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Collective Memory and an Interpretative Approach: The Struggle over Kosovo's Independence as an Ideational Background for Contemporary Serbia's Foreign Policy Choices

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Summary

Contrary to the common understanding that collective memory functions as a driver for fostering domestic peace, stability, a common national identity, and serves as a cornerstone for the realisation of specific national goals, our aim is to show how collective memory is understood as a constitutive element of foreign policy narratives and how memory can influence foreign policy choices (Anderson, 1983; Gillis, 1994; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Bodnar, 1992; Schudson, 1993; Dian, 2017). Building on the work of Müller (2002), Bell (2010), Langenbacher and Shain (2010), Resende and Budryte (2014), Dian (2017) and Bachleitner (2018), we will argue that Serbia's foreign policy choice in 2013 to sign the agreement with Kosovo is best understood with the help of an interpretative approach to foreign policy, as this issue *de facto* reflected the continuation of the role of sacrifice within Serbian collective memory. A narrative of victimisation was used to efficiently bridge the 'guilt' and tie it to the notion of great powers' intervention. This article also examines the paradox of Serbia's endeavours to hold on to Kosovo by looking into how the struggle over the nation's past provides the fundamental ideational background for contemporary foreign policy choices.

Keywords: Collective Memory, Interpretative Approach, Foreign Policy Choices, Narratives, Myth

Introduction

Understanding contemporary social and political dynamics in correlation with the phenomenon of belongingness is never easy. For this reason, scholars utilize history and historical narratives to determine the factors that pave the way towards the

formation of national identity. Through the erection of a shared past and common origin, that is, by answering the questions of who we are and where we come from, national histories aim to empower people to conceive themselves as parts of national communities. By this, memory enters the public sphere, shapes national history and becomes a part and parcel of a social construction called collective memory. Indeed, collective memory is not concerned with history itself, but only with its legacy as it is remembered and interpreted (Halbwach, 1980). In this case, collective memory should be understood as an intersubjective understanding of the country's past, which is used to make sense of a country's identity and role in the world (Dian, 2017: 6). One of many empirical realities of this observation can be seen in the example of the Kosovo myth, which is perceived as a cornerstone to Serbia's cultural and national identity (Subotić, 2016: 618). The constitutive myth of Serbian martyrdom at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, where predominantly Serbian Christian forces[1] led by Lazar Hrebeljanović of Serbia fought against the Ottoman Turkish forces of Sultan Murad I, is deeply engraved into Serbia's collective memory as the battle, which is remembered as a defeat,[2] that led to the loss of independence and the 'five century-long Turkish oppression' (Djokić, 2009: 6). Even though the outcome of the battle is rather dubious, the majority of historians agree upon the fact that both sides grieved substantial losses, and that both the Serbian Prince and the Ottoman Sultan were killed (Koljević, 1980; Djokić, 2009: 6). The cultural dimension in regard to the Kosovo narrative should be understood through the prism of the Serbian Patriarchate, which was established in 1346 in Peć (Metohija), followed by some of the most important churches and monasteries built by Serbian medieval sovereigns (Djokić, 2009: 6–7).

The uniqueness of political and cultural position of Kosovo in Serbia's collective memory was well-kept in the rich heroic poetry and in church archives during the Ottoman era,[3] but the significance, such as it has today, emerged in the 19th century alongside modern Serbian nationalism (Hosking and Schopflin, 1997). The (re)instrumentalisation of importance of Kosovo came on 28 June 1989, when Slobodan Milošević went to Kosovo in order to address a crowd from all parts of Yugo-

[1] Zupančič (2013: 156) argued that prince Lazar Hrebeljanović also invited Albanians to fight with them against the Ottoman Empire.

[2] Central to this defeat is the cult of Holy Martyr Lazar, who was, according to the legend, offered a choice between an empire in heaven and an empire on earth by Holy Prophet Elijah (Djokić, 2009: 7). Lazar's choice – a heavenly empire – meant that Ottomans would win but the Serbian nation would secure a kingdom in heaven. This sacrifice made at Kosovo turned a military defeat into a moral victory (*ibid*.).

