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BRIDGES ACROSS THE ATLANTIC? INTERTWINED ANTI-COMMUNIST MOBILISATIONS IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE COLD WAR

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ABSTRACT - *This article focuses on transatlantic interrelationships between advocacy groups calling for historical recognition, legal accountability and collective remembrance of communist-era crimes. A case study of three partly overlapping anti-communist networks established during and after the Cold War, in the United States and Europe, shows that the exchange of ideas across the Atlantic is not underpinned by a tightly institutionalised network but by cross-references between organisations with slightly diverging audiences, claims and future-oriented agendas. The article identifies two factors that account for the persisting fragmentation of this memory activism in the post-Cold War period: the distinct organisational and ideological roots of anti-communist networks and the idiosyncrasies of the political and institutional contexts in which they operate.*

RÉSUMÉ - *Cet article analyse les liens transatlantiques entre des organisations militantes appelant à une reconnaissance historique, une mémoire commune et une judiciarisation des crimes de la période communiste. Une étude de cas portant sur trois réseaux anticommunistes partiellement imbriqués, créés pendant et après la guerre froide aux États-Unis et en Europe, montre que la circulation des idées des deux côtés de l'Atlantique n'est pas sous-tendue par un réseau étroitement institutionnalisé, mais par des références croisées entre des organisations dont les publics, les revendications et les agendas divergent légèrement. L'article identifie deux facteurs expliquant la fragmentation persistante de ce militantisme mémoriel dans l'après-guerre froide : les racines organisationnelles et idéologiques distinctes des réseaux anticommunistes et les particularités des contextes politiques et institutionnels dans lesquels ils opèrent.*

KEYWORDS - *anti-communism, transnational mobilisations, memory activism, transatlantic relations*

MOTS-CLÉS - *anticommunisme, mobilisations transnationales, militantisme mémoriel, relations transatlantiques.*

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In the late 2000s, an intriguing succession of similar mobilisations for the victims of communist crimes¹ occurred on both sides of the Atlantic. In June 2007, the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation unveiled in Washington, DC, a memorial dedicated to the “one hundred million victims of Communism worldwide.” In April 2009, the European Parliament passed a resolution on “European conscience and totalitarianism,” which called for the EU to create a pan-European documentation centre/memorial for the victims of all totalitarian regimes and to commemorate the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 by inaugurating 23 August as a European-wide Day of Remembrance (EP, 2009). In May 2014, the US House of Representatives adopted House Resolution 4435 designating 23 August as “Black Ribbon Day” in memory of the victims of both Soviet communist and Nazi terror. These initiatives suggest that despite the demise of the Soviet bloc, anti-communism remains a global phenomenon sustained by the circulation of ideas and claims between the United States and Europe. It is these transatlantic entanglements that this article seeks to explore by investigating two lines of memory activism that have developed independently: mobilisations aimed at shaping an anti-communist memory regime across the European Union, and US-based anti-communism.

The main focus of critical approaches to transnational memory politics in Europe after the end of the Cold War has been the struggle to equate communism and Nazism (Littoz-Monnet, 2012; Mälksoo, 2014; Perchoc, 2014; Radonic, 2018; Neumayer, 2019). Beginning in the 1970s, the Holocaust took centre stage as the ultimate symbol of barbarism in Western remembrance regimes. In the 1990s, post-communist countries on the path to EU accession adopted the Western canonical representation of the Holocaust and acknowledged their specific share (depending on each country’s war experience) of the responsibility in the extermination of European Jews. Simultaneously, they also claimed a “double victimhood” status (Zombory, 2017) based on the putative equivalence between Stalinism and Nazism. In EU-level debates, a variety of memory entrepreneurs² calling for the equal treatment of Nazi and Communist legacies repeatedly clashed with established Western memory cultures. This article broadens the scholarship by exploring the connections between these memory entrepreneurs and non-European movements pursuing similar goals – more specifically, ethnic organisations that have preserved remembrance of Communist crimes in transatlantic memory communities since the late 1940s.

From the moment it attained a truly global reach and transnational dimension in the 1920s, anti-communism has remained a “flexible label” (van Dongen et al., 2014, p. 2) that encompasses widely diverging interests and groups supported by varying degrees of public funding and state patronage (Stone & Chamedes, 2018). During the Cold War, one particularly active strand was “American ethnic anti-communism,” defined as the struggle against communism waged in the United States by exile communities of Eastern European descent, based on nationalism, pro-Americanism and an ideological opposition to Marxism (Zake, 2009; Zake, 2010). As part of a broader attempt to fight Soviet influence, the US administration established a variety of links with Central and Eastern European (CEE) dissidents and exile communities in both Eastern and Western Europe, as well as in the United States. A domestic perspective on US ethnic anti-communism has demonstrated this evolution over time, from the strident opposition of the early Cold War to the adoption of the “language of human rights”

¹ Memory activists use this expression to lump together, across national contexts and historical periods, all serious human rights violations committed by communist regimes since 1917.

² This notion, coined by Michael Pollak, designates those actors interested in bringing the past to public attention. They are “made up of two categories: those who create common references and those who make sure they are respected. These entrepreneurs are convinced of having a holy mission to accomplish and draw inspiration from an intransigent ethics by establishing equivalence between the memory they are defending and the truth” (Pollak, 1993, p. 30).

during *Détente* and the active support of dissidents during the demise of the Soviet bloc (Moyn, 2012; Brier, 2013). One of the most interesting aspects of ethnic anti-communism was its connections to US state institutions through Cold War organisations sponsored by the National Committee for a Free Europe (Kádár Lynn, 2013). Other scholars have taken into account the external dimension of American anti-communism: Cold War hardliners initially tried to topple Soviet-type regimes by directly supporting opponents in the Eastern bloc (Faure, 2002) and to contain communist ideology in Western Europe by financing exile organisations and waging a “war on the mind” (Grémion, 1995; Berghahn, 2002). During *Détente* and late Socialism, transnational networks linking US-based activists to opponents from the Eastern bloc persisted, even if their goals and modes of contention evolved in different directions (Kind-Kovacs & Labov, 2013; Mikkonen & Koivunen, 2015). Nonetheless, most of the accounts of transnational networks that crossed the Iron Curtain during late socialism, linking US-based activists to Eastern European opponents who demanded the recognition of Soviet crimes, end at the beginning of the 1990s.

