

HOW TO REMEMBER EUROPE?



Educational Briefing 2024

Contested European remembrance culture(s)

Content

03**Introduction:**

How to remember Europe?:

Towards a European Culture of Remembering

By Marlene Gärtner

07**Culture of (dis)remembrance:**

Colonial amnesia in the European Union's trade encounters with the Global South

By Antonio Salvador M. Alcazar III

16**Diverse Memories, Shared Futures:**

Rethinking Europe's History in Education

By Daniela Cappuccio

20**A Fight Against the Mafias:**

Memory, Justice, and Collective Action
in Italy and Europe

By Libera Bologna

24**List of References****26****Understanding Europe****27****Imprint**

Introduction

How to remember Europe?: Towards a European Culture of Remembering

By Marlene Gärtner

Marlene Gärtner holds a PhD in Literary Studies with a focus on social narratives and everyday storytelling. She is a Project Manager for Understanding Europe, responsible for publications, fundraising and strategy development. For this text she conducted two workshops on Cultural Memory and Remembrance Culture with members of the Understanding Europe network.

Remembering is crucial. As human beings we find ourselves between the past and the future. We experience our reality as an interplay between the memory of what was and the expectation for what is to come. We derive our self-understanding – who we are – from this interaction. This is not an individual but a collective act. Through socialisation and communication with others, we are embedded in a framework of shared knowledge and shared imaginations of time and space. In Cultural Studies, this shared framework is known as “Cultural Memory” because it conveys a cultural sense of identity and belonging. It makes sense to distinguish between Collective and Cultural Memory. Collective memory relies on direct interaction, for instance, a grandmother telling her grandson about her experiences during the Second World War. Cultural memory, however, can endure more than three generations because it becomes institutionalised, ritualised and stored in symbolic forms.¹ Installing national holidays are the most potent

tool for such institutionalised remembrance politics. How societies remember their past is political in nature because it influences decisions in the present and it mirrors current power struggles.

In two sessions at the European Summer School 2024 and the Transnational Training for Trainers (TT4T) in Belgium, we discussed whether there is something like a European cultural memory, the challenges it entails and the forms it can take. The facilitator opens the session by asking, “Which event do you remember in your context?”.

¹ Assmann, Jan, 2008. “Communicative and cultural memory.” In *Cultural memory studies. An international and interdisciplinary handbook*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 109-118. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Here are some responses:

We remember...

- "...the *November Pogroms* (*Reichspogromnacht*, 9th of November 1938) against Jews every year. It is an important day in Austria and Germany" (Austria and Germany).
- "...revolution, war and mobilisation in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014. I was 10 years old" (Ukraine).
- "...the fight between the state and the mafias, and its martyrs" (Italy).
- "...the *Carnation Revolution* (25th of April 1974), the revolution that ended Portugal's dictatorship. It is a commemoration of freedom and a reminder that it cannot be taken for granted." (Portugal)
- "...the *Rainbow Night* (7th of August 2020), where protesting LGBTQI+ activists were arrested in Warsaw." (Poland)

It soon became apparent, that violence, grief, trauma and oppression are at the forefront of collective remembrance. In the workshops, we realised how personal remembering is. We constated that it is not only the mind that remembers but also the body. Memory thus becomes embodied and inscribed in us through generations.

In this publication, the text by **Libera Bologna** impressively shows how the memory of mafia violence not only leaves its mark on the population but is also inscribed into the land itself. By confiscating assets and re-using the territory for social purposes, the people empower themselves through memory. The workshops equally revealed that empowerment is the flip side of the pain inherent in remembering. The question "Which events do you celebrate in your context?", sparked a debate about unity, resistance and liberation as collective answers to the violence we endure as humanity.



Remembrance is also a crucial topic in post-colonial and post-migrant societies: Whose history is remembered? And which stories are forgotten or silenced? **Antonio Salvador M. Alcazar III** tackles in his article the erasure of colonial continuities in the European Union's trade agreements. He showcases how the EU portrays itself as a "post-colonial benefactor" and "normative international partner" of the Global South while concealing the exploitative aspects of the agreements. Within Europe, a culture of remembrance that would do equal justice to all Europeans is prevented by power inequalities, too. **Daniela Cappuccio** describes in her contribution how the Understanding Europe Crash Course has been biased in the past, as many educational materials are. The powerful nations of Western Europe often take centre stage in historiography, the writing of history. She describes the review process as a journey towards a vision of classrooms where students see their own stories reflected and connected with others – fostering a stronger sense of ownership and connection to the materials.

So, is there something like a European remembrance culture? In the tangle of different cultures of remembrance on a global, national and regional level, there are some obvious challenges in trying to create shared European memories. Firstly, most memory resources are bound nationally. This does