[3] Svetozar Koljević (1980) argued that the myth of Kosovo survived through centuries among a largely illiterate people.

slavia who assembled to rejoice the 600th anniversary of the battle, and continues to stay, in different form,[4] in the core of the Serbian collective paradigm. An important indicator in explaining this is the speech by former Minister for Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremić in 2011, three years after Kosovo's independence, who said in Chicago that "For Serbs, Kosovo is like the very air they breathe, and it is the beating heart of their culture" (cited in Subotić 2016: 610). Two years later, when Serbia signed an agreement with Kosovo (the Brussels Agreement), accepting the authority of Kosovo's government over the entire disputed territory without official recognition, the Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić swore to the public that "Serbia will never cut their wrists and commit suicide by giving up Kosovo" (*ibid*.: 617). This foreign policy choice suggests that not all activities are driven by pure and instrumental purposes[5] nor are they directed exclusively by social and political structure, but also by beliefs and intersubjective meanings (Dian, 2017: 22). Stemming from this, the interpretative approach to foreign policy is crucial in the equation as it offers an indicative theoretical toolkit to scrutinise the fundamental ideational background behind Serbia's foreign policy choices towards Kosovo. It helps us explain why Serbia would clutch on to Kosovo at all costs, even if the latter does not offer any material benefit for them. Concepts, which are central for this type of analysis, are the following: beliefs, traditions, narrative, resistance, and dilemmas (*ibid*.: 22–23). The interpretative approach to foreign policy, which lies in the nexus of Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations, suggests that just like individual agents operating in domestic policies, state behaviour in the international sphere can be expounded as a form of social practice, unfolding in a world of cognition, perception, misperception, and intersubjective meanings about how the world functions (Bevir and Daddow, 2015; Taylor and Tverski, 1992; Wendt, 1992; Rosati, Hagan and Sampson III, 1994).

The paper aims to contribute, first, to a better understanding of the role of collective memory in foreign policy by looking at how memory can function as a constitutive element of foreign policy traditions and narratives, and how memory can influence foreign policy choices. Second, this paper will test a theoretical model, which was previously tested on two selected post-conflict scenarios after World War II (China and Japan), but failed to address the post-Cold War context. Stem-

[4] A significant change could be observed from 2010 on, when the Serbian government steadily abandoned its prerogative of effective territorial control over Kosovo due to the fact that they started the EU-sponsored dialogue, but they have never changed the position in terms of recognition (Subotić, 2016: 620).

[5] By refusing to accept Kosovo's declaration of independence, Serbia is *de facto* delaying the EU accession process. The instrumental purpose in this regard would be the recognition which would then serve as a signal of Serbia's commitment to the European path.

ming from this, the paper also seeks to understand the specific place of Kosovo in Serbian collective memory. Finally, the paper builds on the empirical reality of Serbia and Kosovo, which is, in terms of the proposed theoretical approach, particularly rare in the existing literature.

The article proceeds as follows. It begins with a discussion on collective memory in International Relations (IR), and in particular the role of collective memory in foreign policy. Here, we will build on Dian's (2017) interpretative approach to foreign policy, which functions as a theoretical toolkit to assess the ideational background of foreign policy choices by looking at how memory becomes a part and parcel of the above mentioned choice. Secondly, it will outline the specific Serbian memory framework, with a particular focus on Kosovo. Finally, the theoretical model will be tested on the selected case study of Serbia's foreign policy choice in 2013 to sign the agreement with Kosovo with a discussion on how foreign policy traditions, narratives, dilemmas, beliefs, and resistance influenced Serbia's foreign policy choice to accept the authority of Kosovo's government over the entire disputed territory. In conclusion, this article will identify whether Serbia's foreign policy choices in the case of Kosovo can be explained by the interpretative approach to foreign policy, as well as set future paths for research on the role of memory in foreign policy.

Collective Memory in International Relations

In the last decade, collective memory has become an important field of research for numerous disciplines, such as sociology, history, philosophy, and psychology. As Jay Winter (2006: 43) observed, the debate on historical memory has become a "cultural obsession of monumental proportions across the globe". Authors like Maier (1988) and Dian (2017) argued that in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars could observe a memory boom, which was fuelled by the third wave of democratisation when new democracies started to reflect on their past and paved the way towards the reconsideration of their national narratives (*ibid*.). The above mentioned third wave of democratisation, which was inherently connected with the end of the Cold War, triggered the process of revisiting national history in several regions, from East Asia to Central and East Europe and the Post-Soviet space (Berger, 2012). The importance of the memory boom, as observed by Charles Maier (1988), lies in "a retreat from transformative politics", as it reflects a narrow focus on ethnicity and nationalism as a substitute for communities based on ideologies and political ideas. This argumentation is important as researchers could then tie collective memory with concepts such as identity, norms, and culture, and situate it within the studies of nationalism, ethnic identity, the politics of recognition and education (Assmann, 2001; Bell, 2010; Müller, 2002). In line with this, we could observe an

