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A glorified rock in international relations? – How the erection of a Soviet war memorial in the far north of Norway can be seen as part of a larger Russian political campaign with geopolitical aims

Introduction

In the spring of 2017, the mayor of the tiny municipality of Hasvik in Finnmark, the northernmost region of Norway with borders to Russia, received a request to erect a Soviet war memorial. The memorial would commemorate six Soviet pilots that died in a plane crash in the municipality during the Second World War. The request came from a joint initiative started by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Russian Ministry of Defense (Husby, 2020, p. 8). This monument falls into a larger trend of memorials being erected, planned, or wanted by Russian actors in Norway (Klo, 2021; Langemyr, 2021). Norwegian commentators and researchers suggest there might be an agenda behind the increased focus on war memorials in Norway. They are pointing toward the direct involvement of Russian central authorities in cases such as Hasvik (Staalesen, 2021), the positioning of monuments in strategic positions close to important military facilities (Klo, 2021) and the timing. Why are they making such efforts decades after the war? (Langemyr, 2021). Despite multiple implications being raised around the erection of the monuments, especially around the Hasvik monument, there are no studies examining the contemporary erection of Soviet war memorials by Russia in Norway.

A large and increasing number of literature is looking into how war memorials are connected to political aims internationally (see: Callahan, 2017, p. 364; Kattago, 2009; Markussen, 2021; Myklebost, 2021; Sadriu, 2019). This literature states that war memorials can be acts of politics and can be placed into the larger paradigm of the politics of memory, the way states use history for political aims (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; Domańska, 2019; Verovsek, 2016). In addition to the politics of memory, the dissertation will be using the theory of diplomacy of memory developed in 2019 (Bachleitner, 2019). This theory brings the politics of memory onto the international stage and theorizes how memory is used in international relations to build memory alliances (ibid). Russia has increasingly been using history for political aims, especially history about the Second World War, both domestically and internationally (See: Domanska, 2019; Edele, 2017). History is being used to provide the regime and the authoritarian nature of the Russian state with legitimacy domestically (Domanska, 2019, p. 2)

while it is used internationally to assert Russia's great power identity and reach geopolitical goals (McGlynn, 2020, p. 30). Memory has also been an important component of Russian foreign policy as it has been waging memory wars with some of the former members of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact (Kattago, 2009, p. 149). This dissertation aims to understand if the Hasvik monument fits into the larger Russian usage of history for political aims and thus contribute to the debate on what the purpose behind these war memorials is. In this dissertation, Russia and Russians will refer to Russian political actors, not the Russian people.

To understand how the Hasvik monument is used for political purposes by Russia, the dissertation will conduct a qualitative case study of the memorial in Hasvik. The case study will consist of two main parts, the first part is concerned with the erection process surrounding the monument. This will be studied by using historical sources like first-hand descriptions and news articles to outline the collaboration that took place to erect the monument. Secondly, the dissertation will conduct a discourse analysis of official Russian discourse about the Hasvik monument and the wider communication about Soviet War memorials in Norway that the memorial is being placed in.

The case study reveals some key findings. The study of the erection process reveals the importance placed on the monument by central Russian authorities and the relationship that was formed between central Russian actors and the municipal administration of Hasvik. The discourse analysis further shows that the Hasvik monument is being used in a larger effort to label states that are "friendly" and "unfriendly" to Russian historical discourses and war memorials. The Russian authorities are describing Norway as a "friendly" nation that respects Russian historical narratives and juxtapositions Norwegian cooperation, like cooperation around the Hasvik monument, to "unfriendly" states like Poland or the Baltics that are not treating Soviet war memorials with the respect and care Russia wants them to.

The dissertation will argue that the monument in Hasvik in the far north of Norway became an unwilling piece in a large Russian international political campaign with geopolitical aims. The dissertation will further argue that Norwegian authorities should have been more active in the Hasvik case and should take a more assertive approach in similar cases in the future. Despite it being demonstrated that memorandums and memorials have been a stabilizing factor in the bilateral relationship (Markussen, 2021; Myklebost, 2021), blindly adopting

Russian historical narratives also means adopting the more sinister Russian uses of history. Thus, the Norwegian authorities should be more involved in future processes to be aware of which narratives they take part in communicating.

This dissertation will first outline the literature on war memorials to show how they can be seen as acts of politics before examining how memory and war memorials are used by Russia for political aims. The dissertation will then provide background information on how the common wartime history in the north of Norway has been an important and stabilizing component in the bilateral relationship since the end of the Second World War. The dissertation will then outline the methodology of the study before the next sections will present the case study and its findings. These are then used as the baseline for the overall argument that the Hasvik monument can be seen as Russia using the Hasvik monument for political aims. The last section will outline some of the implications of this finding, stating that Norwegian authorities should be more active in their approach to Russian usage of memory in Norway in the future.

Literature review – war memorials and the use of memory for political gains

An increasing number of literature is looking into the role of memorials as a component of relations between states and how history is a component of how they conduct foreign relations. A range of cases where memorials have foreign policy purposes have been studied, this includes examples of monuments from different parts of the world with varied purposes and goals for international relations. Work in this field includes studies of the significance liberation monuments from the Second World War have had and still have in bilateral relationships between the Soviet Union/Russia and countries they liberated from Nazi occupation (Kattago, 2009; Markussen, 2021; Myklebost, 2021). Monuments and memorials have also been used to enforce political messages to other countries, like the Japanese exports and marketing of Japanese gardens to restore its international image after World War Two (Callahan, 2017, p. 364) or how the design and ceremonial usage of American war cemeteries in France could be seen as a part of an attempt to make the French resist communism (Lemay, 2018, p. 67). There are also cases of Memorials located abroad being used domestically in campaigns to build national identity (Sadriu, 2019).

“Whether a statue, a place, a building or a combination of these and other elements, a war memorial is a social and physical arrangement of space and artifacts to keep alive the memories or persons who participated in a war sponsored by their country” (Mayo, 1988, p. 62). A war memorial could further be seen as a place where culture and politics meet. While on the one hand being a place for grief and remembrance, it is also a political tool used by governments and state leaders (Niven, 2007, p. 30) as “war memorials are part of a nation’s attempt to (re)build its history. They have a relieving effect, of reunification with a nation’s historical density while creating myths and heroes “ (Rey-García, et al., 2020, p. 361). War memorials can thus be understood as acts of politics.