Drawing on this scholarship, this article carries the analysis into the post-Cold War period to shed new light on current transatlantic anti-communism. It offers a case study of three intertwined anti-communist networks: the Joint Baltic American National Committee (JBANC), established in 1961 and located in Rockville, MD; the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VOC), founded in 1994 in Washington, DC; and the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (hereafter: the Platform), created in Prague in 2011. As they share many defining characteristics, these organisations are ideal cases for testing the effectiveness of the circulation of anti-communist discourse across the Atlantic. They all claim to represent national communities that have suffered under communism, using common tropes to portray communism as a criminal ideology and a matrix of dictatorships as evil as the Nazi regime. Their members call for historical recognition, legal accountability and a collective remembrance of Communist crimes through a range of actions characteristic of knowledge-based interest groups (Medvetz, 2012): the organisation of policy-oriented events and conferences, networking, public exhibitions, and the publication of educational material written by like-minded historians and political scientists. These networks also share a common mnemonic agenda and lobby policymakers, either through the US Congress or the European Parliament. Moreover, the VOC and JBANC are official members of the Platform, while the managing director of JBANC is a board member of the VOC. Yet these groups are only loosely connected on a daily basis: the exchange of ideas between them is not underpinned by a tightly institutionalised transatlantic network, but by cross-references and a partial overlap of entities with diverging audiences, claims and future-oriented agendas. The active circulation of discourses and repertoires of contention between them contributes to the production of a globalised, but not totally unified, anti-communist narrative.

In what follows, two factors that account for the fragmented nature of transatlantic memory activism are identified: the distinct organisational and ideological roots of these anti-communist networks and the idiosyncrasies of the political and institutional context in which they operate. First, tracing these advocacy groups’ genealogy in terms of worldview and political, intellectual and financial resources, highlights how the two spaces of the anti-communist cause³ – the American and the European – have produced different organisational structures and identities. Second, an analysis of these networks’ awareness raising activities about the criminal nature of communism and its contemporary legacies, among the general public and policymakers, elucidates not only the various ways in which these networks interact

³ This notion refers to social spaces that connect different social fields while remaining relatively autonomous from the fields that they cut across and from which they draw their resources (Bereni, 2009).

in order to give their claims a wider reach, but also the specific obstacles they face in promoting their anti-communist discourse in the American, as opposed to the European context.⁴

THE MANY ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY ANTI-COMMUNIST ACTIVISM

The three networks under study stretch across different social fields that endow them with specific political, financial and intellectual resources. JBANC and the VOC have their origins in American ethnic anti-communist organisations. The former uses congressional caucuses⁵ as its main political tool, while the latter is underpinned by the conservative establishment. JBANC's primary mission is to advocate for the interests of the Baltic states among US policymakers, although it also highlights the continued security threat posed by Russia throughout the former Soviet Union. The VOC has a global perspective invested in the fight against communism worldwide, and actively supports anti-communist activists in Latin America and Asia.⁶ By contrast, the Platform is itself a transnational advocacy group geared at European institutions. It has deep ties to the EP and is supported by institutes of national memory (or similar institutions) in a variety of Central European countries.⁷ The Platform is steeped in a "mimetic rivalry" with the Holocaust (Laignel-Lavastine, 1999)⁸ and has a legal agenda interested in prosecuting perpetrators of communist crimes in the former Eastern bloc (Büttner & Delius, 2015).

JBANC and the Protection of Baltic Interests

JBANC was founded in 1961 by Baltic refugees who had come to the United States following the Second World War. It currently claims to represent one million Baltic Americans and to provide a unified voice for their main organisations – the American Latvian Association, the Estonian American National Council, and the Lithuanian American Council. The small organisation's board of directors, composed of three members from each national organisation, meets monthly and provides oversight. Its only employee, the managing director, reports to the board and to the three organisations, who define JBANC's course of action. The Estonian-American Karl Altau has been managing director since 1997.⁹

JBANC was originally founded in the context of the Kersten Committee hearings¹⁰ and the Captive Nations movement (*discussed below*). Since then, it has worked with Congress, across presidential administrations, to steer US policy on Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. From 1961 to 1991, the network's main focus was on upholding the official recognition of the Baltic governments in exile and preserving the Welles Declaration of 1940, through which the US

⁴ The analysis is based on fieldwork carried out between 2013 and 2018 in Prague, Paris, Brussels and Washington, DC. It involved collecting written materials on the individual activities and joint projects (reports, archives, websites) of these networks, conducting semi-structured interviews with memory entrepreneurs and carrying out ethnographic observation at various policymaking and commemorative events.

⁵ Congressional member organisations pursuing a common legislative agenda.

⁶ See the article by Marie-Laure Geoffray in this special issue.

⁷ These state structures were set up beginning in the late 1990s to fulfil three goals: first, archiving the documents produced by communist security apparatuses; second, lustration; third, research and education. Through their dual functions as agents of transitional justice and framers of historical narratives, institutes of national memory have produced an official vision of the socialist period focused on the social-domination mechanisms deployed by the party-state (Behr, 2011; Mink, 2013).

⁸ Some anti-communist memory entrepreneurs question the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but simultaneously apply to Communist mass violence the mnemonic codes that had initially been developed with respect to Nazi crimes.

⁹ Karl Altau holds a BS in Journalism from Radford University and degrees in Social Sciences (Stockholm University), Uralic-Altai Studies (Indiana University, Bloomington) and Russian studies (University of Helsinki).

¹⁰ The Select Committee to Investigate the Incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia into the USSR, chaired by Charles J. Kersten, was formed by the US Congress in 1953. It completed its investigation in 1954.

government refused to recognise the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. Through the 1970s and 1980s, JBANC helped raise awareness about Baltic political prisoners and the Soviet Union's transgressions against the 1975 Helsinki Accords' declaration of principles, particularly with respect to violations of human rights and the self-determination of peoples. When nationalist movements rose up in the Baltic Soviet republics during the Gorbachev era, JBANC organised actions and political rallies in support of independence.¹¹

After 1991, a key issue for the organisation was ensuring that US lawmakers remained focused on the peaceful withdrawal of Russian armed forces from the Baltics, which eventually took place from 1993 to 1994. This was followed by a nearly ten-year campaign to help bring these countries into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). After NATO accession in 2004, JBANC turned its attention to human rights issues, energy security, defending against Russian cyber-attacks and disinformation in CEE, and support for Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In addition, the network engaged in annual commemorations of the 1941 and 1949 deportations¹² and of Black Ribbon Day on 23 August (JBANC, 2020).