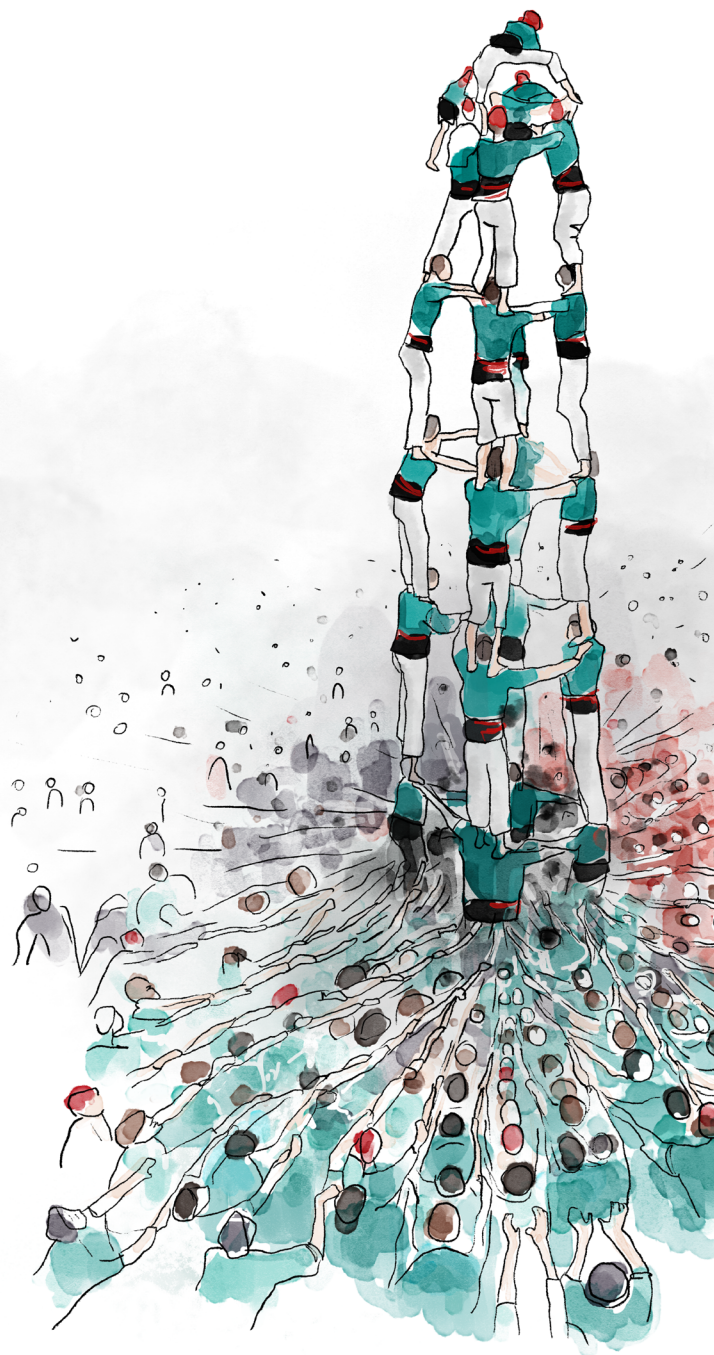
not come as a surprise, given the violent nature of the World Wars and the various dictatorships that shaped Europe in the 20th century. Our workshops have confirmed that participants mostly referred to events that happened in their home countries. However, in contexts like Spain which are marked by strong regional identities, group memories of Basque or Catalan communities have been brought more to the forefront. Moreover, family memories of migrating or the life of ancestors overseas can equally not be fitted into a national framework.

Secondly, as we were able to show in the Understanding Europe publication "**Taking Europe Personally: Young Narratives of Europe**", it is insufficient to simply promote "United in Diversity" as the EU's motto. Due to their vast and loose meaning, a European memory solely based on general global narratives such as "democracy" or "freedom" would have a non-committal character.² The attempt to reduce the plurality of existing remembrance cultures to one common denominator is doomed to failure. However, such simplification and standardization is also not desirable.

Recent academic approaches promote multidirectional memory, seeking to bring together different memories of violence that confront each other in the public sphere but do not necessarily

compete with each other. In re-telling our shared histories, we thereby emphasize the importance of dialogical interaction in society. This approach asks how we can engage with memories without erasing differences or pitting victims against each other.³ Multidirectional remembrance recognizes that memory is never singular. Rather, comparison, analogy, appropriation, and resonance are inherent parts of how we articulate and understand our shared past. Such an ability to allow different perspectives is a prerequisite for European Cultural Memories – in plural.

For us at Understanding Europe, the goal is an “informed and resilient historical memory which is also self-critical”. Thereby, we propose to turn away from a rigidly defined “remembrance culture” towards a common “culture of remembering”.⁴ Citizenship Education has the crucial task to encourage young Europeans to critically reflect on what they know about history. In learning how to contextualise our histories within European and global contexts, we take a decisive step towards a European culture of remembering. For our publication, we wish you a challenging and thought-provoking read!



² Prutsch, Markus J. 2018. “European Remembrance Policies”. Magazine of the European Observatory on Memories. <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/european-remembrance-policies/>.

³ Cf. Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multidirectional memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

⁴ Prutsch, Markus J. 2018. “European Remembrance Policies”. Magazine of the European Observatory on Memories. <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/european-remembrance-policies/>.

Culture of (dis)remembrance:

Colonial amnesia in the European Union's trade encounters with the Global South

By Antonio Salvador M. Alcazar III

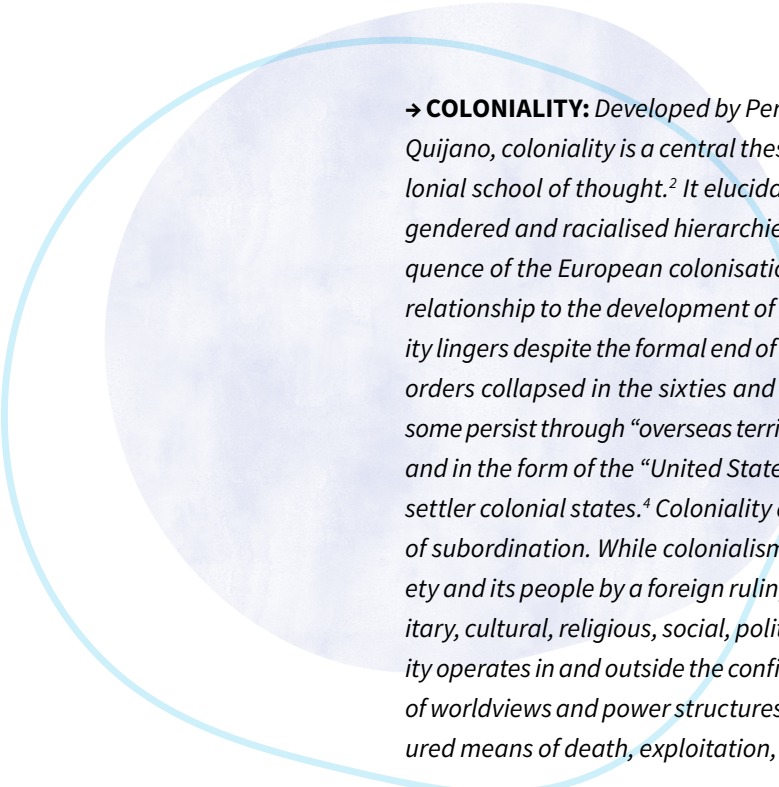
Antonio Salvador M. Alcazar III is a Global Teaching Fellow at Universidad de los Andes and a Visiting Research Fellow at Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals. Antonio has a PhD in politics from Central European University. Their work critiques the European Union's entanglement as a global (trade) power and engages more broadly in the politics of knowledge from decolonial and interpretive perspectives. Outside the ivory tower, Antonio co-organises for South/South Movement, an autonomous transnational collective working to move beyond Eurocentric knowledge regimes in social and political sciences.