For this dissertation, I will draw upon two intertwined concepts to create the theoretical baseline: the politics of memory (Domańska, 2019; Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; Verovsek, 2016) and the diplomacy of memory (Bachleitner, 2019; McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022). The main difference between the two concepts is that diplomacy of memory is memory politics applied on the international level with a goal to create memory alliances. This is done by exporting the commemorative traditions and the narratives of the host country to the second country while also engaging with and promoting “positive historical narratives of the second country” (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 2). The diplomacy of memory is a young term, coined in 2019, with much in common with the politics of memory and its correlating work. Because the literature on the diplomacy of memory is still being developed it is highly beneficial to also draw upon the vast literature on the politics of memory. Bringing these concepts together will explain both the domestic and international dimension of the Russian use of history for political gains and how a monument in a tiny Norwegian municipality in the far north could be seen as a small piece in a large international political campaign with geopolitical aims.

Politicians and leaders often use a common understanding of past events to achieve political aims (Verovsek, 2016, p. 529). This has led some scholars to argue that history “is always made in the present by various actors who may and often do present its various versions” (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014, p. 4). These ideas lie the foundation of the politics of memory, defined by Domanska and Rogoza as “ideas and activities aimed at shaping collective memory and historical discourse in a manner corresponding to the interest of those in power. It involves creative use of symbolic resources present in the public sphere and internalized by recipients, as well as the construction of new threads of historical narrative” (Domanska &

Rogoza, 2021, p. 9). In nations that are still to construct their collective identity and have internal disagreements on how to interpret and choose history, like Russia, the politics of memory takes on an important role (Domanska & Rogoza, 2021, p. 9). The politics of memory is a rich interdisciplinary field with authors from subjects like sociology, history, cultural studies, journalism, and political science making important contributions (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014, p. 1).

Diplomacy of memory is defined by McGlynn and Dureinovic as “political actors’ identification, creation and development of commonalities of memory for geopolitical purposes and/or bilateral relations. Unlike memory wars, which involve different actors contesting their countries’ historical – especially wartime – roles, memory diplomacy involves coalescing and converging the historical narratives around these roles” (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, pp. 1-2). It is further “considered to consist of a deliberate and coordinated diplomatic team effort to portray an official memory to the international stage” (Bachleitner, 2019, p. 495). The diplomacy of memory can be used as a tool in a memory war to create a mnemonic coalition, a coalition of countries with the same historical understanding, within a memory war (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 2). An important component of memory diplomacy is that, like public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005, p. 18), the diplomacy of memory is a two-way street where both parts need to be engaging with each other, either at the same level or where one partner is more engaged than the other (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 2). This entails that the diplomacy of memory is concerned with building relationships with their audiences in addition to spreading a historical narrative for political purposes on the international stage.

The studies that exist on Russian usage of monuments or history in the Norwegian context for political purposes are limited to monuments erected or traditions started right after the end of the war (Markussen, 2021; Myklebost, 2021). With this study, I wish to contribute to the understanding of how contemporary Russia is using history in its relationship to Norway by establishing new monuments or commemorative traditions, by examining a contemporary case of a new war memorial. The case study could further be used by future studies in the new and growing field of memory diplomacy and on how it is being used by Russia in a northern European country, which is something that has not been systematically studied yet.

Contemporary Russian use of memory as a political tool

Despite using different terminology, multiple different scholars state that Russia is actively using history to achieve political goals, both for domestic and international purposes (see: Domanska & Rogoza, 2021; Hill & Gaddy, 2018; Manor & Pamment, 2022; Markussen, 2021; McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022; Miller, 2020; Pearce, 2020; Prus, 2015; Wijemars, 2019). Russian politics of memory is being implemented by various actors like state agencies, state-controlled media, parts of academia and a network of organizations with ties to the government. The efforts are funded by the state or by businesses with close ties to the Kremlin (Domanska, 2019, p. 1).

The memory of politics we see today in Russia started when Putin came back to the presidency in 2012 (Domanska & Rogoza, 2021, p. 11; McGlynn, 2020, p. 2). Domanska argues that as prospects of long-term economic stagnation became possible and with the growing dissatisfaction within the population caused by declining living standards, the ruling elite had to find other sources of legitimization rather than economic development or increased living standards which helped provide legitimacy during the 2000s (Domanska, 2019, p. 2). This led the Kremlin to put greater emphasis on the traditional identity of Russia as a great international power to legitimize its rule (Domanska, 2019, p. 2). The politics of memory have become a “part and parcel” of this project by replicating a Soviet take on the Russian identity (ibid). The Soviet template of history has, according to Domanska been chosen firstly, because of the close historical proximity of the Soviet superpower status. Secondly because of their “set of ready-made symbols, which many Russians still find meaningful” and thirdly because the narrative serves the elites who benefit from Putinism, like officers that served in the Cold-War confrontation with the West (Domanska, 2019, p. 2). Central to this narrative is the memory of the victory over the Nazis in World War Two, or as the Russians call it: The Great Patriotic War (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 2).

The national myth about the war is the only uncontroversial and all-encompassing reference point of Russian identity in the 21st century (Domanska & Rogoza, 2021, p. 28). It is thus the only national myth that truly unifies all Russians under one identity of “Russianness”. Furthermore, the history presented to Russians presents the notion that a strong leader is the only way to keep the country together when faced with a crisis. It also states that leaders like Stalin were needed, despite the pain he inflicted as he managed to lead Russia to victory and superpower status (Prus, 2015, p. 1). The cult created around the victory thus creates a

“dissonance between pride in the nation’s achievements and awareness of the painful, dark pages of totalitarianism” (Domanska & Rogoza, 2021, p. 31). In the Russian memory of the war, heroism and victimhood are the two main narratives. However, these two narratives do sometimes collide with historical truths, like the “Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, mass rapes, and the disastrous retreat of 1941” (McGlynn, 2021). The narrative established by Russia also restrains other historical events like the suffering under Stalin or the repression caused to nations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This repression of certain unpleasant parts of history makes it possible for nostalgia for the great-power status of the Soviet Union to grow (McGlynn, 2021).

