



# Remembering Yalta: The Politics of International History

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## Remembering Yalta: The Politics of International History

On 4 February 2005, military guards welcomed guests arriving at the Livadia Palace near Yalta, as they had done sixty years earlier on the first day of the Yalta Conference, which brought together Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin to discuss the shape of the world after the Second World War. Aside from the guard of honor and the return to the Livadia Palace of some of the former Soviet soldiers and waitresses who had provided security for the conference and helped assure its smooth progress sixty years earlier, there was little resemblance between the events of February 1945 and those of 2005. The organizers of the 2005 Yalta conference—a symposium entitled ‘Yalta 1945-2005: From the Bipolar World to the Geopolitics of the Future’—anxiously awaited but never received greetings from President Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine, to which Yalta and the Crimea now belong, or from President Vladimir Putin of Russia—the legal successor to the Soviet Union, which hosted the Yalta Conference in 1945. Nor were there greetings from the leaders of Britain or the United States.<sup>1</sup> Every political leader whose greetings never reached Yalta on 4 February 2005 had his own reasons to overlook the anniversary of the conference that shaped the modern world and plunged it into almost half a century of cold war.

In the opinion of the Polish historian Jerzy Jedlicki, the twentieth-century history of Eastern Europe is ‘a perfect laboratory to observe how the genuine or apparent remembrances of

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<sup>1</sup> On the symposium organized by the Crimean authorities to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference, see Liudmila Obukhovskaia, ‘Imet’ uvazhenie k proshlomu,’ *Krymskaia pravda*, 9 February 2005. There is an extensive literature on the conference, most of it published during the Cold War. For a post-Cold War assessment of the decisions made at Yalta, see Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago, 1993).

the past may aggravate current conflicts and how they themselves are modified in the process.’ According to Jedlicki, the most intriguing question that the study of Eastern Europe can help answer is ‘what factors activate historical reminiscences, and what circumstances would rather allow them to remain dormant and apparently forgotten. In other words, collective “memories” may become “hot” or “cooled,” and the course of events may often depend on their emotional temperature.’<sup>2</sup> This article examines patterns of collective remembrance and forgetting of historical events of international importance by analyzing public debates on the legacy of the Yalta Conference in Russia, Latvia, Poland, Ukraine, and the United States. It looks into interrelations between politics and historical representations in each of these countries. It also discusses the impact of the changing international situation on the ways in which intellectual and political elites interpret the importance of the Yalta agreements. Finally, it looks into the narrative strategies employed by the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of Yalta in representing their vision of the past.

Since the end of the First World War and the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman Empires, Eastern Europe has been an arena for the competing interests of new nation-states and the ambitions of great powers. After the German vision of *Mitteleuropa* as a Berlin-dominated space between Germany and Russia evaporated in the wake of the German defeat in the First World War, and the Bolshevik revolutionary advance on Europe was thrown back in 1920 by the ‘miracle on the Vistula,’ the territory between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas became a contested ground between the capitalist West and the communist East. While Britain and France regarded the newly independent countries of the region as a ‘cordon sanitaire’ against

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<sup>2</sup> See Jerzy Jedlicki, ‘Historical Memory as a Source of Conflicts in Eastern Europe,’ *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 32, no. 3 (September 1999): 225-32, here 226.

Bolshevik expansion, the Soviets tried to undermine some of the new regimes by turning their republics of Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia into a socialist Piedmont for the national minorities of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. Eventually Stalin used the irredentist argument to divide Eastern Europe with Hitler in 1939. As Britain and France entered the Second World War over the German invasion of Poland, London considered the restoration of Poland's independence and British interests in the region one of its main objectives in the war. The Yalta Conference effectively put an end to those plans, since Soviet armies occupied most of Eastern Europe, and Churchill failed to persuade Roosevelt to back British policy in the region. Yalta initiated the era of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, which lasted until the end of the Cold War and left bitter memories of Western betrayal and Soviet dominance in the collective memory of the region.<sup>3</sup>

Historians have often treated the events leading to the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, the collapse of the USSR, and the emergence of new nation-states on the ruins of the communist empire as a manifestation of 'the revenge of the past.'<sup>4</sup> It would be difficult indeed to exaggerate the role of history in the rearticulation of national identities in post-communist Eastern Europe. The recovery of collective memory suppressed by authoritarian regimes and recollections of the region's traumatic experiences during and after the Second World War not only helped boost the national pride of the newly freed nations but also fueled

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<sup>3</sup> On the origins of the concept of *Mittleuropa* and its transformation into the notion of Eastern and, later, East-Central Europe, see Erhardt Busek and Emil Brix, *Projekt Mittleuropa* (Vienna, 1986); Hubert Łaszkiwicz, 'A Quest for Identity: East-Central Europe and Its Historians,' in *East-Central Europe's Position within Europe: Between East and West*, ed. Jerzy Kłoczowski (Lublin, 2004), 60-74.

<sup>4</sup> See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993).

ethnic and sectarian conflicts from the Balkans in the west to Nagorny Karabakh in the east.<sup>5</sup> The European borders established at Yalta generally survived the historical and national resurgence of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Germany was reunited, but there was no adjustment to its eastern border as of 1989. Czechoslovakia split into two states, but their borders remained those established immediately after the Second World War. Nor was there any change in the borders of Poland or the former Soviet republics of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, all of which ‘inherited’ part of Poland’s interwar territory. Does this mean that the new national elites are satisfied with the map of Eastern Europe as drawn at Yalta, or do they still harbor grudges against the authors of the Yalta agreements? The historical ‘amnesia’ of the world leaders who forgot to send their greetings to the Yalta symposium in February 2005 indicates that while the Yalta borders generally remained intact, the historical and political consequences of the decisions made at Yalta in 1945 continue to haunt the world’s political elites.

### *The Ghosts of Yalta*

Vladimir Putin had more reason than any world leader to ‘forget’ the sixtieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference. In early 2005 he faced a growing international crisis whose roots could be traced back to the legacy of Yalta. Russia ended 2004 as a big loser in international relations: its intervention in the Ukrainian presidential elections on the side of a pro-Russian candidate with a well-known criminal record and underground connections backfired. The Orange Revolution brought to power a Western-leaning and pro-democratic Ukrainian opposition leader, Viktor

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<sup>5</sup> On the role of history in post-communist Eastern Europe, see Tina Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe’s Ghosts after Communism* (New York, 1996); John Borneman, *Settling Accounts: Violence, Justice, and Accountability in Postsocialist Europe* (Princeton, 1997); Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (New York, 1993).

Yushchenko. Russia was losing control over its closest neighbor, whose territory now included the Crimea and the site of the Yalta Conference. In December 2004, the Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sergei Lavrov, suggested to the American secretary of state, Colin Powell, that Ukraine was part of the Russian sphere of influence—a statement that had all the hallmarks of a Yalta-type approach to international affairs. It was intended to counter Western criticism of Russia’s meddling in the Ukrainian elections and persuade the American leadership to give an increasingly authoritarian Russia a free hand in proceeding against democratic governments on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Powell rebuffed Lavrov’s suggestion: the United States regarded developments in Ukraine as proof that democracy was on the march all over the world, from the Middle East to the former Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup>

While the American administration rejected the Yalta-inspired principle of the division of the world into spheres of influence, politicians in Germany and Japan—the main ‘losers’ of the Yalta agreements—rejected not only the principles underlying the Yalta decisions but also the legitimacy of Russian territorial acquisitions approved by the Crimean conference. In October 2004 the opposition parties in the German parliament raised questions about the continuing militarization of the former East Prussia, allocated to Russia by the Big Three in February 1945 and known as the Kaliningrad oblast ever since. They suggested calling an international conference with the participation of organizations representing Germans resettled from East Prussia to discuss the economic development of the region, to which they referred as the Königsberg oblast. They also suggested the creation of a Lithuanian-Polish-Russian cross-border

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<sup>6</sup> For a Russian commentary on the outcome of discussions between Powell and Lavrov during a conference of foreign ministers of OSCE member nations in Sofia, see Artur Blinov and Artem Terekhov, ‘Kraakh mifa o zonakh vliianiia,’ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 9 December 2004.