As a trade power, how does the European Union (EU) come to terms with its colonial past and present? In line with the familiar EU-as-a-peace-project narrative, the EU's remembrance culture—that is, how a given society collectively and intersubjectively elects to be conscious of its own past—tends to dwell on the dark histories of National Socialism and Stalinism in the twentieth century. This tendency troubles the EU's memory politics, not least in the sense of “expediting a ‘negative foundation myth’ of the EU that makes European history appear to be essentially a post-1918 phenomenon, hereby neglecting other epochs and experiences such as colonialism and imperialism”.¹

This article takes issue with the erasure of colonial relations in the EU's practices of remembering the past. It shows how the EU creates different historical narratives about its external economic relations with the Global South. These historical narratives sustain a particular self-image of the EU as

a “post-colonial benefactor” and “normative international partner” of the Global South. While the EU explicitly traces its trade ties with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to colonialism, it tends to deny or downplay the colonial question in relation to other Global South countries. Using interviews with EU trade policy officials and research at the Historical Archives of the European Commission in Brussels, this article argues that coloniality organises the EU's trade relations with the Global South even if those relations are often rendered outside colonialism in official EU narratives.

¹ Prutsch, Markus J. 2018. European Remembrance Policies. <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/european-remembrance-policies/>



→ **COLONIALITY:** Developed by Peruvian sociologist and political theorist Aníbal Quijano, coloniality is a central thesis to the Latin American and Caribbean decolonial school of thought.² It elucidates how civilisational, economic, knowledge, gendered and racialised hierarchies have persisted since 1492 as a direct consequence of the European colonisation of the Americas/Abya Yala and its intimate relationship to the development of modern global capitalist structures. Coloniality lingers despite the formal end of European colonialisms. Many of these colonial orders collapsed in the sixties and seventies following decolonisation, although some persist through “overseas territories” controlled by certain EU member states³ and in the form of the “United States of America”, “Canada”, and other European settler colonial states.⁴ Coloniality and colonialism are related but distinct forms of subordination. While colonialism entails “the direct political control of a society and its people by a foreign ruling state”⁵, through racial, economic, legal, military, cultural, religious, social, political and other modes of domination, coloniality operates in and outside the confines of colonialism. Coloniality endures as a set of worldviews and power structures that rationalise and sustain colonially configured means of death, exploitation, and hierarchy in today’s modern world order.

Ambivalent remembrance culture in EU trade politics

In its external trade relations with colonised peoples, the EU lacks a collective historical memory. Perhaps this does not come as a surprise considering the complicated and distinct colonial histories of some EU member states. What comes as a surprise, however, is the ambivalence of how the EU explicitly implicates its trade relations with some Global South countries in colonial relations but not with others. Broadly speaking, we can discern this ambivalence in relation to the EU’s commercial relationship with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and other Global South countries outside of this bloc.

On the one hand, the EU’s trade ties with ACP countries carry heavy historical baggage. They trace back to the inception of the European integration project itself, from the Treaty of Rome to today’s **Economic Partnership Agreements**. While this long-standing relationship has evolved over the years, the EU explicitly remembers its trade relations with ACP countries as a “metropolitan obligation to the former colonies”.⁶ In a **European Council decision**, EU leaders acknowledge that reinforcing these ties through the recently signed **Samoa Agreement**, albeit in a more subtle tone, “reflects both the historically close relationship and increasingly strong links” between ACP and EU countries.

² For an introduction, see: Quijano, Anibal. 2000. “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”. *Nepanta: Views from the South* 1 (3): 533–80.

³ Boatcă, Manuela. 2020. “Thinking Europe Otherwise: Lessons from the Caribbean”. *Current Sociology* 69 (3): 389–414.

⁴ Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. “Decolonization is not a metaphor”. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1): 1–40.

