

Collective Memory and National Role Conceptions: The Legacy of Violence on Foreign Policy in Austria and Greece During the Cold War

The winner of the 20th anniversary award¹

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Abstract

This article investigates the influence of collective memories of violence on the foreign policies of small states, focusing on Austria and Greece as two 'frontline states' of the early Cold War in Europe. The article develops an analytical framework linking memory narratives to policy. Using qualitative discourse analysis, it shows how policy elites framed past violence either as heroic sacrifice or as national victimisation to conceptualise and legitimise diverging foreign policy strategies. The findings demonstrate that the selective remembrance of past violence shapes national role conceptions and strategic choices. They underscore memory's role as a strategic resource for policy elites, offering new directions for scholarship on the ideational foundations of small state foreign policy.

Keywords: *small states, foreign policy, violence, memory, national role conceptions, Austria, Greece*

¹ The winner of the 20th anniversary award for the best paper by a PhD candidate, a postgraduate (Master's) student or a recent graduate.

First published online on 2 March 2026, issue published on 2 March 2026

Introduction

Small states play an active role in global politics, frequently defying the realist assumption that their strategic choices are limited to balancing, bandwagoning or hedging. For example, the Baltic states have successfully lobbied NATO to strengthen its deterrence posture toward Russia, challenging the notion that small states merely follow the lead of larger allies. Norway has acted as an issue leader in international diplomacy and mediation. Cyprus and Malta have influenced the European Union's migration policies. These cases illustrate that, even though small states' autonomy in international politics is certainly limited, they engage proactively with their strategic environment and may pursue interests that do not align with the preferences of larger powers.

How, then, do small states devise foreign policy strategies? This article explores the importance of historical memory in the formulation of foreign policy. It makes the case that conceptions of national identity, which serve as the foundation for foreign policy strategies, are heavily influenced by memories of political violence. Although material constraints shape the range of foreign policy strategies small states can plausibly adopt, they do not determine how these states perceive threats or define their international roles. Instead, memory narratives of past violence influence both how security is framed and how it is institutionalised.

While constructivist International Relations (IR) theories emphasise the importance of identity and norms for the definition of the national interest, the field has paid limited attention to the specific role of collective memory in shaping small state security. For their part, interdisciplinary memory studies are mostly concentrated on domestic identity politics rather than on international behaviour. By developing an analytical framework that connects memory to policy, this article bridges the gap between these literatures. It argues that the formative impact of memories of violence on small states' foreign policy operates through two primary mechanisms. First, elite framing uses narratives of glory, sacrifice, defeat and renewal to make sense of historical experiences of violence. Second, the resulting moral and strategic lessons from the past are institutionalised in national security doctrines, material organisations of national security and everyday policy practices. Both mechanisms interact with the material constraints small states face to shape the foreign policy strategies they pursue.

This article investigates empirically how Cold War role conceptions in Austria and Greece were influenced by collective memories of early 20th-century violence. Although both countries experienced intense political violence during the early 20th century, they developed different interpretations on this history starting in the late 1940s, when both found themselves as 'frontline states' of the Cold War

in Europe. While past violence was framed in terms of heroic sacrifice in Greece, it was portrayed as national victimisation in Austria. The two countries' different foreign policy approaches during the Cold War were influenced by these divergent memory narratives.

The article applies qualitative discourse analysis to these two complementary but contrasting historical cases, starting from the premise that policy actors are doing something by saying something – that is, that public discourse does not simply describe but constitutes political reality. The analysis follows an interpretive coding strategy. During repeated close readings of the empirical material, codes emerged iteratively around recurrent narrative elements such as sacrifice, victimisation and renewal which, as the analysis shows, policymakers and senior national security officials invoked to justify foreign policy choices. The empirical material used consists of primary documents collected from public and private archives in both countries, supplemented by press sources, (auto)biographical writings and the historiographical literature. The analysis focuses on the period from 1949, following the end of the Greek Civil War, to the late 1950s, when both countries consolidated their international alignments as frontline states of the Cold War in Europe.

The article makes two key contributions. First, it provides a more robust theoretical framework for understanding the connection between memory, identity and foreign policy. Second, it expands constructivist IR's conceptual and empirical engagement with small state security. Following a review of the pertinent literature in memory studies and constructivist IR, the article develops an analytical framework that links memory to policy preferences through the mechanisms of elite framing and institutionalisation. This framework is then used to examine how memory narratives influenced national role conceptions in Austria and Greece during the early Cold War. The findings' wider implications for the study of small states and the role of memory in global politics are discussed in the conclusion.

Small states in international politics: Agency, role and collective memory

Noting the challenges associated with quantitatively focused definitions of the small state (Wivel, Bailes & Archer 2014: 5–6; Neumann & Gstöhl 2006: 4), recent IR scholarship has moved toward using the concept of the small state as a focusing device that concentrates on the examination of these states' behaviour within global hierarchies of power. According to this relational approach, small states are defined by their position vis-à-vis other states and by the strategies they use to exercise agency (Wivel 2021: 492). It also uses a more comprehensive concept of power, which includes normative and symbolic forms of influence in addition to material capabilities (Dombrowski & Reich: 6–11, 14–19).

A relational perspective enables the application to small state studies of a core constructivist insight: that processes of identity construction influence how states define and pursue their national interests (Ruggie 1998: 20–22; Finnemore 1996: 1–2; Katzenstein 1996: 73). In this context, ontological security theory (OST) and role theory offer particularly useful frameworks for understanding the ideational drivers of a state's external behaviour. According to OST, states aim to maintain a stable sense of identity, beyond mere physical survival (Bachleitner 2021a: 12–15; Subotić 2016: 613–615; Mitzen 2006: 351–353). Role theory, for its part, examines how a state's self-conception relates to its actions in the international system (Brummer & Thies 2015: 276–277; Cantir & Kaarbo 2012: 11; Breuning 2011: 20–22). Both theories draw attention to the tension inherent in identity-building processes. Although identity provides a sense of internal coherence, it also requires differentiation from external others. It only emerges through comparison with – and distinction from – significant others (Wehner & Thies 2014: 419–421; Harnisch 2011: 46–48; Berenskoetter 2007: 657–658).