JBANC exerts its influence mainly via direct political pressure on Congress, close contact with congressional offices and the establishment of caucuses. The House Baltic Caucus and the Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus were both founded in 1997 by two members of Congress of Lithuanian origin, Senator Dick Durbin (Democrat) and Congressman John Shimkus (Republican). Senator Durbin had served previously in the House of Representatives and as part of a congressional delegation that had supported the Baltics since the 1980s.¹³ As soon as John Shimkus was elected to Durbin's seat in the House of Representatives in 1997, Shimkus launched a Baltic Caucus in order to "maintain strong relationships with the Baltic states, promote healthy democracies and assist them in strengthening free market economies" (House Baltic Caucus, n.d.). At a time of considerable public interest due to the NATO enlargement campaign, both caucuses grew quickly and reached their highwater marks by the early 2000s – 15 members in the Senate, and close to 80 in the House. Although the House Baltic Caucus is more active than the Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus, both of them have been met with renewed interest since the annexation of Crimea and the rise of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014.

From the Assembly of Captive Nations to the VOC Foundation

The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation defines itself as "a non-profit educational and human rights organisation devoted to commemorating the more than 100 million victims of communism around the world and to the freedom of those still living under totalitarian regimes" (VOC, 1993). Although its establishment only dates from 1993, its roots can be traced back to the ethnic associations and lobby groups sponsored by American hardliners during the Cold War.

In 1959, the National Captive Nations Committee (NCNC) was founded in Washington, DC, as an anti-communist advocacy group. Established by President Eisenhower according to Public Law 86-90, which introduced the Captive Nations Week, the NCNC was tasked with maintaining the Captive Nations List – a public campaign used to directly oppose policies of détente, which émigré organisations regarded as a form of "appeasement" in the face of Soviet aggression and the "enslavement" of CEE peoples (Kádár Lynn, 2013). President Eisenhower, and every successive US president up to and including Donald Trump, has declared the third week of July to be Captive Nations Week.

¹¹ Skype interview with JBANC's Managing Director, 7 June 2018.

¹² Tens of thousands of Baltic citizens were deported by Soviet authorities to Siberia between 1941 and 1953. The main waves of deportations occurred in June 1941 and March 1949 (Pettai & Pettai, 2015, p. 55).

¹³ The Ad Hoc Monitoring Committee on the Baltic States and Ukraine, which existed before the restoration of independence in 1991.

As early as 1991, Senator Steve Symms (Republican, Idaho) and the former adviser to Ronald Reagan, Representative Dana Rohrabacher (Republican, California) introduced concurring resolutions in Congress urging the construction of “an International Memorial to the Victims of Communism at an appropriate location within the boundaries of the District of Columbia.” In 1993, Rohrabacher and Senator Jesse Helms (Republican, North Carolina) sponsored amendments to the 1993 Friendship Act, which reformed the statutes governing international relations between the former Soviet republics and the United States. The Act cited “the deaths of over 100,000,000 victims in an unprecedented imperial holocaust” and resolved that “the sacrifices of these victims should be permanently memorialized so that never again will nations and peoples allow so evil a tyranny to terrorize the world” (US Congress, 1993). The bill authorising the construction of a memorial in Washington, DC, was passed unanimously by Congress and signed into law by President Bill Clinton. The law prohibited spending federal funds on the memorial but authorised the NCNC to establish an organisation, the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, to construct and operate it based on donations from individuals, foundations and corporations.

As textbox 1 indicates, their multi-positioning (Boltanski, 1973) allowed the VOC’s co-founders to act as links between three social fields: conservative thinktanks; associations of American citizens of East European descent; the US foreign policy and security community.

Textbox 1: The Co-Founders of the VOC Memorial Foundation

Lev Dobriansky (1918-2008): Born in New York City to Ukrainian immigrants, PhD in economics from New York University, professor of economics at Georgetown University in Washington, DC (1948-1987). Dobriansky also served as a consultant to the US Department of State and the US House of Representatives, and was ambassador to the Bahamas (1982-1986). He was involved in various anti-communist and émigré organisations such as the Ukrainian National Information Service, the American Council for World Freedom and the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America. Dobriansky wrote the original Captive Nations Resolution in 1959 and was the founder and long-time chairman of the NCNC. First Chairman of the VOC Memorial Foundation.

Lee Edwards (1932-): BA in English from Duke University and PhD in world politics from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. Distinguished Fellow in Conservative Thought at the B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies at The Heritage Foundation and adjunct professor of politics at the Catholic University of America. Former fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Media Fellow at the Hoover Institution and President of the Philadelphia Society. First President of VOC.

Zbigniew Brzeziński (1928-2017): Polish-American diplomat and political scientist. Counsellor to President Lyndon Johnson (1966-1968), national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981), active supporter of Solidarność in Poland in the 1980s and the independence of Ukraine in the 1990s. Brzeziński signed the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism of June 2008, which led to the adoption of the EP resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism in April 2009 and the creation of the Platform in 2011.

The VOC represents an *interstitial space*, a “semi-structured network of organisations that traverse, link, and overlap more established social spheres” (Medvetz, 2012, p. 25). Its creation enabled the constitution of a distinct social space where actors from politics, academia, bureaucracy and ethnic advocacy groups, all of whom espouse a strong anti-communist ethos, exchange institutional credibility, access to policymakers, scholarly authority and policy-oriented knowledge. This “mutual legitimation circle” (Bourdieu, 1976, p. 90) comprises prominent figures of the American conservative establishment and various strands of anti-communism. Yet the VOC is a small organisation, only recently professionalised, only hiring

an executive director in 2013,¹⁴ a director of academic programs in 2016, and a director of government relations in 2017.

Europeanised memory activism: the Platform

The Platform of European Memory and Conscience defines itself as “a non-profit international non-governmental organisation” that brings together “public and private institutions and organisations active in research, documentation, awareness raising and education about the totalitarian regimes which befell Europe in the 20th century” (Platform, 2019a). In 2020, the Platform listed 62 member institutions in 20 countries across Europe and North America, including NGOs, archives and research centres, victims’ associations, museums/memorials and private foundations. Nonetheless, the network is driven mainly by state-sponsored institutes of national memory such as the Polish IPN (Institute of National Remembrance) and the Hungarian NEB (Committee of National Remembrance). Except for Canadian ethnic associations, its only non-European members are the VOC and JBANC. The network claims to represent “at least 200,000 European citizens and over 1,100,000 North American citizens with European roots” (Platform, 2019a), although it does not include any elected or otherwise mandated representative body.