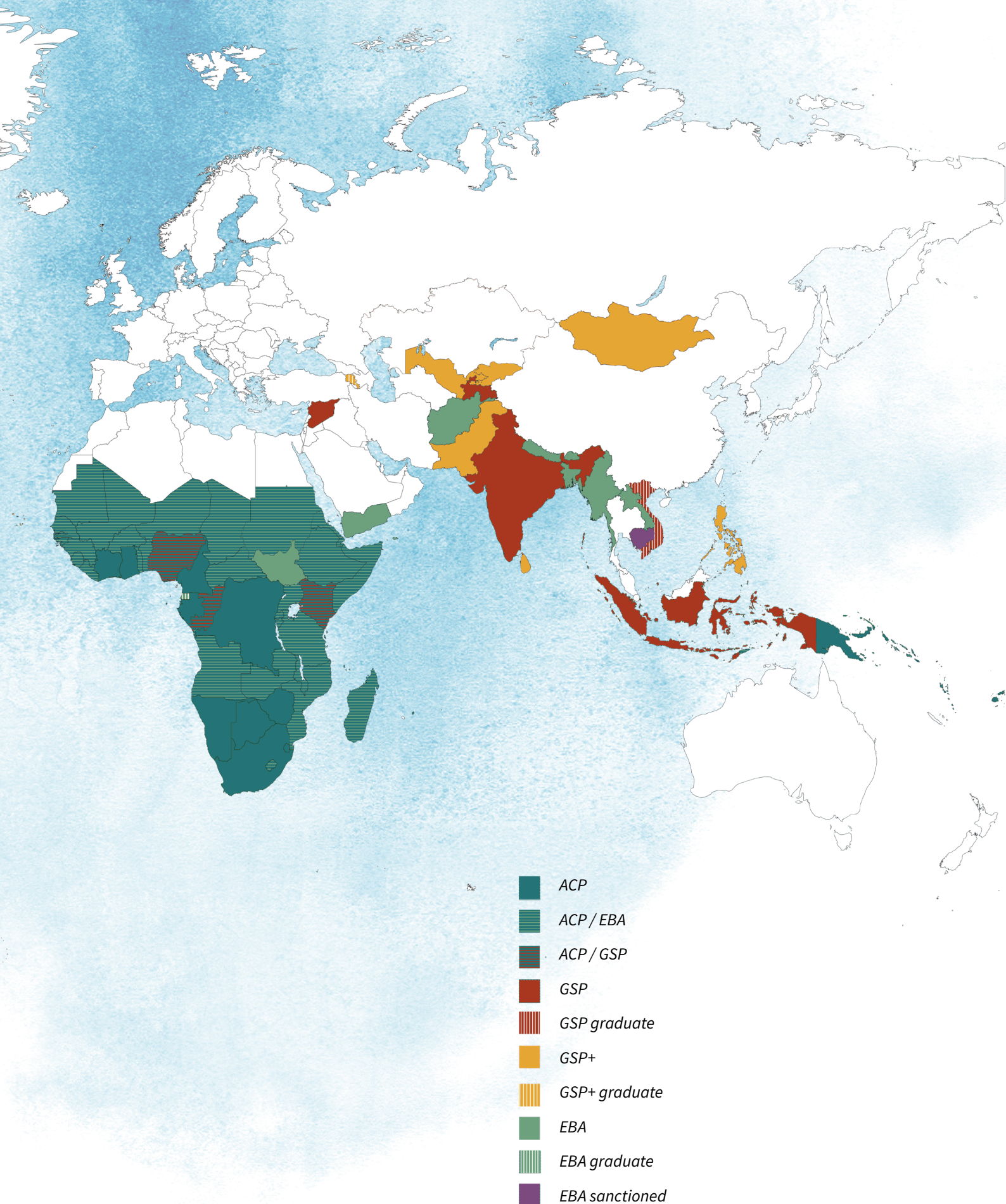
⁵ Go, Julian. 2016. “Colonialism and Neocolonialism”. In: *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, First Edition, edited by John Stone, Rutledge M. Dennis, Polly S. Rizova, Anthony D. Smith, and Xiaoshuo Hou. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1.

⁶ Lincoln, David. 2008. “Drawing the EBA (Everything but Arms) Map: Least Developed Country Classification and the Case of EBA Sugar”. *Area* 40 (2): 226.



On the other hand, the EU delinks its trade ties with other so-called “developing” countries from colonial relations of power. Since 1971, the EU has ordered its economic relations with Global South countries more broadly through the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), a preferential policy framed in terms of development cooperation. Under GSP, the EU either lowers or removes its tariffs and quotas to stimulate exports from the Global South. However, GSP countries are not obliged to offer the same material concessions to the EU, thereby retaining their ability to earn duties on EU exports and safeguard their industries.

Further complicating the EU’s political practice of categorising countries based on their presumed levels of “development” is the Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative, a sub-tier of GSP that offers “least developed countries” tariff-free and quota-free access to EU markets, except in the trade on weapons and armaments. In effect, since its creation in 2000, EBA has fractured the ACP group by differentiating between “developing” and “least developed” countries. While “developing” ACP countries preserve their historical and political association with the EU as “ex-colonies”, “least developed” ACP countries have lost this explicit association since they are now subject to the GSP policy. In this sense, GSP “represents a de-historicising of a significant colonial relationship between North and South”.⁷



Remembering the origins of GSP?

In 1971, the European Economic Community created the world's first ever GSP. It narrated the inception of this policy as “an act of faith and solidarity towards disadvantaged countries”⁸ and “a real turning point in international trade relations”.⁹ It took great pride in responding to the demands by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Here, the **Group of 77** countries called for special and differential treatment on their (semi-)manufactures in affluent Western markets to decrease their dependence on agricultural commodity exports.

Today, the European Commission considers GSP the **flagship** of the EU's normative trade agenda. This agenda leverages the EU's power as a major commercial bloc to attach political conditions to GSP. Should Global South countries commit to respecting international conventions on human rights, labour standards, climate protection, and good governance, then the EU would offer them more preferential trading terms. Should they fail to do so, then the EU would (threaten to) sanction them by taking away GSP. In this framing, some trade policy elites in Brussels insist that, unlike the EU's “post-colonial” trade agreements with ACP countries, GSP exists outside of colonial relations

because it is presumably a contractual interaction.¹⁰ For them, GSP is different because European colonial projects exploited trade without any respect for human rights. Now, GSP promotes trade with due regard for human rights.¹¹ In short, by virtue of GSP, the EU sees itself as a guardian of human rights and other international norms.

This line of thinking goes on to justify the position of the EU in imposing political conditions and obligations on target countries since GSP is a unilateral EU policy. GSP asks target countries to ratify and implement international conventions that they themselves have voluntarily signed. For this reason, EU trade policy officials reject the notion that GSP is implicated in colonial relations because it champions international conventions, not EU norms.¹² Relatedly, as far as EU citizens are concerned, trade and human rights represent two of the most salient areas for “development cooperation” based on a recent **Eurobarometer** survey. And in **another survey**, many EU citizens believe in the EU's role in upholding a rules-based international trading order, of which GSP is a constituent part.