For small states, larger powers represent such significant others because their international position depends to an important extent on the recognition and support of more powerful actors. However, there is also a temporal dimension of identity construction, in which states draw on their own historical experience as a source of role content (Bachleitner 2021b: 28–29). This underscores the importance of a society's collective memory – shared narratives of the past that encode accepted interpretations of historical experiences – for contemporary national role conceptions (Cubitt 2007: 26–27, 234–235; Winter 2006: 57; Bastide 1970: 95–96). Such memories can assume an almost existential significance in forming conceptions of national security for small states that have suffered from acute vulnerability to external threats and internal fragmentation.

In these cases, the ability of policy elites to organise historical narratives in ways that reaffirm national identity constitutes an important ideational resource (Steele 2008: 57–60). These narratives are neither objective records of historical fact nor entirely subjective accounts of the past. Rather, they represent the past selectively by simplifying complex events, reducing their ambiguity and infusing them with moral messages (Olick 2007: 23, 40, 56; Zehfuss 2006: 229; Edkins 2003: 229; Zerubavel 2003a: 23–31, 83–87; Müller 2002: 22–24). They become salient for foreign policymaking in the present under two conditions: first, they must resonate with widely shared perceptions of insecurity and national purpose; and second, they need to be institutionalised in policy practice.

National role conceptions and narratives of violence: An analytical framework

Collective memories of dramatic episodes in national history, often involving violence, are important elements in the formation of national role conceptions.

Memories of violence are particularly relevant for small states because of their vulnerability to external domination. The analytical framework proposed in this section shows how memories of violence become embedded in the concepts and practices of foreign and security policy. Specifically, it identifies two key mechanisms – elite framing and institutionalisation – through which dominant narratives of past violence are integrated into small states' role conceptions.

Mechanism 1: Elite framing of violence as a strategic and moral lesson

The integration of past violence into the national 'autobiographical narrative' (Subotić 2016: 613–615) poses a challenge for all states because of the divisive and destructive nature of violence. For small states, this 'shadow of the past' is arguably even more threatening because constraints on their military, economic and diplomatic resources heighten their sense of vulnerability. For such states, security threats may even extend to the possibility of 'state death' through annexation by foreign powers or through internal divisions and the collapse of state sovereignty.

While the integration of violent episodes into a shared account of the past is anything but unproblematic, it is important to bear in mind that not all experiences of violence are inscribed into collective memory as tragic, negative or traumatic (Lerner 2022: 46–58; Bell 2006: 9–10; Kansteiner 2004: 205–207). Borrowing from Hutchinson's (2009: 402–403) concept of violence as a *mythomoteur*, this paper argues that policy elites construct, and societies endorse, a variety of frames to make sense of past violence. This process is both political, binding the state's citizens into a collective identity, and psychological – geared toward the individual's need to mourn and memorialise (Innes & Steele 2013: 17).

Memory narratives may draw on themes of glory and sacrifice, highlighting victorious outcomes of violence or emphasising the transcendental experience of war, while glossing over physical destruction and social fragmentation (MacMillan 2021: 116, 142; Frazer & Hutchings 2007: 190–191; Schivelbusch 2001: 26). However, even narratives of defeat can unite communities under a collective self-image of victimhood (Bachleitner 2019: 496–497). Moreover, victimhood narratives are often combined with the theme of renewal, thus suggesting that the end of violence provides a moment of catharsis – as illustrated in the rhetoric of a 'zero hour' that followed the defeat of Germany and Japan in World War II (Tischmeyer 2018: 21). The theme of national renewal is powerful because it draws a sharp line between a 'problematic' past and holds out hope for a brighter future (Lebow 2006: 31; Zerubavel 2003a: 89–93; Gillis 1994: 12).

With time, traumatic experiences of violence can also be integrated into successful foreign policy creation. Relevant narratives suggest that societies have come to terms with the past by accepting their collective responsibility (Fogu & Kansteiner 2006: 290; Olick 2003: 278), by making 'adequate apologies' to

victims and by engaging in the diplomacy of guilt (Hall 2015: 118–121; Subotic & Steele 2021: 505; Bell 2009: 356–358; Feuchtwang 2006: 179–181).

Narratives of glory, sacrifice, defeat and renewal are not only backward-looking explanations of the past. They also purport to hold lessons for the present and the future. To make memory narratives usable as a legitimisation for decision-making, however, policy elites need to adapt them to contemporary domestic conditions, current geopolitical circumstances, and the transnational ideological *zeitgeist*. For this reason, collective accounts of past violence always incorporate only certain memories while marginalising others (Feuchtwang 2006: 182; Edkins 2006: 105; Ashplant, Dawson & Roper 2000: 52–53). Wilful forgetting – what Jelin and Kaufman (2000: 106) refer to as the ‘presence of absence’ – represents the silent corollary to narratives of sacrifice, renewal and responsibility (Fierke 2006: 131).

Mechanism 2: Institutionalisation and contestation of memory narratives

Collectively shared narratives of the past provide guiding principles for interpreting a state’s identity, its role(s) in the world, and the behaviours deemed appropriate to those roles. Over time, these role conceptions and the narratives that underpin them become institutionalised – that is, widely accepted as rationality criteria for everyday political practice (Béland 2019: 253; Lepsius 2017: 36–37). Frequently invoked in political discourse and embedded in national security doctrines, they provide incentives for political actors to align their decisions with accepted roles. They also influence organisational designs and resource allocations in the security and diplomatic sectors and serve as evaluative criteria applied to policy outcomes (Adler 2019: 253; Goldstein & Keohane 1993: 20–21; Geertz 1973: 340).