region to be called 'Prussia.' The Russian government was appalled. Stressing that Gerhard Schroeder's government had no territorial claims against Russia, Sergei Lavrov condemned those German politicians who had raised the question of the lost territories.<sup>7</sup> If in Germany the government decided against opening the can of worms represented by the post-Second World War European borders, in Japan there has always been a national consensus favoring the return of territories lost to Russia as a result of the Second World War. The Japanese government never recognized the loss of the southern Kurile Islands, which were 'awarded' to the Soviet Union by the Yalta Conference, and continues to insist on the return of what it calls the 'northern territories.' In the spring of 2005 the Japanese parliament adopted a resolution increasing the number of islands that it wanted back from Russia. The return of those islands is regarded as a precondition for the signing of a peace treaty, the absence of which has clouded Russo-Japanese political, cultural, and economic relations ever since the end of the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

In early 2005 Russia's neighbors to the west, the Balts and Poles, attacked the Russian government for its failure to apologize for Stalin's occupation of Eastern Europe, which had been sanctioned by the decisions of the Yalta Conference. The attacks came in response to Russia's decision to invite world leaders to Moscow to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the victory over fascist Germany in May 2005. Cashing in on the heroism and sacrifice of the Soviet peoples in World War II, the Russian government was hoping to carry out a public-relations coup and improve its international image, which was suffering from growing authoritarian tendencies, the persecution of independent-minded business tycoons such as Mikhail

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<sup>7</sup> See Evgenii Grigor'ev, 'MID RF otstoial Kaliningrad,' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 November 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See Artem Blinov, 'Tokio daiut trubu, no ne ostrova,' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 17 January 2005; idem, 'Ul'timatium proigravshego,' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 10 March 2005.

Khodorkovsky, and the continuing war in Chechnia. The failure of Russian policy in Ukraine added urgency to the government's resolve to appear in the international arena wearing the mantle of principal victor over fascism and saviour of Europe from Nazi rule. VE Day, however, brought not only liberation from fascism but also Soviet occupation of Eastern and Central Europe, which lasted in one form or another for more than forty years. The leaders of the 'captive' nations were now determined to remind the world of that episode and, in the process, to encourage Russia to face its Stalinist past and acknowledge the atrocities committed in Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union and its communist allies.

### *The Baltic Front*

The Russian invitation to the leaders of East European nations to attend VE Day celebrations in Moscow aroused heated discussions in the Baltic states. At the core of Russo-Baltic tensions was the question of whether the Soviet takeover of the Baltic states, tacitly approved by the Yalta Conference, was or was not an act of occupation. The answer to that question had serious legal and political repercussions for Russia, as it would affect the status of the Russian minority in Latvia and place on the international agenda not only the issue of Russia's moral responsibility for an act of aggression but also its legal consequences. Potentially, the Russian government faced lawsuits demanding material compensation for the imprisonment, deportation, and death of hundreds of thousands if not millions of citizens of the Baltic states. The Russian political elites took the issue so seriously that they were prepared to soften their demands on the issue of the human rights of Russian speakers in the Baltic states—their main weapon in diplomatic conflicts with the Baltics throughout the 1990s—if Latvia and Estonia would drop their claims for recognition of the Soviet takeover of the Baltic states as an act of occupation. On 3 February



2005 (the eve of the sixtieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference) the Russian side leaked to the press drafts of unsigned joint declarations on Russo-Estonian and Russo-Latvian relations that included a quid pro quo agreement in that regard.<sup>9</sup>

The debate over the participation of the presidents of the Baltic states in the VE Day celebrations in Moscow became especially acute in Latvia, the home of the largest Russian minority in the Baltics. Indeed, it crossed national boundaries and caused an international scandal. The president of Latvia, Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga—herself a refugee from Soviet rule and a former professor of psychology at the University of Montreal, known in Russian diplomatic circles as a ‘Canadian’—has been a strong promoter of the thesis that Soviet rule in her country amounted to an occupation. She has not been reluctant to express that conviction at home and abroad, and in January 2005, at the ceremony marking the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp, she presented President Putin with a book promoting that interpretation of the history of Russo-Latvian relations. The Russian response was swift and decisive. The publication of the book, entitled *The History of Latvia: The Twentieth Century*, was officially condemned by the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and when a Russian translation of the volume was subsequently launched in Moscow, one of its authors was denied an entry visa to Russia.<sup>10</sup>

Not surprisingly, Dr. Vike-Freiberga was highly reluctant from the outset to participate in the Moscow commemorations. Only later, under pressure from President George W. Bush of the United States, did she change her mind and accept the invitation, becoming the only Baltic head

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<sup>9</sup> On the history of the Baltic states after the Soviet takeover, see Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990* (Berkeley, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> On the controversy accompanying the Moscow launch of the book presented by Vike-Freiberga to Putin, see Ivan Gorshkov, ‘Èto prosto tochka zreniia latyshei,’ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 4 February 2005.

of the state to attend. The Latvian president stated that she would take part in the ceremony in Moscow out of respect for the Russian people and their sacrifice in the fight against Nazism, but she stood firm when it came to the interpretation of Latvian history and Russo-Latvian relations after the Second World War. Speaking on the Latvian radio program *Krustpunkti*, she suggested that Russia's harshly negative reaction to the Latvian viewpoint precluded open discussion on important questions of recent history, while other countries were making attempts to reevaluate their past. According to the Latvian president, Soviet-era stereotypes continued to dominate the Russian interpretation of the Second World War and the postwar era. In an article published in *Der Tagesspiegel* on 6 May 2005, Vike-Freiberga reiterated her earlier statement, arguing that after the expulsion of the Nazis, Latvia and the other Baltic states had become victims of Soviet occupation, which resulted in mass arrests, killings, and deportations of their citizens. She also suggested that both Latvia and Germany had faced their record in World War II, while Russia refused to separate its heroes from its tyrants and condemn the atrocities committed in the name of communism.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Polish Revolt*

If in the Baltic states the decisions of the Yalta Conference were seen as a mere confirmation by the Western powers of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which delivered the Balts into the hands of Stalin, in Poland those decisions were discussed in a different context. There the Yalta debate coincided with discussions about President Aleksander Kwaśniewski's possible visit to Moscow

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<sup>11</sup> See Vaira Vike-Freiberga, 'Was Rußland von Deutschland lernen kann,' *Der Tagesspiegel*, 6 May 2005.

For Russian reaction to Vike-Freiberga's decision to come to Moscow for the VE Day celebrations, see Kirill Reznik-Martov, 'Bush priglasil prezidenta Latvii v Moskvu,' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 8 February 2005.

for the VE Day celebrations. The tone and direction of the debate provoked strong criticism on the part of Moscow. As in the case of Russo-Latvian disagreements over the interpretation of the Soviet past, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took it upon itself to present the Russian point of view on the matter. On 12 February 2005, sixty years to the day after the conclusion of the Yalta Conference, the Information and Press Department of the ministry issued a statement distributed by the government-controlled press agency ITAR-TASS. The authors of the statement took issue with those Polish authors and politicians who regarded Yalta as a symbol of Poland's betrayal by its Western allies and of the subsequent Soviet occupation. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested what it called an attempt to rewrite the history of the Second World War and take historical events out of context. It asserted that the participants in the Yalta Conference had wanted to see Poland strong, free, independent, and democratic. The fact that the Soviet Union did everything in its power to turn that country into anything but a strong, free, independent, and democratic state apparently was not considered by the authors of the statement to be part of the historical context. Another Russian argument in favor of the Yalta decisions dealt with the extension of the Polish borders to the north and west and the recognition of those borders by the Big Three at Yalta and Potsdam. The statement conveniently overlooked the fact that Poland lost its eastern lands, and, by incorporating western territories previously settled by ethnic Germans, became an accomplice in Stalin's partition of Europe.<sup>12</sup>

It is not clear what the initiators of the Russian Foreign Ministry's statement expected, but it created a great deal of negative publicity in the Polish media. Critics immediately pointed out that as a result of the Yalta decisions, Poland found itself under the control of a totalitarian

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<sup>12</sup> See the commentary of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/sps/314872473059B3E2C3256FA60050BAC4](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/314872473059B3E2C3256FA60050BAC4).

