National Identities and Foreign Policy in the European Union

The Russia Policy of Germany, Poland and Finland

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Chapter One

Introduction: Identity, Memory and Russia as Europe's Other

This book explores the relationship between national identities and foreign policy discourses concerning Russia in selected member states of the European Union (EU). In doing so, it builds on previous studies that focused on European and national identities and the role of external factors in the process of identity construction. An increasingly large body of European Studies literature has explored the emergence of a shared European identity (see Bayley and Williams 2012; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Herrmann *et al.* 2004; Risse 2010). These works generally argue that European identity is, at best, still developing next to national identities. Following Willfried Spohn's (2005: 2) categorisation, three main perspectives can be identified in the literature. The first sees European identity as a weak addendum to strong national identities. The second assumes that European identity will unfold in the long run and restructure national identities through their gradual Europeanisation. The third hypothesises the future emergence of a variable mix of European and national identities. All three perspectives agree on the current dominance of national identities over a still weak European identity.

As these initial observations suggest, national identities play an important role in Europe and may provide a key to understanding European politics. Scholars studying nationalism have argued that we are unlikely to see the transcendence of national identities by a strong European identity (Smith 1996a: 363). Their colleagues working on memory politics, a domain that is very close to and partly overlaps with identity studies, have come to similar conclusions in their assessments of the prospects for a common European memory: national discourses are pervasive in collective memory and can scarcely be reconciled with a shared European discourse (Bell 2006: 16; Jarausch and Lindenberger 2007: 1). This is not surprising, as nation-states have a much longer history than European institutions. Linguistic, historical and cultural differences contribute to the endurance of national identities and of political constructions that draw their legitimacy from national communities.

The focus on the national level in this book should not lead to the assumption that the concept of European identity can simply be dismissed. A feeling of attachment to Europe and to the political structures of the EU is observable among both European elites and citizens, however weak and inconsistent it might be (see Standard Eurobarometer 83: 112, 123). The creation of a common European market, the removal of barriers to the free movement of citizens and numerous transnational schemes have contributed to its emergence. However, as most of the relevant scholarly literature argues, in Europe national identities and memories

are still stronger than transnational ones. Studying national identities is thus important to understand both the dilemmas surrounding European identity and, most importantly, current European politics.

Social constructivist literature has highlighted the strong relationship between national identity and foreign policy discourses.[1] This book applies a social constructivist theoretical model to examine this relationship in three European states – Germany, Poland and Finland – and assess the prospects for a shared European foreign policy discourse concerning Russia. The key argument is that divergent national foreign policy approaches to Russia are the result of the different ways in which the country's national identity was constructed. However, the analysis also shows that national identity is malleable and a country's leaders can reformulate dominant narratives in order to achieve particular foreign policy goals. It is argued that national discourses on Russia can be reconciled if divisive identity narratives are marginalised and common foreign policy goals are pursued.

Relations with Russia have been chosen as a litmus test for a shared European foreign policy discourse because they have proven to be one of the most divisive issues among European Union countries (Cadier 2014; Casier 2011; David and Romanova 2015; David *et al.*, 2011, 2013; Gromyko 2015; Haukkala 2010a, 2015; Korosteleva 2016; Nitoiu 2016; Romanova 2016). In 2007, former EU trade commissioner Peter Mandelson stated that 'no other country reveals our differences as does Russia' (cited in Kagan 2008: 14). A decade later, such divisions continue to exist and are reflected in the different stances of EU member states concerning the future of relations with Russia after the Ukraine crisis (Emmott 2016; Romanova 2016; Siddi 2016a). Russia is the EU's largest neighbour, a key energy supplier and an essential, though often very controversial, factor in the European security architecture. As highlighted by the profound crisis that erupted in Ukraine in the autumn of 2013, the European Union and its member states cannot guarantee the stability of their eastern neighbours without taking Russia into account as a geopolitical factor. Furthermore, the political system built by post-Soviet Russian leaders challenges some of the European Union's founding values, particularly in the field of democracy and human rights (see Treaty on European Union Article 2; Shiraev 2013).[2]

Relations with Russia are a test for the very idea of a united EU foreign policy because they have traditionally been based on a bilateral, national dimension. The most frequent explanations for this bilateralism refer to the different economic interests and security concerns of EU member states, as well as to Russia's preference for dealing with European countries separately (see David *et al.* 2011: 183–4; Schmidt-Felzmann 2011). This book proposes an alternative understanding of the relations of the EU and its member states with Russia, one that is based on national identity. The focus on national identity provides a useful research angle

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1. *See* Chapter Two in this volume for a detailed discussion.

