

Andrzej Paczkowski
Institute of Political Studies
Polish Academy of Sciences,
Collegium Civitas, Warsaw

Past and politics: Europe 1945-2005

Timothy Garton Ash, the well-known British historian and political scientist, in his essay titled “Mesomnesie” ventured that the traditional European response whenever dealing with the past, or with a fallen regime, was to “forget” and to “forgive”. This held true until after World War II. Since then, the response is : to “remember” and to “punish”. In support of his thesis, Ash cites a long list of examples; starting with the Peloponesian War (which ended with an amnesty), through Ceasar’s assassination (with Cynceros’ appeal: “*omnem memoriam discordinarum oblivione sempiterna delendam*”), to the Glorious Revolution, which ended with the *Act of Indemnity and Oblivion*. After the fall of Napoleon, the principle of *oubli* was put in place, while the Lausanne agreement of 1923 required that both Turkey and Greece forgo their mutual grievances. These examples can, however, be countered with other ones. Napoleon did not, after all, repair to St Helen’s of his own volition. The Paris Conference of 1919 affirmed that Germany was responsible for the outbreak of the Great War and plans were drawn to prosecute Emperor William II. Under British pressure, the Turks arrested some of those responsible for the murders of Armenians and British POWs. The great Russian poet, Alexander Blok, was a secretary of the Extraordinary Investigative Commission created in May 1917 by the Provisional Government. It was established in order to bring accusations against the high tsarist officials.

Incidentally, the amnesty declared in Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War was not general. It excluded those who personally killed or wounded anyone, and the highest ranking members of the dictatorship were given a choice of punishment or emigration.

Nevertheless, even if we find Garton Ash's thesis too bold for our liking, World War II indeed marked the moment from which "remembering" and "punishing" became a norm. The International Tribunal convened at Nuremberg (a similar one convened in Tokyo), and many countries created their own tribunals to deal with crimes committed during the time of war (such as collaboratiuon with the enemy). The trend persists until today, the most recent examples being the tribunal to punish the crimes of the Khmer Rouge or Saddam Hussein.

Before I venture into the crux of my discourse, I would like to draw its framework.

In 1946, Karl Jaspers published his "Problem of Guilt" (*Schuldenfrage*) which, I am convinced, is a seminal text for anyone wishing to ponder the question of responsibility for the past. According to Jaspers, there were four kinds of guilt: criminal guilt (that of the perpetrators), political guilt (that of the decision-makers), moral guilt (the witnesses) and metaphysical guilt (belonging to the contemporaries). I think that these groups can be divided into two broader categories. The first one would include the criminal and political guilt, or the ones which entail judicial penalties. The other kinds of guilt are not associated with any particular consequences, but instead are ill-defined, amorphous, and have no distinct "physical" character, such as the criminal deed itself, or an order, which results in a crime. This ill-defined guilt has been defined by the Austrian writer

Hermann Broch as “a crime of indifference”.

Assuming that such a division is indeed justified, I would like to propose to employ different terms in order to describe each of the pairs:

Retribution - when discussing a guilt which will be punished within the legal framework. The retribution targets people rather than the subject qualifying the nature and the very existence of the crime. This subject can be a lawmaker who defines the legal norms of procedure, the court which decides punishment for their violation, but the lynching crowd can become such a defining subject as well.

The term “reckoning” would apply to the second category, and would refer to a reflection of one’s own actions, those of the individual, but most of all, in a collective meaning of this term. Such a reckoning ought, of course, be done by those directly responsible for crimes. In their case it would be remorse, which is well known to all Christians. Above all, I refer in this context to people who were witnesses to murder. They formed the silent audience; they have seen but failed to act, or they failed to see, because they chose not to take active interest in the surrounding reality. Together, they became the passive, deaf and dumb “context of crime”.

