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ETHNIC CLEAVAGE IN POLITICS AND MNEMONIC TENSIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF WORLD WAR II COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES IN LATVIA

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

In Latvia, history and remembrance of World War II is a source of contestation between the ethnic Latvian majority and the Russian speaking minority. However, despite this prevailing idea of two conflicting positions, several studies on public opinion, suggest that the memory of Latvians and non-Latvians is more nuanced and different positons on 20th century history exist also within both ethnolinguistic groups. This thesis looks at commemorative rituals of the so called Legionnaire day on March 16, and the commemoration of end of World War II on May 8 and May 9 that represent mnemonic cleavages between Latvians and the country's Russian speaking minority. Using Bernhard and Kubik's (2014) theoretical framework of mnemonic actors and memory regimes, this study seeks to answer how the diversity of mnemonic positions within both ethno-linguistic groups is reflected in the political discourse. Next to that, opportunities of mnemonic reconciliation exist are examined. The overall conclusion is that both March 16 and May 9 present a fractured memory regime in Latvia. The mnemonic cleavages are drawn along ethnic lines but within the ethnolinguistic groups different positions were found as well. While May 9 is becoming a point of more intense mnemonic contestation and it is gaining more prominence, March 16 is increasingly abnegated by major political actors.

Keywords: Memory politics, Latvia, ethnic cleavage, mnemonic actors, memory regimes

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INTRODUCTION

In Latvia, history and remembrance are a source of contestation between the ethnic Latvian majority and the country's sizeable Russian speaking[*] minority. Every year certain commemorative days draw public attention to the unsettled memory politics between the two groups. Researchers have shown that while economically and socially there is minimal or no gap between the two groups, symbols, national identity and memory are dividing factors between Latvians and Russian speakers (Zepa, Šūpule, Kļave, Krastiņa, Krišāne, & Tomsone, 2005).

Especially dichotomous is the memory of World War II (WWII) where the Latvian majority are seeing themselves as victims of Soviet and Nazi occupations while the narrative of victory over Nazism dominates within the Russian speaking minority (Kaprāns & Procevska, 2013). The restoration of independence is another point where memory narratives contradict because in Latvia the memories of restoration of independence are inevitably linked with the memories of WWII and Soviet occupation in what Eglitis and Ardava (2014) refers to as "layered memory" (p. 126). However, despite this prevailing idea of two conflicting positions, several studies on public opinion, suggest that the memory of Latvians and non-Latvians is more nuanced (see, for example, Cheskin, 2012; Kaprāns & Procevska, 2013; Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017).

Studies on the identity of Latvian Russians similarly suggest that the group is identifying itself with neither the dominant Latvian narratives, nor with the narratives of contemporary Russia but develops a group belonging of their own (Cheskin, 2015) and feel attached to Latvia as their home country (Zepa et al., 2005). Thus, imposing the dichotomous division on collective memories in Latvia is unproductive because it requires classification of history narratives as either right or wrong and in such a manner rules out possibilities of building bridges between the two groups (Cheskin, 2012.). This is echoed by Hanovs (2012) who advocates critical engagement with memory to overcome the conflict while Kattago (2010) suggests that memory in the Baltic States should be approached from the standpoint of pluralistic democracy that is based on tolerance and empathy.

[*] In academic literature as well as public discourse in Latvia the term "Russian speakers" is preferred to Russians because, even though the majority of this community are ethnic Russians, the group includes other nationalities as well but as a whole is characterized by the use of Russian as first language.

Nevertheless, it is unclear if these trends towards a more pluralistic understanding of history have also entered the more institutionalized levels of memory. Quite the opposite, "the agony of politics" is dominating the debate on memory (Kattago, p. 390) and in both ethno-linguistic groups political parties as well as different civil society organisations are solidifying their identities and certain collective memories as a crucial part of them (Hanovs, 2012). Political actors have a significant role in institutionalizing memory and they also often manipulate with memory issues for political benefit. Therefore, it is useful to look at official memory in Latvia, i.e. the memory discourse that is put forward by the agents who are holding power or operating in the political arena (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014). For this analysis it is relevant that ethnic cleavage prevails in party politics in Latvia. The division between parties representing ethnic Latvians and the Russian speaking minority overruns the traditional left-right spectrum in Latvian politics. A considerable body of research indicates that political parties in Latvia tend to exploit ethnic tensions to gain popular support (Nakai, 2014; Zepa et al., 2005). Upholding dichotomous memory and manipulation with historic narratives can be a part of such political strategies.

This leads to the need for a careful examination of political actors as agents that form official memory. This thesis focuses on narratives of history and commemoration that have been voiced in the Latvian political space during significant anniversaries of historical events. This study builds on the theoretical framework presented by Bernhard and Kubik (2014) in "Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration". These authors look at commemoration of the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe around the 20th anniversary of these events. Similarly to Bernhard and Kubik this study looks at commemoration as carriers of official memory. It extends their framework to the commemorative rituals of WWII events that constitute a significant mnemonic confrontation on societal and political level in Latvia. Those are March 16 – the unofficial remembrance day of the Latvian Legion, which was a formation of Latvian soldiers that fought on the side of Germany during WWII, and commemoration of the end of WWII that is marked on May 8 and May 9.

Bernhard and Kubik argue that political environment is composed of mnemonic actors who either defend a single narrative, accept a pluralistic vision of history or avoid issues pertaining to history and memory. The interaction between different types of

mnemonic actors leads to particular memory regimes where there is either one narrative of the past event ("unified regime"), several accepted narratives ("pillarized regime") or conflicting narratives ("fractured regime"). The gist of the theory is that the presence of at least one mnemonic warrior – an actor who only accepts one version of history - leads to a fractured memory regime. Eglitis and Ardava (2014) study the memory regime in the Baltic States concerning the restoration of independence and the events leading up to it at the time of their 20th anniversary. They find that the memory regime in Latvia is deeply fractured and that divisions exist along ethnic lines. However, they too acknowledge a division within Latvians, some of who are critical of the political and economic developments after independence.

The conclusion that mnemonic divisions exist only between ethnic groups contradicts the studies that indicate within group variation. Because a fractured memory regime occurs both when only one warrior is present and when everyone takes a warrior position, this classification tells little about the nuances of memory politics. Pettai (2016) suggests the need for a qualitative dimension of memory regimes because "the quality of fractured memory regime can vary considerably depending on the degree to which the mnemonic debates and divisions touch upon more principled issues of national identity or state legitimacy" (p. 174). In the Latvian case it is also useful to look at whether both ethnolinguistic groups are dominated by mnemonic warriors. The centrality or marginality of warrior narratives is also important because it can have an effect of the possibility of mnemonic reconciliation on societal level. Political elites are crucial in avoiding destabilizing effects that memory conflicts can have on democracies (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014). If politicians are not participating in the mnemonic conflict or are taking more pluralistic views, the possibility of reconciliation and sideling divisive positions is greater than if everyone takes a warrior position. In addition, finding common positions could serve as an indicator of what narratives are accepted by both groups.

This gives an insight into how incompatible the different positions within the mnemonic field of Latvia are. I use the classification of mnemonic actors into warriors, pluralists, prospectives and abnegators developed by Bernhard and Kubik (2014) in order to examine positions of political actors regarding the Legionnaires Day and end of WWII commemorative days, which are particularly contested in Latvia. Commemoration of the end of WWII on May 9 - Victory Day is widely celebrated by Latvian Russians, while

May 8 is the official observance commemorating victims of the war. March 16 is a remembrance day that is accepted among many Latvians while it has been vocally condemned by Russian speakers. Bernhard and Kubik's model enables to determine what mnemonic positions the political actors in Latvia take on these events and how likely they are to accommodate different versions of history.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to determine if support exists for mnemonic pluralism and what types of mnemonic narratives are present and whether mnemonic actors only take positions that reinforce dichotomy. First I look how the diversity of mnemonic positions within both ethno-linguistic groups is reflected in the political discourse or in Bernhard and Kubik's terms how the memory regime within both ethnolinguistic groups is constituted. In addition I aim to establish to what extent interpretations of history exist that both sides accept and which present opportunities of mnemonic reconciliation. These findings demonstrate the main points of contestation and the likeliness of reconciliation. The political actors are theoretically able to create more inclusive top-down narratives. This study shows if such attempts have been made or the opposite – if political elites are indeed the ones perpetuating mnemonic fissures and there is a need for an improved political culture.

The study is structured as follows. I first explain the concept of collective memory. Next, I turn to Bernhard and Kubik's model and outline the types of mnemonic actors and memory regimes. In chapter 2 the cleavages in interpretation of history are described based on a review of existing research. This chapter is concluded by an insight in ethnic divisions in Latvian party politics. Further, I proceed with outlining the methodology and then I apply the model to mnemonic positions on March 16 in 2014 and May 8/9 in 2015 that present anniversaries of the respective historical events. I conclude with a discussion, reviewing the results and outlining the likely implications of such memory regimes on Latvian politics.

1. CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES FOR STUDYING COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

1.1. The concept of collective memory

The concept of collective memory was first developed by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs (1980) argued that individual memory interacts with the environment and what one remembers depends on the group he or she belongs to. Different groups can remember the same events in contrasting ways because memory is selective and each of these groups create interpretations that are based on their social interactions. Since Halbwachs and with the raise of constructivism, collective memory has been an important area of research in social sciences, especially social psychology, sociology and history but also increasingly in political science. Memory is not treated as a mere reproduction but "an active and constructive process" where "past is remade for present purpose" (Olick, 1999, p.341). Mechanisms of collective remembering have been widely discussed and theorized, trying to determine the effects that mnemonic manipulations have on politics.

Collective memory is dealt with on different levels. Aleida Assmann (2004) distinguishes four formats of memory: individual, social, political and cultural. Individual memory concerns personal experience that is voluntarily or involuntarily recalled. The other three types of memory are collective. Social memory is formed during one's interaction with other individuals, both familiar and unknown contemporaries who experience the same events. In this respect, Assmann puts particular emphasis on generational memory that is shared by people who belong to one generation. She states that "[t]he change of generation is paramount to the renewal and reconstruction of societal memory" (ibid, p. 23). The generational memory can, however, be transferred onto next generations in the form of symbols like monuments or commemorative rituals, In this way certain memories become an important part of a group's identity that transcends the generation by whom particular events were experienced. Nora (1989) refers to such carriers of memory as *lieux de mémoire* – sites of memory.

Such symbols are the carriers of political and cultural memory that in contrast to social memory are institutionalized ways of remembering. These symbols create top-down narratives that are durable as opposed to social and individual memory that present bottom-up narratives. Political and cultural memory correspond to Olick's (1999)

characterization of collective memory that he contrasts to “collected memory” where the latter is a result of compilation and interaction of individual memory. Political memory is not something a group simply has. It is formed by the group that constructs a coherent narrative and as such, it can become a tool for ideological manipulations. Political memory is very selective in order to create a positive self-image and produce a narrative that fits with present conditions and future visions of the collective entity. For instance, Assmann (2004) writes that hegemonic nations are more likely to remember victories while the smaller nations that have a “victim identity” focus on defeats, commemorate their suffering as a unifying factor and create martyr “tragic hero” narratives. The key in any national memory is a “heroic narrative”. Hence, only victims that can be portrayed as having suffered for a cause can function, distinguishing it from traumatic experience where victims are deprived of all their agency (ibid., pp. 27, 28).

The function of cultural memory is to ensure “survival” of the group. Cultural memory can transcend generations because it is enshrined in material representations and rituals. According to Jan Assmann (1995) cultural memory is “… a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation” (p. 126). It transcends the present because it has “fixed points” or events that are maintained in the cultural memory though materialization and institutionalization in the form of texts, memorials, monuments, films, buildings, commemoration procedures and other forms that Assmann calls "figures of memory” (ibid. p. 129). Cultural memory preserves information that is crucial for group’s identity and helps distinguish it from others.

Political scientists study the impact memory has on identities and ideologies as well as how memory influences collective action and identity of such units as states and nations (Assmann, 2004). Bernhard and Kubik (2014) state that political science focuses on “*strategies that political actors employ to make other remember in certain, specific ways and the effects of such mnemonic manipulations*” (p. 7, authors’ emphasis). They see political actors as “cultural-political entrepreneurs” who actively shape collective memory and are also able to change dominant narratives (ibid., p. 28). Such activity can be particularly visible in countries in transition such as the former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Regime change is not only a political and economic turn

but it also requires "reformulation of collective identities and the introduction or reinvigoration of principles of legitimizing power" (ibid., p.8). Revision of society's collective memory is one part of the transition. To study societies in transition, Bernhard and Kubik have developed a framework of mnemonic actors and memory regimes that is explained in the next subchapter.

1.2. Mnemonic actors and memory regimes

This study uses the theoretical model presented by Bernhard and Kubik (2014) to classify the actors in Latvian political environment. This framework presents how interaction between four different types of mnemonic actors leads to memory regimes where there is either one narrative on the past event, several accepted narratives or conflicting opposite narratives. Their theory pertains to official memory which they define as a form of collective memory that is "propagated by the state but also by political parties and other actors in the public space" (p.8). In a narrow understanding, official memory requires involvement from the government, public authorities and/or political parties.

Mnemonic actors is Bernhard and Kubik's interpretation can be individuals as well as organizations such as political parties who take a certain stance on a memory event or issue. The four types of actors are pluralists, warriors, abnegators and prospectives. Prospectives are characteristic to revolutionary movements and, as Bernhard and Kubik conclude, they are not relevant in the given context. Therefore in the following description of actors I only include the first three types.

Mnemonic warriors promote one mythical vision of the past. Warriors believe in a single truth about history and see themselves as its guardians while all the others are propagating "wrong" versions of history. In warriors' opinion, history is non-negotiable and they have to make others accept the "right" version of history. Hence warriors are striving to delegitimize other interpretations. Warriors most often see events through a frame of nostalgia for the better times in the past or the opposite – a past that has been entirely negative. For example, Latvians often refer to present thorough the lens of idealized first independence period or bad times during the Soviet occupation. Russian speakers in turn tend to refer to the Soviet period as the good times that are lost. Warriors consider the true vision of history to be a fundament of the present polity. Therefore, they

delegitimize the ones who hold different views on the past and perceive them with antagonism.

Pluralists, in contrast, think that others are "*entitled*" to their own interpretation of the past. If these actors consider others' interpretation of past to be wrong, they are ready to engage in a dialogue to find a common ground. Pluralists are concerned with building a field of memory where different versions can coexist. Reconciliation of conflicting memories is a goal of mnemonic pluralists. In this case, neither of the historic periods is seen in exclusive terms.

The last type - abnegators are actors who avoid bringing up or taking positions on topics that relate to history and memory. These actors are either simply not interested in the past or cannot benefit from memory entrepreneurship. They focus on the present and do not find engaging in discussions about memory useful. The reasons for choosing an abnegator position can be a true disinterest in the past, agreement with the dominant narrative or lack of political benefit from taking a warrior position. Memory issues do not figure in these actors' discourse. Another reason for taking an abnegator past is "politics of purposive forgetting" – a conscious choice to exclude some memories from political environment (p. 14).