2. All references to the Treaty on European Union concern the treaty version as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon.

because, in contrast with predominant analyses focusing on power politics and economics, it seeks to explain relations with Russia through an investigation of historical and cultural factors.

The conceptualisation of identity as a key element in international relations provides a much-needed alternative to realist and liberal institutionalist models framed around the notions of anarchy, balance of power and institutional cooperation. The book analyses international relations as a social construction, of which national identities are essential constituents. Drawing on constructivist literature, a theoretical model is developed highlighting the mutually constitutive relationship among national identity, interests and foreign policy discourses. In particular, the historical dimension of national identity formation is explored in order to examine its relevance in current foreign policy discourses. Hence, the book adopts a historicist approach, which assigns key importance to cultural and historical context. Foreign policy discourses are studied through discourse-historical analysis (DHA), a variant of critical discourse analysis developed by Ruth Wodak (2002a). DHA was previously used by scholars to study debates about immigration and identity politics in the media, in EU institutions and among the wider public (Krzyzanowski 2010, 2009; Oberhuber *et al*. 2005; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Wodak 2009). This book constitutes the first application of the methodology to the analysis of the public discourses of national foreign policy elites.

Empirically, the book also contributes to the understanding of the current foreign policy of the EU and its member states towards its eastern neighbours. It constitutes an attempt to strengthen the strand of research focusing on the role of nationalism, identity and memory politics in EU–Russia relations. The surge of nationalist sentiment and widespread political use of history during the current Ukrainian crisis has exposed that these are powerful factors in EU–Russia relations (Luhn 2014; Siddi 2016c). This book shows that national identity and memory politics played an important role in this relationship well before the beginning of the turmoil in Ukraine. The empirical chapters highlight the significance of identity and memory politics in events that took place during the last decade in fields of extreme importance for the EU, such as energy security, the stability of the neighbourhood, Russia's democratisation and its role in the European security system. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining social constructivist theory, discourse theory and historical analysis, the book sheds light on the deep identity and cultural roots of relevant foreign policy discourses.

The focus of the empirical analysis is restricted to key foreign policy leaders (heads of state or government and foreign ministers) for reasons of feasibility and relevance. Covering thoroughly three national discursive arenas, each having thousands of participants, would not be possible within the scope of this book. However, in countries such as those under analysis, key foreign policy decisions are ultimately made by a restricted group of leaders who have received a mandate from a parliamentary majority or a majority of electors. These leaders also represent the country internationally and, thanks to their political prominence, they have the discursive power to steer the country's main foreign policy debates.

Chapter Two

Theorising National Identity and Foreign Policy

This chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological framework of the book. It first explores the conceptualisation of identity in the three main grand theories of International Relations, namely neorealism, neoliberalism and social constructivism. Drawing on social constructivist literature, it presents an interpretive theoretical model that conceptualises the relationship between identity, interests and foreign policy as mutually constitutive. The chapter discusses how this relationship is studied at the discursive level, through discourse-historical analysis (DHA). Finally, it illustrates the selection of three national discursive arenas and four case studies for the investigation of official narratives concerning Russia.

National identity and European foreign policy towards Russia

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Russia is arguably the most divisive issue in European foreign policy. Divergent views often emerge when EU member states are required to formulate a foreign policy response to a major event that sees Russia as a protagonist. Different opinions have frequently led EU member states to pursue bilateral relations with Russia, rather than coordinating their policies at EU level. The response of EU member states to the 2008 Russian–Georgian war, to Moscow's energy policies and to its concerns over NATO Eastern enlargement provide prime examples of diverging European approaches to Russia (David *et al*. 2013). Despite belonging to a single economic and defence community, EU member states perceive Russia differently, particularly with regard to their security interests. The reasons for these differences go beyond neoliberal and neorealist theorisations of institutional cooperation or interstate relations in an anarchic and hostile environment. They must be investigated at the domestic level, where national identities and interests are constructed and discourses on Russia are formulated.[1]