Having adopted this distinction, we may ask ourselves whether one can draw a clear and unequivocal distinction between the spheres of Retribution and Reckoning? Are they so distinct? Can we trace a line between them? Moreover, is it possible that having passed the stage of Retribution for the others, we fail to engage in our own Reckoning? Is it possible that the phase of Retribution for the

“others” allows us to entirely avoid our own Reckoning? Although I am unable to give an unambiguous answer to this question, the events of the last 60 years in Europe allow me to venture that Retribution precedes Reckoning. It is not an ordinary reckoning undertaken by each generation, dealing with its own perception of the past. I rather refer a profound shock, which usually is associated with deep and rapid transformations, such as a downfall of a regime or a collapse of a state.

In the recent European past there have been two waves of such reckonings. The first one following World War II (hereafter called “post-war reckoning”), and the latter following the collapse of the Communist regimes (to be called “post-Communist reckoning”). We could add here the mid-step wave, geographically restricted to Portugal, Spain and Greece. In the seventies, they witnessed the collapse of their own dictatorships. According to Samuel Huntington, these events all blended into one great phenomenon of the global progress of democracy.

The post-war wave was by far the most significant one. It was the most important given its sheer geographical dimension, having included the entire continent, stretching from Great Britain to the Soviet Union, and from Norway to Italy. The post-war phenomenon was also a long-lasting one. It started de facto, in 1943, when the French started to put collaborators on trial in Algiers, and the Soviets in the Ukraine. In some cases the process has not yet finished. The 1997 trial of Maurice Papon, the 2002 sentencing of a Nazi death-camp warden in Poland, or the on-going quest for murderers conducted by the Wiesenthal Centre are some examples of this ongoing process.

This post-war wave has been well described, but only in a Western-European

context, where freedom of speech made it possible. An exhaustive account of Retribution in 11 countries was already published in 1964 (Paul Serant, *Les vaincus de la libération*). Nothing of this kind can be said about the eastern part of the continent, which fell under Communist rule. For reasons of censorship, restrictions on scholarship, and most of all, due to the all-dominant paradigm of “moral and political unity of the nation”, studies similar to those conducted in the West, were simply impossible. In addition, social taboo and pressure towards national cohesion played a significant role.

The post-war Retribution in Germany and in Japan need to be addressed separately, due to the fact that the process of punishment had been implemented by external factors, i.e. the occupying powers. In other countries, including Austria and Italy, Retribution came under the authority of the given state and, especially during the early period, was often executed by local communities, or guerillas, degenerating often into a series of lynchings. According to some historians, the number of executions (sometimes called *l'épuration sauvage*) in Italy, in Belgium and in France alone, surpassed 10.000.

The early prosecution of war-time crimes struck not only persons or groups directly involved, such as members of the military, police, and state apparatus. The reprisals also included members of the upper classes and elites, who had nothing to do with war crimes and played no role in the structures of collaborating states. Campaigns against elites took a particularly vicious turn in Communist countries, becoming a part of the so-called “revolution from above”. The process of lumping elites together with the collaborators was fairly simple in Romania, Hungary, or Bulgaria, which were allies of the III Reich. In Poland, however, where no state-

sponsored collaboration took place, thousands of members of the *Résistance* were arrested under the suspicion of “betrayal of the Polish nation”, or “collaboration with the enemy”. 1600 people were arrested between 1944 and 1956, accused of “having been involved in the process of fascization of political life before September 1, 1939”. It is difficult to say to what extent the elites were targeted in Western Europe, but this phenomenon was quite obvious during the *épuration sauvage*.

Discounting the lynchings, the punishment has been meted out on three different levels:

The punishment *sensu stricto*, or an individual investigative and judicial procedure. Although the lists of accused were extensive, the sentencing had an individual character - even at Nuremberg.

Isolation – (internment) of members of organizations such as the political police, special military units, the ruling party apparatus, higher state officials, etc. The internees were undergoing a process of selection, and some were sent away, to be tried in the court of law.