Bernhard and Kubik stipulate that different combinations of these actors form certain memory regimes. Memory regime is "(1) an organized way of remembering a specific issue (2) at a given moment" (ibid, p.16). The definition tells that memory regimes are not solid. They can change over time, for example, when an actor brings a new narrative about history into the public space or when an anniversary of a particular memory event increases salience of its interpretation. Taken together all the memory regimes "in a given country in a given period can be called the official field of (collective or historical) memory" (ibid.).

In total Bernhard and Kubik classify three types of memory regimes. If all actors are abnegators, the memory regime is "unified", meaning that there is one version of explaining history and nobody is interested in challenging it or history and memory are simply not salient for political actors. A combination of pluralists and abnegators leads to a "pillarized" memory regime where history is debated but actors accept that individuals can hold different, equally legitimate versions of history. In contrast, when there is at least one mnemonic warrior in the public space, the memory regime is called "fractured". As

warriors only accept their own interpretation of history, fractured memory regimes are characterized by conflicts on memory issues.

One caveat to this framework is that it is very actor-centric and assumes that actors are able to rationally calculate costs and benefits of their actions. Thus it stipulates that in a fractured memory regime political forces uphold mnemonic cleavages because they can exploit positions on salient memory issues for their political benefit. Bernhard and Kubik, however, do acknowledge structural factors such as the wider societal context in which official memory is embedded. They argue that the he actors need to take such constraints into account if they want to remain credible. They outline two types of constraints: cultural and structural.

The first type is cultural constraints that determine what discourses are accepted in society. Cultural constraints concern actors' own beliefs, values and identities. Particular audiences hold certain visions of history and have a particular individual and social memories. Official communication and education systems reproduce and disseminate official narratives while informal networks can maintain unofficial narratives that are different from the official ones. As Assmann (2004) states cultural memory is "active" and "archival" – some artefacts are used some are stored but still available to bring up and create new narrative, reshape the existing ones or they can become salient when circumstances change. If a mnemonic actor tries to propagate something that is out of these limits, his or her position is most likely to be dismissed as illegitimate. The other type is structural constraints that determine whether the actor has the ability to set a trend in how particular events are remembered. Potentially the more prominent the actors or the more powerful is their position, the more access they have to shaping collective memory. In the post-transition situation also political actor's background, how they are perceived by others and their former relation to the old regime constrain the choices.

It follows that the motivation of actors to choose particular strategy is usually based on cost-benefit reasoning and/or their own cultural convictions. In the first case, mnemonic actors use history as an instrument to legitimize their right to hold power. Actors think about political benefits when choosing to take, for example, an abnegator or a warrior position. The second depends on actors' personal identities and background. Very strong cultural motivation to an extent that political costs remain of secondary importance is characteristic to radical warriors. In reality, however, a mixture of the two

determine actors' choices. Bernhard and Kubik argue that successful actors would find a way to optimize the cultural and political strategies.

2. ETHNIC CLEAVAGE AND DIVIDED MEMORY IN LATVIA

2.1. Ethnic cleavage and the different interpretations of history

2.1.1. Origin of mnemonic cleavage, dominant mnemonic narratives and WWII commemoration rituals

Integration of the Russian speaking minority has been an important issue in Latvia since 1990s. The citizenship and language policies of the restored country were focused on reversing the consequences of the Soviet occupation and rebuilding a Latvian nation state. Latvia's Russian speaking population saw a swift change in their status from being on top of the socio-linguistic hierarchy to being largely excluded from the nation-building process in the 1990s (Zepa et al., 2005). Latvian became the only official language and large parts of the Russian speaking community did not automatically receive Latvian citizenship but could only later obtain it in a naturalization process that included tests of Latvian language skills, knowledge of history, culture and state institutions of Latvia. For long language, especially the question of minority schools, was seen as the most important potential source of conflict between the two ethno-linguistic groups in Latvia (Zepa et al., 2005). However, memory politics gained momentum in the Baltic States after the so called "Bronze Night" in Estonia's capital Tallinn when protests broke out after a decision of the Estonian government to move a Soviet war memorial from Centre Tallinn to a war cemetery (Ardava, 2015). This incident brought to spotlight the two different collective memories and contributed to interest in memory politics not only in Estonia but also in Latvia.

Collective memory in the Baltic States was an important part of the independence movement. The shift of power after the independence from the Soviet Union came with a shift in officially acknowledged memory (Onken, 2010). It was a tool that helped unite people around a common cause. Latvian memory researcher Vita Zelče (2009) argues that "[c]ollective memory also created a future myth – the image of an ideal, free and independent Latvia – which inspired the movements of the National Awakening" (p. 46). Victims of the Soviet regime became the central element of the Latvian collective memory and also a focal point for Latvian identity. The Soviet period in Latvian collective memory is seen as passive – people have no agency and the victimization narrative included not only people who had directly suffered from repressions but also "lost years" for all the Latvians who had to live under Soviet occupation (ibid, p 56). In

line with Burke (1989) social memory and past are especially important as the groups that find their cultural roots threatened and this is characteristic to Latvians who felt that their language, culture and memory are at peril as a result of Soviet occupation and dominance of Russian language.

New places and rituals of commemoration focusing on the victims of the Soviet past were a symbolic repayment to the victims and also a symbolic institutionalization of Latvian social memory. The memories that were oppressed under the Soviet rule were now institutionalized through "law and education, historiography and the establishment of commemoration dates and practices" (Onken, 2010, p. 285). The new national memory was, however, from the very beginning almost exclusively shared only among the majority ethnic groups. Acceptance of one version of history became central in the nation-building while memories that did not fit in the collective victimhood narrative did not enter the national memory (ibid.). Brügemann and Kasekamp (2008) argue that "[i]n the case of the post-Soviet Baltic States, the politics of memory created a "real" history that was based upon a common understanding of collective victimhood under Soviet rule, thus excluding the Russian-speaking minority from this state-building memory community" (p. 426). As a consequence, the Russian speaking community perceived it as strategic exclusion of their versions of history (Onken, 2010).

As many non-Latvians did not identify with the new narrative, they filled the gap with maintaining their own account of the past. Collapse of the Soviet Union was an identity crisis for Latvia's Russian speaking community and they suddenly obtained a new status of aliens who had arrived under an illegal occupation. Policy of the Latvian state was perceived as discrimination and created "alienation from the Latvian state and from the values of Latvian history and memory" (Zelče, 2009, p. 48). The main point of dispute became the fact of occupation of Latvia that was hard to accept for the Russian speaking minority as it did not really provide a space to include non-Latvians. The new narrative was based on collective victimhood of Latvians and a division into the "good" and the "bad times" – independent Latvia in 1920s and 1930s versus the Soviet occupation. In this narrative the Russian speaking minority belongs to the "bad times". "The good times" in the 1920s and 1930s was a unifying narrative for the again independent Latvia but the Russian speaking community often could not relate to this period (ibid.). In turn, victory over Nazism in the "Great Patriotic War", glorification of

the Soviet Union and resentment of Russia's lost influence became an important nodal point in their collective memory (Cheskin, 2012). As the new Latvian history did not include them, the Russian speakers resorted to the Soviet propagandistic versions of Latvian history and contemporary Russian history. This has led to the existence of two divergent collective memories in the Latvian society. Contrary to the Latvians, Russian narrative of WWII saw Russians as bearing the biggest suffering in the fight against Nazism (ibid., 2012). Further alienating factors have been a divided media space as well as the influence of Russian media on Russian speakers in Latvia as well as education policies in Latvia, which caused an increased resentment with the government among Latvia's Russian speakers (Wezel, 2016).

Divided media space and interpretation of history in Russian Federation are additional factors that contribute to the conflicting mnemonic field. Studies show that Latvia's Russian speaking community is heavily influenced by a media environment (Zepa et al., 2005). Wezel (2016) therefore stresses the influence of memory politics in Russia on the views of Russian speakers in Latvia, arguing that "[c]urrent Russian memory politics block any attempts to thoroughly and critically evaluate the role of the Soviet Union during World War II" (p. 570). Lack of repentance, absence of pluralistic debate on history and consolidation of pride of USSR as a having been a great power, which is, for example, manifested in the triumphant May 9 celebrations, resonates in the Russian speaking community in the Baltic States (Zelče, 2009). Brüggemann and Kasekamp (2008) suggest that victory over Nazi Germany as a unifying component of Russian identity is accepted among the Baltic Russian minorities because it fills the gap that was created as they could not accept the memory cultivated by the ethnic elites. Hence, the fact that certain memory is sacralised in Russia has impact on the lack of pluralistic memory in the Baltics. Cheskin (2012) comes to similar conclusion stating that the Soviet victory over Nazism and the liberation narrative has become a "nodal point" for the identity of the Russian speaking community. In his words "nodal points are privileged discursive points which allow us to find meaning in an otherwise contested, meaningless, and non-universalized world" (p. 564). All in all, this contributes to two completely opposite memory narratives in Latvia– one based on condemnation of Soviet past while the other is built around its glorification.

However, not all researchers who have studied collective memory in Latvian agree with the opinion that there are two dichotomous memories. While, for example, while Brüggemann and Kasekamp (2008) compare the international division between Estonia and Russia to the domestic division between Estonians and Russian speakers, Cheskin (2015) suggests that the Russian speaking minority in Latvia is building its own identity that gradually includes the official memory that is propagated by the Latvian state. Russian language is pivotal to this identity while the political affection towards Russia is weakening. Nevertheless, Russia still remains culturally and politically attractive. Earlier survey data on integration have shown that Russian speakers prefer integration to assimilation – they want to maintain their cultural and linguistic identity (Zepa et al., 2005) and data on social memory suggests that Latvian Russians want to maintain certain ways of interpreting 20th century history as well (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017).

Likewise Eglitis and Ardava (Eglitis & Ardava, 2014) offer an additional mnemonic narrative to the two dichotomous positions. In total they thus identify three narratives characterizing remembrance of the period of restoration of independent Latvia. The first "ethnic elite political narrative" is put forward by Latvian political elite and state institutions and pictures the past as a triumphant development towards "progress" and "freedom" (p. 126). The second, "political and economic alienation narrative" questions the legitimacy of the actions of the new political elites and is based on resentment that the new regime has not delivered what the independence movement was struggling to achieve. The third "ethnic alienation narrative" exists within the Russian speaking minority and is based on glorification of the Soviet past and resentment about the present. Even though Eglitis and Ardava's analysis adds a third narrative to the binary Latvian – Russian-speaker distinction, Pettai (2016) is critical to this distinction. She points to the lack of representation of the second narrative in official memory and also to the fact that only the first and the third narrative are really based on group identity and concern core values of the state and legitimacy of past events. The resentment rather comes from dissatisfaction with current politics, it does not involve a particular interpretation or reformulation of the past.

Another factor that has influenced official memory in Latvia is Europeanization. Preparing for its accession to the European Union and NATO, Latvia had to westernize

its memory. “Mnemonic accession criterion” stipulated that acceding countries had to give more prominence to Holocaust remembrance and evaluate Nazi collaboration (Neumayer, 2015, p. 3). This was indeed done and a more balanced accounts of the past emerged (reference). At the same time, after the accession to the EU, the new member states became mnemonic warriors on the EU level. Central and Eastern European countries wanted to see recognition of their suffering under Nazis and communism (ibid.). Mälksoo (2009) argues the reason for this mnemonic entrepreneurship to include the experiences of communism in European memory has been “fundamental insecurity” of these countries about the place of own the past and their belonging to Europe (p. 655). As a result, the mnemonic actors in Latvia are stranded between the need to adopt a more “European” memory and the sense of injustice that they derive from it.

2.1.2 The role of history and researchers

In developing pluralistic vision of the past, history as a discipline plays an important role. Despite history and memory being two distinct concepts, they are closely related. Both memory and history are subject to socially conditioned “unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion” (Burke, 1989, p. 98). Burke separates history and social memory arguing that the latter is a “product of social groups” while history is consciously undertaken reconstruction of the past according to certain methodology. Yet, historians pick what to write about in line with the point of view of their groups in a process of selection and interpretation because the past can be assessed “only through the categories and schemata of our own culture” (ibid., p. 99). In other words, even though in a democracy historians can work freely, they have to comply with the norms and values of the environment. The initial function of history in Latvia was to provide the new states with legitimacy. During the National Awakening, history was the main political tool for mobilization and it was written not only by historians but also journalists, writers and politicians. The discipline was underfunded and dominated by the victim narratives and struggles to bring to light the “truth” about the past rather than balanced, comprehensive investigation (Zelče, 2009). Zelče argues that therefore in Latvia relationship with the past is unsettled. It has been dealt with emotionally and chaotically which has hindered the development of historical responsibility. She describes historical responsibility as looking at history through critical lens and undertaking self-assessment and developing

the ability to avoid transfer of past resentments onto present. Instead history as a science was replaced by myths of the mono-ethnic collective memory that contributed to a strong victim identity of Latvians as a nation that had suffered more than anyone else.

History-making was altered when Latvia prepared to join the European Union and had to align its history with that of the EU. However, the undertaking of the academics remained in the self-sufficient frame of finding the true and objective history. Moreover, historians were unlikely to engage with collective memory or the vernacular history thus the more solid and fact based interpretations of history did not enter the collective memory. An additional factor that contributes to mistrust of Russian speaking community in the work of Latvian historians is that history still mainly reflected the Latvian collective memory and had close relation to the state institutions. Also, mostly it is carried out by ethnic Latvian historians which further contributed to exclusion of the minorities' memories from the official narratives (Zelče, 2009).

A recent trend, nonetheless, is an increasing discussion on history and memory in the academia that reaches out to the media and thus to wider society. In 2012 a Social Memory Research Centre was established at the University of Latvia with the aim of seeking strategies for unification of Latvian society (UL Press Centre, 2012). Hanovs (2012) argues that the work of academics, however, has not entered political discourse where a distinction between right and wrong memories are perpetuated. In his view, the Soviet falsifications that are alive in individual memory must be actively engaged with and deconstructed. Simple dismissal of "forbidden" memories creates resistance, perception of threat to particular individual or group's memory and a tendency of self-exclusion which in turn make this group susceptible to political manipulation.

2.1.3 Bottom-up memory

Different stories about history are emerging in Latvian culture and arts. In 2015 The New Riga Theatre featured a performance called "The Lake of Hopes" telling an autobiographic story of the producer – a Latvian Russian who is struggling to live in two worlds: one where his mother represents the elderly generation that is nostalgic for the Soviet era and cherishes the celebration of May 9 and his own where he is part of the Latvian society and would mark a commemoration of victims of the war on May 8 (Cerību ezers, n.d.). This play, similarly to an earlier performance at the same theatre "The

Grandfather", received an award as the best theatre performance of the year. "The Grandfather" also revealed the many different versions of the WW2 memory through a personal autobiographical account of an actor who was searching for his grandfather who was lost during the war (Vectēvs, n.d.). The play tells three different stories of three different men that he found. These two plays one coming from Latvian environment, the other narrating the problematics of Latvian Russians, reflect on collective memory that is not unified in either of the ethnic groups. Other reflections on WWII memories in culture and arts are listed by Rozenšteine, Saulītis, Siliņa and Zelče (2011).