⁸ HAEC BAC 3/1978 No. 1042, 7 juillet 1971, Pas de cadeau pour le tiers monde, Journal de Genève, Jasmine Audemars.

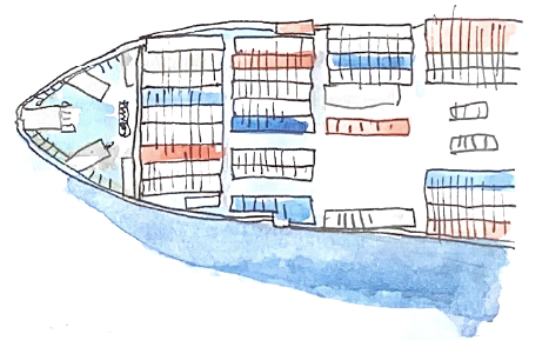
⁹ HAEC BAC 3/1978 No. 1042, juin 1971, Commission de la CEE, Note d'information, La CEE et les préférences généralisées en faveur des produits semi-finis et manufactures des pays en voie de développement.

¹⁰ Interview with trade diplomat from a New Hanseatic League member state, 29 November 2021, online; Interview with a trade policy official at the European Commission, 21 April 2022, Brussels; Interview with a European People's Party official, European Parliament, 21 April 2022, Brussels.

¹¹ Interview with Maria Arena, Human Rights Chair and Socialists & Democrats member, European Parliament, 29 November 2021, online.

¹² Interview with a European People's Party official, European Parliament, 21 April 2022, Brussels; Interview with a cabinet member, European Commission, 20 May 2022, Brussels.

While there is a tendency in the EU to forget or inadvertently de-emphasise the complicity of GSP in colonial relations, there is also at times a propensity to either deflect or accept historical responsibility. For example, a trade diplomat from an EU member state without any formal colonies in the past thinks that GSP has been “forced onto us” by the EU since their country has no historical responsibility to carry as colonisers.¹³ Unlike this trade official, Maria Arena, Socialists and Democrats member and former chair of the Sub-committee on Human Rights at the European Parliament, directly associates GSP with European colonialism and how it continues to materially benefit Europeans today:



Historically with some countries, not with all countries, but historically with some countries, we say that this tool is to support development in some countries, but in most of the cases this tool of GSP was a post-colonial tool. It was also to guarantee that after the independence of some countries, we, as Europeans, continue to receive the raw materials coming from these countries without having to pay tax. [laughing] We have to have that in mind because sometimes Europeans are just saying that GSP is a gift for these least developed countries. In fact, it is not a gift to them. It is a gift to us to guarantee that all these raw materials are entering Europe without tax to be transformed in Europe. [laughing] This is really something that we have to say also to be fair on this mechanism.¹⁴

These conflictual memory politics surrounding EU trade policies force us to interrogate the EU's colonial amnesia and ahistorical understanding of GSP.

¹³ Interview with a trade diplomat from a New Hanseatic League member state, 24 November 2021, Brussels.

¹⁴ Interview with Maria Arena, Human Rights Chair and Socialists & Democrats member, European Parliament, 29 November 2021, online.

GSP as a creature of coloniality

Framing GSP as a means for the EU to pursue development cooperation or international partnerships ignores the histories of European colonialism and ongoing processes of exploitation in the global economy.¹⁵ A development policy expert in Brussels exemplifies this erasure: “Colonial powers were imposing their preferences and their choices on their colonies. In this case, [GSP is] more about ... the exportation of norms and trying to be an international norm-setter and influence norms. But nothing forces a country”.¹⁶

As a counterpoint to this ahistorical narrative, my research at the Historical Archives of the European Commission shows how GSP in the 1970s formalised colonial difference in its categorisation of “developing” countries, politically divided the Global South due to Western Europe’s policy of associationism with Africa, and perpetuated colonial patterns of trade as the United Kingdom clung on to Asian Commonwealth countries and Hong Kong as a dependent territory.¹⁷

Today, coloniality lives on within GSP. GSP maintains hierarchical relations between the EU as “developed” and its so-called beneficiaries as “developing”. GSP enables the exploitation of workers in the Global Souths in the name of export-oriented growth. GSP sucks raw materials out of the Global Souths, causing environmental harms, land-grabbing, and displacement of peoples there. GSP empowers the EU to intervene in GSP target countries and judge their political performance on international conventions, or else they risk losing their preferential access to EU markets. In other words, the EU exercises power over the Global South by relegating them to a never-ending state of lack and becoming.¹⁸

¹⁵ Shaffer, Gregory, and Yvonne Apea. 2005. “GSP Programmes and Their Historical-Political-Institutional Context: Commentary on Lorand Bartels”. In: *Human Rights and International Trade*, edited by Thomas Cottier, Joost Pauwelyn, and Elisabeth Bürgi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 491.

¹⁶ Interview with a development expert at a European think-tank, 22 November 2021, online.

¹⁷ Alcazar III, Antonio Salvador M. forthcoming. “Not a gift for the Third World”: How the European Economic Community’s generosity as a global trade power kept coloniality alive”. In: *Thinking European Studies Otherwise: Empire, Colonialism and Race*, edited by Rosalba Icaza, Beste İşleyen, Jan Orbie, and Siddharth Tripathi.

¹⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2014. “Global Coloniality and the Challenges of Creating African Futures”. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 36 (2): 181–202.



Towards a culture of remembering?