ever-growing body of scholarly work in the field of political science, where the main research focus lies in the nexus between collective memory and contemporary power struggles (Bachleitner, 2018: 11). By highlighting that memory is politically contested, the predominant literature advocates the instrumentalist approach, where focus is what people *do* with memory (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy, 2011: 249–251; Berger, 2012: 12; Olick, 2007). Through such lens, the existing literature provides important insights into how collective memory affects the relationship of power within society, but only on the level of domestic politics. While authors like Edkins (2003), Fierke (2010), and Confino (1997) underlined that the emergence of collective memory is conceivable only within a given society as an outcome of a multifaceted interplay of political interests, the concrete integration of the concept into International Relations is yet to be consistently introduced. Even though some researchers have managed to situate the above mentioned political interests within the broader argument that the political interests always reflect both national and international political goals, International Relations research, as Berger (1998: 12–25) pointed out, exhibits an inclination to underrate the extent to which memory essentially impacts the policy-making processes.

The small existing body of scholarly work within International Relations, which is centred on the concept of collective memory, can be divided into two main parts. The first utilises a normative approach towards collective memory while focusing on questions of justice, reconciliation, responsibility for past action and the obligation to remember the dead (Margalit, 2002; Elster, 2004; Olick, 2003). An important contribution in this regard was made by Elazar Barkan (2001), who assessed international state behaviour in terms of restitution and official apologies vis-à-vis their global increase as a signal of a newly emerging morality within the international community. The second part of scholarly work, which is situated within the positivist approach paradigm, aims at explaining state behaviour with memory by resorting to the analysis of foreign policy decisions. Here we can mention Thomas Berger (2002) and Peter Katzenstein (1996), who evaluated how cultural narratives shape actors' policies. An important research in this regard was conducted by Yuen Foong Khong (1992), who theorised how historical analogies are employed in foreign policy decision-making, and Ernest May (1975), who exhibited how history is (mis)used in American foreign policy. Finally, we can mention Thomas Banchoff (1999), who went beyond the decision-making process and discussed broader foreign policy implications resulting from historical memory. These works, which are divided into two main parts, can be further differentiated in terms of their theoretical approaches to collective memory, namely: i) Instrumentalist; ii) Historical Determinist; iii) Culturalist (Berger, 2012; Dian, 2017). This is important as they offer three different explanations of how collective memories arise and how agents shape or manipulate them for political purposes (Dian, 2017: 4). Furthermore, as Matteo

Dian stressed (*ibid*.: 4–5), they employ different conceptualisations regarding central issues such as the relationship between history and memory; the possibility of conquering the memory of certain events while selecting others; insolence and rise of countermemories; and how states and leaders should come to terms with the past to achieve reconciliation. Even though the above mentioned theoretical approaches are important for situating the concept of collective memory within the discipline of International Relations, our aim is to introduce an alternative theory that explains the interaction between collective memory and foreign policy. Deriving from this, we will, in the next section, introduce a theoretical approach, which should be understood as a framework that integrates the main ideas and the concepts of the interpretative approach to foreign policy with the study of collective memory.

Collective Memory and Foreign Policy: Introducing the Interpretative Approach

The interpretative approach is entrenched in numerous epistemological and ontological postulations. Bevir and Daddow (2015: 4) argue that the interpretative approach "rests on the assumption that explanations for political action follow from an empathetic understanding of the social meaning that underpins political activity, especially how the processes of social representations are formed and internalised in the realm of the international". By this, the authors directly rejected positivism, which is inherently related with mainstream International Relations theories, and advocated for more postfoundational epistemology that corresponds with the idea that social facts cannot be known either by pure reason or pure experience (Hall, 2015). The latter is crucial for interpretivism as social facts, which emerge within a prior set of beliefs, function as a tool to analyse the social world by reference to how it is interpreted by agents (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010). In line with this, the ontology behind the interpretative approach focuses on the human side of social action and rejects the idea that political and social behaviour can be straightforwardly determined by structures (Dian, 2017: 22). Actors in this regard are not simply motivated by a rational cost-benefit analysis, but instead resort to meanings and discourse that exist within the social structure in which they function (Bevir, 2015). For that reason, the interpretative approach to foreign policy as an alternative theoretical approach offers an evocative toolkit to scrutinise the process of redefinition of a country's memory and the political struggle behind it, and, what is even more important, it elucidates the means by which the struggle over a nation's past offers the fundamental ideational background for contemporary foreign policy choices (Dian, 2017: 23). According to Dian (*ibid*.: 22–28), the key concepts, which are essential for the interpretative approach, are the following: beliefs, traditions, narrative, resistance, and dilemmas.