regime and not only gained but also lost territory. Still, the Polish media was not prepared to open the Pandora's box of the postwar European border settlements. Some observers even asserted that if Lviv had remained in Poland after the war, it would probably have become a Polish Belfast. Generally, when it came to countering Russian arguments on the significance of the Yalta decisions, the Polish media treated them with a kind of fatalism—what else could one expect of the Russians? Commentators stated that it would be unreasonable to think that Moscow could condemn the decisions made at Yalta with the participation of Roosevelt and Churchill if it still refused to admit its failure to support the Warsaw uprising of 1944 or release all available information on the Soviet execution of thousands of Polish prisoners of war in Katyn Forest in 1940.<sup>13</sup>

The Katyn massacre of more than twenty thousand Polish prisoners of war by Soviet security forces has been always high on the list of Polish grievances against Russia.<sup>14</sup> In the spring of 2005, some commentators even suggested that Kwaśniewski's visit to Russia for the VE Day celebrations would be justified only if he used the occasion to lay flowers at the mass graves of Polish officers in Katyn Forest. Even the last communist ruler of Poland, General

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<sup>13</sup> For the Polish discussion of the consequences of the Yalta Conference in response to the statement issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, see Tadeusz M. Płużański, 'Jałta—zwycięstwo Stalina, zdrada Zachodu,' 26 February 2005, [mazowsze.k-raj.com.pl/pluzanski.shtml](http://mazowsze.k-raj.com.pl/pluzanski.shtml); Marek Ostrowski, 'Druz'iam moskovitam,' [http://www.pravda.ru/world/2005/5/14/38/19148\\_Polska.html](http://www.pravda.ru/world/2005/5/14/38/19148_Polska.html), and the transcript of the discussion on Radio Swoboda on 16 March 2005, with the participation of Polina Oldenburg and Aleksei Dzikovitsky, <http://www.svoboda.org/archive/>.

<sup>14</sup> There is an extensive literature on the Katyn massacre. At the time of writing, the latest monograph on the subject is George Sanford's *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (London and New York, 2005).

Wojciech Jaruzelski, who was invited to attend the celebrations in Moscow and intended to visit his father's grave in Siberia, stated that he did not understand why the Russians were reluctant to tell the whole truth about Katyn and publish the available documents.<sup>15</sup> Opposition leaders in parliament, including the future president of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, declared themselves against Kwaśniewski's visit to Moscow. But the Catholic Church hierarchy and majority public opinion supported the visit, as did the government, which maintained that it would not amount to a ratification of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 or the Yalta decisions of 1945.

In his interview with the German daily *Die Welt* in late February, Kwaśniewski stated that he intended to go to Moscow to celebrate the end of the bloodiest dictatorship in human history but would not accept the invitation if it were for a ceremony marking either the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or of the Yalta Conference. Like the Baltic presidents before him, Kwaśniewski noted President George W. Bush's earlier statements that Yalta had led to the partition of Europe and failed to bring freedom to significant numbers of Europeans. Kwaśniewski believed that the anniversary of the end of the war in Europe presented Putin with an opportunity to remind the world of the contribution of the Russian and other Soviet peoples to the victory over fascism and to give a just assessment of what had taken place after the war. In early May 2005, before leaving for Moscow, Kwaśniewski addressed his compatriots at the Polish VE Day celebrations in Wrocław. According to the Polish State Information Agency (PAP), Kwaśniewski stated: 'Yalta was painful...for Poles, above all because the declarations on independent and democratic Poland were not kept.' He added, however, that 'thanks to the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, our country built and continues to build its sovereignty and found new opportunities for development in the west and north.' Kwaśniewski

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<sup>15</sup> See Wojciech Jaruzelski, 'Ich empfand den 8. Mai als riesige Erleichterung,' *Die Welt*, 3 May 2005.

condemned the Soviet killings of Polish patriots after the war, stating that ‘We remember with indignation and bitterness that when fireworks exploded in the Moscow sky to celebrate the victorious end of the war, sixteen leaders of the Polish Underground were incarcerated in the Lubianka Prison, and three of them were murdered.’ Having calmed public opinion at home and countered his opponents’ calls to turn down Putin’s invitation, Kwaśniewski was ready to depart for Moscow.<sup>16</sup>

There he was in for a major surprise that strengthened the hand of those who had opposed the visit from the outset and advised him not to go to Russia. In his speech at the festivities President Putin omitted Poland from his list of nations that had contributed to the victory over fascism. This apparently came as a surprise not only to Mr. Kwaśniewski but also to his communist predecessor, Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had boasted before his trip to Moscow that he was going to Russia as a representative of the fourth largest army in the anti-Hitlerite coalition. Whether Putin’s omission of Poland in his VE Day speech was deliberate or not, it helped bring Polish-Russian relations to a new low. As was later admitted by Artem Malgin, the coordinator of the Polish-Russian Forum on European Politics, official Russia lost a unique opportunity to improve its image abroad. In Poland, according to Malgin, Russian diplomats did not show sufficient flexibility, as they failed to shift discussion from topics harmful to Russo-Polish relations and focus on useful ones instead. One such topic, suggested Malgin, was the current status of veterans of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, who had fought not only against the Germans but also against the Poles and Soviets. In Malgin’s view, Russia had failed to exploit

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<sup>16</sup> See Jacek Lepiarz’s summary of Kwaśniewski’s interview with *Die Welt* in the online version of *Polityka*, 27 February 2005. On Kwaśniewski’s participation in the Wrocław commemorations, see Trybuna.com.pl, [http://www.trybuna.com.pl/n\\_show.php?code=2005050903](http://www.trybuna.com.pl/n_show.php?code=2005050903).

the generally positive opinion in Polish government and society of the role played by the Soviet Union in the Second World War. In the Baltic states, where the governments adopted an 'anti-VE' stand, the best option for Russia was allegedly to ignore the historical debate altogether. Malgin warned his readers against assuming that there was a coordinated Western information offensive against Russia and called upon them to continue working for the improvement of Russia's image abroad. Given the degree to which that image had been damaged by the debates over the legacy of the Yalta Conference, Malgin's advice was timely indeed.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile the Russian authorities preferred to put on a brave face and interpret the criticism of their country's post-Second World War role in Eastern Europe as an indication of the growing strength of the Russian state. Thus the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, stated that in 1995, when the world celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the victory over fascism, no one had bothered to present historical claims against Russia, since it was a weak state at the time. As Russia grew stronger, its neighbors became concerned about its new might and decided to advance their historical claims. According to Lavrov, one of the factors that worried Russia's detractors was its desire to lessen its treasury's dependence on energy exports. This was a peculiar claim to make at a time when much of Russia's economic recovery was fueled by the country's energy exports and rising oil prices.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Second Front: The Americans Join In*

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<sup>17</sup> See Artem Mal'gin, 'Nad imidzhem pridetsia rabotat', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 May 2005.

<sup>18</sup> See the interview with Sergei Lavrov in *Izvestiia*, 17 May 2005. Cf. the text of the interview on the website of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/sps/1B0BC3CE4ACCA28EC32570040020C546](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/1B0BC3CE4ACCA28EC32570040020C546).

Lavrov's questionable argument, which linked energy policy with the history of the Second World War, appears less strange if one considers the interplay of two similar factors in the speech given by President George W. Bush in Riga on 6 May 2005. Bush entered the East European historical debate head on, placing the legacy of the Yalta agreements within the broader context of the progress of freedom throughout the world and American support for democracy in countries ranging from former Soviet republics to Iraq, the latter occupied by American troops. As Bush presented it, democracy was the link between America's policy in Eastern Europe after the Second World War and its policy in the oil-rich Middle East. But this is the only parallel that one might draw between the Russian and American positions on the significance of the Yalta decisions.

As he accepted Vladimir Putin's invitation to attend the VE Day celebrations in Moscow and encouraged others, such as President Vike-Freiberga of Latvia, to do likewise, Bush decided to take the opportunity to visit not only Russia but also Latvia and Georgia, two former Soviet republics whose recent relations with Russia were far from smooth. The message was clear. Although the US administration cared about maintaining good relations with Russia, it was not relinquishing its support of democratic processes in former Soviet republics struggling to escape the Russian sphere of influence. In Latvia Bush apparently felt obliged to take a stand on the legacy of the Yalta Conference, given the prolonged debate in that country on the history of Russo-Latvian relations during and after the Second World War. Referring to the conference in his Riga speech, Bush deliberately took the East European side in the ongoing debate. Indeed, he showed his readiness to go further than any of his predecessors in acknowledging American complicity in the Yalta division of Europe.