Removal - from the public service of members or activists of the ruling parties. Certain people were also denied, by official fiat, the right to exercise their profession. In some cases the decision was made by the professional organizations willing to purge themselves. In the case of Poland, the penalty of infamy imposed on collaborating actors acquired most notoriety.

This is not a full list of measures, since many other means were employed in order to penalize past behaviour. In France, for instance, certain newspapers which had not been closed under the occupation, were closed after the liberation. That marked the end of “Le temps”, one of the best known daily newspapers. It was soon replaced by “Le Monde”.

The sheer scope of retribution was enormous: in Hungary, 27,000 people were put on trial, 322 were sentenced to death, 40,000 went through the internment camps and 62,000 were removed from the public service. All of this happened before March 1948. In Poland, 39,000 people stood accused of “occupation crimes”, 1,600 of whom were sentenced to death. Many among them, as I have already mentioned, belonged to the anti-communist underground, this being the reason for their punishment. In Austria, before 1949, 125,000 people were detained, although briefly, for the most part. 11,400 people were convicted and 150,000 were removed from their professions. In Norway, before 1950, 130,000 people were arrested under suspicion of treason, 100,000 were officially charged, and more than 20,000 were sentenced to prison terms. 30 people were sentenced to death. In Belgium, 200,000 people were put in internment camps, 57,000 were put on trial and convicted, and 238 were sentenced to death (among them 70 journalists). In Holland, 127,000 people were denied the passive electoral rights (right to be elected), and 95,000 were removed from public service. Even in tiny Luxembourg, 10,000 people were arrested. Also in Great Britain, which (this side of the few Channel islands) had not been occupied, 48 people were sentenced for treason and 6 were sentenced to death (four verdicts were carried out).

It can be said that the retribution was radical, merciless, and even cruel. Especially

the retribution against the *izmienniki Rodiny* (traitors of the Motherland) in the Soviet Union. The legal foundations of these trials were laid by the decree of April 19, 1943. The most famous trial concerned Andriej Vlasov and 11 other persons, delivered to the Soviets by the Western Allies in 1946.

According to incomplete data, among the ca. 1,5 million Soviet citizens who enlisted in various collaborationist forces and who were subsequently apprehended, 200,000 were killed and another 100,000 died in the camps or while in transit to the camps. Tens of thousands of those who were involved in lower echelons of occupation administration were also convicted and imprisoned. Another measure targeted the entire nations termed “collaborationist”, such as the *mountaignards* of the northern Caucasus and the Tartars of the Crimea. 200,000 of Red Army POW’s (who never belonged to any collaborationist force) were also convicted of the crime of treason.

The wave of radical and mass persecution lasted several years. Western Europe was the first to call for an end to this process. The first amnesties were declared in Italy in 1946, in France in 1947, and in Austria and the German Federal Republic in 1949. In the Soviet Union, however, the first amnesty was issued only in 1955, ten years after the end of the war. One can talk of a certain lack of symmetry; the pace and the scale of repression in Western Europe diminished with the onset of the Cold War, while in the Soviet Union the same phenomenon occurred at the end of the most intense phase of the Cold War. In any case, a few years after the end of the war, the reckoning with the past ceased to be of paramount importance. In the eyes of the West, the new Soviet-communist threat replaced the past priorities. Nevertheless, the issue of social re-integration of huge masses of people previously

tried, accused, or suspected of collaboration, remained important. Particularly so in the case of Germany, where various forms of de-nazification involved more than one million people.

During the early phase of punishing, there was little room for moral reckoning, little room for reflections on the deeds of those Frenchmen, Belgians, or Norwegians who were neither collaborators, nor members of the underground opposition, and were never imprisoned nor subject to social infamy. The next stage, that of reckoning with one's own past started, for earnest, more than a quarter century after the war, when people, for the most part, have already forgotten about retribution. Certain historians, such as Henry Rousso or Christian Graf von Krockow, suggest that the "new" reckoning has been made possible in the aftermath of the events of 1968, when a new, post-war generation discovered its own identity. One of the questions asked frequently of their parents was "Dad, what did you do 25 years ago? Were you, perhaps, a policeman in Marseilles, or in Amsterdam?". Or, "what have you done, when people were being slaughtered?".