However, these are not just activities in arts and culture that show pluralism in memory. Several studies have indicated that young Russians in Latvia feel differently about narratives on history that their parents and grandparents. Cheskin (2012) after surveying participants of the 9 May celebration at the Victory monument in Riga points to likeliness of younger Russian speakers to accept different narratives on history. Although the views are still far from fully fledged pluralism, his study shows that among younger Russians there is a modest inclination incorporate the "Latvian memory myths" in their own interpretation of history. Cheskin concludes that attributing the historic memory of Latvia's Russian speaking minority to the influence of Russia, although somewhat fair, is too simplistic and overrides the complexity of how memory is shaped and how different narratives interact. The result is a dichotomy between the two narratives that is almost impossible to overcome. The idea of a generational change offers a more optimistic view, assuming that increasingly pluralistic understanding of history is emerging from below within the Russian-speaking community. According to Cheskin such bottom-up trends eventually enter and changed the "totalized memory-myths" (p. 564).

Yet, Kaprāns and Procevska (2013) deny the conciliatory effect of a generational change. Their extensive research on social memory in Latvia shows that radicalization is increasing among the youth of both ethnic groups. They have observed that among youth the attitude towards the events of World War II and its participants as well as commemorative rituals and places are more confrontational than among elderly people who actually still have memories of the war or middle aged people. The Russian youth is more likely to condemn the people who fought in the German army as accomplices in Nazi crimes while considering Red Army veterans heroes. Nevertheless, Kaprāns and

Procevska (2013) also point to the existence of diverging opinions within both groups that are even more significant than the interethnic cleavage. Moreover, segments of both groups, especially older people, have a common perception of World War II participants on both sides as victims.

However, social surveys show considerable differences in how different periods and historical events are perceived in both ethnolinguistic groups. Most importantly, the majority of Russian speakers assess the Soviet period positively and the restored Latvia negatively. Among Latvians the results are opposite and the number of people who assess the Soviet period negatively has increased between 2012 and 2017 (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017). Also, the conflict of occupation is still salient with the majority of Russian speakers not supporting the official Latvian state position on history (ibid.).

All in all, the conclusions of the social memory survey carried out in 2012 and 2017 suggest that the bottom-up memory among Latvia's Russian speaking minority is quite pluralistic and meaningful differences exist also in how Latvians see historical events. In addition, the latest survey shows that the majority of inhabitants of Latvia (55%) are ready to accept different interpretations of 20th century history. At the same time, a similar majority within both ethnic groups of the population take a mnemonic abnegator positon and want to see less public discussion on contested historical events (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017). This presents a fertile soil for political elites to engage in mnemonic reconciliation and the possibility to avoid memory conflicts. Further in this study I look into to what extent the different interpretations of history also proliferate in the political discourse. However, prior that it is necessary to provide a short insight into Latvian political environment and party politics.

2.2 Ethnic cleavage in party politics

In the Latvian case, official memory encompasses not only the narratives propagated by state authorities and parties that represent the dominant national narrative but also parties representing the narrative that is accepted within the Russian-speaking minority. Thus, official memory in Latvia includes the narratives on history that is widely accepted among country's Russophone population even if they diverge from the generally accepted opinion in the state institutions. In official state rituals, however, only the collective memory of Latvian ethno-linguistic groups is firmly institutionalized (Pettai, 2016).

However, Russian speakers (and also their collective memory) are represented in the party system. Further on I look into party politics in Latvia because for researching official memory, it is necessary to establish which actors operate in the political environment and have access to structures of power.

The party system in Latvia is divided along ethnic lines and there is ample research on how this cleavage functions and impacts Latvian politics as well as society (e.g. Ījabs, 2015; Nakai, 2014; Zepa et al., 2005). This division is not in place in the other two Baltic States, Estonia and Lithuania and in fact, this makes the Latvian party system peculiar among all the EU member states that formerly belonged to the socialist block. This situation leads to a unique political environment where political parties exploit ethnic tensions to gain popular support rather than social or economic issues as it is in the traditional right – left spectrum. In fact, left-wing is mainly understood as representing the Russian minority while centre and right wing political forces are the parties that are generally relying on ethnic Latvian electorate (Kažoka, 2010). This dichotomy comes with certain incompatible views attached to each political force: "The ethnolinguistic political borderline is clear-cut and is linked to the issues of support for Latvia's independence and pro-Western orientation versus a pro-Russian orientation and dependency of Russia" (ibid, 2010, p. 86).

Latvian political landscape is characterized by quite a large number of parties and certain volatility. Emergence of new parties, formation of party unions or splitting of existing parties are not unusual. Usually around 5-6 parties reach the 5% threshold and obtain seats in the parliament called *Saeima* which has 100 seats in total. In the last two elections in 2014 and 2011, six and five parties and party unions obtained seats in the parliament (12. Saiemas vēlēšanas, 2014; 2011. gada tautas, 2011). All except one of these parties have been mainly relying on ethnic Latvian electorate. Concerning ideology most of them are characterized as "catch-all parties" that do not fit the usual Western European standards of party ideologies (Kažoka, 2010). Issues of memory and history do not feature on their party programs explicitly. However, they mostly rely on ethnic-national values. For example the party program of one of the largest parties after the last three parliamentary election Unity (*Vienotība*) reads: "The basis of the Latvian state is a nation with a common understanding of its own history, respect for Latvian language and culture."[1] (Vienotība, n.d.)

An exception is the National Alliance that quite clearly positions as national conservative. It is a union of the party For Fatherland and Freedom (*Tēvzemei un brīvībai LNNK*), which is a successor of the Latvian National Independence Movement, and a radical nationalist party All for Latvia (*Visu Latvijai!*). The party is an active mnemonic warrior. For example its election manifesto for Riga municipal election in 2013 contains a promise that "[i]n Latvia and Riga everyone will honour Latvian cultural traditions, national symbols, and the commemoration of Latvian soldiers"[†2] ("Nacionālā apvienība", 2013). In the original Latvian language version of the programme the world "Latvian" refers to the ethnicity rather than nationality and thus it also indicates opposition towards honouring other soldiers.

The largest Russian minority party is Harmony (*Saskaņa*), previously Harmony Centre and People's Harmony Party. As a party that is perceived as representing the ethnic Russian population and being pro-Russian, it has never been included in the ruling coalition despite being among the largest and most stable political forces in the parliament. This party has been active since 1998 and at the moment has the largest fraction in the Latvian parliament or Saeima with 24 MPs after Unity (*Vienotība*) with 23. The more radical minority party Latvian Russian Union (*Latvijas Krievu Savienība*, Russian - *Русский союз Латвии*, until 2014 For Human Rights in United Latvia, known for its abbreviation in Latvian PCTVL or ЗаПЧЕЛ in Russian) has become more marginalized in the recent years and did not reach the 5% threshold in the last two parliamentary elections. Even though it is represented in the European Parliament by Tatjana Ždanoka, the party has lost most of its domestic electorate to Harmony. Ždanoka was an opponent of Latvian independence in 1990 and is now known for outspokenly criticizing minority rights in Latvia as well as a supporter of Soviet and contemporary Russian narratives on history. The party program of the Latvian Russian Union for the European Parliament elections in 2014 reads "We are against any expression of neo-Nazism and revision of the results of World War II. The veterans of anti-Hitler coalition have to receive an official status and benefits"[3] ("10. Saraksts", 2014). Thus, it is also one of the few parties with an explicit reference to historical memory in its programme.

[†] All the quatations that are originally in Latvian or Russian are author's translations. The original text is provided as endnotes in Appendix I.

For the perpetual opposition party Harmony, history is one of the main points of disagreement with the "Latvian" political forces. Namely, the party leaders have not recognized Soviet occupation and discuss this part of history reluctantly, while some members of the party have outwardly denied it ("SC izvairās", 2010; "Urbanovičs izdod", 2011). Nevertheless, Harmony's rhetoric on questions of history and national minorities is much more subtle that that of Latvian Russian Union. Cheskin (2012) attributes it to top-down pressures that make the party adapt its interpretation of history and find "more conciliatory positions which find greater accord with the official memory-myths of the Latvia state" in order to be able to access political power in Latvia (p. 579)." In addition, Harmony has increasingly tried to position itself as a social democratic party outside ethnolinguistic categories. In contrast to the "Latvian" parties which see the Latvian state as founded on the Latvian nation and culture, Harmony stresses "equal participation in political, social and economic life of all people in Latvia" (Saskaņa, 2011).

Despite the efforts to present Harmony as a social democratic party and occupy the vacant niche of the political left (Kažoka, 2010), its main electorate is still the Russian speaking community and those efforts saw a setback when Harmony supported a referendum for Russian as a second language in Latvia in 2012 which lead to a deepening of the ethnic cleavage both in Latvian society and party politics (Ījabs, 2015). Pettai (2016) points to the fact that Latvia is the only Baltic State with a where the ethnic minority is represented by a "viable" political party. In addition, even though Latvian Russian Union as a political force has seen a decline, the other two Baltic States do not feature a political actors that are so starkly countering the official state narratives on 20th century history and questioning legitimacy of state institutions (ibid.). The presence of radically opposite positions likely has impact also on the rest of the political actors and the positions they choose.

According to Bernard and Kubik (2014) political actors take positions on salient memory issues when a particular stance can bring political benefits. This theory suggests that political forces in Latvia would use memory issues to increase political power, thinking that strong stance provided popular support. In line with this assumption, Zelče (2009) blames "low political culture" for exploiting conflicts over history (p. 54). In addition, Hanovs (2012) states that not only the radical political actors on both sides of the spectrum would portray certain memories as illegitimate or wrong but also the centrist

mainstream parties employ hierarchy of right and wrong individual and collective memories.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This is a case study of Latvia, employing the theoretical model of Bernhard and Kubik (2014). In the next chapter I will use content analysis to examine the Latvian political environment to classify which types of mnemonic actors are present with regard to commemorative days that are especially important in the mnemonic field of Latvia.

Arising from previous studies of memory politics in Latvia, the research questions of this study are:

1. How is the diversity of mnemonic positions within both ethno-linguistic groups reflected in the political discourse? How the memory regime within both ethnolinguistic groups is constituted?
2. To what extent do interpretations of history exist that are common to both groups?

I classify the types of mnemonic actors present in Latvian politics in line with Bernhard and Kubik's model. The main characteristics of the three ideal types of actors - warrior, pluralist and abnegator - are described in table 3.1. Bernhard and Kubik characterize the actors based on *Who, What, When, How*, and *Why* questions. I categorize and analyse texts on the basis of the actor positions the text contains, applying the questions in table 3.1. In addition, I look if the position is represented among political actors who are considered to represent the ethnic majority or ones coming from parties that are backed mainly by Russian-speakers, i.e. Harmony or the Latvian Russian Union.

Table 3.1: Types of mnemonic actors and their dominant strategies

Questions	**Mnemonic warriors**	**Mnemonic pluralists**	**Mnemonic abnegators**
***Who* are the participants in memory politics?**	Us versus them.	Us and them.	Those who dwell on the past, not us.
***What* is the predominant vision of collective memory?**	Memory is non-negotiable, as there is only one "true" vision of the past.	Negotiation on memory issues but within an agreement on the fundamentals of mnemonic politics.	Low salience of memory issues for politics.

***When* are the events to be remembered happening?**	In a single mythical past (wrongs of the past are part of the tissue of present politics).	(Probably) in multiple pasts. Different interpretations of the past exists.	Never mind when; it is not important. There is no time like the present.
***How* is the mnemonic contest to be carried out? What are the culturally prescribed strategies of action?**	Defeat, deny power to, delegitimize alternative version of the past. Do not negotiate, avoid compromise.	Practice respect, toleration for alternative views of the past on the basis of a common understanding of the fundamentals. Be ready to negotiate or disagree.	Avoid mnemonic contests. They are waste of time.
***Why* is it worthwhile or not worthwhile to engage in mnemonic struggle?**	Fundamentalism: our "true" vision of the past legitimizes our claim to power.	Pluralism: there are several visions of the past that are acceptable. Our claim to power rests on our effort to institutionalize a frame for their coexistence.	Pragmatism: propagating a predominant vision of the past is not seen as worthwhile in comparison to responding to present-day problems.

Note: From Bernhard and Kubik, 2014, p. 14

I look at the mnemonic positions put forward by political actors in line with the definition of official memory put forward by Bernhard and Kubik. As formulation and propagation of official memory "involve the intensive participation of state institutions and/or political society (the authorities and major political actors such as parties, who are organized to hold and contest state power)" (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014, p. 16), these are the actors that I focus on. Particular attention is paid to political actors because they bring different narratives into the state institutions or exclude particular ways of remembrance. As Pettai (2016) points out, one of the weaknesses of the chapter by Eglitis and Ardava

(2014), which focuses on the Baltic States in Bernhard and Kubik's book, is that instead of official discourse, the authors focus on intellectuals and other opinion leaders that are quoted in the media. Even though these people are important, they have a lesser role in shaping official memory. I, therefore, look at how different political actors in particular contribute to a specific memory regime that exists with regard to each of these mnemonic events. Political parties and their individual members as well as those holding high government offices are considered political actors for the purpose of this study in line with Bernhard and Kubik's definition of official memory.

In addition, anniversaries of specific events increase their salience in the political environment. They bring increased attention to commemorative events; therefore the commemorative days are more likely to be mentioned in public discourse, including speeches and commentaries delivered by political figures. Hence, significant commemorations of certain past events are chosen to determine the timeframe for data selection. This study looks at two commemorative days: May 9 - Victory Day that is widely celebrated by Latvian Russians together with May 8 - The Defeat of Nazism and Commemoration Day of Victims of World War II that is an official commemorative day in Latvia, and March 16 – an unofficial remembrance day of Latvian legionnaires. The commemorative days and anniversaries are listed in table 3.2 (see next page). These commemorative days embody the different interpretations of World War II among the Latvian majority and the Russian speaking minority; therefore they are good indicators of mnemonic divisions. Moreover, anniversaries of these historical dates were marked recently, either in 2014 or 2015. These are also highlighted as some of the most important memory events in the collective memory of Latvians and the Russophone community by Zelče (2009). Similar findings are presented also by Kaprāns and Procevska (2013) and Kaprāns and Saulītis (2017). Moreover, as Eglitis and Ardava (2014) show analysing the remembrance of the national awakening, WWII memories are the deepest dimension of the conflict upon which other memories are layered.

May 9 is an important "nodal point" for Latvian Russian speakers' identity and March 16 is often seen as its ideological opposite (Cheskin, 2012). Even though the Legionnaires Day is a highly politicized commemoration that does not have as big popular support among Latvians and neither is alone a crucial element of Latvian national identity, attitudes towards it and the levels of acceptance of both commemorations are illustrative

of how pluralistic the mnemonic actors in Latvia are. The people who support 9 May are most strictly against March 16 and the commemoration of Latvian legion is backed by people who are most antagonistic to Victory Day participants (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017).