‘As we mark a victory of six days ago—six decades ago, we are mindful of a paradox,’ stated Bush. ‘For much of Germany, defeat led to freedom. For much of Eastern and Central Europe, victory brought the iron rule of another empire. VE Day marked the end of fascism, but it did not end oppression. The agreement at Yalta followed in the unjust tradition of Munich and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Once again, when powerful governments negotiated, the freedom of small nations was somehow expendable. Yet this attempt to sacrifice freedom for the sake of stability left a continent divided and unstable. The captivity of millions in Central and Eastern Europe will be remembered as one of the greatest wrongs of history.’<sup>19</sup>

A US administration official later revealed that the Yalta remark was intended as an invitation for Putin to apologize for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. If that was indeed the case, then the White House speechwriters clearly miscalculated, for the remark did nothing to change Russia’s position on the issue. Bush certainly scored points with leaders of the ‘new Europe,’ but he also created unexpected problems for his administration at home. The speech reignited the old debate between Republicans and Democrats over the role of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in what his critics called the ‘sellout’ of Eastern Europe to Joseph Stalin. Conservative journalists and commentators such as Pat Buchanan and Anne Applebaum praised Bush’s remarks as a long overdue recognition of the ‘awful truth,’ while liberals, represented by a number of historians of American foreign policy and the Cold War, accused the Republicans of reviving the spirit of Joseph McCarthy. The Democrats maintained that the Yalta Conference had done little more

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<sup>19</sup> For the text of Bush’s Riga speech, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/05/20050507-8.html>.

than recognize the reality on the ground, given that by the time of the Crimean summit Stalin had already gained control of Eastern Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The Riga speech was by no means the first public statement in which President Bush criticized the Yalta agreements. He had done so on previous occasions as well, always expressing his criticism in remarks addressed to East European audiences. Those remarks were apparently designed to placate allies of the United States in the new Europe, demonstrating American concern about the consequences of an event crucial to their history. They were also aimed at President Putin, encouraging him to be more honest in his assessment of the role played by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. In the past, Bush's criticism of the Yalta agreements had failed to convince Putin to alter Russia's official interpretation of the event, but it was clearly appreciated by the East European elites.

When it comes to American discourse on Yalta, Bush's critique did not so much follow in the footsteps of Joseph McCarthy, as claimed by his Democratic critics, but echoed statements made by leading figures in President Bill Clinton's administration. In March 1999 Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the daughter of a former Czechoslovak diplomat who escaped to the West after the communist takeover, stated to representatives of East European governments: 'Never again will your fates be tossed around like poker chips on a bargaining table.' In fact, Albright was developing an argument made earlier by her deputy and Clinton's classmate Strobe Talbott. 'After World War II,' remarked Talbott in May 1997, 'many countries in the east suffered half a century under the shadow of Yalta. That is a place name that has come to be a codeword for the cynical sacrifice of small nations' freedom to great powers' spheres of

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<sup>20</sup> For a survey of the American debate prompted by Bush's Riga speech, see Elisabeth Bumiller, 'In row over Yalta, Bush pokes at Baltic politics,' *International Herald Tribune*, 16 May 2005.

influence, just as Versailles has to come to signify a short-sighted, punitive, and humiliating peace that sows the seeds of future war.<sup>21</sup>

Why, then, were the liberal opponents of President Bush so critical of his Riga speech? Leaving aside the political dynamics of May 2005, it should be noted that Bush was much more explicit in his critique of the Yalta agreements than his Democratic predecessors, especially as he compared Yalta not to Versailles but to Munich and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In so doing, he indeed revived some of the ghosts of the McCarthy era. ‘The Munich Called Yalta’ was the title of a chapter contributed by William H. Chamberlin to a book published in 1950 that criticized American diplomacy for appeasing Stalin and sacrificing the independence of Poland and the national interests of China.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the comparison with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a new addition to the decades-old controversy introduced by the author of the Riga speech, the presidential assistant Michael Gerson.<sup>23</sup> It seemed appropriate to mention the division of Europe between Germany and the USSR in 1939 in a speech made in Latvia, where the memory of the Hitler-Stalin deal is alive and well more than sixty-five years after the event, and where every schoolchild knows that at Yalta Roosevelt and Churchill agreed to Soviet territorial acquisitions based on that pact. Not so in the USA. By drawing attention to the connection between the pact and the Yalta agreements, Bush opened the door to possible comparisons of FDR not only with Neville Chamberlain but also with Hitler and Stalin. More than anything else, it was that sacrilegious suggestion that provoked attacks on the administration from the

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Matt Welch, ‘When Men Were Men and Continents Were Divided,’ Reason on Line, 10 May 2005, [www.reason.com/hitandr/un/2005/05/when\\_men\\_were\\_m.shtml](http://www.reason.com/hitandr/un/2005/05/when_men_were_m.shtml).

<sup>22</sup> See William Henry Chamberlin, ‘The Munich Called Yalta,’ in *The Yalta Conference*, ed. Richard F. Fenno, 2d ed. (Lexington, Mass., Toronto, and London, 1972), pp. 84-98.

<sup>23</sup> See Bumiller, ‘In row over Yalta, Bush pokes at Baltic politics.’

belligerent Democrats—attacks that the White House had not expected and would have preferred to avoid.

What were the arguments on both sides of the Yalta debate in the United States? It would appear that the opposing parties contributed very little new material to the debate that reached its climax in the 1950s and 1960s. On the Democratic side, the old arguments were summarized and reiterated by a participant in the academic debates of the 1960s, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. In his commentary on Bush's Riga speech, he stated that the president 'is under the delusion that tougher diplomacy might have preserved the freedom of small European nations.' Schlesinger rebuffed that thesis, stating that 'it was the deployment of armies, not negotiated concessions, that caused the division of Europe.' He reminded his readers that at the time of the Yalta Conference Eastern Europe was already occupied by the Red Army, and conflict with the USSR was inconceivable as long as the war with Japan was still going on. Among the achievements of the Yalta Conference, Schlesinger listed Stalin's promise to enter the war with Japan at a time when 'the atom bomb seemed to be a fantasy dreamed up by nuclear physicists,' and FDR's success in making Stalin sign the Declaration on Liberated Europe, which obliged the Soviets to conduct free elections in the countries of Eastern Europe that they occupied.<sup>24</sup> Jacob Heilbrunn, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, put forward another important argument in favor of Yalta that Schlesinger had overlooked. He claimed that refusing to make a deal with Stalin on Eastern Europe 'would have seriously jeopardized the common battle against Germany.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., 'Yalta Delusions,' *The Huffington Post*, 9 May 2005, [www.huffingtonpost.com/theblog/archive/2005/05/yalta-delusions.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/theblog/archive/2005/05/yalta-delusions.html). Here Schlesinger summarized some of his arguments presented in the October 1967 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. For a reprint of the article, see 'Origins of the Cold War' in *The Yalta Conference*, pp. 152-83.

<sup>25</sup> See Jacob Heilbrunn, 'Once Again, the Big Yalta Lie,' *Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 2005.

The defenders of Bush's Riga speech did not, of course, argue that the West should have gone to war with the Soviet Union, jeopardized the victory over Hitler, or impeded the war effort in the Pacific. Their argument, like the reasoning of their opponents, was deeply rooted in formulas developed in the political and scholarly debates of the 1950s and 1960s. Pat Buchanan, for example, titled his article on the issue 'Was WWII Worth It? For Stalin, Yes,' echoing the title of the chapter 'Stalin's Greatest Victory' in Chester Wilmot's book *The Struggle for Europe* (1952).<sup>26</sup> Buchanan juxtaposed Putin's rhetoric about the Soviet liberation of eleven countries with Bush's admission that many of the European countries liberated from fascism found themselves under another form of oppression as a result of the agreements reached at Yalta. Siding with Bush, Buchanan accused FDR and Churchill of selling out Eastern Europe to one of history's deadliest tyrants, Joseph Stalin. Following in the footsteps of prewar American isolationists, he also questioned the rationale behind American involvement in a war that took fifty million lives. Echoes of the earlier debates were also to be heard in the *National Review* editorial 'Yalta Regrets,' which stated that the United States could have won the war against Japan without Soviet participation.<sup>27</sup>

Anne Applebaum, on the other hand, added some new emphases to the old theme as she attacked 'a small crew of liberal historians and Rooseveltians' who claimed that 'Yalta was a recognition of reality rather than a sellout.' 'Their charges,' according to Applebaum, 'ignore the breadth of the agreement—was it really necessary to agree to deport thousands of expatriate

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<sup>26</sup> See Pat Buchanan, 'Was WWII Worth It? For Stalin, Yes,' AntiWar.com, 11 May 2005, <http://www.antiwar.com/pat/?articleid=5899>. Cf. Chester Wilmot, 'Stalin's Greatest Victory,' in *The Yalta Conference*, pp. 59-84.