The constructivist school of thought defines the politics of identity as one of the keys to understanding how a country's domestic dynamics interact with and affect global politics (Hopf 1998: 192). Constructivists treat identities and interests as endogenous to interaction, whereas neoliberals and neorealists consider them as exogenously given and constant. For neoliberals and neorealists,

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1.   As Henry Nau (2002: 16) argues, national interests 'begin with what kind of society the nation is, not just what its geopolitical circumstances are'.

states have uncomplicated and unchanging identities and interests, which neither affect nor are influenced by agents and structures (Laffey and Weldes 1997: 193–237; Waltz 1979). Neoliberals investigated the significance of norms and ideas in international relations, but did not explain whether and how they play a role in identity construction. Neoliberal studies tend to consider ideas and norms only as intervening factors between states seeking self-help in the anarchic international system and their subsequent actions (Wæver 2002: 21). Neoliberal approaches largely neglect the domestic level of analysis and the function that the domestic constituency plays in the formulation of foreign policy preferences. Hence, neoliberalism does not provide solid theoretical foundations to analyse the domestic construction of national identity and its interaction with international politics.

Neorealism also focuses on structures and treats states as monoliths, unproblematic units that follow the logic of self-help and power-balancing in an anarchic international environment (see Waltz 1979: 102–28). The neorealist approach to international relations does not attribute any role to domestic and social factors such as national identity in foreign policy making. Due to the lack of attention to these factors, neorealism offers a static view of international politics and is unable to explain change, particularly peaceful change (Ruggie 1998: 874–5). This deficiency is due also to the neorealists' inability to articulate a convincing framework to understand the formulation of state interests. State interests cannot be derived from the condition of anarchy, as neorealists claim, because anarchy is an ambiguous concept. In fact, neorealism handles interest formation by assumption (Ruggie 1998: 862–9).

Moreover, neorealism oversimplifies the process of preference formation and decision making. Decision makers are not always rational, as neorealists tend to assume (Legro and Moravcsik 1999: 53). They may rely on heuristics, the logic of appropriateness (Müller 2004) and the logic of practice (Pouliot 2008), in which the decision-making process is deeply influenced by the social embeddedness of actors, their identity and other cultural elements. Thus, decision-making processes are best studied within a constructivist framework that analyses the multifaceted, malleable and complex nature of identities, as well as their mutually constitutive relationship with agents and structures (Checkel 2008: 72). Table 2.1 summarises the different conceptualisations of identity in the main approaches of International Relations theory and highlights its central role in social constructivism.

National identity tends to be constructed in relation to one or more significant Others, namely actors in the international environment that are perceived as different or antithetical by the nation (or Self). It operates as a cognitive device that provides a state with an understanding of other countries, their motives, interests, probable actions and attitudes (Hopf 2002: 5). Language and discourses play an essential role in the construction of national identity and its significant Others. Dominant identity discourses are the cognitive structures through which policy makers formulate national interests and take foreign policy decisions. A country's leaders, particularly its political and intellectual elites, are the primary agents and interpreters of national identity construction, as they shape and are influenced by

Table 2.1: Conceptualisation of identity in the main theories of International Relations

	Neorealism/neoliberalism	Social constructivism
	Exogenous to theory	Endogenous to theory
	Constant	Fluid, malleable
	Does not influence agents and structures	Shapes and constitutes agents and structures
Conceptualisation of identity	Does not affect state interests, which are derived from the anarchic international system	Shapes and constitutes state interests
	Has no influence on rational decision makers	It is a cognitive device that influences decision makers' motives, actions and understanding of the world

Source: author's own compilation.

the dominant discourses of the national environments in which they are embedded (Checkel 2006: 63; Lebow 2008a: 556–64).[2]

National identity, the Other and Wendtian constructivist research

The concept of identity has been discussed widely in constructivist scholarship. The term originates from social psychology, where it describes the individuality and distinctiveness of an actor (the Self) in its evolving relations with significant Others (Jepperson *et al.* 1996: 59). Alexander Wendt transposed the concept to international relations theory and argued that identities are relatively stable (albeit subject to change in the long run) role-specific understandings and expectations about an actor that are constructed in interactions with other actors. The type of social structure that prevails in the international system depends on how actors construct their identity in relation to others. Relatively stable identities and expectations about each other develop as a result of continuous interaction (Wendt 1994: 384–96).