In France the public debate started with the documentary film by Marcel Ophuls, "*Le chagrin et la pitié*", in which witnesses give an account of war in a small-town setting. They described local policemen and officials, but most of all they talked about the "ordinary people", or simply about themselves. The film raised questions about the myth of "fighting France", which until now had been reinforced with much application by the gaullistes and the communists. After many delays, the film was screened in the theatres in the Spring of 1971. Two years later, a French edition of *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* was published. This book by American historian Robert O. Paxton went in the same

direction, and offered a radical re-interpretation of French war-time history.

Truth be told, questions about the past were raised even earlier. Hannah Arendt talking about the “banality of evil” ventured that practically everyone could become a murderer. Her ideas about the *judenräte* (Jewish councils in the ghettos), where she suggested that one could look for guilt even among the victims, were even more provocative. Jews around the world were shocked, but the question could no longer be dismissed altogether.

We can say that what Jaspers wrote, in 1946, about the moral and metaphysical guilt, became applicable some twenty years later, and in fact still is today. Although there are very few people left to be tried and punished for treason or for war-crimes, the questions regarding the attitudes and behaviour of social groups, or even nations, are as pertinent today as they were when the war had ended.

The wave of retribution swept across Europe, but the next stage, the moral reckoning (or the collective confession) was practically absent in the communist countries. According to Polish sociologist Anna Wolff-Powęska, “each dictatorship requires a homogenization of nations” and “a drive to integrate people around the leader and the party is an overriding reason to falsify history”. Telling the bitter truth was therefore out of the question. There were some exceptions, of course, such as the Hungarian film “Cold Days”, which was about the pogrom of the Jews in a small town. There was also a Polish movie in which people were hunting down a Jewish girl who had fled. By and large, however, in communist countries, history has been frozen in the stage of retribution. The question of guilt, if discussed at all, happened in the context of a further condemnation of the

perpetrators.

First attempts of moral reckoning started when the communist system began to weaken and lose its hold on the society. In Poland, the process began during the mid-1980s, with the publication of an essay by Jan Błóński, who questioned the passive attitude of Poles with regard to the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. After 1989 the topic was “unfrozen” and the past ethnic conflict, some of them long-forgotten, erupted again. Starting from the “velvet divorce” of the Czechs and the Slovaks, through the Slovak-Hungarian and Hungarian-Romanian conflicts, to the bloody wars in the post-Yugoslav area. This “freezer” has also been opened in such a sense that while the ethnic and national issues had been openly debated in Western Europe, the discussion in the east had been restricted to small groups of intellectuals. The wider public remained largely ignorant of these issues.

The process of “unfreezing” started to slowly change the popular consciousness but, in the case of Poland, the emotions following the publication of two small books by Jan T. Gross (“Horrible Decade”, and - most of all “Neighbours”, which dealt with Poles murdering the Jews under the German occupation) demonstrated how painful the subject of war-time guilt had still been. Gross’ book argued that even though Poles, as a collective, undertook an effort to punish war crimes, they failed to address the problem of their own attitudes during the time of war and occupation. A democratic, pluralistic and liberal state was, most likely, a precondition of such a task.

