interesting, as it shows which groups are not dominant. Ethnic minorities are not so visible in Kosovo. And in the public sphere, women are not part of memory practices, nor of other political movements and resistances that were outside the KLA umbrella.

An example of institutional initiatives is the "Zahir Pajaziti" Square in Pristina (see image 1). Zahir Pajaziti was a KLA commander. In other cities there are similar squares like this one. And next to it is a photo of the "Adem Jashari Youth and Sports Centre" in Pristina, that was built during socialist times. The original name of this centre was in honour of two Partisans, "Boro and Ramizi", to symbolise the socialist ideology of brotherhood and unity. Today, the name has changed to "Adem Jashari", to honour the founder of the KLA (see image 2). Moreover, many streets and schools have been named "Adem Jashari", even beyond the institutional initiatives - for instance, the Prishtina international airport. I assume you know the tragic story of Adem Jashari and the Jashari family, where more than 50 members of the family died during the attack. The women and children of the Jashari family are not commemorated in the public space in the way the KLA founder is.

IMAGE 1: Commemoration of armed resistance: Zahir Pajaziti statue in the square named after him.



Author: Venera Çoçaj

IMAGE 2: Youth and Sports Centre *Adem Jashari*.

Author: Venera Çoçaj

It is interesting that in Kosovo there are numerous private initiatives of families building monuments for their family members who were killed in the war as KLA fighters. This picture was taken in my village, Gjonaj, where my parents come from. On the left side we can see the private monument that was erected this year by the Reshat Çoçaj family (see image 3). He was a KLA soldier, and on the right, there is the building of the cultural centre, also called after Reshat Çoçaj (see image 4). This is in a small village near Prizren. It is interesting to see how private and public initiatives blend into each other.

IMAGE 3: Statue of the KLA fighter Reshat Çoçaj.

Source: telegrafi.com, 2020.

IMAGE 4: Commemorations at the Cultural Center *Reshat Çoçaj* in Gjonaj Village.

Source: GazetaePrizrenit.net, 2020.

Public commemorations can challenge the ethno-national framework. An example of this is the commemorative plaque in Mitrovica. This year, the municipality of Mitrovica honoured the civilians who lost their lives in the green market in Mitrovica. In the first image, we can see the names of six victims only (see image 5). They are all Albanian names. After thorough research by the Kosovar researcher and activist, Shkelzen Gashi, it was discovered that the seventh victim was a young Roma girl, whose name was not included in the plaque by the Municipality of Mitrovica.

IMAGE 5: The monument dedicated to the victims of Mitrovica bombings, without the name of Elizabeta Hasani.

Source: EkonomiaOnline.com, 2020.

IMAGE 6: Civic intervention for inclusive memorialisation in Mitrovica.

Source: Exit.al, 2020.

This provoked a huge public discussion. In the second image, you can see local citizens' protests demanding that the name of the Roma girl, Elisabeta Hasani, should be included in the plaque (see image 6). After this public reaction, the municipality of Mitrovica apologised and amended the plaque by adding the name of Elisabeta Hasani (see image 7). This is one of the very recent examples where we can see the public and citizens engaging with public institutions and having a positive impact. However, it would have been much better if the municipality of Mitrovica had put her name there in the first place.

IMAGE 7: Memorial plaque with the name of Elizabeta Hasani included.

Source: Prishtina Insight.com, 2020.

Regarding gender, it is obvious that women are under-represented in memory practices in Kosovo, as well as in the region. The recent effort that was taking place in Kosovo is related to wartime sexual violence. And this has made Kosovo one of the first countries in the region to recognise wartime sexual violence. Two examples are of importance here. It is a fact that survivors are not speaking, but monuments, publications and NGO's are speaking in their name. It is important to unpack what they actually mean. I will show two initiatives: the "Heroinat" monument and the art installation "Thinking of You", both inaugurated in 2015 (see image 8). The "Heroinat" monument is very interesting. It was a parliamentary initiative, from the then member of parliament Alma Lama. The monument represents 20,000 women thought to have experienced wartime sexual violence. The monument has a secondary meaning - acknowledgement of women's contribution in the Kosovo war. However, that part is quite ambiguous, and not clarified by the author of the monument.

IMAGE 8: Women and nation: *The Heroinat Memorial*.