According to Wendt (1999), national identity formation happens at state level, but it is also influenced by international structures. In the international arena, countries define the boundaries of their Selves and those of their respective Others so as to consolidate their distinctive national traits. National interests are rooted in national identity, because an actor 'cannot know what it wants until it knows who

2. As Jeffrey Checkel (2006: 63) argues, agents are persuasive because they are authoritative, but also 'because they are enabled and legitimated by the broader social discourse in which they are embedded'.

it is' (Wendt 1999: 231).[3] In particular, national identity determines the interests of a state based on how other actors are perceived (Wendt 1999; cf. Adler 1997, Hopf 1998). Such perceptions are profoundly influenced by historical interaction between the state and its Others. An actor that has played the role of Other over a protracted historical period becomes internalised as such in a country's national memory (Barnett 1996: 446; Lebow 2006: 3; Smith 1992: 58). In the national memory of several European states, Russia has been internalised as a significant Other (Lebow 2008a: 10; Neumann and Medvedev 2012: 13). Together with Turkey, Russia constituted the main Other against which identities were constructed in early modern and modern Europe (Neumann 1998). The concept of otherness is thus fundamental to understand Russia's role in national identity construction in European states.

The antithesis between Self and Other is a central theme in modern philosophy, social anthropology, psychology and literary theory (Neumann 1996: 141–54). In the early nineteenth century, Hegel (1999: 15–20) argued that the citizens of a state develop a collective identity as a result of conflicts with other states. In the second half of the century, Nietzsche elaborated on Hegel's thinking and stated that Self and Other are not fixed elements, but perceive each other from changing perspectives (cited in Neumann 1998: 148). Following the same line of argument, a century later Carl Schmitt (1976) claimed that political identities can best be formed in struggles against others. During the last twenty years, the dichotomy between Self and Other became a pivotal topic in International Relations theory. David Campbell (1998: 191–205) attempted to explain US foreign policy as a continuous search for new collectives to treat as Others in order to consolidate national identity and rally domestic support. Campbell argued that, following the demise of the Soviet Union, Washington identified new Others in Saddam Hussein's Iraq and China. Writing a decade later, Richard Ned Lebow (2008a: 11) asserted that American domestic and foreign policy after the terrorist attacks of 9 September 2001 showed how easy it was for political leaders to exploit the fear of Others to create solidarity at home.[4]

Ole Wæver (2002) analysed the relationship between Self and Other from an interpretive constructivist perspective, focusing on the role of discourses. According to Wæver, a collective Self is predicated on some essential political ideas, such as what constitutes a state or a nation. The Self attempts to make these ideas the core of institutionalisation in political cooperation, which produces discursive clashes with the Other. Wæver argued that these conflicts can be studied as the substance of world politics in an alternative, identity-based approach to
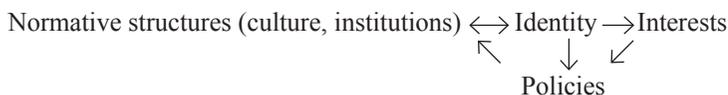
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3. To emphasise the tight correlation between identity and interests, Wendt (1999: 231–2) also claims that 'interests are needs or functional imperatives which must be fulfilled if an identity is to be reproduced'.

4. The popularity of Samuel Huntington's (1997) work on the 'clash of civilisations' has shown that the dichotomy of Self/Other has become a pervasive theme in public debates. Huntington's book in itself was evidence that othering could be used as a deliberate policy to strengthen national identities.

foreign policy analysis. Further studies investigated specific aspects of the Self/ Other dichotomy. Erik Ringmar (1996: 80) highlighted the active participation of the Other in an actor's identity construction. He claimed that Others are the main recipients of the Self's narratives and determine whether such narratives are a valid description of the Self through interaction. Jennifer Mitzen (2006: 341–70) studied the use of Others in the framework of ontological security. She contended that states become dependent on security dilemmas[5] due to their reliance on routines that help consolidate their identities in relation to significant Others.

