

**'REMEMBRANCE IN ACTION: EVERYDAY CHALLENGES
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE'**

Debate within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe

**9th European Remembrance Symposium
27 October 2021, Tallinn (Estonia)**

On 27 October 2021, the second day of this year's edition of the European Remembrance Symposium, a debate within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe was held entitled 'Remembrance in action: everyday challenges and recommendations for the future'.

The debate was led by representatives of four leading European institutions active in the field of historical education and commemoration: Oriol López-Badell on behalf of the European Observatory on Memories (EUROM), Rafał Rogulski for the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, Constanze Itzel for the House of European History and Łukasz Kamiński for the Platform of European Memory and Conscience. The debate was moderated by Sergei Metlev, a member of the Board of the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory.

Prior to the debate, the panellists were invited to prepare a list of recommendations for the future of Europe concerning two main areas:

- 1) European remembrance policy
- 2) History and citizenship education.

During the debate four sets of recommendations were presented and discussed with the audience.

The first panellist was **Constanze Itzel, director of the House of European History (HEH)**, a museum based in Brussels presenting 19th- and 20th-century history of Europe. She stressed that the museum was created by a team of historians and art historians from across Europe. Despite being owned and financed by the European Parliament, the museum is not a political outlet of the Parliament but developed by an academically independent team. Therefore, the statement that she was about to present was not a political one, but represented the views of the museum's team based on their experience in dealing with history from a transnational perspective. At the same time, her recommendations were directed at a broader audience – not only the EU institutions, but all organisations dealing with the past and remembrance.

In her first point Itzel tackled the issue of **various layers (content levels) of looking at history**. She observed that historical objects or documents can have multiple layers of significance at the same

time – they can illustrate not only local, regional or national aspects of history, but can also be significant for European or global history. She noted that a transnational way of thinking about European history and heritage does not exclude but complement experiencing history from a national perspective. Therefore, she advocated for linking these levels and for presenting them together as a complement to each other. This approach could be taken by memory institutions even down to the local level.

The second point Itzel made was about **engaging actors in encounter and exchange**. She noted that according to the analysis of the HEH's visitors' profiles prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the museum's visitors came from Southern and Western Europe. On the one hand, she stated, it provided a unique chance to inform Western Europeans about the history of the rest of the continent, but on the other hand, the museum intends to reach out more to Central-Eastern European audiences. Itzel recalled Timothy Garton Ash stating the importance to get to listen but also to tell each other's narratives. Her recommendation was to enhance the creation of content and formats that can be seen anywhere across Europe (including developing digital formats, travelling exhibitions and fostering international cooperation), so that even Europeans in the most remote part of the continent could become acquainted with narratives that are distinct from their own.

Lastly, Itzel added some **methodological considerations**. She observed that at present practices of looking at the past differ across Europe, notably as regards the ways of addressing painful and negative aspects of history. She noted, however, that it might be possible to agree on a common methodology of remembering. She recalled the words of the political scientist Markus Prutsch, who suggested a shift from a 'culture of remembrance' towards a 'culture of remembering'. Therefore, Itzel recommended further developing, at European level, a methodological framework for researching, presenting and debating the past. In her view, as regards memorial regimes, concepts such as 'multidirectional memory' seemed to be more conducive to enhancing understanding, rather than antagonistic, conflicting and competing memory regimes. Instead of remaining in the logic of a competition for recognition, such as materialised in some comments about the House of European History, a multidirectional framework allowed for studying how the debate on the memory of one victim group can benefit or impact the examination of the memory of other groups. She also underlined the necessity of addressing the past always based on serious historical fact analysis and academic research rather than on current political objectives.

The second speaker was **Oriol López-Badell, the coordinator of the European Observatory on Memories (EUROM)**. EUROM is a platform established by the University of Barcelona Solidarity Foundation with the support of the European Commission. It gathers 53 partner organisations, from museums and memorials to universities across and beyond Europe, that work together with the aim of enhancing memory policies.

López-Badell presented the following principles for the organisations and actors dealing with memory and remembrance, including the EU institutions:

1. **working with a transnational and multidisciplinary perspective** that can contribute both to acknowledging diversity, as well as fostering common European identity;

2. **engaging a variety of actors**, including not only academics, but also artists, journalists or filmmakers in order to broaden the scope of promoting public remembrance;
3. **fostering citizen participation in creating memory policies** and giving citizens the necessary tools and resources that can lead to the creation of interesting bottom-up initiatives;
4. **engaging young audiences in public memory projects**, taking into account that the way we look at the past has an enormous influence on the present societal behaviour;
5. **promoting educational systems that study and explain the past from the challenges of the present**, such as the rise of far-right movements, racism and any form of discrimination; educating from historical knowledge with responsibility;
6. **securing long-term support/funding** to organisations developing European public policies of remembrance;
7. **inviting third countries to participate in EU-promoted projects**, in order to present a comprehensive picture of the past.