Author: Venera Çoçaj

These commemorations are situated within the ethno-national frame, as they neither challenge nor acknowledge victims from non-majority groups. It is "Heroinat" - it is in the Albanian language. The "Heroinat" memorial also projects an image of how an Albanian woman should look like. The art installation "Thinking of You", by the artist Alketa Xhafa Mripa, supported by the then President Jahjaga, was presented on three languages: Albanian, Serbian and English (see image 9). Citizens donated dresses or skirts to represent the voices of the survivors, but actually this act did not challenge gender roles. There is a focus on the Albanian-Serb relationship, and other non-majority communities in Kosovo, such as the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, are not visible.

IMAGE 9: Combatting the stigma of wartime sexual violence: Art Installation *Thinking of You*.

Source: PrishtinaInsight.com, 2020.

And this year, one of the most popular monuments in Pristina, the "Newborn", which represents the independence of the state of Kosovo, included the issue of wartime sexual violence. On every Independence Day, the "Newborn" monument carries a new theme. This year, the monument's theme was wartime sexual violence (see image 10). It depicts all victims of sexual abuse in conflicts all around the world yet focusing on

Kosovo. The narratives are in the English and Albanian languages, but not so much in non-majority languages. This was part of the campaign "Be My Voice", and you can see a lot of media followed the event.

IMAGE 10: NEWBORN Monument: Remembering wartime sexual violence.

Author: Venera Çoçaj

I will now briefly talk about memory activism. Researchers and activists have challenged the idea that the victims were only Albanian. Yes, predominately they were Albanian, but there were also victims from other ethnic groups. This is practiced when the international day for the disappeared is marked in Kosovo. The idea is to put down all the names of the victims, to make sure there is no ethnic discrimination. Also, the exhibition "Once Upon a Time and Never Again", organised by the Humanitarian Law Centre Kosovo (HLC), is another good example (see image 11). It is an exhibition that focuses on human losses, specifically on children in Kosovo. It is a good example, since the HLC cooperated with the municipality of Pristina, of how civil society can contribute to multi-narrative practices becoming institutional. Many students in Kosovo and from abroad have the chance to see the exhibition.

IMAGE 11: Children war victims: Exhibition *Once Upon a Time and Never Again*.

Source: Koha.Net, 2020.

Why is this important? Current pre-university textbooks contain misleading information. For example, this is a quote from the history textbook for the 10th grade in Kosovo, which says that during the NATO bombing, the Serbian army killed more than 15,000 Albanians. The number of war victims is lower than this, and it was not only Albanians who were killed, but also there are victims from other ethnic groups.

Why is memory study important, and why is public debate important too? It is about freedom of speech. This brings to mind the case of Shkelzen Gashi. He was an advisor to the then Prime Minister Albin Kurti, who in an interview said that "individuals of the KLA might have committed war crimes." Gashi was referring to the reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. He was publicly ostracised as being anti-Albanian. And as a result, he was removed from his advisory post in the Kosovo government.

This speaks a lot of how difficult it is to challenge the dominant memory of the KLA. If we go back here, we see the banner which is placed in the

main square in Pristina. On the banner, it is written: "Heroes of war and peace," depicting the current president Hashim Thaçi, and Kadri Veseli, the leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (see image 12). We also see the "UÇK" logo. KLA sentiment is powerful and is used politically, especially now when the Specialist Chambers are working on particular cases. In response to this work, there was a push from this political party to draft a law on "Protection of Kosovo Liberation Army War Values". The Kosovo public and the international community rejected this law, saying that it hampers freedom of speech; hence it did not pass.

IMAGE 12: Manhood and heroism in war and peace.

Source: Indeksonline, 2020.

All in all, despite some efforts on memory activism and focus on gender, it is still difficult to include multi-narrative perspectives that challenge the ethno-national framework.

Thank you.

Vjollca Krasniqi

Thank you, Venera for bringing gender to our discussion of memory politics and remembrance practices. A very important topic definitely, and also, as previous speakers have pointed out, it relates to the dynamics of

inclusion and exclusion in memory politics and remembrance practices. I see that we have fourteen minutes to go before the conclusion of the panel, I would like to give the chance to participants in the panel for questions.

Please feel free to use your camera when speaking, and/or chat to address questions to our panellists.

While waiting for questions from the audience, I would like to go ahead with a round of questions. I would like to start with Ana. Ana, could you give us one or two examples of the selective appropriation of the EU memory norms and how they are practiced currently in the Western Balkans. You argued there is no common European memory. What does this mean in the context of the EU today and for the future?