The starting concept of the analysis are beliefs, which are crucial for understanding the actions of the agents. As already mentioned, due to the fact that the fundamental presumption of the approach is that agents are not only driven by pure or instrumental intentions, but rather by beliefs and intersubjective meanings, the operationalisation of the concept lies in the process of socialisation (Bevir, 2015). The latter should be, for the purpose of our analysis, understood through the prism of political socialisation, where each and every actor carries beliefs about a country's past (Dian, 2017: 23). Socialisation is also important for traditions, but on the level of party politics – foreign policy decision-makers are first socialised into party politics and latter entrenched in foreign policy governance (Ninkovich, 2001).[6] In line with this, policy choices are in advance limited by traditions, which function as a set of beliefs regarding a country's past, its role and position in the world, its "heroes and enemies", traumas and glories (Jorgensen, 2013).[7] In democratic systems, where representatives of different traditions exist and compete against each other, the outcome of the (political) struggle to impose their own beliefs, which are inherently connected with traditions, becomes known as narrative (Dian, 2015; Subotić, 2016). According to Patterson and Monroe (1998), Bell (2009), and Dian (2017), narrative is a very coherent story, where "chosen trauma, glory or myth"[8] become a part and parcel for all the practices of remembrance and for the formation of collective memory. Narratives, which involve government's rhetoric, education, and commemoration, follow the logic of three vital steps, namely: i) relation between facts and events; ii) amplification of a narrative relationship between events; iii) process of selection of components that provide logical stability of the narrative (Somers, 1994). Researchers that focus on narratives have managed to differentiate and create the narrative typology, which encompasses five "ideal types". Hawe, Shiell and Riley (2009: 86) argue for "Against the odds", "Heroic", "Technologist", "Romantic", and "Satirist", Dian (2017: 23–24) advocates "Glorification", "Self-victimhood", "Amnesia", "Acknowledgment", and "Contrition". We will focus on the typology of Dian (2017), as Hawe, Shiell and Riley (2009) situated the typology within the broader picture of community interventions dynamics.

Depending on the used narrative, there will always be the possibility of resistance. The latter emerges when narrative cannot be situated within the broader set

[6] Examples of traditions are Wilsonianism in the U.S., Gaullism in France, Peronism in Argentina, and Christian conservatism in Germany (Hall, 2015; Croci, 2008; Dadow and Schnapper, 2013).

[7] Traditions can be termed the political culture of foreign policy (Bevir and Daddow, 2015).

[8] As Widmaier (2007: 782) and Subotić (2016: 617) argued, traumatic events are useful windows of opportunities for narrative activation as they provide intersubjective meaning to policy change (making it more acceptable).

Table 1. Five Ideal-type Narratives

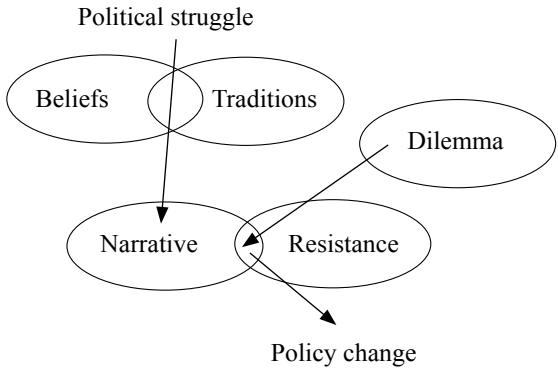
	Glorification	**Self-victimhood**	**Amnesia**	**Acknowledgment**	**Contrition**
Context	State acknowledges the extent of the past acts but considers them as acts of heroism.	State renders itself as a victim of the conflict/ war.	State attempts to remove a particularly traumatic period from the national narrative.	State acknowledges past violence, but strives toward transcending the weights of the past.	State admits the responsibility for wrongdoings.
Main Idea	Legitimizing or justifying conflicts by minimizing the suffering of the 'other'.	The state was 'pushed' into the conflict by external forces.	No museums, commemorations or memorials are present, and history books attempt to leave the trauma out.	Historical reconstruction admits different interpretations and leaves enough space for distrust and debate.	State promotes ceremonies and museums that reflect on the 'problematic past'.