The Platform resulted from the coordinated actions of a variety of memory entrepreneurs seeking a pan-European condemnation of communism. The idea to establish a research institute that would include a museum and raise awareness of the “totalitarian crimes” of communism was first formulated by the conservative EPP (Europe’s People Party) in 2004, and reiterated in the Recommendation accompanying Resolution 1481 on the “Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes” adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council (PACE) in 2006 (PACE, 2006). The “Prague Process” launched in 2008 by an eclectic group of Czech memory activists – politicians, former dissidents and staff of the Czech ÚSTR (Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes) provided the decisive impetus to bring the project forward: it prompted the European Parliament (EP) to include, in the 2009 Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism, a call for the creation of a pan-European documentation centre/memorial (Neumayer, 2019). The Platform, established in Prague in 2011, was initially financed by the International Visegrad Fund;¹⁵ since 2014, its main financial support has come from the Hungarian government.

The creation of the Platform was driven by a pan-European memory claim: in addition to improving coordination between homologous institutions and advocacy groups, the network aims to raise awareness about communist crimes and disseminate, within European institutions, an interpretation of communism based on the totalitarian paradigm. Accordingly, its executive board covers an area at the juncture of the EP, institutes of national memory and victims’ associations (Platform, 2019c). Its trustees, who have an advisory function, are mainly current and former members of the European Parliament – with the notable exception of Stéphane Courtois, an emblematic figure in the totalitarian historiography of communism.¹⁶ As textbox 2 indicates, the Platform’s leadership has brought together, in various configurations since 2011, elected members of European assemblies and the staff of institutes of national memory.

¹⁴ The VOC’s executive director, Marion Smith, holds a BA in government & history from Wofford College and an MA in international relations from the Central European University in Budapest. He is former visiting fellow at the B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics at The Heritage Foundation.

¹⁵ An organisation founded in June 2000 by the Visegrad Group countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – to promote regional co-operation.

¹⁶ See the article by Behr et al. in this special issue.

Textbox 2: The Platform's Leadership

Presidents:

2011-2018: Göran Lindblad (Sweden), former Swedish member of Parliament (1997-2010), former member of PACE (2004-2010), member of EPP. Rapporteur of the Resolution on the “Need for International Condemnation of the Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes” at PACE in 2006.

2018-: Dr Łukasz Kamiński (Poland), historian, director of the Bureau of Public Education (2006-2011) then president of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw (2011-2016).

Managing Directors:

2011-2018: Neela Winkelmann (Czech Republic), former assistant to Martin Mejstřík, one of the senators who initiated the law creating the ÚSTR. Winkelmann was deeply involved in the preparation of the Prague Declaration in 2008 and of the EP Resolution on “European Conscience and Totalitarianism” in 2009.

2018-: Peter Rendek (Slovakia), former employee of the Nation's Memory Institute in Bratislava.

The Platform's purposes are threefold: First, it has an educational mission and seeks to promote human rights and strengthen democracy by “increas[ing] public awareness about European history and the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes and [encouraging] a broad, European-wide discussion about the causes and consequences of totalitarian rule, as well as about common European values, with the aim of promoting human dignity and human rights [...] with the goal of avoiding future threats to democracy.” Second, the Platform commits to “work[ing] toward creating a pan-European documentation centre/memorial for victims of all totalitarian regimes.” Finally, it takes a legal and judiciary stand to support “initiatives at the European level with a view to giving indiscriminate treatment to all crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as to their victims” (Platform, 2011, pp. 3-4).

PARALLEL EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES WITH SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT ANGLES

In addition to partial cross-membership, the three groups bolster each other's credibility and claims through mutual citing. The following sketches the parallel activities and small-scale joint actions of the VOC and the Platform in two educational arenas: the building of memorials and museums, and the organisation of exhibitions and the publication of textbooks. Each network faces specific constraints, foremost in terms of its finances. The VOC relies exclusively on ethnic associations, private donors and foreign governments to fund its projects. Since its inception, the Platform has lacked operational support from the EU¹⁷ and has been financially dependent on the International Visegrad Fund and CEE governments. Its pan-European operational context creates additional obstacles. The network has experienced intense criticism from the left, as well as from Jewish organisations, which regularly accuse the Platform's members of trivialising the Holocaust and exculpating Eastern European societies for their complicity in the extermination of Jews (Bauer, n.d.). Moreover, the Platform has been forced to prove its relevance for Europe as a whole, and not only the former Soviet bloc, engendering a dilution of its anti-communist cause: the network frames its claims through a human rights paradigm that leads to a blanket condemnation of “all forms of totalitarianism” that befell

¹⁷ The Platform has repeatedly requested operational support from the EU program “Europe for Citizens” – to no avail. It has only received two grants for its educational activities. Interview with Neela Winkelmann, Prague, 9 April 2014.

Europe in the twentieth century, thereby tempering the communism-Nazism equivalence at the core of the anti-communist cause it seeks to promote.

Memorials and Museums

In the 1970s, the Nazis' extermination of Jews acquired in the Western world a "general, decontextualised and universal" status, based on a personalisation of the victims (Alexander, 2002, p. 35). Since then, globalised patterns of collective memory have presupposed that tragedies should be remembered and victims should be given a voice. One common form of such commemorations are so-called "memory museums" modelled primarily on the Holocaust Museums in Washington, DC, and in Jerusalem, which are conceived from the point of view of the victims and aim to influence visitors' emotions and to promote human rights. As it is the case with many museums of communism (Apor, 2010; Zombory, 2017), the VOC and the Platform seek to apply these mnemonic codes to depict the various socialist regimes and pay tribute to their victims. They have engaged in parallel actions because each planned museum has a distinct scope: the 2009 EP resolution called for a museum encompassing all former European totalitarian regimes, whereas the VOC aims to portray communism on a global scale and highlight its current threat to freedom.

In response to a lack of interest from Western EU member states for the erection of a memorial for the victims of totalitarian regimes in Brussels, the Platform relied on the support of CEE governments, which took up this agenda during their EU presidencies.¹⁸ In 2016, the Platform organised a public competition sponsored by the Slovak EU Presidency and the Hungarian EU Commissioner for Education and Culture. Young Europeans were invited to submit proposals for a memorial to be erected in Brussels, with the successful entries exhibited during the commemoration of the European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarianism on 23 August 2016 in Bratislava. Five students, all of them from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, were honoured at this event, which was however not attended by any Western European politician and lacked any meaningful follow-up.¹⁹

In May 2017, the Platform tried to give new momentum to the project with the official patronage of the newly elected president of the EP, Antonio Tajani (EPP, Italy). It organised another competition for a "Pan-European Memorial for the Victims of Totalitarianism in Europe" to be located in the heart of the European district in Brussels. According to the announcement, this memorial would cover National Socialism, fascism and communism, and would "celebrate the process of European integration as an achievement made possible by learning from the lessons of the past" (Platform, 2017a). This second competition, under the patronage of Tajani, as well as the Hungarian commissioner for Education and Culture and the Czech ambassador to Belgium, yielded 39 anonymous entries from artists and architects. The British-Chinese architect Tszwai So won the competition, the ten top ranking entries of which were displayed in the EP in April 2018, courtesy of MEP László Tőkés, one of the Platform's trustees. At the time of writing, however, no concrete steps have been taken towards the construction of the monument.