In this way, memory narratives embedded in national role conceptions form a core part of the ideational foundation for small state foreign policies. In the aftermath of destructive violence, policy elites can employ them to respond to security vulnerabilities they perceive on the external, intermestic and domestic levels (Risse 2017: 237; Weyland 2008: 295–296; Legro 2005: 121). First, on the external plane, foreign policy may need to address the sense of vulnerability of a small state recently exposed to the designs of, and conflicts between, larger powers. These fears are not, as IR realism suggests, determined solely by the distribution of material capabilities in the international system but also by collective memories, which foster enemy or friend images vis-à-vis global powers and neighbouring states.

Second, because small states must navigate an international environment dominated by larger powers who can potentially interfere in their domestic affairs through incentives, pressure and sanctions, the boundaries between their external and domestic security tend to be blurred. Small states aim to acquire international status while attempting to avoid or escape undesirable or deviant roles such as ‘weak’, ‘failing’ or ‘rogue state’ because external recognition reduces

risks and confers legitimacy. It may also translate into greater levels of influence in international politics and constitute an important resource in domestic political competition (Carta & Narminio 2021: 345; Risse & Sikkink 2017: 127; Rostoks 2016: 91).

Finally, on a purely domestic level, small states emerging from political violence face the challenge of ideational reconstruction. Violence does not only destroy human lives and property but also renders previously accepted principles regulating trust between the state and its citizens largely meaningless. Foreign occupation, internal conflict and authoritarian repression create rifts that inhibit the ability of a society to function coherently – it shatters, as Hannah Arendt put it, individual capacity for action and thus leads to collective powerlessness (Meyer 2016: 28–29). Reconstructing a stable sense of self reaffirms collective identities. It may help build broad coalitions of power to ensure government stability, repair or gloss over social fragmentation and improve citizens' perception of the state.

The incentives for policy elites to foster broadly accepted interpretations of the past that align with accepted notions of the small state's present and future role in the world are thus clear. However, as pointed out above, collective memory is selective, marginalising or even repressing divergent accounts of the past. These dissenting voices may only survive in niches, but they can form counter-memories that lead to enduring discrepancies between public and private forms of remembering (Kleinfeldt 2019: 95–96; Meyer 2016: 118–119; Bell 2008: 159).

Over time, the gaps and inconsistencies resulting from the simplification of the past provide openings for contestation. By undermining the certainty associated with widely accepted accounts of the past, such 'dangerous memories' (Welch 2007: 123) directly target the coherence and continuity necessary for the conceptualisation of national identity – and the role conceptions associated with this identity (Lebow 2016: 48–50; Cubitt 2007: 210–212, 225–227; Ashplant, Dawson & Roper 2000: 16–20).

National role conceptions in states emerging from periods of violence are thus never fully settled. They exist in a fluid environment of simultaneous reinforcement, contestation and reinterpretation. To examine how these memory-based role conceptions were framed, institutionalised and eventually contested, the next section turns to an account of how policy elites in Greece and Austria linked collective memory to foreign policy strategies during the early Cold War.

Memories of violence and national role conceptions in Greece and Austria during the early Cold War

The foreign policies of Austria and Greece during the Cold War demonstrate that realist accounts of the external behaviour of small states, confined to the binary choice of balancing against or bandwagoning with great powers, are at best incomplete. From the early 1950s through the late 1980s, Austria and Greece

pursued a diverse set of policies that went beyond – and sometimes even counter to – their alignment with the western powers. The empirical record shows that policy elites, in conceptualising and justifying their responses to security crises or to geopolitical openings, frequently drew on national role conceptions that had been formed during the early Cold War. These role conceptions, in turn, were strongly influenced by collective memories of the violence both countries had experienced during the first half of the 20th century.

The post-World War II state and society in Greece and Austria had been shaped by the ‘European civil war’ (Traverso 2016) that lasted from the early 1910s to the late 1940s. The borders of Greece, for instance, had changed nine times between the Balkan Wars of 1912/1913 and the end of World War II. Its ethnic composition had changed profoundly in the wake of the population exchange with Turkey mandated by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The country went from a monarchy to a republic in 1924 and then back to a monarchy, which coexisted from 1936 onward with Ioannis Metaxas’s quasi-fascist regime. Bitter domestic divisions – a consequence of the ‘National Schism’ between pro-German political forces and those leaning toward the *Entente* powers in World War I – contributed to social fragmentation that occasionally grew into violent confrontation and political repression (Beaton 2020: 77–78, 205–232; Kostis 2018: 249–251, 287–289; Zelepos 2017: 102–110, 145–148; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 78–96; Tziampiris 2003: 140).

Violence culminated in the brutal occupation regime of the Axis powers during World War II and, subsequently, the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). The human toll of these two conflicts was catastrophic. Half a million Greeks perished during the Axis occupation, including 90 percent of the Jewish population of Salonica. The civil war, which pitted communists and leftists against a government supported by the United Kingdom and the United States, added another 158,000 dead. Among the tragic legacies of the civil war was the fate of 28,000 children, who had been sent abroad by the communist guerillas under a system referred to as *paidomazoma* (‘gathering of children’), as well as the forced evacuation of 700,000 Greeks from their villages and the internment of those suspected of communist sympathies on prison islands such as Makronisos and Ai Stratis (Beaton 2020: 268–305; Kostis 2018: 299–310, 314–325; Zelepos 2017: 156–157, 178; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 123–125, 127).