The third panellist was **Rafał Rogulski, director of the Institute of European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS)**, an international initiative focusing on research, documentation and dissemination of knowledge about 20th-century history in Europe and ways in which it is commemorated. Rogulski noted that the observations provided are grounded in over 16 years of ENRS experience acquired through organising almost 200 international projects with more than 450 partners from 39 countries. His insights were addressed mainly to the EU institutions: the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, as they have a real impact on formulating policies on the commemoration and dissemination of history at a transnational level and they also have the tools to support valuable activities in this area.

Rafał Rogulski made the following points:

1. **Supporting continuous intellectual exchange about history and memory between researchers, intellectuals and humanists, from a wide variety of countries, who hold different viewpoints.**
Rogulski stated that in order for the European debate on memory to be lively and meaningful in the continuing discourse, it must be open and inclusive, and its participants must be diverse and represent different narratives, perspectives, sensitivities and intellectual currents.
2. **Taking care of the dissemination of historical knowledge among European citizens.**
Rogulski observed that it is highly important for the EU institutions to engage in the commemoration and dissemination of knowledge relating to historical facts, figures and the processes of great importance for the identity of European nations, both those related to tragic episodes of history and those associated with joyful, creative and constructive events for Europe. He noted that there is a pressing need to develop good habits connected with the history of our continents at an international level that can be carried out through educational activities and social campaigns, the establishment of symbolic days of remembrance, supporting and organising specific undertakings and, finally, through symbolic and ceremonial gestures with the participation of key EU politicians and officials.
3. **Taking responsibility for the quality of historical knowledge.**
Rogulski noted the rapid development of new communication technologies and the ease

of spreading disinformation, manipulating historical facts and promoting historical negationism/denialism. He recommended that all activities undertaken and supported by the EU institutions in disseminating history should be based on the latest historical research, while historical facts and processes should be placed in a broader historical context to make it easier to understand their significance and to minimise any ideological bias. At the same time, he said, the EU institutions should rigorously counteract lies, negationism and manipulation in relation to history and prevent them from spreading. Thus ensuring high-quality information only is disseminated on this subject requires a substantial financial outlay and the cooperation of a wide range of experts: historians, educationalists and new media specialists.

4. **Identifying and monitoring conflicts of memory – supporting dialogue and understanding.**
Rogulski observed the significance of many historical processes, interpretations, events and figures is debated and evaluated in different ways. The role of the EU institutions should be, he noted, to support the identification and monitoring of existing and potential conflicts of memory and to seek ways to mitigate them, to promote understanding and reconciliation. However, he said, this should be done in a way that involves the various parties of the dispute and respects their different worldviews, opinions and historical experiences.
5. **Providing sustained support for the most effective models of cooperation in relation to European remembrance developed by various organisations.**
Rogulski proposed that the European Commission should ensure long-term support for the most effective models of cooperation developed by various organisations, thus creating a coherent, complementary programme of activities that would make use of the know-how, experience and methods of operation, as well as the international contacts already developed by these institutions.
6. **Ensuring openness and the inclusion of new organisations.**
Rogulski observed that the European Commission's grant programmes for European remembrance are becoming more and more complex in recent years, setting a high entrance threshold, in particular for young, less experienced organisations. Understanding that a high benchmark and the complexity of the application are in place to guarantee the professionalism of the organisations provided with EU funding and in turn the quality of the projects, he highlighted the need also to ensure access to EU funds for young and less experienced organisations which have potential.
7. **Making use of the experience, expertise and working methods developed by existing organisations active in the field of remembrance.**
Rogulski invited the EU institutions to cooperate and benefit from the experience, contacts, experts and analyses of organisations engaged in international dialogue about memory. He mentioned a set of standards for responsible international discourse on history entitled 'Guidelines for international discourse on history', developed by historians cooperating with the ENRS. Containing eight basic principles and to date signed by 135 persons (historians, heads of institutions and intellectuals) from 34 countries, he observed that the document may serve as a starting point for a discussion on the standards of our work disseminated at EU level.

The last panellist was **Łukasz Kamiński, president of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience**, an international organisation bringing together 68 public and private institutions from

across Europe. At the beginning of his speech Kamiński referred to the statute of the Platform that obliges the institution to ensure cooperation with like-minded organisations and institutions with a similar scope, including the ENRS, the host of the debate. He recommended it as a good practice for other organisations working in the field of remembrance who would like to further their goals.

Łukasz Kamiński put forward the following list of recommendations directed at the EU institutions:

1. Creating an institutional base for dialogue about the past at a European level.

Kamiński observed that the fact that the House of European History has been the first and only institution at a European level to present a vision of European history has attracted severe criticism. He noted that while understanding the need to extend the scope of a digital presence, it is also important to have a dedicated space to encourage a dialogue.

2. Building a pan-European memorial for the victims of all totalitarian regimes, in accordance with the European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism.

Kamiński recalled the competition announced by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience in 2017 that yielded 39 entries from artists and architects. The goal of the project was to propose the first-ever pan-European memorial for all victims of 20th-century totalitarianism in Europe on Place Jean Rey, in the heart of the European district in Brussels. As a result the British-Chinese architect Tszwai So was selected for the project, but the memorial was never erected. Kamiński noted that the commemoration of individual victims helps us to understand each other and creating such a memorial would help European citizens to understand better a difficult past.