<sup>27</sup> See 'Yalta Regrets,' *National Review* online, 11 May 2005, [www.nationalreview.com/editorial/editorial2200505110923.asp](http://www.nationalreview.com/editorial/editorial2200505110923.asp).

Russians back to certain death in the Soviet Union?—as well as the fact that Yalta and the other wartime agreements went beyond mere recognition of Soviet occupation and conferred legality and international acceptance on new borders and political structures.’ The new element in this conservative argument was the conviction with which the author spoke about Stalin’s crimes and the complicity of the Western powers in them. Applebaum, who has written an acclaimed book on the Gulag based on archival materials that became available after the collapse of the USSR, knew exactly what she was talking about when she wrote of the ‘certain death’ awaiting former Soviet citizens shipped back to the USSR by the American and British military. ‘The tone was right,’ stated Applebaum with regard to Bush’s speech, ‘and it contrasted sharply with the behavior of Russian president Vladimir Putin, as perhaps it was intended to. Asked again last week why he hadn’t made his own apology for the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, Putin pointed out that the Soviet parliament did so in 1989. “What,” he asked, “we have to do this every day, every year?”’<sup>28</sup>

### *The Long Shadow of ‘Uncle Joe’*

Putin was certainly in no mood for apologies during the Moscow celebrations of VE Day, and Bush did not insist on them. He stated in his remarks about his Moscow visit that he was dealing with a friend. The American president remained silent regarding Putin’s encroachment on democratic institutions and liberties in Russia—a silence understood by the Russian media as tacit support for Putin.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Applebaum, ‘Saying Sorry,’ *Washington Post*, 11 May 2005, p. A17.

<sup>29</sup> See Iuliia Petrovskaia, ‘Troinaia diplomatiia Busha,’ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 11 May 2005; Artur Blinov, ‘Ia sidel riadom s drugom,’ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 13 May 2005.

During the first half of 2005, the decisions adopted by the Yalta Conference were discussed by the Russian media in a number of contexts, including the long-term implications of the disintegration of the international system created at that conference. On the eve of the Yalta commemorations, the Russian state-run news agency Novosti released an interview with Valentin Falin, the former head of the international department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The veteran of Soviet diplomacy declared the Yalta agreements to be the best chance the world had ever had to end the threat of war. Falin interpreted attacks on the agreement as denunciations of the legacy of President Roosevelt, whom he held in the highest regard. Quoting from Edward R. Stettinius's memoirs of the Yalta Conference, Falin rejected the assumption that Stalin, whom President Roosevelt almost affectionately called 'Uncle Joe,' had outmaneuvered his American counterpart at Yalta. He noted that both the idea for the creation of the United Nations Organization and the final communiqué on the conference were conceived by the Americans. Falin held President Harry Truman responsible for the failure of the Yalta agreements and the beginning of the Cold War. By reiterating that traditional Soviet-era view, Falin was in effect sending a new message to critics of Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe: if you do not like Yalta, address your grievances to the United States.

When asked specifically about the partition of Europe into spheres of influence, Falin first tried to dodge the question; when it was repeated, he used Soviet-era arguments to present Soviet actions at the conference in the best possible light. He rejected the interviewer's suggestion that any spheres of interest had been established at Yalta. Following Stalin's argument of 1945, Falin stated that the Curzon Line, which became the basis of the new border between Poland and the USSR, had been drawn not by the Russians but by the leaders of the

USA, Britain, and France in 1919 on the basis of ethnographic maps. Answering a question about the Baltic states, Falin reminded his audience that they had been cut off from Soviet Russia during the Revolution by pro-German governments and used by the West as a base for intervention against Russia. The United States, according to Falin, did not care about the independence of the Baltic countries as long as they supported the White government of Admiral Kolchak, and Roosevelt had opposed the inclusion of the Baltic states in the USSR only because he did not want to lose the votes of Baltic immigrants in the USA.<sup>30</sup> Falin clearly believed that Russia had nothing for which to apologize in relation to the Yalta decisions. That was also the opinion of Vadim Trukhachev, who commented in *Pravda* on an article by the Polish journalist Marek Ostrowski, noting that the latter had failed to mention that it was thanks to the insistence of the USSR that Poland had acquired its postwar western and northern territories.<sup>31</sup>

The Russian liberal press remained largely silent on the issue of Yalta in February 2005, when it was at the center of controversy in Eastern Europe. Yalta reemerged in Russian public discourse only in April 2005 within the context of a broader debate on Stalin's role in Russian history. The debate had begun in the late 1980s with the onset of glasnost. It originally focused on the crimes committed by the Stalin regime but acquired new characteristics in the 1990s with the rise of Russian nationalism. More Russians adopted a positive attitude toward Stalin after 2000, as Vladimir Putin took power and authoritarian tendencies came to the fore in Russian politics.<sup>32</sup> In the spring of 2005, the Stalin debate was reignited by Zurab Tsereteli, arguably

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<sup>30</sup> See 'Ialta—shans, kotorym ne sumeli vospol'zovat'sia,' RIA 'Novosti,' 1 March 2005.

<sup>31</sup> See Trukhachev's translation of Ostrowski's article and his commentary on it in Pravda.ru for 21 February 2005, [http://www.pravda.ru/world/2005/5/14/38/19148\\_Polska.html](http://www.pravda.ru/world/2005/5/14/38/19148_Polska.html).

<sup>32</sup> On the rise of Stalin's popularity in Putin's Russia, see Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, 'Failing the Stalin Test,' *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 1 (January-February 2006): 2-8.



Russia's most productive and controversial sculptor. In anticipation of the anniversary of the Yalta Conference, Tsereteli created a gigantic bronze sculpture of Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill as depicted in numerous photographs taken in front of the Livadia Palace in February 1945. The sculpture, which is four meters tall and weighs ten tons, was originally supposed to be installed at the Second World War memorial near Moscow<sup>33</sup> but was later offered to the Livadia municipal council. The city council first accepted the offer and then turned it down. After that, the sculpture was offered to the war memorial in Volgograd, the site of the Battle of Stalingrad. By April 2004 the issue had attracted the attention of the Russian media and representatives of the Russian liberal elite, who issued an appeal protesting the idea of installing the sculpture on Russian soil.

The authors of the appeal, who included Oleg Basilashvili, Aleksandr Gelman, Daniil Granin, Oleg Tabakov, and the 'grandfather of perestroika,' Aleksandr Yakovlev, regarded Tsereteli's depiction of the Big Three as an attempt to build a monument to Stalin and as a step toward his political rehabilitation in Russia. 'For the first time since the revelation of Stalin's crimes against humanity,' wrote the authors of the appeal, 'an attempt is being made in our country to put up a monument to him, and that on the sacred occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Victory, which would have cost our nation considerably fewer victims had it not been for Stalin's "purges" of military cadres and his glaring miscalculations in policy and strategy.'<sup>34</sup> The statement was a direct response to those in the Russian nationalist camp and among the public at

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<sup>33</sup> On the Russian politics of remembrance, as reflected in the composition of the memorial during the Yeltsin period, see Nurit Schleifman, 'Moscow's Victory Park: A Monumental Change,' in *History and Memory* 13, no. 2 (2001): 5-34.

