Differences in historical narratives

More and more actions of the Polish extreme right-wing government suggest that the Cabinet is copying the Orbán government. These measures are, for example, reforming the composition of the Constitutional Court or the amendment of the media law. Many argue though, that the real aim in both countries is the formation of historical remembrance. The reason this proves to be easy for the right-wing is that even 25 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, grave secrets regarding operations of the communist regime are still surfacing.

Andzrej Duda, delegated party leader of the polish right-wing, conservative Law and Justice Party (abbreviation of the polish name: PiS) had approved the amendment to the media law. The law makes it possible to remove leaders of public media with immediate effect. As a result the leaders of public media resigned voluntarily. The government, however, does not stop at institutional reforms. The Polish and Hungarian government both aspire to change the way people think about history. Jarosław Aleksander Kaczyński, leader of the PiS announced his “moral revolution” program already during his time as Prime Minister from 2006 to 2007. This meant calling to account those who cooperated with the communist regime before 1989. According to Kaczyński, aside from anti-communism, patriotism and Catholicism can promote the revival of the nation. Conjunction between communist state-party functionaries and the left-wing is an issue not only in Poland. It is a frowned-upon phenomenon in right-wing, ultra-conservative circles in Hungary as well, where it is said that a real regime-change has not happened, since the members of the communist party infiltrated into the sphere of business and media, for which they also blame the West.

History is a fundamental subject of political struggles in both countries, which Western-Europeans and Americans find hard to understand. There is a cut-throat fight for the reformation of historical remembrance. Viktor Orbán, Kaczyński and other Eastern-European right-wing leaders claim that progression of the region had stopped with the arrival of the communist regime. Therefore, they look back upon the historical figures active before 1945. Left-wing and liberal forces do not approve of the respect the right wing shows towards historical figures preceding 1945. Members of the liberal-left criticize that the right wing thinks highly even of the authoritarian regimes and statesmen between the two World Wars for the
sole reason of them being anti-communist (at the same time anti-Nazi). The left accuses the right-wing of not having a democratic tradition. The right, on the other hand blames the left for not showing enough patriotism. Kaczynski and Orbán stress that before 1989, the left took orders from Moscow, now it does the same from Brussels. Kaczynski and Orbán claim that they are the ones protecting sovereignty, while the left is willing to sacrifice it in the name of European integration.

The communist dictatorships left devastating social and financial damage in Eastern-European countries. The greatest harm might be mistrust between its citizens as many were forced to cooperate with the communist secret police. Recently, a historical institution in Poland announced that according to certain documents, Lech Walesa, former leader of the Solidarity Movement had cooperated with the Polish secret police. Nobel-prize winner Walesa, who was also head of state from 1990 to 1995, has rejected the accusations. He had also previously criticized PiS for the restructuring of the Constitutional Court. Many assume a political character-assassination. It is not the object of this analysis to determine whether he was working for the secret police of not. It is not Walesa’s person that is important, rather the mentality that the right and left wing judges certain figures differently based on their historical roles.

Walesa is looked upon as a hero in Poland. An offensive against the living legend could backfire on PiS, as Walesa is highly respected within the society. This issue points out that both left and right wing uses secrets from the past in the fight for historical remembrance. As long as ones secret agent or informer past can be used as a weapon against political opponents, the legacy of communist regimes lives on in Eastern-Europe. Until then, national disputes stemming from the interpretation of the past always overcome those of global economic and policies.