The building of a memorial in Washington, DC – the *raison d'être* of the VOC – has proven equally difficult. In the mid-1990s, Lee Edwards and Lev Dobriansky obtained permission to build a monument on a small unused plot within view of the US Capitol, donated by the National Park Service. Their initial plan was to "raise \$100 million for the construction

¹⁸ Interview with Sandra Kalniete, Brussels, 8 January 2014.

¹⁹ Interview with Neela Winkelmann, Paris, 7 November 2017.

of a museum and monument to the 100 million victims of communism” (Edwards, 2007). This objective collided with reality when, by 1999, the foundation had raised less than half a million dollars. Conversely, plans to build a brick-and-mortar museum close to the National Mall with the same research and education functions as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, which would include an exhibition space, auditorium, archives, and resident scholars, were put off as attention was placed on the construction of a one-million dollar monument.

The VOC reached out to donors and ethnic communities throughout the United States. Vietnamese Americans, followed by Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Hungarians and others donated money to the cause. The VOC also convinced private companies and conservative foundations such as the Heritage Foundation, the educational non-profit Fund for American Studies and the youth organisation Young America’s Foundation, to pitch in. In 2003, President George W. Bush accepted a nomination to serve as honorary chairman of the VOC Foundation. After months of debate, the VOC’s board of directors unanimously selected the Goddess of Democracy, which had been erected by Chinese student protestors in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in June 1989, as the core of the Memorial.²⁰ Several factors account for this choice: the Goddess of Democracy called to mind the continuing oppression in the world’s largest country, China; it was based on the Statue of Liberty in New York; it had become a global symbol of freedom and democracy with replicas in several cities around the world. The Californian sculptor who had previously crafted San Francisco’s replica agreed to create a bronze statue to be placed in Washington, DC. The Victims of Communism Memorial was dedicated by President George W. Bush on June 12, 2007 – a date chosen as the twentieth anniversary of President Ronald Reagan’s famous Brandenburg Gate speech during which he intoned, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” The memorial’s front pedestal reads, “To the more than one hundred million victims of communism and to those who love liberty.” Its back pedestal reads, “To the freedom and independence of all *captive nations*²¹ and peoples.”

The VOC also wanted to break ground on a museum in 2017, in time for the centennial of the October Revolution. In 2014, it launched the “Build the Museum” project with a three-fold purpose: memorialise the victims; educate the public; and document the evidence. Despite donations from private donors and foreign governments,²² this project has again been put on hold for lack of funding. The timing of the opening of the museum remains uncertain. Rather than building its own facilities, the VOC is looking for an existing building to buy and renovate, while gathering archives on communism and developing the museum’s programming.²³

Educational Material: Exhibitions, Textbooks and Online Museums

A similar divergence in scope is visible in the educational material produced by the VOC and the Platform. The VOC presents communism as a global evil ideology and a continuing threat to freedom worldwide, underscoring the alleged danger caused by the rising popularity of socialism among American millennials. By contrast, the Platform expresses a memory claim framed as a call for recognition of Eastern Europe’s “double legacy of victimhood” (Zombory, 2017).

²⁰ The dozens of suggested designs included a replica of the Berlin Wall, Gulag barracks, a killing field in Cambodia, a boat used by the Vietnamese and the Cubans to flee their countries, a cell from the Lubyanka KGB prison in Moscow, a broken statue of Stalin, Lenin, or Mao, and a watchtower with armed guards and barbed wire.

²¹ Emphasis mine.

²² The VOC’s museum project received a \$1 million donation from the Hungarian government in 2014 and a pledge by the Polish government in 2018 for a further \$10 million.

²³ Interview with the VOC’s director of academic programs, Washington, DC, 7 May 2018.

In 2009, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the demise of the Soviet Bloc, the VOC launched an online Global Museum on Communism, which it described as “the first Internet museum that tells the complete story of communism from Karl Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* to current events in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos and North Korea” (Edwards, 2006). Its mission statement read as follows: “The museum serves as a symbol of hope and a needed place of remembrance in a day when many are forgetting the high price communism exacted from the *captive people*²⁴ and the rest of the free world. Its mission is to educate this generation and future generations about the history, philosophy and legacy of Communism” (Global Museum on Communism, 2009). Some entries were written by representatives of CEE national memory institutes that belong to the Platform.²⁵

The Global Museum included the histories of the 37 nations that experienced communism; a multi-media Timeline of Communism from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution to the present; a Gallery of Heroes, depicting those who led the struggle against communism; a Hall of Infamy illustrating the instruments of repression used by communists such as the Berlin Wall, the Gulag, the KGB, the Stasi and the Laogai; and a Victims Registry that allowed people to submit their experiences under communism in video, text or audio format. In 2011, the Global Museum was complemented by an online Gulag exhibition and a Witness Project. The latter consisted of interviews with high-profile opponents to communism who were later awarded the VOC’s Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom, including László Tőkés, Václav Klaus and Vladimir Bukovsky. The VOC’s website was hacked in June 2016, during a policymaking event marking the Tiananmen massacre. Since then, both the Museum and the Gulag exhibition have remained off-line. The VOC is preparing a more modern version to replace them.²⁶

In 2013, a curriculum on the “ideology, history, and legacy” of communism written by Lee Edwards, Paul Kengor and Claire McCaffery Griffin²⁷ was made available for use in high schools. Its scope is global: the curriculum presents not only “Karl Marx and his legacy,” “Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution” and “Stalin and the Soviet Union,” but also “Mao and China,” “Kim Il-Sung and North Korea,” “Pol Pot and Cambodia” and “Cuba, Castro and Che.” Two entries have a specific American angle: “America and Vietnam” and “Captive Nations and the End of the Cold War.” Each entry consists of an overview, a background essay, several student handouts and teacher resources, all ready to use in the classroom – including a lesson plan and topics for student essays (VOC, 2016). The textbook is regularly presented by VOC staff to teachers during professional development days. The VOC also produces an Annual Report on US Attitudes Toward Socialism that warns of the increasingly positive perception of socialism among millennials (VOC, 2019).