Recognising the colonality of GSP aligns with a “culture of remembering” as “an open process of societal and political work on and with rather than a final interpretation of the past”.¹⁹ This process calls for a shift in remembering GSP not as a generous “gift” for the Global South but rather as a policy deeply rooted in the EU’s colonial past and present. This remembering comes at a time of wider and ongoing public attempts in Europe to confront the legacies and continuities of colonial relations in the EU context through citizen participation²⁰ and the activism of civil society groups, such as the European Network Against Racism and Decolonial Europe Day.

What is more, the European Parliament has recently debated a Committee on Culture and Education report and subsequently passed a resolution on cultivating “European historical consciousness” in a self-critical attempt to “reassess all dark sides of European history, including colonialism”. If EU institutions and the public are genuinely committed to taking this historical consciousness seriously, then, remembering GSP as entangled in colonial relations further amplifies the urgent need for the EU to “ensure that its diplomats and officials

have a proper understanding of Europe’s colonial past and how Europe is really viewed around the world” in tandem with wide-ranging public education campaigns about Europe’s colonial past.²¹

Without question, this culture of remembering is a necessary democratic pursuit for EU institutions and citizens. However, it is insufficient without also coming to terms with how Europe’s dark past keeps exploitative relations alive today between the EU and its supposed others in world politics. In remembering and repairing the colonial past, the EU ought to ensure its contemporary trade policies are not causing harm to the knowledge systems and material well-being of the very people whose wretched lives the EU claims to champion in the colonial/modern present.

¹⁹ Prutsch, European Remembrance Policies.

²⁰ Oleart, Alvaro. 2023. *Democracy Without Politics in EU Citizen Participation: From European Demois to Decolonial Multitude*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹ Cameron, Fraser and Shada Islam. 2021. History matters for the EU’s geopolitical ambitions. <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/History-matters-for-the-EUs-geopolitical-ambitions~411810>.

Diverse Memories, Shared Futures:

Rethinking Europe's History in Education

By Daniela Cappuccio

Daniela Cappuccio is an experienced professional with a background in law and extensive involvement in European youth organizations and active citizenship initiatives. Her Italian and Colombian background inspires her commitment to creating inclusive and engaging environments that foster multicultural collaboration and meaningful exchange. After years of volunteering with Understanding Europe, she now works as a Project Manager, bringing her passion to education and civic engagement to the forefront.

The importance of remembrance in educational content is particularly pronounced in Europe, where histories and experiences vary widely. As a Fellow for Understanding Europe in 2022/23, I had the opportunity to rethink the Crash Course on the European Union. This course, aimed at engaging young people across the continent, explores Europe's structure, identity, and history.

I've always found the proverb "history is written by the victors" intriguing, as it highlights how power shapes the stories we accept as history. It makes me wonder how many perspectives have been lost or overlooked because they belonged to those who didn't "win." This idea has changed how I view historical narratives, reminding me that what we learn as "fact" might reflect only one side of a complex story. With this in mind, our main goal became presenting a narrative within the History Workshop of the EU Crash Course that reflected the diverse experiences across Europe, from the southern nations

to those in the east. This review was driven not only by an academic desire to include underrepresented histories but also by a vision of classrooms where students see their own stories reflected and connected with others, fostering a stronger sense of ownership and connection to the course materials.

The Transnational Training for Trainers (TT4T) in Bucharest, an event format designed to bring together trainers from across the Understanding Europe Network to deepen their skills in a specific area, was invaluable in gathering input from our network of volunteers since it focused on the topics of Europe and Social Justice and the ongoing fellowships on those topics. During one module, participants wrote defining historical events from their nations on a shared map of Europe. The exercise revealed contrasting collective memories: while World War II was a common thread, participants also highlighted national dictatorships, struggles of regional minorities, and other country-specific



experiences. These stories, deeply ingrained in their societies and cultures, demonstrated how memory is essential to understanding and representing European identity.

Following the mapping exercise, volunteers collaborated to refine our pre-existing timeline of European history. What struck me was the enthusiasm with which everyone contributed, adding new dates and events previously overlooked. This reflected a genuine desire for inclusivity and mutual listening. It was inspiring to witness the volunteers' mutual respect for each other's histories and perspectives. This commitment wasn't just about adding more events; it was about shifting the narrative from a predominantly Western European focus to one that acknowledges Europe's rich, complex experiences.

After Bucharest, I implemented these insights by updating the timeline to include more diverse cards of historical events. I also added an important note

in the trainer's manual emphasizing critical thinking about Western-centric historical narratives and encouraging trainers to invite students to question the timeline's content and contribute their own perspectives during the group presentations in classrooms. This peer-to-peer format allows students to reflect on their national remembrance while connecting them to the broader European context, deepening their understanding of Europe's multifaceted identity. The workshop presents history as a patchwork of diverse experiences and viewpoints, constantly evolving, rather than a "single" history of Europe.

In addition to revising the timeline and improving the second workshop on EU institutions, I also introduced a third workshop focused on the Competencies of the European Union. Understanding the EU's competencies goes beyond administrative functions; it reflects deeper layers of historical memory preserved through treaties and legislation.

Each treaty is a marker of Europe's evolving identity, chronicling milestones, negotiations, and struggles that have shaped the continent's collective efforts. These treaties capture both compromises and visions, serving as recorded memories of Europe's most challenging moments and shared triumphs—moments that continue to shape the EU's structure and values today.

This new workshop helps students recognize how EU competencies impact their daily lives, fostering a clearer understanding of EU responsibilities, actions, and the political landscape. They learn that these competencies, shaped by responses to historical challenges such as conflicts and the desire for peace, reflect tangible influences on personal and national identities. For example, areas like trade, environmental policies, and human rights demonstrate how European legislation serves as a living memory of shared experiences. Political debates over EU powers often echo deeper issues of identity and sovereignty, shaped by diverse historical paths to unity and division. This perspective encourages students to think constructively about the EU's future, understanding its institutions as historical foundations that can evolve in response to ongoing challenges.