Domestically, Russia has started a war on memory to ensure that “false information”, i.e., narratives that do not correlate to the official state narrative, about history is not being spread. The result is increasingly stricter rules on the interpretation of history being implemented (Edele, 2017, p. 95). In 2014 for instance, the Kremlin signed a law stating that spreading lies about the activities of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War would be punishable by either high fines or up to five years of forced labor or prison (Edele, 2017, p. 95). It has also been reported that producers of history in Russia, like historians, NGOs and journalists that work on the history of the war and the Soviet past have increasingly been targets of human rights abuses after 2014 (FIDH, 2021). History and memory have also gone through a process of being militarized in modern Russia with the usage of terms like “brigades that would battle alleged falsifiers of history” being communicated (McGlynn, 2020, p. 24). It is also implied in the Russian defense policy that an assault on Russia’s historical narrative is an assault on the foundation of the nation (McGlynn, 2020, p. 23).

The Russian use of history for political gains is not limited to the domestic sphere. Internationally, Russia is engaging with history through memory wars, primarily in former Soviet or Warsaw Pact countries or via memory diplomacy with a wider audience. Memory wars have been a component of Russia’s relations with former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries for a while. In the former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries, the end of the Second World War is seen as the start of a new occupation and repression by the Soviet Union (Kattago, 2009, p. 149) especially in countries like the Baltics, Ukraine and Poland (Miller, 2020, pp. 9-10). This narrative fits badly into the understanding of a glorious common Soviet past where the Red Army functioned as liberators of the Eastern European countries. This “memory war” includes a dispute with Poland over the start of World War Two, threats of

legal action after the moving of a statue in the Czech Republic (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022) and cyber-attacks after the Estonian government wanted to move a Soviet statue in Estonia (Kattago, 2009).

Russia is also actively using diplomacy of memory to reach foreign audiences (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 3). This has been documented in countries like Serbia, the UK, France, and Germany (McGlynn, 2020, p. 29). Central to this export are Russian embassies, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and government-organized groups, such as the Russian Military Historical Society (McGlynn, 2021). Importantly, Russian diplomacy of memory stretches beyond the discursive level and includes initiatives and activities like the creation or promotion of initiatives including books, films, exhibitions, memorials, or anniversaries being held with and in other countries (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 10). This is often facilitated via Russian Embassies abroad, which this study will be focused on as the Hasvik memorial is being facilitated via the Russian embassy in Oslo.

Some exports facilitated via Russian Embassies abroad include commemorative events and symbols like the St. George's ribbon which is worn on the Russian Victory Day (McGlynn, 2021). This ribbon has been handed out by Russian Embassies around the world to passers-by in more than 90 countries, they even managed to spread the usage of the ribbon to some high-level officials in foreign countries. Like in the UK where members of the British Labor Party were pictured wearing them (ibid). However, as the ribbon has been worn by Russians as a symbol of support for the aggression in Ukraine, they have a dual meaning that the Embassies fail to communicate to the recipients (ibid). In this way, the Kremlin managed to use the ribbon to "smuggle" a geopolitical stance to other countries by using its narrative of the Second World War. Russia also adapts to the local memory culture in other countries to build alliances or by targeting minority groups with specific historical narratives to create splits within the population (McGlynn, 2020, p. 30).

It is argued that monuments and anniversaries have a special place in the Russian politics of memory. Unlike other mediums that perpetuate historical understandings, like school textbooks, a memorial like a monument or an anniversary is seen as eternal as they can permanently tell the story of the past (Pearce, 2020). The practice of using monuments depicting the war for political purposes, both domestically and abroad, started once the war was over (Niven, 2007, p. 41). Monuments were raised all over the Soviet Union and in

satellite states to “the Soviet Motherland, Stalin or, in some form or another, to the Great Patriotic War” these were used to make the citizens of eastern European states remember the Soviets “as grand liberators from Nazism and to embrace communism – and to forget that this liberation had simultaneously constituted a reoccupation” (Niven, 2007, p. 41).

A 2007 presidential decree further states that military memorial work is a part of the mandate of Russian diplomatic missions abroad (President of the Russian Federation, 2007). This work has been further emphasized through different initiatives and remarks from high standing Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin who has, for instance, stated that “we are witnessing increasingly frequent attempts to slander and distort history and to revise the role played by the Red Army in the routing of Nazism and the liberation of European nations from the Nazi plague» (Putin, 2021). Putin’s speech further emphasizes how war memorials, specifically war graves, in other countries are being treated in “barbaric” ways and how Russian youth is being “brainwashed” into an unpatriotic understanding of the war (ibid). As a reaction to this, Putin turns to Russian diplomatic missions abroad and emphasize their role in the protection and maintenance of war memorials in their countries of assignment. They should also be actively participating in the support of public initiatives that is preserving historical memory according to him (ibid). He also clearly states that “although large-scale and mass celebrations are essential, we have to prioritise systemic work here” (Putin, 2021). The systemic work he is referring to can, as it is mentioned in the context of using Embassies abroad to perpetuate a certain historical view in a systemic way, be seen as a strategy of diplomacy of memory. This further reveals that Russia views the erection and maintenance of war memorials abroad as a part of a wider strategy where memory is used for political aims internationally.

War memorials and memory in the relationship between Norway and the Soviet Union/Russia

While Norway is, on the one hand, a firm member of the west, it has on the other hand a shared border and a rich wartime history with Russia. This has led Norwegian foreign- and security policy since 1949 to be a result of balancing its relationship with a powerful neighbor in the east and towards its allies in NATO and the West (Hilde, 2019, p. 61). The collective memories of the Soviet Union became one of the first obstacles this strategy had to

face (Markussen, 2021, p. 100). However, as this section will demonstrate, the common history has ultimately become a stabilizing factor in the bilateral relationship.