Table 3.2. Commemorative days

Commemorative day	Date	Anniversary year
Commemoration of Latvian Legionnaires	March 16	70 years in 2014
Victory Day/ The Defeat of Nazism and Commemoration Day of Victims of World War II	May 9/May 8	70 years in 2015

The data include speeches, commentaries and other statements made by political actors quoted in the media on the particular commemorative dates in 2014 and 2015.The criteria for data selection were timeframe and whether the actors is in a position to shape influence official memory in line with the definition by Bernhard and Kubik. The timeframe is the whole year of the anniversary even though most texts have been published within the scope of a month before and after the specific date. The actors include political parties and their leaders, members of the government, government bodies, the president, and deputies of the parliament. The data was coded in line with the type of mnemonic actor that the statements represent – warrior, pluralist or abnegator. In addition I take into account the ethnic group belonging of the political actor.

The data is sourced from the database of periodicals in Latvia news.lv which contains over 100 different media sources, the biggest online news portals delfi.lv, tvnet.lv that provide news both in Latvian and Russian, the Russian language portal vesti.lv and the Latvian public broadcasting website lsm.lv. I searched the database and these websites using keywords May 9, Victory Day, Commemoration, Victims of WWII, March 16, and Legionnaires Day in both Latvian and Russian. If these sources referred to other outlets, I also looked up the referenced interviews, commentaries, TV or radio broadcasts, protocols of parliamentary meetings and other sources. In addition to media sources, news and minutes of parliamentary meetings published on the website of the Latvian parliament and in the official state periodical “Latvijas Vēstnesis” and its internet portal lvportals.lv are used as well as information available on the webpages of political

parties. Some speeches that are available online either in the form of a written record or a video are also included in the data. In total 30 texts that concern the commemoration of the end of WWII and 22 texts on March 16 were included in the analysis. Most of the texts are in Latvian. Eleven texts in Russian were included in the sample. I mainly looked at media publications but the data also includes four full speeches, four official government documents and publications from four websites of political parties.

There are some limitations to the data. Firstly, news items in the media use quotes selectively; therefore they might not fully reflect an actor's position. For this reason, full speeches were included in the sample when available. If the quotes were sourced from a TV or radio interview or debate, the full broadcast was reviewed. Secondly, important limitation of the data is that only party leaders and highest officials are the most likely to be quoted by the media. Also, warriors presenting confrontational positions are more likely to obtain media coverage. For this reason, I tried to include a variety of actors in the sample. Moreover, Latvian Russian speakers rely not only on the Latvian but also the Russian media space. Therefore, it is more difficult to draw a line where the domestic mnemonic field ends. At the same time, looking at official memory in Latvia, stipulates that the subjects of analysis are political actors that have access to political power in Latvia. Therefore, analysing external positions is outside of the scope of this study; however, it is important to keep in mind that top-down narratives that influence the mnemonic field in Latvia, can come also from outside.

4. ANALYSIS OF WORLD WAR II COMMEMORATIONS

4.1. March 16: the unofficial commemoration of the Latvian Legion

4.1.1. Origin of the March 16 commemoration and its place in collective memory

March 16 is an unofficial day of remembrance of the Volunteer Latvian SS legion. Up to this day the legion is one of the most contested issues in Latvian history. It was a formation of Latvian soldiers that was formed in the Nazi occupied Latvian territory. Latvian historians have concluded that it mainly consisted of conscripted soldiers and that the legion as such was not involved in Nazi war crimes (Neiburgs, 2011). However, controversies around the March 16 commemorative events remain strong as the day has been highly politicized and has also drawn international attention and condemnation from Russia for glorifying Nazism. The most controversial event of March 16 is a procession of the veterans of the legion towards the Freedom Monument in Riga.

Commemoration of the Legion on March 16 was started soon after WWII by the Latvian exile organization *Daugavas Vanagi*. March 16 was chosen because in 1944 on this date the two divisions of the Latvian legion for the first and only time participated in a battle together. The exile institutions created and kept alive a "heroic myth" about the Latvian legion making them politically and emotionally significant symbols of history (Zelče, 2011a, p, 111). The main component of this myth was the idea that despite fighting under the Nazi Germany, legionnaires were fighting for a free Latvia and their fight against the Red Army was morally justifiable on the grounds of the repressions that the Soviet rule carried out in Latvia during the occupation from 1940 until 1941. After restoration of Latvia's independence this myth of legionnaires as freedom fighters became an important part of the re-emerging Latvian collective memory together with other memories that were outlawed during the Soviet occupation. Zelče (2011a) argues that is was a way for Latvians to fill the lack of heroes that resulted from the fact that Latvia did not show armed resistance to the Soviet occupation in 1940. At the same time, repressions were the core feature of Latvian identity and also the legionnaires theme was dominated by victim discourse.

The heroic myth about legionnaires was already used by political forces in the 1990s and soon also disclosed mnemonic confrontations. In mid-90s the annual procession towards the freedom monument started to take place. The narrative of heroism of the legionnaires as freedom fighters was used by national conservative political actors

to mobilize voters on the basis of patriotism. First mnemonic confrontations occurred in 1998 with condemnation of the procession by Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The condemnation created resistance and in 1998 March 16 was included among the official commemorative days and the Latvian parliament took a decision on "Declaration on Latvian legionnaires during World War II" ("Deklarācija", 1998).

The main positions, nonetheless, changed again as Latvia prepared to join the European Union and NATO and had to ally its national memory with how history is seen in Western Europe - inclusion of the Holocaust and condemnation of Nazi war crimes. This led to a broader acknowledgement that the myth of legionnaires-freedom fighters is inaccurate and problematic on the international stage. The new narrative recognized that Latvians were fighting on both sides during WWII and reinforced the simultaneous condemnation of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as two evils (Zelče, 2011). Consequently March 16 was also removed from the list of official commemorations in 2000 and public officials have distanced themselves from the March 16 commemorative events, especially the march held in Riga. The official Latvian state position has been to commemorate the legionnaires on November 11 as a common commemorative day for all Latvian soldiers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). In 2011 deputies of Saeima from the National Alliance sought to reintroduce the day in the calendar of official commemorations but their proposal was convincingly rejected ("Saeima noraida", 2011). Lately, the number of people at the events is slightly growing but popular support in general is decreasing (Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017). Also, in the political rhetoric March 16 is more and more abnegated. The following analysis of official memory regime on March 16 in 2014, nonetheless, reveals that the mainstream political elites face difficulties in responding to mnemonic warriors from more radical political parties.

4.1.2. March 16 in 2014

In 2014 two new factors influenced how March 16 was dealt with in official memory. Those were international and European pressures to ally Latvian national memory with the west and the crisis in Ukraine that awakened insecurity among many Latvians. As every year the date was marked with a commemorative service in the Riga Dome Church and a procession towards the Freedom Monument that was accompanied by an anti-fascism demonstration (Bērtule, Čunka, & Rozenberga, 2014). The central controversy

of March 16 in 2014 was the dismissal of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional development Einārs Cilinskis from the government position after he resolved to participate in the procession from the old town to the Freedom Monument in Riga.

In 2014 Prime Minister (PM) Laimdota Straujuma suggested all the members of her government not to participate in the procession honouring the legionnaires. Latvian politicians had in mind the upcoming presidency in the Council of the European Union that the country assumed in the first half of 2015. Because political elites wanted to show Latvia as a fully European country, controversies over March 16 were undesirable. Moreover, due to the situation in Ukraine (the referendum in Crimea took place on the same day), security alerts on provocations on behalf of Russia were higher than in other years and security services invited not to participate in the events ("Kažociņš: Šogad", 2014). Straujuma on a TV interview expressed that regarding the commemorative procession at the Freedom Monument, the government "has to take into account the reaction of [its] allies – EU countries on the possibility that the government might be supporting Nazism or fascism which Europe takes very painfully"[4] ("16. marts rada", 2014). All coalition parties apart from the National Alliance supported this position without commenting it, thus taking an abnegator stance. In a letter addressing the coalition parties, Straujuma stated that the Latvian inhabitants were mobilized in the occupying Nazi and Soviet militaries using "inhumane repressions and continuous terror"[5] and against international law ("Straujuma brīdina", 2014). She also expressed respect towards the fallen soldiers and invited to commemorate them on November 11 or at the memorial in Lestene – a cemetery of the fallen legionnaires:

> We - the representatives of government and coalition parties are Latvian patriots and we respect the fallen soldiers. In Latvia the remembrance day of soldiers is November 11, not March 16. For this reason everyone who wants to show respect to the fallen soldiers on March 16 can visit Lestene Brothers' cemetery, in this way not subjecting Latvia to unnecessary threat of provocations.[6] (ibid.)

The former PM Valdis Dombrovskis expressed a similar stance stating that the annual march "has turned into and event where radicals of both sides seek confrontation with each other" and participation of government ministers in the procession would be understood "neither in the west, nor in the east"[7] ("Ekspremjers: Ministriem", 2014). This abnegator position based solely on concern of Latvia's image internationally, however,

was used to make the government politicians appear weak and was challenged by both - nationalists who supported the event and those in opposition who claimed that the march glorifies Nazism.

The minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Protection Einārs Cilinskis resisted government's decision and took part in the march in Riga. As a result Cilinskis, who is a member of the National Alliance, was dismissed from his ministerial position ("Straujuma brīdina", 2016). Defending his choice, Cilinskis argued that "[t]he meaning of March 16 procession is not only to clearly condemn two totalitarian regimes of the past that have brought enormous destruction to Latvia and the world, but also to address the rebirth of fascism today"[8] (Cilinskis, 2014). He connected the event to the war in Ukraine. In an interview he stated: "This year March 16 for sure will not be merely a date on which we commemorate those who fell for Latvia. It will be a protest against the aggressor Russia, and this means that the need to participate in March 16 events is greater than in other years."[9] (Ozoliņa, 2014) Cilinskis also promised to lay flowers in the colours of the Ukrainian flag at the Freedom Monument drawing parallels between annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the Baltics in 1940 as well as the legionnaires – fighters for Latvian freedom and Ukrainians who have been victims of present Russian aggression (Cilinskis, 2014.). Rejection of March 16 was interpreted as concession to Russian aggression and even treason of Latvian heroes.

Other members of the National Alliance also expressed a sense that the prohibition of government ministers to participate in the procession show disrespect to "Latvian soldiers" and that the Prime Minister has imposed it because of a lack of political will to resist external pressures. For example, leader of National Alliance Raivis Dzintars argued that "[i]nstead of having diplomats explain the whole world the history of Latvian Legion, the state has indirectly surrendered to Russian propaganda"[10] ("Straujuma brīdina", 2014). Others like the Deputy of the Riga City Council and historian Ritvars Jansons also drew on the legionnaire – freedom fighter myth:

> The fighters against the occupying powers during the Nazi and Stalinist times maintained the idea of independence. They also passed on this idea to next generations. Without this process we would have no [National] Awakening the way we had it and perhaps we would not have a restored Republic of Latvia but a country that had separated from the USSR.[11] (Jansons, 2014)

In addition, in the nationalist rhetoric March 16 is often contrasted to May 9. For example, National Alliance's member of Saeima Edvīns Šņore called the government's decision "embarrassing' and "a hysteric action against March 16 that contrasts so much to the silence of the responsible public officials before May 9 that sometimes make one think that they are dealing with the local authority of the Latvian USSR rather than the government of independent Latvia" (Šņore, 2014). Šņore also links the situation to Ukraine crisis stating that "in Ukraine there was no March 16, nor 'humiliating' naturalization exams, nor non-citizens and Russia found a reason to send there its troops. Moreover, chanting the same as usual – fight against fascism"[12] (ibid.). Thus, the nationalists found Ukraine crisis to be a reason to support March 16 as a protest against present Russian aggression. The members of the parliament (MPs) of the National Alliance also linked the Ukraine crisis to March 16 and questions of historical justice in the plenary debate of *Saeima* after the annular report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Parliament (Latvijas Republikas Saeima, 2015).

All in all, the party's discourse on March 16 shows that the National Alliance has internalized March 16 as a symbol of Latvian nationalism. As a typical mnemonic warrior, the party uses it to position itself as the defender of the "true" history. Its webpage contains a section on March 16 stating:

> Succumbing to the pressure of Russia and its fifth column, the *Saeima* removed March 16 from the list of official observances; at the same time repressions and a campaign for 'discrediting Latvia's international reputation' were directed against military and public officials who dared to participate in a commemorative march together with the legionnaires at the Freedom Monument.[13] (National Alliance, n.d.)

Also, public debates show that March 16 has become a political tool for the National Alliance to position themselves as the only bearers of truth while other political actors surrender to external pressures.

On the other end of Latvian political spectrum there were warrior statements condemning the Legionnaire Day. Yet, those were fewer and more marginal, mainly coming from separate civil society organizations and individuals. On the political level, the leader of the Latvian Russian Union Tatjana Ždanoka in a TV debate after election to the European Parliament asserted: "Our fathers fought against Nazism but now those who

were collaborationists call heroes. It creates cleavage in society. Revision of history now happens everywhere and it is dangerous to society."[14] ("Izvēlies nākotni!", 2014) One of the demonstrations against "glorification of Nazism" that happened on March 16 in Riga was organized by Elizabete Krivcova who was Harmony's candidate in the European Parliament elections 2014 and is also one of the founders of the Congress of Non-Citizens which is an organization that claims to defend the rights of Russians in Latvia.

However, within the more moderate Harmony there was no unified position on March 16 events. Public statements of its leaders on either the commemorative events or the choice of Cilinskis shortly before or after March 16 in 2014 are difficult to find. This implies that most of Harmony's politicians took an abnegator stance and did not want to engage in mnemonic conflicts. However, the party also featured some clear mnemonic warriors. Besides the already mentioned Krivcova, member of *Saeima* Irina Cvetkova gave an interview to a Russia-based outlet arguing that March 16 events in Latvia demonstrate "glorification of *Waffen SS* legionnaires who are celebrated as fighters for Latvian independence even though it is commonly known that they gave an oath to Adolf Hitler and fought for the Third Reich rather than the independence of Latvia"[15] (Fyodorova, 2014). Cvetkova had already received a penalty according to Code of Ethics of *Saeima* for her earlier remarks about the "reality of revival of Nazism" in the restored Republic of Latvia (Rekeda, 2013; Delna, 2014). Later in 2014 Cvetkova left Harmony and joined the Latvian Russian Union claiming that she has "a continuous conflict with party's leadership because it has given up its own ideology […] by for example not condemning the legionnaire march on March 16 and turning May 9 celebration into a political agitation show with no ideological content"[16] ("Saiemas deputāte Cvetkova", 2014).