As Europe faces challenges such as economic inequality, national sovereignty, and migration,

memory and shared identity are increasingly vital. Historical contexts shape EU debates and policies, while individuals' sense of remembrance influences how they engage as active citizens and voters. This connection between memory and politics affects not only how countries participate in EU policies but also how individuals vote and shape society.

From the network's perspective, a key benefit of the EU Crash Course update process was, indeed, the opportunity to reflect on the importance of these topics. This review process offered a valuable opportunity to make our educational materials more inclusive and representative of diverse experiences of remembrance starting with a safe and open space for network members to share their personal views on memory and history. Similarly, participants of the TT4T underscored in their feedback the urgent need for this work, appreciating the openness of the didactical approach in addressing the historical narratives of Eastern European countries and incorporating significant national events, such as Liberation Days, into classroom discussions. For example, events like Italy's Liberation Day and Portugal's Carnation Revolution play a crucial role in fostering collective remembrance and a shared understanding of history. They are deeply embedded in youth culture through rituals, festivities, and local commemorations, serving as living reminders of these moments in history.

→ **DID YOU KNOW?** Italy and Portugal both celebrate freedom on 25 April, but for different reasons! In Italy, it's Liberation Day, marking the 1945 end of Nazi occupation and Fascist rule, symbolized by Bella Ciao and red poppies. In Portugal, it's the 1974 Carnation Revolution, a peaceful coup that ended a dictatorship, with Grândola, Vila Morena and carnations as key symbols. Different histories, but the same spirit of liberation and democracy!



To conclude, let's reflect on the title of this publication: "How do we remember Europe?" Perhaps we should also ask, "how do we know Europe?" and "how do we want Europe to be?" For younger generations, Europe is evolving beyond a political and geographical entity to become a central part of their identity, grounded in shared values and collective memory. Through our work with Understanding Europe, we aim to help students see the EU not as a distant institution but as a dynamic and evolving identity that shapes, and is shaped by, their perspectives and actions.

We hope this educational initiative inspires students to critically reflect on the EU, engage in its future, and embrace the shared history connecting them across the continent. While it may not lead to a single definitive answer to the question of "how do we remember Europe?", it will encourage young people to explore the question and find diverse answers that, together, are stronger — reminding us, as the European motto suggests, that our strength lies in our diversity.

A Fight Against the Mafias:

Memory, Justice, and Collective Action in Italy and Europe

By Libera Bologna

Libera Bologna serves as the provincial coordination hub of Libera, an association committed to fighting mafias. Since its founding in 2007, Libera Bologna has spearheaded and collaborated on hundreds of initiatives across the Bologna province. Working alongside local authorities, associations, cooperatives, labor organizations, and schools, it strives to build an informed and vigilant community dedicated to opposing mafias and fostering a culture of democratic legality.

Italy's post-WWII history saw U.S. aid drive economic growth while imposing political constraints. During the Cold War, internal tensions emerged due to the national Communist Party's prominence and Italy's strategic importance. From the mid-1950s, covert political structures involving officials, politicians, industrialists, secret services and mafias worked to suppress social movements and create fear. In the 1960s-70s, these groups orchestrated coups and terrorist attacks, often tied to fascist movements, causing widespread casualties. During this time, mafia organizations gained significant political and economic power, infiltrating institutions and controlling regions through violence and corruption, leaving hundreds of victims, including officials, journalists, and ordinary citizens.

Some of the most notorious attacks have targeted prominent figures engaged in the fight against mafia organizations, such as magistrates Giovanni Falcone, Francesca Morvillo and Paolo Borsellino, who were killed in May and July 1992 together with

the men and women their escorts, in sensational bomb attacks. In 1993 Italy witnessed targeted terrorist attacks with bombs placed near sites of historical and cultural importance, with the aim of destabilizing the country's daily life and eroding its socio-cultural heritage.

This season of bombs and widespread violence sparked a strong demand for justice among Italians: there were demonstrations and protests, books and films were published, and a series of associations were founded with the aim of socially, politically and culturally opposing the mafias' presence. One of these was "**Libera**", founded in 1995 as a network of several organizations, each with its own mission, united in a common struggle.

At the core of Libera's mission and activities is the belief that memory is and must be a tool to educate people and to understand the present. Only by guaranteeing rights and social justice to everyone is it possible to fight the mafias. The association is



structured into territorial branches called *Presidi*, named after mafia victims to keep their memory and stories alive.

In 1996, Libera established March 21st as the Day of Remembrance and Commitment in Memory of Innocent Victims of the Mafias, officially recognized as a national day of commemoration by the Italian government in 2017. Each year, a different city hosts a remembrance event where the names of all victims are read aloud, bringing people together to honor them, support their families and foster a sense of community and solidarity. Throughout the year, local *Presidi* conduct educational programs in schools to highlight the importance of memory

and encourage students to engage in daily civic action, often culminating in their participation in the national commemoration event.