Sources: Lind (2009), Sekalala (2016), Dian (2017), Oaten (2014), Ziai (2004).

of beliefs that are internalised by the general public. Resistance can be also closely observed when agents promote change and innovation by adjusting the main beliefs that support their tradition and the policies related with it. However, both innovations and changes do not just happen, they are driven by dilemmas that arise when existing narrative is no longer in a position to provide a coherent refurbishment of past events based on current beliefs and knowledge of the past (Dian, 2017; Keane, 1988). In other words, when the general public does not consider a narrative as valuable for contextualising the role of the country in the world, the internal landscape changes according to the new dynamic between domestic actors.

The figure on the next page illustrates that this dilemma, which is dislocated, echoes the most important added value of the theoretical approach as it reflects the ability to explain change, not just the continuity. Dilemmas are, in the case of an interpretative approach to foreign policy, tackling rather stable narratives about a country's past, which provide an ideational background for the most essential foreign policy choices. In line with this, the next section will be devoted to Serbian memory framework, highlighting the main elements for our empirical analysis based on the core concepts presented above.

Figure 1. Main Features of the Interpretative Approach vis-à-vis Their Intertwine within the Approach



Source: Author.

The Position of Kosovo in Serbian Memory Framework

On 28 June 2001, as he entered a helicopter that flew him to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, Slobodan Milošević, the former Yugoslav and Serbian president, supposedly questioned his guards if they knew that the day was Saint Vitus Day (Glas javnosti, 2001). Saint Vitus Day or *Vidovdan* is important as it is dedicated to Serbian prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, who fought and fell during the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Empire on 15 June 1389. The battle, accompanied by the legend regarding prince Lazar's choice of the "heavenly empire" over the "earthly empire", which determined the Serbian memory framework in a way that *sacrifice* vis-à-vis earthly loss in battle but eternal life in heaven along with *victimisation* vis-à-vis constant self-defense against great powers became inherently internalised by both the elite and the mass population (Subotić, 2013). The above mentioned sacrifice and victimisation, which were recognized as fundamental elements of Serbian collective memory by authors like Bieber (2002), Noutcheva (2012), Djokić (2009), Stockdale (2009), and Subotić (2013: 2016), are important in at least two ways. First, the Battle of Kosovo establishes "a historical continuity between the contemporary Serbian nation and the 'Serbs' of the Middle Ages" in a way that the Kosovo myth repetitively functions as a mechanism for celebrating Serbian protagonists who wanted revenge for the loss of Kosovo and the return of the "Serbian heart" (Bieber, 2002; Subotić, 2016). The latter insinuates that "Serbs will rise again" in a way that what is lost will be reclaimed and what has been grieved will be renowned. Second, the Battle of Kosovo became

the foundation for understanding the Serbian people as victims of foreign (major) powers in a way that what the Ottomans started had a continuation under the Habsburgs, Croats and Slovenes, Germans in World War II, Albanians (Kosovo), Bosniaks (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Croats (in Croatia), and NATO in 1999 (Subotić, 2016: 618). More recently, we can also add the EU in the context of its attempts to legitimise Kosovo's secession from Serbia.