Austria, for its part, had entered the 20th century as a constituent part of the Habsburg empire, which, already weakened by the ‘nationalities question’, had embarked on a ruinous foreign policy course in the Balkans that came to a head with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in the summer of 1914. The ensuing cataclysmic war led to the collapse of Austria-Hungary and to a twenty-year period of increasingly violent contention between the conservative and socialist political camps in the fledgling first Austrian republic. With its economy in ruins and its borders threatened first by the revisionist designs of the newly

independent states of central Europe and then by Nazi Germany's expansionism, a large part of the population never developed much faith in the viability of this republic (Rathkolb 2021: 220, 225; Rathkolb 2020a: 687–692; Kronenbitter 2017: 84–88; Lassner 2017: 91–105; Beller 2006: 178–184, 199–201, 208–211, 219–221).

Consequently, the 1938 *Anschluss* with Hitler's Germany was welcomed by many Austrians. It proved, however, disastrous for the country's Jewish community. Of the more than 200,000 Jews who lived in Austria in 1938, fewer than 6,000 remained by the end of World War II. More than 65,000 Austrian Jews had been murdered in Nazi concentration camps, along with those persecuted for political reasons, Romani people, prisoners of war and foreign forced labourers. At the same time, Austrians constituted ten percent of *Wehrmacht* soldiers and were disproportionately represented in the combat branch of the Nazi's paramilitary organisation – the *Waffen-SS*. By 1945, more than 200,000 of them had died, and 600,000 were held as Allied prisoners of war (Rathkolb 2021: 269; Rathkolb 2020a: 710–729; Beller 2006: 232–234, 236, 241–242).

The ideological legacies of all this upheaval became manifest in the role conceptions adopted in Austria and Greece during the early Cold War. While both countries had been exposed to high levels of violence, their post-1945 elites framed these experiences in distinctive ways. In Greece, elites interpreted the violence of the first half of the 20th century through the prism of heroic sacrifice. According to this narrative, Greeks had fought valiantly against the threats of hostile foreign interference and internal ideological subversion. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, this two-faced menace came to be symbolised most prominently by the spectre of 'Slavo communism' in southeastern Europe.

Early Austrian Cold War narratives, on the contrary, read the preceding violence through the lens of national victimhood. This frame was constructed not only on the basis of the Allies' 1943 recognition of Austria as the first victim of Nazi Germany but also drew on Austrians' sense of abandonment by the Western powers during the interwar years. This frame of victimhood was paired after 1945 with an elite narrative of renewal, which promoted a national focus on building a better future and on leaving Austria's problematic past behind, largely unexamined and unquestioned.

Policy elites in both countries relied on the narrative frames of sacrifice and renewal to conceptualise and legitimise national security policies. These policies aimed to achieve security across three dimensions: to protect against external threats, to pursue international status and legitimacy, and to advance a notion of national unity that glossed over and suppressed socially divisive memories. As the role conceptions based on a distinct narrative framing of the past came to be institutionalised in conceptions of national security and the structure of foreign and defence policy organisations, they shaped particular policy preferences that would endure in both countries for the entirety of the Cold War and beyond.

Heroes and martyrs: How narratives of sacrifice shaped Greece's Cold War identity and foreign policy

The violence of the first half of the 20th century had deeply marked Greek politics and society. The country emerged from a half-century dominated by the ebb and flow of violence with both an inflated notion of national glory and sacrifice as well as a lingering sense that both internal and external elements were arrayed to threaten the state's security. In response to its international environment during the early Cold War, three distinct role conceptions began to crystallise in Greek political discourse during the early 1950s, which drew heavily on the framing of political violence as heroic sacrifice. This narrative frame, and the ensuing role conceptions, underpinned a Cold War policy discourse that linked national security to military strength and the country's participation in strong regional and global alliances.

Outpost of the 'Free World'

The first of these role conceptions can be read as a reaction to an acute sense of vulnerability, rooted in the experience of foreign interference. It portrayed Greece as an outpost of the 'Free World' in the global confrontation between communism and liberal democracy and premised national security on military capability and strong alliance relations. During the 1940s, the underlying narrative went, Greece had defied first the Axis power through its armed resistance to occupation and then a communist insurgency in the civil war. Both had been costly endeavours, but the price paid by so many Greeks in terms of their lives, health and livelihoods had served a greater good, as they had helped heroically uphold the torch of freedom.

This narrative of glorious sacrifice was, however, tempered by memories of great-power interference in Greek affairs during the first half of the 20th century as well as by uncertainty over the future. The notion of a 'Slavic communist threat from the North' merged old fears with new geopolitical realities. Longstanding concerns about national loyalty, especially in Greek Macedonia and Thrace, resurfaced in Cold War rhetoric. Historical animosity toward Bulgaria – dating back to early 20th-century conflicts and wartime atrocities – intensified fears of regional betrayal (Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 8–9, 47–49, 129; Hatzivassiliou 2006: 6; Dokos 2003: 45). The Greek government repeatedly warned the US of a looming Soviet-bloc invasion and consistently portrayed Greece as the frontline defender of global freedom (Greek Government to US Mission 1947).

Both conservative and liberal politicians viewed communism and Slavic irredentism as the principal threats to Greece's security. NATO membership, eventually achieved in 1952, was seen as necessary for the country's national security but also as in itself insufficient because of Greece's geographical exposure in southeastern Europe and the nature of NATO military plans. Therefore,

conservative Greek governments sought to establish closer bilateral defence ties with the United States – including by offering extensive basing rights – as well as to form a trilateral Balkan Alliance with Yugoslavia and Turkey (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1954; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1955; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy 1952; FRUS 1952–1954: 308, 336, 446, 448, 454, 454; Embassy of the FRG in Greece 1960; US Embassy in Greece 1958). During the early Cold War, Greek efforts to strengthen external security were thus directed primarily towards assuring military balancing of the communist threat by strengthening the capacity of its armed forces and building defensive alliances (Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1954; Royal Embassy of Greece in the US 1956; Meeting with Messrs. Dulles and Stassen n.d.; FRUS 1952–1954: 277, 446, 454, 456; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1955; Embassy of the UK in Greece 1956; NATO 1958).