3. Supporting cultural creators dealing with the European experience of totalitarian regimes in their works.

Kamiński observed that such projects usually do not fit into the general competitions for artists organised on a European level, because they are more complex and conducted in different way.

4. Introducing regular research of the state of European historical consciousness within the Eurobarometer framework.

Kamiński noted that while high quality policies should be based on knowledge, European awareness of the past is very limited. He recommended the use of the Eurobarometer, a collection of cross-country public opinion surveys conducted regularly on behalf of the EU Institutions, in order to collect data on the state of European remembrance.

5. Establishing a contact office within the European Commission for permanent cooperation with organisations involved in the culture of remembrance.

Kamiński brought up the issues the Platform faced with communicating with EU officials, highlighting the need for clear communication channels through which organisations dealing with memory and remembrance could reach the right departments and people within the European Commission, suggesting that establishing some kind of the liaison office might be a good solution.

After these presentations members of the audience of European Remembrance Symposium in Tallinn – over 140 academics, government representatives and practitioners from both NGOs and public institutions, actively engaged in the discourse on 20th-century history and remembrance –

were invited to take part in the discussion, ask questions and comment on the panellists' statements. Among them were:

- Barbara Walshe (chair of Board of Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin, Ireland) who drew attention to the possible links between remembering and the polarisation of politics across the world;
- Gentiana Sula (chairperson of the Albanian Authority on Access to Information to the former State Security Service, Tirana, Albania) who underlined the importance of involving the Balkan region in the process of developing common European memory policies;
- Silver Silliksaar (Estonian researcher) who drew attention to the rise in repressions towards the Jehovah's witnesses in the Russian Federation and underlined the need for a reaction against such practices;
- Alexander Formozov (project coordinator in Civic Education at the Deutsch-Russischer Austausch [German Russian Exchange; DRA], Berlin, Germany) who raised an issue of the relevance of recent developments in the study of 1989 transformation for the future of Europe;
- Oliver Reisner (professor of European and Caucasian Studies at the Ilia State University Tbilisi, Georgia) who recommended the book by Antoon De Baets entitled *Responsible History* (New York, Oxford 2008), which proposes a code of ethics as a guide for responsible historians;
- Marek Mutor (director of the Remembrance and Future Centre in Wrocław, Poland) who proposed all four organisations who led the discussion to issue a common statement.

The representatives of the ENRS, the House of European History and the Platform of European Memory and Conscience spoke at length about the importance of continuous dialogue, involving a wide variety of actors: not only politicians and remembrance institutions, but also civil society organisations and regular citizens, ensuring openness and transnational cooperation in the field of history and memory. They were of the opinion that the growing polarisation is dangerous for Europe and Europeans, regardless of the differences between different nations and their views relating to the past, Europeans should look for things that unite them. They underlined the role of reinforcing multiperspectivity and critical thinking in an educational setting (both formal and informal), allowing for co-creation and intergenerational exchange. They also stressed the importance of the development of common European policies to deal with history that take into account the needs of different societies. The panellists emphasised, however, the need to garner further support for such activities from EU officials and institutions. Ultimately, lively and meaningful historical debates, with the participation of representatives of diverse backgrounds, are hard to organise without consistent and considered support, both political and financial.

Besides increasing lobbying efforts, both at the European and national levels, the panellists pointed towards the different ways in which already established European tools and mechanisms could be utilised in aid of common memory policies, including the relevant European Parliament resolutions.

This seemingly straightforward idea attracted a different layer of partners in the conversation about a common European memory, broadly defined as the European public. While governmental or nongovernmental institutions make an effort to foster reliable historical research and fact-based

historical and civil education, the success of any common European remembrance culture ultimately relies on the resonance of the narrative it provides with a broader society.

A debate followed in which panellists raised the following points:

- The need for building transnational cooperation that allows different narratives to be represented was highlighted.
- The need for extending financial support on EU level for various remembrance activities and for securing stable, long-term funding for organisations dealing with memory politics through further lobbying efforts in EU bodies and among the member countries was underlined. The funding mechanisms, however, should be constructed in a way to ensure that even new, less-established participators and institutions can take part in the discussion.
- Following up on the comments on the definition of 'Europe' in European memory, the importance of dialogue and building institutional networks that reach beyond the geographical limitations of the Europe of the European Union was stressed. Projects should include those in the Balkans, Ukraine, Turkey and countries linked with the continent by their colonial past.
- The importance of transnational and an even broader global perspective on European memory was emphasised.
- The need for the EU's coordinated response to disinformation and historical negationism/denialism was stressed.
- The need for a clear communication process through which remembrance organisations can reach the appropriate offices in the European Commission was highlighted, suggesting that the establishment of some kind of the liaison office might be a good solution.
- A thoroughly discussed issue was also how to monitor the activities of European remembrance institutions. For example, the use of a Eurobarometer in order to gauge the popular beliefs concerning the European past and identity was suggested.
- The importance of intergenerational dialogue as well as addressing the younger generation in education and through outreach, especially via digital tools and any other media they use on a daily basis was underlined.