The development of victimisation and sacrifice through the prism of the story of Kosovo was not spontaneous, and the (political) trigger was only dependent on the predominant ideology. The latter means that when nationalism replaced Yugoslav socialism, one part of the cultural and intellectual elite started to openly associate the Battle of Kosovo with Serbia's contemporary political concerns with the logic that Serbian national interests are being loomed by other nations in the Yugoslav federation (*ibid*.). When Slobodan Milošević succeeded in eradicating the historical aloofness between past and present, the pursuit of "historical justice" manifested in Serbia's war in Kosovo. The latter was also the main cause for NATO intervention in 1999, which only further hardened the Serbian perception of victimhood and injustice at the hand of great powers, as Jansen (2000) argued. Here we should also mention David (2013: 191), who said that all the governments after 1999 sponsored the memory of Serbian victimhood during the NATO intervention as if it were the central idea behind the wars in the 1990s. This did not diminish even after the fall of Slobodan Milošević in 2000 as the Serbian media insistently broadcasted and reported the attacks of Kosovo Albanians and the maltreatments of Serbs by the Kosovo Liberation Army, as well as documented the demolition of Serbian cultural sites (Bieber, 2002: 105). This, alongside with the official political positions of key policy actors through time, cemented the position of Kosovo within Serbian collective memory. As Di Lellio (2009), Ejdus and Subotić (2014), and Subotić (2016) showed, the above mentioned position was present in Serbian foreign policy narrative 48 hours before Kosovo declared its independence[9] and on 19 April 2013,[10] when the countries signed the Brussels Agreement. Deriving from this observation, the next section will test the interpretative approach on the case of 2013, when Serbia concluded the agreement with Kosovo by which they accepted Kosovo government's control over the entire territory.

[9] Koštunica (2009: 207) argued that Kosovo should be understood as a synonym for the most valuable contribution made by Serbia to the Christian civilization, and for that reason no one can integrate Serbia into Europe without Kosovo.

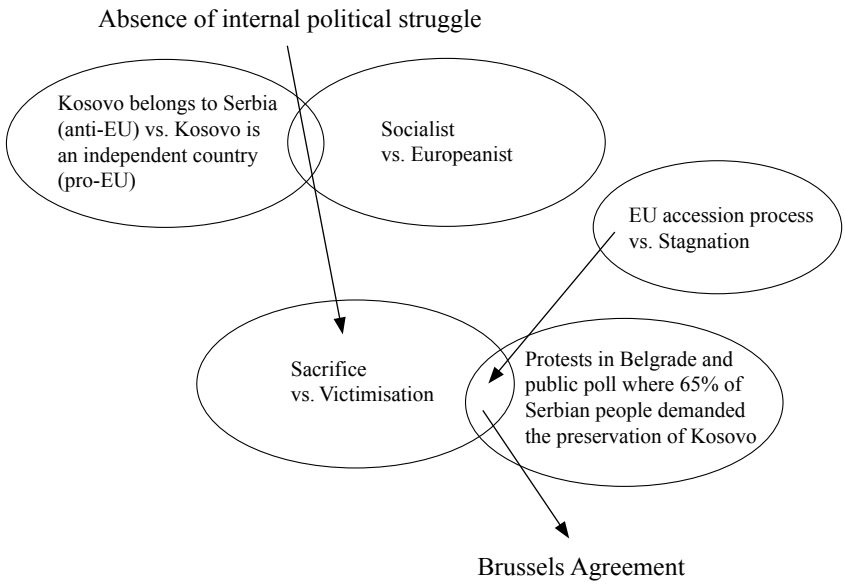
[10] Serbian Prime minister Ivica Dačić said that great power meddling contributed to the disagreements in the Balkans, and Serbian president Tomislav Nikolić argued that "the international community does not have a plan for Kosovo, but instead follows the great powers" (B92, 2013).

Brussels Agreement between the Continuation, Shift and Policy Change

Thirteen years after the fall of Slobodan Milošević and five years after Kosovo declared its independence, Serbia concluded the Brussels Agreement under which it accepted Kosovo government's control over the territory and in return negotiated significant autonomy to Serbs that live in the north of Kosovo (Ejdus and Subotić, 2014). This policy change, which came rather late, intrinsically corresponded with the EU accession talks as the question of the normalisation of Serbia-Kosovo relations became the prerequisite for entering the EU. The latter functioned as a fundamental dilemma that tackled the stable narrative regarding the role of Kosovo in both Serbian contemporary politics and collective memory. By doing this, the Serbian government had to justify this innovation/policy change to the general public as they believed, to a certain extent, that Kosovo would always belong to Serbia. As the internal landscape in terms of policy advocacy changed, the key policy actors started minimising the Brussels Agreement in a way that they began to promote the idea that no real policy change occurred. There was still a significant resistance as there were protests in Belgrade where one of the bishops even staged a "funeral" of the Serbian government and accused the government of betrayal (RTS, 2013). Furthermore, in a month after the protests, the resistance translated into the public opinion polls where 65% of Serbian citizens demanded that the government preserve Kosovo as part of Serbia (Balkan Insight, 2013). Several politicians such as Aleksandar Vučić (deputy Prime Minister), Ivica Dačić (Prime Minister), and Tomislav Nikolić (President) galvanised the sacrifice narrative, but this time they pushed for the impression that great powers forced Serbia to give up Kosovo (B92, 2013b). If Dačić was saying that "great power meddling contributed to the disagreements in the Balkans, and that each of them has its people in the Balkans", Vučić argued that "the agreement is the only way for Serbia to survive, stay united and solve their problems together in the future" (Subotić, 2016: 622–623).