Centre of Hellenism

A second early–Cold War role conception tied the modern Greek state to the civilisational legacies of its historical predecessors in classical antiquity and the Byzantine Empire. This role conception reflected struggles over the identity of modern Greece since it had gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830 as well as the state's link to existing diasporas in the eastern Mediterranean region. It thus rested on notions of modern Greek nationalism and irredentism tied to the legacy of the 'Great Idea' – a nationalist vision of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that aimed at uniting all ethnic Greeks in southeastern Europe through territorial expansion (Beaton 2020: 122–129; Veremis & Koliopoulos 2003: 13–14; Tziampiris 2003: 137).

However, Greece's defeat in the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) had terminated the country's ambitions for territorial enlargement and had led to the 'catastrophe of Asia Minor', the displacement of most of the ethnically Greek population from modern-day Turkey. The challenges of integrating these refugees, along with growing fears of communism, prompted a shift in the interwar years toward an insular, homogenising form of Greek nationalism. National identity became tied to cultural and linguistic uniformity, with education policy and settlement strategies used to solidify Greek control in sensitive border areas in the country's north (Zelevos 2017: 120–124; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 7–8, 98; Veremis & Koliopoulos 2003: 16–17).

With the end of World War II, Greece revisited some of its earlier territorial claims and sought to regain areas from Albania and Bulgaria as well as the (Italian-controlled) Dodecanese Islands. Although military force was no longer considered viable, diplomatic efforts continued, driven by the belief that Greece's wartime sacrifices against the Axis powers deserved compensation. Nevertheless, even though Italy agreed to cede the Dodecanese to Greece, the Western Allies

proved otherwise unsympathetic to Greek demands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1945; Tayfur 2018: 53; Hatzivassiliou 2006: 6). The misgivings caused in Greece by the failure to advance territorial claims were soon exacerbated by the escalation of the Cyprus crisis.

By the mid-1950s, Greek Cypriot demands for decolonisation and *enosis* (unification) with Greece led to the rise of armed resistance against British colonial rule and to the deterioration of intercommunal relations between ethnic Greeks and Turks on the island. In turn, Cyprus became a major issue in Greek foreign policy and domestic politics. The centre-left parliamentary opposition in Athens developed a doctrine of Greece as a 'national centre' of Hellenism, implying a government duty of protection not only for citizens of the modern Greek state but also for ethnic Greeks left outside this state by the territorial settlements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Greek advocacy of the right for Cypriots to self-determination strained the country's relations with Turkey, the United Kingdom and ultimately the United States as well. When a centre-left government eventually came to power in Athens in 1963/1964, tensions over Cyprus brought Greece to the brink of war with Turkey and called into question the country's strategic alignment with US and NATO Cold War objectives (Beaton 2020: 308–321; Zelepos 2017: 189–196; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 131–133; Hatzivassiliou 2006: 51; Coufoudakis 2003: 111).

The anti-communist state

The third role conception portrayed Greece as a quintessentially anti-communist state, thus refracting domestic divisions through the prism of superpower confrontation. This role conception was based on a polarising discourse that described post-civil war Greece as a 'besieged nation' (Veremis & Koliopoulos 2003: 18) that had to contend with communist threats from both within and beyond its borders. The political Right, arrogating to itself alone the duty of protecting the state, targeted the outlawed Communist Party and systematically excluded its sympathisers from political and social life. The defeat of the political Left in the Greek Civil War was thus not just military but political and social as well.

The deeply entrenched enemy image of the Left polarised post-war Greek politics. The vaguely defined concept of *ethnikofrosyni* (national mindedness) became a prerequisite for political and social participation, with applicants for positions in the civil service and the armed forces required to procure certificates of good conduct from the Security Police. At the same time, public and political discourse remained silent about two significant aspects of World War II and the Greek Civil War. The first of these was that resistance to the Axis powers had, to a very significant extent, depended on the activities of left-wing and communist groups, which were essentially written out of the country's recent history, while many of those later fighting on the government side during the civil war had col-

laborated in a more or less active fashion with the occupiers. The second aspect concerned the fact that, while atrocities had been carried out by both sides in the civil war, including against the civilian population, only the crimes of the insurgency received significant attention and punishment in the conflict's aftermath (Vournas 1963; Kostis 2018: 331–336, 423–430; Zelepos 2017: 179–181; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 115–116; Bellou 2003: 158–159).

The marginalisation of the political Left nurtured two related narratives within segments of the population who felt that their sacrifice during the Axis occupation was not validated and that they themselves were persecuted for their ideological sympathies. On the one hand, the dominance of the political Right and its strong links to the military security services encouraged resentment against the so-called *parakratos* (shadow state), an informal network of military officers, conservative politicians and nationalist groups that evaded democratic oversight (Tayfur 2018: 51; Kostis 2018: 336–338; Koliopoulos & Veremis 2010: 7). On the other side, the tendency of NATO to overlook anti-democratic tendencies in Greece fanned the myth of a shadowy 'foreign factor' (*xenos paragontas*) controlling the country from behind the scenes and skewing its national interest. This myth was based on the conspicuous presence of American military and civilian personnel, large inflows of aid money and the very real influence they had on political and economic life in early Cold War Greece. A note of the French foreign service remarked that into the early 1950s, US 'tutelage' over Greece was absolute and 'obvious even to the uninformed' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France 1955).