The Platform’s educational projects – a textbook for high school students and a travelling exhibition – are meant to cover all twentieth-century European totalitarian regimes. However, their content was provided by CEE institutes of national memory and is clearly focused on Central European history and on the supposed equivalence of Nazism and communism. The travelling exhibition “Totalitarianism in Europe – Fascism – Nazism –

²⁴ Emphasis mine.

²⁵ For instance, the Romanian political scientist and University of Maryland professor Vladimir Tismăneanu wrote the entry on Romania. In 2010, he became head of IICCMER (Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile), which is a member of the Platform. See the article by Bogdan C. Iacob in this special issue.

²⁶ Interview with the VOC’s director of academic programs, Washington, DC, 7 May 2018.

²⁷ Kengor is professor of political science at Grove City College and author of the hagiographic book *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York City: Harper, 2006). An independent consultant specialised in civic education, McCaffery Griffin is the former vice-president for education at the Bill of Rights Institute – a non-profit educational organisation that works “to engage, educate, and empower individuals with a passion for the freedom and opportunity that exist in a free society” (Bill of Rights Institute, n.d.).

Communism” was organised by the Platform in 2012, with financial support from the European Union and the International Visegrad Fund. To date, this exhibition has been shown in thirteen European countries, at the EP, at PACE, as well as at the VOC Foundation in Washington, DC. It offers statistics on the victims and on “the structures of totalitarian power responsible for war crimes and/or crimes against humanity” in thirteen European countries, the leaders of which are identified with a photograph and a short biography (Platform, 2013a, p. 1). The exhibition is geographically lopsided: it covers all post-communist EU member states, but only two longer-standing member countries – Germany and the Netherlands. Fascism is only featured by means of Italy’s occupation of Slovenia, while the regimes of Pétain, Franco, Salazar and the Greek colonels are ignored. In addition, although the exhibition is intended to “illustrate the [totalitarian] regimes’ historical interrelations,” the very design of its catalogue reifies their equivalence: a black album made up of panels classified by country and totalitarian regime, with one side presenting the Nazi or fascist regime, and the other side the communist regime.

The introductory text also makes a memory claim deploring the lack of justice for communist-era crimes. The exhibition features the number of prosecutions after the fall of the regimes, guilty verdicts reached and prison sentences actually served. More than just a tribute to the victims, it marks an intensification of the Platform’s mobilisation in favour of the prosecution of former communist leaders at the European level. This mobilisation has resulted in the “Justice 2.0” campaign launched in 2015, aimed at the creation of an EU-level court similar to the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. No such court has been created to date, but the campaign has yielded two results: Legal proceedings were opened in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic for the killings of East German refugees at the borders of former Czechoslovakia in the 1980s (Platform, 2019b). The ministries of justice of eight post-communist EU member states also committed to the establishment of a Council for the Investigation of Crimes of Communist Regimes to deal with crimes against humanity committed by these regimes (Platform, 2017b).

In 2013, a second EU grant enabled the Platform to publish the textbook *Lest We Forget: Memory of Totalitarianism in Europe. A Reader for Older Secondary School Students Anywhere in Europe*. Containing “30 remarkable life stories of people affected by totalitarianism from 16 European countries” (Platform, 2013b, p. 4), the textbook describes the persecutions suffered by opponents to communism and Nazism, as well as by the Roma and the Crimean Tatars during the twentieth century. It was published in English, French and German and subsequently translated into Czech, Polish, Ukrainian and Italian. The geographical scope and available languages of the publication suggest that the textbook’s aim is to spread knowledge on CEE history throughout Europe in order to shape a pan-European narrative that asserts an equivalence between communism and Nazism. The ten countries that entered the EU between 2004 and 2007 are covered, as are Ukraine and Moldova, alongside only four longer-standing member states (Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Austria).

An introduction by Stéphane Courtois picks up the main tropes of the totalitarian paradigm and its assertion of the equally criminal nature of Nazism and communism. The Holocaust is qualified as “a genocide that left more than five million dead,” and the text mentions the “extermination war against the Slavs” waged by the Nazis. Courtois then adds that “the war situation enabled totalitarian powers to secretly engage in [civilian] massacres and collective deportations against groups defined according to ideological criteria: racial for the Nazis – targeting specifically the Jews imprisoned in ghettos – and social for the Communists – targeting the economic elites, deported with their families to the USSR” (Platform, 2013b, p. 10). This symmetrical vision of history logically leads to the denunciation of the “double standard” allegedly applied in the retrospective assessment of communism and Nazism. On 23 August 2014, on the occasion of the first celebration of Black Ribbon Day in the United States,

an event was jointly organised by the VOC and JBANC at the VOC memorial in Washington, DC, in anticipation of which the Platform sent a copy of the textbook to all senators and members of Congress.

PARTIAL OVERLAP IN DIRECT PRESSURE ON POLICYMAKERS

Each network actively targets a different set of policymakers – members of the European Parliament for the Platform and members of the US Congress for JBANC and the VOC. This raises a specific set of challenges. The Platform’s main weakness lies in its lack of political and geographical representativeness: its activities mainly attract a small number of right-of-centre MEPs from post-communist Europe, which hinders its capacity to circulate its narrative of communism in the EP (Neumayer, 2017). Conversely, JBANC’s primary activities consist in lobbying through congressional caucuses, but the organisation requires bipartisan support in order to keep the Baltic cause on a crowded congressional agenda.²⁸ Last, the VOC lacked any direct means of influencing the US Congress until 2017, when it established a Victims of Communism Caucus in the House of Representatives, modelled on the Baltic Caucus. The three networks regularly organise policy-oriented conferences to keep the anti-communist cause alive and to push for the establishment of official commemorations of the victims of communist crimes. While JBANC and the VOC cooperate closely in their activities directed at American policymakers, they very seldomly engage in joint activities with the Platform – with the notable exception of the campaign to commemorate the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a clear case of mutual inspiration across the Atlantic.

Organisation of policy-oriented events

The VOC, JBANC and the Platform regularly organise parliamentary hearings and conferences with policymakers. These meetings are characterised by a high redundancy in the speakers, references and approaches deployed by each organisation, which produce “a self-confirmation and self-reinforcement effect, thereby the illusion of self-evidence” (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1976, p. 61). During these events, distinctions such as prizes and medals are bestowed by the VOC and the Platform to individuals and organisations that epitomise anti-communism worldwide, enhancing the credibility of both organisations by lauding high-profile memory entrepreneurs active in both.