Elaborating on Wendt's theoretical framework, the essays in Peter Katzenstein's (1996) edited volume 'The Culture of National Security' further investigated the dichotomy between Self and Other. Most importantly, they offer crucial insights for the study of the relationship between identity and foreign policy. In an introductory essay, Katzenstein, Wendt and Ronald Jepperson argued that cultural and institutional elements of states' domestic and global environments shape national identity. Variations in national identity determine the security interests and policies of a state and in turn affect normative structures, namely culture and institutions (Jepperson *et al*. 1996: 53–65). These relationships can be summarised in the following model:

$$\text{Normative structures (culture, institutions)} \longleftrightarrow \text{Identity} \longrightarrow \text{Interests}$$
$$\nwarrow \quad \downarrow \quad \swarrow$$
$$\text{Policies}$$

As the model shows, identity influences policies through the determination of interests, but it can also shape policies directly as a result of a state's identity politics. The case studies in Katzenstein's volume provide convincing empirical evidence for the model. Among these, Thomas Berger's work (Katzenstein 1996: 318) argued that, because of historical experiences and how these are interpreted by domestic political actors, Germany and Japan have developed national identities which make them reluctant to resort to the use of military force.[6] Berger showed that German and Japanese post-1945 identity politics, notably the decision to construct an antimilitaristic national identity, had a direct impact both on policy making and on the domestic institutional context where defence policy is formulated (see also Bjola and Kornprobst 2007).

Robert Herman's (1996) essay on Soviet foreign policy in the late 1980s showed the interrelation between identity construction, the formation of interests and the formulation of foreign policy. Herman argued that the end of the Cold War was a consequence of Gorbachev's new thinking, which caused a radical reconceptualisation of state interests. This redefinition was determined by the

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5. Security dilemmas refer to a condition in which one state's gain in security decreases the security of other actors (Jervis 1978: 169–70).

6. Events with enduring significance for a country, such as the Second World War for Germany and Japan, create dominant collective memories that allow the mobilisation of national identities in particular directions (Liu and Hilton 2005: 545).

Chapter Three

National Identities in Historical Perspective

As Chapters One and Two have highlighted, national identity is a complex construction that involves a large number of cultural and historical factors. Deconstructing national identity and examining its main components is essential in order to understand its relationship with a country's foreign policy. This chapter analyses the historical construction of German, Polish and Finnish identity, with particular focus on discourses that are considered most relevant to national foreign policy towards Russia. The main argument is that, in the last two centuries, Russia was a prominent Other in national foreign policy discourses and perceptions of Russia played an important role in national identity formation. The chapter draws on the scholarly literature on German, Polish, Finnish identity and foreign policy and on original material collected during fieldwork in the countries under investigation. National identity construction is studied in a *longue durée* perspective. The focus is on the period starting from the nineteenth century, when modern national identities began to be constructed. The *longue durée* approach highlights the historical roots of current national identities and foreign policy behaviours. It thereby provides a historically grounded and substantive interpretive framework for the discourse analysis in the following chapters.

While the discussion below is by no means an exhaustive analysis of the three national identities, it hopes to provide the essential framework to understand and interpret them, most notably their mutually constitutive relationship with national foreign policy. For each of the three countries under analysis, the dominant themes and historical trends of national identity construction are investigated alongside their relationship with contemporary foreign policy. The role of Russia as Other in identity formation and the evolution of national discourses on Russia are analysed in greater depth in distinct, yet strongly interconnected, sub-sections.

Democracy, stability, multilateralism: the historical construction of German identity

Well into the second decade of the twenty-first century, Germany appears as one of the most successful countries in Europe, with well-established democratic institutions, a strong economy and a leading role in the EU. The Berlin Republic seems to have successfully combined political stability and a strong economic performance, after nearly a century of wars, dictatorships and territorial division.[1]

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1. The term 'Berlin Republic' is used to distinguish post-reunification Germany from the country's previous republican experiences: West Germany, which had Bonn as its capital (1949–90), and the Weimar Republic (1919–33) (see Wittlinger 2008).

Democracy, economic prosperity, the respect of human rights and the rejection of war as means to solve international disputes have become an integral part of German identity (see Berger 1996; Bjola and Kornprobst 2007). These values influence German foreign policy discourses, notably the country's strong support for multilateralism and its normative approach to international affairs (Risse 2007). Governments in Berlin believe that their foreign policy priorities can be achieved best within the framework of the EU, which explains their strong pro-European orientation (Banchoff 1999).