Over time, in the interstices between publicly promoted role conceptions and the private memories of many individuals, resentment simmered against personal marginalisation and the sense of overbearing foreign influence. Though the counter-narrative of Greece as an 'underdog country' exploited for the sake of great power interests with the willing participation of domestic conservative political forces remained latent during the early Cold War years, it exacerbated domestic political instability and created the basis for a potent challenge to dominant national role conceptions. It eventually burst onto the political scene in the mid-1970s after the fall of the Greek military junta (1967–1974) and ushered in a radical reframing of Greece's geopolitical alignment and national role (Bellou 2003: 159; Diamandouros 1993: 3–7).

Victims and peacebuilders: How Austrian narratives of renewal forged Cold War neutrality policy

Violence had changed Austria fundamentally during the first half of the 20th century. After World War I, a weak state emerged from the rubble of the Habsburg Empire. It was politically divided, economically unstable and regarded by a large part of the population and policy elites as merely a steppingstone toward unification with Germany. The turbulent years of the interwar period prompted a major-

ity of Austrians to welcome the *Anschluss* (unification) with Nazi Germany in 1938. After the end of World War II, Austria was divided into four occupation zones. The growing disputes between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union made a quick resolution of the Austrian question impossible and led to a decade of Allied occupation. During this time, policy elites developed dominant role conceptions that rested on a framing of Austrians' experience during the interwar years, World War II and the occupation period as undifferentiated victimhood.

The conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955 and the related adoption of military neutrality represented, according to this narrative, a clear break with the past and a renewal of the national community and its role in the world. Austria's strategic preferences during the Cold War reflected the framing of past violence as tragic and traumatic: They prioritised multilateral diplomacy and the maintenance of constructive relations with both sides amid bipolar confrontation, while minimising the role of military force as a tool of foreign policy.

Security through neutrality

The first role conception – of Austria as a neutral state between the blocs of superpower confrontation – strongly reflected this sense of a turn away from unsuccessful earlier attempts to ensure national security. Gehler (2017: 328) detects in the interwar years the roots of a quadruple Austrian trauma: first, the myth of the state's economic non-viability, rooted in the travails of the First Republic (1918–1938); second, its dependence on external powers; third, the deep mistrust between social democrats and Christian socialists; and fourth, the end of national independence as a result of the 1938 *Anschluss*. Finding a constructive resolution for Austria's security dilemma as a small state wedged in between large blocs of power thus represented a key goal of post-war Austrian politics.

Austria's preference for western alignment emerged very quickly. Fear of the Soviet Union dominated within the major political parties and among the population, especially in the eastern part of Austria, which suffered under the brutal occupation regime of the Red Army. Even though studies of the archival record have found no evidence that the USSR intended to partition Austria (Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022: 72–73; Rathkolb 2021: 10–11; Mueller 2017: 349), both the governments in Vienna and Washington considered the country as particularly threatened by communism. Consequently, the US extended generous aid under the Marshall Plan to Austria and, after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia of 1948, also supported the country's rearmament (Bischof & Wineroither 2023: 631; Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022: 60–67; Rathkolb 2021: 9–11, 42; Rathkolb 2017: 322; Beller 2006: 252–253; Gehler 2005: 84).

In spring 1955, an Austrian delegation at the highest level visited Moscow and made a political commitment to future military neutrality in exchange for Soviet agreement to the finalisation of a State Treaty that would grant Austria full sovereignty and the withdrawal of all occupation troops. Subsequently, the narrative

of neutrality 'having bought' the country's unity and freedom took hold, and the passing of the Neutrality Act by parliament in October 1955 became an integral part of the myth of a new beginning (Bischof & Ruggenthaler 2022: 109–110; Rathkolb 2021: 193–194; Rathkolb 2017: 321; Gehler 2005: 79, 133–134).

This myth was further cemented when, barely a year after Austria committed itself to military neutrality, an uprising against communist rule broke out in neighbouring Hungary. Despite fears that disorder could spill across the border, that the Soviet army marching into Hungary might violate Austria's sovereignty and that the Hungarian Revolution could trigger a larger conflict between the superpowers, the events of fall 1956 led to a positive evaluation of the benefits of neutrality. While insisting that Austria scrupulously upheld its military neutrality – and refuting accusations from Moscow and Soviet satellite states over the alleged delivery of weapons to insurgents through Austria – the country's political leadership called on the Soviet Union to end the bloodshed in Hungary and respect the rights of the civilian population (Office of the Federal Chancellor 1956a). Further, Austria played a constructive role in providing humanitarian assistance (Office of the Austrian Federal Chancellor 1956b; Office of the Austrian Federal Chancellor 1956c; Office of the Austrian Federal Chancellor 1956d; Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in New York 1956; Granville 2017: 146) and in trying to find a solution to the crisis through multilateral diplomacy in the framework of the United Nations.

At the same time, the Soviet reaction to the events in Hungary made it clear that Austria – whose borders with communist and socialist states extended over more than 1,000 kilometers – would have to find a way to navigate the cross-pressures emanating from its wish to belong culturally and politically to the 'free world' and the simultaneous Soviet demands for a strict adherence to a neutral stance. The country's ability to participate in the project of European integration spurred by the signing of the 1957 Rome Treaty, for instance, was constrained by such *realpolitik* considerations. Thus, making a virtue out of necessity, throughout the Cold War Austrian policy elites framed military neutrality as a cornerstone of the country's security. Over the following decades, neutrality was eventually idealised by all political camps as the basis of Austria's post-1945 success story.

International peacebuilder

The second role conception to emerge in the mid-1950s was also linked to the narrative of renewal and sought to forge a positive image of Austria within the international community while also seeking to strengthen identification of citizens with the state. It rested on an intense engagement in processes of multilateral diplomacy and international conflict mediation. Contrary to the Swiss model of neutrality, Austria joined the United Nations in December 1955 and quickly became an active member, as indicated by its commitment to a

diplomatic solution to the Hungarian crisis. From the 1960s onward, Austrian governments regularly dispatched 'blue helmets' for UN peacekeeping forces and successfully advocated for Vienna as the third seat of UN organisations after New York and Geneva.