The most prominent leader of Harmony, Mayor of Riga Nils Ušakovs, in contrast, took an abnegator stance stating in an interview to a Russian news outlet *Meduza* that "[i]t is easier for politicians to talk about a threat from Moscow or the rebirth of fascism than about social issues"[17] (Azar, 2014). Nonetheless, in the same interview he voiced rather pluralistic positions highlighting that "Latvian citizens were not mobilized [in the legion] on the basis of ethnicity, but on the basis of passport. From Latgale, a lot of Russian and Russian speakers were conscripted."[18] He also acknowledged that under the Soviet rule "terrible repressions" were carried out against the population of Latvia and

the majority of legionnaires were mobilized and "could choose between the Legion and the concentration camp"[19], thus assigning them a victim role in history:

> Moreover, more than a million citizens of the Soviet Union fought on the side of the Germans. My mother is from Krasnodar, and there a unit of 250,000 people was formed from the Cossacks, who fought on the side of the Germans. This is more than Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians combined. Therefore, everything is complicated. Practically for everyone in Latvia someone of their relatives has been in the legion. This is part of family memory. But to use people who became victims of history, in modern politics, to earn some points, is unacceptable.[20] (ibid.)

His remarks present an attempt not to look at the history exclusively through ethnic categories and take a pluralist stance. However, these opinions are only expressed in a single interview for an outlet that does not target the domestic audience in Latvia.

Another trend towards greater pluralism is the emergence of Lestene as an alternative and a less controversial location for March 16 commemorative events. Even though also these events are attended by political actors, mainly from the National Alliance, they have not drawn equal publicity and are mainly attended by the war veterans and their relatives who often themselves do not support the march taking place in Riga. This is illustrated by the news title quoting one of the participants "People in Lestene commemorate legionnaires at their resting place without *pompous processions*" ("Lestenē cilvēki", 2014). Also public surveys show that the Lestene memorial enjoys much greater acceptance among both ethnic groups (Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017).

In sum, regarding March 16 the memory regime is fractured and there are radical mnemonic warriors on both sides. Among the Latvian mainstream political parties, abnegator position dominates. The warriors are marginalized but taking an abnegator position, the mainstream political leaders also risk providing space for more radical powers to voice their positions. Without providing any substantive explanation why March 16 should not be marked they have allowed the national-conservative discourse to dominate. The National Alliance is clearly employing Legionnaires Day in its political rhetoric in order to show its opponents as weak and unable to defend national history. Among the parties representing the Russophone population, Latvian Russian Union takes a clear warrior position while in Harmony there are both warriors and abnegators.

However no political actor representing the Russian speakers would evaluate March 16 positively. Therefore, the conclusion is that the memory regime on March 16 is fractured on both sides of the ethnic-political division. The only common point is the abnegator position and the condemnation of politicizing remembrance. The positions are outlined in table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Mnemonic positions concerning March 16

Questions	**Warriors I: Legionnaire hero myth**	**Warriors II: Legionnaires day – revision of history**	**Pluralists: Everyone has the right to commemorate**	**Abnegators: Discussing March 16 is unfruitful**
***Who* are the participants in memory politics?**	We who defend national heroes against them who want to erase them from history.	We who believe Nazism was the biggest tragedy in history and commemorate the ones who fought against it against them who want to revise history.	All of us who understand that WWII history was complicated and victims and perpetrators are to be found on both sides, among all ethnicities.	Those political actors who exploit memory battles for political manipulations.
***What* is the predominant vision of collective memory?**	Legionnaires were Latvian heroes because they fought against the Soviet Union and for a free Latvia.	Legionnaires fought on the side of Nazi Germany which is not justifiable on any grounds.	The history of Latvian legion is complex and mainly can be viewed to the prism of individual experiences.	Marking and discussing Legionnaires day only complicates Latvian political and security situation.
***When* are the events to be remembered happening?**	The events are transferred to the present – defending national heroes is important	Victory over Nazism is a reference point for history and the basis of present Europe.	Latvians and Russian speakers as well as Western Europe each have their own interpretation of past.	Never mind when; Latvia needs to focus on its present political, economic and security issues.

***How* is the mnemonic contest to be carried out? What are the culturally prescribed strategies of action?**	We must tell the world the truth about the Latvian legion. Compromises and concessions are betrayal of our national values.	Legionnaire day is a form of celebration of Nazism; therefore it requires outspoken condemnation and international attention.	We have to acknowledge the crimes of Nazism and communism but everyone has the right to their opinion and the right to commemorate the fallen soldiers.	Memory should not be politicized and political actors should not take part in disputes over March 16.
***Why* is it worthwhile or not worthwhile to engage in mnemonic struggle?**	Forgetting the heroes and the tragic history of WWII will provide space for Russian aggression and may lead to the history to repeat.	The mnemonic struggle is connected to the rights of Russians in Latvia.	The memory conflict has to be settled to avoid escalation and possibility of manipulation with history.	It is not worthwhile. Engaging in memory politics will just attract unwanted attention.
Which political actors voice the position?	Only actors representing ethnic Latvians.	Only actors representing Russian speakers.	Elements of this narrative can be found in among both politicians representing both ethnolinguistic groups.	Elements of this narrative can be found in among both politicians representing both ethnolinguistic groups.

Note: Adapted From Bernhard and Kubik, 2014, p. 14

4.2. Remembering the end of World War II

4.2.1. When and how is the end of World War II remembered in Latvia?

The root of the controversy between May 8 and May 9 is the date and time when the capitulation act of Germany was signed. Because of time difference, in Western Europe

it happened on May 8 while in the Soviet Union it was already the day after. This historical detail in Latvia has been amplified by radically different interpretations of this day. Inheriting the ritual from the USSR, in Russia and also among many Russians in the former Soviet countries May 9 is marked as a victorious mass celebration. At the same time, the Latvian understanding of May 8 is based on victim identity and mourning while commemorative events are formal and mainly involve only the political elite.

Collective memory of the majority of Russian speakers in Latvia is informed by the Soviet and contemporary Russian official historiography. This vision is built around heroism of the Red Army that was crucial in the defeat of Nazism and the suffering that was borne by the Soviet and Russian people (Cheskin, 2012). Thus, Victory Day has an exclusively positive meaning in the Russian collective memory and it is a source of positive self-identification (Ločmele, Procevska & Zelče, 2011). In contrast, for Latvians end of the war also marked start of sovietisation, mass repressions, activity of national partisans and lost independence (Zellis, 2011). As consequence, May 8/9 is a particularly salient commemorative day that represents the starkest conflict between the narrative of liberation and the Latvian official narrative on occupation and suffering under two equally brutal dictatorships. In contrast to the 16 March commemoration of Latvian legionnaires that is being increasingly abnegated by the political elites, the Victory Day celebration remains important for the Russian minority and is even gaining more public support in the latest years (Kaprāns & Procevska, 2013).

Ločemele, Procevska and Zelče (2011) have observed that the change in how Victory Day is marked among Latvian Russian-speakers is analogue to evolution of May 9 in Russia. From rather quiet celebration focusing on war veterans in the 1990s, since 2000 the day has become a form of political entertainment and expression of the solidarity of the Russian speaking community with the past taking an increasingly mythical form. They highlight that the May 9 events and places like the Victory Monument in Riga have become sites of institutionalization of Russian minority's political activity and resistance against state policy. Victory day has been increasingly linked to political issues that are salient for Latvian Russian speakers such as rights of Russian speakers, citizenship and the language of instruction in minority schools (Ločemele, Procevska & Zelče, 2011). In what follows I look at how May 8 and May 9 have been framed in Latvian public

discourse and by political actors in particular during 70th anniversary of the end of WWII in 2015.

Officially since 1995 May 8 in Latvia is The Crushing of Nazism and Commemorative Day of Victims of World War II while May 9 is not a formally recognized observance. The homepage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia informs about this date, stating:

> For Latvia and the Latvians, World War II was a time of great suffering. Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union violated international law by mobilizing the population of Latvia into their armed forces. About 200 000 Latvian soldiers served in the forces of both occupying states, and about half of them (100 000) were killed in battle. ("Latvia's National", 2016)

As an infographic of the State Chancellery of Latvia shows, May 8 is, thus, a commemoration day of the victims of WWII that is marked in Latvia on the same day as in the rest of Europe, while May 9 is celebrated as European Day ("Ko pasaulē atzīmē", 2015).

4.2.2. Commemorations on May 8 and May 9 in 2015

In 2015 several events took place to commemorate the end of WWII on both May 8 and May 9. However, only May 8 events were truly official in a sense that the highest public officials were present and state authorities organized or officially recognized the events. May 9 events, in contrast, were not attended by state officials but several political actors, nevertheless, did take part. The most important commemorative events on May 8 in 2015 were commemorative ceremonies in Riga Brothers' cemetery, Salaspils Memorial – the former location of a Nazi concentration camp and Brothers' cemetery of Lestene – the burial site and memorial for soldiers who fought in the Latvian Legion ("Otrā pasaules kara", 2015). On May 9 there were events in both Riga and other cities but the most notable and widely attended was the annual event at the Victory Monument in Riga (ibid.).

During the May 8 events Latvian state officials made various statements that ranged from warrior to abnegator to pluralist. By constructing May 8 as a neutral commemoration day, the political elite was taking an abnegator stance on the memory conflicts that are related to WWII. A rather pluralistic position was voiced by President

Andris Bērziņš who already in 2012 invited to remember the victims of WWII on May 8 as "a suitable day for all war veterans to gather in a single commemorative event and together remember all the victims of Nazism and communism during the WWII" [21] ("Otrdien, 8. maijā", 2012). He also urged "…remembering the end of Second World War and commemorating its victims, to thank people who fought for this victory [over Nazism] and an opportunity to open a new page in world history"[22] (ibid.). In addition Bērziņš started a tradition for the highest state officials to attend the commemoration in Salaspils memorial as well as invited war veterans of both sides to meet at the commemorative event in Riga Brothers' cemetery on May 8. Earlier the veteran organization of the 130th Latvian riflemen corps (a formation of mainly ethnic Latvian soldiers within the Red Army) held their own, completely separate commemorative event in the Riga Brothers' cemetery just before the arrival of the highest public officials and the two events never coincided (Ločemele, Procevska & Zelče, 2011). In 2015 around 200 people had gathered at the commemoration and according to the media report war veterans had pinned medals and orders to their clothes, ribbons of Saint George but others – little Latvian flags thus showing that people holding different opinion have united in the commemoration ("Piemiņas pasākumā", 2015).

At the same time Bērziņš expressed expectations that marking 8th and 9th of May separately is a transition period that will change ("Bērziņš: 8. un 9. maija", 2012). In 2015 Bērziņš attempted to separate individual memories and individual participants of war from the deeds of totalitarian regimes, stating "[i]n the special situation of Latvia we have many soldiers who were forced to fight on both sides or a brother had to fight against a brother"[23] ("Prezidents: Brauciens", 2015). He also emphasises that the question on the outcome of WWII in Latvia is "more complicated than in any other place because Latvia suffered from both of the big powers"[24] (ibid., 2015). The emphasis on Latvia's unique situation during and after the war is also expressed by other actors. Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma stated in a speech in Salaspils memorial: "The war was a horror caused by totalitarian power and afterwards Latvia was unfree for long years. We condemn these totalitarian regimes – the Nazi as well as Soviet totalitarianism. And that we need to remember."[25] ("Latvijā piemin kara", 2015)

However, not all highest public officials chose the same approach. While the President and Prime Minister of Latvia acknowledged the suffering that occurred under

both totalitarian regimes and on both sides, the speaker of *Saeima* Ināra Mūrniece, member of the National Alliance, put a different emphasis and took a warrior stance, focusing exclusively on Latvian suffering under the Soviet occupation. She also chose to connect the memory of restoration of independence on May 4 in 1990 to the commemoration of 70 years since end of WWII, stating:

> 25 years ago we experienced an essential victory of justice over injustice and the resurrection of truth with the decision of the Supreme Council on the restoration of the Republic of Latvia that was forcibly interrupted by the Soviet occupation. And not every nation is able to restore a once lost country on the foundations that are as strong. Independence of Latvia was restored on the values of the Republic of November 18, 1918 – Latvian language, Latvian culture, love for our own land, people and own country. And Latvian people maintain the eternal values in the hardest circumstances. It is testified by our breaking away from the half-century long oppression and stagnation.[26] ("Ināra Mūrniece apmeklē", 2015)

These statements were made during a speech at the Lestene memorial and only acknowledges the Soviet occupation. Quite peculiar is the fact that considering the site of the speech – a memorial of soldiers who fought in the Latvian legion – there is no mention of the Nazi occupation. The second part of the speech referring to the foundations of the Latvian state also quite clearly excludes the part of Latvia's population of other ethnicities.

Regarding May 9 most Latvian political actors take an abnegator stance. A few remarks more pluralistic remarks express that everyone can mark either date on individual level and that war veterans and their relatives need to be paid due respect. Prime Minister Straujuma invited people to "tolerant and compassionate", attributing the memory conflicts over May 9 to "extremists" and recognizing different commemoration rituals:

> There are groups of extremists who always want to create provocations on May 9. On these dates [March] 16 and May 9, there are different groups of population and different emphases. Russian speakers historically mark Russian people's victory over fascism but for Latvia it is the beginning of occupation.[27] ("Straujuma 9. maijā aicina", 2015)

The wording of this comment is considerably accommodating of the Russian speaker narrative on Victory Day, allowing the two positions to co-exist. However, the tone and

wording of these remarks were not convincing and neither did the Prime Minister of the president engage in a discussion of history that would characterize mnemonic pluralists.

Representatives of National Alliance, in contrast, have been keen mnemonic warriors. Those political actors who express more pluralistic views or take abnegator stance have often been "attacked" by mnemonic warriors who feel that history is misrepresented. One of the central points of conflict is that these actors feel that recognizing the victims of both sides, the suffering of Latvians is neglected or not sufficiently acknowledged. As presented in the previous chapter, this was manifested by claims for official recognition of 16 March. Tolerance towards the Victory Day, invoked a comparison to March 16. For example, reacting to the statements of the Prime Minister, MP Edvīns Šņore, who is a historian and a film director, and one of the most outspoken MPs regarding 20th century history, expressed in an interview: "Of course in a coalition you have to search political compromises but there are things that are hard to accept. I personally cannot accept Unity's position on March 16. Call of the head of government Laimdota Straujuma on May 9 to be tolerant and compassionate is in stark contrast to what she usually says before March 16."[28] (Antonevičs, 2015) Šņore has expressed a strong warrior position in the previous years as well:

> Those [people going to the Victory monument in Riga on May 9] are people who have something to be grateful for to the USSR occupation. Without it they would not be here. May 9 in Latvia celebrates the occupant army that has only a decorative link to remembrance of the dead. The real essence of May 9 is a celebration of Russian imperial might with the *invincible army – liberator* as the central element. If it is understandable in Moscow, then in Riga it is a defiant demonstration of disrespect to this once occupied country and its indigenous population.[29] (Šņore, 2014)

His position delegitimizes both the Victory Day celebration and the people who perform it portraying them as belonging to Russia or the past of Soviet occupation with no place in present day Latvia.