<sup>34</sup> For the text of the appeal, see 'Oskvernenie Dnia Pobedy,' *Grani*, 12 April 2005, <http://grani.ru/Society/m.87674.html>.

large who often cite Stalin's contribution to the victory over Nazi Germany as the main argument for his rehabilitation. Ironically, the appeal was addressed not to the Russian public but to President Putin, who brought back the Stalin-era anthem of the USSR as the anthem of the new Russia and whose rule witnessed a rise in the popularity of the once dreaded generalissimo. It would appear that the liberal intellectuals who signed the appeal had no illusions about the presence in Russia of any force other than the authoritarian president capable of stopping the public rehabilitation of Joseph Stalin.

The Stalin controversy and the approaching celebrations of VE Day finally brought the question of the Yalta Conference and the historical responsibility of the USSR (and, by extension, Russia) for its decisions to the attention of Russian liberals, giving them a legitimate voice in a discussion earlier dominated by officialdom. On 3 April 2005 Vladimir Pozner, the host of the popular Russian television program *Vremena* (Times), asked a guest who was to be credited with victory in the Great Patriotic war, Stalin or the people. The guest refused to distinguish between the two, and Pozner was later criticized by Russian nationalists for trying to separate Stalin and the state from the people.<sup>35</sup> But the liberals were not silenced. Writing in *Izvestiia* in late April 2005, Fedor Lukianov noted the danger of associating the end of the Second World War with the victory of the Russian state. He wrote: 'But if that war is understood not as a heroic feat of the nation but as the political triumph of the Russian state, then we fall into a trap. One would then have to argue, foaming at the mouth, that Stalin acted as he should have done, the pact of 1939 was in accord with international law, and Yalta brought democracy to

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<sup>35</sup> See Iu. Krupnov, 'Kto vyigral voinu? Narod ili Stalin?' *Internet protiv teleëkrana*, 10 October 2005.

Eastern Europe.<sup>36</sup> Writing after the VE Day celebrations in Moscow, Viktor Sheinis, a member of the liberal Yabloko Party, stated that at Yalta the Western leaders had approved the territorial acquisitions obtained by Stalin according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Those decisions blocked the progress of democracy in Eastern Europe for more than forty years, and it should come as no surprise that the East Europeans regarded Yalta as another Munich and refused to participate in the VE Day celebrations in Moscow. In Sheinis's opinion, 'If one is to show respect for Churchill, who understood earlier than others what a mess Stalin's Western allies had made, then I would depict him not in a chair on the Crimean shore but at the rostrum in Fulton. But such a monument should not, of course, be erected at Yalta....'<sup>37</sup>

### *The Crimean Debate*

What happened in and around Yalta in the spring of 2005 that first prompted the municipal council of Livadia, the actual setting of the Crimean conference, first to accept Tsereteli's gift and then to refuse it? The city fathers changed their minds mainly for two reasons. The first was the attitude of the Crimean Tatars, whom Stalin forcibly deported from the peninsula less than a year before the Yalta Conference. They were welcomed back by the government of independent Ukraine and became embroiled in a political struggle with the Russian-dominated Crimean parliament for the restoration of their political, cultural, and economic rights in their historical homeland. The second reason was the position taken by the Ukrainian government, the new master of the Crimea and of the conference site. In 1954 the Crimean peninsula, including Yalta,

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<sup>36</sup> See Fedor Lukianov, 'Den' Pobedy: mezhdunarodnyi aspekt,' *Izvestiia*, 29 April 2005,

<http://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/3986.html>. Cf. Lukianov's much less critical article about Yalta in the 8 February issue of *Vremia novostei*, 'Global'nyi disbalans: mir posle Ialty,' <http://www.vremya.ru/>.

<sup>37</sup> See Viktor Sheinis, 'Ten' vozhdia narodov,' *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 20 May 2005.

was transferred from the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation to that of the Ukrainian SSR, and in 1991 it became an autonomous republic within the independent Ukrainian state. Thus, by the spring of 2005, it was not only the citizens of Livadia but also the Mejlis (parliament) of the Crimean Tatars, the authorities in Simferopol, the capital of the Crimea, and the leadership of the Ukrainian state in Kyiv who influenced the Livadia decision.

The decision to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference was made by the Ukrainian parliament on 16 December 2004, less than two months before the event. The reason for this last-minute decision was readily apparent, given that in November and December 2004 the Orange Revolution had thrown the Ukrainian parliament into turmoil. The decision on the Yalta commemoration was made after the resolution of the political crisis but prior to the third round of the presidential elections, which brought the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, to power. The organizing committee for the celebrations consisted of members of the Crimean government, and in January 2005 its vice-president, Professor Vladimir Kazarin, was busy making a last-minute pitch to raise the public profile of the event. In an interview with Kyiv's most respectable weekly, *Dzerkalo tyzhnia* (Weekly Mirror), Kazarin suggested that by starting late and not committing enough resources to the celebrations, Ukraine, a founding member of the UN, was losing a chance to raise its visibility in world affairs and give a boost to its struggling tourist industry. According to Kazarin, one of the problems encountered by the organizers of the commemoration was opposition to Tsereteli's monument to the Big Three. Kazarin argued that it was a monument commemorating a particular event, not a tribute to Stalin. One could not remove important figures from history or pretend that certain events had never

happened. Kazarin also noted that there were monuments to Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, which, in his opinion, was as it should be.<sup>38</sup>

As Kazarin sought to promote the commemoration of the Yalta Conference in the national media and argued in favor of installing Tsereteli's monument in Livadia, he found himself under increasing attack in the Crimea. The leaders of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis accused Kazarin—who, aside from being vice-premier of the Crimean government, was also a member of the communist faction in the Crimean parliament and head of the Russian cultural society of the Crimea—of attempting to rehabilitate Stalin and Stalinism under the pretext of commemorating the Yalta Conference. They reminded the public that two years earlier the communist deputies of the Sevastopol city council had voted in favor of building a monument to Stalin in their city. A leading figure in the Mejlis, Ilmi Umerov, stated that he could not accept the idea of a monument to the Big Three, given the forcible deportation of the Crimean Tatars conducted on Stalin's orders, as well as the controversial nature of the Yalta Conference, which had divided Europe into spheres of influence. The head of the Mejlis, Mustafa Dzhemilev, stated for his part that if such a monument were to be erected in Livadia, the Crimean Tatars would ensure that it would not stay there long. The appeal not to allow the installation of the monument was signed by dozens of former dissidents in Ukraine and Russia. The Crimean branches of Ukrainian political parties that supported the Orange Revolution made a similar appeal to Kyiv. As a result, the office of the Crimean attorney general annulled the decision of the Livadia town council to install the monument, citing a law that gave national authorities the right to make final decisions

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<sup>38</sup> See Mykola Semena, 'U tsentri uvahy chy na zadvorkakh? Ukraina vtrachaie mizhnarodnyi prestyzh, zabuvaiuchy pro svoiu rol' u mizhnarodnii istorii,' *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 15-22 January 2005.

on the construction of monuments of national significance. Kazarin had to retreat, announcing the postponement of a final decision pending ‘public consultation’ on the project.<sup>39</sup>

This was not the end of the controversy. On 4 February 2005, the anniversary of the Yalta Conference, communists staged a meeting in Simferopol to protest the refusal of the Crimean authorities to install the monument. They criticized the Crimean premier, Serhii Kunitsyn, for kowtowing to the new ‘Orange’ government in Kyiv and threatened to initiate a criminal investigation into Kunitsyn’s alleged embezzlement of parcels of land on the Crimean shore of the Black Sea. The Crimean Tatars held their own rally in Livadia to protest the installation of the monument. On the eve of the commemoration, Kazarin noted the irony that a bust of President Roosevelt was to be unveiled in Yalta, but that there would be no monument to the Big Three in Livadia. At the Livadia Palace, there was an exhibition featuring the offices occupied by Roosevelt and Churchill during the conference but not Stalin’s office. Eventually the organizers of the commemoration compromised, deciding to include Stalin’s Livadia office in the exhibition instead of installing the monument to the Big Three. President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia even promised to send artifacts from the Stalin museum in his native town of Gori.<sup>40</sup> But the controversy over the monument did not go away entirely. In April, Leonid Hrach, the leader of the Crimean communists, called upon the Livadia town council to install Tsereteli’s monument in order to honor the memory of those who had fallen for the ‘Great Victory.’ The leaders of the Mejlis issued their own statements on the matter, threatening to block the roads

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<sup>39</sup> See ‘Ukraina i Vtoraia mirovaia voina,’ *Krymskoe obozrenie*, 1 February 2005; ‘V Krymu otmechaut 60-iu godovshchinu Ialtinskoi konferentsii,’ *Krymskoe obozrenie*, 6 February 2005.