Ana Milošević

I like challenging questions. I would like to start with the challenging question. What I said was, that there is no European memory. There is no unifying narrative in the EU about what the past was. There are a number of examples of how the EU memory framework has been downloaded in the countries of the Western Balkans. And of course, one example that comes to my mind is the one of the Srebrenica genocide and the fact that the EU, and especially the European Parliament, have been exerting a certain sort of a pressure on Serbia to acknowledge what happened in Srebrenica.

Everybody who has been researching memory politics in Serbia or memory politics at the European level knows that the European Parliament passed a resolution - a number of resolutions, actually - to provide support for victims' families. The events of genocide drove this resolution on the European level and have exerted a sort of pressure on Serbia to recognise what happened there. At a certain point in time, the Serbian parliament did pass a resolution that sees the Srebrenica events as something that was wrong - although the Serbian parliament never recognised it as a genocide. Why did the Serbian parliament pass the resolution then? Why? As it was not something that goes in line with the official memory politics of Serbia. The Serbian parliament did it because they wanted to move faster on the EU membership track.

This is one of the examples, but there are a number of examples of this downloading actually happening in a number of countries, which actually leads me to my point: that I am really, really, really sceptical about the success of memorialisation and its uses for symbolic justice and reparations for the victims, for the local communities. I am really, really sceptical, sceptical about that. I think also, actually, that there is a lack of research on this topic, on the popularity of memory as a tool of symbolic justice and reparation, and on the efficacy of these kinds of various types of memorialisation in transitional justice and post-traumatic settings.

Vjollca Krasniqi

Vjeran has offered a more optimistic view, right, Vjeran? You have pointed out that you detect a nuanced shift in the public discourse in terms of memorialisation and remembrance practices in Croatia. But there is a gloomy side to it, too. Can you give us a little bit of this optimistic blueprint?

Vjeran Pavlaković

During this summer's "Operation Storm" round table, I was also the optimistic one, whilst my colleague Sven Milekić from BIRN was my pessimistic counterweight. His argument was: Who cares that some politicians showed up at a commemoration and afterwards nothing practical was accomplished? But you know, I think that symbolic politics do have an impact. With President Ivo Josipović several years ago, nothing practical changed and Serbian-Croatian relations actually got worse. You can then say, okay, it doesn't really have a long-term effect. But if it's supported by concrete local initiatives that are backed by a clear political will at the top levels of the state, this can create real change and not just a photo opportunity during a wreath-laying ceremony.

If these new kinds of memory politics can encourage Croatian Serbs who are living in Serbia to return and generate a new situation on the ground, it can be supported by activists, academics, journalists, members of religious communities, and other social actors who feel empowered by the overall political atmosphere rather than feeling they are constantly challenging the hegemonic state narrative. I've been working with colleagues in Croatia and Serbia for over ten years on conferences and

IMAGE 12: Commemoration in Varivode at newly erected monument in memory of nine murdered Croatian Serb civilians, 5 October 2010.

Author: Vjeran Pavlaković

workshops about Serb-Croat relations, and there has been a sense that not much has happened; but a change like this from the top inspires new initiatives to move forward. Let's see what happens at the Vukovar commemoration, even though many right-wing politicians have warned that they don't want Vukovar to be another Knin. The biggest opponents of reconciliation have stated they don't want the state telling them how to commemorate. Nevertheless, let's say I am cautiously optimistic, and I think that Croatia is moving forward in a positive direction regarding memory politics.

Venera Çoçaj

To say something optimistic is very hard, honestly - thinking about the institutional history and textbooks that are divided and polarised along ethnic lines. As long as that is happening, all this positive memory activism is open for debate. How much have they impacted younger generations who actually do not remember anything from the 1990s? This

is problematic. But also, the reconciliation projects fail. We saw recently, in the publication stemming from the research project "Joint History Project Textbook", that there are misleading interpretations about Kosovo and Albanians, and about the position of Kosovar Albanians in the former Yugoslavia. I do not have a clear answer on this.

Vjollca Krasniqi

Thank you. Thank you all for interesting presentations and for sharing your thinking, research, and also future directions on memory politics and remembrance practices in Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia. All of you have touched upon the importance of education and research, and the need to maintain an inclusive public sphere where different narratives, memories and experiences, are represented and discussed in a genuine democratic way.

Thank you very much. Thank you also on behalf of the HLC Kosovo. I hope we will meet again in future events of the HLC Kosovo and RECOM.