Consolidation of a warrior position is also observable in the rhetoric of the Minister of Culture Dace Melbārde, another member of the National Alliance. She expressed her surprise that besides "the generation that immigrated to Latvia with concrete goals during the Soviet times" also young people come to the Victory monument

in Riga. She further poses a question of "what are these youth taught about the history and symbols if Latvia"[30] ("Melbārde: Jauniešu", 2015). She expresses hope that the young Russian speakers can be "taught" to identify with the Latvian state that was proclaimed in 1918 and restored in 1990. These statements present the two ways of remembering as mutually exclusive. Hence, any form of coexistence of two different memories, whereby people who celebrate May 9 as Victory Day could also celebrate Latvian national holidays, is perceived as impossible. They also show the positon held by Latvians that Victory Day belongs to the past.

The perceived incompatibility is also shown in that Victory Day is presented as the ideological opposite to European day. For example, the internet portal of the official periodical of the Latvian government features a commentary on May 9 by a historian Vilnis Purēns (2015) states: "On Europe Day - May 9 the founding of the European Union is marked as a symbol of a Europe that is new, peaceful and focused on society. In our region a part of society turns the tragedy of the Second World War into an impressive propaganda show."[31] Similar publication was featured in the official periodical also in the following year titled "Shuman versus Stalin". The text reads: "…Victory Day in its present form is the central celebration of the political views of Putin's Russia, sometimes called Putinism. In the first place this celebration is for anyone who is dissatisfied and disappointed in the liberal west."[32] (Sils, 2016) Victory Day in this text represents Latvia's past in the Soviet Union (as well as threat from present Russia) while European Day represents Latvia's present and future – returning back to its place in Europe. These two days are framed as a mutually exclusive dichotomy whereby the Victory Day celebration and often also the people celebrating it are seen as a threat to Latvia's freedom and its identity. Indeed, also in the official discourse on May 8, many political actors emphasise Latvia's place in Europe especially against the backdrop of the perception of external threat from Russia that has increased with the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. For example, Ināra Mūrniece proclaimed that "today when the threat of hybrid warfare is openly discussed in Europe, Latvia need to clearly acknowledge its western orientation"[33] ("Saeimas Priekšsēdētāja", 2015). Thus, the need to be a part of Europe and to secure Latvia's identity as a European country finds a strengthened expression in the context of the Ukraine crisis.

The conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea was a significant external factor that shaped the mnemonic narratives in 2014 and 2015. It has played a role in Latvian memory politics by invoking a fear of the past that could repeat (Wezel, 2016). On the one hand, political actors saw a threat of escalating the mnemonic conflict between Latvians and Russian speakers which lead to more actors taking pluralist and abnegator stances. Similarly as on March 16, political actors adopted more cautious positions also because Latvia assumed its presidency in the Council of the European Union in 2015 and memory conflicts could show the country in a negative light. For instance, the Citizenship, Committee of the *Saeima* on Migration and Social Cohesion issued a call to avoid provocations on March 16 and May 9. The committee called people to be responsible and tolerant to different ways of remembering the victims of WWII:

> Let us pay respect to the war veterans and the relatives of the fallen who want to join the veterans and commemorate their close ones. Let us remember the horrible circumstances in which the soldiers were separated from their families, injured, maimed or killed. We invite to remember the fallen, not to judge them. They did not start the war and they are not continuing it at present! We invite others not to continue this war too and not to use its consequences for selfish and provocative purposes.[34] (Saeima, 2015)

Importantly the call reads: "Inviting to choose May 8 as a common day for commemoration of the victims of World War II, we respect the wish of the veterans to commemorate their fallen fellow soldiers on either March 16 or May 9."[35] It also refers to strengthening "peace in Latvia with dignified commemorations of the victims of World War II regardless of where, when and on which side they were fighting and where and when we are remembering them in Latvia."[36] Similarly to the statements by Bērziņš and Straujuma, this text expresses a pluralist positions and disconnects individual participants of the commemorations from memory and history conflicts and the current politics. On the other hand, the more nationalistic political forces saw expansion of 'Russian imperialism' in the May 9 events that are threatening to rewrite the history. Hence, they found the events in Ukraine to be a reason for taking an even more radical warrior position.

Positions supporting Victory Day celebration were based on two arguments. The first argument places the victory over Nazism as a reference point to present day stability

and links any alternative narratives to the concerns over the rights of Russians and revival of Nazism. The second line of thought portrays Victory Day as a people's celebration with an emphasis on individual memories, thus attempting to rhetorically disconnect it from the Soviet regime or the present Russian politics.

The more radical "Russian" party Latvian Russian Union mostly employs the first argument. The leader of the Latvian Russian Union, a current Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Tatjana Ždanoka builds Russian speakers' identity around May 9 and portrays pluralism or other versions of history as aggression towards Russia and Russians. It also connects any alternative versions to rise of neo-Nazism, hence blocking debate in history.

> This May 9 is the 70th anniversary of the Victory. There are catastrophically few veterans remaining among us. The generation who survived the war, who bore its burden on their shoulders is passing away. I am talking about this change with anxiety because the living memory of witnesses in the public consciousness is replaced by scraps of impressions drawn from movies and newspapers. This is a dangerous moment, because the scale of the tragedy of the Second World War is becoming something abstract, and often embellished by artistic fiction and propaganda. The emphasis in assessing the perpetrators of the war and the role of the winners is shifting. Cases of diminishing of the role of the Red Army and the Soviet people in the defeat of Nazism are not uncommon. From the obsessive moral equalization of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, the bridge is gradually shifted to the rehabilitation and legalization of Nazism. But the main purpose of the revision of history is to find a theoretical and moral basis for a discriminatory, aggressive attitude towards modern Russia and the Russian communities in the EU.[37] (Ždanoka, 2015)

In this speech there is an attempt to securitize the memory of May 9. It asserts that the single "correct" memory is threatened by oblivion and other interpretations that are referred to as "propaganda". Ždanoka delegitimises other narratives as it is characteristic to mnemonic warriors. The speech also constructs the possible oblivion or reformulation of May 9 as a common threat to Russia and Russians and transfers the past to the present politics. Questioning May 9 is seen as an attack on ethnic Russians today.

In the recent years, Harmony has become a more important actor in supporting the Victory Day celebration in Riga. The party has gradually side-lined the Latvian Russian Union and its leaders. The identity of the Russian speakers and Victory Day as a part of it plays an important role in party's rhetoric. It is more tolerant to other versions of history, especially when those concern the level of individual memories of different groups. However, members of the party also link May 9 to present day events and the situation of Russian speakers in Latvia. Victory Day has entered official rhetoric more prominently because the leader of Harmony party and the mayor of Riga Nils Ušakovs attends the events every year and also does not avoid publicly defending the May 9 celebration. Latvian media have also repeatedly published information on the party's significant involvement in organizing and popularizing the Victory Day celebration via a foundation "9may.lv" and the foundation having received funds from Russia (e.g. "Ar «Saskaņu» saistītā", 2015) which created even more resistance towards the celebration among many ethnic Latvians.

Ušakovs's statements portray May 9 as "people's celebration" that is attended by masses of inhabitants of Latvia and commemoration of the war is based on individual memories of family members' experiences and Nazi atrocities that must not be forgotten. There is an attempt to portray the celebration at the Victory Memorial as innocent of politics or any further reaching consequences. His speech at the Victory Memorial in Riga in 2015 starts by stating "…Victory Day 9 May is the stories of my father and my grandmother. Those are both of my grandfathers who fought at the front… It is family's memory. Family's memory is not related to geopolitics, political environment, ideology or propaganda."[38] (Ušakovs, 2015)

The speech does acknowledge the repressive character of Stalinism (although not naming it directly) and the victims of two regimes but justifies the May 9 celebrations as the victory over the ultimate evil:

> 20th century was a time of terrible dictatorships and bloody regimes. In the past century we learned about such words as Holocaust, genocide, concentration camps, mass repressions, mass deportations. Many European peoples became victims of these regimes, including the Latvian people. We in Latvia know what deportations and repressions are and we always have to cherish the memory of the

> victims of all regimes but we have to remember that the Nazi regime was the absolute evil.[39] (ibid.)

His recognition of the suffering of Latvian people (yet, not ethnic Latvians in particular) is significant. It certainly reflects the cultural constraints that are around May 9 in Latvia and could be taken as an attempt at reconciliation of different memories. Moreover, in Ušakovs's speeches there is an emphasis on Victory Day being a celebration in Latvia disconnecting it from Russia proper and the Soviet Union and presenting it as something characteristic to Latvia: "Victory Day in Riga on May 9 – it is a Latvian celebration. Not a Soviet celebration. Not a Russian celebration. But exactly Latvian celebration because hundreds of thousands of Latvian citizens, patriots of their country mark it."[40] (Ušakovs, 2016) Another point is the emphasis on May 9 celebration not being a threat to Latvian statehood and a common future despite different opinions on history (ibid.; "Ušakovs: Cilvēki 9. maijā", 2015).

However, the mayor of Riga has also made more controversial statements such as "Without the destruction of Nazism, without the victory in World War II, today we would not have our restored country and we would not have the possibility to celebrate May 4 [Declaration on the Restoration of Re-Independence in 1990] and November 18 [Independence Day of Latvia]"[41] ("Ušakovs: Bez uzvaras", 2016). This peculiar attempt to connect the World War II victory to the later history of Latvia was evaluated as absurd and provocative in a commentary to the media by the Latvian political scientist Ivars Ījabs (ibid.). Yet, this points to a problem that one can read also in the other statements. Namely, portraying the Victory Day as a celebration for everybody demonstrates a disregard of the Latvian memory of occupation and loss of independence as a national tragedy. The narrative universalizes Victory Day celebration and reveals a discursive strategy where the alleged depoliticizing of the commemoration allows to vilify the ones who hold a different opinion as unnecessarily politicizing an innocent ritual. In this sense it employs and enforces ethnic alienation because it presents Victory Day as a uniting factor for Latvian Russians while this very celebration is outside the Latvian state official narrative. Ušakovs's is a warrior narrative also looking at the aspect that it represents the Soviet soldiers as nothing other than heroes and the events of 1945 as liberation from the Nazi without sufficient acknowledgement of other interpretations. Ušakovs's statements also fall under the Russian narrative of the Soviet Union having played an important role

in enabling the emergence of modern Europe (see Mälksoo, 2009). Ušakovs also connects the present to the past and mentions the situation in Ukraine but in a rather different light than most Latvian politicians do. He depicts it as a tragic occurrence of military conflict in Europe - something that the veterans of the Soviet army in WWII fought for not to repeat.

While Ždanoka in the quote above clearly founds her position on ethic alienation, Ušakovs stance is slightly different. Ušakovs's Victory Day narrative, rather than building on alienation, is trying to include May 9 in the Latvian public space. However, it happens without sufficient engagement with the ways of remembering that are accepted among ethnic Latvians. If the rhetoric is an attempt to normalize the Victory Day celebration in the Latvian public space and reconcile the conflicting memories, then it fails to accommodate or acknowledge the Latvian dominant narrative. Thus, it is a mnemonic warrior position. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense the "ethnic alienation narrative" expressed by Ušakovs when speaking about the community that celebrates May 9: "The state consistently ignores these people and after that it wonders about integration problems and blames the education system."[42] ("Ušakovs komentē", 2015) Likewise, ethnic alienation narrative is expressed by other members of Harmony, for example, Jānis Urbanovičs (2016), the head of Harmony's fraction in *Saeima*.

In 2012 a popular initiative on "restoration of the true Victory square" was started and it reached the parliament in 2016. This initiative was supported by the National Alliance, including its ministers and proposed to reconstruct the Victory Park according to the project that was created in 1930s ("Par Uzvaras pieminekļa", 2013; "Saeimas komisija", 2016). It was rejected by *Saeima* but, nevertheless, created tension between both sides. In relation to this initiative, Urbanovičs (2016) expressed resentment that the Russian minority has suppressed its own take on history: "Who knows, maybe the ones who were recruited in the Red Army themselves (and their relatives) take for granted the opinion that they are worse than the fellow nationals who fought on Hitler's side."[43] He also emphasizes the importance of Victory Day for the Russian ethnicity as sacred memories about the victims of the war. These mnemonic warrior statements are a response to what is deemed unjust suppression of the memory of Latvian Russians. Rhetorically they are very similar to the positon on March 16 voiced by the National

Alliance in relation to the Latvian legion. Thus, both sides see the recognition of the other as a threat to their own memory.

In sum, Harmony's rhetoric aims at acknowledgement of May 9 as a legitimate day of celebration in Latvia, something that would be unacceptable to most Latvians. Portraying it as a universal celebration, moreover, ignores the feelings that it may raise in many Latvians. Besides, Harmony's framing is consistent with how May 9 has evolved from commemoration to a more festival-like "people's celebration" in Russia and in parts of the former USSR (Procevska, 2011, p. 329). However, there are attempts to disconnect it from Russia and an emphasis on May 9 not being a threat to Latvian state which are addressing the fears that drive the antipathy among many ethnic Latvians against this commemoration ritual. At the same time Harmony's involvement in organization of May 9 celebration at the Victory monument in Riga is a consolidation of the Russian speaking minority around a narrative that is external to the Latvian state institutions and contributes to alienation rather than dialogue and integration. Hanovs (2016) warns that May 9 has become a platform for building alternative institutions to the state such as the Congress of Noncitizens which claim to represent the part of population that has been excluded and discriminated by the Latvian majority.

Taken together all the above mentioned positions on the end of WWII again constitute a fractured memory regime with three dominating positions. The first narrative is mostly expressed by Latvian centrist political parties like Unity and can be characterized as abnegator but has some pluralist features. The second is a warrior position that is voiced by more nationalistic Latvian political actors while the third is also a warrior stance that mainly characterizes Latvian Russian political actors. These three narratives are broken down according to Bernhard and Kubik's model in table 3.1. Thus within Latvian political forces present more varied positions. The warrior positions voiced by the Latvian Russian Union and Harmony express resentment with the state of affairs and link the May 9 celebration to rights and status of Russians in Latvia. Thus, they touch the more fundamental questions that relate to the identity of Latvian Russians. Even though these three types lead to a fractured memory regime, there are some nuances within these narratives that voice slightly more pluralistic attitudes and occasional acknowledgement of the other group, especially when individuals memories are concerned. In addition, some political actors like the Latvian President between 2011 and

2015 Andris Bērziņš have taken a pluralist stance and there is a rather neutral attitude towards May 8. Therefore, I also include a pluralist position in table 4.2 even though it is rather weak.

Table 4.2 Narratives on commemoration of the end of WWII

	Warriors I: Victimization of Latvians	**Warriors II: Victory over Nazism**	**Pluralists: acknowledging two positions**	**Abnegators: Commemorate end of WWII on May 8**
***Who* are the participants in memory politics?**	Latvians – the collective victims of Soviet occupation versus those who celebrate occupation of Latvia and who arrived here under Soviet occupation.	Those who want to celebrate victory over Nazism and commemorate their relatives versus the ones who try to deny them this possibility.	All of us who commemorate the victims of WWII that could be found on both sides.	Those (radicals) who use memory battles for political manipulations.
***What* is the predominant vision of collective memory?**	Latvians as victims of Soviet and Nazi occupations. Red Army was an occupying force. Latvia marks end of WWII on May 8 as the rest of Europe.	May 9 was as the victory over Nazism that should be celebrated by everyone. WWII in Latvia ended with liberation from Nazism.	There are different interpretations but they all see WWII as a tragedy and recognize victims of totalitarian regimes on both sides. Both May 8 and May 9 can be marked.	There is no need to discuss the past. The end of WWII should be commemorated on May 8 while May 9 is European Day and these should not be politicized.

