

Victory Day: A war of narratives

written by Nahia Sanzo

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May 10 – “More than 25 million Soviet people died during World War II. Yet many Russian families still commemorate the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany on May 9,” Deutsche Welle wrote yesterday on social media, sharing one of its articles in what could be considered the strangest message on a day of contrasts, manipulation of

reality, and widespread propaganda.

The German outlet saw no need to explain why it considers it a contradiction that families in a former Soviet republic like Russia celebrate victory in a conflict that destroyed their country, caused millions of victims, and provoked a total mobilization against a war of annihilation in which Germany's ambition was to hold territory, enslave the portion of the population needed to act as a slave working class, and expel or exterminate the rest.

The demonization of May 9 celebrations, an active policy in the European Union and Ukraine since 2014, despite the fact that those countries had participated in the commemorations in previous years, predates the Russian intervention [in Ukraine] in 2022. But the effort to counteract Victory Day with Europe Day saw its clearest example yesterday of the political use of images and the attempt to keep open a political divide that Brussels hopes to maintain beyond the war. "War criminal Putler," read a huge sign hanging in the museum in Narva, Estonia, so that it could be seen from the Russian side.

Days earlier, Russia had placed several giant screens on its side of the river so that the Russian population of the Estonian city could watch the May 9 parade. To the chagrin of the authorities, hundreds of people gathered on the riverbank to watch the Victory Day concert broadcast from the Russian side.

From the celebration of the common victory—where a troop parade in Moscow was even seen, with the Ukrainian flag taking equal prominence with the Russian one—the event has shifted to proclaiming Russia's failure in organizing the event by mocking the supposedly low-profile of those attending. However, the images that emerged yesterday from Moscow and Lviv, where Ukraine had counter-scheduled the Victory Parade with a tribute to itself attended by European Union leaders, told a very different story.

Without even bothering to show a minimally aesthetic photograph in a monumental city, [former Estonian Prime Minister and current EU representative] Kaja Kallas published her message of European unity in the form of a line of representatives from the member states and a wreath-laying ceremony in a cemetery littered with red and black flags, used today by the Right Sector and in the past by its ideological ancestors, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). Meanwhile, in Moscow, Vladimir Putin appeared accompanied by Xi Jinping, leader of the world's second-largest power, and surrounded by leaders from countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

This clear geopolitical message of a diversity currently lacking in European Union diplomacy, withdrawn inward and surrounded by the fanaticism of its representatives, was also sent by the Russian media. The presence of choirs from Indonesia, India, China, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia in the version of "Sacred War," one of the anthems commemorating the Second World War, sends a similar message, one more in keeping with the existing multipolar world, in which the EU, the United States, and Canada continue to pretend they can mock other countries and leaders from the moral high ground.

Yesterday showed a Russia that has lost virtually all of its European allies, with the exception of Slovakia and Serbia, whose leaders defied Kaja Kallas's order not to go to Moscow, but which maintains diplomatic appeal in the Global South. The relative success of the meeting—and not the failure predicted by people like [Ukrainian Interior Ministry advisor] Anton Gerashchenko, who camouflaged what were simply their wishes in their analysis—is what has sparked the wave of demonization of the event.

"Creating a fatal problem for themselves—suffering massive losses—and then declaring themselves 'victors.' This is the usual and inescapable cycle of Russian history. In the mid-20th century, they supplied the Nazis with resources, helped

them rebuild their army, colluded to divide Europe, and lost more than 20 million lives. Today they celebrate. And they have voluntarily taken the place of those same Nazis, now in the 21st century,” [Ukrainian politician] Mikhail Podolyak wrote yesterday. The deliberate distortion of history is blatant.

However, in a propaganda struggle, reality is less important than rhetoric, and the fact that media outlets and citizens continued to post messages on social media during the military parade is of little importance to those seeking only to impose a narrative. Suddenly, the country that has legally banned symbols of victory over fascism —millions of Ukrainians fought in the Red Army and partisan units whose monuments have been vandalized and demolished first by the far right and then by the state—and has exalted as heroes for the freedom of the homeland the small minority who fought side by side with Nazi Germany in groups like the OUN-UPA or the SS Galizien Division, has become the ultimate authority denouncing Russian revisionism.

By banning symbols of victory and the army that caused the greatest number of casualties to the invading German army, Ukraine chose in 2015 to exclude itself from the celebration that had until then been a common one. Now, while many of the former Soviet republics participate in the May 9 celebrations in Moscow (whether with the presence of their political leaders, the parade of their troops, or both), Kiev demands recognition of the supposedly immense role that the Ukrainian nationalists played in the victory.

It does so by demonizing initiatives such as the Immortal Regiment, a parade to honor family members or friends who fought in the war, which has been exported to other countries and which Ukraine has sought to denounce as Russian interference or the propaganda use of a victory to which it apparently has no right. Ukraine celebrated Victory Day yesterday by arresting an elderly woman who came, carrying a portrait of her father, a war veteran, to pay tribute to those who gave their lives in

the war. Unlike the handful of people who did the same in cities like Odessa, who carried only flowers and no flags or symbols, the detainee in Kiev was wearing a partisan cap from which she had not removed a banned symbol, the hammer and sickle, which since 2015 has been equivalent in Ukraine to the Nazi swastika.

In the same social media post, Mikhail Podolyak, an advisor to [Head of the Ukrainian President's Office] Andriy Yermak, falsely claimed that Russia had disrupted communications across European Russia to prevent the thinly veiled attacks President Volodymyr Zelensky had threatened. Anton Gerashchenko, an advisor to the Interior Ministry under Arsen Avakov and one of the men who introduced Azov as a police battalion into the National Guard, echoed the same sentiment. "During the parade, there are snipers on every rooftop in Moscow. There have been jokes that Putin is using Xi Jinping as a kind of air defense, and that is why he was so anxious about Xi's arrival," he wrote on social media, deliberately confusing the protection of high-profile guests and the responsibility to take an obvious threat seriously with irrational fear.

Xi Jinping's visit was never in doubt, despite Ukraine's obvious attempt to frighten potential parade guests by creating the impression that Russia would be unable to maintain security in the heart of its capital. Only Viktor Orban [president of NATO-member Hungary] and Ilham Aliyev [president of Azerbaijan] succumbed to fear and canceled their visits—a poor example of a threat that shouldn't have gone unnoticed.

Several media outlets reported yesterday that Vladimir Putin had been accompanied by four Great Patriotic War veterans who are over 100 years old, a fact that serves as a reminder that the Second World War is gradually ceasing to be a living memory and becoming the memory held by generations who were not there to fight in it. The loss of these voices with the moral authority that comes with having participated in the events places a greater responsibility on those charged with safeguarding that memory, from the families who each year parade through Russian city centers with

portraits of their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents, to the historians and politicians, whose temptation to manipulate memory for political ends is evident.

The struggle over discourse that took place yesterday, the European Union's attempt to redefine May 9 as "Europe Day"—also changing the definition of Europe from a continent to a political bloc with the right to admission—and the demonization of the collective celebration of the victory over fascism were just another episode in the continental rupture, the Western attempt to maintain power and the narrative, and the prelude to a political and geopolitical confrontation that will continue no matter what happens in the coming months on the Ukrainian front.

Translated by Melinda Butterfield

Source: [Slavyangrad.es](https://slavyangrad.es)