<sup>40</sup> See Liudmila Obukhovskaia, ‘Ialta 1945-2005: ot bipoliarnogo mira k geopolitike budushchego,’ *Krymskaia pravda*, 1 February 2005; idem, ‘Imet’ uvazhenie k proshlomu,’ *Krymskaia pravda*, 9 February 2005.

along which the monument could be transported to Livadia. By that time the decision not to allow the installation was final, forcing Tsereteli to look for a site in Russia, which led in turn to a major controversy in the Russian media.<sup>41</sup>

*'Making Sense of War'*

In 2002 Amir Weiner published a book under this title in which he discussed the impact of the Second World War on the elites and general population of Vinnytsia oblast in Ukraine during the postwar era.<sup>42</sup> Judging by recent debates in the Ukrainian media, Ukrainians are still struggling to make sense of their Second World War experience; hence the Yalta debate was not limited to Crimean political and historical discourse. Throughout 2005, articles in the Ukrainian press criticized the artificiality of Stalin's 'constitutional reform' of 1944, which allowed the Soviet dictator to ask for an additional UN seat for the Ukrainian SSR. Such prominent Ukrainian historians as Yuri Shapoval attacked Stalin for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, questioning the dictator's role as 'gatherer' of the Ukrainian lands.<sup>43</sup> The Kyiv authors Serhii Hrabovsky and Ihor Losiev, writing in the American Ukrainian-language newspaper *Svoboda* (Liberty), adopted

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<sup>41</sup> For reaction to Hrach's statement by the leaders of the Tatar Mejlis, see Tsentri informatsiï ta dokumentatsiï kryms'kykh tatar, <http://www.cidct.org.ua/press/2005/20050104.html#33>.

<sup>42</sup> Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> See Iurii Shapoval, 'Ukraïns'ka Druha Svitova,' *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 15 (543), 23 April-6 May 2005; Serhii Makhun, "'Zoloty veresen'"abo "vyrishennia pytannia shliakhom druzhn'oï zhody,'" *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 36 (564), 17-23 September 2005; Vladyslav Hrynevych, 'Iak Ukraïnu do vstupu v OON hotuvala stalins'ka "konstytutsiina reforma" voiennoï doby,' *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 41 (569), 22-28 October 2005.

the Polish-Baltic position on Yalta.<sup>44</sup> That position was shared by the majority in formerly Polish-ruled western Ukraine, which became part of the USSR as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Yalta agreements. Eastern Ukraine, however, was not prepared to accept the ‘Westerners’ interpretation of the history of the Second World War or of the decisions reached at Yalta. In the spring of 2005, as the Ukrainian government struggled with the question of whether President Yushchenko should accept Vladimir Putin’s invitation to the Moscow celebrations, the Ukrainian media kept its readers informed about the controversies provoked by the VE Day anniversary in Poland and the Baltic states. Polish articles debating the issue were published in translation in Ukrainian newspapers, and statements of the Baltic leaders were liberally quoted in articles by Ukrainian authors. Some of them, such as Viacheslav Anisimov, writing at the end of March in *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, called upon Yushchenko not to fear displeasing the Kremlin, decline Putin’s invitation, and celebrate the anniversary in Ukraine with his own people.<sup>45</sup> After long hesitation, President Yushchenko opted for compromise: he flew to Moscow for a few hours, then rushed back to Kyiv on the same day to commemorate VE Day in the Ukrainian capital.

Prior to the VE Day celebrations in Moscow and Kyiv, public debate in Ukraine centred on the issue of whether the country had fought in the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people or participated in the Second World War. The first interpretation meant sticking to the old Soviet myth of the war, which treated only Red Army soldiers as legitimate combatants and portrayed the cadres of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), who fought both the Soviets and the Nazis in

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<sup>44</sup> See Serhii Hrabovs'kyi and Ihor Losiev, ‘Ialta 1945: triumf svobody, chy peremoha zla?’ *Svoboda*, no. 5, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> See Viacheslav Anisimov, ‘Radist' zi sl'ozamy na ochakh, abo pro polityku, istoriiu i moral' na zori XXI stolittia,’ *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 11 (539), 26 March-1 April 2005.



western Ukraine, as German stooges. The second option allowed Ukrainian intellectuals to develop a Eurocentric or Ukrainocentric interpretation of the war, as opposed to a Russocentric one. Within that framework, Ukraine emerges as a country that fought against and was one of the major victims of both totalitarian systems of the twentieth century—fascism and communism.<sup>46</sup> The choice of concept was not only important for the interpretation of history but also had serious political implications for the Ukrainian government and society at large.

At President Yushchenko's initiative, the new Ukrainian government sought to do away with the Soviet-era tradition of commemorating Victory Day with a formal parade and attempted to use the occasion to encourage reconciliation between Red Army and UPA veterans, who had fought one another during the war. Among other things, such a reconciliation was supposed to help bridge the gap between eastern and western Ukraine that had opened up during the divisive presidential elections of 2004. Like many of the plans of Yushchenko's revolutionary government, the high hopes invested in the VE Day commemorations were disappointed. First, the Soviet Army veterans' organization protested against changing the format of the celebrations. Then the idea of reconciliation was opposed by the communists and their allies in parliament, who protested the extension of government benefits enjoyed by combatants in the 'Great Patriotic War' to UPA fighters. The government, trying to avoid a new conflict between the two veterans' groups and their supporters, decided to abandon the idea of changing the traditional VE Day anniversary celebrations. The communists maintained their control over the Soviet veterans'

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<sup>46</sup> See Vitalii Radchuk, 'Velyka Vitchyzniana chy Druha Svitova?' *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 26 (554), 9-15 July 2005. For diametrically opposing views on the issue, see articles in Ukraine's leading Internet newspaper, *Ukrains'ka pravda*, by Serhii Hrabov's'kyi, 'Chas povertatsia z viiny,' *Ukrains'ka pravda*, 6 May 2006, and Dmytro Krapyvenko and Pavlo Slobod'ko, 'Tvir do Dnia Peremohy,' *Ukrains'ka pravda*, 8 May 2006, <http://www.pravda.com.ua>.

association and preserved their de facto political monopoly on the commemorations.<sup>47</sup> When on 15 October 2005 UPA supporters tried to celebrate the sixty-third anniversary of the founding of the army with a demonstration in Kyiv, they were physically attacked by communists and supporters of radical pro-Russian groups.<sup>48</sup> Once again, worshippers of ‘the great Stalin’ intervened to oppose Ukraine’s attempt to break with the Soviet past. After the VE Day celebrations Ukraine remained as divided as before in its attitudes toward the Second World War and its outcome.

### *Conclusions*

It has become a cliché to state that all politics are local. It is more controversial to state that all historical debates are parochial or are determined by local (national) agendas, traditions, fears, and complexes. The recent Yalta debate, despite its international scope, seems to support the second proposition as much as the first. Remembering, forgetting, and (re)interpreting the Yalta Conference during the winter and spring of 2005 turned out to be a process fuelled as much by national historiographic traditions as by current perceptions of national interests. Nevertheless, the recent Yalta debate allows one to draw some preliminary conclusions of a more general

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<sup>47</sup> On the actions of the communists and the leadership of the Soviet Army veterans’ association relating to the failure of the planned reconciliation, see Hrabovs'kyi, ‘Chas povertatysia z viiny’; Mykola Velychko, ‘NKVD ne prostylo UPA,’ *Ukrain's'ka pravda*, 10 May 2005, <http://www.pravda.com.ua>; Volodymyr Danyliuk, ‘Prymyrennia veteraniv. Misiia nezdiisnenna,’ *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 11 (539), 26 March-1 April 2005; Iryna Mahdysh, ‘Nasha porazka u Druhii Svitovii viini,’ *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, no. 21 (549), 4-10 June 2005.