***When* are the events to be remembered happening?**	Latvian state is still struggling with the consequences of occupation. The present is seen through the lens of occupation and restoration of independence.	Victory Day is connected to rights of Russian speakers in present Latvia.	There are different reference points in the past for different groups of society.	It is unimportant. The present is more important than the past.
***How* is the mnemonic contest to be carried out? What are the culturally prescribed strategies of action?**	It is simply wrong to celebrate Victory Day because the true version of history is that Latvia was occupied by a brutal regime.	The right to celebrate May 9 must be defended against illegitimate attempts to rewrite history.	Both groups need to respect each other's memory. History and memory should be more widely discussed, presenting different positions.	Official commemoration is May 8. Those who want can mark May 9 but engaging in discussions is unproductive and even dangerous.
***Why* is it worthwhile or not worthwhile to engage in mnemonic struggle?**	Latvian state has regained its independence for Latvians to enjoy freedom again. May 9 is part of the past wrongs and a tool of present Russia's soft power. Thus, it poses a threat to Latvia and Latvians.	May 9 is important for Latvian Russian speakers. The right to celebrate May 9 is part of the struggle for improving the rights of Russian speakers in Latvia.	The mnemonic conflict has negative impact on social cohesion and poses a threat of escalation.	Engaging in memory politics will just exacerbate the conflict.

Which political actors voice the position?	Only actors representing "Latvian" political forces.	Only actors representing Russian speakers. However, slight variation exists in the positions within the group.	Elements of this narrative can be found among politicians representing both ethnolinguistic groups.	Abnegator position regarding May 9 is mainly taken by Latvian actors.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.3. Discussion of results

Summarizing the results, ethnic cleavage indeed dominates the mnemonic field of Latvia regarding WWII commemoration. Yet, in line with some of the earlier research (Cheskin, 2012; Kaprāns & Procevska, 2013), analysis of the commemorative rituals of the Legionnaire Day and the remembrance of the end of WWII suggests that differences in mnemonic positions exist not only between but also within both ethnolinguistic groups. Both days have also departed from their initial meaning of commemoration of the participants and victims of WWII. In the rhetoric of politicians they are connected to such present issues as national or ethnic identity, national security, ethnic alienation, minority rights and integration. Bernhard and Kubik (2014) state that collective memory is constructed by a "purposive use of selective remembering and forgetting" and that can also be observed in the official memory narratives put forward by political actors in Latvia (p. 8). The actors pick certain moments or facts that best fit their claim to power.

Both groups present more moderate and more radical mnemonic positions. The leading government party during the analysed timeframe Unity and its Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma have taken more of a pluralist stance regarding May 8 and an abnegator stance on May 9 as well as March 16. President Bērziņš also attempted to reconcile both groups and construct May 8 as a common remembrance day. National Alliance, in contrast, are clear warriors in relation to all mnemonic events. On the other side of the spectrum, Harmony is mostly an abnegator on the questions that are essential to Latvian narrative of history but becomes a warrior in relation to May 9 and issues that concern the identity of Russian speakers. This can be explained by the fact that "attacks" on Latvian memory would only distance the party even more from ethnic Latvian voters. Further, Kaprāns and Saulītis (2017) show that the majority of ethnic Russians do not want to engage in mnemonic conflicts while Victory Day rituals – and thus also the politicians' support to it - is essential for the Russian speaking electorate. Yet, mnemonic actors with very different positions can be found within the Harmony too. The radical positions presented by Latvian Russian Union are becoming more marginalized. However, they still find political representation. In addition, not all actors correspond to the ideal types. For example, even though Unity's politicians have expressed acceptance of differences in how various groups interpret history, their overall position is still more

warrior-like. They are seeing history in ethnic terms where the point of reference is the Latvian unique suffering under two totalitarian regimes. Similarly, also Harmony's positions include some pluralistic points while overall the rhetoric is dominated by ethnic alienation and support to May 9.

The discourse of Latvian political actors presents the country and Latvian people as negatively chosen. Latvians perceive themselves as a "threatened majority" (Zepa et al., 2005) even 25 years after the restoration of independence and claim "exclusive rights" to traumatic experience (Hanovs, 2012). Such ardent reaction of Latvian political actors against Victory Day as the proposal to remove Victory monument signals about insecurity about their own collective memory. Likewise, the social memory survey shows that generally Latvians are less likely than Russian speakers to accept different interpretations of history (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017) that might also indicate a greater insecurity. In line with Assmann (2004) who states that small nations build their mnemonic narrative around defeats and a "victim identity" (p. 27), Latvian politicians emphasise the suffering under two occupations and the nation's heroic resistance. This position with the ethnic prism attached to it enables to exclude other narratives of history.

The political actors representing Russian speakers, in contrast, build their narratives on the interpretations that resonate within the minority group. More than 60% of Russian speakers celebrate Victory Day (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017) and it also has become an important counter-position to the official state narratives which create feeling of alienation among Russian speakers (Cheskin, 2012). In the political rhetoric this alienation is used to unify the Russian speakers, and the Victory Day itself is connected to the rights of ethnic minorities. Latvian Russian Union rhetorically connects Latvia's Russian speaker community to Russia and all Russians abroad. Harmony, even though a less militant warrior and often an abnegator, has not been building a more "Latvian" or European narrative either and the May 9 celebration in Riga has largely assumed a character that resembles the Victory Day celebration in Russia. However, Cheskin (2012) highlights some indications of integration of the Latvian official history narratives in party's rhetoric. He states that Harmony has changed its views of history due to "top-down pressures" while politicians operating exclusively in Russian environment would not have a reason to do so. He further argues that "because HC wish to access political power in Latvia they have adopted more conciliatory positions which find greater accord

with the official memory-myths of the Latvian state" (p. 579). This is demonstrated, for instance, by the recognition of repressions carried out by the Soviet regime.

Looking at the two commemorative days examined in this study, May 9 certainly presents a more fundamental mnemonic fissure. While the memory of the Latvian Legion is still unsettled, March 16 is somewhat losing its prominence. The results of this study show that March 16 is increasingly abnegated by Latvian politicians apart from members of the National Alliance. Abnegator position taken by other leading Latvian political forces can be explained by "purposive forgetting" (Bernhard & Kubik, p. 14). The commemoration contradicts Latvia's European orientation and is perceived as a source of provocations. Latvian politicians are unwilling to discuss the time of Nazi occupation similarly as they are unlikely to engage in deeper analysis of collaboration with the Soviet regime. Moreover, public opinion surveys also show fatigue towards the annual controversies around the legionnaire march and indicate that attitudes towards March 16 among Latvians are not unanimous (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017). Warrior position does not have the potential to bring significant political benefits because the issue is salient only to a part of Latvian society. In addition, attitudes towards March 16 show that the date is not as essential to ethnic Latvians as May 9 is for Russian speakers even though both days are often linked in political rhetoric. In contrast to May 9, the Legionnaire Day does not concern such questions as recognition of occupation and is not as crucial to Latvian national identity as May 9 has become for Russian speakers. Therefore, political elites find it easier to take an abnegator stance on it.

At the same time, the abnegator stance of mainstream Latvian politicians in 2014 created a vacuum and a lack of a balanced debate on the role of the Latvian legion. This was filled by the National Alliance which is an ardent promoter and exploiter of the Legionnaire hero myth described in detail by Zelče (2011). Their willingness to explain the rest of the world the truth about the Latvian legion perfectly matches Bernhard and Kubik's description of mnemonic warriors. In line with Assmann (2004) they construct the narrative around a "tragic hero" who unsuccessfully fought for independence (p. 27) and were later unjustly repressed. Another argument that cautions against the abnegation of March 16, as pointed out by Cheskin (2012), is that avoidance to talk about the Latvian Legion risks that Russian speakers can become even more heavily reliant on the positions expressed in the Russian media if information comes only from these sources.

Regarding May 9, the most important question for reconciliation is whether or not the two narratives – liberation from Nazism and occupation - can coexist. Some political discourse includes recognition of individual memories and the right to commemorate the victims on both sides. This is also in line with the public opinion demonstrating that both ethnolinguistic groups are more tolerant to individual veterans. There is within group variation in how Red Army soldiers and Latvian legionnaires are perceived and rather large proportions of both Latvians and Russian speakers tend to see all WWII participants as victims or both victims and heroes (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017).

However, when it comes to the clash of occupation and liberation narratives characterizing the end of WWII, mnemonic reconciliation is much more difficult. On the one hand, as Pettai (2016) argues, questioning the occupation fact also questions the legitimacy of the restoration of independence. For all Latvian political actors occupation and re-establishment of independence are the basis of the current state. Therefore, the narratives that deny occupation are in any case incompatible with this official position. Even though some Latvians are ready to be pluralistic to a certain extent, they are warriors if the occupation question is at stake. On the other hand, recognizing the fact that the Red army simply occupied Latvia at the end of WWII for Russian speakers means that they "have no morally and legally justifiable place in modern Latvia" (Cheskin, 2012, p. 569). On the basis of his survey results, Cheskin proposes that it is easier for the Russian speakers to accept a narrative that includes occupation and liberation simultaneously (ibid.). However, such a narrative would be contradictory and might not initially resonate with the perceptions of either groups because the fundamental understandings of occupation and liberation are incompatible. Such a position would be unlikely to bring benefit to political actors.

Solidifying the Russian-speaker historical narrative around Victory Day has elicited defensive reactions among Latvian political forces. This was amplified by the armed conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. While mainstream Latvian political elites showed more tolerance and became mnemonic abnegators in order to avoid tensions, nationalistically-minded political actors saw it as an opportunity to take even fiercer warrior positions and portray the moderate parties as weak and incapable of defending national history. They also denounced the Europeanization of Latvian memory at the same time striving to reaffirm Latvia's place in Europe and contrasting it to Russia

and Victory Day celebration as the "other" and the non-European. National Alliance also reinforced ethnic tensions in their mnemonic positions. The ethnic composition of Latvia was framed as one of the unjust consequences of the Soviet occupation. National Alliance is currently one of the largest and most stable political parties and it is also a part of the ruling coalition. Hence, the narratives that it promotes cannot be considered marginal but they are actually shared by a sizeable part of Latvian population with the party occupying 21 seats in the 100 seat parliament.

Another question is to what extent the construction of May 8 as a neutral commemoration date has been successful. Bernhard and Kubik (2014) state that "[e]ffective positions are those that are consonant with the cultural terrain of target groups, those that resonate with their images of the past" (p. 12). May 8 is certainly a more inclusive commemorative day than May 9 in a sense that it fits into the Latvian narrative of two equally condemnable totalitarian regimes, simultaneously marking the defeat of Nazism in Europe that is important for Russian speakers. Yet, the formal commemorations on May 8 and the initiative of Bērziņš to hold a meeting of the few still alive war veterans have not extended to wider society. A possible explanation is that May 8 does not resonate with either of the groups or it even conflicts with the memories of both. Furthermore, warrior positions in general are much louder and more solidly formulated than the attempts at reconciliation. In line with Bernhard and Kubik (2014), even a single mnemonic warrior creates a fractured memory regime. Also, neither PM Straujuma nor President Bērziņš possessed the ability to present their positions eloquently and convincingly but rather seemed to be doubting between different interpretations of history themselves.

This lack of support to a common ritual reflects "cultural constraints" (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014) that limit mnemonic actors' operation in the field of official memory. In Latvia these constraints are first of all the ethnic divide itself and second the two different "repertoires" of how history can be interpreted that arise from this divide. Mälksoo (2009) has argued that pluralistic, democratic memory is the only way to settle mnemonic conflicts because "attempts to invent a shared past only tend to provoke more or less violent expressions of difference" (p. 673). Kattago (2010) similarly suggests that the only way to overcome the mnemonic divisions is to resort to a pluralistic understanding of memory in a truly democratic public space. In her opinion, democracy is not

characterized by consensus but the possibility to disagree while seeking a single truth about the past means silencing those who disagree. Nonetheless, also mnemonic pluralism requires acceptance and recognition of different visions of history on the basis of common values which as the March 16 and May 9 events present, is not the case in the Latvian political environment.

5.1. Conclusion

This thesis is a case study of memory politics in Latvia, employing the theoretical framework of Berhard and Kubik (2014). The empirical case of this study is the commemorative rituals of March 16, May 8 and May 9 that represent mnemonic cleavages in WWII memory between Latvians and the country's sizeable Russian speaking minority. The analysis presented in this study looks at how the diversity of mnemonic positions within both ethno-linguistic groups is reflected in the political discourse or in Bernhard and Kubik's (2014) terms, how the memory regime within both ethnolinguistic groups is constituted. Next to that, the existence of interpretations of history that both sides accept and which present opportunities of mnemonic reconciliation is also examined.

The overall conclusion is that both March 16 and May 9 present a fractured memory regime in Latvia. The mnemonic cleavages are drawn along ethnic lines but within the ethnolinguistic groups different positions were found as well. Nonetheless, political forces employ warrior positions that constitute the mnemonic division in Latvians and ethnic Russians. Despite that several mnemonic abnegators and pluralists were found among both Latvian and minority political forces, each of the groups also presented a strong warrior narrative that is hostile to the positions of the other group. In other words, the parties that are designated as "Russian" support and promote different history narratives than the "Latvian" parties. Moreover, the narratives supported by the Russian speakers and their political representatives to a significant extent oppose the official state position, making the cleavage more fundamental. Yet, while May 9 is becoming a point of more intense mnemonic contestation and gaining more prominence, March 16 is increasingly abnegated by major political forces.

In this analysis, few unifying positons were found. Apart from the common view that WWII brought suffering and there were victims among all ethnicities, the mnemonic

narratives are contradictory. A common position on March 16 is distancing from it and leaving the commemoration to the social and individual level of memory. May 9, in contrast, is becoming increasingly important for the Russian speaking minority and is gaining more support. These developments create insecurity among Latvians, causing some radicalization around Latvian national positions.

Mnemonic pluralism is often seen as the preferable way of avoiding mnemonic conflicts in Latvia. Nevertheless, it is unclear if Latvia's society is ready and willing to engage in mnemonic discussions and deeper assessment of 20th century history. The social memory survey has shown that the majority of both Latvians and Russian speakers rather prefer sweeping memory issues under the rug (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017). The analysis presented in this study demonstrated that Latvian mainstream political elites often also prefer this position. If more and more political actors choose abnegator position and also society shows fatigue of mnemonic conflicts, employing memory for political purposed might become unprofitable.

Yet, whether it is the best solution to mnemonic conflicts and if a healthy, democratic society can be built without a proper settlement with its own past, remains a question. Besides, silencing of the conflict is more likely to happen regarding March 16 than May 9 which enjoys wide support in the Russophone segment of Latvian society. Further research should be done on how the top-down narratives proliferate in social memory as well as what the attitudes towards other commemorative days are. It could reveal if, for example, November 18, the Proclamation Day of the Republic of Latvia which is seen rather positively by the ethnic non-Latvians (Kaprāns & Saulītis, 2017), could serve a unifying commemorative practice.