Norway and the Soviet Union/Russia have much common history regarding the war, especially in the north. The two main topics of shared memories that have been used for political purposes are connected to the Soviet liberation of eastern Finnmark from Nazi occupation in 1944 and the history of the Norwegian partisans. Norway was from 1940 occupied by Nazi Germany until the Nazi forces surrendered in 1945. However, the liberation of Norway started about half a year earlier, on the 18th of October 1944, when the Soviets crossed the border of Jakobselv in the far north of Norway (Grimnes, 2022). The Soviet troops freed an area from Jakobselv by the Soviet border in the east to the Tana River further west in the Finnmark region (Holtmark, 1994, p. 3). The Norwegian government exhibited fears after 1944 that the superpower wanted to occupy parts of Norwegian territory after the war or be offensive on the contested issue of Svalbard (Holtmark, 1994, p. 5). These claims were, however, disproven when Russia exited Norwegian territory in 1945 and gave the Norwegian authorities back the control of the area (Myklebost, 2021, p. 64).

The other historical memory with a central role in the Russo-Norwegian memory relationship is the Norwegian partisans. The partisans were a group of approximately 40 Norwegians that joined the Red Army after the German attack on the Soviet Union. They were educated by the Red Army to conduct intelligence and sabotage behind enemy lines against the Nazis in the North of Norway (Huitfeldt, 1997, p. 5; Ringheim, 2006, pp. 430-433). Despite their efforts being claimed by historians to have been very important for the allied forces in the north during the war (Huitfeldt, 1997, p. 17), they received little to no attention and recognition for their efforts by the Norwegian authorities and their history was mostly not included in school textbooks or other historical narratives of the war (Sandvik, 2018). Many were also accused of being Soviet spies during the beginning of the Cold War and imprisoned due to suspicions of them still delivering intelligence to the Soviet Union (Huitfeldt, 1997, p. 20). Their efforts were not acknowledged by the Norwegian state until the 1980s (Sandvik, 2018).

Memorials of the events that took place in the north of Norway are argued to be a source of stability in the bilateral relationship between Norway and the Soviet Union, and later Russia (Myklebost, 2021, p. 60). Even when the bilateral relationship has been very strained, like in

2014 after the Russian annexation of Crimea, long-established celebrations and anniversaries have taken place between the two countries (ibid). In the period right after the war, many monuments were erected in Norway to commemorate fallen Soviet soldiers and prisoners of war all over Norway, not just in the North (see e.g. database over Soviet war cemeteries in Norway: Stiftelsen Falstadsenteret, 2022a). There is no centralized database over memorials in Norway, only a database on war graves. These estimate that there are about 13.000 Soviet war graves in Norway. Most of these were moved to centralized cemeteries under operation “Asfalt” in the years right after the war because of fears of Soviet espionage (see: Klo, 2020; Kulturdepartementet, 2014, pp. 4-5; Soleim, 2016).

The memorials after the war were erected by different actors. Some were erected by surviving Soviet prisoners of war (Kaalstad, 2021; Solberg, et al., 2017, p. 19), others by the Norwegian Ministry of defense (Solberg, et al., 2017, p. 9) and some by request from the central Soviet authorities (Markussen, 2021, p. 99). The liberation monument in Kirkenes that was raised in 1952 after a Soviet initiative, only three years after Norway had sided with NATO and the US in the Cold war is argued to be the most important of these (Markussen, 2021, p. 99). This monument is one of very few monuments depicting the achievements of the Red Army outside the Warsaw pact countries (Markussen, 2021, p. 99). Additionally, there have been no controversies connected to the monument after it was erected, not even after the fall of the Soviet Union (ibid). This is relatively rare as similar monuments have been focal points of multiple controversies in other countries (Kattago, 2009; Markussen, 2021, p. 101). The main reason for this is that the Soviet army *actually was* liberators in the Norwegian context. They made the Germans leave, helped the Norwegian population, and left the area to Norwegian authorities when the situation was under control (Markussen, 2021, p. 101). This is in stark contrast to other countries with Soviet liberation monuments, as the Soviet liberation often marked the start of a new occupation and the memorials erected right after the war thus often ended up adopting this meaning for the population (ibid).

The Soviet liberation of eastern Finnmark has been celebrated every five years since the Soviet Union took the initial initiative in 1954 (Myklebost, 2021, p. 65). It has later become a mixture between a political top meeting and a festival for the people (Myklebost & Bones, 2021) However, as Myklebost states, the Norwegian authorities stood in a conflicting position in regards to these anniversaries (Myklebost, 2021, p. 66). On the one side, if Norway decided to suppress the memories of the Soviet liberation, they would risk their

relations with a powerful neighbor in the east. On the other side, if they put too much emphasis on it, it would create problems among their allies in NATO (Markussen, 2021, p. 101). Throughout the Cold War, a more or less common narrative of the events in the north of Norway during the war was developed between the Soviet Union and Norway as the celebrations became a norm in the relationship (Myklebost, 2021, p. 69). However, the issue of how much emphasis to put on this common history was evident from the Norwegian side to a certain extent also after the Cold War (Myklebost, 2021, pp. 74-75).

In the past few years, multiple scholars and analysts are stating that we can see a change in the Russian approach to how they use memory in their relations with Norway (Klo, 2021; Langemyr, 2021; Soleim & Myklebost, 2021). This includes an increase in new memorials being wanted, planned, or erected from around 2016 and onwards in the northernmost region of Norway (Klo, 2021; Langemyr, 2021). The new memorials are focusing on a broader aspect of the common war history, especially the partisans (Soleim & Myklebost, 2021). Some of these monuments are results of local historical groupings from both sides of the border wanting to erect a specific monument, while others are directly commissioned by the Russian foreign or defense ministries (Myklebost & Bones, 2021). Additionally, has Russia been active in giving out medals and rewards to Norwegian actors that are working on documenting the partisan history and maintaining Soviet war cemeteries (ibid). This is an interesting development because of the timing. Why make these efforts now, decades after the war? This is especially interesting as they are happening after Putin has amped up his usage of memory as a political tool, both domestically and internationally.

