

Securitization of Memory in the Pandemic Period: The Case of Russia and Latvia

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Abstract: The article examines the processes of memory securitization in the Russian Federation and Latvia during the coronavirus crisis. The key factor that allowed the authors to make such a statement about the problem was the temporary coincidence of the pandemic with the 75th anniversary of the final defeat of Nazi Germany and the so-called Victory Day. As a theoretical basis for the study, we use the constructivist understanding of security in order to study, with specific examples, how the threat in the form of a pandemic became a frame for securitization of memory. The authors identify the peculiarities of the articulating of security problems by political elites in two states with different memory regimes framed by the pandemic as an external factor.

Keywords: Securitization, memory, Russia, Latvia, Covid-19 pandemic.

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Having turned into a politics, historical memory, both internal and external, changed its cause-and-effect relationships. Previously being an argument in justifying and legalizing the adoption of certain decisions by governments, memory has turned from an object into a subject, from a consequence into a cause, often determining certain actions of the policy makers. The coincidence of the “commemorative mainstream” (in our case, the anniversaries of the Second World War) with the *Covid-19* Pandemic has created a new, as yet unexplored reality/unreality, which, in our opinion, will define new outlines of the symbolic politics, significantly increasing the population’s susceptibility to its impact due to its forced isolation. And although this impact can hardly be considered as direct and immediate, the authors believe that quarantine measures have changed not only the scenario of the planned events related to the 75th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany and Russia’s celebration of Victory Day, but also the very nature of the system of historical remembering regarding issues of international security in Russia and Latvia. This, on the one hand, led to a temporary weakening of the influence of Russian foreign political propaganda, and, on the other hand, forced Russia to compensate for the

lost commemorative domination with an authoritarianization of domestic policy (under the guise of quarantine measures) and rather aggressive declarations in foreign policy, which in fact represents a new round of memory securitization.

In turn, for Latvia, the pandemic indirectly led to favorable opportunities for a more rigid fixation of the national narrative. Through their activity at the domestic legislative level and their remarkable joint statements with the leaders of Estonia and Lithuania, the political elite of Latvia took an active part in promoting the Eastern European commemorative vision of the events of 75 years ago in its national vision based on the ideas of “two totalitarianisms” and the Soviet occupation.

Thus, the subject of this study is the processes of securitization of memory in Russia and Latvia during the coincidence of the celebrations of the anniversaries related to the Second World War and the quarantine measures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the goal thereof is to identify the peculiarities of the articulating of the “security problems” by political elites in the two states with different memory regimes framed by the pandemic as an external factor.

As a theoretical basis for research, we take a constructivist understanding of security in order to study, with specific examples, how the coincidence in time of the pandemic and the memorial events became a framework and an external factor for the securitization of memory. As a hypothesis, the authors believe that the coincidence of the coronavirus pandemic with the symbolic date of the end of the Second World War caused not only significant adjustments to the commemoration scenario, but also changes (possibly temporary ones) in the balance of the power of the Russian and Latvian mnemonic actors (actors in the system of remembering). What we are trying to show is the unexpected results the Covid pandemic can have for such a seemingly distant issue as historical politics.

Based on the above research objectives and hypotheses, we consider it appropriate to structure the article as follows. The first part is devoted to determining the feasibility of studying the memory policy in the security concepts, while describing the approaches and methods adequate for the research. The second part is devoted to the study of the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic has made in Russia’s policy of instrumentalization of memory, and the transformation of the Russian memory policy from an object of internal and external securitization into a security dilemma (mnemonic confrontation) in the international arena. In the third part, with the use of the example of Latvia, the external and internal factors of consolidation of the main plots of the official mnemopolitics in the construction of identity are studied as the basis of the ontological security of the state in conditions of an unfavorable geopolitical situation (threats from the Russian Federation) on the one hand, and against the background of an emergency situation facilitating the securitization policies on the other.

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY AND SECURITIZATION

The subject and object field of research that we have designated presuppose the use of the concepts of “security” and “securitization” as the core ones. The authors rely on the constructivist approach to understanding security that was systematically structured in the studies of the Copenhagen School. They consider security as a socially constructed phenomenon and define identity protection as one of its main goals. In accordance with this approach, the correlation between memory and security can be traced from at least three angles. First, similarly to security, a collective memory is also socially determined. Second, the collective memory underlies the various configurations of identity, including the national identity. Third, collective memory is not only an object of protection (securitization), but a resource on the basis of which the security actors identify the threat, form the image of the enemy and determine the means of protection.

According to the constructivist awareness of security, the threats to it can be determined in terms of subjective perceptions, understandings and interpretations of the threats by

politicians or other security actors who directly influence the decision-making process, relying, among other things, on historical experience that lies within the framework of the collective memory. In addition, the subjective threats can not only be postulated by the politicians, but also be born and circulate in public opinion, the generation of which depends on various factors, including the influence of another state. Thus, Russian propaganda, by permanently actualizing the risks to Russian identity in Latvia, maintains a certain degree of the perceived threat to the social security of the Russian community. This once again confirms the thesis about the relativity of security subjectivism. Inter-subjectivity in this case means that since people live in groups, their decisions about whether something is a security issue or not are not their individual decisions (Buzan – Wæver – de Wilde 1998: 31, quoted in Rostoks 2010: 64).

Thus, the awareness of the threat on the part of the reference object of security (in our case, the historical memory) determines its securitization. Securitization is, on the one hand, an analytical basis that has been developed in the framework of security research and, on the other, a set of practical measures that actors take to counter the existential threats that endanger value reference objects, especially an identity (Rostoks 2010: 70). The founder of the theory of securitization, O. Wæver, wrote that it is a process of identifying a threat that occurs through a speech act. This act is a fixation of the threat that the actor produces (Wæver 1995: 57).

Despite this classical definition (threat identification), various authors highlight different stages of this process, writing specifically about memory securitization. M. Mälksoo considers memorial laws to be a securitization of memory, especially those that criminalize individual historical events and public attitudes towards them (Mälksoo 2015). A. Miller declares that securitization is the very perception of discussions about history and collective identity through threats to national security (Miller 2020a). V. Apryshchenko and V. Strukov consider securitization as a whole system of mnemonic actions, or multi-modal announcements, including symbolic exchanges and various types of iterations, such as art, cinema, etc. (Strukov – Apryshchenko 2018: 5). In all these cases, however, the focus is on the historical narrative. A narrative that offers a coherent picture of a chain of historical events is the main format for representing the past in both historiography and political discourse (Malinova 2018: 37). Mnemonic narratives underlie securitization strategies, and conversely, securitization emerges as a system of narratives used by government officials, regulators, cultural entrepreneurs, etc. Conflicts arising from conflicting narratives set the stage for further securitization steps (Strukov – Apryshchenko 2018: 18).