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APPENDIX I

Quotes from primary sources in original language

[1] “Latvijas valsts pamatā ir nācija ar kopīgu savas vēstures izpratni, cieņu pret latviešu valodu un kultūru.”

[2] “Latvijā un Rīgā visi godās latviešu kultūras tradīcijas, nacionālos simbolus un latviešu karavīru piemiņu.”

[3] “Mēs uzstājamies pret jebkurām neonacisma izpausmēm un Otrā pasaules kara rezultātu revīzijas. Antihitleriskās koalīcijas veterāniem ir jāsaņem oficiālais statuss un atvieglojumi.”

[4] “Mums ir jāskatās arī mūsu sadarbības partneru ES valstu reakcija par to, ka valdība varētu atbalstīt nacismu vai fašismu, ko Eiropa uztver ļoti sāpīgi.”

[5] “…necilvēcīgas represijas un nepārtrauktu teroru, gan okupējošā Vācijas nacistiskā vara, gan arī PSRS totalitārā vara, pretēji starptautiskajām tiesībām, nelikumīgi mobilizēja vai piespieda daudzus Latvijas iedzīvotājus pievienoties vienas vai otras valsts bruņotajiem spēkiem"

[6] "Valdības pārstāvji un koalīcijas partijas, esam Latvijas patrioti un respektējam visus karā kritušos karavīrus. Latvijā oficiālā karavīru piemiņas diena ir 11.novembris, nevis 16.marts. Tāpēc visi, kas vēlas izrādīt cieņu kritušajiem karavīriem 16.martā, var doties apmeklēt Lestenes brāļu kapus, tādejādi nepakļaujot Latviju nevajadzīgiem provokācijas draudiem,"

[7] “Šis pasākums, kā zināms, jau sen ir pārvērties par pasākumu, kur abu pušu radikāļi cenšas viens ar otru konfrontēt, un es uzskatu, ka ministru klātbūtne tur it pilnīgi lieka. Tas tikai šo konfrontāciju var saasināt un tieši tā, to nesaprot ne austrumos, ne rietumos”

[8] “16. marta gājiena jēga ir ne tikai paust skaidru nosodījumu 2 totalitāriem pagātnes režīmiem, kas ir nodarījuši milzum daudz posta Latvijai un pasaulei, bet arī vērsties pret fašisma atdzimšanu šodien.”

[9] “Katrā ziņā šogad 16. marts nebūs tikai datums, kurā pieminam kritušos par Latviju. Tas būs protests pret agresori Krieviju, un tas nozīmē, ka nepieciešamība piedalīties 16. marta pasākumos ir daudz lielāka nekā citus gadus.”

[10] “Tā vietā, lai diplomāti pasaulei skaidrotu latviešu leģiona vēsturi, valsts ir netieši padevusies Krievijas propagandai.”

[11] “Cīnītāji pret okupācijas varām nacistu un staļinistu laikā saglabāja Latvijas neatkarības ideju. Viņi šo ideju arī nodeva nākamajām paaudzēm. Bez šī procesa mums nebūtu tādas Atmodas, kāda mums bija, un varbūt nebūtu arī atjaunota Latvijas Republika, bet valsts, kura atdalījusies no PSRS.”

[12] “Histēriskā vēršanās pret 16. martu tik ļoti kontrastē ar atbildīgo personu klusēšanu 9. maija sakarībā, ka dažbrīd liekas, darīšana ir nevis ar neatkarīgas Latvijas valdību, bet ar LPSR pašpārvaldi. [...] Ukrainā nebija nedz 16.marta, nedz “pazemojošu” naturalizācijas eksāmenu, nedz nepilsoņu un vienalga Krievija atrada iemeslu, lai ievestu tur savu karaspēku. Pie tam skandējot to pašu, ko vienmēr – cīņu pret fašismu.”

[13] “Pakļaujoties Krievijas un tās piektās kolonnas spiedienam, Saeima 2000. gadā svītroja 16. martu no atzīmējamo dienu saraksta, vienlaikus pret militārpersonām un amatpersonām, kuras tomēr uzdrošinājās 16. martā kopā ar leģionāriem iet atceres gājienā līdz Brīvības piemineklim, izvēršot represijas un kauninašanas kampaņu “Latvijas starptautiskā tēla diskreditēšanā”.”

[14] "Mūsu tēvi karoja pret nacismu, bet tagad tos, kas bija kolaboranti, nosauc par varoņiem. Tas rada sašķeltību sabiedrībā. Vēstures pārskatīšana tagad notiek visur un tas ir bīstami sabiedrībai."

[15] “В Латвии, к сожалению, существует героизация легионеров Ваффен СС, которых чествуют как борцов за независимость Латвии, хотя общеизвестно, что они давали клятву лично Адольфу Гитлеру и сражались за Третий Рейх, а не свободу Латвии.”

[16] "Piemēram, nenosodot latviešu leģionāru gājienu 16.martā, 9.maija svinības pārvērstas par aģitācijas šovu, kam nav ideoloģiskā piepildījuma.”

[17]“Политикам проще говорить об угрозе Москвы или об угрозе возрождения фашизма, чем о социальных делах.”

[18] “Кстати, в легион призывали граждан Латвии не по национальному признаку, а по паспорту. Из Латгалии очень много русских и русскоязычных призвали.”

[19] “…были страшные репрессии против жителей Латвии, и отношение к большевистской власти было, мягко выражаясь, негативным. Поэтому какая-то часть пошла в Легион добровольно, но абсолютное большинство было мобилизовано, и люди могли выбирать между Легионом и концлагерем.”

[20] “Более того, больше миллиона граждан Советского Союза воевали на стороне немцев. У меня мама родом из Краснодара, и там из казаков было сформировано подразделение из 250 000 человек, которые воевали на стороне немцев. Это больше, чем латышей, литовцев и эстонцев вместе взятых. Поэтому все сложно. Через латышский легион практически у каждого в Латвии кто-нибудь из родственников прошел. Это часть семейной памяти. Но использовать людей, которые стали жертвами истории, в современной политике, чтобы заработать какие-то очки, недопустимо.”

[21] "...tieši 8.maijs ir atbilstoša diena, lai izteiktu aicinājumu visiem Latvijas kara veterāniem pulcēties vienotā piemiņas pasākumā un kopīgi pieminēt visus nacisma un komunisma upurus Otrajā pasaules karā.”

[22] “8.maijā, atceroties Otrā pasaules kara beigas un pieminot tā upurus, šajā dienā teiksim paldies cilvēkiem, kuri izcīnīja šo uzvaru un deva iespēju atvērt jaunu lappusi pasaules vēsturē.”

[23] “Jo Latvijas sevišķajā situācijā ir daudzi karotāji, kas ir bijuši spiesti abās pusēs karot vai karot brālis pret brāli.”

[24] “Tāpēc es gribu uzsvērt, ka šis ir ļoti sarežģīts jautājums un šeit Latvijā viņš ir vēl sarežģītāks kā jebkurā citā vietā, jo Latvijas cieta no abām lielvarām.”

[25] “Karš bija vienas totalitāras varas izraisīts ārprāts, un pēc tam Latvijai bija ilgi gadi nebrīvē. Mēs nosodām abas šīs totalitārās varas – gan nacistus, gan padomju totalitārismu. Un tas mums jāatceras.”

[26] “Pirms 25 gadiem mēs pieredzējām principiālu taisnīguma uzvaru pār netaisnību un patiesības augšāmcelšanos. Ar Augstākās padeomes pieņemto lēmumu par Latvijas Republikas neatkarības atjaunošanu, kuru varmācīgi bija pārtraukusi padaomju okupācija. Un ne jau katra nācija reiz zaudētu valsti spēj no jauna atjaunot uz tikpat stipriem pamatiem. Latvijas valsts neatkarība tika atjaunota uz 1918. gada 18. novembra republikas pamatos liktajām vērtībām: latviešu valoda, latviešu kultūra, mīlestība pret savu zemi, tautu un savu valsti. Un latviešu tauta saglabā mūžīgās vērtības visgrūtākajos apstākļos. Par to liecina mūsu izraušanās no pusgadsimtu ilgās apspiestības un stagnācijas.”

[27] “Ir ekstrēmistu grupas, kas 9.maijā vienmēr grib izraisīt provokācijas. Šajos datumos - 16.[martā] un 9.maijā - ir dažādas iedzīvotāju grupas un dažādi uzsvari. Krievvalodīgie

iedzīvotāji vēsturiski atzīmē krievu tautas uzvaru pār fašismu, bet Latvijai tā ir okupācijas sākšana."

[28] "Protams, koalīcijā nākas meklēt politiskus kompromisus, taču ir lietas, ko grūti pieņemt. Man personīgi nav pieņemama "Vienotības" attieksme pret 16. martu. Valdības vadītājas Laimdotas Straujumas aicinājums 9. maijā "būt tolerantiem un iejūtīgiem" ļoti kontrastē ar to, ko viņa parasti runā pirms 16. marta."

[29]"Tie ir cilvēki, kuriem ir par ko pateikties PSRS okupācijai. Bez tās viņi šeit vispār nebūtu. […] 9. maijs Latvijā ir PSRS okupācijas armijas godināšanas svētki, kuriem ar mirušo piemiņu ir tikai dekoratīvs sakars. Īstā 9. maija būtība ir Krievijas impēriskās varenības svinēšana ar «neuzvaramo armiju – atbrīvotāju» kā centrālo elementu. Ja Maskavā tas ir pašsaprotami, tad Rīgā tā ir izaicinoša necieņas demonstrācija pret šo savulaik okupēto valsti un tās pamatiedzīvotājiem."

[30] "To paaudzi, kas te ar konkrētiem mērķiem ieceļoja padomju laikā, mēs neizmainīsim, taču nav saprotams, kāpēc pie pieminekļa nāk jaunieši. Tad ir jautājums - ko šiem jauniešiem māca par Latvijas vēsturi un simboliem? Ģimene ir viens, taču otrs ir valstiskā audzināšana skolās."

[31] "9.maijā Eiropas dienā kā jaunas, mierīgas un uz sadarbību orientētas Eiropas simbols tiek atzīmēta Eiropas Savienības pamatu likšana. Mūsu platuma grādos daļā sabiedrības Otrā pasaules kara traģēdija tiek pārvērsta iespaidīgā propagandas izrādē."

[32] "Turpretī Uzvaras diena tās mūsdienu izpausmē ir Putina Krievijas un politisko uzskatu kopuma, kuru dažkārt pieņemts dēvēt par putinismu, centrālie svētki. Primāri šie svētki ir domāti Putina Krievijas pavalstniekiem un etniskajiem krieviem ārpus Krievijas, bet sekundāri – ikvienam, kurš ir neapmierināts un vīlies liberālajos Rietumos.

[33] "Šodien, kad par hibrīdkara draudiem atklāti runā Eiropā, Latvijai skaidri jāapzinās sava rietumnieciskā orientācija."

[34] "Cienīsim kara veterānus, kuri vēlas pieminēt savus mirušos biedrus bez naida celšanas šobrīd. Cienīsim arī kara veterānu un kritušo tuviniekus, kuri vēlas kara veterāniem piebiedroties un pieminēt savējos. Atcerēsimies tos baigos apstākļus, kuros karavīri tika šķirti no savām ģimenēm, ievainoti, sakropļoti un nonāvēti. Aicinām pieminēt karā cietušos, nevis viņus nosodīt. Viņi neuzsāka karu un neturpina to tagad! Aicinām arī visus citus neturpināt šo karu un neizmantot tā sekas savtīgiem un provokatīviem nolūkiem."

[35] “Aicinot par kopīgu dienu Otrā pasaules kara upuru atcerei izvēlēties 8. maiju, mēs respektējam kara veterānu vēlmi savus kritušos biedrus atsevišķi pieminēt arī 16. martā un 9. maijā.”

[36] “Stiprināsim mieru Latvijā ar svētsvinīgiem Otrajā pasaules karā kritušo karavīru piemiņas brīžiem – neatkarīgi no tā, kur, kad un kurā pusē viņi cīnījušies un kur un kad viņus tagad Latvijā pieminam.”

[37] “Нынешнее 9 мая — это день 70-летия Победы. Ветеранов остается среди нас катастрофически мало. Уходит из жизни поколение, пережившие войну, вынесшее на своих плечах все ее тяготы. Я с тревогой говорю об этой смене, ибо живая память свидетелей в общественном сознании замещается обрывками впечатлений, почерпнутых из кино и газет. Это опасный момент, поскольку масштаб трагедии Второй мировой войны становится чем-то отвлеченным, а зачастую и приукрашенным за счет художественного вымысла и пропаганды. Смещаются акценты в оценке виновников войны и роли победителей. Нередки случаи уничижения роли Красной Армии и советского народа в разгроме нацизма. Новым стандартом для стран Восточной Европы становится недоброжелательное отношение к памяти советских солдат, воевавших с нацизмом. От навязчивого морального уравнивания нацисткой Германии и советской России постепенно перебрасывается мостик к реабилитации и легализации нацизма. Но главной целью ревизии истории является подведение теоретической и моральной базы под дискриминационное, агрессивное отношение к современной России и русским общинам в ЕС.”

[38] “Для меня 9 мая, День Победы 9 мая это рассказы моей бабушки и моего отца. Это оба моих деда, которые воевали на фронте. […] Эта память моей семьи. Семейная память не зависит от политической конъюнктуры, геополитической ситуации или идеологической пропаганды.”

[39] “20-ый век был временем страшных диктатур и кровавых режимов. Именно в прошлом веке мы узнали такие слова как Холокост, геноцид, концентрационные лагеря. Массовые репрессии, массовые депортации. Многие народы стали жертвами этих режимов. Среди них и народ Латвии. Мы в Латвии не понаслышке знаем, что такое репрессии и депортации. Мы всегда должны чтить память жертв

всех режимов. Но при этом мы должны помнить о том, что режим нацистский был абсолютным злом.”

[40] “День Победы в Риге 9 мая — это латвийский праздник! Не советский праздник. Не российский праздник. А именно латвийский праздник, потому что его отмечают сотни тысяч граждан Латвии, патриотов своей страны.”

[41] “Bez nacisma sagrāves, bez uzvaras Otrajā pasaules karā mums šodien nebūtu arī atjaunotas valsts, nebūtu iespējas svinēt 4.maiju un 18.novembri. Tāpēc mēs vienmēr pieminēsim jūsu varoņdarbu.”

[42] "Valsts šos cilvēkus konsekventi ignorē un pēc tam brīnās par integrācijas neveiksmēm, vainojot izglītības sistēmu."

[43] “Kas zina, varbūt tie, kuri tika rekrutēti Sarkanajā armijā, paši (un viņu radi) jau kā pašsaprotamu ir pieņēmuši viedokli, ka ir sliktāki nekā Hitlera pusē karojošie tautieši?”