Methodology

This dissertation will conduct a qualitative case study of the memorial in Hasvik to understand if the monument fits into the Russian usage of history for political aims internationally. A study of the process and actors involved in the erection of the monument will be coupled with discourse analysis to identify Russian official discourse about the monument. The dissertation will study the erection process as it reveals crucial information about the actors involved in the process, how they interpreted the process, how they communicated and the relationship they formed. It also reveals how Norwegian authorities handled the erection of the monument.

Discourse analysis has become a popular research method in international relations studies. This is because it allows for an understanding of the strategy behind political communication, which is useful as political processes are, to a large extent, made up of different acts of communication (Bērziņa, 2015, p. 3; Titscher, et al., 2000). The units of analysis for the discourse analysis will be official communication about the war memorial and Soviet war memorials in Norway in general from relevant Russian government institutions. The inclusion of studying the general discourse about Soviet war memorials in Norway has been added as it allows for an understanding of the wider context the communication the Hasvik memorial is being placed into. The dissertation will be using speeches, press releases, and briefings sourced from official websites of the relevant Russian government institutions (kremlin.ru, mid.ru, mil.ru) and the Russian Embassy in Oslo. The study has tried to use English versions of official text as much as possible to make the sources more accessible to readers, however, in cases where there is no English translation available, the study has used material in Norwegian and Russian. The texts were found by using the search tool on Russian sites with the keywords: “Hasvik” (Хасвик), “Hasvik Memorial” (Мемориал Хасвика), in addition to “Norway memorial” (мемориал норвегии) to find the wider discourse about Soviet war memorials in Norway. The search is limited to the period after 2017 as this is when the plan for the monument was started.

For the erection process, the dissertation will mostly be drawing upon Norwegian sources involved in the erection. The reason for this is because the Norwegian sources are more accessible, more extensive, and to a certain extent more reliable than the Russian sources as there are quite a few firsthand Norwegian sources from credible actors directly involved in the process. The main source for this part is the book: “Minnesmerket - om krigen som var og mange spørsmål uten svar” (The memorial – about the war that was and many questions without answers) about the process around the monument and the war history of Hasvik, written by the mayor of Hasvik, Eva Husby (Husby, 2020). This book provides multiple firsthand descriptions of the process of erecting the monument and the history behind it. Norwegian and Russian media sources are also included as secondary sources to supplement the book.

There are however a few limitations to this design. The first limitation is that the number of accessible Russian sources is limited. For the discourse analysis, the relevant Russian

governing institutions, like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Defense, do have communication available, but it is limited to a few articles, statements and mentions. This means that the analysis and choice of text are largely limited to what is accessible. This falls into a larger problem doing discourse analysis on Russian foreign policy decisions, as large parts of the process of forming policy in Russia are not accessible to the public (Staun, 2017, p. 316). This is also a limitation in studying the erection process as there is no accessible information from the Russian authorities describing their decision making and internal process of the project.

Furthermore, some commentators suggest that this memorial and others wanted by the Russians might be placed there for strategic reasons, citing the proximity to Norwegian military facilities and strategic locations (Langemyr, 2021). These locations include the highest point on the Varanger peninsula, Persfjord and at Mårøya in Laksefjorden which are all geographically close to Russia and important Norwegian military facilities tasked with monitoring the Russian border (Langemyr, 2021). The dissertation cannot tackle this issue as access to classified information would be needed to properly study it. This question is thus not included in the analysis of the monument.

This dissertation will not be able to generalize on the Russian use of memory for political purposes in Norway as it is only conducting one specific case study. This is however not the goal of this study. This study wants to see if the monument in Hasvik can be placed into the existing frameworks of how states conduct international relations with memory and see if it can provide a possible explanation for the agenda and usage of it by Russia. This study can be used in future research on how memory is used for political aims by Russia in Norway, or in a larger context such as Scandinavia or Northern Europe, by for example pairing the findings of this study with other case studies on the erection of contemporary war memorials or other contemporary commemorative activities including Russia or Russian sponsored actors. As Bachleitner states that diplomacy of memory is a coordinated and consistent effort (Bachleitner, 2019, p. 495), thus more case studies are needed to be able to generalize.

The study will be able to provide an important contribution to the larger field of diplomacy of memory which is a young, relevant, and growing field. This study will, to the best of my knowledge, be the first of its kind that tackles how contemporary Russian usage of history for political aims and war memorials are connected in the Norwegian and in the Scandinavian

context. This paper will thus make a timely contribution to the field as war memorials and Russian use of history has become a topic of debate, concern, and even conflict in the last couple of years. Both in Norway, Scandinavia and Northern Europe (Langemyr, 2021; Myklebost & Bækken, 2022) but also in countries across the western world (McGlynn, 2020) and in what Russia views as its sphere of influence (Kattago, 2009; Gabowitsch, 2021; Zachová, et al., 2022).

Case study – The Hasvik Monument



Figure 1: The monument in Hasvik pictured on the unveiling on the 7th of October 2021 (Klo, 2021).

The morning of the 17th of June 1944 was described by local fishermen as being cold and windy with heavy fog. At around 6 AM, the experienced local fisher, Torleif Hansen, hears a plane rapidly approaching (Husby, 2020, p. 195). Hansen and the other fishers become terrified by the sound as they had become accustomed to the possibility of being shot at by the passing military airplanes, something Hansen had first-hand experience with (Husby, 2020, p. 195). The fishers were listening in fear as the thick fog concealed the environment around them. Suddenly, they hear a massive bang, the plane had hit the steep mountain next to them, Andotten (Husby, 2020, p. 195). The plane that crashed into Andotten was an American Catalina plane on a transfer flight between Canada via Iceland to Murmansk. Inside the plane were six Soviet soldiers, including high-standing personnel and they were all

wearing American uniforms. All six died momentarily from the crash which was a result of a malfunction and the bad weather conditions (Husby, 2020, p. 207). The Catalina plane was a part of a top-secret mission under the American lend-lease program called Project Zebra (Husby, 2020, p. 205). Project Zebra was started in 1944 and was a collaboration between the Soviet Union and the USA where about 300 Soviet pilots were trained by the Americans in using amphibian bombers produced by the USA. The training took place in Elizabeth City in North Carolina before they returned to the fighting in Europe in the American planes (Price, 2018). This fascinating story is the baseline for the memorial raised in Hasvik in late 2021.