While some people were trying to reconcile with the past, others were busily working at setting in stone the traditional image, whose overriding motive was

“evil is the others”. The collapse of communist regimes helped, in a way, to pave way for the subsequent rehabilitation of people who were punished after the war. The fact that many post-war judges were deeply involved at the same time in laying foundations under the totalitarian and oppressive states and facilitating the process of rehabilitation. It is suffice to say that Romania’s gen. Ion Antonescu, Croatia’s Ante Pavelic, and Slovakia’s rev. Josef Tiso, or the leaders of collaborationist regimes, all enjoy once again a high degree of respectability. Given the political views of these people, one can say that these “returns” are largely related to reckoning with the communist past. Many assume that the founders of communist regimes are guilty of punishing the leaders who, while sometimes misguided (choosing the losing side in the war), were after all, “real patriots”.

Looking at the “mid-wave” of mid-1970s we see radically different solutions. In Greece, during the two years following the downfall of “black colonels”, several members of the junta and some of the most brutal policemen, were found guilty and given prison terms. Victims and their families were offered financial compensation. This brought the process of retribution to an end, and the archives of the political police had been destroyed. In Spain, after the death of Franco, all political parties involved in the so-called *ruptura pactada* (“negotiated breakthrough”) agreed that the past cannot become a topic of political fight. In 1977 an amnesty had been issued, which pardoned politically-motivated crimes committed during the Civil War (1936-39) and after. Moreover, and to the great chagrin of historians, the documents of the political police had been destroyed. The political discourse plunged into amnesia.

This pact started to fall apart after 25 years. Quite recently an association for Reclaiming Historical Memory has been created. The families of the victims would like to know where the secret burial places of their relatives are located, and where bodies of victims of persecution are being exhumed. In addition, a “train of memory” is touring Spain and many exhibitions devoted to the crimes committed during the Civil War are being organized. Crimes committed by the Franco side, of course, and not by the leftist republicans. It is still impossible to open judicial proceedings into these cases, as the famous judge Baltasar Garzon is more concerned with Latin American criminals than their Spanish counterparts.

How, as seen in this perspective, fare the post-communist societies? It is difficult to say, as the process of reckoning with the past is an on-going one and I, as a historian, prefer to deal with chronologically limited events. Nevertheless, I will try to present this phenomenon, focusing on local differences, which are more telling than similarities.

The phenomenon of post-communist reckoning with the past has a much smaller geographical reach. It is related, in part, to the fact that communism as a state system had a lesser reach than the sphere of Nazi influence, which encompassed (directly, or through proxies) nearly the entire continent. There was no reckoning with the past in the post-Soviet area, with the exception of the Baltic states. Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia as well as the republics of the Caucasus and of Central Asia failed to punish the guilty associated with the communist regime and in the name of the communist state. The only serious attempt of this kind was planned during the early Yeltsin years, when plans were made to put the communist party on trial as a “crime organization”. The trial never went ahead. There are groups

trying to document the crimes of the past and to make the evidence public (Society “Memorial” is the best known among them) , but the Russian state does not go beyond a judicial rehabilitation of the victims, sometimes followed by token financial compensation. Moscow bookstores are full of monographs and studies written by Russian historians and devoted to Stalin’s crimes and Stalin’s henchmen. Several outstanding movies have been made on this topic, but on a legal and political level, there is no movement.

A similar situation is to be found in the post-Yugoslav states. Historians’ findings have no bearing on the official discourse and on political decisions. They also find little sympathy among the wider audience. The wars, which tore the old Yugoslav federation apart in a way “rendered invalid” the question of crimes committed by the *ancien regime*. While in Poland, for instance, the studies of the communist period stress the growing conflict between the state and the society in a state of rebellion, in ex-Yugoslavia the stress is being put on the ethnic conflicts and divisions.

It can be added that the collapse of the communist system precipitated the downfall of the traditional communist parties in the West. They were, in a way, forced to face up to their previous “collaboration“ with Stalinism.