The crucial components in the structure of the securitization are the subject(s) of the securitization, the reference object, the threat created and the audience that accepts the threat per se (Gaufman 2017: 15). The general public accepts the securitization if it feels a threat to its ontological security and, above all, its identity. E. Gaufman emphasizes that in the process of identifying the “foe” as a threat, its image is transformed into the image of the enemy, which is personified, discursively formed and visually presented. Collective memory plays a major role in this, since it contains images, stereotypes and entire narratives of historical enemies (Gaufman 2017: 6). Thus, the threat must resonate with previous threat constructs (collective memory) and be broadcasted at the government level in order to be successful (Gaufman 2017: 6). To gain adherents, the securitization actor must link the applied discourse to the external reality. In our case, such a context appears to be the Covid-19 pandemic, and the direct/indirect response to it in the states being considered – the strategic use of discourse against the background of facilitating the conditions can be described as discursive framing (Olesker 2018). Such framing can be defined as the ability of an actor to influence the actions of others, and shape the course of a debate on a given issue. According to Entman (1993), certain aspects of reality are selected and emphasized in such framing. Thanks to this, the subject can apply a certain

concept of defining a problem or a threat, their causal interpretation or recommendations for a solution.

Thus, the constructivist understanding of security, with its understanding of the historical memory as a reference object of securitization, allows us to determine how the securitization process led to the adoption of political measures in the framework of certain conditions (the emergency regime in Latvia, the quarantine measures in Russia due to the Covid-19 pandemic). Based on this, the main sources for the analysis were as follows:

- 1) Performative speech acts (utterances) of the subjects of the securitization (mnemonic actors): The main emphasis was placed on speeches, statements, and declarations of heads of powers and governments, ministers, deputies, and other officials, which were regarded by the authors as performative speech acts. The time interval of the analysis was directly related, on the one hand, to the celebration of the anniversaries related to the Second World War and, on the other hand, to the quarantine measures that came at about the same time (January 2020 – the end of June 2020).
- 2) Normative legal acts and legislative initiatives (political measures) legitimizing the processes of the securitization and associated with the performative speech acts of the subjects of securitization: In addition, we analyzed the regulatory documents that were adopted earlier, but created certain conditions for the securitization processes (e.g. the *European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe (2019/2819(RSP))*).
- 3) Expert assessments, articles, and interviews with historians and political scientists of Russia and Latvia who act as the subjects of securitization (Latvia), or form the securitized discourse (Russia).
- 4) Sociological data on the public reactions to securitization processes.
- 5) Reactions to the “speech acts” (memorial events) in the media and social networks.

SECURITIZATION OF MEMORY IN A RUSSIAN WAY: SECURITY AS A MEANS

The Russian media landscape and political debate are riddled with threat stories and images of Russia’s enemies that are endorsed and cultivated by the government and the state-controlled media (Gaufmann 2017). Recently, a discursive field of the “memory wars” has been artificially formed in Russia (Miller 2020a, 2020b). On the one hand, it presents Russia as a victim, and on the other, it performs a mobilization function. The “wars of memory are beneficial to the Russian political elite, since the official concept of the emergence of the Russian state is a reaction to external threats. Therefore, the imperative of survival remains the most important imperative in Russian history (Cygankov 2010: 81). That is, in this view, the fight against threats is the key to survival. If there is no threat, then a threat must be formulated and at the same time built into the collective memory (Gaufmann 2017: 6), which is what happened with the myth of the “Great Patriotic War”.

The main objectives of Russia’s European security policy remain unchanged, regardless of the degree of their implementation: strategic control over the post-Soviet space, minimizing the consequences of NATO and EU enlargement by creating an “internal buffer zone” in Eastern Europe, and transforming the existing NATO security system in Europe to maximize the political influence of Russia (Menkiszak 2019: 4). Instead of the tragedy of Russia’s defeat in the Cold War, the collapse of the socialist camp and the collapse of the USSR, V. Putin needed to create a non-conflictual image of the past which, in addition to the communicative function, would play a significant role in ensuring the security of the state, outlining the circles of “us” and “foes”, providing a cultural and historical sense of space and time, and securitizing the internal space (Apyrshchenko 2016: 97) (and as time has shown, the external one as well). The memory mode in which the president is the “chief historian” – a mnemonic actor and the main subject of securitization – has formed a unified reference object with the only semantic construction shared by the

majority of the population (a “bond” between them) – the historical myth of the “Great Victory” in the “Great Patriotic War”. According to Malinova (2016), “the Great Victory” has become the main pillar of the memory policy aimed at the formation of Russian identity, since it is actually the only event in Russian history that meets all the criteria of “political suitability” in accordance with the concepts of securitization: it is actualized in the mass consciousness by numerous “speech acts” and through the creation of a branched infrastructure of memory (places of memory), and has a wide range of symbolic meanings for defining “ours” (positive) and “foes” (negative), and in the conditions of the state monopoly on the politics of memory it is not the subject of opposite assessments. In addition, the memory of the Second World War plays the role of a defensive / offensive weapon aimed at the past against the traumatic events of the Soviet totalitarianism and occupation in the national narratives of Eastern European countries, including Latvia. The rejection of the Russian narrative of the history of the Second World War by the Eastern European Baltic countries transfers them into the category of the “foes”, as this transfer was first consolidated in the new edition of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (2015) (Oficial’nyj sajt prezidenta Rossii 2015) and more recently in the “updated” Constitution (Gosudarstvennaya Duma Federal’nogo Sobraniya RF 2020).

A. Miller defines the policy of memory of the Russian Federation as forcedly securitized: “if earlier people were looking for reconciliation in conversations with the neighbors about the past,” now “the essence of the policy of memory is understood as an irreconcilable confrontation between the political opponents, in which one must win and the other must lose. With such an approach, there is no place for a dialogue and for searching for joint interpretations as well” (Miller 2020b). In fact, this is an articulation of the official version of shifting the blame for the so-called “wars of memory” to the countries of Eastern Europe, which replaced the “cosmopolitan approach” to the politics of memory dominating in the EU with an “antagonistic” one, replacing the “old European idea of the Second World War, with its focus on the Holocaust and Nazism” with “the legend of two totalitarianisms, Soviet and Nazi, on which (and only on which) supposedly lies all the responsibility for the nightmare of war” (Miller 2020b). Calling 2020 a “turning point” in the field of memory politics, and pointing to its beginning – Putin’s “shock visit” to Israel, A. Miller stresses the importance of his symbolic dividends: “In January, Putin goes to Israel – a monument to the victims of the blockade is being opened there. This is a very important step because the survivors of the siege are placed on the same pedestal with the victims of the Holocaust” (Rossiya v global’noj politike 2019). The fifth World Holocaust Forum, which took place on January 23 at Yad Vashem, was preceded by the unveiling ceremony of a monument in honor of the heroic residents and defenders of the besieged Leningrad, the “Candle of Remembrance”, in the central Jerusalem park, Gan Sakere. The unveiling of such a memorial in the context of the largest international commemoration ceremony for the victims of the Holocaust created the most convenient context for promoting the Kremlin narrative: in his speech there, Putin equated “anti-Semitism” with “Russophobia” (Lihachev 2020).

