

## **Overcoming European Civil Wars: Patterns of Consolidation in Divided Societies, 2010–1800**

Divided, sometimes antagonistic, communities in officially unified nations seem to be the rule in Europe. In some cases, they conjure up the most painful memories of actual civil-war events, such as Jedwabne, Naoussa, Londonderry, or Srebrenica, but usually they constitute the common experience of most Europeans. Almost every European nation went through the overwhelming experience of the two World Wars—either as winners or as the defeated, sometimes as perpetrators, and often as victims. Many were defenceless against mass murder, ethnic cleansing, and more lost their homes, surroundings, neighbourhoods, security, and peaceful ways of life. Many of these experiences were archetypal. Some were related to the transition from one or another type of dictatorship to democracy, or vice versa. Others to the twofold process of dissolving empires and creating new nations, medium- or small-sized independent countries, when major portions of populations suddenly found themselves, due to shifting borders, moved from imperial centres to peripheries or from imperial peripheries to national centres. Many experiences had to do with weathering civil war and reconstruction. And there the universal European experiences of the transformation from traditional to modern society, of the competition and cooperation between nations, and then their ultimate integration into the European Union. The political languages and narratives of these experiences often have their roots in collective transitional tasks, such as establishing democracy, fighting for national liberation, national reconstruction, modernisation, and forging a collective identity out of the ideals of the nation-state, European cooperation and federalism. These discourses have been held together by elite-generated identity models, images of preceding conflict, interpretations of the recent past, the self and the inner alterity, and the blueprints of memory. They have been the building blocks of the patterns of consolidation, the underlying assumptions of turning divided societies and fractured political cultures into a political community. Each one of them has had its share in the “European civil wars”. In spite of major breakthroughs, especially in Germany and the Franco-German reconciliation, we find all over Europe that the experiences and humiliations of previous generations have remained unspoken and unelaborated at both individual and community levels. Dangerous as they are, such narratives and undigested traumas necessarily call for well-advised, learned and thoughtful acts of overwriting and reworking.