The second important difference is linked to the fact that even in those countries, where certain measures were taken to deal with the past, they were never pushed far enough. There is absolutely no comparison between the depth and the scope of post-WWII retribution, with hundreds of thousands arrested, sentenced, removed from work, and thousands dead or executed. It is only in the Czech Republic and

in Germany that the principle (in a limited sense of the word) of collective guilt had been adopted. In the Czech Republic former party members, agents, and informers of secret police were denied the right to occupy certain public functions (exception being made for becoming a Member of Parliament). In Germany, “zero tolerance” for former agents and party members has been adopted in the case of the army, police, attorney’s office, certain jobs in the civil service, and schools or universities. In other countries, the process called de-communicization (compared to de-nazification) was never undertaken, or had a very limited scope. In Poland, for instance, the process of purge had been done only in the case of the Secret Service. A large-scale transformation of civil service eventually occurred, but the process was linked to the changing electoral fortunes of major political parties. Whenever victorious, the parties of the right would de-communicize the public sphere, removing officials associated with the old regime, while the victorious parties of the left would often bring back the same persons to positions of power.

Measures undertaken in several countries, (Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria) intended to punish individuals for crimes and abuses of power, nowhere deteriorated into massive witch-hunts. The largest number of people were convicted in Germany - for the most part soldiers of border troops found guilty of shooting fleeing refugees. Erich Mielke, the long-lasting chief of the notorious Stasi was tried and convicted, but not of the crimes committed by the institution for which he was responsible, but for his involvement in a 1931 murder of two policemen. In Poland 30-40 people, mostly those found guilty of torturing political prisoners in the 1940s and 1950s, were sentenced to a few years in prison. Several people were sentenced in the Czech Republic and in Hungary, while Lithuanians sentenced 7 people actively supporting the Soviet anti-independence activities in

1991. The cases of lynching occurred only in Romania.

The reasons are rather obvious: communist regimes in Europe “imploded”, under internal pressures, or as a result of transformations next door. The phenomenon has been referred to as “the domino effect”, with the first block having been flipped in Poland, in the Summer of 1989. This implosion transformed itself, as it did in post-Franco Spain, into a “negotiated revolution”. This, in turn, reinforced tendencies to pardon without seeking retribution. Only the Ceausescu regime, through the dictator’s obstinate refusal to negotiate and to share power, collapsed amidst violent struggle. As a result, he (and his wife) were executed on the authority of a certain kind of a “revolutionary court”.

It might be pointed out that the Nazi Germany and her allies had been defeated in armed struggle and it was the victorious allies who, to a large degree, set the standards of retribution and occasionally conducted the entire process themselves. All prosecutors and judges at Nuremberg were citizens of the Allied countries, and the only Germans present were those on the bench of the accused or their lawyers. Communism lost its struggle against the West, both in economic and cultural terms. Since no armies were involved, and there was no threat of the use of power, there was little legitimacy to engage external actors in domestic retribution.

Moreover, the most repressive stage of communist repression ended in the second half of the 1950s. There was, therefore, little enthusiasm for direct reprisals, such as among the collaborationist societies after World War II. The anti-communist opposition was also concerned with the fact that such a turn of events might lead to the creation of a different form of dictatorship, rather than the dawn of democracy.

Vaclav Havel and Adam Michnik came to symbolize the trend to defuse the popular drive for post-communist retribution. Their motivations seem to have been both stimulated by both ethical and political motives, as well as by fear of permanent social disintegration. The same rationale helped to mitigate the process of retribution in France and in Germany after the war.

The phenomenon of “negotiated revolutions” meant that the whole process of holding people to an account played out over an extended period of time. The first acts of war-time retribution occurred, as I have mentioned before, even before the war had ended. Post-communist trials and settling of accounts gained legitimacy (with the exception of Romania) through the action of democratically elected parliaments, several months after the communists had surrendered power. Therefore, when we look at these two forms of retribution, the underlying situation appears to have been strikingly different.

The wave of post-communist settling of accounts brought about certain features that were absent during the post-World War II period. One of these features was the creation of institutions tasked with researching the communist regimes. Some of these institutions were created rather late, but none were created after 1945. The best known among them is, of course, the German Federal Office for Management of Archives of the former Ministry of State Security, created in 1991 and known (after the name of its first director) as Gauck’s Office.