As already mentioned above, when key policy actors promoted the idea that nothing really changed, they were, to a certain extent, right, as the years that followed produced limited policy change. In this regard we can talk about a continuation, as key policy actors like Ivica Dačić and Aleksandar Vučić still repetitively argue that "Brussels cannot expect that Serbia would commit the 'historical harakiri' (suicide) by letting Kosovo go" (Ekspres, 2018), and that "Serbia's fight for Kosovo is like a fight between David and Goliath" (RTS, 2018). The resistance by the general public is still present, as the Institute for European Studies located in Belgrade showed 81% of Serbs would not support the independence of Kosovo, and 55% of the Serbian people believe that this government will not recognise Kosovo (*ibid*.). Finally, during the process of challenging foreign policy change, key policy actors played on some elements of Serbian collective memory, such as sacrifice and

Figure 2. Application of the Interpretative Approach to Brussels Agreement



Source: Author.

historical injustice vis-à-vis the great powers argument, while leaving behind the notion of returning Kosovo at all costs. The combination of those elements means that the "loss of Kosovo" is narrated in a way that Serbia and its people are again witnessing the great sacrifice, but this time the perpetrator is the EU.[11]

Conclusion

Understanding contemporary social and political dynamics in correlation with the phenomenon of belongingness is never easy, as it could be observed in the case of Serbia. The Serbian collective memory, where the position of Kosovo, after more than 600 years, still functions as an important impetus for contemporary foreign policy choices, illustrates that not everything can be explained with materialistic arguments. If that were the case, then why Serbia, 20 years after the NATO intervention and Kosovo war, would still relentlessly keep Kosovo in their contempo-

[11] The statistics by Demostat survey is telling as we can observe that 76% of Serbs do not agree with the fact that Serbia should recognize Kosovo's independence in exchange for EU membership (Balkan Insight, 2018).

rary policy endeavours if the EU perspective is dependent on the final outcome of the dialogue between the countries. The perplexing foreign policy choices of Serbia towards Kosovo after the fall of Slobodan Milošević until now are hard to explain without an interpretative approach to foreign policy, where policy choices are limited by a set of beliefs regarding country's past, its heroes, traumas, and position in the world in advance. This, alongside with traditions, function as a cognitive template for narratives that should be understood as an element for justifying contemporary policy choices. In our case, the cultural and political instrumentalisation of the Battle of Kosovo, where eternal life in heaven and self-defense against great powers became a part and parcel of Serbian collective memory, acts as the driving force of Serbian political action. The added value of the interpretative approach lies in its ability to explain both change and continuation, as it could be observed in the case of the Brussels Agreement. If the Serbian foreign policy decision to accept Kosovo government's control over the territory, which should be understood as change, was driven by the external dilemma of staying on the European path, the internal dilemma of not changing the stable narrative regarding the position of Kosovo to avoid resistance pushed key policy makers to minimise the change and stick to the perception of continuity. The latter was the case as the years that followed showed that nothing substantial actually changed, not even the official positions of Serbian political actors, as the fundamental internally-driven dilemma of Kosovo being the "heart of the nation" functioned as an element for preserving continuity. The case of Kosovo is not unique as there are many cases in contemporary International Relations that could be explored with the help of the interpretative approach in order to explain those contemporary foreign policy choices that are inherently connected with both the historical elements and the collective memory of respective nations. If we move beyond the region of the Western Balkans, this analysis can be applied to great benefit in other cases, like Germany, Japan, Turkey, Ukraine, and Russia, all of which are facing similar internal and external dilemmas when conducting their foreign policies. All states have their myths, narratives and historical elements that are later intertwined and embedded into their collective memories. For that reason, my argument is, if we are talking more broadly, giving an example of the necessary analytical synthesis of foreign policy choices and collective memory in order to provide International Relations scholarship with another possible tool for integrating collective memory more directly into the study of the interpretative approach within the subdiscipline of foreign policy.

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