The VOC organises two types of policy-oriented events to increase its public profile and raise funds. To finance the construction of the memorial, it initiated in 1999 an annual awards event at which a Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom is bestowed to an organisation or individual, in America or abroad, who “demonstrated lifelong opposition to communism and [...] support of freedom and democracy” (Edwards, 2007). Since the completion of the VOC memorial in 2007, these medals have been awarded during a Roll Call of Nations wreath-laying ceremony. This event is held at the memorial every year around 12 June, a date chosen to commemorate the Tiananmen Square massacre, and is attended by diplomatic staff, former dissidents, ethnic associations and human rights organisations. The first four recipients were Soviet dissident Elena Bonner; former Lithuanian independence leader and MEP Vytautas Landsbergis; former Bulgarian Premier Philip Dimitrov; and Lane Kirkland, former president of the AFL-CIO and active supporter of Solidarność in the 1980s.²⁹

²⁸ In June 2019, more than 340 caucuses were officially registered with the US House of Representatives.

²⁹ The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is the largest federation of trade unions in the United States. During the Cold War, it maintained a radical anti-communist stance (Waters & van Goethem, 2013).

Selected awardees of the Truman-Reagan Medal include prominent Eastern European dissidents such as Lech Wałęsa, Václav Havel, László Tókéš and Vladimir Bukovsky, as well as Pope John Paul II and conservative politicians from the region like Václav Klaus and Viktor Orbán. American anti-communist figures such as William F. Buckley Jr (founder of the *National Review*), the Cold War liberal Henry “Scoop” Jackson, historians Richard Pipes and Robert Conquest, and the former president of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus Tom Lantos, have also been awarded the Medal. A third category of recipients comprises contemporary South American and Asian civil rights activists such as Chen Guancheng (China), Guillermo Fariñas Hernández and Armando Valladares (Cuba), Father Nguyen Van Ly (Vietnam) and Cardinal Joseph Zen (bishop emeritus of Hong Kong). In 2017, the VOC launched a second series of fundraising galas called “Triumph of Liberty Conference and Gala Dinner” with members of the US administration, foreign diplomats, members of the military and academics. MEPs Tunne Kelam and Sandra Kalniete, two of the most active trustees of the Platform, were jointly awarded the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom, alongside former Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, during the 2018 gala.

Textbox 3: Platform Trustees Awarded the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom

Sandra Kalniete (Latvia): born in Siberia (where her parents had been deported to by the Soviets) in 1952, art historian. One of the leaders of the Latvian Popular Front (1989-1991), diplomat, Foreign Affairs minister (2002-2004), European commissioner (2004), MEP (2009-).

Vytautas Landsbergis (Lithuania): born in 1932, musicologist. President of the Council of the Sajudis movement (1988-1991), president of Lithuania (1990-1992), member of PACE (1993-1996, 2000-2002), MEP (2004-2014), member of the International Advisory Council of the VOC.

Tunne Kelam (Estonia): born in 1936, archivist and historian. One of the leaders of the Estonian Committee (1990-1992), member of the Estonian Parliament (1992-2004), member of PACE (1992-2000), MEP (2004-2014).

László Tókéš (Romania): born in 1952, bishop. Leader of the 1989 demonstrations in Timisoara, MEP (2007-2019), vice-president of the EP (June 2010-January 2012).

The Platform also created a prize in 2014 with a focus on European activists. Its past recipients include the leader of the Crimean Tatar People, Mustafa Dzhemilev, the Russian opposition activists Alexei and Oleg Navalny, the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, the Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo López, and Ilmi Umerov, deputy head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People in Crimea.³⁰ The Platform also holds events at the EP to push for EU-level policies directed against the perpetrators of gross human rights violations, including the conferences “Legal Settlement of Communist Crimes” in 2010 and “Justice 2.0” in 2015. These small-scale events, however, typically reach only a narrow segment of the Assembly. In addition, the Platform and the VOC regularly organise separate events to commemorate turning points in the history of communism. In October 2017, both advocacy groups organised two “sister conferences” in order to mark the centennial of the Bolshevik Revolution and denounce its disastrous impact on the world. Amongst the hosts of the VOC’s Centennial Commemoration were two active Platform Trustees, Stéphane Courtois and Vytautas Landsbergis. In line with

³⁰ A former dissident and political prisoner in the USSR, imprisoned again in Russia-occupied Crimea in 2017.

its global perspective and ambition to topple existing communist regimes, the VOC's presentation of the event read:

On a cold night in Petrograd, one hundred years ago, a small group of Red Guards seized the Winter Palace and installed the world's first communist government. The Bolshevik Revolution marked the beginning of a century in which adherents to communist ideology committed some of the worst and most widespread atrocities known to history. This November, we will gather to honor the memory of the more than 100 million victims of communism, to celebrate liberty where it has triumphed, and to further our pursuit of a world free from communism (VOC, 2017).

These events typically lead to the adoption of Declarations and Resolutions that allow both advocacy groups to reiterate their, as of yet, unfulfilled claims. After the conference "100 Years of Communism: History and Memory" held in Paris in November 2017 under Courtois's auspices and dedicated to "the dark legacy of communism and Communist dictatorships," Platform members issued a Memorandum which repeated three claims that have been made by its representatives for years: an official, European-wide prohibition of the public presentation of communist symbols; the building of a memorial to the victims of totalitarianism in Brussels; and the creation of an International Tribunal for Communist Crimes (Platform, 2017c).

The Commemoration of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

The commemoration of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is the most telling instance of mutual inspiration through the circulation of narratives and mnemonic practices between the Platform, the VOC and JBANC. Although this powerful symbol is shared across the Atlantic, the mobilisations aiming at institutionalising an official commemoration of the Soviet-Nazi Pact through a legislative act have come up against distinct obstacles: the Platform has faced a dilution of the anti-communist cause in the EU, while the lack of support in the US Senate has to date created a dead-end for the VOC and JBANC in the United States.