Similar institutions have been created in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, and in Latvia. Their role was to create conditions facilitating the research of the *ancienne regime* in each of these

countries as well as to withdraw the archives of the old security police from under the authority of the present forces. In the case of Poland this institution is called Institute of National Remembrance and its mandate covers the prosecution of crimes defined as “communist crimes”. In some countries sister institutions were given investigative powers. Elsewhere, they conduct scientific research and publish studies concerning the communist apparatus of terror and repression.

Another new feature was the “review” (*lustracja*), or revealing of the identities of former secret collaborators of state security. Of course, during the post-war period of retribution and during the *l'épuration sauvage*, informers and secret collaborators were also prosecuted and punished. During the post-communist phase, however, this element became one of fundamental importance. It is hard to say why. It may be related to the fact that, in the eyes of the members of the opposition, these people came to symbolize the main tool of post-Stalinist repression and control. They were considered renegades and traitors and were singled out as particular threats. One way or the other, the “review” (*lustracja*) became one of the fundamental elements of settling accounts with the ancien regime, seen by many as a pre-condition of any change.

In most of the post-communist countries, “*lustracja*” (identifying the informers) was at the root of retribution. Czechs and Slovaks were the first ones to start the process, (although Slovaks abandoned it soon after the break-up of Czechoslovakia) along with the Germans. The forms of “outing” of informers differed: in Bulgaria, Lithuania, or Romania being a former collaborator of secret police does not automatically disqualify one from public office or professional activities. In other countries (in Germany, for instance) the fate of ex-informers is

being determined by their superiors who, having received relevant information from Gauck's office, can decide that they had lost their confidence and may, consequently, be let go. Still in other countries (Estonia, for example) the former informers can retain right to remain in civil service, as long as they willingly submit their resignation. In Poland ex-agents who lie about their past (and who occupy higher functions) are automatically barred from civil service for the following ten years. It has been only in the Czech Republic where higher-placed former party members, as well as informers and some members of state security were permanently excluded from office. In all post-communist countries, however, all ex-informers who had willingly admitted to their past wrongdoings, are allowed to be elected to Parliament.

The "outing" of informers went hand in hand with rendering public the files of secret police. The victims of invigilation gained thus access to their own files. First, the process was made official in Germany and later, it was adopted in others countries. Rather recently decisions have been made to give access to secret police files not only to historians (who had already previously gained access in most countries) but to all citizens who have an interest in the issue. This, in turn, gave rise to controversies, since the new policy would give access to very private (sometimes even intimate) information protected by the privacy legislation. The most notorious was the case of the Stasi file concerning the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl who successfully blocked third parties' access to this material. In certain countries (such as Czech Republic and Slovakia) public institutions publish the lists of secret informers on the internet. Researchers working in specialized institutes devote their time to describing the past repression, the structures of the security apparatus, as well as the cases of individual informers and agents. This

form of “revealing”, or “outing” performed by the agencies of the state, giving access to the files, is all quite new. I have never heard of victims being given, during the post-war period, access to the files of the Gestapo, those of the fascist OVRI, or ones created by the Petain’s police. There were no official lists of informers and agents published.

Lack of time makes it impossible to dwell at length on the issue of reckoning with the national, collective, and individual past of the communist period. It can be said, however, that countries that conduct no official, institutional research of the communist period, discourage citizens from undertaking this effort. In European countries, the total (or sufficient - in the case of Russia) liberty of expression and research allows historians, sociologists, or philosophers to conduct such an exercise in reckoning on their own. In Poland, notwithstanding the current academic publications, frequent public debates took place which dealt with the problem of social attitudes toward communism and towards the communist state. The debates revolve around the thesis which claims, after the first period of armed struggle against communism (1945-1948), the majority of Poles abandoned active opposition and, though massive participation in propagandist actions, or in staged elections, legitimized the system. In this context, the wave of nostalgia and sentiment for “good old times”, which swept through all post-communist countries is more readily understandable.

