

Shared Values under Threat: How the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted the German and Italian memory laws

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The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 drastically changed the global geopolitical landscape. Shortly after the beginning of the invasion, the European Union and other Western democracies implemented unprecedented sanctions against Russia and abruptly many existing diplomatic and economic ties with it. For instance, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared the political *Zeitenwende* (watershed era) as a consequence of Russia's military actions in Ukraine. He argued that the 'return of the war in the European continent' marked a turn in European history. This speech also signified the German change in its *Ostpolitik* (Eastern politics). Analogous to Scholz, Italian then-prime minister Mario Draghi framed the invasion as the existential struggle of democracy versus autocracy. Against this background, we argue that the invasion triggered changes in German and Italian mnemonic politics and memory laws, especially regarding the post-World War II order and Soviet Union legacy.

Much has been written about memory laws in Eastern European states and Russia, as well as shared mnemonic policies of the EU in general. Nevertheless, little was done to investigate memory laws in the leading EU democracies, such as Germany and Italy, impacted by the collective trauma other than World War II and the Cold War. Consequently, in this paper, we ask: *What was the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on German and Italian memory laws?* For this reason, we select and compare legislative and non-legislative acts, official declarations and proposals from national decision-making bodies in Germany and Italy which criminalised or legitimised certain collective narratives regarding the nation's past and were implemented or modified in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine from 24 February 2022. To investigate our research question, we implement the narrative analysis by looking at the collective mnemonic narratives conveyed in the chosen memory laws. Specifically, we depict the main narrative topics transmitted and enforced by these laws and examine whether and how these narratives were influenced and provoked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In this, we reserve particular attention to mentions concerning the commemoration of the traumatic nazi/fascist and communist pasts.

In addition to its theoretical significance, this paper suggests a potential practical tool that allows the exploration and evaluation of the narrative dimension of the laws adopted by both countries. By understanding to what degree the collective memory and political narratives influence the legislation, this paper may provide some suggestions for increasing the general objectivity of legal documentation. Moreover, particularly with regard to the construction of the common legal mnemonic framework of the EU under the influence of such external factors as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this comparative study of the German and Italian mnemonic legislation may help to articulate certain shared values within a wider EU common memory framework and indicating points of reconciliation in the EU memory.

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