Thus, in Jerusalem, the Kremlin was beginning to work systematically to build a chain of commemorative and political events timed to coincide with the anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The result of this symbolic campaign was a reformatting of Russia's foreign policy image. In addition, in Jerusalem, Putin came up with an initiative to hold a summit of the founders of the UN – the permanent members of the Security Council (Russia, China, the United States, France and Great Britain), which was also timed to coincide with the jubilee anniversary of the UN General Assembly, which can be considered as a call for an analogue of the Yalta world order, in which the “great” powers – the victors in the war – based on their ideas about the national interest, would divide the spheres of influence (Lihachev 2020).

Trying to find allies in “memory wars” Putin focused on the East and on April 24 signed the law, previously approved by the State Duma, on postponing the commemoration of the date of the end of World War II from September 2 to September 3 (Oficial’nyj internet-portal pravovoj informacii 2020). At the same time, the bill was included in the Defense and Security thematic block, and it was explained in the explanatory note that the changes were aimed at “*strengthening the historical foundations and patriotic traditions, [and] preserving historical justice in relation to the winners of the Second World War*” (Sistema obespecheniya zakonodate’noj deyatelnosti 2020). At the same time, the Russian Federation President’s Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights opposed the postponement of the date, since September 3 is the day of remembrance for the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan. Thus, in the manipulation of the memorial dates, internal security – the negative reaction of interested actors – was ignored in favor of the external commemorative policy.

Conducting the Victory Parade in Moscow to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II was of key importance for the Russian leadership in the context of the culmination of the Kremlin’s policy of instrumentalizing the memory of the war, through which V. Putin hoped to, firstly, demonstrate to the world the mobilization and military strength of a “great power” and, secondly, unite the invited guests with a common mnemonic ritual; these two acts together should have significantly improved the shaken image of Russia and brought it out of its isolation in connection with the sanctions. However, the pandemic has made its own adjustments to the plans to convert the symbolic capital of the victory over Germany into a legitimization of the regime both domestically and in the international arena.

Back in January 2020, Putin began preparations for the celebration. In order to preserve the historical memory and in honor of the 75th anniversary of the victory in the “Great Patriotic War”, 2020 was proclaimed as the “Year of Memory and Glory” in Russia (Oficial’nyj sajt prezidenta Rossii 2020). As already mentioned, all the grandiose events to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the victory were of great importance for both domestic and foreign policy. Within the state, they were aimed at creating a sense of universal enthusiasm and consolidating mass support for the changes to the Constitution as a result of which Putin was able to rule the country until 2036. Maybe for this purpose, articles on the construction of the memory of the war were added to it: the prohibition of “*diminishing the value of the heroic deeds of the people in defending the fatherland*”, and the “*rights and obligations*” of the state “*to defend the historical truth*” (Gosudarstvennaya Duma Federal’nogo Sobraniya RF 2020), which can be regarded as another round of the securitization spiral. In the international arena, Putin was preparing for a diplomatic breakthrough, hoping for the presence of the leading world leaders at the parade.

However, the existential threat in the form of the pandemic revealed a complete disorganization of the management, starting with Putin himself and ending with the mayors of the cities. It was one more proof that the fight against the internal and external enemy is the only thing that unites various state and near-state actors (Stepanova 2020). The pandemic has exposed the ineffectiveness of Putin’s political model. In the fight against the coronavirus, the state was where it should not be, and it was not where it should be. The self-isolation of Putin in Novo-Ogaryovo, which has been popularly dubbed as the “bunker”, led to a pandemic paradox: the majority of the leaders of Western democracies grew in terms of their rating during the epidemic, while Putin’s rating fell (Kolesnikov 2020). Data from the Levada Center (as of April) on the approval rating of the president’s activities showed a historical anti-record – 59% (Levada-centr 2020).

At public online meetings on the situation with the coronavirus, which V. Putin held on a weekly basis, priority was given to information of an exclusively optimistic nature, which clearly contrasted with the situation on the ground. At one of these meetings, V. Putin, defining the tasks of combating the pandemic in the context of protecting the national

security and protecting Russia's national interests, resorted to historical analogies: *"All things must pass, [and] this too shall pass. Our country has gone through serious trials more than once: both the Pechenegs and the Polovtsy tormented it – Russia coped with everything. We will defeat this coronavirus infection too. Together we will overcome everything"* (Oficialnyj sajt Prezidenta Rossii 2020). This speech act simultaneously contained a hint of a "thousand-year" history – the reference to "Polovtsy and Pechenegs" – and the mobilizing statement saying "we will win", as Russians always won. However, the perception of this performative speech act led to almost exactly the opposite effect. "Pechenegs" and "Polovtsy" became a popular meme which quickly spread in the social networks and opposition media, and references to historical memory acquired an ironic meaning, which has been reflected in numerous jokes on the social networks: *"That is, [Putin] read the history books before the Pechenegs; the Polish ambassador can breathe easy for now; Constantinople at the ready"; "Me: – I hope that Putin will stop constantly remembering the Great Patriotic War and will find something else that Russia can be proud of. Putin: – Pechenegs"* (Meduza 2020).

Observing the events, and their reflections in the media, it can be argued that V. Putin did not want to cancel the parade, which, however, is understandable given the planned scale of the celebrations: military parades were to be held in 28 Russian cities, and solemn events with the participation of military troops were to take place in 475 cities and towns of Russia. On May 9, the largest monument in the history of modern Russia was to be opened – the Rzhev Memorial to the Soviet Soldier. However, the opening ceremony was first postponed to June 22 and then to June 30. As part of the celebration, the grandiose Main Temple of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation was consecrated and the "Memory Road" museum complex was opened on its territory.