Austria's international engagement was subsumed under the concept of 'active neutrality'. It included efforts to promote détente in Europe – by pursuing constructive relations with Austria's neighbouring socialist countries in central-eastern Europe and by hosting superpower summits, such as the 1961 Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in Vienna – as well as the establishment of contacts with leaders of the non-aligned countries and of newly decolonised states across the Global South (Senn, Eder & Kornprobst 2023: 5; Rathkolb 2021: 195–199; Gehler & Bischof 2017: 6–7; Nowotny 2017: 28; Gehler 2005: 295). In short, Austrian policy elites strove to construct a favourable image for their country and demonstrate its 'usefulness' as an active and reliable member of the international community (Eder 2023: 291–292; Rathkolb 2021: 296; Gehler 2005: 447, 458). In this way, they sought to secure Austria's sovereignty in between the blocs of Cold War confrontation.

At the same time, international status also bolstered the identification of Austrian citizens with their country. Even though Austrians were in general not more interested in matters of foreign policy and diplomacy than those of other states, it is safe to assume that positive media coverage of their politicians' contacts with world leaders contributed to a positive national self-conception and supported the project of Austrian 'nation-building' that policy elites had embarked upon after 1945, especially by seeking to clearly differentiate Austria historically and culturally from Germany (Rathkolb 2021: 13; Karner 2005: 416–417; Thaler 1999: 294). They conveyed a feeling that Austria, despite its small size and checkered recent past, had returned to the centre of world politics – and, this time, as a force for good. As Gehler and Bischof (2017: 6) put it, 'if Austria was no longer a great power, it became a darling of the world'.

First victim of Nazi Germany

The narrative of renewal underpinning the above two role conceptions was tied closely to a second narrative frame, namely that of Austria as the first victim of German aggression in the late 1930s. This narrative of victimhood drew on the declaration of the 1943 Moscow Conference, which had described Austria as the 'first free country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression' (Moscow Conference 1943), but also on the sentiment, widespread in 1945, that the Western community of states had forced unwanted independence on Austria after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918 and had then refused to protect it from aggressive German designs in the 1930s (Bischof 2017: 131–132; Gehler 2017: 328–329; Gehler 2005: 26).

From the perspective of post-war Austrian political elites, many of whom had been persecuted by the Nazis, the claim to victimhood was to an extent justified

(Bischof 2017: 117; Beller 2006: 105, 265; Gehler 2005: 93–94). But among the Austrian population, who had in their majority welcomed or at least accepted the 1938 *Anschluss* and had subsequently contributed to Nazi war crimes and the genocide of European Jews, the victimhood myth was also adopted in undifferentiated form. Austrians pointed to the plight of *Wehrmacht* soldiers either dead or held as prisoners of war, to the civilian victims of bombing raids as well as of Red Army reprisals, and to the general misery and deprivation of the immediate post-war years (Rathkolb 2021: 13–14; Gehler 2005: 141).

In addition, the Allied occupation lasting for ten years after the end of World War II also contributed to the victimhood narrative. In Austrian public memory, the decade 1945–1955 became fixed as ‘occupation time’, and the year 1955 as the moment of liberation. Thus, Austria ‘became free’ in the collective consciousness, not in 1945 as a result of the Allied defeat of Hitler’s Germany, but ten years later, when it was ‘liberated’ from Allied occupation. In fact, one of the most prominent images of the post-war period in Austria is that of the foreign minister appearing on the balcony of the Belvedere Palace in Vienna in May 1955, commenting on the signing of the State Treaty with the words ‘Austria is free’ (Rathkolb 2020b: 756–757; Rathkolb 2021: 7–8; Beller 2006: 250).

The narrative of victimhood thus was shaped by the experiences of the *Wehrmacht*, the ‘homefront’ generation and the occupation period. Allowing all Austrians to style themselves as victims had a harmonising social effect. In addition, it also facilitated the reconciliation of the conservative and socialist political camps, whose bitter rivalry in the interwar years had escalated into a short-lived civil war in the early 1930s and contributed to the establishment of an authoritarian, ‘Austrofascist’ regime in 1934 (Rathkolb 2020a: 692–701; Lassner 2017: 91–92; Beller 2006: 203–205, 209–223).

However, the success of consociational democracy in Austria after 1945 came at the expense of marginalising the memory of victims and survivors of the Holocaust. According to the prevalent legal doctrine, Austria had ceased to exist as a sovereign state in March 1938. It could thus not be held legally responsible for German crimes and, consequently, was not liable to pay war damages or restitution to those persecuted by the Nazis (Beller 2006: 259; Gehler 2005: 50–51, 390–391). Similarly, the question of Austria’s – and Austrians’ – moral historical responsibility for Nazi crimes went largely unexamined for decades. A public reckoning with this question set in only once it was revealed during the presidential election campaign of 1986 that one of the contenders, Kurt Waldheim, had publicly lied about his service record in the *Wehrmacht* (Rathkolb 2021: 23–24, 124–125; Beller 2006: 287; Gehler 2005: 540–542).

The international ripple effects of the ‘Waldheim affair’, most notably the American decision to put Waldheim on a watch list of persons refused entry to the United States, contributed to a wider societal debate about Austrian responsibility

for World War II and the Holocaust (Huemer 2008; Gehler 2005: 443–544). In the following years, the Austrian government repudiated the doctrine of unqualified Austrian victimhood and eventually established a national fund to compensate the surviving victims of the Nazi regime (Cede & Mangott 2023: 573; Beller 2006: 304).