The project to erect the memorial over the plane crash was started in 2017, when the mayor of Hasvik, Eva D. Husby, was contacted by the Norwegian Department of Culture, which administrates the erection and maintenance of war memorials in Norway (Husby, 2020, pp. 34-35). They conveyed a request received from the Russian Embassy in Oslo, which had gotten the request directly from the Russian Ministry of Defense in Moscow, to erect a Soviet war memorial, fully funded by Russian authorities, on the mountain Andotten at Sørøya to commemorate the then mostly unknown history of the plane crash. This meant that the request also included an invitation for cooperation with the Russians on mapping out the full story of the plane crash and the role of the Soviets in the area during the war (Husby, 2020, p. 8). Their efforts in the area included intelligence operations by Norwegian partisans and Soviet personnel, incidents regarding the Murmansk convoys in and around the area and Soviet prisoners of war in Hasvik, these events were also discussed in the meetings (Husby, 2020). The mayor was positive about the project but was worried about the security and foreign political implications it might have as the request came from the central Russian authorities and the bilateral relationship was described as being at its worst since the Cold War (Husby, 2020; Mohr, 2020). She thus decided to seek advice from Norwegian authorities, however, this proved to be difficult (Klo, 2020). Husby states, both in her book and in an interview, that she tried multiple times to contact the Ministry of Culture, without getting any response (Husby, 2020, p. 35; Klo, 2020). When she, at last, got an answer, they told her that the Ministry does not have any guidelines regarding foreign nations erecting memorials on Norwegian soil and that the local governing body was responsible for approving the project (Husby, 2020, p. 32).

Between the start of the project and the erection of the monument, the mayor, and the Chief Municipal Executive in Hasvik, Erik Arnesen, participated in two meetings at the Russian

embassy in Oslo (Husby, 2020, pp. 22-29 and 57-61). Both meetings included high standing officials from the Russian side. In the first meeting held on the 25th of October 2017, the Ambassador to Norway, Teimuraz Ramishvili, the military attaché to Norway, Alexander Kosarev, the press attaché, Timur Chekanov, and three other senior advisors were present. They discussed the common war history in and around Hasvik and the initial plans for the monument were unveiled. These included plans of a 5.2 meters and 25-ton heavy monument placed as close to the top of the mountain as possible (Husby, 2020, pp. 22-29). However, this monument was too large for the municipality to accept as it was much larger than the memorial erected for locals that lost their lives during the war, it would thus clash with local memory traditions (Husby, 2020, pp. 27-28). The Russians understood this concern and had by the second meeting on the 19th of June 2018, made a new outline for the monument that fitted the local culture of commemorating the war. In this meeting, the assistant to the Deputy Defense Minister of Russia, Alexander Kirilin, the leader of the Russian Foreign Ministry department for immortalizing the memory of servicemen who died defending their homeland, Vladimir Popov, and a secretary to the Ministry of Defense were present in addition to the six men in the last meeting (Husby, 2020, pp. 57-61).

The embassy and the municipality maintained contact between and after the meetings with sporadic emails regarding the monument, greetings for Christmas and new years and invitations to the celebration of the Russian victory day on the 9th of May at the Russian embassy in Oslo, which the Mayor participated in both in 2018 and 2019 as the only or one of very few mayors present (Husby, 2020). The mayor described being met at the embassy with a warm welcome and personal greetings from different diplomats at the embassy who remembered her on a first-name basis (Husby, 2020, pp. 54-56 and 66-67). The meetings also started a comprehensive collaboration lasting for four years between the municipality, the mayor, the chief Municipal Executive, and the Russian embassy in Oslo on gathering more knowledge about the crash and the role of the Soviet Union in the area during the war. The collaboration thus also resulted in a productive and friendly relationship between the embassy and the municipality (Husby, 2020).

The local administration did, however, not want to give their approval to the project before the authorities in Oslo gave the project their approval in January 2021 (Staalesen, 2021). The monument was unveiled on the seventh of October 2021 with high-level officials from Norway, Russia, and the USA present (Nilsen, 2021). The final monument is a 2.5 meters

high rock with a bronze bras-relief that depicts three soldiers, the Catalina airplane, and an inscription of the names of the fallen soldiers (Russian Embassy in Norway, 2021). The bronze bras-relief is made by the M.B. Grekov Studio of Military Artists in Moscow (сто́дия военных художников, 2021) and was transported to Hasvik via Murmansk on an aircraft from the Northern Fleet according to the Russian Ministry of Defense (Russian Ministry of Defense, 2021).

Which story is being communicated?

Examining the official discourse surrounding the monument reveals that the main narrative in the official communication from Russian Governing Bodies is to present Norway as a “friendly” nation that is taking great care of Soviet war memorials. The memorial and the actions of Norway are often compared to “unfriendly” nations, primarily Poland and the Baltics, that do not care for Soviet war memorials like Russia thinks they should. Most of the official communication from the Russian Foreign Ministry about Soviet war memorials in Norway includes some sort of praise for Norway for being a friendly country that takes good care of Soviet War memorials and Russian historical narratives in general (Bogdanov, 2021; Lavrov, 2017, 2021ab; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2020; Russian Embassy in Oslo, 2021ab, 2022; Russian Information and Press Department, 2019; Zakharova, 2019ab, 2021abcdef, 2022)

The Hasvik monument has become a part of this narrative. Every time the monument is mentioned in communication by the Foreign Ministry, it is mentioned as a positive project in a continuum of a long tradition of historical cooperation and is often juxtapositioned to actions of countries that, in Russia’s opinion, are unfriendly to Russian historical narratives (Zakharova, 2021b, 2022). For instance, Maria Zakharova, the spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry, states this after talking about the Hasvik project: “We are sincerely grateful to the Norwegians for their invariably caring attitude to the graves of Red Army soldiers who perished in Norway during World War II. We would also like to thank them for preserving our common history. This is particularly important against the backdrop of the purposeful efforts by other countries (which I have just mentioned) to distort the historical truth and glorify Nazism» (Zakharova, 2021b). This statement is referring to the remark placed above the one mentioning Hasvik named “Desecration of a Soviet Burial in Poland”. In this flaming remark, she is talking about the vandalism of a Soviet military cemetery from the Second

World War in Poland and the Polish Governments lack of reporting this to Russian diplomatic offices (Zakharova, 2021c).