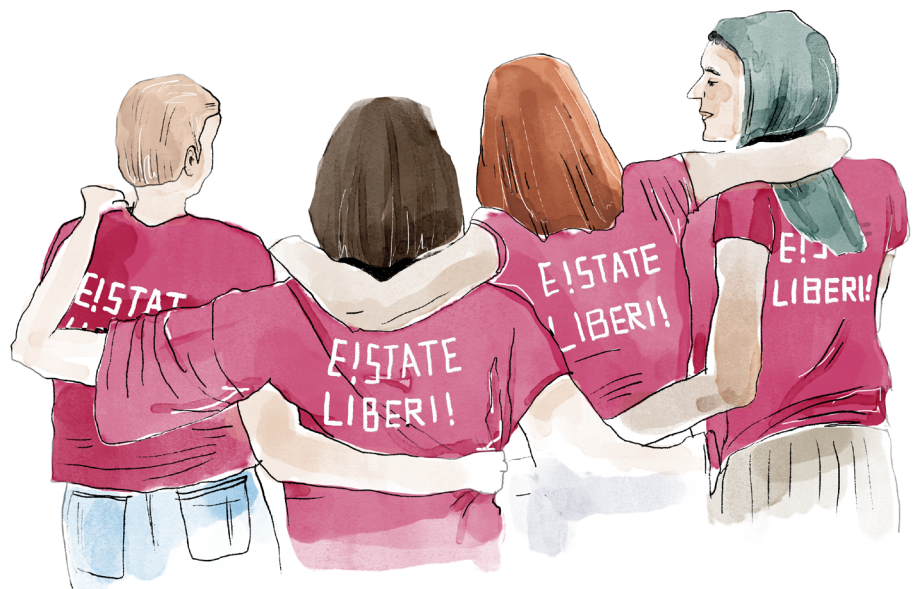
With the support of over a million signatures, Libera also proposed a new law to the Italian Parliament in 1996. This act was built upon a 1982 law advocated by Pio La Torre, a communist unionist killed by the Sicilian mafia. It classified mafias' affiliation as a specific crime and introduced the possibility of confiscating assets from mafias' members.

The 1996 law established that those assets should be reused for social purposes, in order to return to the community that had been taken from them by

mafia violence and oppression. This was a significant achievement for the association and for Italian people: from that moment on, many confiscated assets have been transformed into agricultural cooperatives, social spaces, association offices, and more. In 2001, “Libera Terra” cooperatives were founded to produce agri-food products in a way that respects the land, the environment and the dignity of workers, who are often individuals with limited opportunities, such as former prisoners, people recovering from substance abuse, or those with disabilities.

Every year, Libera also organizes summer camps for young people on confiscated properties, offering them an opportunity to connect. *Memoria* is one of the key educational tools used during the camps where participants learn about the stories of individuals who opposed the mafias and hear testimonies from the families of innocent victims.

→ **MEMORIA**, as an educational tool of Libera, goes beyond the simple act of remembering—it is about inspiring active commitment. Victims' stories are not just individual or familial; they represent the histories of entire communities, coming together to tell a significant part of the country's collective narrative. Memory serves to build collective awareness, and by safeguarding these narratives, Libera aspires to create a public, shared memory rooted in truth. This collective memory transforms grief into action and promotes reflection on “reparation,” seeking to mend the societal fractures caused by mafia violence“



This crucial aspect of Italian history is often overlooked in educational curricula and, more broadly, in the country's remembrance policies. As a result, many Italians lack historical awareness and struggle to recognize how the mafias operate today. For this reason, as an association, we are committed to building collective tools of awareness and resistance, firmly believing that remembrance and understanding of historical events can be transformative and inspire action in the present.

However, as the mafias have been operating for decades on a European and global scale, it is crucial that this becomes a European and global issue. The first step in this direction is to dismantle the harmful stereotype that the mafias only exist in Italy. The widespread presence of mafias is clearly shown by numerous international police operations, investigations by the EPPO (European Public Prosecutor's Office), and the existence of confiscated assets in other European countries. Mafia criminal organizations are growing in power in Italy, across Europe, and globally. Today, they operate in sectors such as waste management, human trafficking, public procurement and drug trafficking,

establishing strong ties with other organized crime groups worldwide. These activities allow the mafias to generate vast profits, quietly infiltrating high finance and the global economy.

That is why, as an association and as European citizens, we feel urgency to raise awareness among young Europeans about how to recognize the mafias and to develop the tools we can use to prevent their further expansion in Europe.

Precisely for these reasons, Libera has promoted the creation of CHANCE (Civil Hub Against organised Crime in Europe), a network that connects various European initiatives addressing these issues. In 2021, as activists from Libera Bologna, we organized a trip to Paris to build connections with other organizations within the network and collectively discuss tools and strategies to fight the mafias on a European level. We are committed to taking care of our countries, territories, and the people who inhabit them. To do so, we must engage with our shared memory and heritage and work together toward a more informed and conscious political future.

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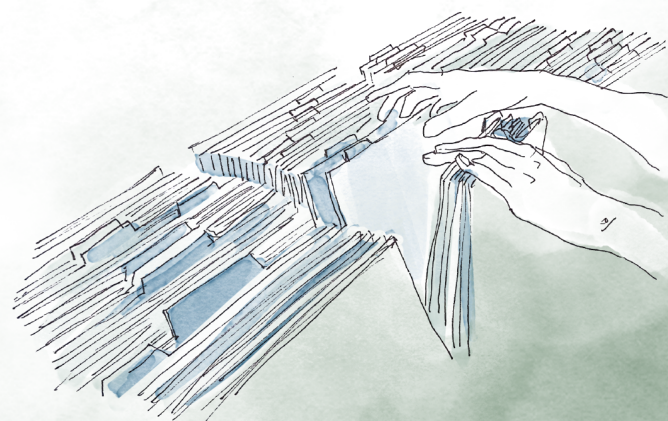
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Understanding Europe

The transnational educational network Understanding Europe empowers young people across 12 European countries through democratic citizenship education, amplifying their voices and fostering active engagement. We support and provide guidance for educational initiatives led by young people, driven by commitment to civic participation and a vision of a democratic, diverse, and open-minded Europe.

Our educational programs are rooted in the Peer Education approach, which emphasizes participation and self-determination. Peers, who share common social spaces and similar experiences, use their lived experiences to connect with the perspectives and realities of young people. This approach creates a safer and inclusive environment for learning and collaboration, where participants can explore their identities, broaden their horizons, and appreciate diverse worldviews and experiences.

At the heart of Understanding Europe are our young peers, aged 16 to 28. They form the backbone of our network, contributing in various capacities such as Trainers, Peer Educators, Coordinators, and Fellows. Together, they implement and continuously shape the project at multiple levels. The Project Team works alongside them as learning partners and advisors, fostering a collaborative and dynamic exchange.



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