Public assumptions about the possibility of the holiday events being canceled or postponed due to the quarantine were officially recognized as fake (Oganesyan – Luk'yanova 2020). But when information appeared in the press about the infection of the participants of a rehearsal of the parade (DW 2020), the press secretary of the President D. Peskov said on the TV program *Moscow. Kremlin. Putin* that *"the decision to postpone the Victory Parade was not easy for Russian President Vladimir Putin; however, people's health is an absolute priority for the Russian leader"* (RIA 2020). It should be noted that some fears of the patchy response to the postponement of the parade date have been justified. The huge campaigning work in anticipation of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the victory's culmination and the funds spent thereon have not been justified and thus caused indignation. A part of the population was dissatisfied with the postponement of the parade date, which, in their opinion, led to the loss of Russia's monopoly on the victory: *"Voluntarily, we abandoned the Victory Parade, putting on the pandemic masks due to the decision of the pandemic idiots. The logical result is that the official White House declared the USA, Great Britain and [...] the American spirit to be the victors over Nazi Germany"*. Many people lamented the huge expenditure of money in difficult times for the people: *"Every year is just a waste of money. It would be better to help the veterans and internal front workers with some medicines. That would be more useful"* (Sib.fm 2020).

The holding of the Victory Parade in neighboring Belarus not only hit the pride of the Russian ruling establishment, but also threatened Russia with a loss of its monopoly on the symbolic role of the "victors over fascism" (from social networks: *"Cancellation of the Victory Parade in Moscow and holding of the Victory Parade in Minsk is only the top of the iceberg. Putin didn't just postpone the parade. He desacralized the date"*) (Ravreba 2020). On June 18, the American magazine *The National Interest* published an article by Putin about World War II, which was announced in December 2019 and titled "Real Lessons from the 75th Anniversary of World War II". It was also printed in *Rossiskaya Gazeta* the next day. The article itself and the discussion thereof distracted

the focus from the postponement of the parade. The very emphasis in the title on the word “real” can be interpreted in different ways: on the one hand, from the point of view of relevance for the present day, and on the other hand, in a way which, according to the authors, has a greater symbolic meaning, and points to the uniqueness and peremptory nature of the conclusions. Like the previous statements of V. Putin, the article sharply criticizes the resolution of the European Parliament; in the article it is argued, among other things, that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia voluntarily “joined” the USSR in 1940 with the consent of the authorities of the Baltic countries, that their “*accession [...] corresponded to the international and state law of that time*”, and that the Baltic states “*retained their state bodies, [and] language*” and “*were represented in the highest state structures of the Soviet Union*” (Putin 2020). And there is one more aspect of the article’s discourse which attracts attention in the current geopolitical situation. In his article, V. Putin emphasizes that the Second World War did not happen suddenly: “*it is the result of many tendencies and factors of the world politics of that period. All the pre-war events lined up in a single fatal chain. But, of course, the main thing that predetermined the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind is the state egoism, cowardice, the indulgence of an aggressor gaining strength, [and] the unwillingness of the political elites to seek a compromise*” (Putin 2020). The passage about the threat to the fundamental principles of the world order, which points to the desecration of the historical memory and allusions to the “meanness and cowardice” of the destroyers of monuments, creates a performative projection of the period from the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War to the present, in which Western politicians are not ready to compromise with Russia and recognize its “legitimate interests”. And the whitewashing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and Stalin’s aggressive policy in the article justifies Putin’s own imperial policy: his real one in relation to Ukraine, and his declared and potentially dangerous one in relation to the Baltic states and the countries of Eastern Europe. Thus, V. Putin’s article, having once again demonstrated his status as the main mnemonic actor, became a message mainly to the West, and created a new round of memory securitization inside the country (accentuation of the “foe”), which was supposed to compensate for the effect of the ritual commemorative events that failed during the quarantine.

On the eve of the parade, V. Putin gave an interview on the all-Russian channel “Russia-1”; in which, he made another performative utterance of existential threat: “*... if this or that republic became part of the Soviet Union, but received a huge amount of Russian lands, traditionally Russian historical territories, and then suddenly it decided to leave this union, then at least it should leave what it came with*” (Rossiya. Televidenie i radio 2020). Such a statement clearly articulated the threat of encroachments of the territorial integrity of Russia and the desire to restore the imperial-Soviet borders of the times of 1945. This articulation was a deliberate act of securitization in both domestic and foreign policy.

The carefully constructed securitization ended with the failure of the “speech act”. The parade, which took place on June 24, 2020, was dubbed by the media as a “ceremonial absence”: 13 Russian cities refused to hold it, and even loyal Asian and Caucasian leaders refused to participate therein, diplomatically using the pandemic as a reason. This led to image losses and a discrediting of the Russian regime in the world public opinion: “*... to deal with him [Putin] isn’t worth the effort. Nobody wants to go to Moscow without a special need*” (Polovinko 2020). It nullified all the efforts to convert the symbolic politics, at least at the external level.

GENERAL CONTOURS OF THE LATVIAN MNEMONIC LANDSCAPE

The main factor providing the complexity and ambiguity of the Latvian mnemonic background is the ethnic dualism of the Latvian society and the presence of a large Russian-speaking community there. Here we are talking not only about a single minority,

but about the dominant minority, which includes other minorities on a linguistic basis – thus 37.6% of all residents of Latvia use Russian as the main language in their families (Ozolīna 2016: 13–29). That is why in this study we use the broader term “Russian-speaking” instead of “Russian”. In recent years, this term has been increasingly used to build a homogeneous group with common values and characteristics from a diverse selection of heterogeneous groups and individuals (Cheskin 2012). Because of this, according to A. Cheskin, history (not language) is what separates Latvians, drawing a clear line according to the ethnolinguistic criterion (Cheskin 2012).

Through the efforts of the mnemonic actors (the Saeima, the President, nationalist and centrist parties, etc.), a nation-oriented historical narrative has been established in Latvia, the key points of which are the Soviet occupation of Latvia and the associated deportations and repressions, as well as the idea of the legal and political continuity of the Republic of Latvia in 1918–1940 with a modern Latvian statehood. The historical politics defines these plots as central, which determines the corresponding infrastructure and the commemorative calendar.

According to V. Apryshchenko and E. Gaufman, the meanings of security are formed by the past historical experience (Apryshchenko 2018: 29; Gaufman 2017). For Latvians, the deportations were the main trauma and the axis around which their identity has been formed. The anthropologist V. Skultans argues that this tragic plot of their history has the same meaning for them as the Holocaust for Jews (Skultans 1997). This historical traumatic experience defined the meaning of the Latvian security, which assumed that the occupation was the main cause of the Latvian people’s suffering, and viewed the USSR and Russia as the main threat.