Some International Relations scholars have attempted to define the nature of post-reunification German foreign policy by developing concepts such as that of civilian power (Harnisch and Maull 2001). Civilian powers are defined as states that actively promote the 'civilising' of international relations through efforts to constrain the use of force, strengthen the rule of law and promote international cooperation. The endorsement of participatory forms of decision making, social equity, sustainable development and interdependence are also important features of civilian powers (Harnisch and Maull 2001: 3–4). However, this conceptualisation leaves important questions unanswered. How does a country develop a specific type of foreign policy discourses? In what historical and cultural context can concepts such as that of civilian power be understood?

The historical construction of German national identity is illuminating in this respect. The dominant identity discourses that constitute current German foreign policy have been constructed as a rejection of the national experience between 1871 and 1945 and of the East German dictatorship (Jarausch and Geyer 2003: 235–40). The record of the united Germany between 1871 and 1945 is widely considered as catastrophic, as it is associated with two world wars, economic instability, a brutal dictatorship and, most importantly, genocide. Militaristic and chauvinistic Imperial Germany (1871–1918), the economically and politically unstable Weimar Republic (1919–33), let alone the racist and genocidal experience of the Third Reich (1933–45), could provide no positive reference for the identity of post-1989 reunified Germany.

In 1945, the German nation had no 'usable past' (Moeller 2003a) from which to reconstruct its political identity.[2] Foreign occupation and the existence of two radically different German states after 1949 further complicated the emergence of a new sense of national identity. East German authorities drew a thick line between the Third Reich and the newly founded German Democratic Republic (GDR). Official rhetoric portrayed GDR citizens as either anti-fascist heroes or victims of the Nazi regime, who had finally been united under the first socialist state in German history (Fulbrook 1999: 55–9; Naimark 1995). It also attempted to construct a separate identity based on anti-fascism and hostility to the capitalist Western world. However, most East German citizens never fully accepted

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2. While in 1945 Germany had no 'usable past' in political terms, a large part of German cultural and artistic heritage was not discredited by the catastrophic outcome of national unity until 1945 and — together with the shared language — continued to constitute a powerful unifying factor in the following decades.

the official narrative. In fact, East–West competition and the GDR authorities' obsession with defining their country in opposition to West Germany acted as a constant reminder of all-German commonalities among East German citizens (Fulbrook 1999: 198).

In West Germany, the dynamics of national identity construction were more complex. In the first post-war decade, the focus was on material and economic reconstruction. The swift achievements in these fields, including the so-called economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*), created a feeling of identity based on collective working ethics and the resolve to rebuild a country that lay in ruins (James 1989: 177–95). In foreign policy, alignment with the US and support of European integration were seen as absolute priorities in order to be accepted as a full member of the Western community. The issue of coming to terms with German history, particularly with the recent past, proved more controversial. Although the Bonn Republic accepted paying reparations to Israel in 1952, public debates on the Nazi past did not gain momentum until the early 1960s (Herf 1997: 334–72).

From the 1960s onwards, memory of the Holocaust became a dominant public and institutional discourse, as well as a crucial constitutive element of West German identity and foreign policy. The sense of responsibility for genocide prevented attempts to positively define West German identity and to reassess German history in less negative or exculpatory terms.[3] In foreign policy, the rejection of unilateralism and the support of European and Western integration appeared even more as the only possible course of action to re-establish the country's reputation (Banchoff 1999: 273–4). West German attitudes to national identity and foreign policy choices led many intellectuals to argue that, by the 1970s, the country had become a post-national democracy. According to this view, West Germans had learnt from the past and moved beyond the ideas of nation and nationalism (Berger 1997: 77–108; Jarausch and Geyer 2003: 240; Winkler 1996).

This interpretation was seriously challenged by events in East and West Germany in 1989–90. Reunification brought about attempts to renationalise German history and identity (Berger 1997: 198–221). The fall of the Berlin Wall clearly showed that a German nation had survived Cold War divisions. Undeniably, the existence of two German states with different political and economic systems left material and cultural traces in post-1990 united Germany (see Arnold-de Simine 2005; Herf 1997; Kocka 1996; Weidenfeld 2001). The Wall fell when East and West Germans were growing apart in practice, but the West German government and the majority of GDR citizens still believed in the unity of the nation in principle (Fulbrook 1999: 23). Although elements of a distinct GDR identity survived