This discourse could further be seen in Mikhail Bogdanov, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, mention of the Hasvik case. He stated that, despite having bilateral agreements on the maintenance of military graves with 15 different countries and one multilateral agreement with the CIS, most of these partners are far from fulfilling their obligations. He then precedes to give positive remarks to some nations without bilateral agreements, including Norway, that is treating their Soviet war graves with much respect and that supports Russian efforts to perpetuate the Soviet war memory (Bogdanov, 2021). He goes on to mention the Hasvik memorial as a positive example of a project in the meeting with top officials like President Vladimir Putin, and the Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu present (Bogdanov, 2021). Here again, the juxtaposition between “friendly” and “unfriendly” history partners is clear.

The clearest example of this is found in a statement including a long list of Soviet war monuments being vandalized or destroyed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (Zakharova, 2022). In the remark called “international day for monuments and sites,” Zakharova gives detailed descriptions of more than 70 specific incidents of vandalism and attempts to remove Soviet war memorials in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, and Moldova. The remark ends with her giving attention to the Hasvik monument as a positive project where Norway and the individuals involved in the project are given praise for their collaboration on preserving Soviet history. The monument in Hasvik is the only monument that is mentioned as a positive event in the remark (Zakharova, 2022).

Findings

This dissertation is studying if the erection of the monument in Hasvik can be seen as an act of Russia using memory in Norway for political aims. The case study of the monument reveals multiple key findings to answer this question. The study of the process around the erection of the monument reveals that firstly the project had an importance for the Russian side. This is demonstrated through the high-level representatives being a part of the project, like the Ambassador to Norway and the representatives sent from Moscow and the direct

involvement of the Russian Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs as seen through their participation in the meetings with the mayor and by initiating the project. This confirms that it is not just a local small-scale project initiated by the Embassy. Secondly, it shows that a relationship was formed between the Russian Embassy in Oslo and the municipality, this is an important step to use history in diplomatic efforts according to Bachleitner (Bachleitner, 2019, p. 495). This is indicated by the mayor being invited as the only or one of few Norwegian mayors to the 9th of May celebration at the embassy in Oslo, the exchange of greetings over holidays and the friendly relationship formed between the mayor and the employees and diplomats at the embassy over the quest to research the wartime history of the Soviet Union in the municipality. This is also indicated by the mayor being personally met at the embassy and them being on a first-name basis with her. Thirdly, it illustrates the lack of involvement from Norwegian authorities that did not have any guidelines and left the approval of the project in the hands of the municipality administration. The only reason the erection of the monument had to wait for central approval was because the municipal council and the mayor had decided that they wanted central authorities to approve the project. In theory, the erection could have happened without central approval.

The communication about the Hasvik monument and the communication about war memorials in Norway reveals a fourth implication. This is that the communication of the monument fits into a larger trend of Russia defining morality and values through the lens of historical narrative alignment. Russia places states into categories of being either “friendly” or “unfriendly” based on their historical narratives and how they approach the Russian narrative of history. Similar discourse can be found in other countries like Serbia, where the positive actions of the Serbian government towards Russian historical narratives are being explicitly and implicitly contrasted by the Russian authorities to the actions of other governments in the Baltics and in Ukraine (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 8).

The top-level involvement in the process, confirming the importance of the project by Russian central authorities and the relationship formed over the erection confirm that the Hasvik case can be seen as a coordinated diplomatic effort where memory is used to form a relationship. The narrative the monument is being placed in by Russian central authorities illustrates that the monument is being used for political aims, namely to gain “allies” that support Russian historical efforts and contrast this to the behavior of “unfriendly” nations, such as Poland or the Baltics. In this way, a monument in the shape of a large rock erected in

a tiny municipality in the far north of Norway has gained an unwanted place in a large scale Russian political campaign with geopolitical goals.

As Bachleitner states that “diplomacy with memory is considered to consist of a deliberate and coordinated diplomatic team effort to portray an official memory to the international stage” (Bachleitner, 2019, p. 495). This means that it is not possible to make the argument that Russia is using the diplomacy of memory in Norway for political aims by only drawing on the conclusions of this one case study. However, the case study illustrates the role this one monument has gained in Russian discourse and opens up for further study of other monuments that are being wanted, erected or planned across northern Norway. Future research could for instance be done on the 2018 monument outside Vadsø in Finnmark commemorating a group of Norwegian partisans which was not erected directly by the Russian state (Sandvik, 2018). This monument was planned by the Expert Group on the History of the Partisan fight against Fascism in the North 1941-1944, founded by the former Senator representing Murmansk in the Federal Council, Igor Chernyshenko. He has been very active in bettering the relationship between Russia and Norway based on the promotion of war history, especially the history of the Norwegian partisans. His project has gathered support from high up officials from both sides of the border, including individuals in the Norwegian parliament and from the Norwegian-Russian Friendship group, “a loose network of legislators with sympathies towards their powerful eastern neighbor” (Staalesen, 2020). This is normal for Russian memory diplomacy that in addition to using state-sponsored efforts, they also use different local or quasi-governmental organizations. The involvement of local actors in such projects makes them more culturally nuanced and less politicized (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 10). This would provide important insight into Russian usage of memory of diplomacy towards Norway.