However, in the specific conditions of Latvia, such an active assertion of the national-ethnic narrative simultaneously turned into a serious threat in the form of stigmatization of the Russian-speaking community. The majority of Latvian Russians did not accept the national narrative of the occupation. Moreover, under the influence of Russia’s aggressive historical policy, the Russian minority of Latvia adopted the narrative of their historical homeland with an understanding of the events of 20th century history that is the opposite of the Latvian one, as in the Latvian Russians’ understanding, the central plot is the Soviet “liberation” of Latvia from the Nazis and the commemoration of May 9 as Victory Day. Numerous polls show that the majority of the Russian-speakers support a pro-Soviet narrative that tends to rationalize the occupation of the Baltic states and justify the Soviet repression. According to a 2012 poll 58.5% of the Russian-speakers believe that Latvia ended up in the USSR as a result of its voluntary decision (Kaprans 2016). A poll conducted in the summer of 2015 showed that 26% of the respondents had celebrated May 9 in the previous five years, with a huge difference between the answers of the Latvians and the Russian-speakers – only 7.5% of the Latvians celebrated it, but the figure for the Russian-speakers was 65.8% (Zelče 2018).

With the special status of May 9, the Second World War Victory Day celebrations are a significant element of the collective myth for Russian speakers in Latvia, as it has become part of their national identity, while this special holiday has simultaneously become a natural form of identity demonstration for the Russian speakers. As a result, any form of refusal to celebrate this holiday by Russians in Latvia is associated with a threat and is very painfully perceived in the context of the fear that may arise as a result of the thought of losing this viable myth.

MEMORIAL INITIATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ANNIVERSARIES AND THE PANDEMIC

The quite expected exacerbation of the mnemonic politics took place in 2020 in connection with two symbolic dates that are the benchmarks of two respective narratives – the 80th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the 75th anniversary of the end

of the Second World War. In Latvia (as well as in other Baltic countries), the 2019–2020 period was marked by the final transition of the issues of the historical memory from the plane of ideological framing of identity to the plane of national security, which took shape in a number of international and national documents.

A quantitative comparison of the securitization acts of the previous periods, namely those that resulted in the adoption of an appropriate legislative decision in the period of the first half of 2020, suggests that the period that coincided with the pandemic and the memorable dates was characterized by a greater density and frequency of securitization. Thus, the corresponding acts of the memory securitization in Latvia stretched out over the past three decades and their peak was in the 1990s, when the national narrative was being formed. Among the main ones are the declarations of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia “On the Occupation of Latvia” (dated August 22, 1996), “On the Occupation of Latvia” (Latvijas Republikas tiesību akti 1996), “On Latvian Legionnaires in the World War” (dated October 29, 1998) (Nacionāla Apvienība 1998), and “On the condemnation of the totalitarian communist occupation regime of the USSR that was carried out in Latvia” (dated May 12, 2005).

In Latvia prohibitive measures against communist and Nazi symbols were introduced gradually and under the influence of the political conditions. At first, the use of symbols of the USSR, the Latvian SSR and Nazi Germany was prohibited at political and public events, which is mentioned in the Law on Assemblies, Processions and Pickets. In turn, the prohibition did not apply to entertainment, festive, commemorative and sports events. In the early 2010s, there was a rapid strengthening of the alternative narrative of the counter-memory, which contradicted the Latvian official one and was stimulated by the historical policy of Russia. The central plot of this narrative was the “liberation” of Latvia and the Victory Day on May 9. Its celebration was accompanied by a massive use of Soviet symbols and anti-state rhetoric (Pettai – Pettai 2015: 164). Therefore, in 2013, some amendments to the law on the safety of public entertainment and festive events were adopted, which introduced a prohibition of the use of the stylized forms of flags, coats of arms, anthems and symbols of the former USSR, the LSSR and Nazi Germany, such as the Nazi swastika, signs of the SS, the Soviet hammer and sickle and a five-pointed star, at such events. The use of the uniforms of the armies of the USSR and Nazi Germany was not prohibited, however.

To some extent, the intensity of the securitization increased in 2014 and this was due to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, one of the ideological frames of which was the historical memory of the amendment to the Criminal Code which criminalized the denial or justification of aggression committed by totalitarian regimes (Kaprans 2016: 82). In 2014, amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted that further criminalized the denial or justification of aggression committed by totalitarian regimes, and also an amendment to the relevant law specifying the deadline for the full opening of the KGB archive – in 2018 (Kaprans 2016: 82). And finally, also in 2014, the main paradigm of the Latvian national narrative – the paradigm of two evils – the Soviet and the Nazi occupation – was introduced into the Latvian Constitution (Latvijas Republikas tiesību akti 2019). Nevertheless, the first half of 2020 differs from 2014 in that during such a short period 5 legislative initiatives that securitized the national narrative were submitted.

In the pre-Covid 2019, the most significant of them were the European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe and the new National Security Concept of Latvia. The former fully and systematically included the Eastern European narrative including what is important for us – the Baltic historical narrative of the Second World War with the concept of two occupations, the equality of Nazism and totalitarianism, and the condemnation of the historical revisionism of the Russian Federation. The concept of the national security has designated the historical memory as a sphere of national security.

Table 1
Memorial legislation and initiatives

Proposed legal act	Actors	Referent object	Threat	Audience	Brief description	Result
Amendments to the Law on the Safety of Public Entertainment and Celebrations (Latvijas Republikas tiesību akts 2020)	National Alliance, President		Popularization of the symbols of the totalitarian regimes	Latvian Saeima	A ban on the use in public events of clothing that identifies the wearer as belonging to the former USSR, its republics or the armed forces of Nazi Germany or law enforcement agencies (repressive institutions), as well as the elements thereof	Adopted with amendments by the President
Amendments to the Law on the Safety of Public Events and Celebrations; Amendments to the law On meetings, processions and pickets (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 2020c)	National Alliance	National narrative of the Second World War	Popularization of the main symbol of the Russian narrative of the Second World War and Russian hybrid expansion	Latvian Saeima	Prohibition of the St. George Ribbon	The Latvian Saeima Commission on Human Rights and Public Affairs supported the draft law at its meeting
Law on the Freedom Monument and the Riga Brotherhood Cemetery (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 2020d)	National Alliance	Memorial sites of the national narrative	Discrediting and disrespecting the main places of the memory of the national narrative	Latvian Saeima	The Liberty Monument and the Riga Brotherhood Cemetery are transferred from the care of the Riga municipality to the care of the state. Penalties are established for expressing disrespect to these places of memory.	Adopted