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3. Conservative historians Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber attempted to relativise German responsibility for the Holocaust by presenting it as a reaction to Bolshevism (Nolte 1986) and by comparing it to the suffering of German expellees from East-Central Europe (Hillgruber 1986). Their claims sparked a vitriolic exchange with left-leaning intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, known as the *Historikerstreit* (historians' quarrel). The debate took place on the pages of prominent national newspapers (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Die Zeit*) and was followed with great interest by the West German public (Berger 1997: 91–2; Knowlton and Cates 1993).

among its former citizens and sometimes resurface in nostalgic filmic and cultural representations, they do not overshadow dominant identity discourses and are contested by competing narratives that focus on the authoritarian and repressive nature of the East German regime (Arnold-de Simine 2005; Sabrow 2009).

While reunification revived the feeling of a German national identity, it neither reawakened the extreme nationalism that had characterised the history of Germany in 1871–1945, nor did it mark a sudden departure from pre-1989 West German identity and foreign policy discourses. The latter became dominant also in the reunified Germany. Memory of the Holocaust and the suffering inflicted upon other nations during the Second World War plays a central role in the collective identity of the united Germany (Langenbacher 2010: 43–9; Wilds 2000; Wittlinger 2011: 139–40). If anything, debates on these issues have become deeper and more prominent since the 1990s, including social groups that had been neglected earlier (such as Soviet prisoners of war and forced labourers, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals).[4] The erection of numerous monuments commemorating the victims of National Socialism in the reunified Berlin has led some authors to label it as 'the capital city of remorse' (in German, *Hauptstadt der Reue*; see Reichel 2005).

The experience of the East German dictatorship constituted a further controversial issue which the Berlin Republic had to come to terms with in order to forge a united national identity. The trials of GDR officials and border guards in the 1990s and the social issues and economic difficulties resulting from reunification ensured that the East German past was present in public debates in both the 1990s and the 2000s (Ahonen 2011; Gellner and Douglas 2003). Despite the already cited nostalgia for some aspects of life in the GDR, dominant discourses and historical analyses have drawn an unequivocally negative balance for the East German regime (see Fulbrook 1995, 2011; Hodgin and Pearce 2011; Jarausch 1999; Jarausch and Geyer 2003: 77–81; Klessmann 1999; Langenbacher 2010: 54–7). This contributed to reinforcing the stress on democracy and human rights and the rejection of any form of totalitarianism in German identity discourses.

Although the national past has remained mostly a source of contrition and collective responsibility for the perpetration of unprecedented crimes, in the second post-reunification decade the Berlin Republic felt confident enough to address the issue of German suffering during and in the aftermath of the Second World War. This concerned in particular the expulsion of approximately twelve million ethnic Germans from East–Central Europe between 1945 and 1950, the rape of thousands of German women in the last months of the war by Allied soldiers, the carpet bombing of all main German cities and the internment of millions of Wehrmacht soldiers in Soviet camps (Langenbacher 2010: 49–54; Moeller 2003a). German suffering had been largely a taboo in mainstream public and institutional

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4. These debates were fuelled by the appearance of new studies, films, documents and exhibitions. Among the most important are the Goldhagen controversy concerning the responsibility of ordinary Germans in the Holocaust, the exhibition on the crimes of the German army in the Soviet Union organised by the Hamburg Institute of Social Research and the Walser-Bubis quarrel over the building of the Holocaust memorial in central Berlin (see Weidenfeld 2001: 30–2).

debates since the 1960s. It returned forcefully to mainstream discourses in 2002 with the publication of Günter Grass's novel *Crabwalk* and Jörg Friedrich's *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany 1940–1945*. During the following years, a lively memory debate on German suffering took place, fuelled by numerous television productions and new publications (Langenbacher 2010: 51; Wittlinger 2008: 10; Zehfuss 2006: 222–6).

This memory received institutional endorsement in 2008 through the creation of the *Bundesstiftung Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung* (Federal Foundation Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation). The foundation was given the task of setting up and curating a museum that would commemorate the expulsion of ethnic Germans from East–Central Europe in the wider context of Nazi racial policies and of other forced resettlements in twentieth century Europe.[5] Chancellor Merkel's endorsement of the project and her simultaneous, unambiguous acknowledgement of Germany's historical responsibility reflect her willingness to encourage a discussion of multiple national memories and identities, without relativising the role of the Holocaust and Germany's criminal policies in the Second World War (Wittlinger 2008: 22). The focus on German suffering during the last decade has not significantly altered the nature of dominant German identity and foreign policy discourses. If anything, it strengthened their pacifist and anti-totalitarian components by emphasising the pernicious consequences of aggressive and unlawful policies (see Langenbacher 2010: 50).