Table 1: Post-World War II memory narratives, role conceptions and policy outcomes in Austria and Greece

Dimensions of small-state security		Greece Narrative of heroic sacrifice	Austria Narrative of victimhood and renewal
External security	Role conception	Outpost of the 'Free World'	Security through Neutrality
	Policy outcome	Military balancing	Military neutrality
Status	Role conception	Defender of Hellenes	International peace-builder
	Policy outcome	Civilisational nationalism	Focus on multilateral diplomacy
Domestic unity	Role conception	Anti-communist state	First victim of Nazi Germany
	Policy outcome	Polarising division	Undifferentiated denial of responsibility

Source: Author

Implications and conclusion

The empirical analysis of Greek and Austrian national role conceptions during the Cold War shows that collective memories of violence shape small states' foreign policy strategies in diverse and enduring ways. Both countries had been implicated in, and suffered from, the continental 'civil war' that had engulfed most of Europe during the first decades of the 20th century. Unsurprisingly, memories of this period loomed large in policy elites' conceptualisations of the geopolitical environment they operated in, the threats and challenges they faced both externally and internally, and the role their country could play in international politics. The end of World War II, as well as, respectively, of the Greek Civil War in summer 1949 and of the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, signified not only a critical juncture in their foreign policy trajectories but also an opportunity to rhetorically fix a new 'founding moment' (Hutchinson 2009: 402–403) for the imagined communities of the Austrian and Greek nations.

Despite the destructive legacy of violence in terms of human lives and material resources, the empirical analysis demonstrates that its narrative was not unequivocally tragic. In the case of Greece, recent political violence was read

largely through a lens of glorious sacrifice. It suggested both pride in the heroism of those who had 'defended democracy' as well as the claim to the idea of an Hellenic civilisational and cultural space extending beyond the confines of the modern Greek state. This reading facilitated a polarising world view during the early Cold War that drew sharp distinctions between friends and enemies, both within and outside the state. In turn, this conceptualisation of a world divided into irreconcilable ideological blocs gave rise to a preference for military instruments to safeguard national security.

In Austria, on the other hand, post-war policy elites sought a clean break with a recent past characterised by a failure to uphold national security either in terms of maintaining internal cohesion or warding off external threats. The doctrine of neutrality, even though it was originally imposed on the country as a condition for Soviet agreement to the conclusion of the State Treaty, turned over time into a cornerstone of Austria's identity, based on a harmonising narrative that sought to reduce and gloss over ideological fault lines both within the state and with its external partners. Neutrality offered an identity marker for the population, signalling a clear demarcation from (West) Germany, with whom so much of Austrian history had been closely, and problematically, intertwined. Furthermore, in its guise of 'active neutrality', Austria's post-war international status also gave the country a ticket for re-entry onto the world stage as a valued intermediary between the ideological blocs.

The empirical analysis also reveals that memory is not merely a passive inheritance from the past. Instead, it constitutes a dynamic resource for policy elites to reshape national roles over time and thus legitimise their strategic choices. The opportunities for such memory entrepreneurship are frequently found in the interstices between officially sanctioned 'public' accounts of the past and the more private and sometimes antagonistic collections of individuals and marginalised groups. National role conceptions and the policy preferences they underlie thus always remain fluid and contested: They are continuously (re)constructed and mobilised to conceptualise, explain and legitimise policy choices.

In Greece, the polarising narrative of the anti-communist state collapsed in the wake of the military dictatorship (1967–1974), when the political Left became fully enfranchised in the country's political community. Once anti-communism crumbled as the ideological basis of the state, narratives of Greece as an exploited 'underdog' came to the fore, and in their wake, Greece's foreign policy alignment changed rather sharply. Austria's harmonising narrative, which had stylised all Austrians as victims of German aggression, survived for another decade. However, by the mid-1980s, as a new generation of political leaders, who had neither direct implications nor recollections of the war, took over the helm of government and also pursued full integration into the European Community (EC), the country belatedly began to face up to its historical responsibility.

The analytical framework proposed in this article advances scholarly understanding on the link between collective memory and international politics by clarifying the causal mechanisms through which memory narratives, once clearly framed and institutionalised over time, produce specific policy preferences. The empirical findings illuminate how elites in small states leverage collective memory to design and justify policy decisions. Thus, they suggest that IR scholars should attend more closely to the discursive and organisational dimensions of memory, as they form a powerful resource for small states navigating complex and often precarious positions in the global order.

Given the limited scope of this article, its findings also invite reflection on the ways in which lessons from the past have guided small states' policy in temporal and geographical contexts other than that of the Cold War in Europe. For small European states in the 1950s, the intermingling of international and domestic violence constituted the predominant memory of the preceding decades. Future studies may examine, by contrast, how the experience of violence was framed in the decolonising states of the Global South from the 1950s to the 1970s and the role conceptions and policy preferences that flowed from these frames.

Research may also take into account that memory practices and narratives are increasingly shaped not only within national frameworks but also in transnational contexts. The process of European integration, for instance, has revealed tensions between purely national recollection and efforts at creating shared historical memories as a basis for policymaking. Future research may examine the ways in which memory narratives influence contemporary debates within (small) member states on the EU's common foreign and security policy. Recognising memory as a dynamic and contested resource will thus open new avenues for understanding the complexity of small state behaviour in international politics by paying greater attention to the interplay of history, identity and strategic choice.

**Funding**

No funding information.

Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported.

Data availability statement

No supplementary data associated with the article.

Acknowledgements

This article is adapted from the author's doctoral dissertation. I am deeply grateful to the members of my dissertation committee for their invaluable mentorship and intellectual guidance. I also sincerely thank the archivists and staff of the Austrian State Archives, the Service of Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation, the Bruno Kreisky Foundation, the Andreas Papandreou Foundation, and the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library. Their generous assistance and professional guidance were essential to the research and preparation of this article. Support from the Cold War Archives Research program at the Wilson Center is also gratefully acknowledged.

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