Table 1 – continuation

Proposed legal act	Actors	Referent object	Threat	Audience	Brief description	Result
Proposals of the President of Latvia to improve the draft law Amendments to the Law on Holidays, and Memorable and Celebrated Days	President of Latvia	National narrative	Doubts about the continuity and succession of the Latvian statehood during the two totalitarian occupation regimes	Latvian Saeima	A proposal to establish a Memorial Day for the National Resistance Movement on March 17	Under consideration
The bill to establish December 15 as the Day of Remembrance of Anti-Soviet Fighters	National Alliance	National narrative	Memorial initiatives of the President as a competitive mnemonic actor	Latvian Saeima	The proposal to establish a Day of Remembrance of Anti-Soviet Fighters on December 15	Under consideration

The coronavirus crisis became a frame for the further securitization process. Latvia has chosen a “soft” response to the pandemic situation: the closure of educational institutions, the cancellation of public events, social distancing and hygiene. The possibility of such an approach was due to, on the one hand, the low population density and, on the other hand, the unwillingness to severely restrict medium and small businesses (as this was impossible for economic reasons, namely reasons of insufficient state support), which created quite optimal conditions for controlling the pandemic within the country. Through the method of personal observation, one can also assert that there was a relative solidarity of the local media (including pro-Russian resources) in their positive assessment of the effectiveness of the actions of the Latvian government in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Against the background of the relative successes in curbing the pandemic and some confusion and demobilization (also due to the pandemic) of the internal supporters of the pro-Russian narrative, the main national mnemonic actors performed a number of actions leading to its further securitization. We divide these actions into the following groups: 1) memorial legislation and initiatives that securitized the national narrative and 2) acts of commemoration of the traditional symbolic dates. In the following table, we introduce the first group of actions – the memorial legislation and initiatives.

The first three initiatives meant not only a tough securitization of the narrative, but also the removal of important symbols and commemorations of the Russian narrative beyond the legal framework. In each case this was preceded by rather harsh statements by representatives of the political elite, which can be characterized as speech acts declaring a threat and giving space to the discourse of securitization. To give two examples, there was the statement of President Egils Levits that those who celebrate May 9 cannot be Latvian patriots (PRESS 2020), as well as the words of the deputy chairman of the Saeima Dagmara Beitnere-Le Galla: “*those who use the St. George Ribbon do not want to belong to Latvia*” (Beitnere-Le Galla 2020).

The fourth and fifth initiatives are attempts to add to the official calendar two new commemorative dates associated with perpetuating the memory of the national anti-Soviet partisan movement. This group of mnemonic events primarily reflects the attempts to adjust the national narrative and the competition between its main actors – the President and the National Union.

In October 2019, the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, proposed to the Saeima that it adopt the proposed amendments to the “Law on Holidays, and Memorable and Celebrated Days”. According to one of them, March 17 should be the official Day of Remembrance of the National Resistance Movement in Latvia. On this day in 1944, under the leadership of Professor Konstantins Čakste, the Latvian Central Council completed the collection of signatures for a memorandum in which a demand was put forward on behalf of the Latvian people for the actual restoration of Latvia’s independence, and confidence was expressed in the belief that the Latvian state and its Constitution would legally continue to exist (Latvijas Valsts Prezidents 2019).

In this case, one can see three reasons that motivated E. Levits to come up with such an initiative. First, there was the desire to consolidate the anti-Soviet consensus in the Latvian historical policy, which again became relevant in the context of Russian historical revisionism. Secondly, the proposed holiday’s chronological coincidence with Legionnaires’ Day on March 16 would make it possible to somewhat decorate this unofficial, but very popular holiday, which led to a gathering of a fairly large number of people and thus worried the EU. On the other hand, the new holiday would make it possible to transfer the commemoration of March 16 into a legitimate area. Thirdly, President Levits believes that the Day of Remembrance of the National Resistance Movement will become an important reminder of the continuity and succession of Latvian statehood during the two totalitarian occupation regimes. Today, the period of

the Second World War is considered to be an interruption of the existence of the Latvian state. With this initiative, the President in a certain way fills this gap in the historical memory, demonstrating the continuity and anti-totalitarian orientation of the state aspirations.

At the same time, one cannot speak of the proposed March 17 holiday as an initiative completely imposed by the government since traditions of celebrating this day have already existed in a certain part of the Latvian civil society; therefore, here we can see a certain coincidence of the political (descending) and the social (ascending) memory.

The President has scheduled several big events to be held by that date. Specifically, the National Resistance Movement in the Historical Memory of Latvia Forum was to be organized and held in the castle of Riga. The agenda of the Forum included laying new traditions of memory by commemorating Professor Konstantins Čakste and sites of commemoration such as the Ilskiy Bunker along with spreading of commemoration idias region wide. However, in connection with the introduction of the state of emergency in Latvia, these events did not take place, and the commemoration of the date was limited to a single candle lighting by the President near the Liberty Monument and his short address to the nation.

The initiative of a number of Saeima deputies to establish another commemorative holiday – the Day of Anti-Soviet Fighters – seems to be strengthening the anti-communist narrative. This initiative is aimed at commemorating the participants of the post-war underground resistance movement in Latvia, who, unlike, for example, their counterparts in Lithuania, have not yet been identified in the symbolic pantheon of the memory. The bill provides for the introduction of a day of remembrance for the anti-Soviet fighters which is to be held on December 15, the day on which Gunars Astra, a member of the national resistance movement, gave his last word in a political trial in 1983 at the Supreme Court of the Latvian SSR. His speech was similar to a diplomatic accusation of the USSR of occupation and violation of the rights of citizens of the Republic of Latvia. The authors of the law linked it openly with the need of the people of Latvia to “*protect their country*” (Upleja 2020). This initiative was almost imperceptible, there are no comments on it from Latvian experts, and nothing was written about it in the Russian-language media. On social networks, there was some discussion about the advisability of introducing such a commemorative date, especially in connection with the presidential initiative to make March 17 a memorial holiday. According to M. Kaprāns, in this case there was a competition of the mnemonic actors within the framework of the national narrative. The politicians from the National Alliance strive to designate their primacy in the formation of the national narrative (Kaprāns 2020).

Commemorative dates and rituals, and their status and scale are one of the main elements that determine the memory politics. As mentioned above, the memory mode in Latvia can be designated as split. The apogee of the controversy is two unofficial commemorative dates that have become practically the symbols of the identity of the two ethnic communities in Latvia – Legionnaires’ Day on March 16 and Victory Day on May 9. In this table we introduce the commemorative rituals (mnemonic events) in Latvia during the state of emergency.