The long way to Ostpolitik: Russia in German identity and foreign policy discourses

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Russia was a significant Other in German identity construction. German perceptions of Russia were predominantly negative, emphasising its presumed social and economic backwardness and threatening military power. However, a counter-narrative that relativised these negative views also existed, notably in particular social milieux and historical periods. A significant strand of German official discourses emphasised the necessity of a cooperative approach to Russia that took into account its strategic importance for Germany and in the international arena. From the late 1960s onwards, these discourses constituted a cooperative West German foreign policy stance towards the Soviet Union that has become enshrined in the concept of Ostpolitik. The term literally means 'Eastern policy' and generally refers to Germany's foreign policy towards its Eastern neighbours (see Ash 1993: 34–5). It acquired a more specific meaning in the context of Cold War detente, when West German Ostpolitik established a tradition of cordial bilateral contacts that has remained an important element of reunified Germany's policy towards Russia. The coexistence of deeply rooted stereotypes and the Ostpolitik tradition has resulted in an ambiguous relationship, which Russia's role in German identity discourses can help us to understand.

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5. Details are available on the foundation's website, www.sfvv.de (accessed on 19 July 2016).

Negative perceptions of Russia in German intellectual and policy-making elites date back at least to the sixteenth century. In 1549 German diplomat and writer Sigmund von Herberstein published a book describing the country as a brutal authoritarian regime and its people as backward and wretched. As Russia was largely unknown in Western Europe at the time, the book became a major source of knowledge (von Herberstein 2010; see Schröder 2012: 97). Criticism of Russia in German discourses became dominant in the nineteenth century and was fuelled by popular publications such as Astolphe de Custine's 'Empire of the Czar'. Published in 1839, it portrayed the Tsarist Empire as a corrupt, inefficient and despotic police state (de Custine 1989). Contemporary German liberals were particularly critical of Russian autocracy and the overall backwardness of the Tsarist Empire. For them, Russia was a threat to German and European liberal values (Schröder 2012: 99).

Conservatives tended to be less contemptuous of the Tsarist political system. Between 1847 and 1852, Prussian agricultural expert August von Haxthausen published a report on his trips to Russia, describing it as a well-ordered patriarchal monarchy. Von Haxthausen's (1972) publication promoted a competing, more positive discourse on Russia and was particularly popular among the German aristocracy, which considered the Tsarist Empire as a bulwark against revolution and democracy. However, sympathetic conservatives were also convinced of Germany's cultural superiority and looked down on the Russian social and economic model. Stereotypes about Russia, such as its image as an underdeveloped and uncivilised country, were widespread throughout German society. Negative views were only partially mitigated by the appreciation of Russian literature, music and art (see Schröder 2012: 99–100).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Tsarist Empire's alliances with France and Britain led to a shift in perceptions among German conservatives also, who no longer considered Russia as a political ally. Dominant discourses in political and intellectual circles portrayed it as a backward colossus that threatened German culture and simultaneously offered a vast expanse for the extension of German power and civilisation.[6] These discourses provided the rationale for Berlin's annexationist policy during the First World War and, in a more extreme and racist variant, during the Nazi–Soviet war (see Liulevicius 2000). In Wilhelmine Germany, publicist Johannes Haller (1917) described the Tsarist Empire as an Asiatic, Tatar state, a true heir of the Golden Horde poised for a war of conquest and pillage. After the Bolshevik revolution, racial discourses intertwined with political ones. The German elites and middle class associated the 'Bolshevik threat' with Jewish commissars and savage Slavs that were keen to commit atrocious crimes and enslave Europe. On the other hand, a sizeable minority (mostly radicals and communists) viewed the Soviet Union as an economic and social model. From the opposite side of the political spectrum, some conservatives remained sympathetic

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6.   Until 1945, German academia contributed to this line of thought. The scholarly discipline of *Ostforschung*, focusing on the European territories east of Germany, justified Berlin's expansionist aims in East–Central and Eastern Europe with pseudohistorical arguments (Mühle 2003).