Another inherited problem had to do with negative or outright hostile attitude towards ethnic and national minorities: pogroms of Jews, persecution of Germans and their expulsion (or resettlement). The communist authorities, which often used internationalist slogans, were, as a matter of fact, chauvinistic.

For reasons of lack of time I have to overlook here the question of retribution and reckoning related to events outside of the European sphere: from the Philippines, through South Africa, to Argentina and Chile, although comparisons would be not only justified but very interesting. Why, for instance, a commission such as the South African Commission of Truth and Reconciliation, was never formed in Europe?

At the very end , I would like to raise one more issue: one does not have to be a scholar interested in collective memory, in order to see, in the official discourse or in the media, information about crimes committed “on behalf of the state” or ideology. We hear of peoples or social groups demanding justice, compensation and punishment for the perpetrators of injustice. Unfortunately, I do not have a comparative scale and it is difficult to say when this phenomenon started to acquire its current proportions. Perhaps it all started with the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichman, which precipitated various requests for compensation from the Jewish circles. In any case, I am certain that we are now witnessing a rapid growth of this phenomenon.

I have to admit that, although I am used to Germans expressing their sorrow for past crimes, I was rather surprised to hear that, in the Summer of 2004, German minister during a visit to Namibia, asked the Herrero tribe “for forgiveness and pardon”. In this case the speech dealt not with crimes committed in Europe, but the bloody suppression of an anti-colonial uprising which started some one hundred years before. Germany lost this colony after her defeat in World War I and independent Namibia (since 1990) received 500 million dollars in assistance from

the Federal Republic of Germany. Now, however, Namibians declared that they wanted to open negotiations with Berlin in order to seek compensation for murders committed by the German state more than a century ago.

I asked myself: should Poland demand compensation from Sweden for the Swedish invasion and occupation from the mid 1650s and request immediate return of art stolen at that time (some of the books, paintings, jewels are still to be seen in the Swedish royal palace and royal library in Stockholm)? And who should pay for the golden roof tiles stolen from Russian churches by the Mongols in the 13th c. ? Should Macedonia pay for the robberies of Alexander the Great? Someone, quite possibly, will follow this line of reasoning.

Scandinavia is peaceful and wealthy. But in Norway a foundation, called the Foundation of Norwegian Children of War, has been founded. The Foundation's goal is to provide relief to children of Norwegian women and German soldiers born during the war. These children were persecuted and discriminated against after the war. Today, these children are all well over 60 but the request for compensation surfaced only now. Also in Norway, peoples living beyond the Arctic circle now demand payments for forced "norwegization" and insufficient investment in the past. The Gypsies, at the same time, request compensation for forced sterilization, which, during several decades, until mid-1950s, was a part of the "racial eugenics" of the Arian Norwegians.

It is my contention that we witness a form of "memory running amok". It seems that no one wants to be considered the hero and the victor anymore, and all opt for the status of the victim. Germans - because millions of them were forcibly

removed (expelled) after World War II; Austrians - because they were “the first victims of the Nazis”; Japanese - “because Americans killed tens of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Russians - because they were the most numerous victims in the dungeons of the NKWD and in the Gulag. In 1848 a certain bearded philosopher from Trier write: “spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism”. Today we know that this spectre threatens Europeans no longer. But a new spectre - a spectre of memory - starts to haunt the world. This spectre demands not only justice and punishment for the guilty. Most often it also requests compensation, in hard cash, for losses, death and humiliation. The spectre demands compensation, but does not talk about reckoning. Is this a new form of class struggle; poor against the rich, South against the North?

I am not sure. One thing is certain: thanks to this “growth of memory”, historians will be busy for a long time. The lawyers too, by the way.