During the Cold War, anti-communist memory entrepreneurs on both sides of the Atlantic had already understood the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as a powerful symbol of both the commonalities between the Nazi and Soviet regimes and their shared responsibility for the Second World War and its fateful consequences in Europe (Budryte, 2004). The idea of using a black ribbon, a symbol of grief in European cultures, to publicly denounce the Pact and commemorate the victims of totalitarianism, was born in Canada in 1985. Its originators were Markus Hess, a Canadian of Estonian origin, and David Sommerville, then leader of a libertarian organisation called the National Citizens Coalition. On 23 August 1986, the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact was commemorated for the first time in Northern America, Western Europe and Australia with popular demonstrations and speeches by politicians, dissidents and exile activists. Black Ribbon Day also featured academic sessions, press conferences and secular and religious ceremonies commemorating the victims, prisoners, deportees and refugees who suffered under totalitarian regimes. Subsequent anniversaries were accompanied by ever more successful demonstrations. In the late 1980s, the Black Ribbon Committee supported Baltic independence movements and contributed to the formation of a human chain, known as the Baltic Way, which connected Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn on 23 August 1989 (Troebst, 2012; Soltys, 2014).

This mnemonic practice continued after the Cold War on opposite sides of the Atlantic, albeit under different names. During the Prague Process in 2008-2009, memory activists and

conservative MEPs advocated for 23 August as the ideal date to commemorate the victims of Nazism and Stalinism across Europe. Social-Democrats disagreed with the choice of a date that singled out these two regimes, thereby overlooking other dictatorships. As a compromise, the EP Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism adopted in 2009 confirmed the date of 23 August, but proclaimed it “a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes” (EP, 2009). This resolution, alongside the Platform’s subsequent work to raise awareness of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact throughout Europe, inspired JBANC and the VOC to lobby Congress for a similar commemoration in the United States.³¹ After two years of campaigning by JBANC, a “Black Ribbon Day” resolution was introduced in the US House of Representatives in 2013 by the Chair of the Baltic Caucus, Rep. Shimkus, with nearly 50 co-sponsors. Although the reluctance of the Speaker of the House to consider commemorative resolutions for a vote on the floor slowed down the process, a modified version of the legislation passed in the House in May 2014. Due to a lack of sponsors, however, the Senate failed to pass a matching Resolution. In April 2019, in the run-up to the eightieth anniversary of the Pact, the House Baltic Caucus co-chairmen Rep. John Shimkus and Rep. Adam Schiff (Democrat, California) introduced a second text reiterating this claim. House Resolution 300, which expressed “support for the designation of 23 August 2019, as Black Ribbon Day to recognize the victims of Soviet and Nazi regimes,” was subsequently referred to the Committee on Oversight and Reform (US Congress, 2019).

The failure to pass a Black Ribbon Day Resolution in the Senate in 2014 prompted the VOC and JBANC to use the centennial of the Bolshevik Revolution to raise awareness about communism and its legacies. Thanks to the VOC’s contacts in the White House, President Trump issued a statement that declared 7 November 2017 a National Day for the Victims of Communism, condemned communism as a political philosophy “incompatible with liberty, prosperity, and the dignity of human life” and underscored its “continued threat today” (White House, 2017). Again, this initiative fell short of the VOC’s goal: although President Trump issued a similar message on 7 November 2018, only legislation could make this commemoration permanent (and thus akin to that on the Captive Nations).

The VOC was also instrumental in the establishment of a bi-partisan Victims of Communism Caucus, modelled upon the Baltic Caucus, in the House of Representatives,³² dedicated to “raising awareness of how Communism victimized and enslaved more than one hundred million people in the past and how its tyranny in the five existing Communist countries (China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam) and its legacy in the post-Soviet sphere shapes international relations today” (Philipp, 2017). This caucus – the VOC’s primary vehicle for its engagement with Congress – became operational on 7 November 2017. One of its first actions was to introduce a resolution in support of the VOC’s Museum in Washington, DC. In May 2018, the caucus co-chairs wrote to EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, urging him not to appear or speak at the unveiling event of the statue of Karl Marx that the People’s Republic of China had gifted to Marx’s hometown, the city of Trier in Germany. The Platform simultaneously protested against this unveiling in a separate statement.

CONCLUSION

This article has analysed three contemporary anti-communist advocacy groups that represent interstitial spaces where anti-communist memory entrepreneurs from various social-political fields exchange credibility, access to decisionmakers and best practices. The VOC is located at the intersection of politics, academia, conservative thinktanks and associations of

³¹ Skype interview with JBANC’s managing director, 7 June 2018.

³² Skype interview with the VOC’s director of Government Relations, 13 June 2018.

Americans of Eastern European descent, while JBANC is composed of Baltic ethnic associations. The Platform brings together MEPs, representatives of victims' associations and CEE institutes of national memory. These organisations cultivate some interconnectedness that contributes to their reciprocal validation: they construct the figures of the “victim,” the “hero” and the “perpetrator” of communist crimes by mingling humanistic principles and political logics, in order to raise compassion for innocent victims, respect for those who resist against state terror and outrage against perpetrators who evade justice. Yet their shared political outlook translates into mnemonic activities and future-oriented agendas that diverge according to each organisation's historical trajectory, socio-political field of operation, political and financial resources, institutional support and targeted audiences. Each network underscores different future-oriented issues, such as the legal treatment of crimes against humanity perpetrated during the Soviet era (the Platform), the security of the Baltic states (JBANC) and the fight against current communist regimes in Asia and Latin America (the VOC). Rather than a tightly coordinated effort to speak with one voice, transatlantic anti-communism results from a pragmatic division of labour and mutual promotion between small entities with limited resources.

Further research is still needed to assess the impact of these groups. There is no doubt that the Platform's actions keep the anti-communist cause on the EP's agenda. Yet its resolutely Central and Eastern European mobilisations have little resonance in the wider European political space, as testified by the geographical homogeneity of the participants at its awareness raising events and the limited number of states that actually celebrate the EU Remembrance Day on 23 August and have committed to the creation of a court to try former communist leaders. Likewise, the difficulties encountered by the VOC in building a museum and establishing 23 August as an official Remembrance Day in the United States point to a reduced visibility among policymakers and to a limited resonance in American society.

The circulation of an anti-communist discourse between the three organisations highlights the structural fragmentation of memory activism: despite the cross-membership of a limited number of high-profile memory entrepreneurs, these idiosyncratic networks only partly overlap and do not constitute a monolithic entity. They are equally determined to promote an anti-totalitarian narrative of indictment of communism but mainly engage in parallel initiatives, with a limited number of joint actions that – in fact – diffuse their messages, instead of jointly organising large-scale policymaking events or producing common educational material. The end of the Cold War and the increase in global connectivity have made it possible for criminalisation discourses to circulate freely across the former Iron Curtain. Yet global anti-communism remains a diverse phenomenon consisting of a mosaic of organisations maintaining reciprocal ties and sustaining interrelations, without being structured as a unified transnational actor that could defend a single agenda.

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