From the presented table, two groups of mnemonic events can be distinguished. The first is the traditional official dates of commemoration – March 25 and June 14 (the Day of Remembrance for Victims of the Communist Genocide and the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communist Terror and Mass Deportation, respectively) and May 4 – the Day of the Restoration of Independence. Due to the coronavirus restrictions, they passed without mass events, and the main actions were the addresses of the President and the Speaker of the Saeima, and the individual layings of flowers at the Liberty Monument. Let us note two indicative points related to the intervention of the pandemic in the planned scenarios of the events. Firstly, in the speech acts of the leaders of the state,

Table 2
Acts of commemoration of the symbolic dates

Date	Mnemo event	Status	Places of memory	Originally planned commemoration rituals	The rituals held instead due to the pandemic
March 16	Legionnaires' Day	Informal	Freedom Monument	A procession, laying flowers near the Monument Funeral, a ceremony at the Lestenes fraternal cemetery	A single floral tribute at the monument
March 25	Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Communist Genocide	Official	Freedom Monument, Memorial to the victims of deportations – a cattle car at the station	A procession from the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia to the Freedom Monument on Freedom Square, a solemn changing of the guard, and a laying of flowers there with the participation of deputies of the Saeima, members of the government, the leadership of the National Armed Forces and diplomats. Minutes of silence at the monument, wreath-laying, and meetings. Wreath laying and a memorial service near the carriage.	A single flower-laying, lighting candles
May 4	Independence Restoration Day	Official	Freedom Monument, Saeima, a memorial plaque dedicated to the adoption of the declaration on May 4 (2020) was installed near the building of the Saeima	A solemn meeting near the Freedom Monument, a procession of brass bands, a procession of people in folk costumes, concerts of musical groups, a craft market for folk art	A virtual ecumenical service in the Riga House. A speech by the President during a virtual excursion along the cognitive path in Old Riga, where the declaration of the restoration of Latvia's independence was discussed, written and adopted. The individual sports campaign titled "Thank You" #PaldiesParBrivibu!

Table 2 – continuation

Date	Mnemo event	Status	Places of memory	Originally planned commemoration rituals	The rituals held instead due to the pandemic
May 9	Victory Day	Informal	Monument to the Soldiers – the Liberators of Riga	Mass meeting, a flower-laying “field kitchen”, a concert of musical groups	Laying flowers in groups, keeping a distance
June 14	Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Communist Terror and Mass Deportation	Official	Freedom monument, the memorial to the victims of deportations – a cattle car at the station	A procession from the Museum of Occupation to the Freedom Monument, a solemn changing of the guard, and a laying of flowers there with the participation of deputies of the Saeima, government members, the leadership of the National Armed Forces and diplomats. Minutes of silence at the Freedom Monument, and at the Skirotava and Tornakalns stations. Laying of wreaths and meetings. Laying of wreaths and a memorial service near the carriage.	The President’s meeting in the Riga Castle with people who survived the exile to Siberia, and participants in the school works competition “Children of Siberia”. A meeting near the Freedom Monument.

a symbolic connection was traced between the historical trials of the Latvian people and the current pandemic. The latter was presented as a test for the nation, which it must overcome with honor.

On March 25, Inga Murniece, the Head of the Saeima, in her address on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Communist Genocide, urged Latvians to survive the current hardships by drawing inspiration from the example of Latvian peasants who survived the deportation: *“However, we are clearly aware of the power that has allowed the deported people far from home, in dire conditions, to survive and abide the dark times. Let us, in the current difficult situation, recall the past together and draw strength from the Latvian peasant who wanted to be the owner of his yard and did not join the collective farm. Let’s learn from this power!”* (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 2020b). A similar leitmotif sounded in the Address of President Egil Levits on the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communist Terror and Mass Deportation: *“The course of the history of our people gives confidence that by rallying forces, we overcome great obstacles and find the right ways in crisis situations”* (Latvijas Valsts Prezidents (2020b).

References to the current pandemic were also present in the speeches of state leaders on the Day of the Restoration of Independence of Latvia: *“We are forced to be on our own, with our closest family members only, or at least two metres apart from each other. I am certain that we can overcome even these circumstances and restore our strength, as we have our Latvia, where we are always together”* (Latvijas Valsts Prezidents 2020a). And in a solemn address, Inga Murniece drew attention to the success of Latvia in curbing the pandemic: *“The measures we have chosen to take during the COVID-19 pandemic are among the most successful ones. Without introducing strict prohibitions or a full lock-down, we have achieved the most important goal – to flatten the infection curve. This ensures, most importantly, that each patient receives the best medical care possible”* (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 2020a).

Another example is the following statement by Levits from his Address on the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Communist Terror and Mass Deportation: *“In the historical experience of our people, we can also gain strength to overcome today’s difficulties, comparing modern problems with the more difficult times that our parents and grandparents had to endure”* (Latvijas Valsts Prezidents 2020b).

Secondly, in the public space, an idea that was voiced was that the official events on the day of remembrance of victims of deportations should be abandoned in the future, and that the focus should rather be on the remembered events’ personal, sorrowful character. This idea was expressed by the deputy of the Saeima and the European Parliament Sandra Kalniete: *“This year, when due to restrictions we cannot get together in a large procession, may become a turning point where we start thinking that it can be mentioned in a different way”* (LSM. Lv. 2020).

The second group of mnemonic events is the informal commemorative dates, which, as a rule, resonate more with the public and have a potential for conflict in Latvian society – March 16 (Legionnaires’ Day) and May 9 – Victory Day.

The traditional informal procession on Legionnaires’ Day was canceled, and the commemoration was carried out by a single laying of flowers by some right-wing politicians and members of the public at the Freedom Monument, while they kept a distance from each other.

Meanwhile, Russia, which introduced strict coronavirus restrictions much later than Latvia, did not abandon its planned measures which were directly related to the mnemonic confrontation with Latvia and were part of the war of memories. Thus, on March 16, at the International Press Center of MIA “Russia Today”, a round table was held and the report “Companions of Nazi Crimes. 96 Veterans of the Latvian Legion Who Are Still Alive” was published. It was organized by the Historical Memory Foundation and the Foundation for the Support and Development of Jewish Culture, Traditions, Education

and Science, and one of the authors of the report was V. Semendey, a well-known critic of the historical policy of Latvia. The publication revealed the names of 96 Latvian legionnaires who still live in various countries of the world, including Latvia, the USA, and Canada (Sputnik Latvija 2020).