Implications

If Russia is using the Hasvik case for political aims internationally what are the implications? The usage of memory and the activities they entail can come across as innocent acts of friendship that help bolster bilateral relations. However, this is argued to be more troublesome than it first appears (McGlynn, 2021). The goal of Russian memory diplomacy is not just to bolster Russia’s image domestically by gaining international legitimacy for its

historical views, but also to contrast the historical understandings of geopolitical rivals to undermine their opposing understandings of history (McGlynn, 2020, p. 23). Russia has increasingly been involved in memory wars with its eastern European neighbors over the past decade and in turn militarized its own view of history (Edele, 2017, p. 108). This means that the Russian historical narratives have gained a geopolitical dimension that is exported through its views of history. As seen for instance in the case of the St. George's ribbon being promoted abroad without its dual meaning as support for aggression towards Ukraine being communicated (McGlynn, 2021). This geopolitical dimension entails not just a certain narrative about history where "the Soviet Union did not occupy but liberated Eastern Europe, one in which the West left the Russians to bleed dry, one in which only non-Russian people collaborated with the Nazis" (McGlynn, 2021) is being communicated, but also a view of a world order where Russia is once again a powerful actor as it was during and after the war (ibid).

Additionally, Russian aggression in Ukraine has increasingly been tied to its narrative about the Great Patriotic War. Russia has tried to tie the current war in Ukraine together with the Great Patriotic War by claiming that «the Soviet Union had, just as Russia had now, done everything it could to avoid war in 1941. War, he claimed, only became inevitable then, just as today, due to an inescapable and existential "Nazi" threat» (Garner, 2022). The parallel is also visible in the symbolism used in the current war, as symbols like the St George's ribbon are again used to symbolize support for the aggression toward Ukraine by pro-Russian actors (Garner, 2022).

By blindly participating and adopting Russian narratives about the war, countries are also adopting the geopolitical symbolism that these narratives entail. McGlynn states in her case study on how diplomacy of memory is used by Russia in Serbia that "leading Russian politicians depict Russia as a country that has reconnected with its past and historical truth, a process that enables it to provide a civilizational alternative to the West (...) In this context, Russia can cite Serbia as another country following Russia's path and, by extension, justifying the Russian government's increasingly messianic depiction of its country's global role" (McGlynn & Dureinovic, 2022, p. 9). The same can be said about the monument in Hasvik as the finding of this study entails that it has gained a similar role in Russian communication.

It is not feasible to claim that Norway is adopting Russia's entire historical narrative and all it entails by erecting one monument or participating in commemorative events and activities over the events of World War Two. However, the position the monument and Norway have gained in Russian discourse about "friendly" and "unfriendly" nations has made Norway an unknowing piece in a Russian memory war with its other neighbors, which has turned out to have stark geopolitical consequences as seen in Ukraine. It is, however, important to state that this dissertation is by no means arguing that the erection of war memorials in Norway should be ended based on this as the common history and the commemoration of them have been an important and stabilizing factor in the bilateral relationship as argued by Markussen (2021) and Myklebost (2021). However, if a country *blindly* adopts the historical narratives and commemorative traditions of Russia without thoroughly examining which narratives the events and symbols are portraying, it can also entail adopting the more sinister sides of Russian usage of history.

It is therefore alarming that the Norwegian authorities do not have any formal guidelines or take a more assertive role when such requests arise. It was demonstrated multiple times in the Hasvik case that the municipality was mostly left to their own devices in dealing with the Russian request. Husby mentions one meeting with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in her book that took place on November 22nd in 2017 and that this meeting proved to be important and calming as it illustrated that Norwegian authorities were invested in the case (Husby, 2020, p. 32). However, she further mentions the disappointment she got a few days later when the Norwegian Ministry of Culture got back to her and stated that they did not have any guidelines for projects like this and placed the responsibility of the monument on the municipality's shoulders (Husby, 2020, p. 33). Norwegian authorities were not further involved in the erection besides the actual unveiling of the monument (Nilsen, 2021). There is little evidence throughout the case study that the Norwegian government is actively engaging and examining which narratives are being perpetrated through the Russian usage of history in its relationship and actions towards Norway. Based on the findings in this study, the Norwegian authorities should develop routines and practices that can support small municipalities when requests like the one in Hasvik emerge. It should not be the responsibility of a municipality of a thousand people to judge whether something like this monument, which is used by top-level foreign political actors for political gains internationally, should be created and under which premises.

Conclusion

This dissertation has conducted a case study of the monument erected in Hasvik in October 2021. Based on this case study, the dissertation argued that the monument can be seen as a part of a larger Russian political campaign with geopolitical aims. This argument is based on a study of the erection process and the discourses communicated by Russian authorities about the monument and Norwegian approaches toward Russian historical narratives and war memorials. The case study found that Russia placed large importance on the monument by having top-level representatives be involved in the process and it showed that a relationship was formed between Russian actors and the Norwegian municipality, something that is an important component to how memory is being used for foreign policy purposes. The discourse analysis further demonstrated that the monument in Hasvik has been used in a larger Russian effort where states are parted into being either friendly or unfriendly towards Soviet war memorials and Russian historical narratives. This discourse is placed within Russia's memory wars waged with countries like Poland or the Baltics by labelling them as unfriendly nations in contrast to Norway.

Based on this, the dissertation argues that Norwegian authorities should adopt a more assertive approach when cases, like the Hasvik monument, emerge. This is as blindly adopting Russian historical narratives also entails the adoption of the more sinister Russian uses of history, as we can see in the current war in Ukraine, or the memory wars waged in part of Eastern Europe. The memorandums and memorials do have an important and stabilizing place in the bilateral relationship and should not be stopped based on these findings. It does, however, suggest that Norwegian authorities need a more active approach towards Russian requests to use its history on Norwegian soil so they can take an active part in which narratives they take part in communicating.

This case study cannot provide a generalizable argument about the Russian usage of history on Norwegian soil for political aims. It can, however, be used for future research as a part of a larger effort in documenting how a larger segment of Soviet war memorials is being used by contemporary Russia, both in Norway and abroad. A future study could be conducted on for example the monument in Vadsø, which was erected by actors *sponsored* by the Russian state, i.e. the Russian state was not directly involved as in the Hasvik case to see if this monument expresses similarities to the monument in Hasvik. Furthermore, this case study

can be used as a component to further develop the new and growing field of the diplomacy of memory.

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