<sup>48</sup> Ron Popeski, ‘Leftists, nationalists scuffle in Ukraine over WW2,’ Reuters, Kiev, Ukraine, 15 October 2005.

nature, as it sheds light on the interrelation between historical memory and international politics in a dialogue involving great powers and smaller states dependent on their protection. One such conclusion is that if the victims of Yalta stood united in their negative assessment of the Yalta accords, the victors' assessments of the agreements varied by political camp. It has been said that victors are not judged. The debates of 2005 in the United States and Russia show that they are judged not only by others but also by themselves.

For the East Europeans, the anniversary was a chance to express their indignation about an event that had remained at the core of their historical memory and identity for the last sixty years. They could finally begin the process of healing their historical traumas by presenting a list of grievances to the main perpetrator, Russia, and its Yalta accomplices. It seems quite clear that for most of the Polish and Baltic elites, remembering Yalta was necessary not only to recover historical facts suppressed by the communist regimes but also to ensure international recognition of the trauma suffered by the East European nations after the end of the Second World War. The first of these tasks was achieved immediately before and after the collapse of communism, with the consequent delegitimization of the Russocentric communist historical narrative. It was now time to achieve the second goal. By commemorating Yalta in 2005, the East European elites were once again parting ways with their nations' communist past and dependence on Russia—but they were now doing so on the international scene. As the countries of Eastern Europe were admitted to NATO and the European Union, it became safer for them to air their historical grievances against Moscow in the international arena. As the new Russia's activity in the region increased with the start of the new millennium, while a new generation of East European citizens who had never witnessed communist or Soviet domination of their countries came of age, it also became useful for domestic and international reasons alike to remind the world about the trauma

of Yalta. As the East Europeans saw it, the new generation should not forget the lessons of the past, while the West should not repeat the errors of Yalta by allowing Russia a special role in Eastern Europe.

No country in the region was more interested in delivering this message to the world than Ukraine, which had just emerged from the drama of the Orange Revolution, in which it rejected Russian interference in its internal affairs. While the new Ukrainian government would have preferred to side with its Polish and Baltic colleagues in unreservedly condemning the Yalta agreements, it had to beware of the lack of consensus on the significance of the Second World War within its own political elite. Remaining pro-Soviet sentiment in the country's eastern regions, as well as the still influential communist opposition in parliament, drastically limited the new government's options with regard to public remembrance of the end of the Second World War. The Ukrainian public debate on the legacy of the Yalta Conference was influenced not only by political dynamics after the Orange Revolution but also by international considerations. None was more important than the issue of Ukraine's borders. While sharing the criticism of Yalta expressed by its western neighbors, the Ukrainian intellectual elites could not fully condemn the conference that had made their country a founder of the United Nations and provided international legitimacy for its western borders. Thus in the Ukrainian media the border question was discussed in the context of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact but not in that of the Yalta agreements. The sensitivity of the border issue helps explain Ukraine's reluctance to take advantage of the anniversary to raise its international profile: at Yalta the Big Three had made not only Poland but also Ukraine complicit in Stalin's division of Europe. As a result of the Yalta decisions, Ukraine obtained lands that did not belong to it before the war, although they were largely settled by ethnic Ukrainians. A new nation that could be considered both a beneficiary

and a victim of Yalta, Ukraine, as represented by its government, preferred to ‘forget’ so important an event in its history as the Yalta Conference.

What about the other beneficiaries of Yalta? No country seems more entrapped by the Yalta decisions and the legacy of Stalinism than the Russian Federation. Faced with actual and potential claims against its Yalta booty and post-Yalta policies on the part of Germany, Japan, Poland, and the Baltic states, the Russian leadership is as far today as it has ever been from issuing a public apology for the ‘crimes of Yalta.’ Russian imperial pride is one reason why President Bush’s invitation to President Putin to apologize for the wrongs done to Russia’s neighbors has elicited no positive response and will not do so in the immediate future. For the Russian elites, Yalta remains a symbol of their country’s glory, reminding them of Moscow’s former status as the capital of a superpower rivaled only by the United States. The nostalgic communists continue to see the Yalta decisions as proof of the triumph of communism and the greatness of the communist dictator Joseph Stalin. Only the liberals, now weak and marginalized—an echo of the once powerful popular movement of the Gorbachev and early Yeltsin years—remain critical of both the Stalinist legacy and Russia’s continuing imperial ambitions.

All Russian political forces, from nationalists to liberals, approached the Yalta and VE Day anniversaries with their own hopes and political agendas. The ruling elites wanted to raise and embellish Russia’s international image by reminding the world of its leading role in defeating fascism. The Russian conservatives complained about the post-Cold War world, rife with unpredictability and danger now that it was no longer held in check by Yalta-type agreements. In the eyes of Russian diplomats, the solution to the world’s new insecurities was quite simple: it would suffice to recognize the territories of the former Soviet Union as a zone of

Russian responsibility. Russian liberals expected the collapse of the unjust Yalta arrangements to lead to the complete elimination of the Iron Curtain and make Russia a full member of the club of European nations. None of these scenarios materialized, and the negative reaction to the Moscow celebrations in East Central Europe dashed the hopes of Russian conservatives and liberals alike. This failure should not obscure the general trend in the evolution of Russian collective memory since the collapse of the USSR. As the loss of empire becomes more obvious to the Russian elites and society at large, and former clients adopt more independent policies toward Moscow, official Russia becomes less inclined to issue apologies for crimes and injustices perpetrated against the empire's former subjects. On the contrary, it becomes more aggressive both in the interpretation of its historical role in the region and in the pursuit of its current policies there.

Only the United States rose to the occasion when in the words of its president it condemned the Yalta agreements, placing them in the same category as the Munich appeasement and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Unlike Russia, the United States is prepared to admit its historical error for the sake of building better relations with the countries of the region. President Bush's remarks about Yalta are an interesting case of the use and abuse of history on the international scene. There is little doubt that they were not intended mainly for a domestic audience. Bush appears to have had at least two goals in mind. The first was to support the countries of the new Europe that showed loyalty to the United States and embarrass President Putin, who was in no psychological, political, or economic position to afford a similar admission of guilt. The second was to legitimize his war in Iraq and his policy in the Middle East by pledging never again to abandon support for freedom and democracy—the latter being the major theme of his discourse on Iraq. The president's use of the Yalta anniversary to recognize

America's past errors, while promoting his new international agenda, did not sit well with critics of his administration in the USA. Enraged by the comparison of the Yalta agreements to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (a mere recognition that, in the Baltic states at least, the Yalta decisions ratified the borders established by the Stalin-Hitler agreement of 1939), the Democrats rose instinctively to the defense of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Democratic president revered even by Ronald Reagan. The Yalta debate in the United States itself demonstrated once again the predominance of the national over the international perspective in the collective memory of the world's only remaining superpower.

Nevertheless, it would appear that the United States is winning not only the geopolitical competition with Russia in its East European backyard but also the historical debate. The ideas of freedom and democracy, which lie at the core of the master narrative of American history, are well suited to the requirements of past and present American policy in the region and find support and understanding on the part of the East European 'losers' of Yalta. As the tone of the Yalta debate in Poland demonstrates, the ideas of liberty and independence remain central elements of the Polish historical narrative and national self-image. They coexist with the tradition of depicting Poland as a quintessential victim of Russia and other world powers from the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the second half of the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth. In the East European countries discussed in this essay, only the Ukrainian elite ended up sitting on the fence, in complete accordance with a popular historiographic paradigm of Ukraine as a country positioned on the civilizational divide between East and West, democracy and authoritarianism.

In the case of Russia, its historical narrative lost its universal appeal with the collapse of communism. It is no longer possible to justify the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe either by

the interests of world communism or by those of the toiling masses of the East European countries. The Pan-Slavic idea, employed by Stalin during and immediately after the Second World War, has also lost its appeal. The idea of Russia's great-power status, which works at home, can only frighten the western neighbors of the new Russia. Thus, as was the case during the Yalta Conference, Moscow sought in 2005 to find common ground with the West and its former republics and dependencies by appealing to Russia's role in the struggle against Nazi Germany and the liberation of Eastern Europe from fascist rule. While the anti-Hitler theme clearly worked and apparently has a future, the 'liberation' motif clearly backfired, since it opened Russia to attack by all those who were enslaved by communism after having been liberated from fascism. The only way for Russia to change the dynamic of the historical debate would have been to offer sincere apologies to the victims of the Yalta agreements. Moscow had missed one more chance to improve its image abroad and its relations with its western neighbors.