Despite the assurances of the round table participants about the possibility of the former legionnaires being prosecuted, the report does not provide any evidence of the participation of these persons in war crimes and, obviously, the publication first and foremost had a symbolic goal – to provide a Russian propaganda response to the historical policy of Latvia.

Due to the state of emergency, the celebration of the most important commemorative date of Latvia's Russian-speaking community, May 9, was relatively quiet and intimate. However, a fairly large number of people (20 thousand people) participated in it, and they came to the traditional place of the celebration – the monument to the Soviet “liberators” of Riga. However, in the information space, this date again caused the expected tension. This was due to two episodes. Firstly, there was the scandal caused by the expulsion from a Jurmala cafe of a couple of Russian tourists wearing St. George ribbons. The owner of the cafe, a local government deputy from the National Union, demanded that the visitors remove the ribbons, and after their refusal, he did not let the couple into the cafe (M!XNEWS 2020). This caused a widespread discussion in the Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking segment of Facebook (GRANI. Lv 2020; Uzulēna 2020).

The second episode was a case of non-observance of social distance by people who came to the monument to the “liberators of Riga” on May 9. The Prime Minister, K. Karins, even demanded an official explanation from the Minister of Internal Affairs in this regard (DELFI 2020).

Thus, the “mnemonic competition” with the Russian Federation, intensified in the context of the symbolic anniversaries and framed by a new social and political situation in connection with the pandemic, led to a re-actualization of the historical experience and the collective trauma of Latvians associated with the Soviet occupation, and accelerated the formation of meanings of security that imply a strengthening of the political and legal measures to protect the national narrative as an element of identity.

CONCLUSION

The constructivist approach, formalized in the studies of the Copenhagen School, seems to us the most optimal when studying memory politics. The case of Russia and Latvia proves that the protection of an identity through the securitization of memory is one of the main goal-setting meanings of national/state security, a component of the national interest. The constructivist construction of the meanings of security and the collective memory is the main prerequisite for their interconnection and mutual influence.

Discourses of memory would hardly be a successful guarantee of securitization if they were not, to a certain extent, correlated with current threats. Referring the historical memory to the subject field of national security in Latvia was a reaction to Russia's actions to disavow Latvia's historical narrative. In case of Russia, disagreement of those countries having a different concept of the securitization of memory to accept the WWII narrative promoted by Russia is perceived as an external threat to Russia's national security. The processes of securitization of memory are connected with the external reality, which does not depend on a speech act or any other expression of discourse and is a favorable/unfavorable condition for the use of memory discourses. In our case, the COVID-19 pandemic became a factor in the external reality.

The coincidence of the coronavirus pandemic with an intensification of historical politics, which was in turn associated with two symbolic anniversaries that were important for two respective narratives – the 80th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and

the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War – led to changes (perhaps only temporary ones) in the balance of power of the mnemonic actors, in our case along the line of confrontation between Latvia and Russia. At the same time, these changes were characterized by the memory securitization in both countries, but with different degrees of success in each case.

For Russia, the pandemic created unfavorable conditions for the Russian authorities to use the opportunities that were provided to them by the implementation of a large-scale program to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the “Great Victory”. On the one hand, the paternalistic feelings of Russians were undermined due to the inability of the government and the president to fully control the situation. On the other hand, the carefully constructed “speech act” of using the anniversaries in the symbolic politics at the external level failed, which forced the subjects of the securitization (particularly V. Putin) to use a clearly aggressive rhetoric in an attempt to rehabilitate their image after the losses it suffered. Holding the Victory Day parade in the neighboring Belarus on May 9 under the conditions of the pandemic not only hit the pride of the Russian ruling establishment, but also created the threat of Russia losing its monopoly on the symbolic role of the “victors over fascism”.

For Latvia, the coronavirus crisis has unexpectedly created a favorable political and social situation for a more painless securitization of memory and an even more serious defining of the main subjects of the official mnemopolitics. From March to June 2020, five memorial bills were put forward in Latvia. Against the background of its relative successes in curbing the pandemic and a certain confusion and demobilization (also due to the pandemic) of the internal supporters of the pro-Russian narrative, Latvia made a number of decisions that additionally securitized the national historical narrative in its anti-communist orientation, which gives us grounds to speak of the final transition of issues of the historical memory from the plane of ideological framing of identity to the plane of national security.

A quantitative comparison of the securitization acts of the previous periods allows us to speak of the greater density and frequency of such acts during the coincidence of the pandemic and the memorial dates. If the previous acts of securitization of memory were stretched out over almost three decades, then it was during the quarantine measures that it became possible to avoid a great public outcry and opposition of the pro-Russian forces in reaction to the adoption of the memorial laws and initiatives important for the national narrative. That allows us to consider the acts of securitization to be successful.

Summing up, it seems important to us not only to record the facts and events described and analyzed with the use of the concepts of securitization, but also to express some value judgments. We consider our research to be a definite contribution to the study of pandemic “framing” of symbolic politics, including the politics of memory. In other words, we define the pandemic as an immediate contextual condition and part of the external “support” for memory securitization. In this case, we see the new act of securitization both in Russia and Latvia not as an isolated case, but as a case that becomes a trend. Evoked by anniversaries and related memorial events and unexpectedly coinciding with the pandemic, this trend makes it easier for state authorities to manage symbolic politics. In the case of Latvia, it is easier for the state to consolidate and strengthen its national narrative, due, firstly, to the strengthening of its national reputation, thanks to the competent counteraction to the pandemic, and, secondly, to the distraction of society and potential counteragents of memory to the problems of fighting the Corona crisis. In the case of Russia, the pandemic created unfavorable conditions for the implementation of the vast program of the 75th anniversary of the “Great Victory”. On the one hand, the pandemic undermined the paternalistic feelings of Russians due to the inability of the government and the President to fully control the situation. On the other hand, it spoiled the opportunity to use the carefully prepared anniversary in symbolic politics on the

international level and forced the use of clearly aggressive rhetoric in an attempt to rehabilitate the image losses as well as pushed the President into the pathway of reinforcement of authoritarian power.

Russia's search for new memory allies – for example, China – with the fixation of new commemorative dates, can lead to tactical successes, but in the long term it can create a security dilemma in a multinational state with numerous identity memories. The performative “gathering of lands” of the former USSR has already provoked a negative reaction from Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Belarus, not to mention Ukraine and the Baltic states. Though he uses the memory securitization for geopolitical purposes, that is, to expand the Russian sphere of influence, V. Putin may face a completely opposite effect, namely resistance, both within the state and on the part of other actors in foreign policy, from among which he could lose even his most loyal allies.

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